[Press release: Readout of PM call with Leo Varadkar: 5 November 2018](#)

A Downing Street spokesperson said:

> The Prime Minister spoke to the Taoiseach this morning to take stock of the progress being made in the negotiations, including on the Northern Ireland backstop. In a constructive conversation, the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach discussed the remaining issues.
>
> They agreed that the intention was that the backstop should only be a temporary arrangement and that the best solution to the Northern Ireland border would be found by agreeing a future relationship between the UK and the EU. In order to ensure that the backstop, if ever needed, would be temporary, the Prime Minister said that there would need to be a mechanism through which the backstop could be brought to an end.
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> She affirmed the UK's commitment to the Belfast Good Friday Agreement and to avoiding a hard border between Northern Ireland and Ireland. The Prime Minister and the Taoiseach agreed that discussions should continue.

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Published 5 November 2018

[News story: Future assessment of GCSE computer science](#)

Ofqual today (5 November) [launched a consultation on long-term arrangements for the assessment of programming skills in GCSE computer science](#).

Earlier this year, following consultation, we [changed the assessment arrangements for GCSE computer science](#) because of evidence that the confidentiality of some of the programming tasks had been compromised. These revised arrangements mean that for students taking exams in 2019 and 2020 their GCSE computer science grades will be based on their exam performance alone.

We discussed with teachers and subject associations the ways by which students' programming skills could be assessed in the longer term. We concluded that it is not possible to use non-exam assessment in the qualification to assess programming skills in a way that is manageable, reliable and fair. We also concluded that exam boards could assess programming skills in different and potentially innovative ways under exam conditions, and that our rules should require them to do so.

For students starting their courses in 2020, who will be taking their exams in 2022, we propose that:

- all assessment, including that of programming skills, is conducted by exam.

- the assessments will require students to complete the 4 steps of designing, writing, testing and refining a program to achieve a task or solve a problem as separate or combined activities.
- the original assessment objective weightings for this qualification are reinstated, to reflect the importance of practical programming skills.

Today's consultation also proposes that the current short-term arrangements remain in place for students starting courses next September and sitting exams in this subject in 2021. This will allow exam boards to put in place revised assessments and allow teachers time to prepare. The current arrangements mean students have 20 hours set aside in their timetables to complete a programming task, and their programming skills are assessed during the exam.

Sally Collier, Ofqual Chief Regulator, said:

> Practical programming skills are an important aspect of the computer science GCSE and we have carefully considered how best to assess them. Reflecting on how programming could be effectively assessed, previous experience with this qualification, and the views of those within the sector, we believe that in order to secure valid assessment and manage the risk of malpractice, programming skills should be assessed by examination.
>
> We are keen to encourage innovation and in our consultation, launched today, we propose granting exam boards discretion over the form of exam assessment they offer. We are proposing a timetable that ensures exam boards have sufficient time to determine their approach and that teachers can select and prepare to deliver the approach that best meets the needs of their students. I encourage anyone with an interest in GCSE computer science to respond to our consultation.

[Press release: Tightened measures to protect the country from Xylella](#)

Olive trees (Olea europaea) will soon be added to the Government's list of tree species included in the statutory notification scheme for imports from the EU. These new measures, coming into force on 26 November, will strengthen the UK's protection against the risk of the plant disease Xylella.

The statutory notification scheme involves a legal requirement to notify the APHA in advance of the import of certain trees and plants from EU member states.

Olive trees are known hosts of the bacterium Xylella which causes disease in a wide range of plants grown in the UK and its introduction could have a significant effect on our landscapes. The Government is following the situation in Europe closely where the disease has devastated olive groves in southern Italy and was recently intercepted at a wholesaler in Belgium.

Adding olive trees to the notification scheme is part of the risk-based approach in tackling tree and plant diseases. It will help inspectors target specific imported plant consignments, giving the best chance of intercepting any diseased plants at an early stage.

These new measures apply to England only but other parts of the UK are considering the introduction of equivalent legislation.

Biosecurity Minister Lord Gardiner said:

> Xylella is a major threat to our landscape and our industry and we must do all we can to ensure the UK remains a Xylella-free zone. That is why we have introduced tighter measures around the import of certain high risk-hosts, such as olive trees, which will come into force later this month.''
>
> Alongside these tightened measures we urge the public and tree and plant professionals to remain vigilant for signs of Xylella, practice good biosecurity measures and to notify authorities without delay if the disease is suspected.

All growers and traders should take the following actions:

- Ensure imported plants both originate from and are sourced from disease free areas.
- Source from known suppliers or visit suppliers to view their processes, procedures, bio-security arrangements and the plants they grow.
- Isolate or quarantine new batches of plants and monitor them during the growing season for signs of the disease.
- Ensure that plant passports arriving with plants are correct and keep the plant passport to aid trace back if necessary.
- Follow the full [guidance on Gov.uk](#), including requirements on notifying imports to APHA.

[Press release: Tightened measures to protect the country from Xylella](#)

Olive trees (Olea europaea) will soon be added to the government's list of tree species included in the plant health statutory notification scheme for

imports from the EU. These new measures, coming into force on 26 November, will strengthen the UK's protection against the risk of the plant disease Xylella.

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- follow the full [guidance on Gov.uk](#), including requirements on notifying imports to APHA.

This update to the legislation follows the launch of the government's first [Tree Health Resilience Strategy](#) in May, which pledged tough action to protect the nation's trees from pests, diseases and climate change.

Read the [updated legislation](#).