

Education and Lockdown

The decision to put the country back into lockdown ended the argument about whether the schools should stay open. It also strengthened the position of all those who wanted to have another year without GCSE and A level exams. The Secretary of State who had been defending keeping schools open and exams in the summer had to announce an abrupt change of plan. Numerous matters now need to be sorted out as arguments continue over how much longer schools will remain closed.

The loss of exams is a blow. Whilst many teachers appraise their pupils professionally and give them realistic grades, the reliance on teacher grades contains at least three problems for the Examining Boards. The first is how do the Exam Boards ensure common standards throughout. Working with a limited number of Examiners and a marking scheme for exam answers makes this easier when using professionally moderated exams comparing with previous years. The second is how do you ensure a few teachers are not affected by the social skills and friendliness of the pupil which may not be the same as the work and talent on display. The third is how do you stop the natural process of wanting to do well and seeing the pressures on the school leading to Grade creep? Will there be surrogate school based tests and exams? What is the role of the mock exam? How much adult support and guidance is allowed for course work?

The loss of social contact and play with peers is a big loss for young children. They learn a lot from each other at school and need the challenge and stimulus of others of their age.

Have now all families in need been equipped with laptops or mobile devices that allow them to participate fully in remote learning? Have teachers been trained in offering good on line courses? What use is going to be made of bought in on line materials as opposed to teacher driven materials?