

Research into the Sawtooth Effect published

News story

The Sawtooth Effect examines the patterns seen in student exam performance when assessments are reformed.



Ofqual has today [published further research](#) on the student exam performance pattern known as the 'sawtooth effect.'

The sawtooth effect is the pattern in student performance that can be seen when assessments, such as GCSEs and A levels, are reformed. Performance tends to dip, then improves over time as students and teachers become more familiar with the new content and the new assessments.

In 2016, our [research on the sawtooth effect](#) enabled us to better predict how performance might change over the years following reformed qualifications and ensure fairness to students while the reforms were rolled out.

This new research, [published with an overview](#), brings together ideas that explain the sawtooth effect, alongside ideas that explain how we maintain standards more generally, including the comparable outcomes principle.

The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has created conditions that are far less consistent or predictable than periods of qualification reform, but very similar considerations arise, especially the need to be fair to candidates. We can use some similar methods to address this.

The effects of COVID-19 will, however, be far more severe for some learners than for others. Applying the comparable outcomes principle can only represent a partial solution to the problem of teaching or learning loss attributable to COVID-19.

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