

Exams head back to normality in 2023

GCSE, AS, and A level exams in England will largely return to pre-pandemic arrangements next summer as young people continue to recover from the pandemic.

In line with the plans set out last September, Ofqual has [confirmed](#) a return to pre-pandemic grading in 2023.

To protect students against the disruption of recent years, and in case students' performance is slightly lower than before the pandemic, senior examiners will use the grades achieved by previous cohorts of pupils, along with prior attainment data, to inform their decisions about where to set grade boundaries.

This mirrors the approach used in the first years of reformed GCSEs and A levels in 2017, when early cohorts were protected against the impact of changes to the qualifications and means, for example, a typical A level student who would have achieved a grade A before the pandemic will be just as likely to get an A this summer.

The government is also confirming that students should continue to be provided with support in GCSE mathematics, physics and combined science with formulae and equation sheets, but not with advance information of exam content, as was the case last year.

The decisions reflect the reduced levels of disruption this cohort have experienced compared to the cohorts of the previous two years. Ofqual has launched a consultation on the plans for formulae and equation sheets today.

Education Secretary Kit Malthouse said:

Students working towards their qualifications next year expect fairness in exams and grading arrangements, which is why we are transitioning back to pre-pandemic normality.

Schools are doing a great job in supporting students to catch up and get back on track including through the National Tutoring Programme, which continues to provide one-to-one or small group tuition to students that need extra help.

Chief Regulator, Dr Jo Saxton said:

This summer was an important step back towards normality. Our plans for 2023 take us a step further, whilst also recognising the impact of Covid.

I've visited schools and colleges up and down the country and I've

seen young people's admirable resilience and dedication. Giving the 2023 cohort some protection against any impact of Covid disruption is the right thing to do. Our approach to grading in 2023 will provide a soft landing for students as we continue the process of taking the exam system back to normal.

Ofqual already announced [earlier this year](#) that pre-pandemic arrangements for non-exam assessment, fieldwork and practical science have been reinstated. The department confirmed at the same time that schools and colleges this year will be teaching the full content of qualifications to students taking exams in 2023.

Arrangements for vocational and technical qualifications (VTQs) and other general qualifications were [confirmed](#) in May 2022.

Ofqual does not expect any further adaptations to be used in VTQs. Awarding organisations are expected to take account of the approach, including in relation to grading, used in general qualifications so that students taking VTQs are not advantaged or disadvantaged in comparison.

UCAS Chief Executive Clare Marchant said:

We welcome today's announcement by the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual).

As an independent charity, UCAS's aim is to help students make informed decisions about their future that are right for them, whether pursuing university, college or an apprenticeship, and this early clarification means students will be able to apply with confidence in the 2023 cycle.

Higher education admissions is becoming more competitive, with a 1/3 increase in 18-year-olds forecast to apply by 2026. This decision will support teachers and advisors in giving the best guidance to their students, as well as enable universities and colleges to make offers with certainty.

David Hughes, Chief Executive of the Association of Colleges, said:

The move back to a grading profile in line with pre-pandemic levels, with some protection, is the right thing to do now. It gives certainty to everyone in the system – students, parents, teachers, advisers, employers – but we also need to be alert to the ongoing impact that pandemic lockdowns have had for many young people on mental health, confidence and study skills and make sure they get the support they need.

A series of further consultations relating to qualifications next year and in future years has also been launched today:

- The department and Ofqual are jointly consulting on guidance to schools and colleges about gathering assessment evidence to support resilience in the general qualifications system. The guidance proposes schools and colleges gather evidence in a way that aligns with their normal arrangements for preparing students for exams, helping ensure preparedness should a scenario ever again arise where it would be unsafe or unfair for students to sit exams.
- The department and Ofqual are both consulting on plans to remove the expectation that students engage with unfamiliar and abstract material, such as unfamiliar vocabulary, within modern foreign language (MFL) GCSE assessments from 2023 onwards. The Department's consultation covers the curriculum, while Ofqual's covers how it is assessed.
- The Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) are consulting on the exam timetable for next summer, which seeks to maintain some of the space built into the exam timetable last year between the first and last exams in the same subject. This spacing was well received by schools and colleges in 2022 and reduces the chance of students missing all exams in a subject due to circumstances such as illness.

The department's decisions on next year's arrangements reflect that schools remained open to all pupils through the last academic year, with this year's cohort having the opportunity to benefit from time in the classroom with teachers and interventions such as the National Tutoring Programme, compared to students from the previous two cohorts.

The government is investing nearly £5 billion to support students' recovery from the impact of the pandemic, including £1.5 billion for tutoring programmes and almost £2 billion in direct funding, largely targeted at those that need help most.

Over 2 million courses have now started through the [National Tutoring Programme](#), including 1.8 million so far across an estimated 80% of schools – helping children to catch up with learning loss.

[Net Zero Review calls for views of](#)

British public

- Chris Skidmore MP urges the public and British businesses to speak up over how the fight against climate change is best delivered
- comes as rapid review scrutinising delivery of the net zero commitments, aimed at boosting economic growth and energy security, launched earlier this week
- former Energy Minister promises thorough appraisal so UK's world-leading climate commitment is met in an economically-efficient way

People up and down the country will have the chance to give their views on how the UK can eliminate carbon emissions in a way that grows the economy, under plans announced today (29 September) by Chris Skidmore MP.

This is the first stage of the rapid three-month review by the former Energy Minister, examining how the country's legally-binding net zero 2050 target can be met while also maximising growth, increasing energy security and in a way that is affordable for consumers and businesses.

Speaking at the Business Green 'Net Zero Festival' in London later today, Mr Skidmore, will announce a broad month-long call for evidence aimed at the public, businesses and local authorities, giving them a chance to share their views on the green transition.

People will have the chance to offer their views on a range of topics, on everything from how cutting people's carbon footprint will affect their everyday lives, to how reaching net zero will be paid for and what more can be done to capitalise on it to grow the UK's economy.

Other topics will include:

- the opportunities and measures needed to support the transition to net zero, in a way that also supports economic growth and job creation;
- the challenges and obstacles to decarbonising, for households and businesses;
- what more can be done to support consumers and businesses to cut their emissions

Chair of the Net Zero Review, Chris Skidmore MP, said:

Everyone in the country has a stake in the UK's transition to net zero. It doesn't matter if you live in Argyle or Aberystwyth, Carlyle or Canterbury, our lives will need to change, whether that means the way we travel to work, heat our homes or run our factories.

The decisions and actions we take today will impact consumers, employees and businesses alike, in cities, town and rural communities all over the country. That's why I want to hear the

views of as many people as possible over the next month.

I want to ensure that net zero isn't just viewed as the right thing to do for our environment, but becomes an essential driver of economic growth – and a win-win for Britain and the world.

While the UK's world-leading target to reach net zero by 2050 remains in place, the review comes in response to major changes to the economic and political landscape, with Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine, historically high global energy prices and high inflation; all placing huge pressures on British households and businesses.

Chris Skidmore's rapid review aims to identify new ways to deliver the legally binding target by 2050 in a way that is pro-business and pro-growth. It will examine the most economically efficient path to reaching net zero, while maximising innovation, investment, exports and jobs.

The UK has already managed to grow its economy by 76%, while cutting its emissions by over 44% since 1990 – decarbonising faster than any other G7 country. Official statistics also show there are already around 400,000 jobs in low-carbon businesses and their supply chains across the UK, with turnover estimated at £41.2 billion in 2020. Both the British Energy Security Strategy and Net Zero Strategy aim to leverage an additional and unprecedented £100 billion of private investment, while supporting an additional 480,000 British jobs by 2030.

Alongside today's call for evidence, Mr Skidmore is touring the UK to speak to as many consumers, investors and industrial leaders as possible. He will also consult with experts in areas including energy, land use and transport to help inform his review. This includes his first roundtable events this week, with one taking place tomorrow (Friday 30 September), organised by the Aldersgate Group, with more scheduled for around the country over the coming weeks.

He will report to the government with a set of recommendations by the end of this year to help turbocharge the UK's transition to net zero by identifying key economic opportunities.

Notes to Editors

[The Call for Evidence can be accessed here.](#)

[Further details of the Net Zero Review are available here.](#)

Under the UK's presidency of COP26, net zero commitments now cover more than 90% of global GDP – up from 30% two years ago. The Glasgow Climate Pact focused the eyes of the world on bolstering action, including getting 190 countries to agree to phasing out coal. And work continues to encourage countries to revisit and strengthen Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) that are not currently aligned with the Paris Agreement temperature goal.

[The Net Zero Strategy can be accessed here](#), and the government's latest [British Energy Security Strategy is available here](#).

GDF to create more than 4,000 jobs within the first 25 years

More than 4,000 jobs are set to be created during the siting and constructing of a deep underground facility for the safe and secure disposal of higher-activity radioactive waste.

The [GDF – \(Geological Disposal Facility\) Creating Jobs & Skills: A First Look](#) report, which was published today by Nuclear Waste Services (NWS), sets out how the multi-billion-pound programme is expected to create thousands of skilled, well-paid jobs for over a century.

This highly engineered facility will be one of the biggest infrastructure projects in the UK and will provide a major investment for the local host community and its economy. Work on a GDF will carry on for about 175 years, generating an expected average of 2,000 jobs in any given year. During this time, it could provide significant additional investment and create thousands of extra jobs through increased business opportunities and the development of new or improved infrastructure and facilities across the region.

Employment will be generated at the facility itself and in the supply chain, while attracting further investment in the local area. Most of the jobs created during construction and, operation could and should be locally based.

NWS will be the developer of a GDF and is committed to recruiting locally where possible, and once a site is selected, roles would be available in a range of disciplines including engineering, science and technical, trades, operations, and business functions. 75% of roles are estimated to be for candidates with qualifications equivalent to A-Level or below.

The long timeframe means that education and training initiatives are planned to ensure local people have the best opportunities to develop relevant skills and qualifications. This project will provide a unique opportunity not only to recruit but also to upskill and reskill local communities, transforming the prospects of a region for generations.

Karen Wheeler, Nuclear Waste Services Deputy CEO/ Major Capital Programmes Director, said:

A GDF will be one of the biggest infrastructure programmes in the UK and provide a major investment for the local host community and its economy, as well as being a vital national project.

The long-term nature of the project provides a unique opportunity to develop skills, expertise and sustainable jobs for a local community.

We are now making real progress and having conversations with a number of communities about the potential for them to host a GDF.

A GDF will make a major contribution to the environment by safely and finally disposing of waste which otherwise would have to be stored and maintained for thousands of years above ground.

The UK search for a suitable site is a nationwide process based on community consent and includes detailed investigations over a number of years to ensure a GDF can be constructed safely and securely. Community Partnerships, which have formed in Mid Copeland, South Copeland, and Allerdale in Cumbria, and Theddlethorpe in Lincolnshire, are engaging in a dialogue with local people to ensure they have access to information about what hosting a GDF might mean.

The Creating Jobs & Skills report provides a national picture, and at this early stage in the process, is not specific to any region. Building on this generic review, NWS is commissioning further detailed analyses to understand requirements for specific regions.

To learn more about GDF and for more information about progress, please read the [GDF Annual Report](#).

[Career Insight: Amy, Legal Trainee, Government Legal Department](#)

“After completing a degree in Spanish and English Literature, I knew that I wanted a career that combined my interests in international relations, law and policy; that was fast paced and exciting; and full of different possibilities and outcomes.

However, I also knew that I did not have family members who were lawyers or any connections in the legal sector, nor had I undertaken legal work experience from when I was 14 years old. After the final year of my degree, I was not only absolutely exhausted, but at a complete loss of how to actually go about embarking upon my dream career.

And so, I started from where I could: I applied for any and all opportunities that could further my career aspirations, whilst living with family and working part-time in hospitality. I undertook various brief stints of unpaid voluntary work and then writing articles for an online news blog for young

people.

It was only in the summer of 2019, a whole year after I had graduated, that I realised that the [Government Legal Profession Legal Trainee Scheme](#) offered not only the chance to work on the type of law I was interested in, but also included sponsorship of the LPC (without which I simply would not have been able to fund).

But with thousands of applications for fewer than 60 positions, I honestly did not think that I would ever be lucky enough to be selected for a training contract with the [Government Legal Department \(GLD\)](#). Yet, the way in which the GLD recruits is unique: by reducing the capacity for individuals to highlight the school they attended, the degree result they achieved, and the previous work experience that some people may have, it really does feel fair and transparent. The emphasis instead is on your ability to make effective decisions, communicate and influence, work together (with others) and deliver at pace. It is on the skills you possess and the ways in which you behave, and not on what you degree result you achieved or secondary school you went to.

When I was first offered my training contract, it felt as if I had been handed a golden ticket, and to a large extent, I still feel that way today. My first year training with GLD has comprised of two six-month seats in public law and private law litigation, serving a range of clients from the [Ministry of Justice](#), [Department for Education](#), [Department for Transport](#), [Department for Health and Social Care](#) and [Department for Work and Pensions](#). I have attended numerous hearings, some of which have been extremely high profile with leading barristers instructed on both sides, and I have had the opportunity to take the lead on my own cases. I have greatly enjoyed the level of responsibility that GLD entrusts to its trainees from Day 1, the high-profile nature of the work, as well as the continual focus of learning and development. In all honesty, I simply cannot conceive of a better place to train as a lawyer.

I truly believe that I have found a career that combines my interests in international relations, law and policy, that is fast paced and exciting, and that is full of different possibilities and outcomes, and for that, I could not be more thankful.”

[New Justice Secretary agrees deal to get criminal barristers back to work](#)

- fee rises for legal professionals for the vast majority of Crown Court cases
- barristers and government commit to working together to reduce the backlog

Criminal barristers have agreed to vote on ending strike action to get justice moving for victims following discussions with Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice, Rt Hon Brandon Lewis MP.

The Criminal Bar Association will re-ballot members following meetings with the Lord Chancellor and his decision to offer a package of further reforms and fee uplifts to criminal legal aid. This represents further investment of £54 million in the criminal bar and solicitors.

A planned 15 percent fee increase for criminal barristers will now apply to the vast majority of cases currently in the Crown Court. This will also apply to fee increases for solicitors and is part of a wider package of proposals announced by the government today (29 September 2022) to help tackle the court backlog.

As part of the proposals, the Criminal Bar Association and Bar Council have also committed to working together with the government to reduce the courts backlog and increasing diversity among barristers. Measures designed to reduce delays for victims, such as increasing early resolution of cases, reducing the number of ineffective trials and progressing cases between magistrates' courts and the Crown Court, will be explored.

Lord Chancellor and Justice Secretary Brandon Lewis said:

I greatly value the criminal bar and solicitors and the work they do every day in our Crown and Magistrates Courts. They are crucial to reducing the backlog.

My priority in these discussions has been to ensure that victims aren't forced to wait longer to see justice done.

These are generous proposals, and I would strongly urge all members of the Criminal Bar Association to consider carefully, end their strike and work with me to deliver better outcomes for victims of crime.

The Ministry of Justice will make £3 million of funding available for case preparation like written work and special preparation. A further £4 million will be allocated to defence barristers involved in pre-recorded cross-examinations, which are used to reduce the trauma of a trial for vulnerable victims and witnesses.

The Ministry of Justice is also proposing a £5 million uplift per year for fees in the youth court, from the 2024/25 financial year, expected to benefit both solicitors and some junior barristers.

An Advisory Board on Criminal Legal Aid reform will hold its first meeting in October, to discuss future proposals to improve the system for legal professionals and victims in a constructive way.

Further uplifts for solicitors will be announced in the weeks ahead.