



Education Committee

House of Commons London SW1A 0AA

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From Robert Halfon MP, Chair

The Rt Hon James Cleverly MP
Secretary of State for Education
Department for Education
London
SW1P 3BT

12 July 2022

Dear James,

Re: Errors made by exam boards in summer 2022

We are writing to raise concerns that the Committee has over several reports of errors made by exam boards during the summer 2022 exam series.

We welcome that the Department for Education has ensured GCSEs, A-levels, BTECs and other vocational exams went ahead this summer following the Covid-19 pandemic. Exams are the fairest form of assessment, and we are pleased that young people have had the opportunity to demonstrate the results of their hard work. However, we were disturbed to hear that the advance exam topic information given to pupils was in some cases ignored by exam boards.

As you will be aware, the Department and Ofqual decided that advance information on summer 2022 exam content would be provided by exam boards, in order to help pupils focus their revision. This was part of a package of measures to mitigate the educational disruption faced by pupils as a result of the pandemic. We consider this approach to be an important part of levelling the playing field for pupils whose learning was affected during the pandemic.

As Ofqual outlined, this advance notice of topics was intended “to support students and teachers in focusing revision for exams [...] to make sure that we are being as fair as possible to students given the disruption they have experienced [...] due to the coronavirus pandemic.”

It is therefore deeply regrettable that due to an apparent lack of due care and attention, some exam boards have issued papers that ignored the advance information, or contained errors.

This negligence on the part of exam boards would have resulted in pupils facing unnecessary distress and anxiety during this already stressful period of high-stakes summer exams. In addition, these errors risk undermining public confidence in the exams system.

Recent examples that have come to our attention include:

- AQA including a question on energy transfers and circuits in a GCSE physics paper. Circuits had not been included as a topic for revision in the advance information.
- An AQA A-level law paper including a 30-mark question on a topic not listed in advance information.
- Edexcel labelling Gabon as the Republic of Congo on a map of Africa, in its GCSE geography paper.
- AQA's GCSE geography paper featured a question that included a coloured map and key that were inaccessible to colour blind pupils.

While errors in exam papers, and the issuing fines in response, are not unprecedented, we believe the consequences of such errors are more profound this year, given the educational disadvantage pupils faced during the pandemic.

We urge Ofqual to implement the following recommendations:

- Exam boards must automatically issue full marks for questions where errors occurred, and ensure this decision is communicated to schools and pupils without delay. We note that in the case of the AQA GCSE physics paper, AQA has already agreed to issue all pupils with the full 9 marks.
- Ofqual must levy financial penalties on exam boards whose papers contained errors. Fines should be proportionate to the scale of the errors, and significant enough to act as a strong deterrent.

We would be grateful for a response no later than 29 August.

I am also copying this letter to the Chair of Ofqual.

Yours sincerely,

Robert Halfon MP
Chair of the Education Committee

