



Education Committee

House of Commons London SW1A 0AA

Tel: 020 7219 2370 Fax 020 7219 2370 Email: educom@parliament.uk

Website: www.parliament.uk/education-committee Twitter: [@CommonsEd](https://twitter.com/CommonsEd)

From Robert Halfon MP, Chair

Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP
Secretary of State for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
London
SW1P 3BT

20 November 2020

Thank you for your letter dated 13 November, in which you responded to the Committee's request to be provided with the departmental papers on exams 2020.

Our Committee has unanimously decided that it is essential we are given full access to the relevant official papers and minutes of meetings related to this, so the Committee can obtain a full and unobstructed picture of the discussions between the Department and Ofqual from March to the end of August.

It is disappointing, therefore, that the Department has refused to provide us with these papers, and we do not regard the proposal of providing us with a summary of these documents as an acceptable solution. Nor does it appear to us to be in keeping with the assurances given in the House on 9 September that the Department would work with our Committee and provide us with the information we request wherever possible. This was a commitment which was reaffirmed directly to us in your appearance before the Committee on 16 September.

The Committee takes your concerns around the 'chilling effect' that the release of such papers could have on the willingness of officials to provide advice extremely seriously. We do accept that, for Government to formulate policy effectively, officials must be able to provide free and frank advice to Ministers, confident in the knowledge that these ideas can be discussed freely.

We do not lightly depart from this position.

Nevertheless, given the unfairness and fall out that this years' exams have caused for hundreds and thousands of pupils and their families, and the near total collapse of public confidence in the results system this summer, we sincerely believe that the best way to restore public confidence is through complete transparency and openness. Our Committee has unanimously decided that this can now only be achieved by a full disclosure of these papers to our Committee.

It has now been over two months since our request was initially made. No papers have been provided to our Committee, despite the assurances on 16 September that the Department would do 'the absolute maximum to ensure that as much information as the Committee

requires is made available'. We ask that these papers are now provided to us without further delay.

Yours ever,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Robert Halfon'.

Robert Halfon MP
Chair of the Education Committee