



Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP
Secretary of State

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Rt Hon Robert Halfon MP
Chair, Education Select Committee
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Dear Robert,

I am writing to you following my [letter](#) to Ofqual on 13 January on which you were copied, to update you on the latest steps we are taking in response to the impact of the pandemic on exams later this academic year.

As outlined in my letter to Ofqual, it has become clear that the course of the pandemic requires government to take additional measures to control the spread of the virus. As the Prime Minister said on 4 January, new national restrictions in England are essential, and all primary schools, secondary schools and colleges have moved to remote education, except for vulnerable children and the children of critical workers, until at least February half-term. This is absolutely necessary to reduce transmission and limit progress of the virus.

Given this further disruption we have sadly had to review our plans to deliver exams this summer. We cannot guarantee that all students will be able to sit their exams fairly this summer and it is my firm policy position that alternative arrangements are needed to award qualifications. Together with Ofqual, we must therefore now deliver an alternative approach to ensure young people still receive a grade that supports them to progress to the next stage of their lives.

Together with Ofqual, my department had already worked up a range of contingency options. We have now issued a joint consultation to seek views on alternative arrangements for GCSE, AS and A levels, and propositions for vocational and technical qualifications (VTQs) and other general qualifications that are not GCSEs, AS and A levels.

For GCSE, AS and A level, it is my firm policy position that students' results should be determined based on teachers' assessment of their performance, informed by a breadth of evidence. The joint consultation will consider how we can support teachers to do this, including whether the use of externally set tasks or papers to support their judgements should be required or recommended and

what broader evidence should be used. We will seek to minimise the additional burdens for teachers and schools created by this need for evidence.

It is my view that students should be assessed based on what they have learnt, rather than against content they have not had a chance to study, and that this should be balanced against the need to ensure good enough coverage of the curriculum for all students to support successful progress. It is also my view that a teacher's final judgement ought to be given as late as possible in the academic year to maximise teaching time.

The consultation will include proposals for quality assurance of teachers' assessments. This will require careful guidance, training and support for schools and colleges. It is my position that as well as internal quality assurance, there should also be external checks in place to support fairness and consistency between different institutions, and that any changes should be the exception and based on human decisions, not an automatic process or algorithm.

The joint consultation will seek views on the options for private candidates to ensure there is a clear and accessible route for them to be assessed and receive a grade, and on options for any student to request a review and appeal their grade if they do not believe their grade reflects the standard of their work.

The consultation process will also cover Vocational and Technical Qualifications (VTQs) and other general qualifications such as Core Maths, Pre-U and the International Baccalaureate. The impact of the coronavirus pandemic has led the government to reach the view that it is no longer viable for written exams for some vocational and technical qualifications to go ahead in February and March. It is our view that written exams of these qualifications scheduled for April onwards should also not go ahead. We are consulting on which qualifications should be in scope, and the alternative arrangements that should be put in place where exams are not taken. We want to ensure fairness for all students and propose that the arrangements put in place for these qualifications are similar to those for GCSEs, AS and A levels.

As with the approach for students taking GCSEs and A levels, I am keen to maximise the opportunities for students to continue to develop their knowledge and skills and catch up on any lost learning for the remainder of this academic year. It is my view that internal assessment should continue, and should take place remotely for VTQs and other general qualifications wherever possible, whilst recognising that the level of disruption suffered might mean that not all internal assessment can be completed by all students. We expect that if where internal assessment is completed, this will be included as evidence when deciding your results. Like with GCSEs, AS, and A levels, the DfE and Ofqual are consulting on the approach.

For other general qualifications that are not GCSEs, AS or A levels, such as Core Maths, Pre-U and the International Baccalaureate, the awarding approach should be similar to GCSEs, AS and A levels. Where possible, I expect Functional Skills Qualifications assessments to continue to proceed in line with public health guidelines, including remotely. Where this is not possible, alternative arrangements should be put in place to award results.

There are a number of qualifications where a practical demonstration of occupational skills is needed. It is not possible to award these qualifications on the basis of teacher judgement alone, because often there are health and safety or regulatory elements where assessment is critical. I expect that assessments for these qualifications should continue wherever possible, subject to public health guidance, so that students are able to progress to the next stage of their lives. However, in some cases these may need to be deferred. The consultation seeks views on this approach.

To provide certainty to schools, colleges and students, balancing the need both to engage widely and to reach conclusions quickly, the consultation will run for a fortnight. I am keen to seek the views of teachers, school and college leaders, students, and their parents. I have provided further detail on my views on the consultation in my letter to Ofqual.

I look forward to continuing working with you on this matter.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'G. Williamson', with a large, stylized 'G' and 'W'.

Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP
Secretary of State for Education