

Written evidence submitted by a member of the public

I'm writing to make my views felt on the situation facing private GCSE candidates registered for exams this summer, particularly those of Y10 age or younger.

My own daughter is home educated because, though academically able, her mental health would simply not be able to cope with the anxiety induced by an exam season where she sat 8-10 subjects at once. For this reason and with the full support of her school we took her out for year 10 and 11, to home educate and study 4 subjects (Maths and Triple Science) in summer 2020 and 5 subjects spread between Autumn 2020 and summer 2021.

Of course I realise that the Coronavirus pandemic has wrecked the plans of vast numbers of school students, of which very many will not feel they receive a result that is fair. I also acknowledge that Ofqual and the exam boards are reeling from the load placed upon them to come up with a solution, and are doing their best to be fair in very, very difficult circumstances. All the same, I need to let you know that the suggestion from Ofqual that the grading process for this summer's GCSE cohort should not apply to those below Y11 age feels very wrong to me, to my daughter and to thousands of private candidates who have spent a whole year (or more) working towards this set of exams. These students are emphatically not in the same situation as year 10 students in schools having an early crack at GCSE maths in the hope of clearing some curriculum time for more focus on other subjects in year 11.

From my experience, private candidates are often in a very different situation to that of school-educated children. Many, like us, have mental health reasons to spread exams over a number of years, which would make deferring the exams to the next opportunity very problematic and in some cases dangerous for those children. Many, like us, have studied independently, without tutors or distance learning courses, using free and paid online resources as well as text books and past papers. They therefore have no opportunity to provide teacher-verified coursework or teacher-marked mocks, to show their progress towards their expected grades. Yet they, like us, have most definitely put the work in and are expecting to be able to prove their learning, otherwise their families would not have paid fees (including exam centre charges) of around £150 per subject. (As an aside, there seems not even to be any certainty that if candidates did withdraw they would get these fees reimbursed, either the exam board fees or the exam centres' charges.) I do not have access to information comparing the pass rates of external candidates with those of internal ones (though I'm sure it exists), but I would not be surprised if the above factors were reflected in a significantly higher success rate for those who are paying privately for the opportunity to take their GCSEs.

So I appeal to you to come up with a different approach in order to be fair to these children. In my view, any of the following (or a combination) could give a fairer outcome than the current proposed approach of simply forcing students to withdraw and resit up to a year later:

- Give a nominal result (even if it's just Fail / Pass / Good Pass) using whatever data exists (School assessments/mocks up to Y9 or Y10, even KS1 and KS2 SATs results) to predict how well these students would have performed at KS4
- Allow private candidates without tutors to submit evidence of the work they have done to study and revise (e.g. revision courses on Seneca and other such highly regarded sites, some of which offer '8/9 grades or your money back' if students complete all relevant quizzes)

- Provide an opportunity for students to sit this summer's exams no later than September, if they choose to, in order to reap the benefit of this year's work and still have time to embark on new subjects for Y11.

Thank you for taking the time to consider this input and I hope you will be able to announce some better news for private candidates very soon. Not least because the deadlines for withdrawing from these exams are barely a week away, and hundreds of families are uncertain as to whether to stick with the process in the hope of getting a grade this summer, or withdraw with the hope of recovering at least some of the moneys invested so far.

I do sympathise wholeheartedly with the difficult situation you and your staff find yourselves in, and I look forward to hearing from you.

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