

Written evidence submitted by Freya Jones

Dear members of the Education Committee,

My name is Freya Jones, and I'm an A Level student at a state sixth form in Devon. Following Wales' decision (on 10th November) to cancel GCSE and A Level exams for summer 2021, I am writing with regard to the following term of reference:

- The effect of cancelling formal exams, including the fairness of qualifications awarded and pupils' progression to the next stage of education or employment.

I am very worried that the Welsh decision might pressure England into acting similarly, so I hope that my views will support the current policy of extending revision time, rather than cancelling exams. As a student, I feel that exams really *should* go ahead for several reasons:

Firstly, there is not enough time to prepare for classroom assessment in the Spring Term.

If England were to follow the Welsh system (or similar), it appears that results would be based on semi-formal exams set to run before Easter. This actually gives students *less* time to prepare than if formal exams were to go ahead in summer. While I feel confident that I could catch up on lost learning-time by July, I will be unable to do myself justice if any significant assessment happens in the Spring Term.

Secondly, formal exams are still the fairest way of awarding qualifications.

Any system which relies on an element of teacher-assessment has the potential for bias – there is a real fear among my peer-group that teachers' personal knowledge (or lack of it) will affect the way in which they rank their pupils. On the other hand, schools may give their own students higher centre-assessed grades than are realistic, leading to university oversubscription and the devaluation of results. If this last point were to be addressed by taking schools' past-performances into account, however, it would strip students of the opportunity to be graded on individual merit, with the same repercussions as seen last year. To maintain consistency with pre-2020 cohorts, and break the cycle of uncertainty, national exams in June / July are the best way to assess students' abilities.

Thirdly, independent candidates stand to be very negatively affected by the cancellation of exams.

In 2020, no provision was made for these candidates, which was a significant failure of the system to help a minority group. Students who study independently are often dealing with compromising circumstances already, and there ought to be framework in place for them to receive equal consideration. I actually self-teach the subject which I plan to study at degree level (because my sixth form didn't receive adequate funding for the course) and formal exams with sufficient preparation time is the only way in which I believe I could be given a fair result.

So while some argue that our education has been too disrupted for exams to be viable, cancelling them would actually be *more* disruptive, from the viewpoint of a student.

Learners require clarity in order to set themselves effective academic goals.

If the Department for Education could therefore issue a statement about formal exams in 2021 as soon as possible (hopefully in favour of them going ahead), then I would be very grateful.

I look forward to following the Committee's progress, and thank you again for your consideration.

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