

Written evidence submitted by a Student

I'm a 15 year old student at [School Name] Grammar School, and will take my GCSE's in 2021. I have been studying at home since lockdown on 20th March 2020.

I have a recent diagnosis of Asperger's Syndrome and a long-term diagnosis of Dyspraxia. This causes me to suffer anxiety and panic attacks, due to auditory sensitivity and I have some issues with motor and ocular skills.

Personally, I have found home learning during the lockdown to be of benefit because I am able to work in a much more peaceful environment and at my own speed. I have mainly been able to stick to my timetable and complete the work daily. My work was sent weekly on a Monday morning and I was allowed to contact teachers by e.mail if I needed help; although this wasn't always possible and often answers would be provided days later.

The thing I have most struggled with when home-schooling is the ability to be both teacher and student. I have sometimes struggled to assimilate difficult topics and then do the work required in order prove that I have understood the information. This has made learning new subjects a lot more difficult. I know many of my friends have had the same difficulties, as self-management is difficult to maintain and can be very demotivating. My school wasn't able to offer a programme of online learning and I had only three 2-hour face to face sessions with my teachers (via Microsoft teams) over the full period of lockdown.

My main worry on return to school in September will be the fact that I am still expected to learn all the information required to take my GCSE's in June 2021, whilst having had an enormous gap in teaching. I have no idea if what I have learned during lockdown is the same as what I would have learned at school, or even if I have understood everything correctly. This makes me very anxious about next year.

I do not think that it is fair that myself and my peers will still have to sit an exam for which we are less prepared than others in previous years. I have friends in other schools who were taught almost from day 1 using Zoom or Teams with virtually no interruption to their normal school day. They will have a distinct advantage over me. I also have friends who were unable to do any work because they did not have a computer at home and were not able to access the work. Many others will have had family problems because of the virus. They will have a distinct disadvantage against me. This is clearly unfair. Exams are already a huge source of stress and this lack of security in our learning and changes to the learning environment will make that stress even worse. Many students, particularly mentally ill and neurodivergent students, may have struggled during lockdown and may also struggle with being back at school, re-adapting to that environment, and dealing with exams.

I would like the government to understand the pressure and uncertainty this will put on current Year 10 and 12 students and to take this into account when making decisions about the 2021 GCSE and A level exams. In my opinion, exams should either be cancelled, with grading based on course work or exams should be modified to reflect the inequality in students' preparation.

July 2020

