

Contingency plans confirmed for GCSEs, AS and A levels



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The Department for Education and Ofqual have today (11 November) confirmed contingency plans to support students in the unlikely event that exams in England cannot go ahead next year due to the pandemic.

The government intends for exams to take place next summer. But if they cannot go ahead safely or fairly due to the pandemic, contingency arrangements will be in place to ensure that schools and colleges are well prepared to enable students to achieve their qualifications.

Following a consultation, the department and qualifications regulator Ofqual have confirmed students would receive Teacher Assessed Grades based on a range of their work, similar to this summer.

To help minimise workload burdens on teachers and students, Ofqual has today published guidance for teachers on how they should collect evidence of students' work during the academic year. This guidance reflects feedback from teachers and school leaders to make it as clear and helpful as possible.

Exams are planned with adaptations next summer to recognise disruption to education during the pandemic and maximise fairness for students. These include a choice of topics in some GCSE exams and advance information on the focus of other exams to help students' revision.

Exam boards are also publishing formulae and equation sheets to help students in GCSE maths and some GCSE science exams, giving students time to familiarise themselves with them before exams.

Education Secretary Nadhim Zahawi said:

Exams are the best and fairest form of assessment, and we fully intend for them to take place next summer. Planning is underway

for exams to go ahead with adaptations to recognise the impact of the pandemic.

But it's right, and I know schools and families would expect, that we have contingency plans in place so there is a safety net for students to gain their qualifications and progress to their next stage of education or employment, whatever the course of the pandemic.

Ofqual Chief Regulator Dr Jo Saxton said:

Students have shown so much resilience in the face of the pandemic.

The back-up plans announced today incorporate their feedback, and that of their teachers, and mean students don't need to worry about the 'what if?'. They can concentrate on what really matters - studying and revising - as they prepare to show what they know and can do.

The majority of schools, colleges and others who responded to the consultation broadly agreed with the proposals for Teacher Assessed Grades, with more than 70 per cent of people and organisations agreeing that Ofqual's proposed guidance to support schools in collecting evidence was helpful or very helpful.

Ofqual's guidance sets out what schools and colleges need to do in advance to ensure evidence is available for determining grades, to be used if exams are cancelled at a later date. Only at that stage would Ofqual and exam boards provide guidance on how to determine a grade, and on arrangements for quality assurance checks, and appeals.

The Ofqual guidance says that, in many cases, schools and colleges need only conduct their normal amount of assessment, and teachers should guard against over-assessment.

Advance information for next summer's planned exams will be given in early February to help students focus their revision over the final months. The timing will be kept under review, subject to the course of the pandemic. The department has previously published contingency guidance for vocational and technical qualifications.

The government has an ambitious and long-term education recovery plan, backed by an investment to date of nearly £5 billion. It will help children and young people to make up for lost learning and get back on track. This includes delivering world-class training for teachers, providing tutoring across the country, and extending time in colleges by 40 hours a year.

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