



Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP
Secretary of State

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To students taking exams 2021

I am writing to you today because I know that you have faced unprecedented disruption to your education this year due to the pandemic.

Exams can be daunting at the best of times, but a global pandemic has the potential to make exams in 2021 even more challenging. I know that many of you have lost a substantial amount of time at school or college due to the pandemic and that you are working hard to catch-up.

On that basis, some of you might think that we should cancel exams next year and I sympathise with that viewpoint. However, I think that would be the wrong thing to do. Let me explain why.

Whilst they are stressful, exams are the best way for you to demonstrate what you know and can do. They offer you a fair, independent opportunity to demonstrate your abilities and give you control over your future and what you can achieve.

I previously announced that exams will go ahead next year – with most AS, A levels and GCSEs starting three weeks later than normal. This will provide you with some extra time to learn and revise for your exams – which I hope will help you to catch-up on some of the learning that you may have missed.

Today I am announcing additional measures that will help you to prepare for exams and hopefully make them less daunting. These measures will reflect the disruption you have experienced, ensure that exams are as fair as possible and enable you to get the qualifications that you deserve to progress to the next stage in your lives.

Measures to support you in your learning

We know that you have faced challenges this year that students would not normally have to deal with. Therefore, the exams regulator, Ofqual has determined that grading for 2021 GCSE, AS and A level exams will be aligned with the outcomes from 2020, meaning that you will not be disadvantaged relative to grades awarded this summer. Ofqual is also working to ensure that there is a fair approach across vocational and technical qualifications.

To help you best focus your efforts between now and the exams, awarding organisations will give you and your teachers advance notice of some of the topics to be covered in your exam papers. This will help you focus on these areas and target your revision in the run up to exams. For some subjects, exam support materials will be available to you on the day of exams (such as formulae sheets) – so you will not need to memorise all the information you normally would. Ofqual will publish further details on this in the spring term.

For those of you taking vocational and technical qualifications, we are announcing further flexibilities to reduce the number of assessments for many qualifications. This will free up time for you to focus on the areas you need to.

All these measures are designed to make sure that exams are as fair as possible and to maximise your opportunity to do well in them. I intend for as many of you as possible to be able sit exams in the usual way. However, we have planned for all eventualities and we are putting a range of contingency measures in place for anyone who could be affected by the pandemic.

Contingency measures for exams 2021

We are exploring how coronavirus testing developments can help to ensure that you can sit your exams safely, should you otherwise need to self-isolate. If you legitimately miss one or all your exams in a subject due to the pandemic, there will still be ways for you to obtain a qualification.

If you legitimately miss one or more of your assessments, but had completed a sufficient proportion of a qualification, then the existing special consideration process will be used to award a grade.

If you legitimately miss all your exam papers in a GCSE, AS or A Level subject, you will be given an opportunity to sit a contingency paper held shortly after the main summer series, in early July. For the likely small minority of you who might legitimately miss the main series and the contingency paper for a subject, you will have an opportunity to be awarded a grade based on a validated teacher assessment.

A similar approach will be followed for vocational and technical qualifications and other general qualifications.

Our commitment to making exams fair and safe

I want you to know that everyone in government, from the Prime Minister down, understands the challenges you have experienced this year due to the pandemic.

In this extraordinary year, we are committed to giving you the best opportunity possible to demonstrate your abilities, to get the grades you deserve and to progress to the next stage of your lives.

I would personally like to wish you the very best with your studies and your exams and I look forward to congratulating you all on your achievements come results day.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Gavin Williamson', written in a cursive style.

Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP
Secretary of State for Education