

House of Commons: Written Statement

Department for Education

Written Statement made by: **The Secretary of State for Education (Gavin Williamson)**.

Schools Update

This government has always made the education of young people a priority. We are determined to make sure that when the time comes, young people are able to take the next step in their lives with the knowledge and qualifications they need. We want to build on the remarkable efforts of teachers, students and parents across the country as children return to school – and education – through these challenging times. We must continue to do all we can to minimise the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on all those who are studying at school or college.

I know that students due to sit exams next summer have experienced considerable disruption to their education, our £1 billion Covid-19 catch-up package will help to tackle the impact of lost teaching time. It is right that our approach to exams and assessments in 2021 also reflects these students' experience.

Today I can confirm that GCSE, AS and A level exams in 2021 will go ahead, with most exams moved back 3 weeks next year to give students more time to prepare and a chance to catch up on education lost due to COVID-19. We know that exams are the fairest way of measuring a student's abilities and accomplishments, including the most disadvantaged. We want to give our young people the opportunity next summer to demonstrate what they know and can do.

The main exam series will start on 7 June and end on 2 July. One maths and one English GCSE exam will take place before the May half-term, giving any Year 11 pupils who need to self-isolate during the exam period the best possible chance of still sitting a paper in each of these core subjects. Some A and AS levels with typically very small numbers of students entering will also be scheduled in the days just before half term. It is expected that for the majority of vocational and technical qualifications that are taken alongside or instead of GCSEs, AS or A levels, awarding organisations will look to align timetables with 2021 exams.

Results days for AS/A levels and GCSEs will fall on Tuesday 24 August and Friday 27 August respectively, with students taking vocational and technical qualifications needed for progression to further or higher education receiving their results no later than their peers.

I am also confirming today the subject-level changes to exams and assessments outlined in the public consultation carried out earlier this year by the exams' regulator, Ofqual. These changes to exams and assessments next year will support teachers and students by freeing up valuable teaching time. Ofqual has also consulted on how assessments of vocational and technical qualifications will be adapted to free up teaching time and respond to any future public health measures.

Schools and colleges have shown exams can be held, even in areas of local restriction, in the autumn exam series which is currently taking place. Exams next year will be supported by contingencies for all scenarios. Today I have written to Ofqual to ask the regulator to support Government in developing these arrangements, engaging closely with the school and further education leaders, teachers, exam boards, unions and the higher education sector. The results of this planning and ongoing discussions with the sector will be published later in the Autumn.

I am grateful for the commitment and willingness that has been shown by groups across the

sector in enabling and delivering this additional teaching time next year, helping to ensure that young people have the best opportunity to succeed. Our approach will support students to prepare for exams with confidence and ensure they have the best chance of receiving the qualifications they deserve.