

Consultation on an additional GCSE, AS and A level exam series in autumn 2020

Proposals for an additional exam series in autumn 2020 in response to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

This consultation ran from
1pm on 22 May 2020 to 11:45pm on 8 June 2020

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Position (if applicable) **The Chair of Council**

Organisation (if applicable) **Mathematical Association**

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Do you wish any part of your response to remain confidential? *

No

Please select which qualifications and/or subjects you are interested in *

- **GCSEs**
- **Mathematics**
- **Statistics**

- **AS and/or A levels**
- **Mathematics**
- **Further Mathematics**
- **Statistics**
- **Advanced extension award in maths**

The scope of the autumn series

1. To what extent do you agree or disagree that we should require exam boards to offer exams for all of the GCSE, AS and A level qualifications this autumn they had intended to offer in the summer?

- Agree

2. To what extent do you agree or disagree that an exam board that receives no entries for a qualification by its entry deadline can withdraw the exams for that qualification from the exam timetable?

- Strongly agree

3. Do you have any comments on our proposal to require the exam boards to offer exams in every GCSE, AS and A level subject in autumn 2020?

The Mathematical Association (MA) believes that offering a full exam timetable in autumn 2020 will be disruptive for schools and colleges and students re-sitting multiple exams (whilst continuing their education) will not make the most of the 2020/2021 learning opportunities due to these distractions.

A full exam timetable will disrupt many schools' half term holidays and if the exams follow a similar timetable to the summer exams up to five weeks of lessons will be interrupted with students studying for exams and students absent from lessons whilst sitting the exams.

We therefore feel that students should be discouraged from sitting any exams which are not critical to a student's future progression.

4. To what extent do you agree or disagree that for the autumn series the same number of exams should be taken by students as they would have taken if the summer exams had not been cancelled?

- Neither agree nor disagree

5. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the exams taken in the autumn series should be in the same form for each qualification as those normally taken in the summer series?

- Strongly agree

6. Do you have any comments on our proposal that students taking the autumn exams should take the same number of exams in each subject as they would have taken if the summer exams had not been cancelled and that the exams should be in the same form as the ones they would have taken in the summer?

Due to the additional autumn exams being unprecedented some students may focus their attention on improving 2020 exam grades they felt were disappointing, this would be a distraction from a student's continued studies.

Students should be advised to re-sit exams only where it is critical to his/her future progression. The MA feels there is no justification for these additional exams unless the exams are in the exact same form as summer exams that the students prepared for.

The timing of the autumn exam series

7. To what extent do you agree or disagree that we should put in place provisions that allow the exam boards to offer exams from October 2020, with the exact start and finish dates being confirmed by us when the position on the re-opening of schools and colleges is clearer?

- Agree

8. To what extent do you agree or disagree that we should build some flexibility into our regulatory framework to enable us to vary the start and finish dates of the series if that is necessary because of the public health situation?

- Agree

9. Do you have any comments on the preferred timing of the autumn exam series?

The MA believes that the pressures of undertaking exam assessments in the new academic year could distract students from their new studies. Many students will already be feeling anxious about returning to study. Some students may need to continue to self-isolate or shield because of COVID-19 and schools and colleges cannot be sure that they will be fully open by September.

Giving students the dates for the additional exams will help alleviate some of the anxiety caused by the on-going public health issues. The MA does not feel there is any strong reason for changing the dates from October, for A-Levels, and November, for GCSE's. This will also give colleges time to find out the number of students entering each of the exams and make available suitable exam accommodation and staffing.

Reviews of marking and appeals

10. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the normal review of marking and appeal arrangements should apply to the autumn exam series?

- Strongly Agree

11. Do you have any comments on our proposal that the normal reviews of marking and appeals arrangements should apply and, if needed, the normal reviews of moderation arrangements?

The only justification for an Autumn series is that students have access to the full examination format they were preparing for. We agree that the normal reviews of marking and appeals arrangements should apply to the autumn exams.

Certificates

12. To what extent do you agree or disagree that we should amend our rules to allow an exam board to issue a replacement certificate to a student to show either their calculated grade or their grade from the autumn exam series, but not require them to do so?

- Neither agree nor disagree

13. Do you have any comments on our proposal to allow exam boards to issue replacement certificates to students?

The MA believe there should be a unified system for issuing certificates for this year's exams, to prevent any abuse of the system. We see no problems with exam boards issuing replacement certificates that just show the higher of the calculated or the autumn series grade if a student requests this. The exam board should be able to choose to charge for replacement certificates if it decides to offer this service.

Equality impact assessment

14. Are there other potential equality impacts that we have not explored? What are they?

The MA is of the view that disadvantaged students' grades maybe lower in the 2020 exams than had they been in school. This is for a number of reasons including disadvantaged students are more likely to attend schools with lower value-added scores leading to lower calculated grades. Disadvantaged students

will generally have less support preparing for the autumn exams due to limited access to resources and private tutors.

The other significantly disadvantaged group has been privately entered candidates, who are a minority but as stated in the proposal may number 20,000 candidates.

15. We would welcome your views on how any potential negative impacts on particular groups of students could be mitigated.

The MA is concerned that the public health situation will be ongoing, and to mitigate the impact on disadvantaged groups would be complex and could be open to abuse which would undermine the key goals of our examination system.

We would like to see additional support for all the students that have had their education disrupted this year especially students that failed exams and do not have the support systems to be confident in passing re-sits.

Regulatory impact assessment

16. Are there additional activities associated with the delivery of an additional exam series in the autumn that we have not identified above? What are they?

There is a risk the autumn examinations will disrupt a range of courses including A-Level and Btec with lessons missed due to students sitting exams and students having to split their time between independent study and revision for exams. This raises social mobility issues with students from higher income families having the ability to pay for additional support and resources, including private tutors, at a time when many more families will be facing financial hardship due to the COVID-19 economic downturn.

This is especially the case in mathematics. More and more maths teachers are asked to provide maths tutoring either for friends and family, or are undertaking private tuition to supplement their income, charging for tutoring at commercial rates. Having an additional exam season will further increase parents' reliance on private tutors to maximise the chances of their children getting good grades.

17. What additional costs do you expect you will incur as a result of an autumn exam series?

n/a

18. We would welcome your views on any suggestions for alternative approaches that could reduce burden and cost

n/a