

Examinations in summer 2022

In this article, Jugjit Chima considers how exams and assessments will be arranged in summer 2022, and the impact of any changes – and a return to a summer exam series - upon senior leaders and exams officers.

The recent joint DfE/Ofqual consultations on the [proposed changes to the assessment arrangements for GCSEs, AS and A levels in England in 2022](#) and [arrangements for the assessment and awarding of vocational, technical and other general qualifications: 2021 to 2022](#) provide an insight into how exams and assessments may be arranged next summer. We will have to wait until the autumn before receiving final confirmation of how exams will be conducted next summer, but some arrangements are becoming clear.

After two cancelled summer exam series, there is a growing appreciation that although written timetabled examinations may have their flaws, they are the best and fairest form of assessment. Therefore, unless there is extensive disruption to students' education in the coming months which means that exams would not be the fairest approach, there will be an exam series in summer 2022.

It has also been confirmed that a delay to the summer 2022 exam period will not take place. Although this was the intention for the summer 2021 exam series before it was cancelled, the proposed summer 2022 exam series will take place as a typical year from mid-May to the end of June.

It is very likely, however, that there will be some significant changes to exams and assessments in 2022 as a consequence of another academic year in which students have experienced significant disruption to their education. The joint consultation (for GCSEs, AS and A levels in England) provides an insight into the changes which may be implemented to ensure that candidates are not disadvantaged. These include adaptations to examinations, advance information on the focus of the content of exams in the majority of subjects at GCSE, AS and A level being available to students, and support materials being permitted in the examination room.

Regardless of the changes made for summer 2022, there will be an impact...and not only for students. Once the outcomes of the consultations are known, we will be able to assess the impact of any changes upon exams officers, however, it is possible that additional materials in exams for specific subjects, for example, may place pressure upon secure storage capacity, and also require a subject matter expert to be present in the examination room at the start of the exam to explain the purpose of these materials and to answer any questions from students...we will consider such issues further once final decisions are made.

If adaptations are made to examinations, then these are very likely to be made on a subject-by-subject basis as the DfE/Ofqual are seeking views on the following proposals for summer 2022:

- Choice of topics in GCSE English literature, history, ancient history and choice of content in GCSE geography

- Changes to the requirements for the delivery of practical activities in science subjects, and assessment in art and design
- The provision of support materials in GCSE mathematics, physics and combined science exams

These proposals are in addition to the changes to non-exam assessment (NEA) and fieldwork requirements for summer 2022 which were [confirmed by Ofqual on 16 June](#) following consultation.

One thing that we have learnt over the last 18 months is that even the best-laid plans can become problematic when faced with the impact of COVID-19. Therefore, to help plan for contingency measures, Ofqual has launched surveys to understand the views and experiences of [staff](#) and [students](#) of the Teacher Assessed Grades (TAGs) process. The outcomes of these surveys will help to inform any alternative arrangements for summer 2022.

Whatever is decided regarding exams and assessments in 2022, staff within centres will need to have clear guidance upon their return in September to aid their planning and preparation. However, guidance alone will not be sufficient. The authorities must understand the impact of COVID-19 upon staff who manage, administer and conduct examinations, and ensure that the necessary support is in place to help these members of staff deliver exams and assessments with the necessary security, integrity and level playing field in place.

If the autumn 2021 exam series is anything to go by, the promise of support is being fulfilled. The DfE should be credited for supporting centres in the delivery of the exams and assessments in scope during the autumn 2021 series (or where applicable, the spring 2022 series) by reimbursing any deficit created by autumn exam fees (minus any summer rebate) and funding (where eligibility criteria is met) any additional venue and invigilation costs (including training) under its [Exam Support Service](#). However, additional support beyond this exam series must be made available to centres and their staff to help support the recovery from the full impact of the last 18 months.

As far as the exams officer community is concerned, there are several areas which will need to be addressed.

It is clear that the summer 2022 series will be a very busy period for exams officers. It will be in the build up to, and during, this exam series when centres and exams officers will require the type of additional support which has been afforded to the autumn series and, therefore, it is hoped that the DfE will extend the benefits of the Exam Support Service to the remainder of the 2021/2022 academic year, at the very least.

There will also be a requirement to support all exams officers - both new and experienced - as they return to a business-as-usual summer exam series. As the last summer exam series took place in 2019, there will be a significant number of exams officers who have never planned for and delivered a summer exam series. Recent evidence suggests that a significant number of exams officers have left the role over the last 18 months, and a return to churn rates in excess of 20%-30% (as witnessed as recently as 2017/18) threatens to present significant risks to the examination system.

However, it is not only new exams officers who will require support in the coming months. It is

highly likely that those who are experienced in the role will also require some form of refresher training course to help them address the wide range of tasks which need to be undertaken to deliver a successful exam series. Therefore, 'the exam cycle' - which underpins the planning and delivery of an exam series - will not only need to be emphasised to a greater than usual number of new exams officers, but possibly revisited and reiterated with those who have previously experienced a summer exam series.

Senior leaders will also need to ensure that exams officers are given ample time and support to perform their role. A survey of over 2,000 exams officers in October 2020 revealed that over 55% are carrying out another role within their centres, in addition to their core exams-related role. Over the last 12 months, the number of exams officer undertaking an additional role within their centre has increased significantly due to the absence of written timetabled examinations and their involvement in performing tasks to support COVID-related protocols as they were deemed to have capacity within their core role. Senior leaders will need to ensure that exams officers are able to return to focus upon their primary role of managing, planning for, administering and conducting examinations. Exams officers must be allowed to ensure that key tasks associated with the summer exam series – which need to be completed throughout the academic year, starting in September – are undertaken and completed as a priority.

Finally, centres will need to ensure that they have adequate numbers of trained invigilators to ensure that exams are conducted in line with JCQ regulations. In a survey conducted in May 2021, 84% of exams officers (from 607 exams officers surveyed) confirmed that they expect to experience issues in recruiting/having access to sufficient numbers of invigilators for the 2021/2022 academic year. There are several reasons for this, including many invigilators who have withdrawn their services after being affected by COVID-19, some who have moved onto other roles as a result of not being employed as an invigilator since summer 2019, and many who, due to their age or having vulnerable family members, feel unsafe in returning to a school/college setting.

Naturally, there will be immense relief as we emerge from the extraordinary arrangements and difficulties experienced over the last 18 months. However, if we are to return to a sense of normality, exams officers and senior leaders who are responsible for managing and administering the examination system must receive adequate support to enable them to make the transition to a 'business as usual' examination year and summer exam series. A failure to do so will result in further disruption and significant negative impact upon students - which is something that must be avoided at all costs following the difficulties that students and staff have encountered since March 2020.

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