

## JCQ consultation on the provisional GCE, AS, A level and GCSE Summer 2021 timetable

### Response of the Association of School and College Leaders

#### A. Introduction

1. The Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) represents over 20,000 education system leaders, heads, principals, deputies, vice-principals, assistant heads, business managers and other senior staff of state-funded and independent schools and colleges throughout the UK. ASCL members are responsible for the education of more than four million young people in more than 90 per cent of the secondary and tertiary phases, and in an increasing proportion of the primary phase. This places the association in a strong position to consider this issue from the viewpoint of the leaders of schools and colleges of all types.

#### B. General comments

2. We cannot support the proposed timetable in its current form.
3. In our [response](#) to the recent Ofqual consultation regarding mitigation strategies to generate more teaching time for the current Year 11 and Year 13 students, we cautiously welcomed the proposal to delay the start of the exam season. As one of many possible strategies we believed this could make a marginal difference to schools and colleges in their efforts to help students to catch up. However, we made it clear that our support for this proposal was contingent on there being no delay to the release of results.
4. We also, in the [proposals](#) on 2021 exams which we put forward with a number of other organisations earlier this month, highlighted concerns that compressing the exam period could have significant negative consequences on student performance and wellbeing, which may negate the possible benefits.
5. While the proposed timetable does delay the start of the exam series, it also compromises the dates on which results will be released, and compresses the series into a shorter interval. This will result in a number of unacceptable consequences:
  - a) The compression of the exams into a shorter window will cause considerable stress and increased anxiety to students who have already been severely disrupted through Covid-19. This will be a very demanding experience for all GCE and GCSE candidates, given very little likelihood of gaps between exams.
  - b) The number of exam clashes will inevitably increase, particularly at A-level, and the consequent need to run exams at different times will cause increased disruption to centres and students. We are also concerned about how such clashes would be handled in a Covid-secure way, given that this often involves students having to stay away from home overnight.

- c) The proposal to publish both A-level and GCSE results in the same week will cause huge difficulties for the staff in schools and colleges who have to manage this process.
  - d) Some schools and colleges will have resumed their autumn term when the results are published, which will cause severe problems.
  - e) The amount of time available to admit students into further education is greatly reduced and is likely to cause severe organisational issues.
6. We recognise this is a very difficult problem to resolve given the parameters within which JCQ has been asked to operate by DfE, particularly the mandated timeframe of 7 June to 2 July. However, we believe the timetable as proposed is unworkable, and cannot be the right way to respond to this challenge.
7. We would strongly encourage JCQ to take the following actions:
- a) Recommend that the government considers widening the window within which exams can take place, to reduce the amount of compression. We recognise that this creates challenges, including running into the May half-term holiday at one end and the end of the summer term for some schools at the other end. Our view, however, is that the pros and cons of reducing the exams window should be considered alongside other mitigations on which the government is currently consulting, rather than being mandated in advance.
  - b) Revert to A-level and GCSE results days taking place in two separate weeks, to ensure staff in schools and colleges are able to manage this process – ideally in the weeks in which results are usually released.
  - c) If it is impossible to revert to the usual timing for results days, ensure post-16 and HE institutions are able to make any necessary changes to guarantee that students will be able to progress onto their next stage of education or training, despite receiving their results later than usual.
8. If the exams window cannot be widened, it is even more imperative that DfE, Ofqual and the exam boards put in place some of the adaptations currently under consideration, to reduce the pressure on students and give them the best possible chance to perform well, despite the severe and uneven disruption to their learning. These should, in our view, include the following:
- a) Greater optionality, to enable all students to demonstrate what they know and can do, even if they have not been able to complete the whole curriculum, or to study some topics in as much depth as other students. This optionality should be introduced at a centre level, i.e. by centres determining which elements of a paper their students will answer, to avoid the known problem of disadvantaged students disproportionately misunderstanding complex exam rubrics.
  - b) The provision of formula sheets and advance materials where possible, to reduce the amount of time students have to spend revising and therefore maximise teaching and learning time.

- c) The provision of reserve papers, to enable students who are not able to sit an exam on the usual date because they are ill or self-isolating to do so at a later date.
- d) Confirmation that the special consideration process can be used at much greater scale than usual to award a grade to any student who is able to complete an agreed percentage of a qualification.
- e) The implementation of a robust back-up process, involving rankings or grades submitted by centres, to ensure that students can still be awarded grades if they are unable to sit any exams in a subject.
- f) Standards set at a level which recognises the disruption this cohort have experienced.

### **C. Conclusion**

- 9. We are grateful for the opportunity to contribute to this consultation.
- 10. We hope that this response is of value to the process. ASCL is willing to be further consulted and to assist in any way that it can.

Duncan Baldwin  
Deputy Director of Policy  
Association of School and College Leaders  
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