

Ofqual consultation on proposed changes to the assessment of mathematics, physics and combined science GCSEs in 2024

Response from the Association of School and College Leaders

A. Introduction

1. The Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) is a trade union and professional association representing over 25,000 education system leaders, heads, principals, deputies, vice-principals, assistant heads, business leaders 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 children and young people across primary, secondary, post-16 and specialist education. 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.
2. ASCL welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this consultation. Our response is based on the views of our members, obtained through discussions at ASCL Council, with relevant advisory groups, and prompted and unprompted emails and messages.
3. When considering the impact of any proposals on different groups, it is ASCL's policy to consider not only the nine protected characteristics included in the Equality Act 2010, but also other groups which might be disproportionately affected, particularly those who are socio-economically disadvantaged. We have answered the equality impact questions on this basis.

B. General points

4. It is [formal ASCL policy](#) that students should be provided with enhanced formulae and equation sheets in GCSE maths, combined science and physics in 2024, and we have been calling on the DfE and Ofqual to confirm that this will be the case for many months. This decision is therefore very welcome and we strongly agree with all the proposals.
5. As Ofqual's own analysis shows that it did not 'identify any significant assessment issues relating to the introduction of these arrangements in 2022 or 2023', we cannot understand why these arrangements should not continue in perpetuity. If the validity of candidates' mathematical and scientific assessment was not compromised, then we fail to see why this support should not become a permanent feature of these qualifications.
6. We strongly welcome the decision to provide this support in 2024, but are disappointed it has been made so late into the autumn term, despite ASCL and other unions repeatedly bringing it up in stakeholder meetings. Many schools and colleges will have already completed mock exams under the (then correct) assumption that formulae and equation sheets would not be in place.

7. This has particular implications for Ofqual's response to the resilience arrangements going forward, in which centres have been required to produce and retain evidence of candidates' work under 'normal' exam conditions. Ofqual or JCQ should produce guidance for schools and colleges which did not include revised formulae and equation sheets in their mock exams, as this may have had a negative impact on students' performance.
8. Whatever decision is made about the continuation of these materials in the future, the maths formulae sheet must also be made available in the November 2024 series, otherwise students resitting maths GCSE, as a condition of funding, will be even more disadvantaged than is usually the case.
9. In summary, we strongly support these proposals and would advocate they continue beyond 2024.

C. In response to your specific questions

Question 1: To what extent do you agree or disagree that a formulae sheet should be provided in the exam room for GCSE mathematics in 2024?

10. Strongly agree.

Question 2: Do you have any comments on the proposal to provide a formulae sheet in the exam room for GCSE mathematics in 2024?

11. Formulae sheets provided in 2022 and 2023 did not undermine the validity of the GCSE, and Ofqual found no significant assessment issues related to their introduction. They should therefore continue in 2024, and in future years.
12. As in 2022 and 2023, the sheet must also be provided in the November 2024 series.

Question 3: To what extent do you agree or disagree that a revised equation sheet covering all equations should be provided in the exam room for GCSE physics and combined science in 2024?

13. Strongly agree.

Question 4: Do you have any comments on the proposal to provide a revised equation sheet covering all equations in the exam room for GCSE physics and combined science in 2024?

14. Revised equation sheets provided in 2022 and 2023 did not undermine the validity of the GCSE, and Ofqual found no significant assessment issues related to their introduction. They should therefore continue in 2024, and in future years.
15. The volume of memorisation required in GCSE physics is significant, and the provision of this support makes it a more proportionate form of Level 2 assessment.

Question 5: Are there other potential equality impacts that Ofqual has not identified?

16. Yes.

Question 6 - If yes, what are they?

17. Age is a protected characteristic. Younger cohorts taking exams from summer 2025 will be negatively impacted if a decision is made not to provide enhanced exam materials in future series.

18. ASCL was pleased to see Ofqual and DfE taking a broader view of equalities impact in this consultation, which included students whose homes are not conducive to study and students who don't have access to technology. The impact of these proposals on disadvantaged students is only positive.

Question 7: Are there additional activities associated with providing students with formulae and revised equation sheets in their GCSE mathematics, physics and combined science exams that Ofqual has not identified above?

19. No.

Question 9: If yes, what are they?

20. N/A.

Question 10: What, if any, additional costs do you expect you would incur if students are provided with formulae and revised equation sheets in their GCSE mathematics, physics and combined science exams for 2024?

21. None.

Question 11: Do you have any suggestions for alternative approaches that could reduce burden and costs?

22. Ofqual and JCQ should release guidance for schools and colleges which have already completed mock assessments in line with Ofqual's resilience arrangements, on whether they should complete new mock assessments. If not, Ofqual and JCQ need to provide assurance that these centres and their students won't be disadvantaged in the unlikely event that exams are cancelled.

D. Conclusion

23. We strongly agree with all of the proposals set out in this consultation.

24. We hope that DfE and Ofqual will consult on extending these arrangements beyond 2024.

25. We hope that this response is of value to your consultation. ASCL is willing to be further consulted and to assist in any way that it can.

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