

Response to Exam Cancellation

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Today we had some clarity of how students will be assessed at GCSE and A-Level due to the cancellation of exams. In my considered professional opinion using teachers' assessments in conjunction with mock exam results is not a fair way to award grades with these exams.

In more than twenty-five years of being a private tutor and GCSE physics examiner, I have experienced a large number of incorrect grades being given to students. Very often they are assessed at a lower grade than the grade I have assessed them at. It has required my intervention in persuading the school that they have wrongly graded a given student and that they should be put in for the higher tier exam rather than the lower tier for a particular subject. The students have then gone on to achieve the higher grade that I assessed them at. Working one-to-one with a student allows a tutor to more accurately assess the full potential of a given student. Very often predicting the final grade of the student to a higher degree of accuracy when compared to their teacher. It is difficult to see the full potential of a student in a class of more than fifteen pupils.

Mock results can also be a poor indicator of some students final grade in a particular subject. Last year I had a student come to me having been graded level 4 for GCSE physics. They achieved a level 9 in physics after my help and support between receiving their mock result and the final exams. Mock exams are useful in helping students identify any weaknesses in a particular subject, allowing them to make improvements in their understanding before sitting the final exams. It also has to be borne in mind that many students today take mock exams before they have covered the entire specification. They have therefore only been assessed on a narrow range of the specification.

Also it has been my experience that mock exams are not marked to the same standard as the actual exams, from seeing students mock papers that have been marked by teachers at their school. Teachers do not always follow the mark scheme as an examiner would, and awarding marks that should not be awarded or not awarding the correct mark. This inaccuracy of marking can be more pronounced from schools in the private sector and further education colleges where very often the teaching staff do not hold a recognised teaching qualification.

It is also now becoming more prevalent for teachers to set homework using the internet and not marking this, giving the detailed feedback which would have been given before the age of the internet. With teachers not seeing how students answer in detail a given piece of homework, making the assessment of the homework invalid and should not be used towards awarding a final grade at GCSE or A-Level.

Usually in any given class of thirty students there will be some students who rarely come to the attention of the teacher. Usually these will be quiet students that rarely show their potential in class, showing what they can achieve in a formal test or exam. It would therefore not be possible to give these students an accurate grade if there is not sufficient evidence from accurately marked mock exams, which the student took under exam conditions.

The decision to cancel examinations this year by the education secretary was ill-thought, especially taking into account that there was no consultation with the exam regulator or examination boards before the announcement that the examinations scheduled for May and June this year would not take place. There was no clear indication of how students would be graded. The subsequent decision to allow teachers to award grades without any procedure for moderation is akin to awarding the grades as a lottery.

There is the possibility that students who do not receive the grade they feel they are capable of achieving will be able to take examinations later this year. There is scant detail of how these examinations will take place at the time of writing this report.

There needs to be in place a standardised grading system for each student to also be fairly graded. There has been no mention of having such a system in place or how it will be regulated. There is little detail for the criteria on how grades should now be awarded.

The correct and fair decision would have been to have postponed the examinations until later in the year. It should have been possible to have moved them to July or August, moving the date results would have been given and adjusting the start of the new academic year so that the students could use their accurate results when making decisions about further study at sixth form or university.

I was always taught that one should stop and think before making any statement, carefully considering the information you wished to convey. It appears that this advice has been ignored with regards to this year's examinations and awarding of grades. It would not surprise me if there was to be a significant number of students questioning their final grades this year. Consequently wishing to sit the examinations in order to achieve the grade they are capable of achieving.