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Open consultation

# Support materials and advance information for GCSE, AS and A levels in 2021 (html)

Published 10 December 2020

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## Introduction

Students' education has been disrupted this year by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. To make exams in 2021 less daunting for GCSE, AS and A level students, for many subjects they will be told in advance some of the topics that will or won't be on the papers, helping them to manage their revision.

For some subjects, students will be given support material in the exams, such as formulae and equations. The exact approach will vary by subject.

We'd like to hear your views on how these changes should be used; you have until 11:45pm on 20 December to respond.

## Advance information about topics on the exam

The exam boards will decide what information will be provided to teachers and students before the exams, and they will publish this advance information at the end of January. The exam boards will work with each other to make sure that they take as similar an approach as possible for each subject.

With over 1,000 GCSE, AS and A level papers being used in the summer, the exam boards need time to prepare the advance information. They are also preparing contingency papers – for students who have missed all their scheduled exams or assessments. The advance information will also need to be applicable to these contingency papers.

We've developed some principles for the advance information that we'd like your opinion on.

### The principles

- The advance information should not be so detailed that students are able to memorise answers to write in the exam.** This would give an advantage to students who are good at memorising or rote learning – it wouldn't be a true assessment of the student's ability. Students might also memorise answers that someone else had written, so the exam would not be a true assessment of the student's ability in a subject.
- The advance information should not be so extensive or specific that it will damage a student's progression to higher level qualifications in the subject.** Students will focus on the topics that they know will be covered in the exam, but there are some aspects of the content that will be important to be able to study the subject at a higher level. The advance information shouldn't discourage students from investing in further learning.
- It should still be possible to differentiate between students on the basis of their performance.** The results of these qualifications will be used as an important measure of a student's ability when they apply for jobs, or to universities, schools and colleges for further learning. It should be possible to identify stronger and weaker candidates, despite the use of advance information. It shouldn't allow students to predict the questions and prepare answers in advance.

## Providing support materials

In some GCSE, AS and A level subjects students normally have to memorise key information and recall it when they need to use it to answer a question in the exam – for example, formulae and equations used in sciences or maths. We believe that students taking exams in summer 2021 should be given those formulae and equations in the exams for subjects where they would normally have to memorise them.

## Equalities

We've considered whether providing advance information or exam support materials needs to be implemented in a specific way to avoid any disproportionate negative impact on students because they have a particular protected characteristic, for example because their ethnicity or a disability.

There is a risk that students who are able to revise all of the content for a subject will be better prepared to progress to higher level study in that subject than students who focus their revision on topics they know will be covered in the exams.

However, there is also a risk that, without such changes, students whose education has been the most disrupted by the pandemic could find it difficult to prepare for their exams.

The exams boards must publish the advance information, so it is available to all students, including those who are home educated.

Students who request a modified version of the exam paper, for example in braille must also have any support materials in the exam in modified form.

We'd like to know your view on whether these adaptations will have a negative impact on students with a particular protected characteristic. How could the impact be addressed through the way in which the adaptations are made?

You can provide your responses to us by filling in the short survey, linked from the consultation page.

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