

ANALYSIS OF CONSULTATION RESPONSES

Support materials and advance
information for GCSE, AS and A
levels in 2021

ofqual

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Introduction

As a result of the disruption to the education of students caused by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, the government considers that exams cannot be held in summer 2021 in a way which is, and which is perceived to be, fair. Government policy is that exams should be cancelled for GCSE, AS and A levels this summer. Alternative arrangements for issuing students with grades were announced on 25 February 2021.

Prior to the decision being taken to cancel exams, and in light of the disruption to students' education in December 2020 we consulted on ways in which summer 2021 exams could be made less daunting for students.

For many subjects we proposed that students would be told in advance some of the topics that would or would not be on the papers, to help them to manage their revision.

In addition, for some subjects, we proposed that students would be given support material in the exams, such as formulae sheets and equations. The exact approach would vary by subject.

We consulted on how these changes should be used, including the principles that exam boards should apply when determining what advance information to provide to students, and in which subjects support materials should be made available. Our intention was that this advance information would have been published by the end of January, and would have enabled teachers to focus their remaining teaching time on the topics that they knew would be assessed and to provide guidance to students on how to use the support materials in the exam.

This is the summary of responses to our consultation that ran between 10 December and 20 December 2020, and to which we received 10,636 completed returns.

The cancellation of exams meant that this consultation was no longer relevant to the summer series and no decisions were taken as a result. However, in the interests of transparency we are publishing this analysis of the responses.

Background

In July 2020, following the [Secretary of State's letter](#) stating his intention for examinations to take place for the 2020/21 academic year, we consulted on a range of proposals designed to [support students taking GCSEs, AS and A levels in summer 2021](#), in recognition of the disruption to their education due to the pandemic.

Following that consultation, [we decided to allow the exam boards](#) to make changes to the way in which they assessed content in some GCSE subjects, and to make adjustments to the assessment arrangements in some GCSEs, AS and A levels to reflect public health requirements. We also removed the expectation on centres to ensure that students had the opportunity to complete activities such as fieldwork in geography, which may not have been possible due to public health restrictions.

At the time we recognised the potential for further disruption, and confirmed that we would develop additional contingency proposals to mitigate the impact that this could have on students' ability to prepare for their assessments.

This consultation was conducted on the assumption that summer 2021 exams would be able to go ahead. On 4 January 2020, the government announced summer 2021 exams for GCSE, AS and A levels would not take place and therefore the support materials and additional information relating to these summer exams are no longer required. As such we have not taken any decisions in relation to the consultation.

We have since published our [decisions on how GCSE, AS and A level grades should be awarded this summer](#) and are now seeking views [on arrangements for an autumn 2021 exam series](#).

Approach to analysis

The consultation was published on our website and was open to responses via an online survey. The survey was structured as follows:

- Questions 1 to 6 ('About you'). This section concerns the role of the respondent and qualifications which they indicated were relevant to them. The data collected in these questions is referred to throughout the analysis
- Questions 7 to 18 concerned advance information and support materials. For questions 9 to 11 and 13 to 18, respondents were able to choose up to three subjects per question. Therefore, the percentages shown are based on the total number of responses, rather than the total number of respondents. Our

analysis of responses to these questions is in the 'Views Expressed' section of this report. We have used a variety of charts to illustrate the responses¹

- Questions 19 to 24 related to potential equalities impacts of our proposals. Responses to these questions have been considered in the Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) section of this document
- Question 25 invited other comments on the proposals. We refer to the responses to this question in a separate section later in the document

Consideration of entry size

As part of our approach to the consultation analysis, we were mindful of the need to consider the relative entry size of different subjects in interpreting the results.

Therefore, for each of questions 9 to 11 and 13 to 18, we have provided two graphs; the first showing raw data and a second graph where the bars denote the number of responses per entry (based on the 2020 entry size for that subject). We refer to these graphs as 'weighted' throughout the analysis.

Who responded

In total, 10,636 individuals and organisations completed the consultation. We were pleased to receive such a large number of responses, including many from students, and thank everyone who participated. We recognise that the responses are not necessarily representative of the general public or of any specific group.

Respondents were asked to identify whether they were a teacher, student, or parent, and whether they were responding in regard to GCSEs, AS or A levels, or more than one qualification. Respondents could also identify as 'other', a category which was used by some individuals responding on the behalf of a stakeholder organisation. A breakdown of the organisations who chose to respond to our consultation is provided in Annex A.

Respondents could also select more than one role where applicable. A breakdown of the key groups who responded is provided in the chart below:

¹ Note that the bar charts showing responses to questions 9 – 18 only show the ten most common responses by subject, and do not show the responses made for all subjects. In addition, these questions did not ask for any rationale to support the choices made by respondents.

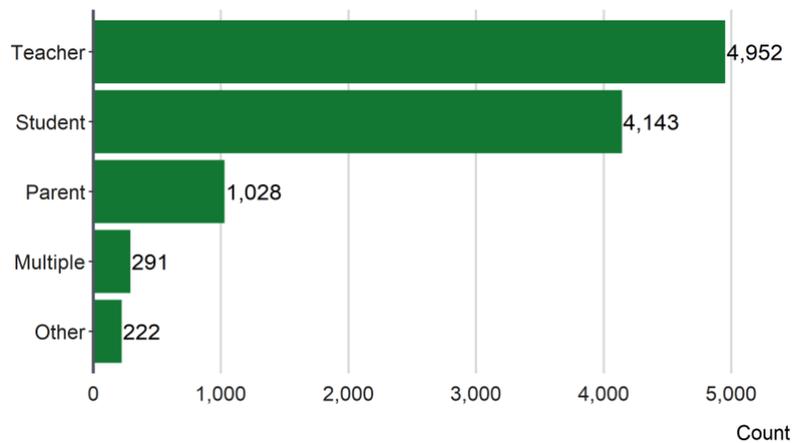


Figure 1: Roles of consultation respondents.

Views Expressed

In this section we report the views, in broad terms, of those who responded to the survey. This section relates to the questions concerning advance information and support materials, which formed questions 7 to 18 of the consultation. Responses to the individual questions were as follows.

Advance Information

Q7: Are you in favour of students taking GCSE, AS, A level exams in 2021 being told in advance some of the topics on which exam questions will or will not focus?²

² Note all the questions in this consultation were asked with reference to the summer 2021 exams series.

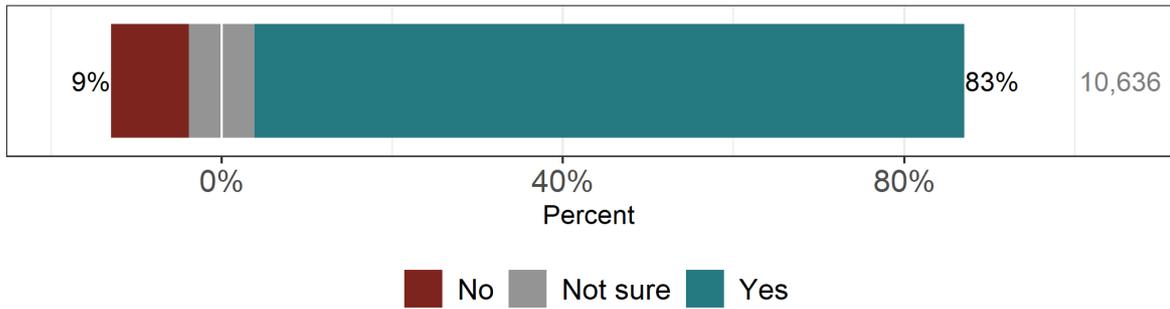


Figure 2: Measure of support for advance information.

This proposal was supported by the majority (83.2%) of respondents. Analysis of responses by the different groups who participated in the consultation also showed very similar proportions in favour: teachers (83.79%), parents (86.8%), students (81.5%) and ‘other’ (79.55%).

Q8: The information shared in advance should...

The information shared in advance should...

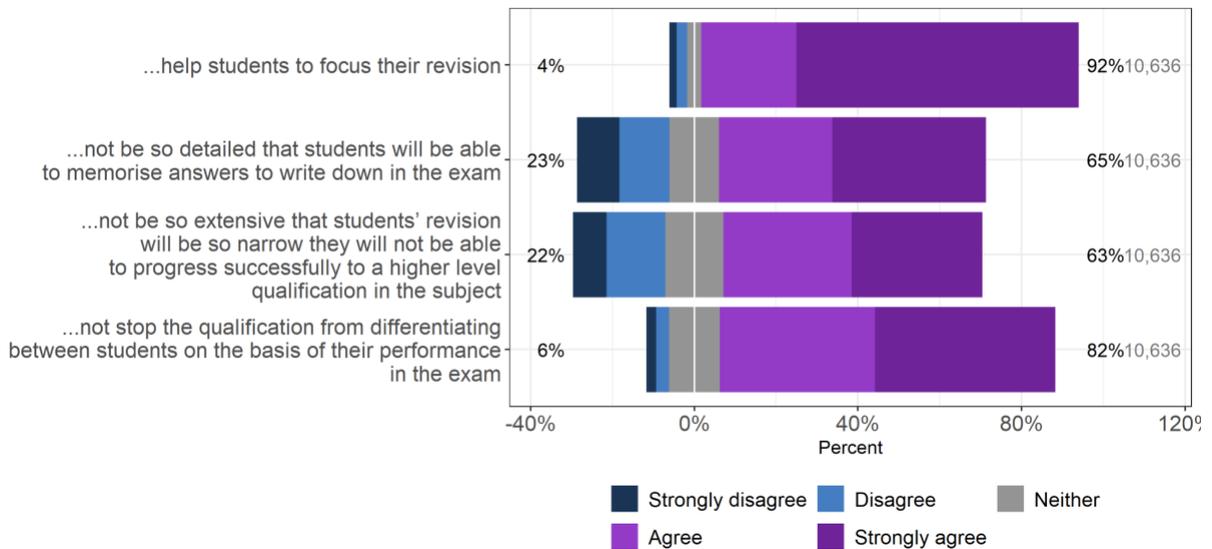


Figure 3: Levels of agreement with the proposed principles for advance information

The information shared in advance should help students to focus their revision.

As shown in the first box plot in Figure 3 above, the overwhelming majority of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that any advance information should

help students focus their revision (92%). This proportion was consistent across all groups participating, indicated by 90% approval or higher for all groups.

The Principles

The remaining three box plots in Figure 3 relate to the three principles around advance information that were highlighted in the consultation.

- 1. The advance information should not be so detailed that students are able to memorise answers to write in the exam (second box plot in Figure 3).** Approximately two thirds (65%) of all respondents agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. This rose to 85% when looking solely at teacher responses, compared to 43% when considering only students' responses. 63% of parental responses indicated that they agreed or strongly agreed with this proposal.
- 2. 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 (third box plot in Figure 3).** Again, approximately two thirds (63%) of all respondents agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. This figure was 87% when looking solely at teacher responses and 44% when considering only students' responses. Parental responses indicating agree or strongly agree were 62%.
- 3. It should still be possible to differentiate between students on the basis of their performance (fourth box plot in Figure 3).** A majority of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. Overall, 82% fell into this category, with strength of feeling varying slightly between groups. However, all were broadly supportive of this statement (teachers 92%, parents 79%, students 71%, 'other' 89%).

Q9: Are there any GCSE subjects for which information about exam topics should NOT be given to students in advance of the exam?³

³ Respondents were able to choose up to three subjects per question for questions 9 - 18.

Figure 4a: Frequency of GCSE subjects where advance information should not be provided

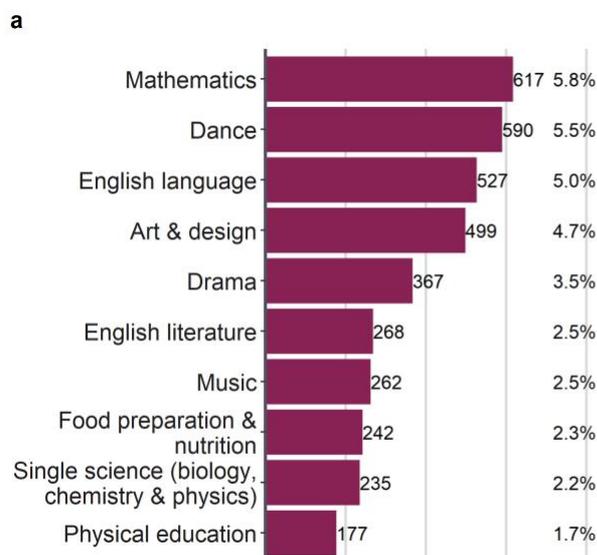
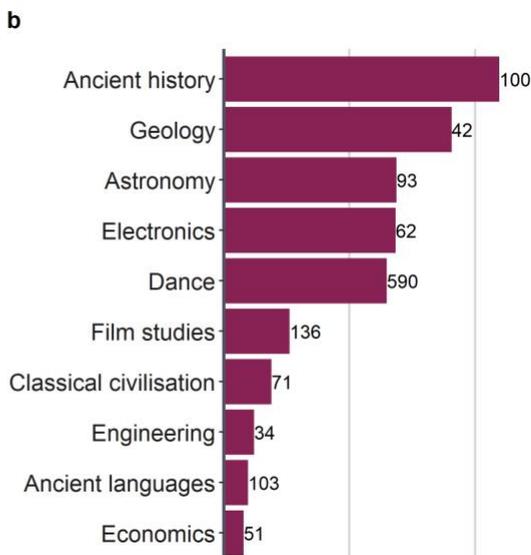


Figure 4b: Frequency of GCSE subjects where advance information should not be provided weighted by entry size in 2020



The most frequent GCSE subject indicated as inappropriate for advance information was mathematics, followed by dance, then English language.. Each of these GCSE subjects was selected by between 5% and 6% of all respondents. With the exception of mathematics, the creative or arts-based subjects were most frequently judged as inappropriate for advance information.

When considering teachers' responses only, mathematics and English language were the top two subjects by frequency, accounting for 5.5% and 4.2% of responses provided by teachers respectively. They were at least twice as frequently selected as the next most commonly selected subject which was single sciences (2.1% of teacher responses).

Mathematics was also the most frequently selected subject amongst parents (5.4%). Students, however, highlighted that dance (10.5%), art and design⁴ (8.7%) and drama (6.3%) were most inappropriate for advance information, followed by mathematics (6.1%) and English language (6.0%). The percentages in brackets correspond above to the percentage of responses from that particular group.

⁴ There is no exam in Art and Design, and therefore any adaptations would not apply. However, it was included in the list of subjects available to respondents to select, and we have included it here and in the graphs provided for transparency but not referred to it in the analysis.

Analysis involving weighting by entry size emphasised the responses to a number of smaller entry GCSE subjects. Ancient history, geology, astronomy, electronics and dance were the top five most frequently selected subjects when entry size was taken into account (see Figure 4b).

Q10: Are there any AS subjects for which information about exam topics should NOT be given to students in advance of the exam?

Figure 5a: Frequency of AS subjects where advance information should not be provided

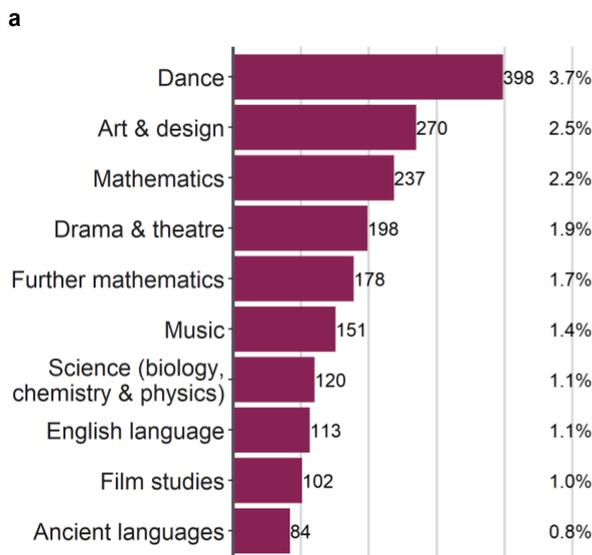
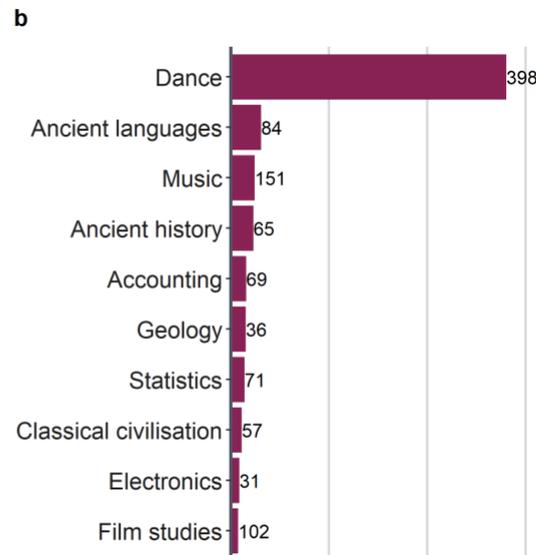


Figure 5b: Frequency of AS subjects where advance information should not be provided weighted by entry size in 2020



For this particular qualification, AS dance was the most frequently selected response. It is worth noting that of all the responses to this question for dance, 78% were from students. For AS drama and theatre, the majority of responses also came from students (77%).

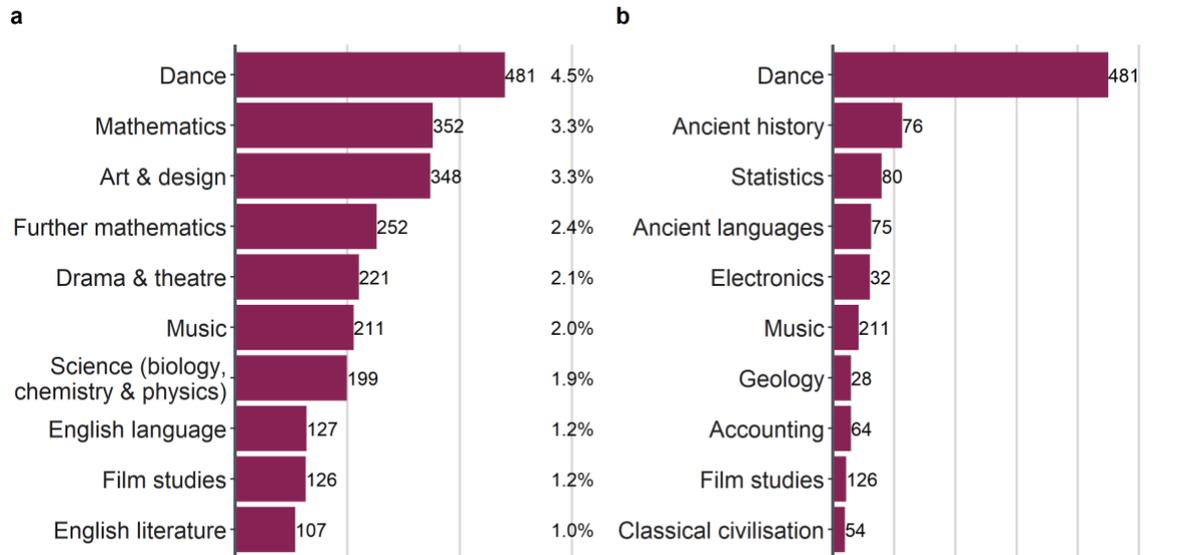
When restricted to teacher responses only, the two most frequently indicated subjects were AS mathematics (2.5% of teacher responses), and AS further mathematics (2.1% of teacher responses).

With the exception of mathematics, the subjects most frequently indicated as inappropriate for advance information were creative or arts-based.

Question 11: Are there any A level subjects for which information about exam topics should NOT be given to students in advance of the exam?

Figure 6a: Frequency of A level subjects where advance information should not be provided

Figure 6b: Frequency of A level subjects where advance information should not be provided weighted by entry size in 2020



For A level qualifications, a similar theme emerged where creative and arts-based subjects were most frequently indicated as inappropriate for advance information. Other subjects such as mathematics and further mathematics also appeared in the top five subjects where advance information should not be provided. Dance was highlighted as the subject most inappropriate for advance information at A level.

It is worth noting that 78% of all responses highlighting dance were from students. In comparison, 43% of all responses for mathematics were from students. Again, our analysis incorporating weighting for entry size shows that the number of responses indicating A level dance is disproportionately high when considered relative to the entry size (See Figure 6b).

Of teacher responses, the highest proportion (3.1% of teacher responses) indicated that A level mathematics would be inappropriate for advance information, followed by A level further mathematics (2.7% of teacher responses). This was in comparison to the next most frequent subject, which was science (1.7% of teacher responses).

Support materials

Question 12: Are you in favour of students taking GCSE, AS or A level exams in 2021 having access to support materials in some subjects?

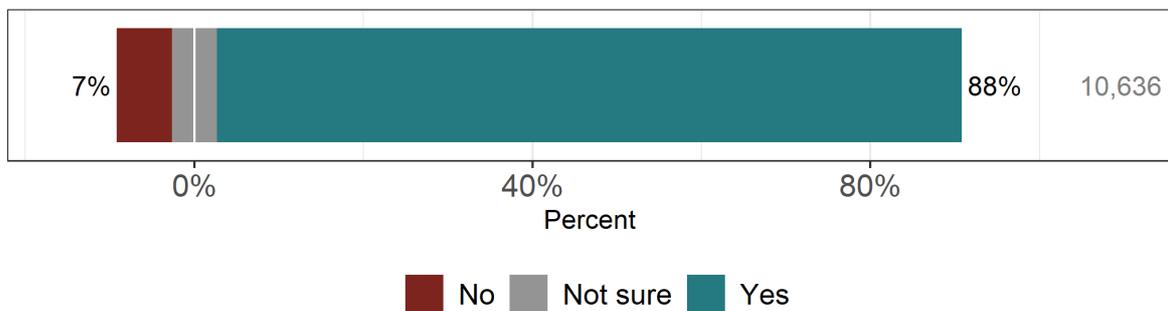


Figure 7: Measure of support for provision of support materials.

This proposal was supported by 88.1% of respondents. This high level of agreement was broadly consistent across the groups who responded: 87.6% (students), 89.6% (parents), 88.48% (teachers) and 86% ('other').

Questions 13 – 15 asked respondents to indicate the subjects in which they felt that provision of support materials would be particularly appropriate.

Question 13: Are there any GCSE subjects for which the provision of support materials in the exam would be particularly appropriate?

Figure 8a: Frequency of GCSE subjects where support materials were felt to be particularly appropriate

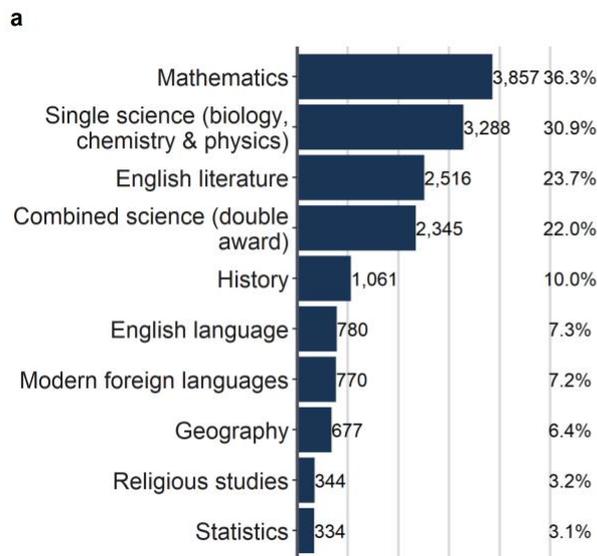
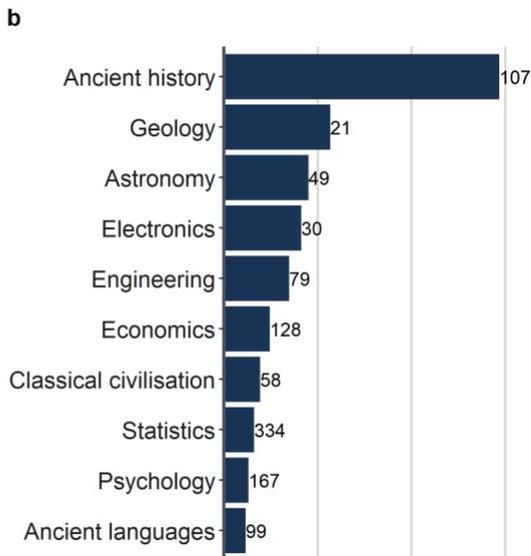


Figure 8b: Frequency of GCSE subjects where support materials were felt to be particularly appropriate weighted by 2020 entry size



At GCSE, the top four subjects identified were mathematics, single sciences, English literature and combined science. The proportions of responses selecting these four subjects was more than 10% above all others. The top four subjects were consistent amongst all groups of respondents: mathematics always being the most frequent, ranging from 33.1% amongst students to 55.8% of parents.

Our analysis reflecting weighting in line with entry size in 2020 showed that ancient history received a relatively high number of responses. Further analysis also showed that 59% of the responses indicating ancient history in this question came from students.

Question 14: Are there any AS subjects for which the provision of support materials in the exam would be particularly appropriate?

Figure 9a: Frequency of AS subjects where support materials were felt to be particularly appropriate

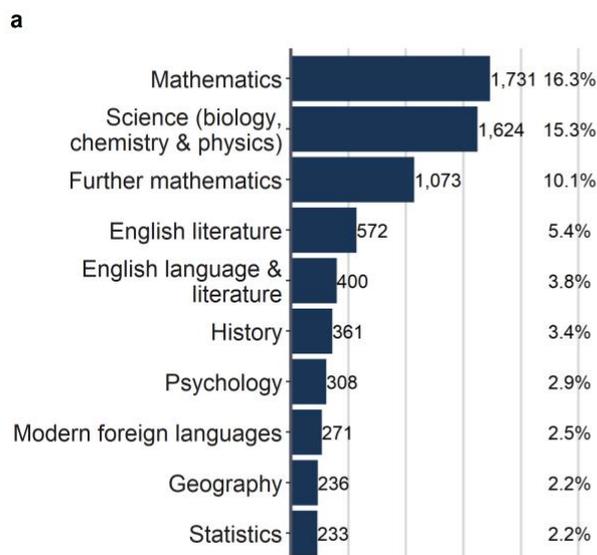
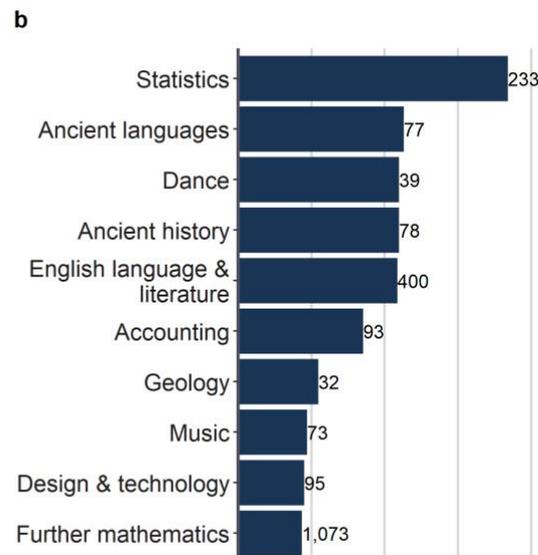


Figure 9b: Frequency of AS subjects where support materials were felt to be particularly appropriate weighted by 2020 entry size



At AS, mathematics, the sciences, further mathematics and English literature were the subjects most frequently highlighted as appropriate for support materials. This was also the case when considering the responses by individual groups (teachers, parents and students). This trend in mathematical and scientific subjects being particularly appropriate can also be seen with AS statistics, which was notable when the frequency of responses was considered in light of the entry size in 2020 (Figure 9b above).

Question 15: Are there any A level subjects for which the provision of support materials in the exam would be particularly appropriate?

Figure 10a: Frequency of A level subjects where support materials were felt to be particularly appropriate

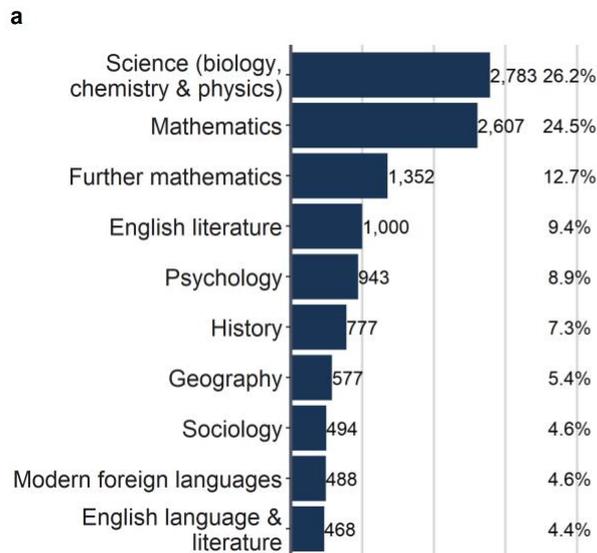
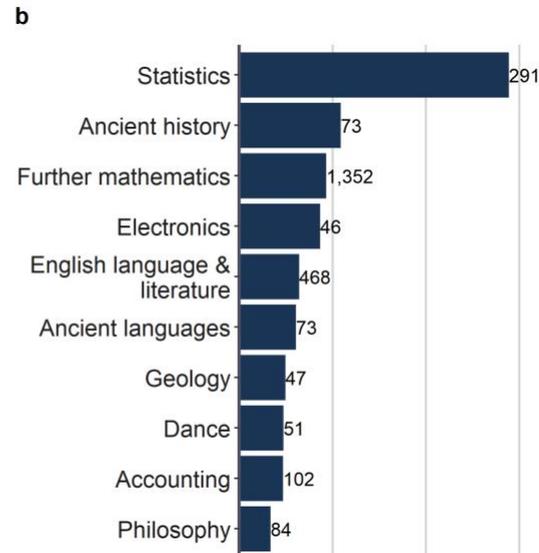


Figure 10b: Frequency of A level subjects where support materials were felt to be particularly appropriate weighted by 2020 entry size



Mathematics, further mathematics, the sciences and English literature were again most frequently highlighted as particularly appropriate for support material at A level. Mathematics (24.5%) and the sciences (26.2%) were approximately twice as popular as the next most frequent subject (further mathematics, at 12.7%)

These top four subjects remained consistent across all groups, with the exception of the student group, where psychology replaced English literature in the top four subjects for which respondents felt support materials would be particularly appropriate. Around 70% of the total responses for psychology came from student respondents.

The proportion of responses selecting A level statistics was also prominent when weighted by 2020 entry size for this subject. This reflects the general theme that subjects with greater mathematical content may be particularly appropriate for support materials.

Questions 16 – 18 asked respondents in which subjects they felt that provision of support materials would not be particularly appropriate. There were fewer responses received for these questions than for questions 13 -15.

Question 16: Are there any GCSE subjects for which the provision of support materials in the exam would NOT be particularly appropriate?

Figure 11a: Frequency of GCSE subjects where support materials were felt not to be particularly appropriate

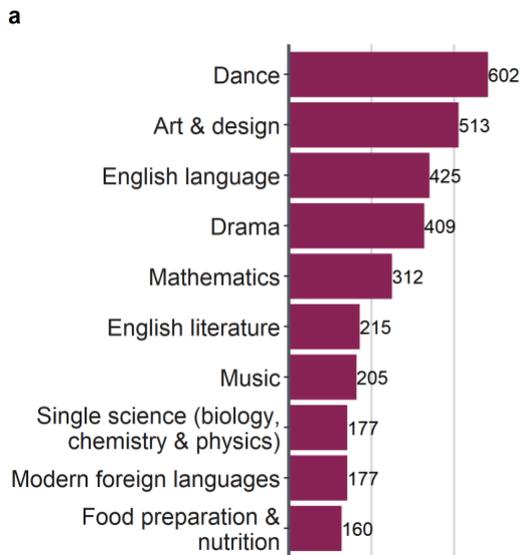
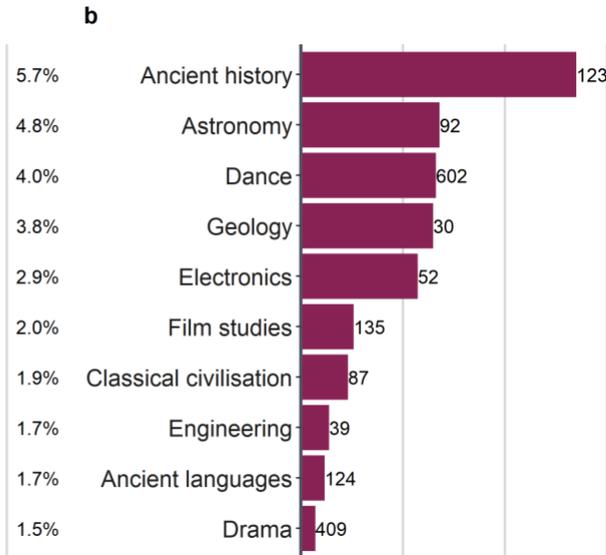


Figure 11b: Frequency of GCSE subjects where support materials were felt not to be particularly appropriate weighted by 2020 entry size



English language, alongside creative and arts-based subjects such as dance and drama were most frequently highlighted as being inappropriate for support materials at GCSE, ranging between 3% and 6% of total responses with responses broadly consistent across all respondent groups (although with some transposition of the order of subjects). Dance was most frequently identified as inappropriate for support materials by students (9.4% of student responses) and parents (7.1% of parent responses).

English language was highlighted most frequently by teachers as inappropriate (2.9% of teacher responses), and mathematics replaced drama as the 4th most frequently chosen subject for respondents from this group.

Responses highlighting ancient history are notable when considered in light of weighting by entry size in 2020 (see Figure 11b).

Question 17: Are there any AS subjects for which the provision of support materials in the exam would NOT be particularly appropriate?

Figure 12a: Frequency of AS subjects where support materials were felt not to be particularly appropriate

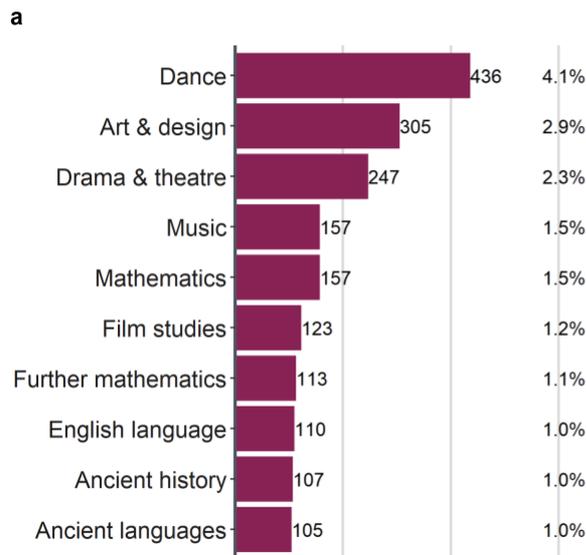
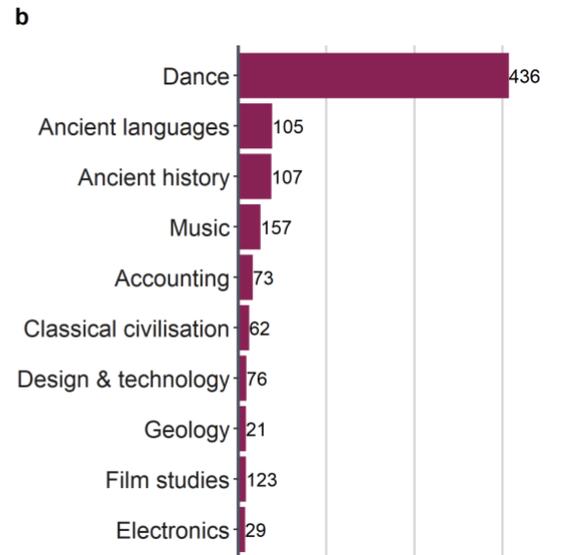


Figure 12b: Frequency of AS subjects where support materials were felt not to be particularly appropriate weighted by 2020 entry size



Responses for AS subjects indicated that creative or arts-based subjects would be inappropriate for support materials. Dance was the most frequently selected subject (4.1% of total responses), and this is further highlighted when the weighting for entry size in 2020 is considered. (See Figure 12b)

Again, the top four subjects selected were consistent amongst parents and students, dance was the most frequently selected subject by both groups with the remaining three in a slightly different order.

Question 18: Are there any A level subjects for which the provision of support materials in the exam would NOT be particularly appropriate?

Figure 13a: Frequency of A level subjects where support materials were felt not to be particularly appropriate

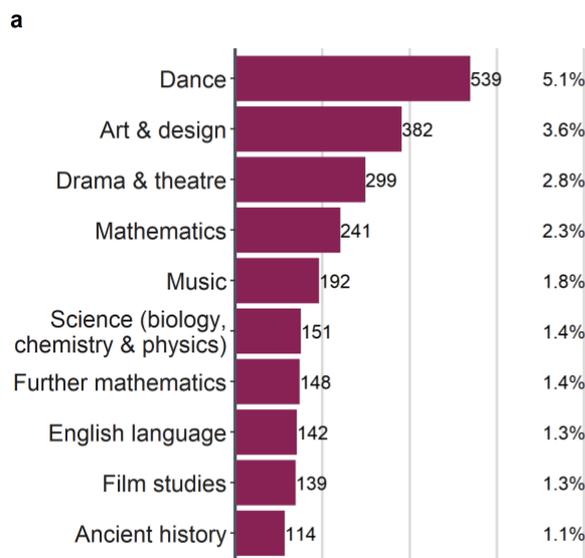
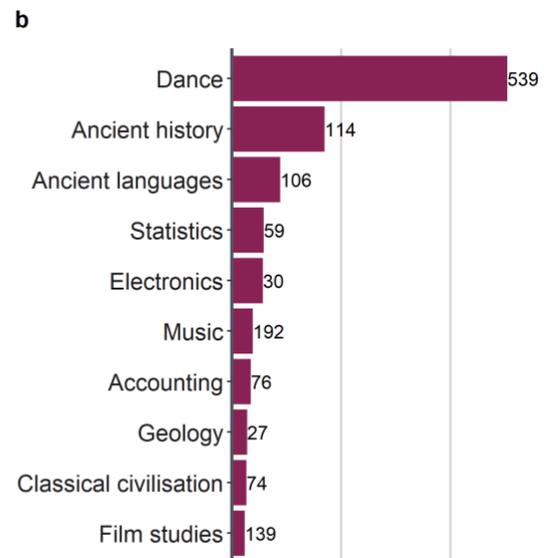


Figure 13b: Frequency of A Level subjects where support materials were felt not to be particularly appropriate weighted by 2020 entry size



The theme of creative and arts-based subjects being inappropriate for support materials emerged again in this question concerning A level subjects. Dance was again the most frequently selected (5.1% of total responses), and this was further emphasised when the weighting for entry size was applied (see Figure 13b).

A slightly larger proportion of responses highlighted mathematics (2.3% of responses) and further mathematics (1.4% of responses) compared to AS. 41% of all responses indicating mathematics as inappropriate for support materials came from teachers.

Questions 19 - 24 related to potential disadvantage to learners with protected characteristics and are considered in the Equalities Impact Assessment section.

Other Comments

Q25. Do you have any other comments on our proposals?

Four thousand, two hundred and seventy-three respondents chose to leave a comment in response to this question. All of these comments were read as part of the consultation analysis. While it is not possible to present every comment within this document, a summary of common themes expressed in response to this question is provided below.

It should be noted that a large number of the responses to this question were out of scope of the consultation, in that they did not relate specifically to our proposals on advance information and support materials and were instead general comments about the assessment arrangements proposed for 2021 or personal experiences during the pandemic. Others referred to qualifications (such as Applied Generals) not covered by these proposals, or which are not regulated by Ofqual such as international GCSEs.

A number of respondents indicated they wanted examinations in summer 2021 to be cancelled, and teacher assessments used to provide students' grades instead. The most frequently cited reasons for this were that the disruption to students' education varied by region; that there should be a consistent approach across the UK; and that exams would be deleterious to the wellbeing of students in the current context, because they posed a risk to either or both of their physical and mental health (the latter is discussed in greater detail below). Others expressed concerns about the fairness of examinations going ahead in summer 2021 in comparison to 2020, when students generally suffered less disruption to their studies but were not required to sit examinations.

Another significant proportion of respondents used the 'other comments' section as an opportunity to express their general views on our proposals. As these views reflected responses given to earlier and more nuanced questions in the consultation, they are not broken down in more detail here. In summary, however, the respondents who commented were fairly equally split between those who agreed with our proposals and those who did not.

Some argued strongly in favour of our proposals, and more generally in support of exams going ahead in summer 2021; others recognised they would provide some help for students but were of the view that they should be coupled with other mitigations which did not form part of the proposals on which we consulted (such as

the provision of extra time or changes to the format of assessments to allow students greater choice in the questions they answered).

Such approaches were considered in our earlier consultation on changes to assessment arrangements in 2021, and our rationale for not permitting them can be found in the relevant [decision document](#).

A few respondents suggested that some or all of these proposals should be maintained into 2022 as well, to mitigate impacts they identified on current Year 10 and Year 12 learners. Some felt they should be adopted indefinitely as a permanent part of the assessments for GCSE, AS and A level qualifications.

Others expressed their dissatisfaction with the proposals. There was some overlap here with respondents arguing for the cancellation of exams, but in contrast a number of respondents argued that we should not implement the changes suggested as they would undermine the validity of the assessments or give students for whom they were likely to be more effective an unfair advantage over their peers.

Some respondents voiced concerns that the beneficial effect of the proposed adaptations for students who had missed significant teaching time would be diluted or nullified by better resourced schools who would be able to more intensively prepare students for assessments – aggravating existing disadvantages caused by the pandemic. A minority expressed concerns about the impact on the knowledge or understanding possessed by students receiving a grade under the proposals, and their ability to progress successfully to further education or employment.

A similar number of respondents took the opportunity to suggest what more they considered should be done if examinations were to proceed in 2021, with most being concerned about the need for clarity about what specifically would be included and not included in the examinations. Some also raised concerns about the potential burden on teachers and exams officers of any divergence in the degree of support being offered to students in specific subjects, either because this would lead to differential pressure on teachers or because of the challenges of administering different arrangements.

Often these were coupled with requests to provide notice as soon as possible to facilitate teachers supporting students; some suggested that the provision of advance information at the end of January would be too late to be of any significant benefit.

Respondents commenting on this topic often cited what they felt to be unfairness in the decisions that had been taken as a result of our previous consultation to make changes to assessment arrangements in some subjects and at some qualification levels but not in others. Considered by group, this sentiment was most frequently expressed by A level students, but to a lesser extent by students or teachers of other subjects also. Geography and psychology were often cited by teachers, but a range

of other subjects were also by some respondents. A limited number of respondents also commented on what they felt to be detrimental decisions about the scheduling of exams under the revised timetable.

Many respondents also raised concerns about the impact of learning loss and other consequences of the pandemic on students' (and in some cases also teachers') mental health. This was frequently linked with arguments to cancel exams, but also appeared in comments calling for different or more wide-ranging adaptations to be made than those proposed in the consultation. In other cases, this impact was cited as a reason why confirmation of the specific details of the adaptations proposed should be made sooner. In addition, there were some generalised comments about the impact of the pandemic on students' wellbeing which did not appear to be offered in support of a particular view on the proposals, but rather as a broader comment on the challenges young people have faced.

Finally, some respondents commented on the format or language of the consultation itself. This included criticism of the wording of some of the questions; the fact that respondents were not allowed to express a view on all subjects; and conversely that respondents were able to offer views on all subjects when, in the case of teachers, parents and students, they would presumably be more familiar with some than others.

Equalities Impact Assessment

Questions 19 – 20 of our consultation specifically asked respondents whether they felt that any of our proposals would be likely to disadvantage any groups of students who possess a particular protected characteristic, and if so how this impact could potentially be mitigated.

The responses to these individual questions have been summarised below. Where relevant to the analysis we have included anonymised comments made by respondents. However, these are provided for illustrative purposes only to reflect the range of views expressed; they do not capture the views of all who responded to the consultation.

Some comments have been edited for the sake of brevity or clarity, but we have been careful in doing so not to misrepresent their viewpoints.

Advance Information

Question 19: Do you think the provision of advance information could disadvantage any students because they share a protected characteristic?

Out of 9,835 responses to this question, 801 indicated that the provision of advance information could disadvantage students with a shared protected characteristic. However, the majority of respondents felt that the provision of advance information would not disadvantage students who shared a protected characteristic.

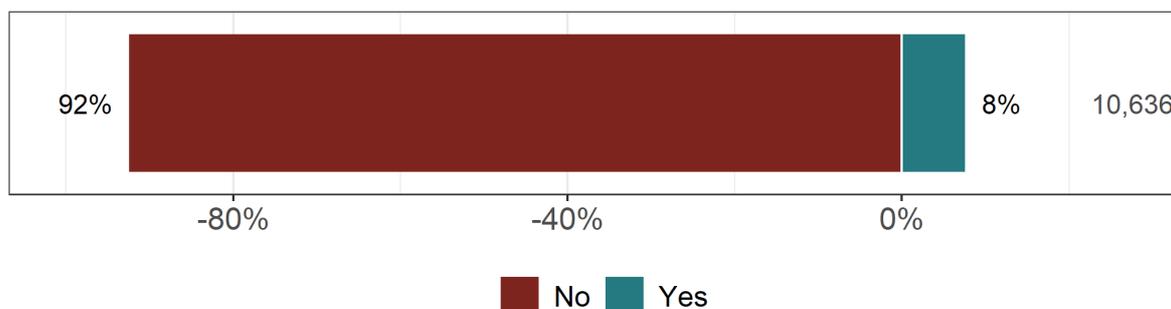


Figure 14: Do you think the provision of advance information could disadvantage any students because they share a protected characteristic?

Question 19b: If you answered yes to the question above, please explain how this disadvantage would happen:

Five hundred and ninety-seven respondents provided comments in response to this question.

A general concern was raised that providing advance information would disadvantage students who experienced more learning loss, which included students who share particular protected characteristics:

‘However provision of a uniform level of advance information will disadvantage pupils who have experienced relatively more loss of learning compared to pupils who have an average amount of loss of learning...some pupils from particular protected characteristic groups have lost proportionality

more learning. For example many SEND pupils did not receive the support with learning they required during lock down, some of whom had further periods of absence from school after lock down ended and are not receiving sufficient support with learning/exam preparation.’ (Other representative or interest group)

‘...those with a learning disability would be disproportionately affected by periods of self-isolation as they generally rely more on face to face support and teaching so to release material to all students in advance of an exam will put SEND students bottom of the pile as they will struggle to use the pre-release material effectively’

Another view expressed was that there may be accessibility and support issues regarding the advance information for students who have issues with cognitive processing. Similarly, some felt that those with recall challenges would be at a disadvantage if advance information were to be provided:

‘People with a learning disability may struggle to access and fully understand and make use of support materials’

‘Some people with disabilities will just focus on the advance info and especially ASD students who are rule bound. Their disability will not allow them to think and act outside the info given. This may confuse some students on the Autistic spectrum.’

‘Children with learning disabilities could still be severely disadvantaged especially if material can be learnt by rote / memorised in advance by other children who do not have recall challenges e.g. dyslexia. This should be avoided at all costs.’

‘People with certain special educational needs could find it more difficult to memorise what topics are in the exam and so the advance information could disproportionately help able students.’

Comments were also made that these students will be disadvantaged if the advance information is not published early enough to ensure required access arrangements are in place.

For visually impaired students, concerns were raised that they would be disadvantaged by the increased reading, processing and collating time:

‘For students with a vision impairment any additional resources which require reading would add additional visual fatigue and strain and effectively lengthen the amount and quantity of visual work needed by a student. This could negatively impact their ability to access the actual exam papers.’

Specific concerns were raised relating to dyslexic learners, who it was felt would be disadvantaged by these proposals if materials were not provided in a format which reflected access arrangements they may already receive in relation to assessments, or if materials were not written with their needs in mind:

‘People with Dyslexia or other mental processing disorders may have difficulty understanding any published documents.’

Some concerns were raised that the provision of advance information may disadvantage those with hearing difficulties:

‘The provision of advance information means an exam becomes less about the content of the course and more about assessing underpinning skills. We believe that some deaf candidates will be disadvantaged because exams are not the best way to assess their underpinning skills.’

Some respondents raised issues relating to race. In particular, concerns were raised that the advance information would not make up for lost learning time due to Covid-19 (which they felt had affected ethnic minority students the most) and that by providing the advance information to all, it would favour those whose education has been least affected:

‘Covid-19 has disproportionately affected students from certain ethnic backgrounds and religions. These proposals, whilst well meaning, are targeted to help all students. Those least affected by covid-19, with better access to school, education, tutors and other forms of support will gain the most from these proposals, widening the gap between wealthy predominantly white students and ethnic minorities and some religions. Thus they disadvantage protected groups. By making exams easier, it is known that this dis-proportionately advantages the more able pupils - and more able, higher achieving pupils are disproportionately wealthy, white students. Thus these changes will widen the disadvantage to some of the protected groups.’

‘Covid 19 has been a particular issue in areas with a large black and ethnic minority community...These students may have less school time to access and work through the materials/information and due to possible illness at home, less support from their families to revise.’

‘In particular, disabled (extremely vulnerable) and black and ethnic minority students have been disproportionately affected by the need to self-isolate or not attend schools. Providing this information in advance and support in exams cannot address the inequality of experience imposed.’

A small number of respondents also raised issues in relation to age – specifically that those taking assessments in summer 2021 would be disadvantaged in comparison to those taking exams in previous or subsequent years, or who received grades under the alternative awarding arrangements in 2020:

‘People taking exams this year will be thought of as having far easier exams. This is discriminatory towards our age groups as, compared to people who took them in earlier years who had to learn everything.’

In relation to sex, some respondents thought girls could be disadvantaged:

‘Girls could be disadvantaged. While there is no good reason for it, girls do tend to work harder throughout the course than boys. These changes would render a lot of that work invalid and disproportionately advantage boys who leave the work to the end.’

‘I’m not certain, but I suspect that this change will favour male students at the expense of female students. In my experience, and generally speaking, female students tend to work more evenly throughout the course, and male students tend to crank up their work in the final stages. By narrowing the range of topics, the exam can draw on, female students will lose some of the advantage they’d otherwise have accrued by working hard throughout the whole course.’

On the other hand, others thought that the arrangements could disadvantage boys:

‘Boys do not perform equally or equitably in line with girls’ achievements when materials are released in advanced as was evidenced in coursework and controlled assessment data prior to

the new GCSE specifications in 2015, therefore boys' attainment will be adversely affected.'

Question 19c: If you answered yes to the question 19a, please explain how it could be avoided or reduced?

Five hundred and forty-one respondents provided comments in response to this question, although some respondents included comments relating to this question in their response to the previous one.

Respondents agreed that in order to avoid/reduce any disadvantage caused by the provision of advance information, the information should be available in various formats which reflect students' needs and current access arrangements. They noted that this would have specific implications for their production and the way in which they are disseminated:

'braille papers and audio recordings would need to be prepared in advance'

'ensure the information can be distributed widely and in various formats. e.g. video, braille, printed sheet'

'Dyslexic students may need coloured overlays, visually impaired larger bolder type face & some students might benefit from images & pictures rather than an overwhelming amount of text. Layout of the information should ensure it is clearly sectioned and headed for students to quickly find what they are looking for.'

Other suggested formats should include videos as well as hard copy diagrams and that content should be provided in different languages.

For dyslexic students some suggested that glossing words on the paper rather than providing a word list or dictionary could help to avoid any disadvantage, and that the time they spend reading the advance information should be taken into account:

'People with dyslexia or reading disabilities - if they have lost class time and, in order to compensate, are having to read information they need in the exam, the time it takes them or difficulties they have doing this should be accounted for.'

It was also suggested that the advance information should consist of formulae and equations and not sections able to be memorised:

‘Allowing formulae or equations to be taken into the exams will give a fairer and more level playing field to all students and remove the recall elements to concentrate on ability. Do not provide sections that can be memorised this completely disadvantages those who have learning disabilities many of which have associated memory recall issues- otherwise you are just awarding higher grades to those can memorise facts...’

Respondents suggested providing the advance information well before the exams so that learners could obtain help to access it:

‘Ensuring adequate time for teaching and support staff to prepare students for the exams, rather than a short pre-release period where some students would not have the skills or experience to prepare for this. This will be a different style of examination, and it is important to pre-teach these skills as well as the content.’

‘Detailed instructions of how schools can help students to access advance information. Also provide information to students and parents. Ensure that information is not just accessible electronically or that schools can print out information for students that appears in an identical fashion to those who can access it electronically.’

Support Materials

Question 20a: Do you think the provision of support materials in exams could disadvantage any students because they share a protected characteristic?

Seven hundred respondents thought that the provision of support materials in exams could disadvantage students because they share a protected characteristic. Again a large majority, 9,936 respondents, felt that there would be no disadvantage to students who share particular protected characteristics.

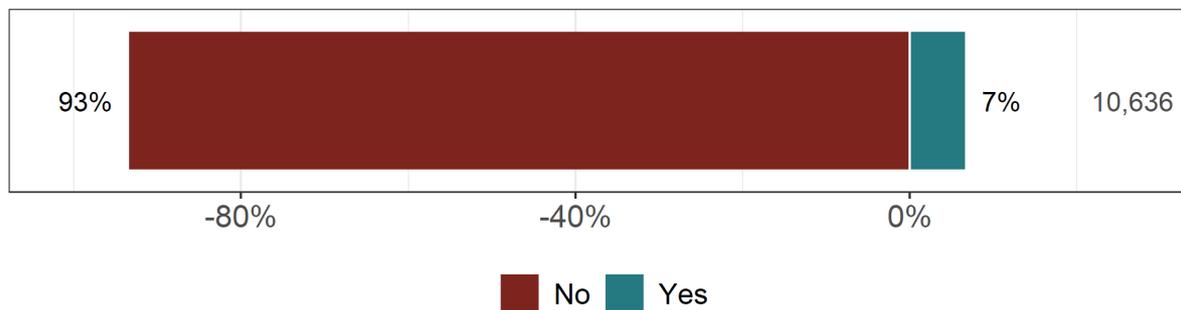


Figure 15: Do you think the provision of support materials could disadvantage any students because they share a protected characteristic?

Question 20b: If you answered yes to the question above, please explain how this disadvantage would happen:

Of the 700 respondents who considered that the provision of support materials could disadvantage students with particular protected characteristics, 435 provided a comment as to how the disadvantage would happen.

Respondents who felt there would be a disadvantage to those students possessing particular protected characteristics expressed concerns about the accessibility of the materials. Furthermore, where they were provided in an accessible format, some noted the need for such students to practise using these materials, and that doing so may disadvantage those who find reading and processing difficult:

‘Accessibility could be an issue - the format and style of such materials would need to be considered, and students would need time to practise using them’

‘Those with slow processing will be distracted by the support materials and lose time in answering exam questions’

‘Using support materials is a different skill which we have limited time to teach pupils how to use these in a time efficient way in the exam. Pupils with specific learning needs who require longer to practise these skills of handling various pieces of information would be at a disadvantage to pupils who are able to process various information sources quickly.’

‘Support materials that have not been provided in an accessible format to meet the individual access needs of disabled pupils would substantially disadvantage such pupils.’ (Other representative or interest group)

Issues were raised in relation to learners with visual impairment, specifically concerns that they would take longer to go through the support materials as they are unable to skim read and that therefore consideration of additional time would be needed. However, there were also concerns that longer exams can lead to fatigue:

‘Additional reading material through provision of additional support materials in exams e.g. formulae, will disadvantage students with a visual impairment, as they will take longer to locate and read such resources. Current access arrangements for additional time will not have taken this into account.’

‘A blind student is not able to quickly scan extra information so would need extra time. Extra time can however be counter-productive and an exam can become impractically long and arduous.’

Concerns raised about the provision of support materials in exams for SEND students included that the information could be overwhelming and that the change in exam format may present difficulties:

‘For SEND students the change could set them back as it changes the goal posts. They will have sat mocks in one format and will now need to change. This is significant discrimination as the nature of their need means they are disadvantaged by any change made.’

‘Those with a disability such as autism may struggle with the change to expected exam routines.’

‘Those with certain SEND needs may struggle with the additional information provided and it could lead to cognitive overload.’

Other respondents identified specific issues which certain approaches to support materials may present to dyslexic students including needing more time and being familiar with the materials:

‘Dyslexia students often struggle with reading and therefore could lose time to answer the questions due to the time taken to read the formula sheet.’

‘Dyslexia - (disability) means recall is poorer and layout of information needs to be familiar not just given formula...’

In relation to race, concerns were expressed about loss of learning in BAME communities who have been significantly affected by the disruption caused by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and access to teaching, and that the provision of support materials will not address this:

‘People from BAME communities have been more significantly affected by COVID19 than others. However, these proposals do nothing to level the playing field for these students. Therefore, in reality if everyone is given exam support materials, those most affected by coronavirus are still disadvantaged when compared with others.’

Question 20c: If you answered yes to question 20a, please explain how it could be avoided or reduced:

Three hundred and eighty-four respondents provided a comment to this question. Many respondents highlighted the importance of familiarity with the support materials and that centres and learners need time to understand how these materials can be used during exams:

‘Students should be allowed to know/see/use the supplementary materials they will be given in the exams BEFORE the exams IN LESSONS and WHILE REVISING... There is little point in giving students extra materials if they are not able to use them properly or to the best of their abilities.’

‘Students would have to be given substantial time to familiarize themselves with support material and build it into their normal routine, understanding that this is a provision for all.’

Respondents also commented that learners with access arrangements may need increased extra time:

‘Some pupils with access arrangements may require further extra time in order to use the support materials in line with the way that pupils without access arrangements do. This may be in addition to the extra time that they are already/usually granted.’

‘Additional time should be added to extra time already applied for due to visual impairments. Increased provision of reader/practical assistant use in exams to locate and retrieve such formulas - which will need extra time.’

Finally, some responses stressed that the support materials would need to be produced in a range of formats to ensure access, for example in relation to learners with visual impairment and dyslexia and special needs in general:

‘Dependent on the format of the support material needs to be accessible e.g. in Braille or perhaps audio version’

‘visually impaired need larger bolder type face & some students might benefit from images & pictures rather than an overwhelming amount of text. Layout of the information should ensure it is clearly sectioned and headed for students to quickly find what they are looking for’

‘Having different styles of the support materials such as dyslexia friendly fonts’

‘Any resource materials would need to be provided with the same range of accessibility features (font size, braille) and access arrangements. Additionally if the extra advance information could be provided in an alternative auditory format this could help to mitigate against visual fatigue and strain.’

Annex A: List of organisational respondents

Confederation of School Trusts (CST)

EHRC

NAHT

National Deaf Children's Society

NEU

OCR

Parentkind

The Bell Foundation



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