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Consultation outcome

Assessment of mathematics, physics and combined science GCSEs in 2023:

consultation decisions

Updated 30 November 2022

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Introduction

Ofqual and the Department for Education (DfE) [confirmed in September](#) that GCSE, AS and A level exams in England will largely return to pre-pandemic arrangements next summer as young people continue to recover from the pandemic.

DfE has also announced that, in 2023, students are not required to memorise formulae for GCSE mathematics and equations for GCSE physics and combined science. This reflects their responsibility for GCSE subject content, and was a change that was also made for exams that took place in 2022.

A consultation was published seeking views on the [proposal to carry forward to 2023 the arrangements in place in 2022](#), which required the provision of formulae and revised equation sheets in exams in GCSE mathematics, physics and combined science.

The consultation ran from Thursday 29 September to Thursday 20 October 2022 and received 8,189 responses. A full summary and analysis of the responses has been published at the same time as this decision document.

Decisions

Ofqual has decided to implement the proposals set out in the consultation document. No issues were raised by those responding to the consultation that have made it necessary to revise the proposals.

Students will be provided with support materials in the form of formulae and revised equations sheets, in the exams for 2023 only, for GCSE mathematics, physics and combined science.

Details

Ofqual proposed that students should be allowed formulae sheets and revised equations sheets in the exams for 2023.

Respondents who supported the proposal said that this was appropriate considering the disruption to education due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. Respondents thought that providing this support would be fair when comparing these students to previous cohorts and that it would make the experience of taking exams less stressful for students and increase their confidence.

They also said it was more important that students could understand, apply and rearrange formulae and equations rather than memorise them.

Respondents who disagreed with the proposal said that these students had been less affected by the pandemic and that some had already learned the formulae and equations.

As set out in the consultation analysis report, there was overwhelming support for the proposal. It aligns with what government, which is responsible for subject content in GCSEs, expects students to cover in these qualifications this year, and no issues were raised by respondents, including in the equalities and regulatory impact assessments as set out below, that made it necessary to reconsider the proposals.

Equality impact assessment

Ofqual considered the potential impact of the proposals on students with particular protected characteristics. The consultation explained that Ofqual did not consider the proposals would have a negative impact on students who share particular protected characteristics. Ofqual did not identify any such issues that made it necessary to change the proposals.

Respondents who raised issues tended to focus on students with special

educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and those who are disadvantaged in some way based on socio-economic status and/or the impact of the pandemic on education. Some respondents suggested that the proposal to allow formulae and revised equation sheets could disadvantage students who struggle with changes to the assessment arrangements or with having to navigate between the question paper and the formulae or revised equation sheet.

Whilst Ofqual understands the concerns, these are mitigated by students being able to practise using the formulae and revised equation sheets in situations such as mock exams as they prepare for their summer exams.

A few respondents suggested that the formulae and revised equation sheets should be edited or printed in different formats to be accessible to SEND students or those with English as an additional language. Whilst GCSE assessment materials are not reproduced in different languages, exam boards can and do provide modified papers as part of their [access arrangements and reasonable adjustments](#).

Regulatory impact assessment

In the consultation, Ofqual identified that schools, colleges and exam boards will have limited or no burden from these proposals. Indeed, the changes are intended to reduce burden to enable more time for teaching.

The consultation sought views on the initial regulatory impact assessment. It asked about any other potential costs or burdens that had not been identified, and what steps could be taken to reduce them.

Many comments referred to the cost for schools of printing the formulae and revised equation sheets, as well as the time for teachers to familiarise students with their use in exams.

While acknowledging these concerns, Ofqual believes these are outweighed by the overwhelming support for the proposals and the benefits for students that respondents identified and, therefore, has not identified any such issues that made it necessary to change the proposals.

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