



Exams 2021: parents Q&A

Pupils all over the country have had their schooling disrupted by the pandemic and we know this has had an impact on their learning and progress.

That's why we've set out a [package of measures](#) designed to support students and deliver next year's summer exams in the fairest way possible. This includes making grading more generous for students than a normal year, advance notice of exam topic areas, exam support materials like formula sheets, and more.

Here we answer your questions on what these measures mean for students, teachers, and parents.

My child has missed months of school because of the pandemic – how is it fair for them to sit an exam just like any other year?

This won't be like every other year. Unlike other years, teachers and students will get advance notice of the topic areas in many of the exams and they will be able to take things like formula tables in with them on the day. This will make the exams less stressful for students and help them prepare.

The exams will also be graded more generously to recognise how difficult this year has been for students. This means more students are more likely to receive the top grades than in a normal year.

If disruption continues and if it affects some areas more than others, will you make further changes to exams and grading next year?

Yes, that's a possibility. An Expert Panel has been set up to monitor disruption. They will be able to make further recommendations. Ideas they will consider include a system of 'flagging' grades to Universities and Colleges if students have been adversely affected.

Does advance notice mean you'll be telling students what the questions will be?

No. In some cases they will be told the topic areas that will come up – but not the questions themselves. Doing this will help pupils and teachers to focus revision and attention on the areas they will be tested on. This won't look the same for all subjects, but the vast majority of subjects will have adaptations like exam support materials, for example formula sheets in maths, or advance notice of topics.

Does that mean my child won't have to learn some of the content because they know it isn't going to be in the exam?

No, pupils should still get to learn the full breadth of the curriculum. Advance notice of topic areas and details of the exam support materials to be provided won't be available until the new year so we expect schools to cover the full curriculum in that time, preparing students for their next steps.

After that they will be told more about the support materials they will have and topics that will be included in the exams so they can focus their revision.

What happens if my child is isolating or ill when the exam comes round?

Students who miss part of their exams because of the pandemic will be able to get a grade through what's called special consideration, which is a process we use each year for students who miss exams.

Special consideration is an adjustment to a student's mark or grade made after exams. It's based on things like coursework and if the student has done other exams in the subject.

Students who miss all their exams and don't have enough non-exam assessment completed to use the special consideration process will be eligible to take a contingency exam paper, which is like a backup exam. Contingency papers will have different questions, but will be broadly similar to the normal exams, so students aren't faced with a totally unfamiliar paper.

My child is extremely vulnerable to covid and has been shielding. It would be risky for them to sit an exam with other pupils so what should they do?

Every year, a small number of students can't sit exams at school. In these cases, they can work with their school to arrange to take exams at home with invigilation. We expect this to

be possible for clinically extremely vulnerable pupils who have been advised not to attend school, though it's best to work through the exact situation via the school.

It isn't just secondary school pupils who have missed time – my child is in primary school will they still have to do SATs?

Pupils will not have to sit the same tests they would sit in a normal year. The key stage 1 tests in English reading and maths and the English grammar, punctuation and spelling test at key stage 1 and 2 will be removed for one year.

We are keeping some assessments though, because it is important for us to be able to understand the progress pupils are making. Primary assessments in summer 2021 will be focused on the phonics screening check, teacher assessment in English reading, writing and mathematics at key stage 1, tests in English reading and mathematics and teacher assessment in English writing at key stage 2.

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