

Exams and assessments: what we know so far

The government has issued updated guidance for schools during the 2021 national lockdown. Find out more here.

12 January 2021

Please note: the information contained in this legal update is correct as of the original date of publication.

The government has issued updated [guidance](#) for schools during the 2021 national lockdown.

Here's what we know about exams and assessment so far:

- **Exams and assessments from 2020:** performance tables are suspended for the 2019/20 school year and the Department for Education (DfE) has confirmed that "no school or college will be judged on data based on exams and assessments from 2020".
- **January exams:** the guidance confirms that "schools and colleges can continue with the vocational and technical exams that are due to take place in January, where they judge it right to do so". It is for the school to decide whether to put on the exam, presumably after undertaking appropriate risk assessment, but Gavin Williamson has [advised](#) Parliament that "[n]o college should feel pressured to offer these". The guidance suggests that occupational competence vocational and technical qualifications (VTQs), which can only be fulfilled through practical assessment, should be prioritised and this approach has been [supported](#) by Ofqual's Interim Chief Regulator. Where a school decides not to proceed with January exams, these may take place at a later date or, where this is not possible, the government will be working with Ofqual to put in place arrangements to ensure that students are not disadvantaged.
- **Vocational and technical qualifications (VTQs) - February onwards:** the government has advised that it is working with Ofqual on VTQ assessments scheduled for February onwards and will update the sector shortly.
- **Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 tests (summer 2021):** Gavin Williamson has [confirmed](#) that statutory Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 tests (including the Key Stage 2 tests in reading and mathematics), and teacher assessments will not take place.
- **GCSE, A and AS Level exams (summer 2021):** these will not go ahead. Ofqual will be undertaking an urgent consultation on alternative arrangements. It is likely to be based much more heavily on teacher assessment, with Gavin Williamson [advising](#) Parliament that "[t]his year we are going to put our trust in teachers rather than algorithms". The media is reporting that 'mini exams', devised by exam boards, will be taken late in the summer term. These will be teacher marked. [Reports](#) further suggest that submissions of portfolios of work completed over the past two years will also be included as part of the proposals.
- **International GCSE exams (summer 2021):** there are currently no plans to cancel these exams, the vast majority of which are taken in private schools. These exams are not regulated by Ofqual and it will be up to individual schools to decide whether to continue with them.

We will know more about the proposals for summer 2021 exams once Ofqual's consultation is published. In the meantime, given the clear indication that the emphasis will be on teacher assessment, now would be a good time to reflect on any issues arising from the issues faced in summer 2020. Steps that could be taken now include ensuring that:

1. There are clear policies, processes and procedures in place to evidence and record teacher assessment;
2. These processes are understood and consistently followed by staff;
3. Staff are clear on what information can be requested by parents and students under data protection legislation – our [GDPR online compliance module](#) for staff could help with this. Please [contact us](#) to arrange a complimentary trial.

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