



POLITEIA

Back the 2021 Public Examinations!

Teacher assessment must not replace external exams, leading teachers urge government in new Politeia proposal

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PDF: [Back to School! Preparation Not Cancellation](#)

Having closed the nation's schools in March and cancelled the public examinations, Gavin Williamson, the Education Secretary now says most pupils will remain locked out until September. For the authors of ***Back to School! Preparation Not Cancellation***, he has made a grave mistake. Not only are pupils missing out on education, most for the nearly six months. But the cancellation of written examinations for GCSE and A levels will have lasting consequences. Even worse, opponents of external written examinations will demand that teacher assessment replaces GCSE and A levels permanently.

The authors analyse the serious implications of cancelling A levels in favour of teacher assessment and consider the failings of education policy in the pandemic. They include

- Louise Moelwyn-Hughes, Master of Marlborough College,
- Dominic Sullivan, Head of Classics at the London Oratory School
- John Marenbon, Senior Research Fellow, Trinity College Cambridge

Professor Marenbon, explains in broad terms why 'the unseen effects' of closing schools and cancelling examinations 'may well represent the greatest loss of all' from the pandemic. Education, he argues, is so precious a benefit that a good government would never countenance depriving children of it, whatever the cost:-

Of all that our state offers its citizens, education is the most precious. Healthcare and economic support may enable humans to survive; education lets them live worthwhile human lives.

Louise Moelwyn-Hughes explains how teacher assessment will never be able to capture what children would have achieved had they been allowed to take the examinations:-

... there will always be outliers; those who perform better or worse on the day; those who planned to use the Easter break to forge ahead with their revision.

Moreover, 'few, if any, schools will have established identical protocols'. There will therefore be unfairness both to individual pupils, for whom the rules will have been changed midstream, and between different schools, because of differences in their ways of marking.

There is also the danger that the moderation process will lead to a smoothing of results, and so further unfairness:-

...what of the school which has a stronger or weaker year group this year than in previous years? When Ofqual takes into consideration the results by school and by subject of previous years, will it be that an exceptional year group will be penalised and a weaker year group advantaged? ...

Dominic Sullivan warns that those who want to do away with external public exams will use the pandemic to do so, and to cancel the 2021 exams. He urges that it becomes a priority for government policy to commit to the exams taking place next year and that pupils education continues uninterrupted irrespective of future developments or social distancing laws.

The government must as a priority:

- Confirm that external exams will be held next year - doing so as soon as possible to give exam boards time to reduce syllabus content, if necessary and schools time to adapt to any changes.
- Commit to adopting whatever means are necessary to overcome future obstacles or difficulties in the coming year if social distancing remains a problem, e.g. additional teaching, longer exam periods.

Back to School! Preparation, Not Cancellation by John Marenbon, Dominic Sullivan & Louise Moelwyn-Hughes will be published by Politeia, 14a Eccleston Street, SW1 W9LT, on Thursday 11th June.

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