



The Rt Hon Gavin Williamson
Secretary of State for Education

By email

Roger Gough
Leader's Office
Sessions House
County Hall
Maidstone
Kent ME14 1XQ

Tel: 03000 416167

Email: roger.gough@kent.gov.uk

15 December 2020

Dear Secretary of State,

Summer Exams for Students Missing Education due to Covid 19

We write to urge further consideration be given to the arrangements being made for public examinations in the summer of 2021. As you know, Kent has been placed in Tier 3 with the 17-18-year-old cohort having particularly high Covid infection rates, closely followed by those in the 11-16 age group.

We have seen the infection rates mushroom in the districts in the north and east of the county, which are the more disadvantaged parts of Kent, and it is children in these areas who have the lowest level of access to IT to support home learning opportunities. We are now seeing infection rates rising rapidly in neighbouring districts, spreading south and west. The districts of Thanet and Swale have borne the initial brunt of this, with some of the highest infection rates in the country, but infection rates are now rising fast across Kent, and other districts are reaching similar levels.

The disruption to students' education is consequently far greater in the districts with high infection rates than for those in other locations. Some schools in these areas have seen very large numbers of Year 11 and Sixth Form students needing to self-isolate away from school for large parts of the autumn term, high levels of teacher absence due to illness or isolating, and more of them have had to close altogether for periods. Whilst self-isolating students have mostly received high quality remote learning, this is no effective substitute for face to face teaching, particularly for those who require additional support and intervention to help their learning, and those whose home circumstances make studying challenging.

Academy Trusts which operate in both Kent and in other Local Authority areas have highlighted to us the significant difference they see in respect of disruption to their students' education, with those in areas with low infection rates essentially having had an uninterrupted education since September.

This clearly means students going into exams in the summer are not doing so on a level playing field, through no fault of their own. This cannot be fair. It cannot be that the future life chances of students can be defined in this way.

It is recognised, and appreciated, that changes have already been made to the exam structure for 2021. Reducing the exam coverage, giving student advance warning of the areas of questioning, and enabling study aids to be used in the exam hall do go some way to help the nation's young people approach their exams more confidently. However, these changes are a one size fits all solution and do not recognise that young people's experiences and their educational opportunities since March have not been uniform. This situation will continue for many weeks and months to come.

We request your urgent attention to develop a more flexible range of solutions to exams which can be applied in different ways to different areas of the country, and which reflect and take account of the fact that some children in some areas have suffered significantly greater loss of learning opportunities than others. Without this there is a risk that some young people in areas of high infection and regular school closures will simply give up, not able to see how they have any hope of succeeding in the exams when they have missed so much, especially if they suffer further interruption to study in the spring season.

Yours sincerely



Roger Gough
Leader of Kent County Council



Richard Long
Cabinet Member for Education & Skills