

Consultation Response from the Royal Geographical Society (with IBG)

**Royal
Geographical
Society**

with IBG

Advancing geography
and geographical learning

• Consultation response: Proposed changes to the assessment of GCSEs, AS and A levels in 2022

... The Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) welcomes the opportunity to respond to this consultation and the following is made as a public response.

The Royal Geographical Society (with IBG):

The Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) is the UK's learned society and professional body for geography and geographers. The Society maintains a strong overview of the discipline, its standing and practice in schools, higher education, and the workplace. This includes the accreditation of geographers and geography programmes through the award of Chartered Geographer to individuals and the Society's accreditation of undergraduate and Masters level geography programmes.

We advise on, and support the advancement of, geography; the dissemination of geographical knowledge to the public, policy makers and other specialist audiences including teachers, Geography ITT Scholars, and those involved in expeditions and fieldwork; and training and professional development for practising geographers. We work closely with the Department for Education, Ofqual, Ofsted, the awarding organisations, and geography teachers to support good practice in teaching and learning in geographical education.

We have 16,000 Fellows and members and our work currently reaches more than three million people per year. The Society awards the professional accreditation Chartered Geographer, which is awarded to teachers through the Chartered Geographer (Teacher) designation and accredits geography undergraduate programmes. Each year the Society works in a range of ways with teachers and pupils from about half of all English secondary schools which includes work with academies and their respective MATs, free, independent and maintained schools.

The Society provides a significant programme of activities to support teachers during their training year and entry into the profession. We work regularly with Schools Direct, Teach First and ITT providers to provide subject specialist input into their secondary programmes and since 2016 the Society has awarded Geography ITT Scholarships to over 500 geographers. Our annual programme of CPD reaches about 1,500+ teachers and the Society's online resources available via www.rgs.org/schools receive over 1.3 million views annually.

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Royal Geographical Society (with IBG)

July 2021



GCSE Geography Exams in 2022

Questions:

To what extent do you agree or disagree that we should allow centres to have some choice of content on which their students will answer questions in GCSE geography, on the lines set out at Annex B?

Strongly disagree.

Do you have any comments on our proposed approach to allowing centres to have some choice of content on which their students will answer questions in GCSE geography exams in 2022?

It is right to seek to support schools' Covid catch-up endeavours. Throughout the Covid period the Society has offered practical suggestions that help address the challenges geography teachers faced and that seek to maintain a broad and balanced geographical education.

The Society has previously highlighted the potential to reduce content using options or the removal of content could help teachers and their pupils.

In a previous consultation submission to Ofqual (2020) the Society suggested that, if there was the appetite for optionality, then this should be explored with urgency by the AOs, Ofqual and subject experts, including the Society, the Geographical Association. The opportunity for the exploration of this issue, in a way which might have gained support from key stakeholders across the geographical community, was lost.

If implemented, the current proposals for optionality will directly penalise an identifiable group of pupils. This will be because of their teacher's past decision (often taken several years ago) concerning the order in which their GCSE topics were taught. If the optional units were covered during Year 10, teachers may feel they have disadvantaged their pupils, who would enter Year 11 facing a full course of required units.

Conversely, other schools will benefit. Those who have already taught their required content in Y10 will be able to cherry pick their preferred optional topics for Year 11, reduce content and free up time. This will allow them to revisit/recap the required units, as well as extra time for revision. Such evident inequality should not be introduced into the qualifications system through a direct – and mid-course – change to the specifications.

The Society notes that these consultation proposals stand in contrast to the findings outlined in Ofqual's *Optionality: a briefing paper (2020)*. This argued that "introducing/expanding optionality in specifications and examinations which do not currently have it, and doing so at pace, risks disadvantaging students" and "might well further disadvantage the groups that it intended to help". There are also other issues that are raised through the consultation materials including:

- Whether optionality has been applied in a balanced way across human, physical and/or people-environment units. Some specifications apply the changes to almost entirely physical and/or people-environment units. In contrast, other specifications focus their options on the human geography and/or people-environment units.
- Significant differences across specifications with regards to their rubric changes. One specification presents pupils with the choice of selecting one unit out of two; another two

units out of three; and a third three units out of five. Where greater choice/complexity is offered there will be a greater likelihood of pupils experiencing rubric errors.

To what extent do you agree or disagree that for GCSE geography, where we propose that centres should have some choice of content on which their students will answer questions, the exam boards should not provide advance information about the focus of the content of exams in addition?

Strongly disagree.

Do you have any comments on our proposal not to provide advance information for 2022 for GCSE geography?

There may be some benefits in providing 'advanced information' for the focus of elements of the summer 2022 GCSE. However, this issue should be approached with caution.

If such this information was provided any earlier than the usual 'revision period' (e.g., Easter onwards) it would just introduce optionality into the Y11 course. Some teachers would be able to use the information to refocus their Y11 programme, whilst other (because of their course sequencing) would be unable to do so.

It would only be during the revision period where advance information could be (potentially) beneficial to all pupils – rather than disadvantaging some.

Equality impact assessment

Are there other potential equality impacts that we have not explored?

Yes.

If yes, what are they?

These proposals will introduce inequality into the assessment of GCSE geography in 2022.

Do you have any suggestions for how any potential negative impacts on particular groups of students could be mitigated?

The consultation proposals for geography should be withdrawn.

The Society notes that the consultation materials identify that “qualifications cannot mitigate inequalities or unfairness in the education system or in society more widely that might affect, for example, students’ preparedness to take the qualification and the assessments within it. While a wide range of factors can have an impact on a student’s ability to achieve a particular assessment, our influence is limited to the qualification design and assessment.”

However, in this case the proposed changes would – and knowingly – establish inequality and unfairness within the actual qualification itself.



For this reason, the consultation proposal should be rejected.

To what extent do you agree or disagree that we should be flexible in the timing of the release of advance information in order to respond to the impact on education of any potential worsening of the pandemic?

No comment given.

Do you have any suggestions for how any potential negative impacts on particular groups of students could be mitigated?

The consultation proposals for geography should be withdrawn.

Do you have any suggestions for alternative approaches that could reduce burden and costs?

Reduce burden and costs. Please see the Society's earlier comments about its support for involvement in a more strategic and longer-term review of GCSE geography.

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