

## Why exams?

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Like hundreds of thousands of other parents all over the country I now face the prospect of having a child at home for many months to come. In my son's case the situation is complicated by the fact that he was about to take his A-levels. And now he will not be. As a result, and given that he was already self isolating with me, his school career has come to a crashing end without any celebration to mark this fact, or even a chance to say goodbye to some of his friends. And, in addition he now faces at least six months off with no chance to travel and no chance to secure work, both of which are also parts of the rite of passage of sixth formers heading for university.

Hopefully, in his case his efforts in the upper sixth form and the mock exams should be more than enough for his teachers to award him A-level grades that will secure his place at university. And in time I suspect that people will forget that the A-levels of 2020 were those that never took place.

But, he is one of the fortunate ones in this respect. For those who were actually relying on the exams to deliver their peak performance, or who are doing retakes without teacher assessment to act as a substitute for them, or for those who are absolutely dependent on getting five GCSEs, and who will now be in doubt as to whether this is possible with massive impact on their overall future, the cancellation of exams is little short of a nightmare. I am saddened for all of them, and hopeful too.

However, this situation gives rise to the obvious question which is that if exams can be cancelled now, why are we doing them? If this year students will progress to sixth form, further education, higher education and university, and even within university in some cases, without their progress been appraised by examination, but instead by being assessed by their tutors, why isn't this the norm? After all, we know that in most cases tutor assessment is incredibly reliable (subject, if it were to become the norm, to the type of third-party appraisal that is already required on coursework based qualifications). Why, then, are we so over invested in examination when so much of what we examine is so utterly and completely useless, starting with most of the syllabus of GCSE maths?

I have said before, and I will no doubt say again, that this crisis will change everything. Education may be one of those things that will never be the same again.