Twitter Thread by Jemma Sherwood

Jemma Sherwood
@jemmaths

THREAD on the Ofqual consultation.

The exams situation is a fiasco on top of a debacle. Yes - loads of kids have missed out on schooling. That is bad. Yes - the provision across the system is the most unequal it has been in living memory. That is bad.

The solution proposed by the DfE and Ofqual is to get teachers to submit a grade that they think their students are “performing at”. Here there are a number of problems:

Problem 1: what does “performing at” a grade even mean? An exam grade is comparative - if someone has any particular grade all it tells you is where they are compared to their peers. There is NO SUCH THING as “grade 6 content” or “working at grade 6”.

This is as true in maths, where content is cumulative, as it is in something like English, where examination is much more subjective. If you ask teachers all across the country to grade, you will get substantial variability because objective criteria simply do not exist.

That’s not our fault, it’s not a training need, its not that we don’t know what we’re doing. It’s literally the way the system has been designed. You can’t train someone in a concept that does not exist.

If they want to change this and give us some kind of valid, objective criteria on which to judge, then they would need a lot more than five months to set and agree such a thing to any kind of reasonable standard. All else is smoke and mirrors.

In the proposal, exam boards are to provide papers that may or may not be compulsory, along with training for teachers to set and assess these papers, which leads us to...

Problem 2: If these papers are not compulsory, then why? How will you create a fairer system by having some students sit them and some not. Will some schools choose to not “risk” giving the papers for fear of underperformance and a forced lower grading?

When teachers want the best for the kids they care about, this could happen. So what then? The ones who didn't sit the paper do better than the ones who did? (This could also work the other way). Optional is ridiculous. Which means...

Problem 3: If these papers are compulsory, how good will they be? It takes a team of examiners a long time (over a year) to write and quality assure a set of exam papers properly. We've only got up to five months.

That begs the question, will they just use the 2021 papers they've written? In which case, why scrap the exams if you're going to use them anyway? Mixed up with this is...

Problem 4: Schools have paid entrance fees like normal to the exam boards. But, in the proposal, the exam boards won't be paying actual experienced examiners to mark these papers. That'll be up to teachers who are already up to their ears in, well, teaching.

Which is a non-stop full-time job despite what the outrage merchant press and bitter trolls might tell you. Linked to this is...

Problem 5: The actual, experienced examiners who won't get any work for a second year running include part-time teachers and others involved in education, as well as retirees, most of whom tend to use it as an income top-up. They're there to do the work, but now can't.

The situation is a pea soup, apparently caused by ill-conceived reactionary responses and a distinct lack of planning (because, seriously, who would plan this?)

They could have kept exams. It wouldn't have been a fair situation given the way this school year has been, but the proposed alternative is far, far worse.

The consultation itself is poor. The questions are written such that it's a done deal. No, "do you agree with what we're about to do?" Just "to what extent do you agree with certain parts we're still debating?"

Whether you like the proposals or not, the consultation is here. Do respond: https://t.co/VwwFJisgN8

Oh, I forgot Problem 6: Appeals should be made to the school. Anyone who knows about school will know the kind of time this will take up when WE HAVE NONE, and how much pressure and emotional blackmail will take place. Just. No.

Also, read this: https://t.co/KLjvD3r6jN

> Actually reading through the Ofqual/DfE consultation rather than what has been said about it by others. It's not making me feel any better.
>
> — Jonathan Mountstevens (@MrMountstevens) January 16, 2021

Problem 7: https://t.co/WkSD1hw4so

My concern about the papers is that if they not sat nationally on the same day, then they risk being leaked and so those who sit it later will do better.

— Lisa Emerson (@LiEmers) January 16, 2021