By attachment to email

Sarah Old
Senior Manager - Standards, Ofqual
Earlsdon Park
53-55 Butts Road
Coventry
CV1 3BH

17 July 2020

Dear Sarah

BCS School Curriculum and Assessment Committee Response to Ofqual's Consultation on proposed changes to the assessment of GCSEs, AS and A levels in 2021

The BCS SCAC has responded to Ofqual's consultation through the online form. This letter summarises the key points made in the Committee's response.

As before, we would like to thank Ofqual for your thoughtful and consultative approach to this significant challenge. In drawing up its response, the Committee considered both the views of its members and the views of Computing at School members. These were sought through:

- an online survey on a set of principles that should underpin the Committee's response
- workshops with practicing teachers
- a further online survey seeking views on Ofqual's specific proposals.

A summary of the latter survey is included as an annex to this letter.

Principles underpinning our response

There was a high level of support for the following principles.
- The examination results awarded should accurately reflect the results candidates would have received had this disruption not happened.
- The health and wellbeing of students and teachers should be the prime consideration when responding to the challenge of preparing candidates for and delivering the 2021 examinations.
- No candidate should be unfairly disadvantaged because of the school's lack of capacity to deliver remote teaching or their access to technology at home.
- The examination process in 2021 should not increase the burden on teachers and schools.

We recognise that inevitably Ofqual will need to be pragmatic in developing a response to this unprecedented situation, so have been similarly pragmatic in applying our principles when developing our response to Ofqual's proposals.

Number and length of examinations.

We agree with Ofqual's analysis that, to avoid additional disruption, there should be no change to the length of exams taken in 2021. However, respondents to the survey were more divided over the number of examinations remaining the same. While the majority supported Ofqual's proposal, 41% supported a reduction in the number of papers.

Timing of the examinations

Again, we agree with Ofqual's analysis, and support the proposal that the A level and AS timetable should start after half term in 2021 even if this necessitates a delay in the release of results.

Optional questions

On balance, and by a small margin (see Annex), respondents to the CAS survey did not support Ofqual's proposal that examinations in computing in 2021 should not include more optional questions than usual.

The advantage of optional questions is that it allows teachers and students to respond to the challenges of Covid by narrowing somewhat the material that they cover.

We recognise that including optional questions sets additional challenges when ensuring comparability of demand between those options, but we encourage Ofqual to consider allowing awarding bodies additional flexibility to offer optionality.

Non Examined Assessment (NEA)

Ofqual proposes to retain NEA for A levels taken in summer 2021, counting as the same fixed percentage (20%) as before.

The teaching community appears divided over its views on this proposal. While a minority (24%) support retaining the NEA for this year on the grounds that it is an essential component for assessing candidates' knowledge, skills and understanding, and is preparation for further study, the majority (67%) believe it should be suspended because of the burden it will place on teachers' and students' time.

On balance, however, the Committee recommends that Ofqual reconsiders this proposal, at least for Computer Science, instead allowing awarding bodies to suspend the requirement, *for one year only*.

The issues are finely balanced even in normal times: notably, at GCSE, the NEA already does not count towards the final award, the result of an extensive consultation. The challenges of Covid have pushed out judgement in this direction for A level as well. Making NEA not count towards the final grade allows the programming project to be done in unsupervised time, and allows teachers to decide how best to use their teaching time. Compulsory NEA reduces the available learning time for out-of-hours catch up activities at home and presents a potential equity issue given young people's differential access to technology at home.

We recognise that this is not ideal and is in some ways a 'least worse' option. We are very keen that, should Ofqual change its proposal that *the change is not seen as an indicator of future policy*. The Committee, through BCS and CAS, would be delighted to work with Ofqual to ensure any decisions are communicated effectively to computing teachers.

As always, we would be delighted to discuss these issues with you, though we recognise the immense pressures facing Ofqual will impact on your ability to hold one-to-one discussions.

Yours sincerely

M Calder

Professor Muffy Calder OBE FREng FRSE
Chair, BCS School Curriculum & Assessment Committee
Vice-Principal and Head of College of Science and Engineering, University of Glasgow
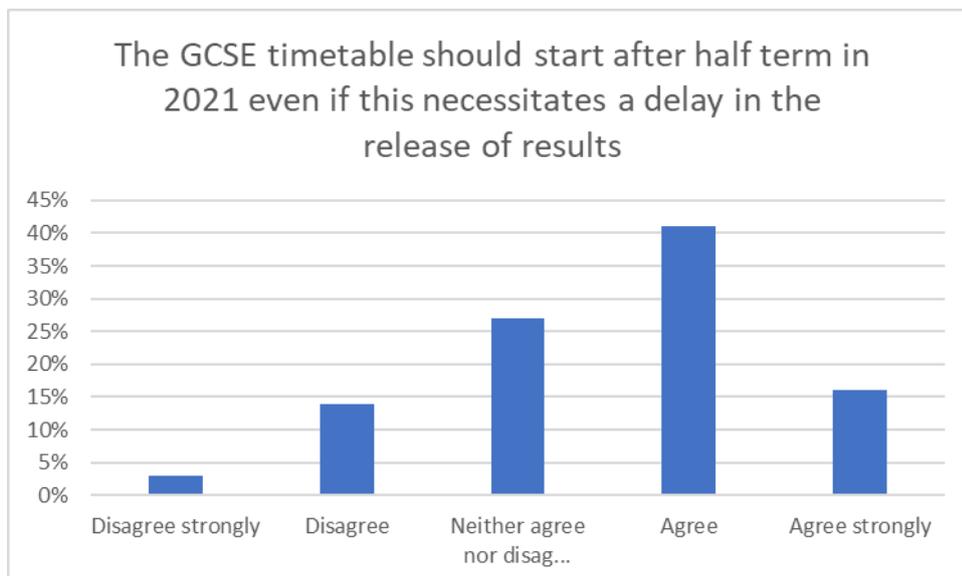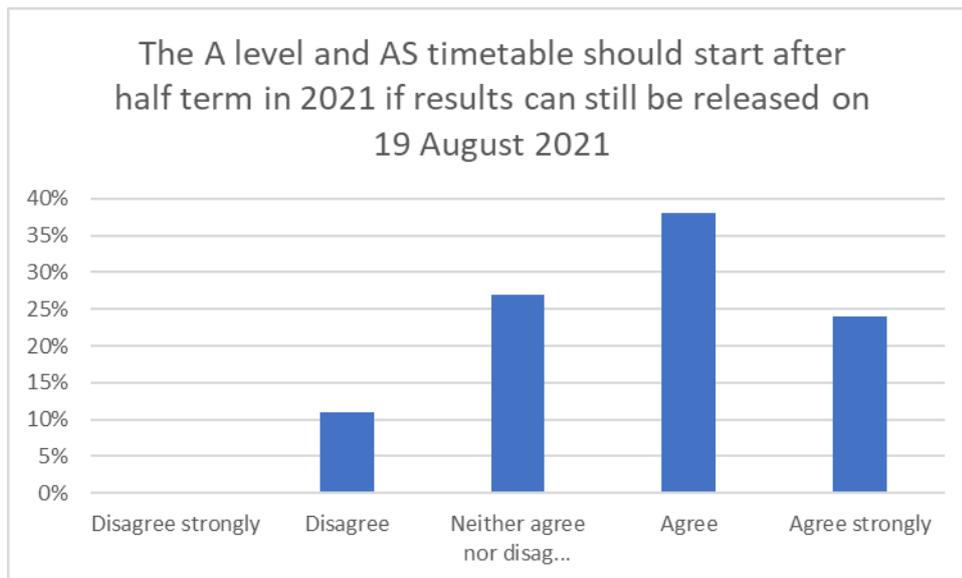
ANNEX: CAS Members' responses to the BCS SCAC survey on Ofqual's consultation on 2021 exam series
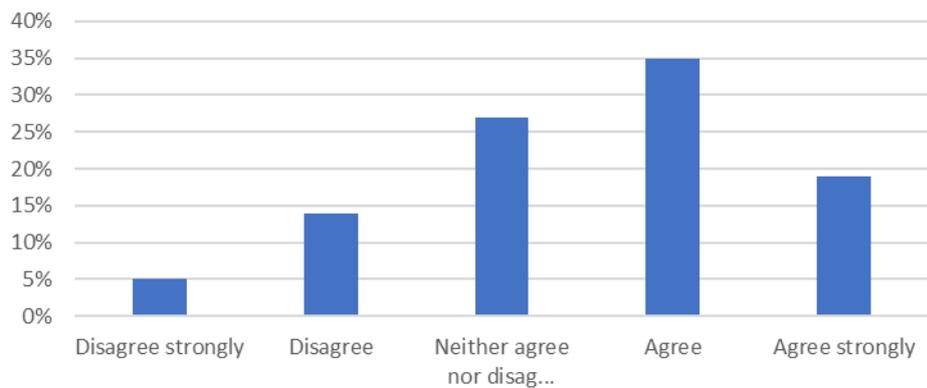
37 respondents completed this questionnaire

To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?

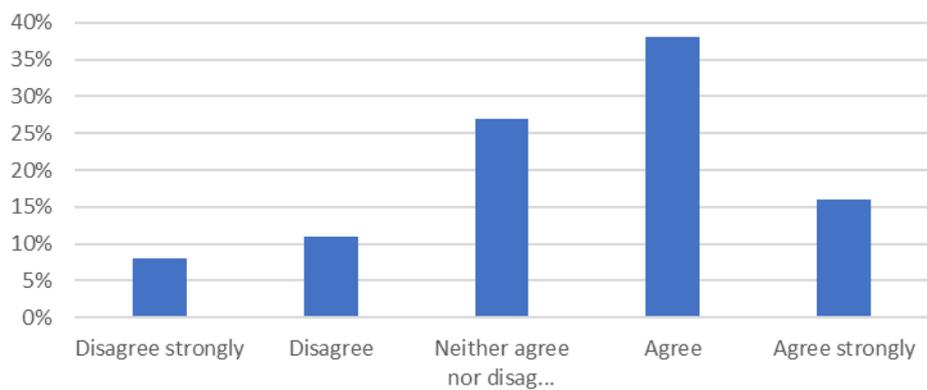|	Disagree strongly	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree...	Agree	Agree strongly	**Net agree**
The A level and AS timetable should start after half term in 2021 if results can still be released on 19 August 2021	0%	11%	27%	38%	24%	**51%**
The GCSE timetable should start after half term in 2021 even if this necessitates a delay in the release of results	3%	14%	27%	41%	16%	**40%**
The GCSE timetable should start after half term in 2021 even if this necessitates a delay in the release of results	5%	14%	27%	35%	19%	**35%**
The A level and AS timetable should start after half term in 2021 even if this necessitates a delay in the release of results	8%	11%	27%	38%	16%	**35%**
Ofqual proposes that the length of exams taken in 2021 should be the same as in previous years	11%	14%	22%	46%	8%	**29%**
Ofqual proposes that the programming project in GCSE Computer Science should remain as a requirement, but should be done in unsupervised time to allow teachers to decide how best to use their teaching time	22%	5%	22%	27%	24%	**24%**
Ofqual proposes that examinations in computing in 2021 should not include more optional questions than usual	14%	30%	19%	16%	22%	**-6%**
Ofqual proposes that the number of exams taken in 2021 should be the same as in previous years	19%	22%	8%	41%	11%	**11%**
Ofqual proposes no changes to A level Computer Science in 2021, including keeping the same requirements and weighting for the NEA	43%	24%	8%	16%	8%	**-43%**

The following bar charts illustrate graphically the proportions of responses

The A level and AS timetable should start after half term in 2021 if results can still be released on 19 August 2021

	Disagree strongly	Disagree	Neither agree nor disag...	Agree	Agree strongly
Value	0%	11%	27%	38%	24%

The GCSE timetable should start after half term in 2021 even if this necessitates a delay in the release of results

	Disagree strongly	Disagree	Neither agree nor disag...	Agree	Agree strongly
Value	3%	14%	27%	41%	16%

The GCSE timetable should start after half term in 2021 even if this necessitates a delay in the release of results

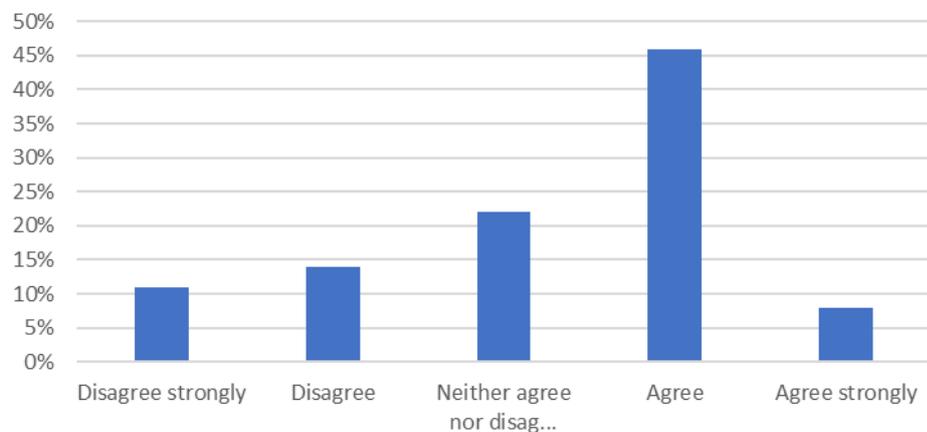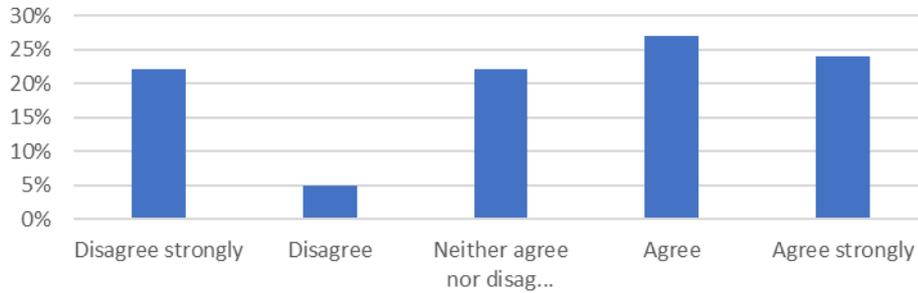| Response	Percentage
Disagree strongly	5%
Disagree	14%
Neither agree nor disag...	27%
Agree	35%
Agree strongly	19%

The A level and AS timetable should start after half term in 2021 even if this necessitates a delay in the release of results
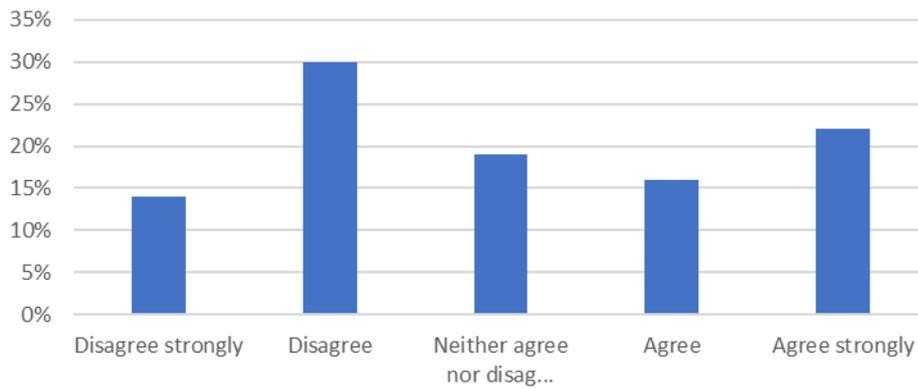
Response	Percentage
Disagree strongly	8%
Disagree	11%
Neither agree nor disag...	27%
Agree	38%
Agree strongly	16%

Ofqual proposes that the length of exams taken in 2021 should be the same as in previous years

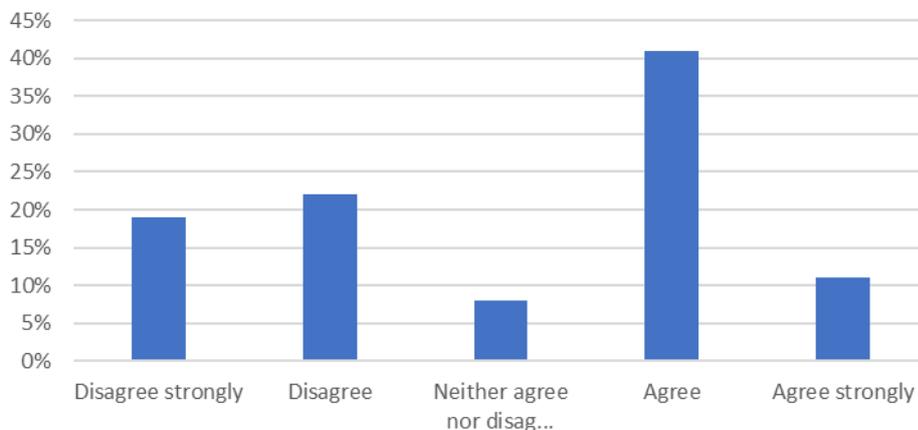| Response	Percentage
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Disagree	14%
Neither agree nor disag...	22%
Agree	46%
Agree strongly	8%

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Disagree strongly	Disagree	Neither agree nor disag…	Agree	Agree strongly
22%	5%	22%	27%	24%

Ofqual proposes that examinations in computing in 2021 should not include more optional questions than usual

Disagree strongly	Disagree	Neither agree nor disag…	Agree	Agree strongly
14%	30%	19%	16%	22%

Ofqual proposes that the number of exams taken in 2021 should be the same as in previous years

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