

**REPLY BY THE PRESIDENT OF
THE COMMITTEE FOR EDUCATION, SPORT & CULTURE
TO QUESTIONS ASKED PURSUANT TO RULE 14 OF THE RULES OF
PROCEDURE BY DEPUTY GAVIN ST PIER**

Following the social media releases by the Committee for Education, Sport & Culture on 6th March in respect of the reinstatement of international exams:

1. Were the contents of the social media releases approved at a political level? If so, by whom?

The content of the formal media release was approved by the Committee's President on the afternoon of Saturday 6th March. The Committee's presumption, based on previous experience of communication cascades, was that its decision would be cascaded to school/college settings and then on by those settings to the relevant students/parents/carers and that the publication and circulation of the media release would be timed accordingly. Social Media content is managed by the Communications Team. Together, the Committee and the Communications Team accept that, generally, it is not appropriate to publish media releases on gov.gg nor via social media during the weekend unless there is a need to convey urgent and/or time-critical information to the community. There was a cascade timing error, for which we have apologised.

2. What changed or catalysed the decision to revisit the previously announced position that these exams had been cancelled?

There was no decision to 'revisit' as no decision with regard to whether Guernsey students would sit international exams had been made by Guernsey's government prior to 4th March. In February, the International Baccalaureate Organisation (IBO), which is one of two international exam boards used by the States of Guernsey, announced that, following consultation with Ofqual (on behalf of the UK Government) it had taken the decision not to hold IB exams in the UK, Guernsey, Jersey and the Isle of Man. The IBO had erroneously assumed that the islands it listed in that announcement were under the UK Government's jurisdiction – an assumption that has now been corrected. The IBO has confirmed that decisions with regard to whether IB exams should go ahead in a jurisdiction in these exceptional times should be a decision taken by that government in partnership with the IBO.

IB students at the Grammar School and Sixth Form Centre were advised by teachers in February that it was necessary to continue to prepare for international exams until such time as the States of Guernsey, in this context in the form of the Committee for Education Sport & Culture, reached a decision on whether international exams should go ahead in this jurisdiction. Thus the decision announced on Saturday 6th March was the first in relation to Guernsey students sitting international exams for the 2020/2021 academic year.

3. Is there a financial penalty in not proceeding with these exams this year and, if so, was this relevant to the Committee's decision?

No.

4. Was the decision to reverse the previously advised position and proceed with international exams a unanimous decision of the Committee?

See the reply to question 2.

The decision made on 4th March that it was safe for students to sit international exams this summer was the unanimous decision of the full Committee. Please note that the Committee's non-voting member, Advocate Jason Green, declared a conflict of interest and was not present during any of the Committee's discussions on this subject.

5. Given the decision of the International Baccalaureate Organisation (IBO) not to hold their exams in the UK, Guernsey, Jersey or the Isle of Man this year, what advice did the Committee seek and obtain from the IBO **before** deciding to seek reinstatement of their exams locally? And was any advice, if any, sought by anyone **after** the decision was made and if so, what advice was received?

See the reply to question 2.

There has been regular dialogue with both of the international exam boards during this period. The policy of both organisations is that exams should go ahead in the summer of 2021 where it is permitted and safe to do so. Following further dialogue between Guernsey and the IBO between 4th and 8th March, the IBO has confirmed it has reviewed and refined its guiding principles regarding recommendations to run examinations or follow the calculated (non-exam) route.

6. If the decision was made on Thursday 4th, why was it not communicated by cascade no later than Friday 5th given that time is obviously of the essence?

See the response to question 1.

The Committee's decision was shared on a confidential basis with settings' Headteachers/Principals on Friday 5th March. In view of the imminent move to stage 2 of the lockdown exit strategy on Monday 8th March, and the return of all students to school by not later than Tuesday 9th March, it was appropriate for students (and parents/carers) to be updated when they returned to school early the following week so that they could also receive, in person, information about the additional support packages that were being put in place to ensure they were well-prepared for the exams, and learn of the accommodations introduced by the exam boards in light of the pandemic. This would also have allowed those students who might have benefitted from, it to receive additional pastoral support.

7. Was the advice received from the Committee's officers supportive of the decision made by the Committee?

A range of views were conveyed to the Committee from senior educationalists and Headteachers/Principals from the settings due to hold international exams. Officers came to the Committee with a recommendation, although advised that there was no overall consensus amongst settings leaders and educationalists, which serves to demonstrate the complex and multi-faceted nature of the issues at hand.

8. What consideration did the Committee give to the impact of the latest lockdown on students?

The Committee gave careful consideration to the impact of the island's second lockdown on students and their learning, and was also advised of the steps that could - and would - be taken to compensate for the time lost to learning during lockdown in advance of the exams being sat. The mental health and wellbeing of students was also considered.

9. Why did the Committee not consult with the students as key stakeholders?

The views of the Headteachers/Principals of all the settings due to hold international exams were sought ahead of the matter being brought to the Committee. It is for those professionals, via discussions with relevant staff, to assess the impact on the students in their setting of a decision to hold/not hold exams when being consulted on matters such as this. Headteachers/Principals were also asked to advise on the capacity of staff to be able to transfer to a teacher assessment approach in the event that plans to sit exams had to be revised on Public Health grounds at short notice, to ensure students would not be disadvantaged should that situation arise.

Although the Committee strongly endorses engagement with key stakeholders on significant decisions, and is very keen to ensure it hears the voice of students on a range of educational matters, it is not appropriate for students to have direct influence over a government's decision on whether or not they should sit specific exams. It is much more appropriate for the teachers who support those students to provide advice, collated via their setting's Headteacher/Principal, about the likely impact on students of each of the possible decision-making permutations, which was why the relevant Headteachers/Principals were consulted in advance.

10. With whom did the Committee consult at the Sixth Form Centre (or elsewhere) and what was the result of that consultation?

Educationalists within the Education Office consulted with the Headteacher/Principal of each setting where students are due to take international exams this summer. These are: The Grammar School and Sixth Form Centre; La Mare de Carteret High School; Les Voies School; St. Sampson's High School; Blanchelande College and The Ladies' College.

With the exception of one setting, at that time (late February), Headteachers/Principals indicated either no strong preference or that their preference was for the exams to take place.

11. Given no other jurisdictions in the British Isles are proceeding with these international exams, how did the Committee satisfy itself that proceeding with them in Guernsey would not be prejudicial to Guernsey students?

At the time of the Committee's decision on 4th March, the statement in the above question was not correct. For example, it was only on 8th March that the Isle of Man confirmed that its Year 11 and 13 students would not be sitting exams set by Cambridge Assessment International Education (CAIE). Again this serves to show the fluidity of the picture internationally.

12. Was the Committee aware that students had been advised following the cancellation of public exams in the summer that they should no longer spend time preparing for mock exams but rather should concentrate on course and other work?

The Committee understands that following the cancellation of exams set by UK exam boards, students studying towards those exams were advised to refocus their efforts away from exam revision. The Committee further understands that students due to sit international exams were advised that the mock exams would not be going ahead and they should first prioritise coursework, which would have to be completed regardless of whether final exams took place. The Committee is not aware of any setting having advised students, ahead of the Committee's decision on 4th March, that the final international exams would/would not be taking place.

13. How did the Committee satisfy itself that the exam boards were going to ensure a fair assessment of exam grades versus teacher assessed grades?

It is incumbent on all exam boards to take all necessary steps to ensure fairness and parity where exam assessment and teacher assessment will be used to assess students in different locations who have undertaken the same course of study in the same academic year. In the case of international examinations where, in some countries, examination routes have been permitted by government, the boards have developed dual pathways which aim to provide comparability of final outcomes. This means that outcomes would have ultimately equal value, albeit that the assessment route chosen might have played to the individual strengths of some students more than others.

The Committee discussed the question of fairness and parity with peers in other jurisdictions during its meetings on 4th March and on 8th March when this matter was discussed at length. Between these two meetings further and specific reassurances were sought from the IBO with regard to the fairness of the two assessment routes, to inform the Committee's final decision.

Whilst the Committee of course has 15 working days to respond, I would be grateful, for any earlier responses to all or some of the questions, if possible – many thanks.

**Date of receipt of the Question: 8th March 2021
Date of Reply: 17th March 2021**