

Gove's exams 'unfair to sex change pupils, pregnant girls and Muslims' because students can't choose when to take exams

- **Course work and modular tests that pupils currently undertaken as part of GCSEs will be replaced with more rigorous end-of-course exams**
- **Some students - such as pregnant girls or fasting Muslims - may be affected by timing of exams**

By Jonathan Petre

Michael Gove's exams watchdog has been accused of wasting public money by assessing whether the new tests to replace GCSEs will discriminate against Muslims, pregnant schoolgirls or teenagers having sex changes. The 'equality analysis', commissioned by Ofqual at a cost of £2,400, has warned that a number of pupils in these categories could be affected by the Education Secretary's controversial overhaul of the exams. Mr Gove announced plans earlier this year to replace most of the course work and modular tests that pupils currently undertake as part of their GCSEs with more rigorous end-of-course exams, to be known as 'I-levels'.



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Last year Prime Minister David Cameron declared that equality assessments were 'bureaucratic nonsense' and civil servants should employ common sense. But exam regulator Ofqual said it carried out the exercise to comply with the Equality Act 2010. It has spent over £5,000 on such assessments in the past year.

Last night critics condemned the new report as a waste of time and money, only highlighting hypothetical effects on a tiny minority of the 600,000 pupils who will sit the new papers. Chris McGovern, of the Campaign For Real Education, said: 'This is misplaced political correctness. We need common sense. We have been coping with exams from time immemorial. There are always going to be exceptions, and you can't avoid them.'



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Mr Gove said he was introducing his exam reforms to push up standards because the current 'dumbed-down' GCSEs had become discredited.

But the Ofqual equality analysis, drawn up by a company called Equality Research and Consulting Ltd and published this month, warns that introducing a single, final exam worth 100 per cent of the marks could have an impact on teenagers who get pregnant while studying for GCSEs.

It said schoolgirls who are expecting babies could struggle if the examination season 'coincides with any problems in pregnancy or is near the due date'.

Concern was also raised in the 25-page report that pupils undergoing 'gender reassignment' may be disproportionately affected. The youngest person to have a sex-change operation in Britain is reported to have been 17, and fewer than 90 children and adolescents nationally are thought to be referred annually to the specialised gender identity services.

However, the report says that reassigning a person's sex by 'changing physiological or other attributes of sex can be a prolonged process, rendering the pupil unavailable at crucial times not only for lessons but for exams unless alternative arrangements are made'.

The third group, Muslim pupils, who make up less than ten per cent of those taking GCSEs, could also be disadvantaged if they happen to be fasting for religious reasons during the exams. Ofqual admitted in its main consultation document that the numbers involved were often small, but said it wanted to take all potential discrimination into account to see if alternative arrangements could be made. Ofqual said it was important to understand 'the potential implications of any significant proposals we make for different groups.

'Doing an equality analysis like this allows us to make decisions in a fully informed way, and also to meet our legal duties under the Equality Act.'