

Tuesday 10 August 2021

Sharon Witherspoon, Royal Statistical Society Vice-President for Education and Statistical Literacy, commenting on today's A-level results, said:

“While last year we saw the government abandon their poorly considered plans to use an algorithm to award individual grades, this year they delegated responsibility to teachers and exam boards but only in late February. Earlier guidance about assessment would have helped ensure more consistency in the evidence available for grading. There would have been more ‘data points’ for each student, and there could have been more consistency between schools.

“We look forward to seeing more details from Ofqual on how statistical evidence was used by exam boards to select which schools would be subject to further investigation – we hope this will be published as a matter of priority.

“There also needs to be an open discussion about what this means for next year's exams. The steps the government has announced to ensure exams take some account of learning loss are welcome. But exams are statistically ‘norm referenced’ - the cut-offs between different grades are partly set by prior decisions about what grading results *should* look like. Is the plan to revert in one fell swoop to 2019 grade profiles, or to adjust them more slowly? This is an issue at the intersection of statistics and policy, and the public needs to be part of this conversation.”

To read the RSS' full statement go to: <https://rss.org.uk/RSS/media/File-library/News/2021/2021-A-Level-results-statement.pdf>