

**RSS SUBMISSION TO OFQUAL CONSULTATION ON PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE ASSESSMENT OF
MATHEMATICS, PHYSICS AND COMBINED SCIENCES GCSES**

23 March 2026

This response has been submitted via an online form. Please find a copy of the questions we responded to below. Full details about the consultation can be found [here](#).

1. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposal that formulae sheets should be provided in the exams for GCSE mathematics for the lifetime of the current qualifications?

- Neither agree nor disagree

2. Do you have any comments on the proposal to provide formulae sheets in the exams for GCSE mathematics for the lifetime of the current qualifications?

We support continuing the existing arrangements whereby some, but not all, formulae are provided to students. This is in line with [our response to the 2024 Ofqual consultation](#) on providing formulae sheets in GCSE mathematics exams between 2025-27. As set out in our [recommendations for teaching statistics in the UK curriculum](#) and our [response to 'Maths to 18'](#), we continue to emphasise that assessment should prioritise students' problem-solving ability rather than their capacity to memorise formulae. The ability to locate, interpret and appropriately apply formulae provided in an exam is an important and authentic skill, reflecting the way mathematics and statistics are used in further study, employment and everyday decision making. We encourage the DfE and Ofqual to clearly articulate which skills these questions are designed to assess, given that formula recall will not be one of them. Clarity on this point will support teachers and students in understanding how best to prepare.

There is ambiguity about whether this proposal intends to straightforwardly continue existing arrangements around formulae sheets (where some formulae are included and some not), or whether it suggests an increase in the number of formulae provided, so that students are no longer expected to memorise any formulae at all. We would oppose any change to provide all formulae in GCSE mathematics exams. Though we recognise the importance of testing understanding and application of formulae, rather than recall, we believe that there is a subset of formulae (for example to calculate the sample mean) which students should be able to recall. Furthermore, it is our view that adding more formulae to the formulae sheet risks creating a long and unwieldy list, difficult for students to navigate. The alternative, providing relevant formulae in the question, risks failing to test whether students can identify the correct formula for the problem, instead testing whether students understand how to substitute numbers in.

5. Are there any other potential equality impacts Ofqual has not identified?

Yes

6. If yes, what are they and do you have any suggestions for how any potential negative impacts on particular groups of students could be mitigated?

We understand the concern that making changes now could introduce inconsistency across exam boards and years, particularly for students retaking exams in 2028, and that current formats are familiar to teachers and students, including in modified papers. However, as recognised by Ofqual, the format and presentation of formulae sheets can have mixed impacts on students with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).



Within this context, we continue to emphasise the importance of regular classroom practice so that all students—especially those with SEND—are confident in knowing which formulae will be provided and how to use them effectively.

There remain concerns around the disadvantages faced by students who struggle with reading; unlike their peers without reading difficulties, they may struggle to navigate formulae sheets quickly, a challenge compounded by the lack of coloured paper, the limits of using a single coloured overlay during the exam, and restrictions on exam support readers, who cannot read operators. This problem risks being further intensified if additional formulae are added to the formulae sheet. Although we recognise Ofqual's reluctance to make immediate changes, we believe that further exploration of alternative formats, including the possibility of printing formulae on coloured paper, remains important to support equitable access.

Looking ahead, we see value in exam boards working together to develop a consistent and accessible design for formulae sheets across mathematics, statistics and the sciences. This would support more coherent teaching and help students build confidence in locating and applying formulae.

7. Are there additional activities associated with providing students with formulae and equations sheets in their GCSE mathematics, physics and combined science exams that Ofqual has not identified above?

Yes.

8. If yes, what are they and do you have any suggestions for alternative approaches that could reduce burden and costs, if identified?

Though Ofqual has identified that schools and colleges will experience limited or no burdens from these proposals, this overlooks the potential advantage for students in settings where teachers actively prepare them to use formulae sheets, compared with those where no such preparation occurs. Teachers may adjust their lessons to ensure students understand which formulae they no longer need to memorise. The RSS is aware that some schools have already adapted their teaching approaches to align topics more closely with the wording and layout of the formulae sheet. We believe that failure to acknowledge the burden of these adjustments risks introducing further inequalities into mathematics assessment.

Some teachers may also require support in teaching students how to use reference materials during an exam, as this may be unfamiliar to those who themselves rely on having memorised the formulae through experience.

The RSS did not provide answers to the following questions:

3. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposal that equations sheets should be provided in the exams for GCSE physics and combined science for the lifetime of the current qualifications?

4. Do you have any comments on the proposal to provide equations sheets in the exams for GCSE physics and combined science for the lifetime of the current qualifications?