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**Editorial**

This issue of The Journal is overdue and for that we apologise to readers.

Over a year ago we were pleased to get the agreement of David Davis and of Trinity College, Dublin to co-publish the papers presented at the international David Davis Conference, *Who am I? Who can tell me who I am?* (March 9th and 10th 2019). We were anticipating that they would be published in two Issues, one soon after the other, last autumn. The hiatus in the publishing of these Journals is due to an unforeseen delay at Trinity. Both David Davis and The Journal are still anticipating that these issues will be published.

Thus we have been prompted to publish an unanticipated Issue. It turns out that is a vital Issue for what are so widely described as unprecedented times. Times that call for re-evaluation.

We stand on uncertain ground, our equilibrium disturbed by the gravity-defying vortex created from the spin of a centralising Government, pretending liberalism and social justice, as it tries to ride a world –wide pandemic. We have to take care that we do not stand pinned to the edge. And there is evidence that we will not. A particular series of events unfolded to combine and so create conditions for this re-evaluation.

Already challenged by the demands and inconsistencies of the English Government’s lockdown, by the fear and anguish that the pandemic provoked and by a prolonged period of confinement and isolation for some, we could have just given up. Indeed some did. But these challenges were juxtaposed by a 21st century phenomenon – that of social media and the web.

A combination of events unfolded:

* the sudden cancelling of national exams;
* the responses to the death of George Floyd
* the success of the National Education Union (NEU) taking a firm, human-centred stand

causing us to ask questions, make demands and take action.

If exams can be cancelled at short notice, thereby rendering obsolete piles of revision materials, months, if not years, of lessons, year 11 assemblies on exam matters, parents’ meetings, reports, number-crunching for predicted grades and CPD; if teacher sweat and toil can be so rudely rendered worthless at the snap of governmental fingers, then, teachers might wonder, what is the point of anything we are doing? Have we been played for fools.? Thus this has brought about a gathering around alternatives. The Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement(s) demonstrated two things to us all as we sat in front of our screens. One, that we don’t need to just sit in front of our screens; that is possible to use social media to effect action in the real world. Two, that there is a great deal of change that we need to be agents of. And the NEU stance similarly offered us another point view. By standing firm and insisting that the government responds to the NEU’s checklist for safe return to school, the NEU modelled a human centred workplace, in which teachers can, in fact, be agents in their own workplace.

To have such a union modelling such a stance at such a time for us is significant. In Jordan organised teachers are facing harsh treatment. There the government and the Teachers Syndicate (the teachers’ union) have been in dispute over low teacher wages (public schools) since the union was formed in 2011. Last October there was a successful four-week teacher strike resulting in the government agreeing to raise teacher salaries. However salary increases have been frozen. At the same time the state ordered that the Syndicate’s premises be closed for two years, their funds have been seized and orderly protest has been met with arrest As one Jordanian teacher has said ‘the arrests of teachers is still increasing and whenever a demonstration in support of teachers takes place, force is used to stop it’.

So, unless, like Hecuba after the fall of Troy, we want to be consumed by the devastation, this is a time to use our educated imaginations to speak out and stand up. Not so much for a ‘new normal’ as for a ‘different way of being’. After all, as the graffito says, “We can't return to normal, because the normal that we had was precisely the problem.”



As Government agencies wash off their responsibilities in bowls of cold confusion we do have the know-how, the ability and the will to take responsibility for ourselves.

In his piece in this Issue, Mathew Milburn says:

NATD has been consistent in arguing for a child-centred, humanising curriculum. Maybe, in a post-pandemic world we should argue for a child-centred, humanising **education** that of course includes curriculum but also pedagogy and assessment processes.

The terms, ‘child-centred’ and ‘humanising curriculum’ run through the DNA of NATD. They are our creed and our touchstone, and perhaps it is timely to re-assert now what they mean, briefly.

**Child-Centred Teaching**

A child-centred pedagogy is the art, craft and science of understanding the needs of the developing child. It is the application of this understanding to a classroom setting, however large or small the class or the children are. These needs become the centre of all planning, teaching, organisation and administration. Assessment only takes place to inform the teacher of the efficacy of her practice. Lessons are not shaped to squeeze and pinch children into the curriculum, but to encourage discovery and challenge.

**A Humanising Curriculum**

There needs to be a profound shift away from knowledge and exam-based teaching, driven by market forces. There needs to be a shift towards student-centred teaching that values and is articulate about and skilful in developing such fundamental qualities as: thinking, imagination, questioning, empathy, self and social expression, social awareness, responsibility of care to self and others, articulacy, an understanding of justice and what is needed to achieve it. Young people must be given a confident sense of having a part to play in society.

This change needs to be made by teachers and teacher educators, perhaps via subject based Associations professional Associations and professional teacher communities.

The aims should be to best serve the needs of the developing child and to induct her into a world where they are welcome, rather than tested, measured and tweaked if found wanting. To this end, the curriculum should respect, enable and develop the child, both within the community (or more accurately, communities) in which the child is growing and in wider society. It should take the stance that the world is knowable and that humans have a role to play in the making and shaping of society.

The Early Years curriculum should be based on applied knowledge and understanding of the needs of the developing child. It should be flexible according to those needs and enable, for example, a rich and prolonged period of play and discovery, in which the child is an active participant.

In the primary curriculum, there should be an emphasis on discovery-based learning in a social context. An excellent example of this is Mantle of the Expert[[1]](#footnote-1) which embraces the whole range of understanding, expressive and communication 'skills' (reading, writing, maths, movement, drama, art) in a pedagogy centred on discovery and co-operative learning.

If you start from where the child is then the relevance of the community (or, more accurately, communities in the locale) must be germane to the learning experience. All subjects can base their work around this approach. For example, Maths can use local traffic and transport systems to calculate frequency, and History can set out to discover local patterns of industry or housing or homes. It is also important for young people to understand communities from a wider sphere. For example, I have had young teachers say to me that they don't have any black students in their school, so they don't need to have an anti-racist teaching policy. This lack of awareness on the part of teachers can, in part, be offset by a curriculum that offers national events as Windrush[[2]](#footnote-2), or the mechanics of democratic representation, for example, how many black MPs are there?

The educating of teachers is essential to the teaching of a human-centred curriculum. There needs to be a clear connection between curriculum changes and teacher education and honed CPD. There needs to be more widespread access to teaching for people from black, Asian and ethnic minorities

In his **Chair’s Report**, Liam Harris is passionate about the need for reform and the need for teachers to wrestle control of education from Government. He uses the examination grade fiasco of this August (2020) to articulate the impact the chaos has had on the A level students he teaches. He argues that

…over the last 20 years the education system has been realigned to focus on the needs of the economy, rather than the needs of the child. It is a shame that it has taken a global pandemic to bring this to light, but there are glimmers of hope beginning to appear as the realisation dawns amongst school staff, students and parents. And as educators, we are on the front line, making sense of this chaos with the young people we teach – a responsibility that we cannot and will not shirk even without leadership and guidance from our current government.

His report is a call to arms and an invitation to Drama teachers to shape the future of the Association in order to provide the education that young people need.

We also publish here ***Assessment beyond exams***, a press release written by Matthew Milburn in response to the chaos. In it he condemns this Government’s haste in protecting a deeply flawed system at the expense of the young people trapped inside it. In this acutely sharp piece, he identifies the central issues with the current system and outlines a humanising, student-centred alternative which he and his colleagues have developed over many years now, celebrating the breadth and depth of the individual student.

We are publishing here, key inputs from two recent Zoom conferences (***Drama in the new normal: Is it remotely possible?***) that NATD has run in response to the Covid 19 pandemic and the call from Drama teachers for support in navigating the situation within which we find ourselves. Guy Williams chaired the events and observed that we are working in a context in which we must ask,

How do we as human beings connect in a world that is disconnected?

And in response to a question about the choice of texts we should make at this time that would work well with social distance, Matthew Milburn responded:

Any text that is born out of where the children are at.

And Maggie Hulson similarly, but from a different direction,

Any text, but you must adapt yourself to be able to approach these questions.

The material and the approaches to it are rich and nuanced – the principles and the pedagogy of the Association are embodied here – a child-centred, humanising response to teaching Drama today.

In ***A Letter to Teachers in Greece***, Maggie Hulson and Guy Williams catalogue the recent history of education in the UK in response to a request from Kostas Amoiropoulos in Greece as he and his colleagues anticipated a lurch to the right. Following the landslide election of a Conservative Government in December 2019 with its much-trumpeted intention to leave Europe with no deal and embrace a de-regulated world distanced from the constraints of the European Court of Human Rights, Hulson and Williams’ description of the neoliberal agenda as it has impacted on the UK is stark and chilling. On the 6th August, the Government announced its intention to radically alter planning permission in the UK, throwing open the doors to property developers to profiteer at the expense of the majority.[[3]](#footnote-3) In its rush to create a trade deal with Trump’s USA, the same Government is prepared to allow American food practices to lower food quality with chlorine washed chicken and meat pumped with antibiotics.[[4]](#footnote-4) In education, the journey from the Education Reform Act (ERA) of 1988, through the National Curriculum and Ofsted to the strictures of ‘austerity’ have led us to a vulnerable place, increasingly divided, offering an impoverished curriculum. The neoliberal agenda is alive and well and we stand on the precipice of cataclysmic change. NATD stands alongside the NEU, the new Drama & Theatre Education Alliance (DTEA) and our international colleagues in drawing a line in the sand and continuing to fight for Drama and fight for Education.

In ***Making History: Inventing the Past,*** Roger Wooster sounds a cautionary note of the dangers of losing a critical analysis of history as museums move towards the *elision of leisure and heritage*. He is clear that museums have a proper educational responsibility that goes beyond a complacent placing of facts or simple entertainment, and advocates the key educational value of acquiring the ability to understand where we are by looking at how we got here, so that we can work out where we need to go next. Crucial to this understanding is the way in which history is presented and Wooster discusses the pedagogical benefits, or otherwise, of virtual reality and the role of the actor /teacher or facilitator.

History is made by people, he argues and with careful consideration of detail, the matter or material of history, he illustrates how the actor/teacher and facilitator can position the students as active learners, following a method of enquiry;

…in this way the nostalgia of facts can be replaced by critical thinking and connective analysis.

Offering us clear examples of how the students’ imagination can be engaged in such a way, Wooster urges us to consider that

…children are increasingly being sold the notion that the future just happens and the best we can do is ameliorate the worse side effects. As educators we need to seek to do more. To interrogate the interpretation of facts and to realise that that knowledge of the facts is not wisdom but merely a path to wisdom.

**Chair’s Report: Educating Through Chaos**

by

Liam Harris

This report was written on Thursday 20th August at 6.00pm. Ordinarily I wouldn’t need to be so specific in making clear the time of writing, but this is my 7th version. For once this is not a result of my own indecisiveness, but instead a measure of the pace and scale of changes to the educational landscape over the past few weeks. Government announcement followed by government amendment followed by complete government U-turn has left us all in a position of bewilderment. Trying to make sense of it all, and to make NATD’s position clear within it, feels almost impossible. But, as I begin to hear notes being played from the world’s smallest violin in respect of my suffering, it is only the smallest of indications of what school leaders and educators across the country are currently feeling about the chaos in which we find ourselves.

In attempting to make sense of it all, I turn to one of the central concepts of Drama-in-Education: finding the universal within the particular experience of the A Level Drama students at my school. I turn to them as they are one of the most incredible, yet most challenged and challenging cohorts I have ever had the pleasure of teaching. In the midst of grieving for a member of their year group who tragically took their own life just months earlier and coping with their own mental and physical health issues, they were faced with the additional prospect of a global pandemic robbing them of their final sense of achievement. I offer the following as an account of their experience of the chaos.

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**March 16th 2020**

As news of a national lockdowns to combat Covid-19 across the globe begin to spread, the UK remains ‘open’ and my A Level Drama students perform their first set of externally assessed performances in front of a visiting examiner. It feels surreal. We laugh hysterically as one group performs *5 Lesbians Eating A Quiche*, a farce about women locked in a bunker as the world comes to an end. During the performance, I receive an email: one of the students in the group needs to self-isolate once the performance has finished as their parent has suddenly developed symptoms. The young person is distressed when I inform them of the situation and deeply concerned about their parent, yet they insist on performing their monologue in an empty Drama Studio before they leave just in case it can be used for assessment.

**March 20th 2020**

It is announced that the UK schools will be closed to most pupils from Monday 22nd March and that the summer exam series will be cancelled. Theatres across the country also close their doors, entirely uncertain of when or even if they will be able to reopen. Many of my students have taken the decision to self-isolate throughout the week as either they or a member of their household are showing symptoms of Covid-19 or are on the shielding list. Meanwhile, our incredible visiting examiner who has agreed to attend our performance, is entirely accommodating and makes everyone feel at ease about the assessments. It dawns on all of us in the room that what we are are about to witness may well be the last piece of theatre performed in the country for quite some time. Parents are not permitted to attend the performance in order to minimise risk. Heads of House and Heads of Year catch wind that students are feeling deflated that they will now be performing their work without an audience and rally the staff body to attend a socially distanced Drama Studio. They should be in an INSET with the Headmaster, finding out about whether or not they will be placed onto furlough. Instead they attend our performance in support of the students. As performances of *Top Girls* and *Brighton Beach Scumbags* come to a close, there are tears from everyone in the room. It feels like a truly special moment. We say our goodbyes, not knowing if or when we will see each other again.

**April 3rd 2020**

OFQUAL announces that GCSE and A Level grades will be determined by teacher predictions, taking into account a full range of evidence that includes classwork, internal assessments, homework and mock exams. Centres will be required to rank students within grade boundaries using this evidence to inform their predictions. Schools are left to interpret the OFQUAL guidance themselves as they scramble to make objective judgements about their students. Some schools run additional mock exams from home while others try to find a way to collect student books which may be in school or may be at home.

I haven’t seen my Y13 cohort since the eve of school closure. They are an incredibly complex group of learners who have been on an extraordinary journey since the start of the course. Not only have they experienced the tragic loss of one of their peers, but they each have their own unique challenges to deal with. Each of them produced stunningly complex work throughout the course. They have incredibly messy learning journeys, full of peaks and troughs. It certainly doesn’t show a clean, linear progression.

We are told that we must apply special consideration at a centre level. I am forced to rank the cohort, making decisions about who is the best Drama student and who is the worst Drama student, while trying to quantify how badly their learning has been affected by their own personal circumstances. Having celebrated the messiness with my students and guided them in developing their own artistry, I have never felt more reductionist.

**April 15th 2020**

OFQUAL opens a consultation for the ‘***exceptional arrangements for exam grading and assessment in 2020’[[5]](#footnote-5)*.** The outcome suggests that most respondents agree with the use of centre-assessed grades (CAGs) and rankings which utilises a statistical standardisation model by applying a school’s historical data. What this model looks like remains unclear, but OFQUAL and the Department for Education continue to assure ‘fairness’.

At my school, some parents begin to raise concerns about the rank-ordering of students. The school assures them that our internal procedures have been properly standardised, are evidence-based and that OFQUAL has given assurances about the fairness of the process.

**May 22nd 2020**

OFQUAL opens a new consultation regarding **‘*an additional GCSE, AS and A level exam series in autumn 2020*[[6]](#footnote-6)’.** The consultation closes and decisions are made which completely disregard the concerns of the majority of Drama Associations. It is decided that the Autumn 2020 examination series will not take into account any non-exam assessment (NEA), with the exception of Art and Design. Essentially 60% of the Drama course at GCSE and A Level is removed, the majority of which is practical. In the Consultation Decision Document, OFQUAL states that:

We understand the concerns of respondents who said that some students would perform better in non-exam assessments than they would in exams. Research indicates this is not necessarily the case, although we acknowledge that the subjects covered by the research are not those that include performance-based assessments such as drama and dance.

(OFQUAL Consultation Decisions Document, 2020:6)

OFQUAL provides assurances that the Autumn 2020 examination series is a safety net for those students unhappy with their CAGs and that it is envisioned that very few students will enter as most will be happy with their grades. It is important to note here that the language is very much centred around CAGs, not standardised grades. I feel reassured that the judgements for my students will be respected and am optimistic that this may signal a new dawn for trust in teacher judgements.

**Wednesday 12th August**

It is the day before A Level Results Day. Examinations Officers and Heads of Centre receive A Level Results in preparation for students receiving them the following day. They are fully aware of the scale of the grade alterations that have taken place and that will emerge the following day. Meanwhile, the Education Secretary, Gavin Williamson, announces late on Tuesday night that Mock examination results can be used should they be higher than the grade awarded by examination boards. This becomes known as the Triple Lock. There is no appeals infrastructure in place for this to occur and Heads of Centre brace themselves for the backlash the following day.

**Thursday 13th August**

It is A Level Results Day and the scale of grade alterations becomes clear, with almost 40% of grades being downgraded by the standardisation process. The effect appears to be linked to cohort size, with smaller cohorts having their grades untouched by the process while larger cohorts are put through the statistical model. Stories emerge across the country of students being downgraded by 2 or 3 grades as the model disregards individual achievement or CAGs and instead focusses solely on rank order, historical achievement and data held about the cohort’s predicted achievement level.

In my school, I attend a results day like no other. I inform students that despite awarding them for the work they have done, they have been the victims of a ruthless standardisation system which never even looked at the brilliant work that they produced. Many have missed out on their university offers and they ask me for advice about what to do next. I have very little advice to give them as the appeals process has yet to be established and universities begin to fill their now vacant places through the clearing system. Their mock exam results aren’t as strong as their awarded grade (they strengthen with practice over time, you see) so the eleventh hour announcement from Williamson is no use to them. I outline the possibility of sitting the exam in the Autumn series, but they feel their practical skills are far stronger than their ability to express themselves in writing. Without the NEA, they only have an outside chance of a grade improvement. Besides, it won’t help them get into university this year.

I console them by reminding them of their achievements in the Drama Studio, the progress they had made as individuals and that no letter on a piece of paper can take that away from them. But the system has ingrained in them that the grade is the summation of their worth as a human being and they leave deflated.

**Saturday 15th August**

OFQUAL publishes its appeals process, outlining how mock examination results and coursework grades can be used in the event of an appeal. 8 hours later, it retracts the publication with no explanation.

Excited and relieved, students and parents contact me with a flurry of questions about whether practical work and coursework can now be used. By the time I have read and digested the publication and begun to consider my replies, it disappears. My students are once again left without answers to time-sensitive questions.

**Monday 17th August**

The Government declares an announcement will be made at 4pm about the fallout of the A Level results fiasco. It is expected that Gavin Williamson or even Boris Johnson will be making the announcement. Instead it is left to Roger Taylor, the Chair of OFQUAL to announce that students will be awarded their CAG for both A Level and GCSE if it is higher than that calculated by the statistical model.

I receive a flurry of messages from parents and students delighted about their results, but who remain confused about what this means for university places. Will the original offers now be reinstated? What will happen to students who accepted a new offer through clearing? The confusion continues.

**Thursday 20th August**

A full week has passed since A Level Results Day. UCAS has shut down their phonelines and student accounts have yet to be updated to the grades they have now been awarded. University admission departments have also closed their phonelines and most are now uncontactable.

Now in the midst of GCSE results day and writing guidelines for Drama teaching next academic year, I receive emails and phone calls from anxious parents and Year 13 pupils desperate for advice about their next steps. I have no answers to give them but reassure them that as soon as the school hears anything, we will be in contact.

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The above tracks the chaotic series of events that relate to my particularly damaged Y13 Drama class and I hope offers an insight into the experiences of young people across the country. More importantly I hope it gives a sense of the chaotic and, I hasten to add, shambolic handling of young people by the Conservative Government throughout this crisis. The above refers only to the A Level results fiasco, but there are so many more examples of Government missteps when it comes to young people and the education sector. To name but a few:

* The Marcus Rashford campaign forcing the government into a U-turn on free school meals provision over the summer break;
* Endless amendments to the ***Guidance For Full Opening: Schools*** [[7]](#footnote-7) documentation that have left Senior Leaders without concrete support or additional resourcing;
* The discrepancies between the guidance for schools and ***Working Safely During Coronavirus: The Performing Arts***[[8]](#footnote-8).
* The outcome of OFQUAL’s ***Proposed changes to the assessment of GCSEs, AS and A levels in 2021*​** [[9]](#footnote-9)consultation that entirely ignored the very real concerns of performing arts subjects;
* On the eve of Year 11 Results Day, Pearson – the BTEC regulator – announce that the awarding of BTEC results will be delayed. Schools are told not to issue results, many of which will have already been sealed in envelopes for the following day.

All of the above makes for some extremely dire reading, but it perhaps shouldn’t come as a surprise. After all, over the last 20 years the education system has been realigned to focus on the needs of the economy, rather than the needs of the child. It is a shame that it has taken a global pandemic to bring this to light, but there are glimmers of hope beginning to appear as the realisation dawns amongst school staff, students and parents. And as educators, we are on the front line, making sense of this chaos with the young people we teach – a responsibility that we cannot and will not shirk even without leadership and guidance from our current government.

As an Association we have seen membership soar over the course of the pandemic as teachers and educators seek support in delivering a child-centred, humanising Drama curriculum in this time of crisis. In fact, membership is at its highest since 2013. This is in large part down to the *Drama in the New Normal* online events the Association has hosted online. Over the course of the 4 events held between May and August, over 200 Drama teachers and educators will have attended. This Journal has been born of this online series, capturing the contributions from them along with other material the Association feels will be useful to teachers in planning for the ‘new normal’. As always, we do not seek to provide ‘oven-ready’ solutions. Instead we seek to provide political and pedagogical guidance, to ask probing questions and to provide a sense of solidarity for those who feel there is more to education than sitting in rows facing forwards. My thanks to the members of the Editorial Committee who have hastily produced this Journal upon my request under some extraordinary conditions.

Throughout the lockdown, NATD attended the various OFQUAL consultation meetings. While the term ‘consultation’ can only be applied loosely, we have nonetheless struck up relationships with some key individuals at OFQUAL who appear genuinely interested in listening to suggestions for reforms of assessment. One of the real opportunities that has arisen from the A Level and GCSE grade fiasco is that the standardisation process has led to an Emperor’s-New-Clothes moment for the assessment system in this country. It simply is not fit-for-purpose and requires urgent overhaul. I was recently reminded on Twitter of a keynote by Sir Tim Brighouse at an NATD Conference in 2013 where he argued for a Driving License style assessment system, where students are recognised for their achievements throughout their learning journey, rather than what they can do under timed conditions on a particular day of the year. If there was ever a time for such a change, it would surely be now.

Perhaps one of the most encouraging developments for Drama Educators was the incredibly promising Drama and Theatre Education Alliance Conference where theatre education departments and all major Drama associations came together in solidarity for an online event. To those in attendance it felt like a truly historic moment and, while there is still plenty of work to do in bringing us into closer alignment, an important step forward. My particular thanks to Geoff Readman who has worked tirelessly to make this happen over a number of years.

In 2015, the Association was entrusted to a small group of individuals to take NATD into a hibernation period. The Association agreed that we would emerge from this period when the ground was more fertile and the need for our child-centred, humanising pedagogy was at its greatest. I feel that the time is now. Despite the chaos, we are on the brink of great change within the education system and NATD has a fundamental part to play in it. I invite you to step forward, reach out and take an active role in laying the foundations for the future of the education system.

**References**

OFQUAL (2020), *Consultation Decisions: An additional GCSE, AS and A level exam series in autumn 2020,* <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/896446/Autumn_Series_2020_Consultation_Decisions_300620.pdf>

1. A teaching method invented by the drama pedagogue Dorothy Heathcote. <https://www.mantleoftheexpert.com> is a good place to find out more. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. In 2018 black people were wrongly detained, denied legal rights, threatened with deportation, and, in at least 83 cases, wrongly deported from the UK by the Home Office. Many of those affected had been born British subjects and had arrived in the UK before 1973, particularly from Caribbean countries as members of the "Windrush generation" (so named after the Empire Windrush, the ship that brought one of the first groups of West Indian migrants to the UK in 1948) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2020/aug/06/race-to-the-bottom-reform-to-planning-system-in-england-could-be-catastrophic> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/mar/02/chlorinated-chicken-foods-us-trade-deal-uk-eu> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/exceptional-arrangements-for-exam-grading-and-assessment-in-2020 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/consultation-on-an-additional-gcse-as-and-a-level-exam-series-in-autumn-2020 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
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