

Exam schedules re-arranged to accommodate Ramadan

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The National Secular Society has warned that the rescheduling GCSE and A-Level exams to accommodate Ramadan must not disadvantage non-Muslim pupils.

The authority which represents the UK exam boards, the Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ), has held consultations with "Muslim leaders" about rescheduling exams to reduce the clash between the Islamic holy month and the exam period.

Considerations included moving examinations in core GCSE subjects like English and Maths to the beginning of the exam period – reducing available revision time in order to move the sessions to before Ramadan begins.

The JCQ have [said](#) that while exam boards will "always aim to be as fair as possible to all", it will only consider making "small" changes "for any one group that [do] not impact negatively on most students".

The body said that "Where possible, large entry GCSE and GCE subjects are timetabled prior to the commencement of Ramadan and consideration given to whether they are timetabled in the morning or afternoon."

NSS executive director Keith Porteous Wood commented on the reports: "If there are a significant number of Muslim students that are affected and calling for a change, a reconsideration of the schedule doesn't seem unreasonable, but accommodations should only be made if this can be achieved with little or no disruption or by disadvantaging other students.

"A proper review of this – not driven by religious interests – but with educators reviewing the evidence, should consider possible arrangements. We cannot enter onto a slippery slope of making unreasonable accommodations on religious grounds. There must be a very stringent test for whether accommodations like this will disadvantage non-Muslim students.

"Moving exams earlier in the day to lessen the effects of fasting will bring exams into a period of the day when teenagers may not be at their most focused or alert: Some researchers [suggest](#) that academic performance is improved in lessons held later in the day. Rescheduling exams to take place earlier may well disadvantage the majority of students on account of Muslim students fasting. The decisions around exam scheduling should be driven by evidence and research, not religious considerations.

"Bringing exams in core subjects, such as English and Maths, earlier in the exam period will lessen the time available for revision for the most important exams. If this does disadvantage students then no special accommodation for religious festivals or fasting periods should be made."

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