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## Self-efficacy, test anxiety, and cancelled school exam experience in first year physics students.

Summer exam cancellations have meant that, in addition to the usual secondary-to-university transition challenges, students who started university last year have had little to no recent high-stakes exam experience. Future cohorts are also affected by the continued disruption to exams. This mixed-methods study investigates the experiences of undergraduate physics students when sitting university exams and the impact that cancelled secondary school exams has had on preparation, self-efficacy, and test-anxiety.

Over 250 first year physics students were contacted in May 2021 to participate in our study. Out of 95 survey respondents, 82 had experienced cancelled school examinations. Preliminary quantitative analysis revealed that students who felt their university exams were more negatively impacted by school exam cancellations felt less prepared and had lower mean self-efficacy ratings. Students who felt their university exams were more negatively impacted also reported higher test anxiety.

Six students participated in follow-up focus groups. Initial results suggest that students felt that the cancellation of school examinations affected their university exam performance to varying degrees. Some students felt that the experience of sitting high-stakes exams would have enabled them to consolidate physics and maths concepts in preparation for university lecture courses, and would have furthered their sense of belonging at a high tariff university. Most students suggested that revision resources did not adequately prepare them for their first exam in January, in addition to feeling quite demoralised and stressed following a generally negative experience of this exam. However, following the experience of their first exam in January, some students took the initiative to change their study methods for summer exams.

Our preliminary findings suggest students find the experience of sitting high-stakes exams valuable. We therefore aim to create exam resources for current and future students to help with exam technique and performance, and also build confidence and reduce test-anxiety.

### Key words

Assessment, self-efficacy, test-anxiety, experiences, mixed-methods

### Region

UK/Ireland

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