

Students' and teachers' views and experiences of A level module re-sits

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Abstract

Currently, A levels follow a modular structure, whereby the content of the course is broken up into a series of units or modules, which are taught and assessed separately. Students are then able to re-sit individual modules (an unlimited number of times) to try to improve their grade. The re-sit system has been subject to criticism that it has contributed to the lowering of the A level standard over time (De Waal, 2009) and led to a focus on exams at the expense of deeper learning (Poon Scott, 2010). This sort of criticism has led to the government asking Ofqual to review the rules for re-sitting A level modules. Others argue that the opportunity to re-sit is vital for those who develop through the course or who had a bad day which limited their ability to demonstrate what they know.

This research attempted to add to this debate by obtaining the views of students and teachers directly. The research questions were:

- 1) What are students' reasons for re-sitting A level modules?
- 2) What are students' experiences of re-sitting modules?
- 3) What are teachers' views and experiences of re-sitting in their schools/colleges?

Questionnaires were sent to all schools with students taking A levels in Psychology or Mathematics offered by the OCR examination board (329 schools taking Psychology and 400 taking Mathematics). There were two separate questionnaires, one for students and one for teachers. Students were asked their reasons for re-sitting modules, as well as their views and experiences of the re-sit system in general. Teachers were also asked their views of re-sits in general and what advice and assistance they gave to their students.

75 schools taking Mathematics and 87 schools taking Psychology responded. Analysis of the questionnaires suggested that students were generally positive about re-sits, and had mainly genuine reasons for re-sitting. Teachers' views were less positive, but many still saw the benefit of giving students another chance, particularly if they had gained more knowledge through studying other modules. Comparison of the two subjects revealed some interesting differences, particularly in the teachers' responses.

References

De Waal, A. (2009). *Straight As? A-level teachers' views on today's A-levels*. London: Civitas.

Poon Scott, E. (2010). *Resits in high-stakes examinations: the unusual case of A-levels*. Paper presented at the 36th International Association for Educational Assessment (IAEA) Annual Conference, August 2010.