

# Morning exams are unfair on sleepy teenage brains

**Greg Hurst** Education Editor

Exams should not take place during mornings because teenagers' brains have not properly woken up then, an Oxford academic has said.

A levels, GCSEs and university exams should be confined to afternoons to avoid penalising adolescent candidates who find it harder to remember things in the morning, he argued.

Paul Kelley, an honorary clinical research associate at the University of Oxford's sleep and circadian neuroscience institute, believes it is unfair to hold high stakes exams for young people before noon.

The body clock of 16 to 21-year-olds shifts dramatically on average by almost three hours, so a 9am exam paper is effectively the equivalent of starting the test at 6am, he said. Dr Kelley claims that 90 per cent of teenagers are less alert in the mornings.

"Few adults would opt to sit a potentially life-changing test so early in the morning but that's exactly what we

expect of our young people. It's unjust and it's unnecessary. Exams should be designed to get the best out of people and to be fair," he said.

Dr Kelley has previously advocated starting the school day for teenagers at 10am, and called for university teaching to begin at 11am. A large-scale study will test the impact on exam results of starting the school day later.

The research, commissioned jointly by the Education Endowment Foundation and the Wellcome Trust, has enrolled 110 secondary schools and will monitor the progress of teenagers who start classes at 10am, and compare their GCSE results with a control group who began their school day just before 9am. A total of 31,800 children will take part.

In a talk to parents at the independent North Bridge House senior school, in Canonbury, north London, Dr Kelley said that rigid timetables caused sleep loss that put teenagers' health at risk. The school has introduced a later start for sixth formers.