

Written evidence submitted by Mr Michael Karim

Prospective Medical Student's places removed as a result of forced downgrading of CAGs

My daughter had three offers from Medical Schools based on her predicted AAA A-level grades following her mock exams. All offers have been rejected by the universities as a result of her centre assessed grades (CAGs) which her school was forced to down grade based on 3 yrs. historical school data. Here is her testimony to her 1st choice university who told her on results day 'to reapply':

Dear Head of Admissions,

I am holding an offer at Plymouth Medical School and have been adversely affected by the centre assessed A-level grades issue. On results day, I called but was told I would have to reapply despite many universities holding places open whilst the controversial process is looked into.

As a summary background to my application:

I am still determined to study Medicine and during the pandemic have been continuing to improve my experience and knowledge by working as an NHS volunteer to help elderly and isolated persons following on from all the previous NHS voluntary work I have done. The last few months have been very challenging personally, but I have kept my spirits strong anticipating receiving the required grades to start my course with you.

My college predicted A-Level grades of:

Biology A
Chemistry A
Mathematics A

These were based on my performance in 'mock' (progression) exams which are the only exams we have taken under the required mock conditions.

I was given the predicted AAA grades based on my continued progress, teacher supportive evaluations and expected achievement when actually sitting the A-levels which I have now not been allowed to sit. It is worth noting that my 1A**, 8A*, 1A & 1B grades at GCSE at an 'Aspiring School' (Sandhurst) were significantly higher than the mocks I sat prior. I have a record of rising to the challenge and increased performance when sitting formal exams.

The 'triple lock process' allowing mocks to be used would have helped, so raised my hopes, but the next day, that was withdrawn by Ofqual. I spoke to a tutor at my college on results day and she acknowledged that other assessments since the mocks have been fraught with inconsistencies, e.g. some students at Farnborough had visibility of assessment questions when sitting them at later dates to me, different assessments for students at different schools etc which would have marked me down in comparison; e.g. some schools have just gone with Mocks or original predicted grades which are now counting. The college has also sent an email to us advising that taking exams in the Autumn will not be advisable due to no teaching since March. The college has since told students they will not be able to stay on and take exams in the Summer 2021!

Applying for Medical School I scored well in the UCAT entrance exam. Following this, I really enjoyed the university's applications and interview process which I found very fair, stimulating and I learned a great deal from it.

I now find myself in the situation where many of my peers have now been upgraded and allowed to keep their places, many students at other elite universities have been given places based on the original predicted application grades (in my case AAA), but I am the one losing out after all I have worked through.

I am ready to make a strong start to my course and I would greatly appreciate it if you can please consider helping me to put this right, as seems to be happening with many other students right now.

Unfortunately, the government process does not allow for me to appeal. To deal with this in support of my application my college tutor has provided the following context to the situation:

'In terms of Centre Assessed Grades:

Biology - B

Chemistry - C

Mathematics - C

As you can see, these results fell short of her predictions and do not reflect how well she could have performed should she have sat the exam but were a result of the strict guidelines that the government (through Ofqual) put onto the College with their CAG guidance. Each curriculum area selected pieces of work across the programme of study that were considered most reliable measures of student performance. The marks for these pieces of work were added up and an average generated for each student. This produced a rank order of students from the highest performing to the lowest performing. Guided by their knowledge of the ability of this year's students, along with the performance of students in the past three years at College, curriculum areas decided where the boundary for each grade should be. This could not have led to significantly more students achieving better grades than in the past, as this would have resulted in the College being investigated by the exam boards for malpractice.'

Through [Ofqual guidance](#), the Head of Centre (the Principal) had to sign off all CAGs. In doing so, the guidance says that they "should consider how the distribution of centre assessment grades compares with grades achieved by the centre in previous years." (page 17). The guidance goes on to state that "Exam boards may investigate any attempts to undermine this system which might be regarded as malpractice." (page 18)

It is worth emphasising that class tests and the formal progression/end of year mock exams had to be considered for the CAGs by the guidelines and that other centres, it seems, have relied solely on end of year mock exams. If this would have been the case with this student, her CAGs would have been much higher as emphasised with the progression/end of year mock exam results I have included for you.

I hope this will be enough to support the student's application. Please do not hesitate to contact me should you have any further questions.'

I would be pleased for your consideration and happy to discuss this live.

Sincerely, your aspiring Medical Student.

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