

## Written evidence submitted by Ms Lisa Thompson

I am a member of the 2020 A Level Grading Issues support group (ALGI) on facebook. Members of the group are students and parents of students who have fallen victim to the unfair awarding of A level grades this year, so we are sharing information re school 'appeals' etc.

I have collated the comments regarding the autumn series of exams - a disaster still waiting to happen - in the hope that you can increase pressure on Ofqual to allow students an independent route of appeal.

In the education select committee meeting on sept 2nd, Roger Taylor admitted that the decision to hold autumn exams as 'compensation' for students 'not happy' with their grades seemed much better back in March, than it does now. In fact, most students affected are not 'not happy' with their grades but understandably frustrated with unfairly awarded grades and no route to appeal.

Gavin Williamson's much promoted 'triple lock' is revealed as nothing of the sort - the calculated grades for thousands of students are unfairly low; mock grades are no longer permitted as a final grade, and the option to take an exam in october is fraught with problems, including -

- Schools who haven't yet received promised funding for additional covid compliance will now be expected to provide space and staffing for students to sit exams in october. This must include special arrangements where applicable, including separate room with individual invigilator / scribe / extra time.
- Students will be sitting exams without formal preparation for them - many didn't finish the syllabus before lockdown, at which point Y13s and Y11s were 'abandoned' by schools understandably needing to focus time and effort on students whose exams hadn't been cancelled.
- When Y13 and Y11 students were abandoned back in march, they were promised by Gavin Williamson that "no young person faces a barrier when it comes to moving onto the next stage of their lives – whether that's further or higher education, an apprenticeship or a job." and that learners "will be awarded a fair grade".
- In addition, Boris Johnson promised "we will make sure that pupils get the qualifications they need and deserve for their academic career.' So students could reasonably expect a grade in line with their predicted / mock /

coursework assessments, and therefore didn't need to continue their studies or revise for distant exams.

- Some students, not expecting to have to sit an exam in October, have found temporary employment or made other plans which prevent them from being able to sit the exams. Students still fighting for places to study medicine / dentistry also have to resit UCATs in October.
- Many students already experiencing stress / mental ill health experienced a deterioration of their condition because of COVID lockdown circumstances and were in no fit state to continue studying / start revising March to July.
- It is no longer practicable, given COVID / social distancing requirements, for students to return to school to study or for the "support" glibly promised by Nick Gibb in parliament on September 8th - only 1 member of the ALGI group has support (after school tuition and Saturday booster classes) from school for autumn exams.
- Some students may have already completed the A level syllabus while others will have not, as there was still plenty of time before the deadlines.
- Some students' families can afford to pay for tutoring to prepare for exams but most can not.
- Some schools are allowing [former] students access to online resources, but others have removed intranet access. Most schools have recalled text books from [former] students.
- This situation of enforced home study discriminates against young carers, students who can't work easily from home, and students with SEN who require additional support for learning.
- It is no longer practicable for students to attend their old school in order to undertake any required coursework or practical elements of the course which were not completed before lockdown - this must have a significant impact on grades.
- Some students may have already completed practical / coursework elements of the A level, while others will have not, as there was still plenty of time before the deadlines.

- If the autumn series of exams does not take into account coursework / practical elements, how will the exam be graded against other years where coursework is a significant % of the grade ?
- If grade boundaries are quite different for this small cohort, what value will these grades ultimately hold for the students sitting these exams ?
- Having received CAGs which they do not believe reflect their abilities, and without an individual route to appeal, many students now find themselves in the unenviable position of being dependent on the goodwill of their old school / college in administering exams (despite the additional financial and human strain) - the same school/college with which they have lodged a dispute against their unfairly low grades.
- The stress for students taking exams can only be increased by this tension between students, families and the school.
- Despite all this, many students will diligently prepare for the exam which is currently their only route out of this incredibly unfair situation - but in this current climate, what if the school is closed under a local lockdown ?
- What if the student's home town is under a local lockdown ?
- What if the student or a family member has become unwell or tested positive for covid and is therefore required to self isolate ?
- In each of these scenarios, it will be impossible for the student to take one or more of the set exams (NB eg biology = one A level, but 3 separate exams on different days) - at this point will the student be allowed to appeal to use their predicted grade in lieu of sitting the exam ? (If that's likely to be the case, just let them appeal now and save all that money, effort, stress !)
- Crucially - how will these exams be graded ? How will grade boundaries be set in this most exceptional of years ? Based on last year's grade boundaries but with far less data to input ? With far fewer students sitting the exams, marks won't be representative of the whole year group - the ability distribution will be skewed. The results won't fit the normal distribution, so how will the grade boundaries be calculated ? And how can they be 'trusted' ? Another grossly unfair situation.
- The student who sits an exam in october will then not receive the result until december - some have university places / graduate level apprenticeships being held open for them on condition of this grade - but it is a place for sept

2021. Yet many students can not afford to simply enjoy 'a year off', especially with options of working severely limited in the current climate.

- Roger Taylor's suggestion of the autumn series of exams as 'compensation' for students 'unhappy with their grades' is patronising and dismissive, and ignores the many unfair disparities which Ofqual have admitted - private schools benefited disproportionately from the Ofqual algorithm, due to smaller class sizes; and many schools moderated grades before submitting to Ofqual. Students with evidence of 'under-CAGging' are therefore justifiably angry and incredibly frustrated with this situation, not 'not happy' !
- Some students will have sensibly decided to sit their a level exams next summer instead of this october and be better prepared - what happens to them if exams are cancelled again ?!
- It would surely be fairer, less costly and less complicated to allow students to make individual appeals based on predicted grades - the only option with no negative impact !

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