

Written evidence submitted by Mrs Bakes

I have some comments to make about the shocking way external candidates have been treated over cancelled exams. It isn't too late to rectify in part, so I would urge you to consider the suggestions I have made, particularly in relation to ranking and appeals.

I just want to politely point out that yet again, external exam candidates are not being considered when policies are made, and this committee is no different. 4 members of teaching unions are being asked to give oral evidence, but nobody from the home educated community.

My son and I were both registered to take maths GCSEs this year as external students. Whilst the initial decision to cancel exams was understandable, the way external candidates were treated was unfair and discriminatory and had a seriously detrimental effect on our mental health and prospects. In short, the issues we faced and continue to face are listed below:

- **Stress:** The mental toll on external candidates had not been considered by Ofqual, and is impossible to encapsulate in one paragraph. Initially we were told that exams were to be cancelled but that 'all' candidates would receive a fair grade. We were told to stop revising. Then we were told that we would a predicted grade from private tutors, and we spent frantic hours trying to locate evidence that we never anticipated we would need, but we were fortunate in that we had a private tutor who is an edexcel examiner and my son had done mocks, Then the goalposts were changed again and we were told that predicted grades from tutors would not count. We spent hours making frantic phone calls, trying to find an exam centre to assess us. Exam centres couldn't help as the guidance given to them was contradictory and confusing. Then to make matters worse there was a suggestion that younger students wouldn't get a grade, so we had a couple of weeks of frantic calls and emails about that. Our centre refused to grade my son, and it was a total mess. Eventually, with just a week's notice we were able to get him assessed with 3 online exams at great expense, but my son did not have time to adequately prepare and felt very panicked.
- **Cost:** Ofqual had no regard for the fact that poorer candidates could be priced out of a grade, and I couldn't afford to be graded myself. To receive a predicted grade, our exam centre asked us to pay £900 to be assessed for 2 exams. This was in addition to the fees already paid on registration. I could not afford this. I paid only for my son as by then he had been messed about for so many months and just needed finality. I spoke to Ofqual at the time, and their representative had no clue whatsoever that such fees were being charged. They just had not put enough thought into external students and did not realise that students from poorer families would be basically priced out of a qualification
- **Ranking System:** The ranking system is very prejudicial to external candidates. Schools are expected to rank external students alongside their own pupils. Some have admitted that it would be impossible to be impartial so have refused to grade external students. We know the grade my son should have got as we have his invigilated exam papers. However, under Ofqual rules, the school would be perfectly within their rights to rank him below one of their own students who might even have scored 20 marks below him on the same exam papers. The reason for this is that they could argue that they have more evidence in respect of their own candidates as they have 2 years of data, whereas they only have 2 exams completed by my son. This is a nonsense. I did urge Ofqual to allow exam

centres to have 2 separate ranks. One for their own students and one for external students. They clearly didn't listen.

- **Appeal System:** In short, there isn't one. After what we have been put through and the implicit unfairness of the ranking system, there should absolutely be an independent panel who can consider the evidence of children who have been quite clearly discriminated against. For example, in our case, we know exactly what my son should have comfortably got as we have the exam papers that he sat, yet our exam centre could have taken £450 off us to use my son as a buffer at the bottom of the rankings which assists their own students. I'm not saying that this is the case with our particular centre, and I can't know till August, but if we do get dropped a grade, it would be a simple process for an independent person to consider the evidence.

I'm sorry to say but at every turn external candidates have been forgotten. I had a number of conversations with people at Ofqual who really hadn't considered the plight of external students adequately and had failed to consult with any representatives of home educated children. At one point I asked them who represented HE students and they gave me the name of an exam centre who they said represented us (the NEC). I spoke to the NEC and they didn't know what I was talking about. Apart from anything else, an exam centre would be conflicted in representing us.

This has been a very unpleasant process for us and it continues. Going forward, there is still time to change the ranking system as suggested above and to introduce an appeals process as our stress continues until this is resolved.

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