

## Written evidence submitted by Adam Rowe

### **The impact of COVID-19 on education and children's services**

#### **Introduction**

I am giving evidence as an individual. I am a Head of Department in an academy who has experience of teaching during COVID-19 and views and experiences that I feel would be useful for Parliament and the Government to consider.

Headings in bold are taken directly from the 'Terms of reference'. I have not included any 'Terms of reference' that I have no experience in.

Experience in the education sector:

- September 2018 – present: Head of Department (Computer Science) within high-performing, all-through Ark school (Isaac Newton Academy) in Ilford, East London
- Incoming Head of Faculty, in charge of Business, Economics and Computing with responsibility for school IT at Haggerston School, Hackney, starting September 2020
- Achieved a Masters degree (UCL) in Leadership, specialising in the impact of academisation on school leadership
- 2016-2018: Completed the Teach First Leadership Development Programme at the Bridge Academy, Hackney

#### **Executive summary**

##### ***Centre Assessed Grades (CAGs):***

- Centre Assessed Grades (CAGs) may result in some students not receiving a grade that they deserve, because of the constraint of using prior attainment data that may not reflect what the student is capable of after the typical summer term revision period.
- Differences in how CAGs are quality assured by different line managers means some subjects within the same school, under different managers, may be more or less optimistic compared to each other.
- Methodologies to guide to teachers and Heads of Department in issuing CAGs are not specific enough to each subject.
- Differences between different school structures (standalone schools at one extreme versus schools within large multi-academy trusts at the other) could lead to differing quality assurance methods of CAGs.
- Mock exam results are maybe not a reliable indicator for a CAG, despite being the main piece of data used to guide issuing of CAGs.

##### ***Support for pupils and families***

- The number of virtual platforms being used due to inconsistency between subjects can be overwhelming for students.

- Some students are becoming very stressed at not knowing when to stop and start work, resulting in children working unacceptable numbers of hours, including at weekends and holidays.
- Some students feel purposeless and have negative routines, including going to sleep regularly between 4-6am.

***Contingency planning:***

- Laptops, internet access for homeless (not rough sleeping, those who for some reason are living in temporary accommodation) and headphones must be ready to issue for those that need it. Including those who may have technology, but have to share with many siblings and/or parents working from home.

**Evidence**

**1. The effect of cancelling formal exams, including the fairness of qualifications awarded and pupils' progression to the next stage of education or employment**

- 1.1. As a Head of Department, I was responsible for issuing and quality assuring Centre Assessed Grades (CAGs) for Year 11 in my department.
- 1.2. In my experience there are a large number of students who make unexpectedly good levels of progress beyond what could have been predicted in mock exams. However, because of the need to use prior attainment data to guide issuing of CAGs, this led, in my opinion, to some students being given a grade lower than they might have achieved. This led to CAGs in 90% of cases being 1 grade higher than students' most recent mock exams, with the occasional student being given 2 grades above their mock exam result. However, as mentioned previously, in my experience of having seen through several exam classes in the last three years (A Level and GCSE), there are many students who perform a grade higher than I expect, which should theoretically lead to some CAGs being on average 2 grades higher, rather than 1. Yet, the prior attainment data would not necessarily suggest that a child was on track to achieve two grades higher than their mock exam result. I was given the message that if I thought a student would achieve a Grade 5 'on a good day', that their CAG should be entered as a Grade 4.
- 1.3. Alongside differences between schools there are differences between departments in terms of how grades are awarded. Different senior managers who line manage different departments can be more cautious or they can be more relaxed when discussing final grades with Heads of Departments (leading to grades either being more pessimistic and lower or optimistic and higher, depending on the manager).
- 1.4. There should also have been recommended methodologies released for specific subjects advising on how to award the CAG. Speaking to other colleagues, this lack of a consistent methodology has led to Heads of Department of the same subject, in different schools, calculating grades in different ways. A general methodology is not good enough, because issuing a CAG for a subject such as Drama, which has a large proportion of coursework and performances that are assessed outside of summer public exams, will be different to awarding a CAG for a subject that is 100% assessed via public exams. This allows those subjects which have already assessed a large proportion of the subject to give a more accurate CAG.
- 1.5. The most important piece of data that was used by Heads of Department to issue CAGs were mock exam results, understandably. However, again, there may have been

inconsistencies with how different subjects used mock exams. In subjects where there is a need to finish coursework components by certain dates, revision for mock exams might not have been as good quality as mocks are less of a priority than preparing for non-examined assessments. Many students also predicted what year of past paper was going to be used and were able to study the mark scheme in detail for the mock exams. Therefore, the primary piece of data used to guide issuing of CAGs may have differing levels of accuracy.

- 1.6. There will be some students who believed that they could have made more progress than the CAG suggests. However, students will be put off from sitting formal exams in the new academic year due to the cost of having to defer their next stage, either post-16 or post-18. This means some students may not attend institutions that reflect their academic profile and therefore could limit their life choices.
- 1.7. Most CAGs have been generated based largely on students' most recent mock exam results. However, being in a large multi-academy trust (MAT), Ark, has affected how my grades will be awarded. Firstly, Ark provided data to support the issuing of CAGs to Heads of Department that was generated using data services and resources that I believe only a large MAT would have. This included data to suggest how likely a student was to actually achieve their predicted grade, based on the whole MAT's prior exam data and historic trends. This would be more accurate in large MATs simply because they have a much larger dataset than one standalone school, or small MAT. However, this data was also of more use to some subjects than others, for example in Computer Science and other small subjects (or subjects new to the MAT or school) because there was not enough historic data, or a wide enough dataset, to provide useful predictions of how likely a student was to achieve their predicted grade. This would then show as a constant percentage likelihood for all students and be of no real use.
- 1.8. Also, once my CAGs had been quality-assured by my manager and principal, the CAGs were then sent to Ark for further quality assuring. Therefore, large MATs are providing more data and more quality assurance than schools not in large MATs. This could affect the grades being issued because, as far as I am aware, neither exam boards or Ofqual are checking methodologies being used by different types of school when issuing CAGs.
- 1.9. There are also not necessarily any moderation and standardisation procedures in place in some schools, especially if departments have only one or two members of staff. This process is vital for the issuing of accurate mock grades, especially if the Head of Department is also the sole teacher of exam groups.

## **2. Support for pupils and families during closures, including:**

### **2.1. The consistency of messaging from schools and further and higher education providers on remote learning**

- 2.1.1. Due to my school not using a universal virtual learning environment (VLE), Heads of Department chose the VLE that they thought was best. This has led to students having to manage different login procedures and login details. Most importantly, it is overwhelming for students, especially those with special educational needs, to manage learning how to use different virtual platforms. As expectations for virtual lessons to be delivered grows, there is now another platform that students and staff have to grapple with to deliver these lessons.

### **2.2. Children's and young people's mental health and safety outside of the structure and oversight of in-person education**

- 2.2.1. Some student's wellbeing has suffered as they do not know the boundaries of when work should stop. This leads to some high achieving students working far more hours

than they normally would, including holidays and weekends. This has led to increases in anxiety in students who wish to complete every piece of work to the best of their ability, even if the teacher makes clear the time limit that should be spent on that work. On the contrary, due to lack of face-to-face contact, some students have not got into a good routine at home and feel purposeless and depressed. Some students are going to sleep between 4-6am regularly and are not leaving the house for exercise.

**3. The effect on disadvantaged groups, including the Department's approach to free school meals and the long-term impact on the most vulnerable groups (such as pupils with special educational needs and disabilities and children in need)**

**3.1.** As mentioned above, the impact on students with special educational needs in terms of anxiety levels is high due to the overwhelming nature of not being able to directly ask their teachers something straight away. Some are also over-working themselves due to lack of boundaries of lesson times so that students know when to stop work.

**4. What contingency planning can be done to ensure the resilience of the sector in case of any future national emergency**

**4.1.** There must be a food programme ready to go for 'Free School Meal' students so that there is no delay for children who need access to this service. Especially when parents may be out of work due to the pandemic or other future crisis.

**4.2.** Ensuring that there is a stock of laptops, mobile internet dongles and headphones to go with the laptops for students from disadvantaged or disrupted backgrounds that have no access to a computer or the internet is essential. Students living in temporary accommodation must also be catered for, where securing an internet connection can be troublesome. The headphones are needed for listening to video lessons in crowded homes. It has taken too long for disadvantaged students to receive these in my school and some equipment required by students in need, have been provided by teachers personally, not by the school.

**4.3.** This provision of technology must also be considered if a home has many occupiers, including children. I know of younger students that have not been able to access their home computer due to having siblings in Year 10 or Year 12 who understandably are given priority of their home computer for longer periods of time. This is exacerbated if parents are working from home and also need to use the home computer.

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