

## Written evidence submitted by Annie Bannister

I am immensely concerned about the impact of the current pandemic on education and, in particular, on the new arrangements for A Levels.

My son, who is eighteen, would have been taking his A Levels this summer with a view to gaining a place at a prestigious University this Autumn. He has worked towards these exams for many years – A Levels are, really, the culmination of all education and learning from Year Nine onwards. Now, despite all those years of work and study, his future is uncertain.

We understand that the exams themselves cannot safely be taken. Social distancing and the enforced closure of schools and colleges have made the usual method of ‘two hundred students in a school sports hall’ impossible. But the schools and the teachers already had a pretty good idea of what grades their pupils were likely to achieve – the UCAS forms were sent to Universities in January, with predicted grades on them. My son was predicted AAB – the grades he needs to get into the University of his choice.

My son is from a disadvantaged background – he gets Pupil Premium and Free School Meals. I am a single parent with a second son who is severely learning disabled. My eighteen year old son is therefore also registered as a Young Carer – and has been actively caring for his brother since he himself was two years old. Despite all these disadvantages, he was predicted grades AAB and did, indeed, get similar grades to the predicted ones in his ‘Mock A Level Exams’. At the Parents Evening that followed the Mocks, we were told that, as a result of his mocks and his continued improvement, he was actually likely to achieve A\* A\* B.

This would all be fine if the ‘Covid-19 alternative’ to A Level Exams, was exam boards using a combination of UCAS Predicted grades and Mocks results. But I understand that the information that the school gives is to be ignored and grading will be done on the school’s past performance. Not the student’s performance. The School’s performance.

This is a ridiculous and deeply unfair way of awarding grades. An exam is a measure of student performance – not of a school’s performance. My son chose to spend his Years 12 and 13 not attending parties or social occasions, not having holidays or days out, not doing anything but concentrate on his A Levels and support me in caring for his brother. His only hope of getting out of a life of poverty – a life like mine – was to get to the University and Course of his choice. And this effort could now be naught because his efforts, his work, will not be counted – all that will matter is how some students from previous year groups, did.

The effect on the mental health of a whole cohort of eighteen year olds is in jeopardy. I understand that OFQUAL need some sort of External Validation of exam results but the weighting in favour of the element that the pupil has no control over – how the college achieved in previous years – is deeply unfair.

Schools and colleges have no reason to lie about their pupils’ expectations. If they regularly predicted grades well in excess of what their students then went on to achieve, Universities would pick up on it. Predicted Grades and Mock Exam Results

are there for a reason and give a good indication of future performance. It makes sense to trust the schools and have faith in their pupils.

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