

Written evidence submitted by Mr Zahir Ditta

Unfair grading process to be implemented by Ofqual.

As parents of a final year A-level student, we feel that the standardisation process to be utilised by Ofqual to correct grades from schools and colleges this summer is grossly unfair.

Use of historical data.

Using a school or colleges historical performance as a key correction tool is a betrayal to high achieving students attending historically low performing institutions. This particular group of students will naturally originate from low income, working class families attending poor performing institutions.

To exacerbate this scenario even further, the absence of an appeals system will further disadvantage talented pupils attending historically low performing schools. The local college our son attends has been performing poorly for many years. Our son is amongst the highest achievers in his cohort of students and currently holds an offer at a Russel Group university, but we now fear he will lose this.

In Scotland, the SQA have decided to allow evidence based appeals where their statistical standardisation model has adjusted a student's grade down from the one submitted by their school/college.

In Ireland, the government have confirmed that their statistical standardisation model will take account of the fact that the particular group of students in the school in 2020 may be stronger or weaker than in previous years, and will also allow for the fact that particular individuals within those groups might have levels of achievement that vary considerably from what has previously been seen in the school. In addition to this, they are allowing individual student appeals.

So, as concerned parents, our question is this – if other countries can allow their plans to take into account high achieving students at low performing schools and allow students a route of appeal to challenge their awarded grades, why can't Ofqual offer the same?

The statements released by Ofqual claiming these options aren't possible are outrageous!

Effect of Covid19.

Currently, the government considers current Year 10 and 12 pupils disadvantaged by the disparities in online teaching provisions between state and private schools.

Why is this empathetic view not applied to the current Y11 and Y13 students?

In many state schools, Year 11 and 13 pupils have had no online teaching since March. How can Ofqual expect these students to sit these exams and perform as they would have in normal circumstances?

Ofqual strategy.

The historical data was never referred to previously by Ofqual as a truth tool and should not be referred to this summer as we feel it is an accusation of dishonesty and malpractice against low attaining institutions. Ofqual is also ignoring the many years of hard work, dedication and commitment of all students affected by these circumstances.

We feel that the government has neglected critical factors and has issued a knee jerk reaction to the examination grading this summer. As the academic year was abruptly ended due to the Covid19 outbreak, the government's decision to refer to an institutions historical performance has created an achievement class system for this summer's students.

Mental health and well-being.

These extraordinary Covid19 reality and the governments grading strategy have exerted unnecessary stress and anxiety on all concerned. No student or parent should have to experience this.

We urge the government to recognise the impact that this whole situation is having on young people's mental health and future life prospects during these already challenging times.

Racial Bias.

We are also concerned about black and minority ethnic students being disadvantaged by the potential subconscious bias of their teachers. If this is present in the submitted centre assessment grades, it will be most likely that these students will have been ranked lower than their peers.

How will the government address this concern?

We fear that disadvantaged and BAME students along with other poor performing students will be disproportionately forced into sitting the autumn exams, resulting in being held behind further in their educational progression as a result.

If large numbers of Year 13s are forced to re-sit these exams, how will schools be able to teach their current students on roll along with exam resits and safely uphold socially distanced teaching if required?

Equality and transparency.

Ofqual must not assume the judgement of a teacher at a historically low-performing school to be any less accurate than that of a teacher at a high-performing one. This would truly be the crudest form of discrimination towards teaching professionals reinforcing an elitist structure many claim exists.

A process that places more weight on historical results of a centre than the attainment of a student and the professional opinion of their respected and qualified teachers will be inherently unfair.

How will the government ensure that all teachers' professional judgements will be respected?

Lack of an appeals process.

An alarming issue is with the absence of an appeals system. It is manifestly wrong that students will feel helpless as they cannot appeal against a system that has clearly disadvantaged them from its inception. We recognise that standardisation is important in ensuring consistency and statistically realistic outcomes but Ofqual's current method requires careful reconsideration and necessary correction.

Conclusion.

We strongly feel that this current standardisation method is grossly unfair and must be scrapped. To ensure fair grades are awarded to all students this summer, we stress that each students completed assessment evidence, teachers predicted grades, ucas grades and university offers should only be referred to by Ofqual. No other unfair method of correction should be applied to disadvantage those high achieving students at historically low achieving schools and colleges.

The current GCSE and A-level students should not be used as an experimental tool for government and Ofqual policy. All students should be given an equal opportunity without exception and should not be left behind and disadvantaged compared to those students who went before them and from those who will go after them.

The government and Ofqual must follow the strategies adopted by Scotland and Ireland that will ensure all students are awarded an accurate grade without discrimination of any kind.

We hope the government and Ofqual consider our concerns and make the necessary changes to ensure all students are treated fairly and without prejudice this summer.

Yours sincerely

Mr Z Ditta & Mrs S Yousaf.

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