

Written Evidence submitted by ALGI

Submission from **2020 A Level grading issues: support group (ALGI)**

School grade predictions inaccurate

Some students are difficult to prepare accurate estimated grades for, perhaps because they are much better at exams than routine homework & school work. We understand this has been raised in relation to BAME students who are under-targeted for the top grades and often exceed expectations. The teachers expectations will now have a greater influence on the grade. Also, schools are expected to use evidence such as mock exams, coursework and homework to create the grade. All things that students were told did not matter as their grades would rest on the final exams.

Students with Autistic Spectrum Disorder suffer extra penalty

The usual exam format does not include homework, which is a problematic area for students with ASD. Many families encounter homework refusal in students who are well behaved and normally attentive at school. Students with ASD are especially disadvantaged by the 2020 arrangements as teachers have been instructed to take homework into account. The relationship between an autistic student and their teacher is often damaged by homework refusal, with teachers seeing the lack of homework as a personal slight rather than an ASD trait. When compiling rank orders, it would only be natural for a teacher to regard a student who completes their homework as “better” than a student who consistently does not.

<http://www.tonyattwood.com.au/books-by-tony-m/archived-papers/76-should-children-with-autistic-spectrum-disorders-be-exempted-from-doing-homework>

Moderation by Ofqual

Ofqual will be moderating grades according to the 3 previous years exam results for the school rather than taking into account previous results for the student, eg GCSE's.

We are concerned that this discriminates against state school students, especially those from schools with a historically poor performance. Their refusal to reveal the exact method by which grades will be moderated increases anxiety and confusion.

Appeals

There will be no option for students to appeal their grades in England & Wales. Scotland and Ireland will allow appeals. This seems very unfair. Our English members would like an appeals procedure.

Low birth cohort for this year

2001 and 2002 were the lowest UK birth rates since 1977, lower than during and after WW2. The low group size has caused funding issues for schools as it passed through primary and secondary schools. Our universities need to allow this cohort to enter in 2020 to ensure financial viability of the sector.

State school students disadvantaged by the proposed autumn exams

It's clear from online forums that most state school Y13 students have had no tuition at all since the schools closed in March. Private schools quickly moved to teaching online, presumably to prevent them being inundated with requests for refunds. This has caused a disparity in the chances of state v private school students who may need to sit the proposed autumn exams. In addition, some schools had not completed the subject syllabuses prior to closure and have not issued guidance regarding what is missing. Students can't revise information they have never been taught or supplied with.

Autumn exam series discriminates against students who would have scored well in assessed work

Ofqual's plans state that any candidates who are forced to sit the autumn exams will have marks allocated 100% by the written paper. For music A level, 60% of the mark would normally be assessed, recorded and submitted to the exam board. Composition (2 x written scores) are normally worth 25% of total marks. Performance (10 min recorded recital) is worth 35%. These students will now have 100% of their grade determined by a written exam.

Contrast that with art: 60% of which was also assessed work. Special arrangements have been made for art students, "their grades should be based on their performance in a new task set and marked by the exam board and taken under the normal supervised conditions." See page 8

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/896446/Autumn_Series_2020_Consultation_Decisions_300620.pdf

Our members believe that it would be wrong to ignore the years of musical training and hard work that would have been evidenced by the 60% assessed component of the music A level. School assessments could be carried over (as with science) or graded music exam results used instead.

Some students will be unable to re-sit Year 13.

For example, a member's school informed them last week that he won't even be able to stay another year to re-take because they are not offering the music A level. We may encounter issues around state funding as well. The present Y13 will not be students on roll at their current schools after July. They would be considered external candidates for any exams. We have been advised that it is not accepted practice to allow students who could take up a university place (via clearing) to re-sit Y13 at state expense. This disadvantages high performing students who will be expected to accept a place through clearing instead of attending a top university. Their only other option would be to pay £15,000 a year to a private school to re-take the whole of Y13. This is plainly not a choice most families would be able to make, which further disadvantages students from lower income families.

2021 cohort disadvantaged by increased competition from 2020 students

2021 A level students could be adversely affected if a percentage of high ability 2020 students compete against them for places at the top universities.

One member's son has offers from Oxford and York. York have agreed to defer his place to 2021 entry if he needs to re-take the year to get the AAA offer grades. Even if the highest ability 2020 cohort do not get their first choices in 2021 they will impact the chances of other high ability students to secure places at the top universities.

Mitigating circumstances

This year the schools were supposed to take ALL a student's mitigating circumstances into account instead of writing a letter to the exam board. The letter system was transparent and could be agreed with the family. The 2020 system is not transparent. It is not clear which mitigating circumstances have been taken into account and which have not. In addition to this, factors like private tutoring and holiday revision courses that could have influenced a student's grade have not been taken into account because they were not provided by the student's school. The lack of an appeal process means that if extenuating circumstances were not applied correctly there is no recourse for students.

Disabled and special needs students may lose their only appropriate place

One of our members needs to attend his local university as he needs to continue living at his family home due to disability. Loss of his place will have a disproportionate impact as no other university is suitable for his needs.

Scholarships

Expected scholarship funding may be impacted. We are aware of a student with an unconditional offer who was on track to achieve A*A*A* which qualified her for a total scholarship of £5000. If her grades are only AAA the scholarship is reduced to £3000. Below AAA she will get nothing.

Fairness

Y13 of 2020 were the Y11 of 2018 that were impacted by the new, harder GCSE syllabuses and scoring. They have previously been used as guinea pigs and do not deserve this extra stress!

Mental health issues

One of our members is an Oxford offer holder who was admitted to hospital as an emergency after suffering severe headaches and anxiety. His stress is due to the fear his grades will be too low to keep his place. He is withdrawing from the offer holders chat because he fears he may never see his new friends in person. The level of stress for students this year is greater than ever before. Their worries have been amplified by the lockdown. Unable to go out to see friends there has been nothing to do but worry about the grades that they have no control over.

Unnecessary suffering and stress for thousands of students

When the cancellation of exams was announced some universities logged into UCAS and amended offers to unconditional. When the government discovered this the UCAS website was temporarily suspended to prevent further alterations. Universities were asked to wait for the outcome of the proposed grading system instead. This move was particularly heartless as it has led to months of stress and suffering for students whose universities would have been prepared to switch to unconditional offers.

Considerations for state high schools

A discussion with a head teacher revealed further concerns. With social distancing measures in place their building capacity is reduced. Also, with the new Y7's arrival in September there will be no spare classrooms to teach former students in. At the end of July the current Y13 leave and will no longer be school students, they would be considered external candidates. There is no indication of how this cohort of school-less students would access lessons or sit exams, or who would fund this.

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