

Gavin Williamson MP  
House of Commons  
London  
SW1A 0AA

Sent via email to: [gavin.williamson.mp@parliament.uk](mailto:gavin.williamson.mp@parliament.uk)

August 17, 2020

Dear Gavin Williamson

I am contacting you following the publication of this year's A level results last week, which, like many across the country have had a devastating effect on many of our Year 13 students. As a secondary school facing the fallout from last week's results, I felt it important to bring some of the facts 'from the coalface' to your attention and ask for your urgent support in addressing this issue.

The stress in the run up to results day was felt acutely by students and staff, and many of our young people continue to experience anxiety and uncertainty with little clarity about the opportunities for, or likelihood of, successful appeals. Staff are having to advise, support and reassure our students and families whilst still awaiting clear guidance from Ofqual as to the final the appeals process - this despite the fact that Nick Gibb has indicated that all appeals for University entries will be processed by September 7th.

The published results appear to indicate that the historical attainment at all grade levels has seemingly carried more weight than any other factor in influencing students' grades this summer rather than any assessment of students' knowledge, skills and abilities. Whilst standards or national outcomes may have been maintained this year, a claim which we along with many find debatable given that 2020 will be recognised by everybody as an extraordinary year, the grades awarded nationally show incredible volatility and have thrown up obvious instances of statistical discrimination.

Our students may not been as heavily downgraded as those in some parts of the country, but we have numerous examples where the algorithm used (rather than the centre-assessed-grades or CAGs) has resulted in unexplained and unfair outcomes, especially with respect to the grades of disadvantaged and/or BAME students where we have seen, on average, a greater decrease from their CAGs. Some individual students have seen a reduction in more than one subject and some by two grades in certain subjects. This means that many have missed out on their first choice and insurance offers from Universities or Art Colleges and in some cases the offer of a placement on apprenticeships.

Behind the statistics and national outcry, we must remember that we are talking about real individuals, young people whose hopes and ambitions have been dashed. I have included some examples of where this has impacted some of our Year 13s most acutely below (anonymised) – of the students listed below over 57% come from BAME backgrounds, giving us strong evidence to support the claim that the Ofqual system has disadvantaged this group more than any other.

Eleven Year 13 students had assessed mock exam grades higher than the official awarded grade and have missed out on their preferred university offers. These include:

**Student 1:** CAGs = A\*AC, official grades = ADE (overall 5 grade level reduction). Missed out on grades for firm choice of Mathematics at Kings College London and their insurance choice

**Student 2:** CAGs = AAA, official grades = BBC (overall 4 grade level reduction). Missed out on grades for firm choice of Ancient History at Manchester University.

**Student 3:** CAGs = A\*A\*A, official grades AAB (overall 4 grade level reduction). Missed out on their first choice of Imperial to study Chemistry

**Student 4:** CAGs = BBB, official grades - BCD (overall 3 grade level reduction). Missed out on Firm and insurance offers to study Psychology

**Student 5:** CAGs = A\*AA, official grades BBB (overall 4 grade level reduction). They had wanted to re-apply for medicine as was expected to do better than anticipated.

We have a further eight students who have missed out on their firm and insurance offers where their CAGs were higher than their official exam board awarded grades, and a further four students who were not awarded grades in their level 3 BTECs due to an administrative error by the exam board.

Each of these represents a personal disappointment, and days or weeks of additional uncertainty and stress. The individual students in question are all being supported by school staff to apply through clearing or to appeal their results.

Overall, 43% of the grades submitted by The Charter School North Dulwich have been downgraded, which is greater than the national average. In some subjects, the work put in by students in the 18 months prior to the lockdown together with the extensive work of teaching staff to produce a fairly moderated set of CAGs appears to have been irrelevant to the final outcome. These results mean that the school's overall performance is lower than its average for the past three years (2017-19), which is difficult to comprehend given that the national results were up overall and we were showing a rising trend year on year.

I am personally disappointed that, in amongst the chaos and uncertainty brought about by the pandemic, young peoples' futures have been decided by a computer programme rather than the professionals best qualified to make a fair judgement.

The need for urgent action is paramount so that our young people feel confident that their academic abilities are correctly recognised and they can progress to the next stage of their careers. This applies not only to our Year 13 students but also, and equally importantly, our Year 11 students who are awaiting their GCSE results on Thursday this week. This continuing uncertainty and apparently random unfairness will also have a negative impact on the mental health of students at a time when they should be looking forward positively to college, university, or the world of work. Disappointment on such a scale will have a lasting and negative effect.

This year's Year 13 and Year 11 cohorts have faced a set of circumstances unseen in a generation and they have reacted with dignity and good grace up to this point and we are very proud of the many success stories, which are a direct result of students' hard work during the 18 months before lockdown changed everything. However, many students, their families and colleagues are quite rightly angry, confused and upset by the outcomes and we would ask that you do everything that you can to help us to address this issue at the highest levels of government.

**Registered Office:** Red Post Hill, London SE24 9JH Tel: 020 7346 6600 FAX: 020 7346 6601

E-mail: [info@charter.southwark.sch.uk](mailto:info@charter.southwark.sch.uk) Web: [www.charter.southwark.sch.uk](http://www.charter.southwark.sch.uk)

In particular, we would ask that you change your mind and insist that centre-assessed-grades to be used instead of the Ofqual algorithm as the basis for the grades awarded to students. Whilst overall grades may well have increased slightly, ministers currently seem blind to the damaging effects and inherent biases in the Ofqual algorithm that mean that some students, both in our school and others, have been particularly badly affected. This is not some abstract statistical anomaly, but is having a real and terrible impact on our young people at a time when we should be supporting them to manage the many other negative consequences of the pandemic. I fear that if the issue is not addressed immediately, it could adversely affect some of our students' lives for a long time to come.

Yours sincerely

Christian Hicks  
Headteacher  
The Charter School North Dulwich

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E-mail: [info@charter.southwark.sch.uk](mailto:info@charter.southwark.sch.uk) Web: [www.charter.southwark.sch.uk](http://www.charter.southwark.sch.uk)