



Jennette Arnold OBE AM

London Assembly Member for North East

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7th August 2020

The Rt Honourable Gavin Williamson CBE MP
Secretary of State for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
London
SW1P 3BT

Cc: Sally Collier, Chief Regulator, Ofqual
Robert Halfon MP, Chair, House of Commons Education Select Committee
Members, House of Commons Education Select Committee

Dear Secretary of State,

Follow up: Preventing unfairness in awarded grades

I wrote to you on 20th April and 16th June 2020, to share my concerns about the proposed system of awarded grades, which are concerns shared by many others. I would like to thank Sally Collier and Ofqual for a detailed reply to these letters on 30th June, and to schools Minister Nick Gibb for replying on 9th July. However, last week we saw in Scotland the potentially highly damaging impact downgraded results could have on young people, and I would like to press you on the need for changes to the appeals system.

Last week, 125,000 pupils in Scotland received results that had been downgraded by the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA)¹. This has led to heartbreaking situations where students who performed exceptionally well at mock exams have received far lower grades than their predictions, and as a result will miss out on their university and college offers. I welcome your decision to allow schools to challenge results calculated based on past performance, which will enable students across London to be treated like individuals rather than statistics.

However, significant concerns remain about the potential impact of unconscious bias, which I have raised with you before. The guidance on how pupils should challenge bias in how their school calculated their grade is vague, and relies in the first instance on

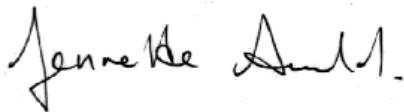
¹ BBC News, [Scotland's exam results: John Swinney denies deprived pupils were penalised](#), August 2020

students approaching that same school to request a review. By its very nature, teachers and schools may not recognise their own unconscious bias, which means students must have access to an independent and timely process to raise this issue. Students raising the issue of unconscious bias also need to have access to full information as to how the school calculated their proposed grade, in order to launch an informed challenge. The decision not to allow young people to directly appeal to the exam board or Ofqual in the event of bias should urgently be reviewed, to enable greater access to the appeals system for London's marginalised young people.

Additionally, the Department must secure guarantees from universities and colleges that they will allow all students who opt for an Autumn resit to enter their chosen course as soon as possible, without having their education delayed by another year. At a time where opportunities for work or study during that time are likely to be limited, it is vital that young Londoners are not barred from pursuing education unnecessarily. London's young people have spent enough time out of education as a result of the pandemic, and the Department should be taking all necessary steps to ensure there are no further delays.

As we get closer to A-Level results day on August 13th, and GCSE results day on August 20th, London's young people and families urgently need reassurance that they will be treated fairly by the awarded grades system. The situation emerging in Scotland shows that, while the grades may be statistically consistent with previous years, individual young people have been seriously penalised by this system. We cannot ignore young Londoners' individual circumstances by failing to address potential bias in the system and preventing them from pursuing further study this year.

Yours sincerely,



Jennette Arnold OBE AM

London Assembly Labour lead on education