



David Hughes
Chief Executive

Rt Hon Gavin Williamson MP
Secretary of State for Education
Department for Education
20 Great Smith Street
London, SW1P 3BT

Sally Collier
Chief Regulator
Ofqual
Earlsdon Park,
53-55 Butts Road,
Coventry, CV1 3BH

13 August 2020

Dear Gavin and Sally,

I am writing to ask Ofqual and DfE to launch and announce an urgent technical review into the A Level results standardisation process for larger centres.

Some of our members with larger numbers of A Level students, and often with students disproportionately from disadvantaged backgrounds are reporting to us some very worrying data. It would appear that the standardisation process may have been biased against larger centres and those with high value-added scores. The evidence that some colleges are reporting is that their higher grade passes (A to C) are much lower than their historic results, over the last 3 years. In other colleges the A to C pass rate has increased compared with historical data. That inconsistency is worrying. The overall pass rates are in line and do not seem to be such an issue. So this is not about over-optimistic assessed grades, it is about actual performance.

The algorithm has also potentially missed strong increases in performance in the last one or two years by a number of colleges. That is clearly something which would have been difficult to pick up in a process across thousands of centres. However, it would be very helpful for you to make clear the appeal process for colleges in that position and promise prompt consideration.

Our hypothesis is that the worrying results might be a quirk of the process, in which smaller centres with lower student numbers systematically had their centre assessed grades confirmed, resulting in a hit for the larger centres in order to minimise overall grade inflation. We also believe that the algorithm may not have taken value added data into account adequately.

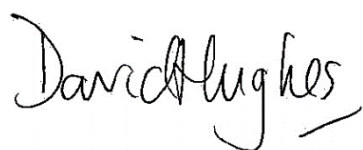
A technical review now could examine that and would avert hundreds of colleges from having to make individual appeals. It would show that you are being transparent and taking the concerns seriously. It would allow the majority of students to focus on their next steps and move forward in confirming their HE places, apprenticeships or jobs but also offer a robust backstop. It would calm the mood and we would warmly welcome it and support you in carrying it out.

We will, of course, continue to encourage colleges and students to focus on progression and to be positive about the prospects of young people. It is clear that the majority of students will achieve the grades they need and want, but that is not sufficient for the process to be deemed fair if it has been systematically biased against college students and/or disadvantaged students.

We recognise fully that this is an exceptional year and have worked closely with DfE and OfQual officials, as well as with awarding organisations to support the approach taken. We are fully committed to working with you moving forwards to help ensure a resilient and robust system which we can all be confident in. But we cannot stand by when the evidence suggests that many thousands of students may have missed out on their grades because of a systemic bias.

I look forward to your prompt response.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David Hughes". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the name.

David Hughes,
Chief Executive, Association of Colleges