



EQUALITY ACT REVIEW

PREDICTING FUTURES

Examining Student
Concerns Amidst
Coronavirus Exam
Cancellations

AUTHOR

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FOREWORD

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FOREWORD

Education is central to the development and improvement of the lives of young people. In the midst of this pandemic there has been a lot of uncertainty, which has extended into education. As a result of the Covid-19 outbreak, exams have been cancelled and GCSE and A-level results will now be predicted by teachers. For these students predicting grades is about predicting their futures. Together with the Equality Act Review Campaign we set out to hear concerns from parents and students in regards to this.

As the MP for Manchester Gorton, which has one of the highest child poverty rates in the UK, I know full well the importance of opportunity for young people. However, the achievement gap between children from poor homes and of BAME background, and their peers is something which needs to be addressed, especially as the pandemic is likely to have exacerbated these gaps. This is one of the reasons I created my Young Leadership Programme, to help young people from all backgrounds gain an insight into a range of sectors and help build their confidence and experience. I am a firm believer that your socio-economic status should not determine your future success and the opportunities you receive. Despite my working-class background, I became the first Muslim Lord Mayor of Manchester and I am the first British Muslim to hold a position in the European Parliament as well as the UK Parliament, an achievement which I am proud of and, I hope can inspire the youth.

This widening gap and rising inequality were the main impetus for this report. We wanted to know whether students from low socio-economic and BAME backgrounds had greater concern over grade predictions. We can't develop solutions until we have accurately identified the problem and in this case, we suspect that one reason for stalled student achievement is that historically predicted grades are telling a vastly different story than other academic measures.



Afzal Khan MP, Shadow Deputy Leader, House of Commons

Whilst this report found that students from all socio-economic backgrounds were concerned, the key findings highlight the serious issue of bias. This bias extends beyond bias just around the BAME identity of students, but also includes other types of bias such as Islamophobia, favouritism, bad behaviour and social class. Unconscious bias is particularly relevant because of this educational achievement gap. Educators at all levels need to address bias and school improvement strategies have a key role to play in closing the achievement gap, but on their own they will be insufficient.

This report seeks to make real changes and improve the chances for all our young people, during their time in education. The recommendations set out in this report are well thought out and succinct and clearly consider the 80% of students who were concerned about the impact of their grade predictions on their future educational, and employment prospects.

Dr Bi is a prime example of how predicted grades can have no bearing on a student's potential. I would like to thank Dr Bi for her hard work on producing this timely and important piece of work, as well as the Equality Act Review team.

I hope that 'Predicting Futures' empowers you to engage in, sustain and address bias in schools. I am optimistic that together we can and will work to transform the culture and climate of silence about bias in the classroom. The evidence in this report clearly shows students concerns that their predicted grades are not a true reflection of their ability and potential. These findings are irrefutable. I urge the Government to take this on board and help overcome this bias by listening to students and parents' concerns.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

As the coronavirus pandemic spread across the world, here at home in Britain we saw the government issue lockdown measures to prevent its spread. These measures included the closure of schools and the cancellation of GCSE and A-level exams, which the government decided to replace with predicted grades. The idea of students receiving predicted grades in light of the exam cancellations was thought by many to be problematic, as it was feared that BAME students would be more likely to have their grades under-predicted. My personal career trajectory is reflective of this debate: I was told by my sixth form careers advisor I would receive five rejections from UCAS. Instead, I went on to secure a place at Magdalen College, Oxford, and continued to study at postgraduate level, completing an MA and a PhD. Along the way, I received a scholarship to Stanford during my undergraduate degree, and completed the final year of my PhD at Yale. All of this was possible primarily because I refused to believe that I was going to be rejected by all five of my university options. As a Muslim woman of Kashmiri heritage, born and raised in one of the most deprived and disadvantaged constituencies in the UK (Birmingham Hodge Hill), state educated and from working class background, the odds were certainly stacked against me; however, my self-belief and awareness of my own potential regardless of whether others saw this or believed in it, was greater than the odds.

For many BAME students and young people, it is this potential and determination to succeed that cannot be captured by a grade prediction. However, a grade prediction can and does hold the power to further structurally limit equality of and access to opportunities, perpetuating a viscous and unbreakable cycle. This cycle is heightened perhaps more than ever before as a result of the exam cancellations due to the coronavirus pandemic. More BAME students are at greater risk than ever before to be plunged into futures that will be shaped by grade under-predictions. We must get this right, as it is not only about predicting grades, but rather, predicting futures.



Dr Suriyah Bi, Report Author

I recognised that my experience and the experience of my peers may well be anecdotal and not a true reflection of the experience of many others. Thus as a researcher and the founder and director of the Equality Act Review, I felt a moral obligation to explore this issue in more detail. In addition, given the lack of student voices in the mainstream discourse around grade predictions, this report centres and writes in the voices and experiences of students and parents so that we can offer solutions to mitigate the potential and highly likely bias they face. This report is about protecting the futures of all students and young people, allowing each and every one of them the best start despite the current global pandemic. We owe that to our youth.

This report and the efforts to make it possible are entirely unfunded and voluntary, and would not have been possible without the support of Afzal Khan MP and the Equality Act Review team: Anisa Mahmood, Daniel McElroy, Gabriela Alvarez Sanchez, Nidah Kaiser, Diana Nolla Mollart. Thank you also to the MPs and diverse body of organisations that promoted the study amongst their networks including Time's Up UK, Race on the Agenda, and Routes to Success.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. This report aims to centre the voices of students and parents in relation to the grades prediction system and is based on 803 responses received from an electronic survey that was live between 5th April 2020 and 1st May 2020.
2. 85.8% of participants who completed the study were from BAME backgrounds. 30.2% of all respondents were from household incomes below the national average of £28,500, and 80.9% did not receive free school meals, which suggests that students of all socio-economic backgrounds were concerned (albeit to various degrees). Respondents also resided in various parts of the UK, however the top three regional areas represented were North West (30.7%), Midlands (27.8%) and London or Greater London (16.2%).
3. 79.8% of all respondents stated that they were concerned about their grade predictions. While the individual rate of concern for each ethnic group varied, collectively across the 16 groups that comprised the BAME groups, the average rate of concern for BAME groups was 71%. 58.82% of participants were concerned for two or more reasons.
4. In 2019, 4.6 million students took their GCSEs (UK Government Statistics) and 660,000 students were entered for A-levels. If the results are to be applied in proportion with these figures from 2019 (80% of 5.26 million), an estimated 4.28 million students could be potentially concerned about their grades at this moment in time.
5. 31.2% of respondents stated that they were concerned that their grades would be under-predicted. However, the reasons for concerns were broad and varied, including but not limited to: bias (17.6%), learning style (namely that they worked harder under pressure nearer to the exams and after their exams had taken place at 17.6%), attitude towards mock exams (that they did not take mock exams seriously at 12.6%), significant progress being made after mock exams (20.7%), predicted grades not reflection of capability (28.2%), the process being unfair (7.5%), mitigating circumstances (6.1%), a lack of resources and support as a result of high teacher attrition rate which resulted in supply teachers and caused disruption to learning (3.6%).
6. Although bias due to BAME identity made up of 22.9% of all concerns relating to bias, participants also highlighted additional factors such as bad behaviour (5.3%), favouritism (26%), class bias (6.1%), racism (2.3%), and islamophobia (4.6%). The latter is of deep concern as not only were 73.8% of respondents Muslim, but the high rates of Islamophobia in Britain post-9/11 may also be existent in teaching and learning environments as some studies have shown (see Bi: 2019, Bi: 2020a, Bi: 2020h).

7. Our study revealed that half of all concerns (50.9%) related to the way in which students processed information and prepared for their examinations. This includes: 17.6% of students had concerned about their learning style, namely that they worked harder under pressure nearer to the exams and after their mock exams had taken place, 12.6% said that they did not take mock exams seriously or that they used the mock exams to highlight areas they needed to improve on, and a further 20.7% participants stated that they had made significant progress since sitting their mock exams and that teachers were unaware of this progress. This data together suggests that half of 50.9% of all respondents' concerns related to the way in which they processed information and prepared for their examinations.

8. 6.1% of respondents raised mitigating circumstances such as family problems (14.9%), bereavement (8.5%), and health complications (53.2%) including mental health issues, personal reasons (17%), change of school (6.4%) to have negatively impacted their school performance. Due to the taboo nature of such issues especially surrounding mental health in BAME communities, we believe these figures to be underreported. Furthermore, given that BAME students come from backgrounds that are more likely to be unstable, the family dynamics and issues surrounding family and household may also be under-reported.

9. Of 21 participants (3.2%) who raised the basis of prediction as a concern, 28.6% stated there was a lack of class assessment upon which grades could be predicted, 19% said they were concerned about the school's prior success being factors into the grade predictions of current cohort of students, which would further marginalise and discriminate against those students (especially BAMER: Black Asian Minority Ethnic and Religious, see Bi: 2020g, 2019) who study at schools in less advantaged neighbourhoods with fewer resources, 33.3% said they were concerned their grade predictions were based on their SATs results from primary school (year 6), which were outdated by five years, and 19% said they were concerned about the standardisation model.

10. 80% of students were concerned about the impact of these grade predictions on their future educational and employment prospects.

11. At present, the grade predictions system does not account for learning style, bias around BAMER identities, and individual circumstances that may have limited students' potential.

12. We found that the grade predictions process was not only about predicting grades but rather, it was about predicting futures.

13. Given the level of concern, particularly amongst BAMER students we must make relevant interventions to protect the futures of our young people. In light of the findings, we make the following five recommendations in particular to eliminate bias in the grade predictions process.

14. **Recommendation 1: BAMER Bias Index**

- In order to mitigate bias against Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic and Religious groups (see Bi: 2020g, 2019), we recommend devising an index that calculates a grade inflation between 1-10% which should be added to the final predicted grades for students from these backgrounds.

- The components of the calculation of this index should include (but not limited to) using (a) educational disparity for each ethnic group from the average GCSE and A-level attainment levels and (b) earning in employment disparity for each ethnic group from the average salary at 25.

15. **Recommendation 2: Learning Style Index**

- We recognise that students have varied learning styles and those from BAMER backgrounds are likely to employ social and community capital to work towards their exams. We also recognise that boys from BAMER backgrounds are more likely to work harder outside of the space of the school due to 'laddish' behaviour norms. Students also highlighted that they work harder under pressure and nearer to the exams.
- As a result, we recommend that a learning style test be devised by DfE (on which we would be happy to consult) and for this to be sent to every GCSE and A-level student. The score obtained from the test should be used to inflate the predicted grade between 1-10% based on the learning style.
- We suggest that the test include questions pertaining to the length of time spent revising, at what point prior to examinations do students begin to work hard, whether they view mock exams as an opportunity to improve, deduce whether students are visual, auditory, kinesthetic, or reading/writing learners.

16. **Recommendation 3: Mitigating Circumstances Index**

- Given that BAMER students are more likely to have unstable family backgrounds exacerbated by an array of intersectional factors, we recommend that, in order to account for individual circumstances that have negatively impacted student performances, all students be provided a form which they can declare any such circumstance(s) that has hindered the student's academic performance.
- We recommend the form should include questions such as, when did the circumstance/difficulty begin, was the school previously notified, do you have any supporting materials (i.e. medical notes), and can you provide details as to how this impacted educational attainment and/or performance.
- This form should be returned to the student's assessment centre and factored in the grade predictions process by way of inflating the grade in the region of 1-10% to account for the negative impact.

17. **Recommendation 4: Bias Training for Teachers**

- In order to mitigate bias towards BAME students, we recommend that all teachers involved in grade predictions undertake bias training before doing so. Furthermore, since respondents stated that favouritism and bad behaviour may also play a role in bias and under-predictions, any teachers who are involved in the predictions of students with which their relationships were strained should be required to excuse themselves from predicting their grades and allow another teacher to do so in an independent way. These measures should be declared as having been conducted and adhered to in the assessment centre's equality and integrity statements when the grades are sent to the exam board. If these recommendations have not been complied with, we recommend that the grades for the students from the centre in question not be accepted.

18. **Recommendation 5: Practice Grade Predictions**

- We also recommend that all assessment centres and teachers working within them practice making predictions for students on test cases before they attempt to make predictions for actual students. Feedback should be provided for each test case and only once the practice grade predictions are of an acceptable standard should the teachers be permitted to predict grades. This is a method already employed by exam boards for examiners who mark exams and should therefore not be difficult to replicate or introduce across the board.

19. **Recommendation 6: Independent Appeals Process**

- We recommend that a centralised and uniform appeals process is applied for all exam boards and assessment centres, in order to avoid conflicting information and increase ease of access for students and/or their parents/guardians.
- We recommend that in the event that students wish to appeal their grades, they contact their assessment centre in the first instance however, if the centre refuses to appeal the result then the student(s) be provided the opportunity to contact the exam board directly.
- All appeals should be treated on a case by case basis and these should not lead to the grade decrease of other students.

20. We understand that the recommendations are time sensitive and therefore urge the DfE and Ofqual to implement them as a matter of urgency so that bias can be eliminated from the process as much as humanly possible.

21. To ensure that the global pandemic does not form an additional structural limitation to young people fulfilling their potential, and achieving their dreams, we will monitor student concerns and the educational, employment, and social outcomes after the summer of 2020. In doing so, we aim to evaluate the process to ensure that if young people have been negatively impacted by the grade predictions system, we will seek to understand the issues and offer tailored solutions to continue to protect their futures.



1. INTRODUCTION

On 23rd March 2020, the government announced that the UK would enter lockdown measures to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. The lockdown measures included the closure of schools and the cancellation of GCSE and A-level examinations. Soon after, the government announced that students sitting the aforementioned exams would have their grades predicted instead, which initiated a public debate as to the likelihood of students from BAME backgrounds to be under-predicted. While the public discourse focused on BAME identity as the sole source of bias, the broader literature on education has shown that, for instance, learning styles also play a huge role in student achievements and neither BAME bias or learning styles were being accounted for in the proposed grade predictions system. Furthermore, the public discourse on the debate has thus far been dominated by the voices of experts and professionals rather than the students who were being impacted. As a result of these reasons, we as the Equality Act Review designed a study that explored the experiences and viewpoints of students and parents, in an attempt to re-centre their voices in the decision-making around the way in which grades were to be predicted. In addition, we were curious to hear from students and parents as to the nature of their concerns and whether these were related to being BAME or involved additional sources of concern.

The study was live between 5th April 2020 and 1st May 2020 and was promoted through social media and various organisational bodies. The survey received 803 responses, which were analysed and interpreted between May and June 2020. The findings are grounded in educational literature (see chapter 2) and the data was collected and stored as per ethical guidelines (see chapter 3). The findings are presented in chapter 4, focusing first on demographic and background data, followed by a presentation of the data relating to concerns. We find that the process of predicting grades is about predicting futures, as 80% of students are concerned about their future educational and employment prospects. Chapter 5 draws on the findings and asks what measures we can put in place to protect the futures of our youth. In this chapter, we make five specific recommendations, three of which involve devising indexes that should be applied onto the predicted grades for students where necessary. Finally, chapter 6 summarises the results and the key recommendations.

We wish to highlight that this report is not an attempt to undermine the excellent work of teaching professionals. We recognise that teachers are under great stress and pressure, and that the work they do is invaluable for students across the country. This report instead is about protecting the futures of our youth by eliminating as much bias as possible from the grades prediction system, as unfortunately bias of all kinds (subconscious or conscious) is present within the education system. When combined with the disproportionate effect of COVID-19 on BAME communities and the impact of lockdown and social distancing measures more broadly, students face a greater risk of both a loss of and inequality and of opportunity.

We must therefore prevent any further negative impact on our youth as a result of the combined and exacerbated conditions we find ourselves in as a nation at this present time in history, which could impact hundreds of thousands of students' futures. We hope that the Department for Education and Ofqual are able to act on this report (findings and recommendations) in a timely fashion.



2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The UK Government announced lockdown measures on 18th March 2020 to slow the spread of coronavirus, which had by then claimed the lives of thousands of people. The lockdown measures included the closure of schools (except for the children of key workers) and the cancellation of GCSE and A-level examinations. It was decided that in place of exams, which would have produced student grades under normal circumstances, that teachers would predict grades based on student performance from mock exams and in class assessments. There was much criticism of the government's decision, which was centred around BAME students fairing worse, as their grades are more likely to be under-predicted compared to students from other ethnic groups. However, many additional factors such as learning style and the "culture of British education" geared towards examinations featured little if at all in the debate. Furthermore, the voices of students whose futures are at stake were largely absent from the debate. In order to re-centre the voices of these students, which the research underpinning this report aims to do, it is paramount to first take a holistic view of the issues that may be at play in the grade predictions process. In doing so, we can better understand the research results and provide tailored recommendations. In this chapter, we provide an in-depth literature review that unpacks nuances of educational attainment, learning styles, teacher expectations, unconscious bias and unconscious bias training, and issues with grade predictions.

2.1 Educational Achievement

The variation in educational aspiration and achievements amongst different ethnic minority groups has long been of concern and attracted both academic and policy inquiry (Modood: 1997, Denmack et al.: 2000, Archer and Francis: 2006, Burgess et al: 2009, Cabinet Office: 2008). BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic) groups have been linked with underachievement (Modood: 2006, Sammons: 2014), often Pakistani and Bangladeshi men being the least likely to possess degrees (Shah and Dwyer: 2010). However, while young Pakistani men are less successful than their South Asian counterparts, young Pakistani men and women are more likely to obtain a university degree than their White peers (Connor et al.: 2004). The most recent statistics available at the time of writing are for the academic year 2018/19 (UK Gov: 2019), which demonstrate that pupils from the Chinese, Asian and Mixed Ethnic Groups achieved higher than average, while White pupils and Black pupils achieved less than average. Pupils from White Gypsy/Roma and Irish Traveller ethnic groups had the lowest average rate of achievement. Broadly, girls were more successful than boys in every ethnic group and pupils eligible for free school meals were less likely to achieve the average than those not eligible. Intersectional markers of identity then, continue to determine educational, employment, and social outcomes of young people.

Explanations for these variations have involved theories of social class and social mobility (Shah and Dwyer: 2006), as well as social capital (Bourdieu: 1986) and ethnicity (Werbner: 1990, Modood: 2004). More recently, the role of religion as a religio-social capital has been argued by Bi (2019, 2020a), to also play a role in determining educational and employment outcomes of ethno-religious minorities in the UK, which she argues is particularly heightened for the British Muslim community. Some academics have, however, explored further, for instance considering the role of parents' qualifications. Sammons et al. (2014) investigated the role of parents' educational qualification and found that in instances where mothers had a degree or higher degree, children showed the highest average for total GCSE scores and the highest average grades in GCSE English and Maths equivalent to at least a grade B. Additional factors known to influence students in achieving their grades are whether they are eligible for free school meals (who have a lower average academic attainment compared to those who do not receive free school meals) and students with special education needs (SEN) who show lower levels of academic attainment at the end of secondary school, as they attain lower average results in their total GCSE points score, and on average, are entered for the lowest number of full GCSES (Sammons et al. 2014).

Research efforts have also focused on student future educational and employment prospects post-16 education. Many studies have shown that despite limiting factors such as the aforementioned, students from different ethnic, racial, and socio-economic backgrounds are likely to develop high aspirations for their futures (Mickelson: 1990, Hanson: 1994, Schneider and Stevenson: 1999, Goodman et al.: 2011, Carter-Wall and Whitfeild: 2012, Cummings et al.: 2012, Gorard et al.: 2012, St Clair et al.: 2013). Many of these studies, however, have argued there is little or no evidence that high aspiration can increase school achievement, and in some cases (Claire et al.: 2013) it has been argued that working class students hold aspirations beyond what the labour market can support. Other academics have shown that having higher aspirations improves school achievement even if expectations are low, as a result of which it is argued that aspirations help students improve their achievement (Alexander et al.: 1975, Jencks et al.: 1983, Marjorbancks: 1998, Bozick et al.: 2010, Khattab: 2015).

These results will be much more significant if they are also accompanied by high expectations from students. Many factors are known to influence levels of expectation and aspirations in particular, such as family and community social capital, which enable students to develop confidence in their abilities and potential to realise their aspirations (Stevenson: 1999, Shah and Dwyer: 2010). While class and ethnic differentials do play a role in determining the degree to which family and community social capital can be mobilised (Hill and Craft: 2003), some academics have demonstrated that different ethnic groups are able to utilise these forms of capital to increase educational achievements (Modood: 2004), attitudes towards schooling (Shah and Dwyer: 2010), and the importance of education and hard work as a means of social mobility (Zhou: 2005, Bi: 2020). The deficits caused by socioeconomic background therefore are thought to be mitigated through strong parental involvement, aspirations, and hard work (Modood: 2004, Shah and Dwyer: 2010). Shah and Dwyer for instance state that "ethnic social relations and ethnic institutions can be conduits of cultural and social capital and therefore become constitutive of class positioning" (2010: 1111). We can posit, therefore, that high levels of aspirations and expectations can have a positive impact on school achievement which can negate socioeconomic barriers and obstacles. These aspirations and the expectations students and their families have for them can have a positive impact on attained grades, as the evidence suggests.

The grade prediction system which is set to replace the examinations system during the coronavirus pandemic is not equipped to take into consideration such nuances that can and do make a significant difference to the grades of BAME students, especially in the build-up to examinations. As we will see in the following section, expectations and aspirations are closely interlinked with learning styles, which also impact student attainment levels, and further give rise to concern as to the degree to which the grade prediction system can cater for the factors that influence attainment levels under normal circumstances.

2.2 Learning Styles

As well as expectations and aspirations, learning style has been highlighted as an additional factor that can have a significant role to play in student attainment levels. The concept of learning styles has featured heavily in recent educational literature, with a number of theories that have been put forward to better understand the process of learning (Willingham: 2015, Arthurs: 2007, Coffield: 2004, Diseth and Matinsen: 2003, Furnham et al.: 2003). Broadly speaking, the concept refers to an individual's preferred way of processing new information for efficient absorption (Huston and Huston: 1995). Research has shown that learning styles differ for individuals, as each individual will exhibit different approaches in the learning process (Brown et al.: 2009, Zwanenberg et al.: 2000), even in the same learning environment (Saban et al. 2005). Student backgrounds, strengths, weaknesses, interests, ambitions, levels of motivation, and approaches to studying can all play a part (Felder and Brent: 2005). Two key theoretical frameworks have been put forward to define learning styles: The Index of Learning Styles (ILS) (Felder and Silverman: 1988) and the Learning Styles Questionnaire (LSQ) (Honey and Mumford: 1992). The ILS scales involve Active-Reflective, Sensing-Intuitive, Visual-Verbal, and Sequential-Global. On the other hand, the LSQ identifies four types of learners based on Kolb's (1984) theory: activists, theorists, pragmatists, and reflectors. These two frameworks can be differentiated through their focus on either type of activity (ILS) or personality type (LSQ) (Zwanenberg et al.: 2000). Theorists have suggested that teachers should be aware of learning styles so that they can facilitate more effective learning environment for students (Woolhouse and Blaire: 2003, Pritchard: 2014), although critics have argued that there is a lack of evidence to support the idea that an individual's learning style and teaching for specific learning styles produces better student outcomes (Pashler et al.: 2008, Vasquez: 2009).

A compelling body of evidence regarding learning styles arises from gendered comparisons. For instance, Rogers and Hallam (2006) found gender differences in approaches to examinations and study between girls and boys. Boys were seen to achieve higher standards while doing less work such as completing less homework than girls, but high-achieving boys had better studying strategies than high-achieving girls. Study approaches for high-achieving girls were found to be mediated by anxiety that manifested itself in motivation to study for exams. In this way, between girls and boys, we can see different elements of the ILS and LSQ playing a role in determining student attainment. A rich body of literature has considered in detail the different learning styles between girls and boys and found that 'laddish' behaviour (Younger and Warrington: 1996, Phillips: 1998, Warrington et al.: 2000) leads boys to take a 'laid back' approach to learning to fit in with their peers. Even among high achieving boys, the work has to 'appear easy' (Power et al.: 1998).

As well as gendered behaviour, learning style can vary between ethnic groups. For instance, Bi (2020a) found higher rates of resilience amongst British Muslim women who despite having lower socioeconomic backgrounds had high levels of undergraduate and postgraduate degrees attainment.

Studies exploring the role of grit (Rimfeld et al.: 2016) as a personality trait, although not having shown significant correlation with student attainment levels, have been associated with levels of resilience which can increase achievements leading to greater educational and employment outcomes (Bi: 2020, McIntosh and Shaw: 2017, Andall-Stanberry: 2017).

Learning style has also been seen to be closely linked with the type of assessment, as studies have shown that students adapt their learning strategies based on the nature of the assessment. Entwistle stated “The strongest single influence on the quality of learning...seems to be the nature of the assessment” (1994: 12). In particular, studies have shown that students can take a surface approach to learning (Gibbs: 1992) where assessments entail learning an overwhelming amount of curriculum (Entwistle: 199b, 1991, Ramsden: 1997, 2003). Furthermore, students modified their revision strategies based on their expectations and knowledge of what may appear in examinations (Entwistle and Entwistle: 1991, 1997, Entwistle and Entwistle: 2003). Thus, learning style is heavily based on what students think will be tested on (Biggs: 2003). As Boud writes, “Learning is so driven by assessment that the form and nature of assessment often swamps the effect of any other aspect of the curriculum” (1990: 103). This is also closely linked with time spent to study, as based on learning styles students will differ in both the time spent and the point in time within which they begin learning for examinations (Wilhte: 1990, Nixon and Frost: 1990).

Thus, the ‘culture of education’ that sits at the heart of the British education system, which has a large focus towards preparing students for examinations, is likely to have a notable impact on student predicted grades given that learning styles are moulded by the assessment system. This will no doubt involve the ways in which students perceive examinations and prepare for them. Thereby, we must question the extent to which predicted grades that employ classroom and coursework-based assessments can fully take into account student performance. Given that classroom assessments and predicted grades are based on teacher judgments, it is paramount to also consider the various layers of nuance surrounding teacher involvement.

2.3 Teacher expectations and unconscious bias

A large part of student attainment level expectations and aspirations is teacher expectations and aspirations for the students they teach. Teachers’ judgements are relied on heavily for entry into university, for which their predicted grades for students factor heavily. Many factors however, can interact with teachers’ expectations of students. Studies have particularly highlighted a positive correlation between stigmatised groups and low expectations (Jussim and Harbour: 2005). For instance, Jussim et al. (1996) found evidence of teachers moderating the expectations by social class and ethnic background in their study of African American students. McKown and Weinstein (2002) also found that students of elementary level who are members of academically stigmatised groups such as African American students and girls in relation to maths as a subject, were more likely to experience lower teacher expectations than students who were from non-stigmatised groups such as Caucasian students and boys in relation to the study of maths. These moderated and more conservative expectations have been found to be deeply rooted in prejudiced attitudes held by teachers towards ethnic groups (Tenenbaum and Ruck: 2007, Gilliam et al.: 2016), with teachers expressing negative expectations for students from BAME backgrounds. In particular, it has been found that non-Black or Asian teachers can have lower expectations of black and Asian students (Gershenson et al.: 2016, Gilborn et al.: 2012, Hattie: 2009, Steifel et al.: 2007). Specifically, stereotypes influence teacher judgements and behaviour

(Millard et al.: 2018, Bhopal and Rhamie: 2014, Van den bergh et al.: 2010, Kawakam et al.: 2002, Stangor and Lange: 1994). McKown and Weinstein show that when asked to rate the behaviour of their teacher towards a hypothetical low-achieving student and a hypothetical high-achieving student, the results showed a difference based on the hypothetical students' ethnic/racial backgrounds. McKown and Weinstein posit that the discrepancy is based on the experienced prejudice by students even though they were not derived directly from teacher behaviour at the time of the test. This study has been significant in paving the way forward when hypothesising and exploring the link between teacher expectations and the achievement gap between ethnic minority and non-minority students, and has been demonstrated in studies across the world including in the Netherlands, New Zealand, China, and South Africa (e.g., Van den bergh: 2010, Rubie-Davies, Hattie, & Hamilton, 2006; Slabbert, 2001; Song, 1998).

Current socio-political contexts in Britain, namely the rise of the far right, Brexit, increasing Islamophobia, a decade of austerity and more, can also affect teacher expectations of student performance. For example, van den Bergh et al. (2010), found this to be the case for students from Turkish and Moroccan backgrounds in the Netherlands. In a recent paper exploring the impact of the Trojan Horse scandal (an alleged plot that far-right Islamists were taking over state schools in Birmingham), it is demonstrated how the state's view when coupled with negative media coverage on a national and global level impacts not only the ways in which teacher's view students, but how students can come to view themselves due to the ways in which they are continuously stereotyped (Bi: 2020h).

With unconscious and conscious bias being so prevalent amongst the teaching body, the solution to address this has been slow paced. However, in her 2017 review, 'Race in the Workplace', Baroness McGregor-Smith highlighted the 'structural, historical bias that prevents ethnic minorities, women, disabled people, and others from progressing in their careers, describing it as 'much more pervasive and more insidious than the overt racism that we associate with the 1970s' (McGregor-Smith, 2017, p.2, see also Atewelogun: 2018, Brownsword: 2019). Baroness McGregor-Smith recommended that a free, online unconscious bias training (UBT) resource be created, to tackle unconscious bias, which was also a recommendation made by the Equality Act Review in an evidence submission to Ofqual (Bi: 2020f). However, it is noted that not all UBTs are effective, as some can condone the use of stereotypes and lead members to become more defensive, while on the other hand, some studies have found that they can be effective depending on factors such as content, length, and audience (Emmerson: 2017). On the whole, it is reasonable to suggest that given the high levels of conscious and unconscious bias and the severity in terms of impact for student educational, employment and social outcomes, it is a worthwhile investment to offer teachers UBT, especially for predicting grades, as the literature thus far indicates predictions can be jeopardised due to bias. This will be considered in more detail in the following section.

2.4 Grade Predictions

Grade predictions feature heavily in the orchestration of student future educational outcomes, as the university and sixth form admissions process largely rely on this measure when evaluating student suitability for their chosen courses (Snell et al.: 2008). Despite the measure's widespread use in the British education system, research has shown that grade predictions can be inaccurate. For instance, research by Cambridge Assessment in 2014 found that while 43% of predicted grades were accurate, 43% were over-optimistic (Gill and Benton: 2015).

More recently, Wyness (2016) found that most A-level predictions by teachers were also over predicted in the majority of cases, with only 16% accurately predicted (see also Burgess and Greaves: 2013). However, among high achieving students, they found that those from underprivileged backgrounds were more likely to have their grades under-predicted than pupils of a similar ability but from more privileged families. As per the aforementioned literature in this chapter, it is also important to account for ethnic and racial identity in grade predictions. Research conducted by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills in 2011 found that BAME applicants had the lowest predicted grade accuracy at 39.1%, while white counterparts had their grades predicted accurately in 53% of cases (Everett and Papageorgiou: 2011). It is also of relevance to mention that often teacher's predictions are in conflict with students' own expectations of themselves. While a rich body of literature strongly argues that students over-predict their performance based on wishful thinking (Sera and DeMarree: 2016), Soderstrom and McCabe (2010) found that students who had high expectations of themselves performed better in examinations. In addition, a 2020 TES survey of 19,000 teachers found that only 39% think that grades are predicted fairly for all students (Lough: 2020). Given the prevalence of grade predictions being under-predicted for those from disadvantaged and/or BAME backgrounds, together with the high rate of unconscious and conscious bias and the lack of accommodation for a variety of learning styles, a worrying picture lies before us as to the accuracy of grade predictions as a measure to determine student attainment amidst the coronavirus pandemic.

2.5 Current Discourse on Predictions

As part of the lockdown measures that were announced on 18th March 2020, schools were closed except to children of key workers and all GCSE and A-Level examinations were cancelled. A significant public debate ensued shortly after, pertaining to the potential impact of grades predictions for students from BAME backgrounds. Organisations and academics including the Equality Act Review which published an open letter that was sent to the Department for Education (Bi: 2020c), raised concerns in more detail. However, much of the discourse around grade predictions during the coronavirus pandemic has centered around BAME students being under-predicted grades, which as the literature has shown, is a valid issue to have highlighted. However, the literature review has shown strong evidence for a range of factors in addition to BAME backgrounds, such as different learning styles, attitude and perception of assessments, gendered differences, aspiration and desire as makers of increased attainment, and the 'culture of British education' that is geared towards examinations, all of which may be best mitigated through the sitting of examinations. In the current circumstances, this is not possible so the question remains: how do we ensure that the relevant bodies design a robust system that mitigates for as many of the negative impacting factors as possible? The answer we believe, lies in placing the students at the heart of the debate, which we explain in further detail in the next chapter.



3. METHODOLOGY

Three key aims were central to this study: to determine whether there is concern amongst students and parents as to the government's decision to predict grades; to understand the nature of any concerns; and to mitigate any negative impact for students by providing tailored solutions that governmental and educational bodies can adopt. The research consisted of a mixed-methods approach employing an electronic survey to capture both quantitative and qualitative data. Due to time constraints, semi-structured telephone interviews were not conducted; however, we aim to carry these out in the second phase of the research which will follow student concerns after results have been issued in the Summer. This initial research phase spanned between 5th April 2020 and 1st May 2020, during which time 803 survey responses were collated.

3.1 Survey

The survey was designed using Google Forms and comprised eleven questions, which included: identity in relation to grades predictions (i.e. student, parent, teacher); the educational level of the student in concern; whether there was a concern about grades being predicted; if there was a concern, to provide more details in a comment box; household income; whether the child in question receives free school meals; ethnic background; religious background; geographical location; the name of the school or college (optional); to provide an email address if they wished to be contacted for an interview (optional). Questions that entailed a yes or no answer were also accompanied by an 'I'm not sure' option, as in some cases there can be uncertainty. Furthermore, we also included a 'prefer not to say' option for background questions that enquired as to respondents' ethnicity, religion and socio-economic background.

A total of 803 responses were submitted to the study between 5th April and 1st May 2020. The survey was shared on social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn by the Equality Act Review Campaign team and MP Afzal Khan's team. Emails were also sent to every MP requesting them to forward the study to constituents and to share via their social media sites so constituents across the country could be aware of the study. Outreach communication with several community and educational organisations also assisted in increasing participation to the study. Due to the urgency of the study and its significance in informing policy on the subject, as predicted results are to be made available around mid-August 2020, the study could only be live for three weeks. If the study was live for a longer period of time, we would have gained a greater and richer set of data. Notwithstanding this, in the time the study was live, we gained an impressive data set from a cross-section of society including all regions, ethnicities, faiths, and socio-economic backgrounds. We aim to continue this research as part of a second phase from September 2020 in order to trace the experiences of students post-receipt of

predicted grades. Semi-structured one-to-one interviews with students and parents will be a key hallmark of this second phase, which, given the time-frame.

3.2 Analysis

The design of the survey allowed for both qualitative and quantitative data to be captured and translated into bar charts and pie charts using Microsoft Excel, which are employed in chapter four of this report. The qualitative data was derived from the 'please tell us why you are concerned' (optional) question in the study. Each comment to this question was read and was employed in the extrapolation of information such as the number of concerns raised by each individual, the nature of concern(s) raised which led to the creation of categories and sub-categories of concerns. As we outline in further detail in section four of the report, these provide significant levels of nuance into the nature of concerns, which can in turn inform governmental and educational decision-making bodies as to the tailored interventions that are required. It should be noted that in conducting this study and including the aforementioned questions, we placed the voices and experiences of students and parents centre stage.

3.3 Ethical Considerations

The Principal Researcher has had extensive ethics training at institutions including Oxford University, SOAS, University of London, University College London, and Yale University. Care was taken to ensure that the highest ethical standards were employed when conducting the research. At the outset, the design of the study incorporated ethical considerations, in that survey responses were anonymous as survey participation did not require names to be provided, the provision of email addresses at the end of the survey were not a requisite for the submission of the survey, and 'further participation' in semi-structured interviews after the completion of the survey was optional (albeit no semi-structured interviews were conducted). Furthermore, the data was handled according to the General Data Protection Regulation, which replaced the Data Protection Act 1998 in May 2018. Access to the data remained with the Principal Researcher and all data was stored on a password protected file as well as a password protected computer.

3.4 Presentation of Results

The methodological frameworks underpinning this research study were based on the Principal Researcher's social anthropological and human geography specialist training, of which feminist ethnography (see Lughod: 1990) and intersectionality form core elements. It was therefore paramount to the Principal Researcher to ensure the voices of the participants were central to this research and a conscious effort has been made to include participants' voices from the qualitative aspect of the survey within the text. This allows for us to see beyond the statistic(s), comprehending the research findings in a holistic manner. When presenting the results, we also considered ease of accessibility to the data, and thus translated our findings into graphs.



4. FINDINGS

The study was live between April 5th and May 1st 2020, during which time we received a total of 803 responses. The research findings will be presented under two key strands: demographic data and data on concerns. The aim of the former section is to provide an overview of the demographic background of those who participated in the study, allowing for the intersectional nuances to be considered, which is an important tool to employ in the interpretation and analysis of voices that will feature in the second section. The second section presents the qualitative extracts that were submitted as part of the study in a thematic format. This approach to organising the research findings is a deliberate choice, because though statistical data is powerful in indicating group behaviours, it is the nuanced accounts of individual experiences of participants that allow for their agency and personhood to be brought forward from behind the statistics. This approach is rooted in anthropological methods (specifically ethnographic methods) that the Principal Researcher actively practices in order to better understand the experiences of young people and/or parents who have taken part in this study.

Chart 1: Participant identity in relation to grade.

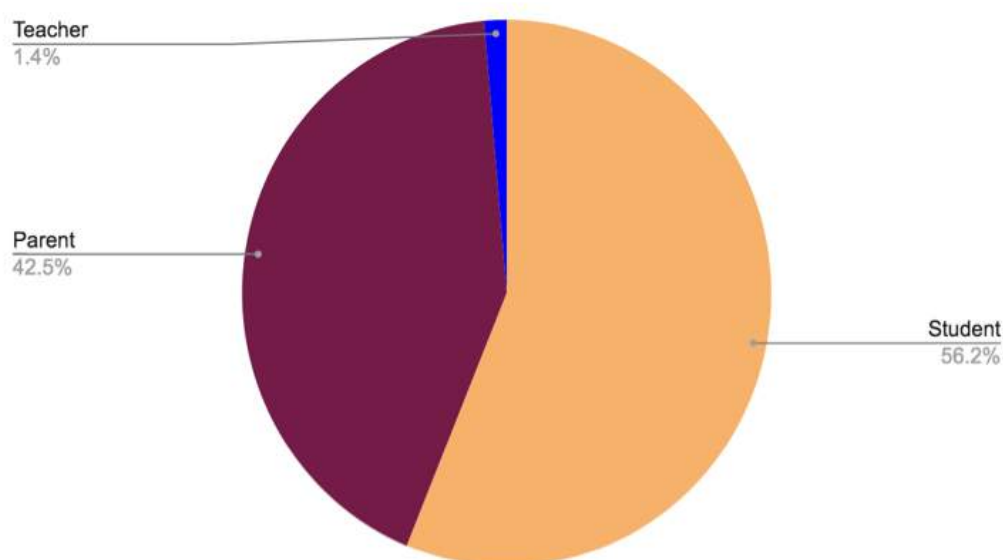


Chart 1 above demonstrates that of 803 study responses, 56.2% (451) of participants were students, 42.5% (341) were parents, and 1.4% (11) were teachers. While our focus and aims in designing the study was to hear from the students and parents as key groups, teachers expressed an interest in sharing their views while the study was live. For this reason, we created an additional category for teachers; however, the study's primary focus remained the key student and parent groups.

Chart 2 below breaks these results down further, demonstrating that all responses were directly linked to student level of study. GCSEs made up the majority education level in this study with 65% (522) of participants either studying at this level, having children that studied at this level, or taught students at this level. 30.6% (246) of participants stated they were studying, had children that studied or were teaching at A2 level, and 4.2% (33) were studying, had children studying or taught at the AS level. 0.1% (1) of participants stated they were studying for their degrees. Of 803 responses then, the most concerns were concentrated at the GCSE level and the A2 level, which is proportionate with potential impact level, as both GCSEs and A2 level provide entry into further education, sixth forms, colleges, and/or apprenticeships and universities respectively. As a result, the priority as suggested by this data set needs to be placed with these groups of students.

Chart 2: Participant level of study.

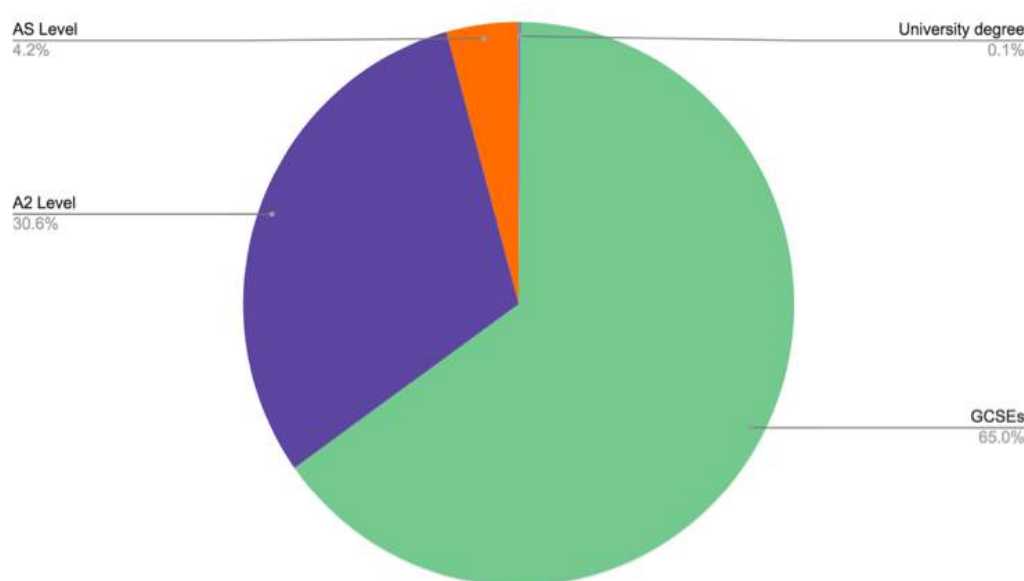
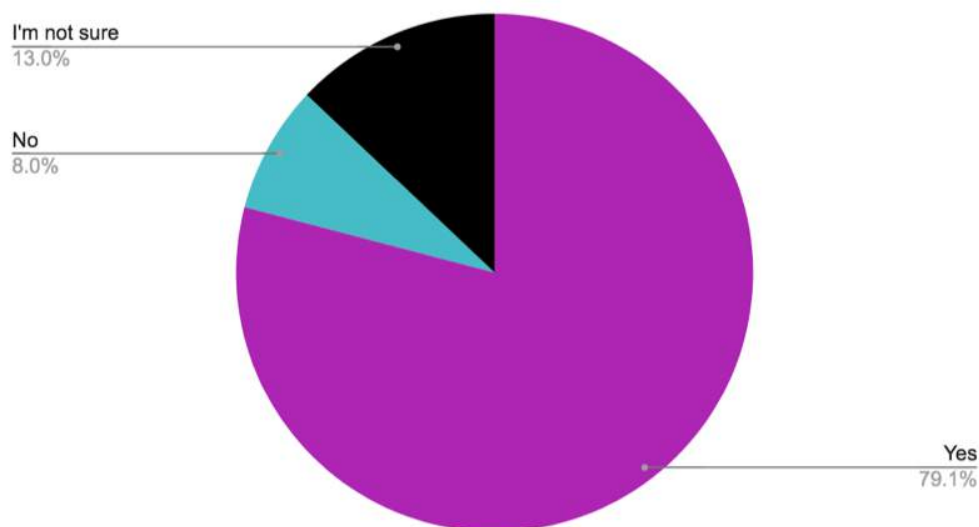


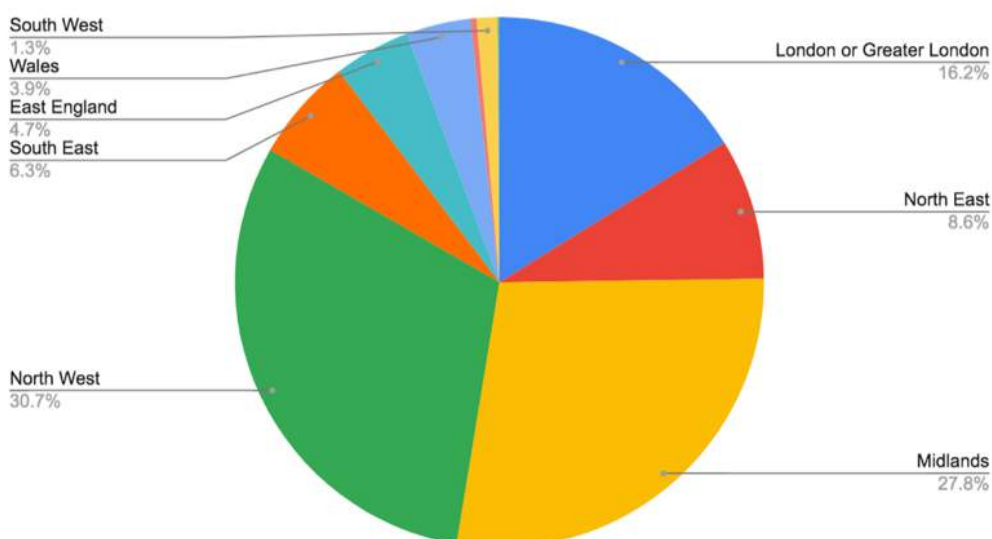
Chart 3 below demonstrates that of 803 survey respondents, an overwhelming majority of 79.1% (635) were concerned about their grades being predicted. 8% (64) were not concerned and 13% (104) were not sure whether they had concerns. This is a significant finding that demonstrates that the government's decision to predict grades in light of coronavirus exam cancellations is of concern to almost 80% of respondents. In 2019, 4.6 million students took their GCSEs (UK Government Statistics) and 660,000 students were entered for A-levels. If the results are to be applied in proportion with these figures from 2019 (80% of 5.26 million), it is estimated that 4.28 million students could be potentially concerned about their grades at this moment in time.

Chart 3: Distribution of concern amongst participants.



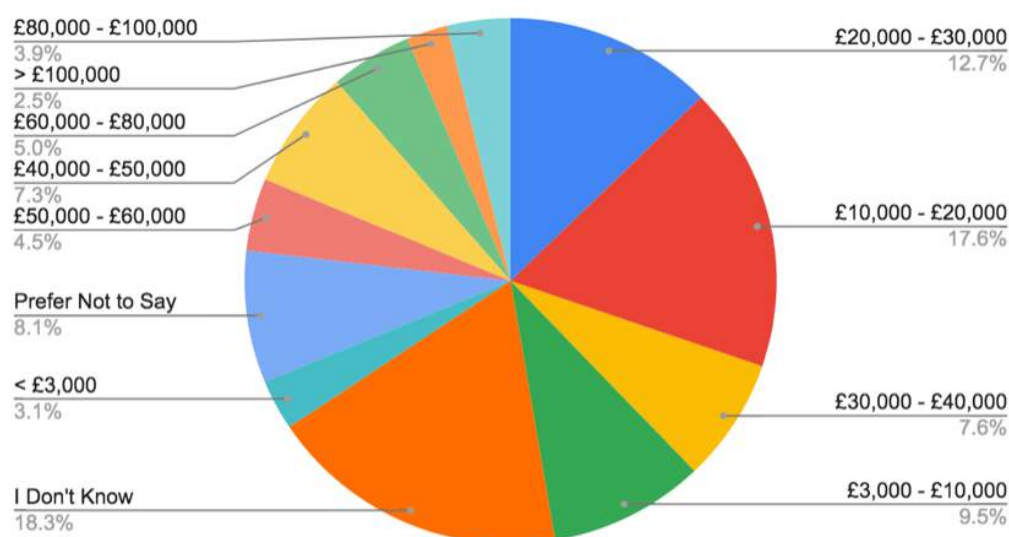
The background data collected demonstrated that participants were from diverse backgrounds from across the UK. Chart 4 below demonstrates that 30.7% (243) of participants reside in the North West (includes Manchester, Cumbria, Lancaster, Liverpool and Carlisle), 27.8% (220) reside in the Midlands (includes Birmingham, Nottingham, Leicester, Stafford and Worcester), 16.2% (128) reside in London or the Greater London area, 8.6% (68) reside in the North East (Leeds, Bradford, Scarborough, Durham, Sheffield, York), 6.3% (50) reside in the South East (Oxford, Surrey, Kent, Portsmouth, Southampton), 4.7% (37) reside in East of England (includes Cambridge, Ipswich, Luton, Peterborough), 3.9% (31) reside in Wales, and 1.3% (10) reside in the South West (includes Cornwall, Somerset, Dorset, Devon). 1 participant from Northern Ireland and 3 participants from Scotland completed the survey. Since the percentage for these amounted to 0.1% and 0.3% respectively, these do not appear on the graph below. The study therefore received responses from students and/or parents from all four constituent countries of the United Kingdom.

Chart 4: Participant geographic location.



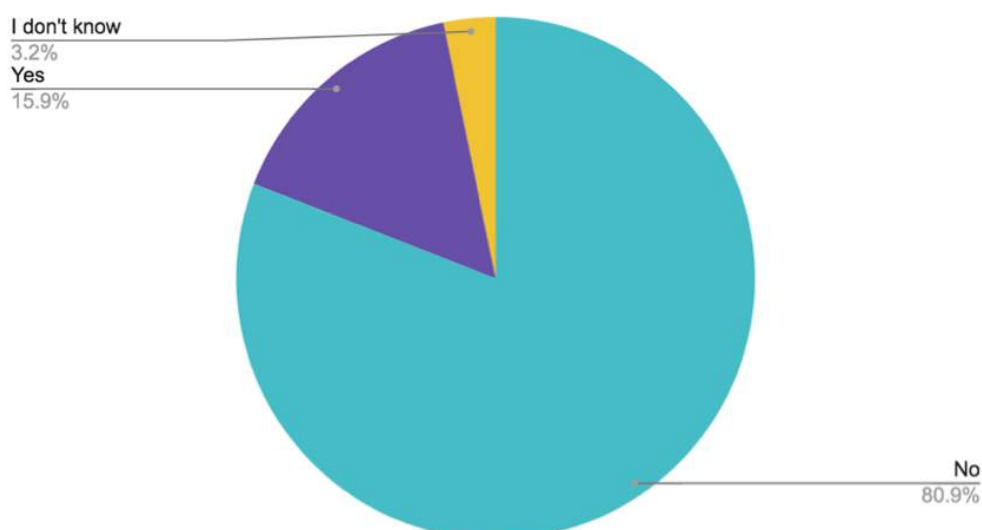
The study also allowed for the capturing of the household income distribution amongst the participant cohort. Chart 5 below demonstrates that, in order of income bracket, 3.1% (25) of participants had a household income of less than £3000 per annum, 9.5% (76) had a household income of £3000-10,000, 17.6% (141) had a household income of £10-20,000. In other words, nearly a third of all participants' (30.2%) household incomes were below the 2018 national average household income of £28,400 (Office for National Statistics: 2019). 12.7% (102) had a household income of £20-30,000, 7.3% (61) had a household income of £30-40,000, 7.3% (59) had a household income of £40-50,000, 4.5% (36) had a household income of £50-60,000, 5% had a household income of £60-80,000, 3.9% (31) had a household income of £80-100,000 and 2.5% (20) had a household income of more than £100,000 per annum. 18.3% (147) said they did not know and a further 8.1% (65) said they preferred not to share this information

Chart 5: Participant household income distribution.



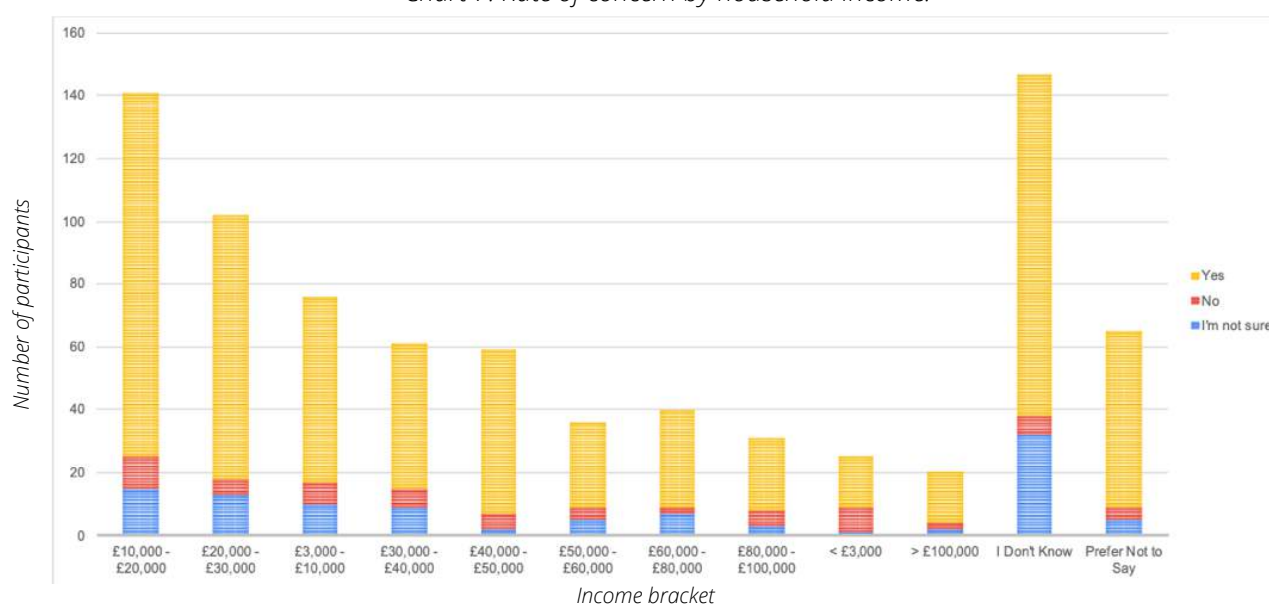
In order to provide further nuance in relation to socioeconomic background, we also asked how many participants were in receipt of free school meals. Chart 6 demonstrates that 15.9% (127) were in receipt of free school meals while 80.9% (648) stated they were not in receipt. A further 3.2% (26) stated that they did not know whether they were in receipt of free school meals. Both these data sets suggest that concerns about grade predictions were spread across household incomes, although a greater proportion were from households with less than £50,000 annual income.

Chart 6: Number of participants in receipt of free school meals.



We tested this further by analysing the rate of concern by the household income bracket as shown in Chart 7. We found that of 25 participants who selected <£3000 as their household income, 16 (60%) stated that they were concerned about their grades. Of the 141 participants who selected the bracket £10-20,000, 116 (82%) stated they were concerned about their grades being predicted. Of the 76 participants who stated £20-30,000 as their household income, 59 (78%) stated that they were concerned about their grades being predicted. Of the 61 participants who selected £30-40,000 household income bracket, 46 (61%) stated they were concerned. Of the 59 participants who selected £40-50,000 as their household income, 52 (88%) stated they were concerned about the grades being predicted. Of the 36 participants who selected £50-60,000 household income, 27 (75%) stated they were concerned about their grades being predicted. Of the 40 participants who selected the £60-80,000 bracket, 31 (77.5) stated they were concerned. Of the 31 participants who selected the £80-100,000 bracket, 23 (77%) stated they were concerned. Finally, of the 20 participants who stated their household income to be >£100,000, 16 (80%) stated that they were concerned. However, 147 participants they were unsure as to the household income and of these, 104 said they were concerned. 65 participants said they preferred not to disclose their household income and of these 56 (86%) stated they were concerned about their grades being predicted.

Chart 7: Rate of concern by household income.

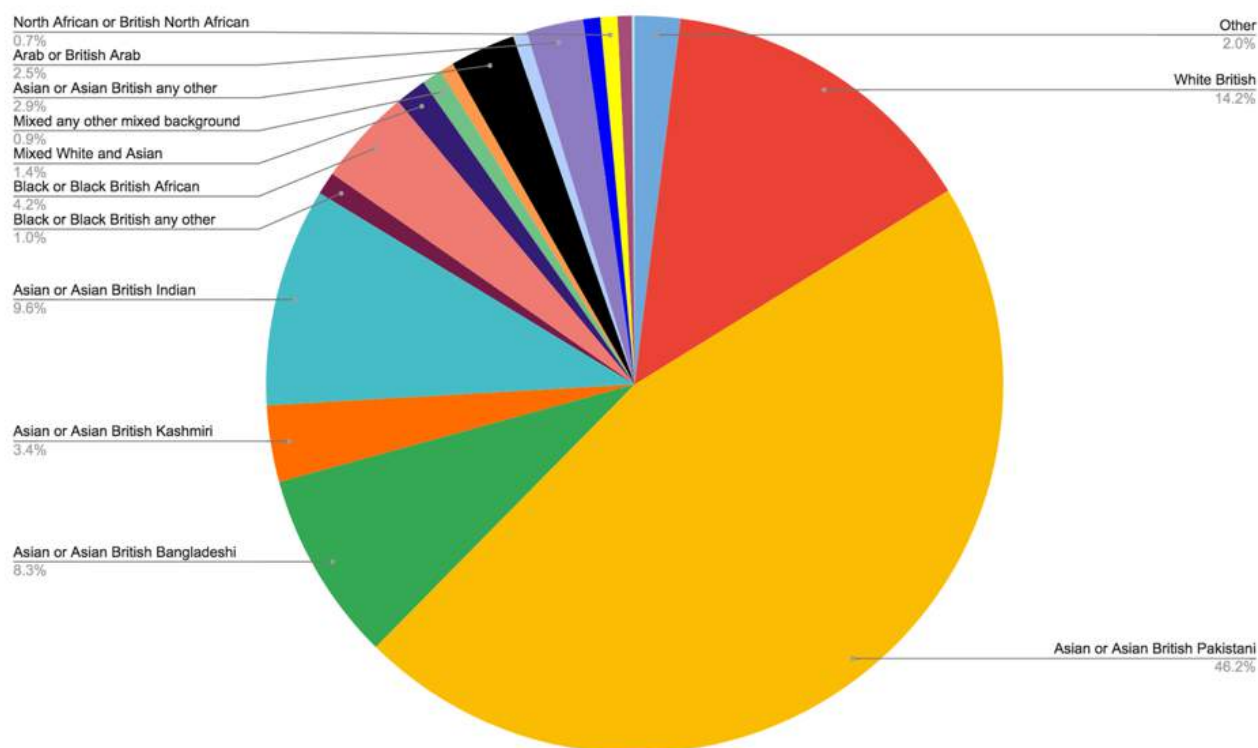




Together with the data on household income distribution, this data is significant, as it shows higher rates of concern from households that fall below the national average income of £28,500 (UK GOV: 2019). Significantly, this indicates that it is important to maintain an intersectional lens when considering the impact of grade predictions, as the BAME category, around which current debates have been centred, risks silencing additional makers of identity, that may also be involved in exacerbating the negative impact of grade predictions.

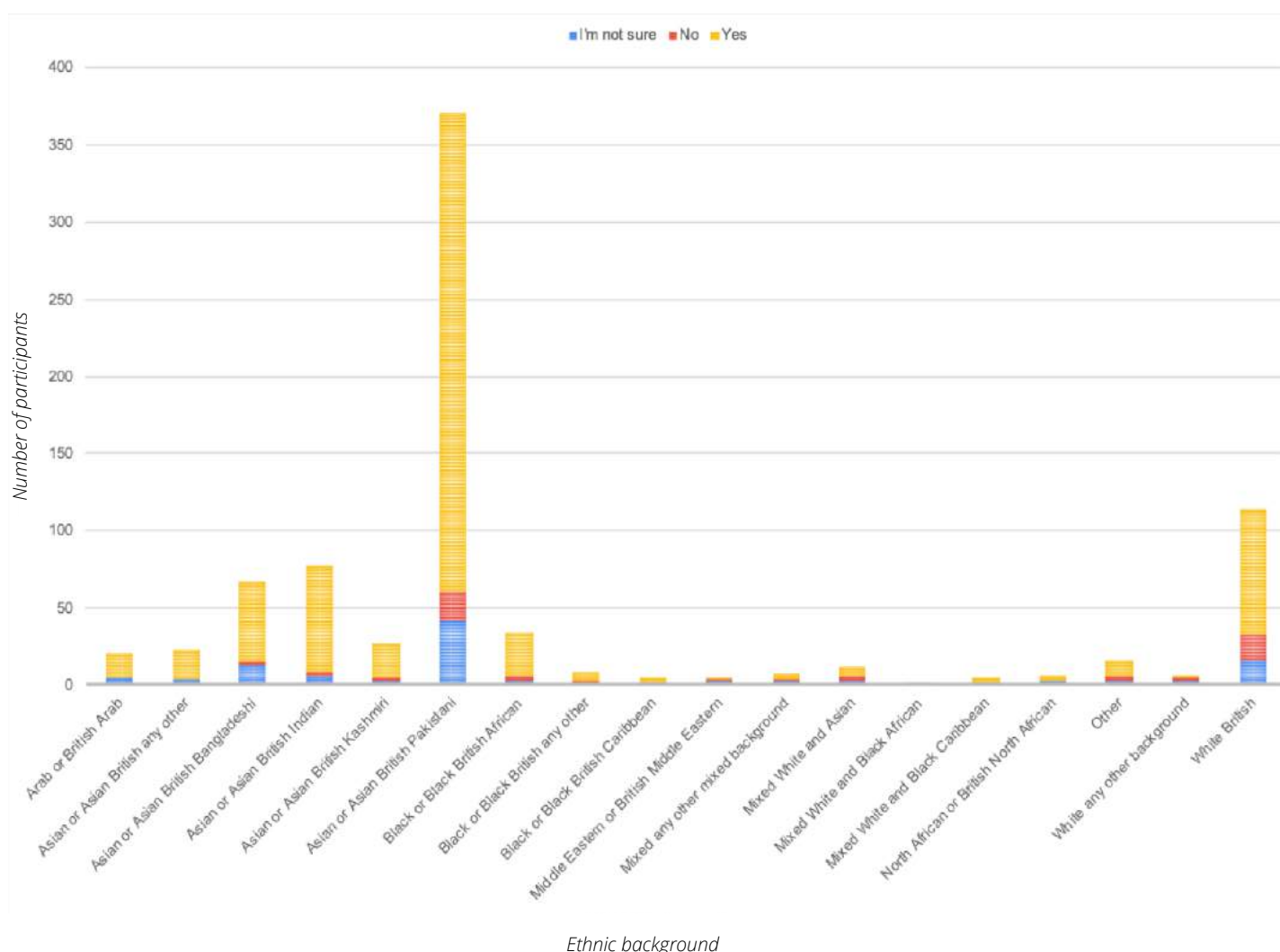
Participants were also asked about their ethnic background. Chart 8 below demonstrates that the study received responses from a diverse set of communities. The largest community represented in the data set is the Asian or Asian British Pakistani at 46.2% (371) of participants. The second largest community represented is White British with 14.2% (114) of participants selecting this ethnic category. The third largest group represented was British Indians, with 9.6% (77) of participants making this selection. The fourth largest group was Asian or Asian British Bangladeshi at 8.3% (67) of participants, which was closely followed by Black or Black British African as the fifth largest group with 4.2% (34) of participants selecting this ethnic category to describe their identity. The sixth largest group was Asian or Asian British Kashmiri at 3.4% (27) participants. The seventh largest group was Asian or Asian British Other at 2.9% (23) participants, followed by Arab or British Arab at 2.4% (20) as the eighth largest group. The ninth most selected ethnic identity was Other at 2% (16) followed by Mixed White and Asian at 1.4% (11) as the tenth most representative ethnic identity. The remaining ethnic category selection were Black or Black British any other at 1% (8), Mixed any other mixed background at 0.9% (7), White any other background at 0.7% (6), North African or British North African at 0.7% (6), Black or Black British Caribbean at 0.6%(5), Mixed White and Black Caribbean at).6% (5), Middle Eastern or British Middle Eastern at 0.6%) (5).

Chart 8: Number of participants by ethnic background.



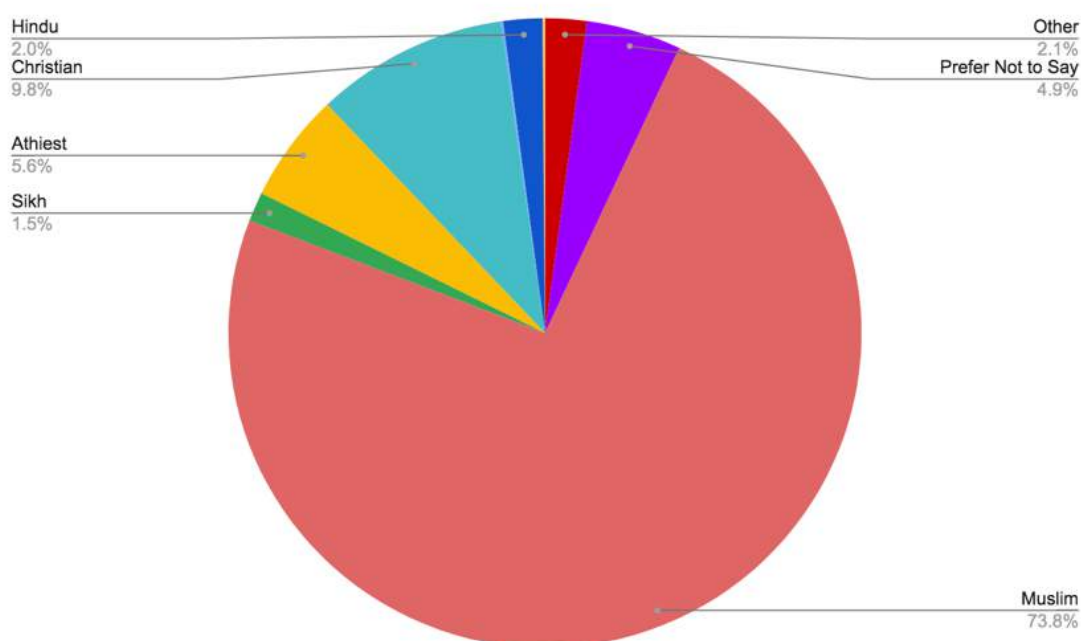
As Chart 8 demonstrates, 85.8% of participants were from BAME backgrounds. We nuanced this finding further by measuring the rate of concern for each ethnic group, which is shown below in chart 9. We found that the rate of concern was higher amongst BAME groups as a collective (16 groups), averaging at 71%. Individually, the percentage of concern distribution was as follows: 77.6% of British Bangladeshis were concerned, 81% of British Kashmiris were concerned, 83.5% of British Pakistanis were concerned, 75% of Arab or British Arabs were concerned, 66% of British North Africans were concerned, 89% of British Indians were concerned, 82.6% of British Asian Others were concerned, 82% of Black British Africans were concerned, 80% of Black British Caribbean students were concerned, 20% of British Middle Eastern were concerned, 45.5% of Mixed White and Asian were concerned, 100% of Mixed White and Black African were concerned, 80% of Mixed white and Black Caribbean were concerned, 42.8% of Mixed any other background were concerned, 71% of White British students were concerned, 16.6% of White any other background were concerned, 62.5% of students from Other backgrounds were concerned.

Chart 9: Rate of concern by ethnic background.



We also surveyed the religious backgrounds of study participants, which is demonstrated by Chart 9 below. The largest representative religious group are Muslims at 73.8%, followed by Christians at 9.8%, Atheist at 5.6%, Hindu at 2%, Sikh at 1.5%. 2.1% of participants selected other religious background and 4.9% selected 'prefer not to say'. Jewish and Buddhist were also listed as religious identity categories, but no participants made either of these selections. In the three weeks the study was live, minority religious communities were therefore the most representative. If the study were to be more widely shared over a longer duration, this data set may have been more diversified. On the other hand, the data set could equally be suggesting that minority religions carry greater concern, and this may also be intertwined with the complexity of Islamophobia, hate crimes, and anxieties around potential discrimination in education and employment (Bi: 2020a).

Chart 10: Religious identity of participants

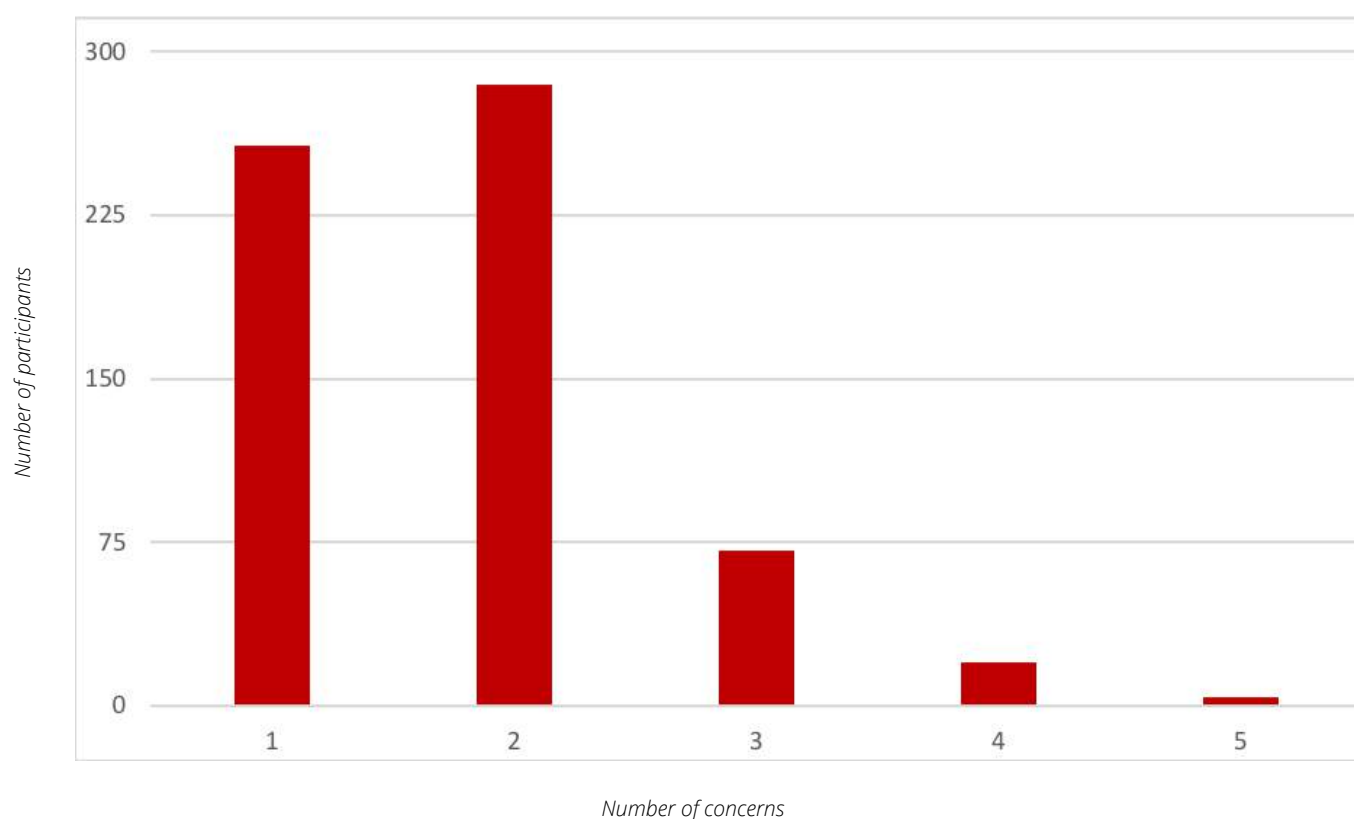


4.2 Data on concerns

This section of the chapter provides a detailed analysis of the concerns that were raised by participants who took part in the study. This data is derived solely from the qualitative responses submitted as part of the survey, as no interviews were conducted with participants at this stage of the research. Of 803 responses, 642 (79.9%) responses stated concerns regarding their grades being predicted. The nature of the concerns were varied, transcending beyond simply being 'under-predicted', which has formed the majority of the discourse that has emerged since the government's decision to predict grades as a result of the coronavirus outbreak and subsequent lockdown measures that were put in place. In order to offer targeted and accurate interventions, understanding the nature of concerns in a holistic manner is paramount.

The chart below demonstrates the number of concerns per participant. 257 of 642 (40%) participants raised one concern, 285 of 642 (44.4%) participants raised two concerns, 71 of 642 (11%) participants raised three concerns, 20 of 642 (3%) participants raised four concerns, and 4 of 642 (0.42%) participants raised five concerns. Put differently, 58.82% of participants were concerned for two or more reasons. This is a significant finding, which shows that students are being impacted in multiple ways and an urgent need for tailored intervention is therefore required.

Chart 11: Number of concerns per participant.

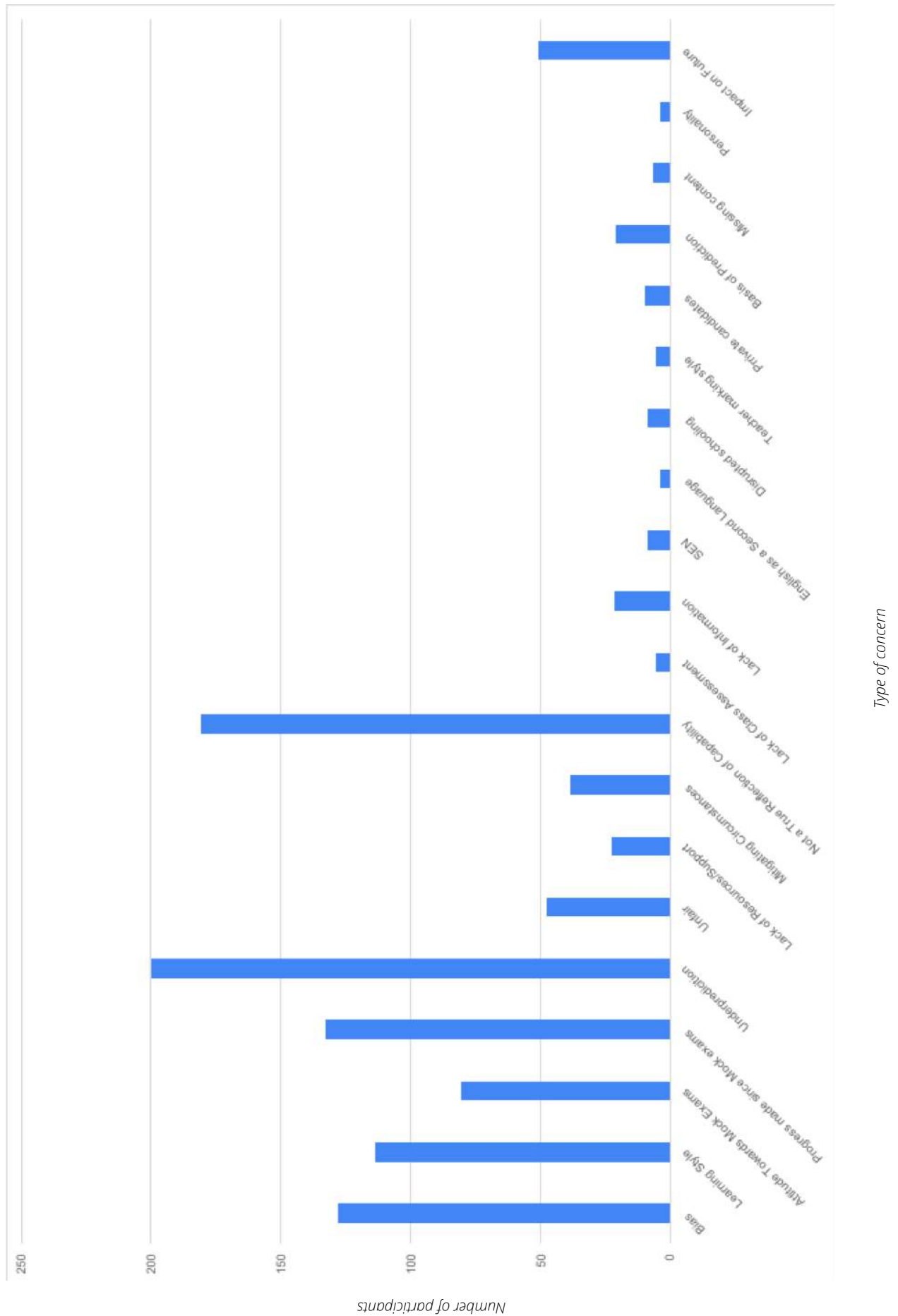




In analysing the concerns, we went further to provide a detailed breakdown of the nature of the concerns raised, organising them into broad categories. The chart below demonstrates the nature of concerns raised by participants, which are broad and varied. Of 642 participants, 128 (19.9%) stated concerns relating to bias, 114 (17.6%) stated concerns about their learning style, namely that they worked harder under pressure nearer to the exams and after their mock exams had taken place, and 81 (12.6%) said that they did not take mock exams seriously or that they used the mock exams to highlight areas they needed to improve on. A further 133 (20.7%) participants stated that they had made significant progress since sitting their mock exams and that teachers were unaware of this progress. 200 (31.2%) participants said they were concerned their grades would be under-predicted and many cited examples of this having happened to them in the past, as they outperformed their predictions. 48 (7.5%) said they were concerned that the predictions would not be determined in a fair way, and 23 (3.6%) stated that they had a lack of resources and support (many of whom mentioned a high teacher attrition rate which resulted in supply teachers, which caused disruption to learning). 39 (6.1%) participants stated mitigating circumstances as reason for concern, 181 (28.2%) participants stated that predictions were not a reflection of their capability, 6 (0.9%) participants stated that they had not completed their class assessments as a result of which their predictions would not be accurate, 22 (3.4%) respondents stated that there was a lack of information as to how their grades were going to be predicted, 9 (1.4%) respondents stated having SEN (Special Educational Needs), which affected their class assessments and/or mock performance, 4 (0.6%) participants stated having English as a second language as a result of which their access to education was impacted negatively, 9 (1.4%) participants stated disrupted schooling as having a negative impact on their predicted grades, and 6 (0.9%) participants stated that they were concerned about the marking style of teachers, as some marked leniently while others marked harshly. 10 (1.5%) private candidates stated that they were unable to have predicted grades as their teachers were their parents, which translates into a severe delay to their educational and employment progress. 21 (3.2%) participants stated that they were concerned as to what predictions were based on, 7 (1.1%) stated they were concerned due to missing content, 4 (0.6%) participants expressed concern over personality type, namely being shy, which may result in the teachers not recognising their achievements. 51 (7.9%) respondents expressed concerns regarding the impact of having grade predictions on their futures, which was tightly interconnected with many of the concerns raised such as under-predictions, not being able to demonstrate their full potential, learning style, and progress made since the mock exam.

The insights provided by this data set allow for nuanced understanding as to the breadth and depth of the nature of concerns. Since these concerns have not been widely acknowledged in the public discourse surrounding the government decision to predict grades, the strengths of this study are further highlighted, as the students and their parents have been, rightfully, placed at the centre stage. Thus, any decisions or consultations that are made by governmental and/or educational bodies must take these concerns into consideration.

Chart 12: Number of participants per type of concern



As per the feminist ethnographic methodology that lies at the heart of this research project, it is essential to complement the statistics with qualitative commentary of participants, as statistics cannot always capture and convey nuances. This mixed method approach also enables the voices of participants to take centre stage in decision making pertaining to their futures. We have therefore provided below extracts from the qualitative aspects of the survey as to the nature of concerns that participants raised.

4.2.1. Attitude towards mock exams

12.6% of participants' concerns revolved around attitude towards mock examinations. This was raised by students, parents and the teaches who took part in the survey. Extracts include:

"I did quite bad in the mock exams as I thought they weren't important and I was told they wouldn't be used so I carried on messing about in the exams and not revise enough because I didn't know they would be used...and now its said they will be used and I'm really worried as I did really bad in them and that those grades don't reflect what I could achieve in the actual GCSE's as I improved so much from the November mocks."

"We don't know what grades our teachers are going to put down and also are concerned with the mocks because some of us didn't take the mocks as serious and didn't put best efforts because we thought they wouldn't count so this is a major concern for us towards our overall grades we are going to get"

"Basically I've haven't taken mocks seriously, and I hoped I can show them in the real exams but know they will have to predict and I can't show my real side of knowledge."

"I didn't put as much effort in mocks then I would have GCSEs."

"I didn't try in mocks as I didn't think it was that serious."

"Mostly predicted grades and mock exam results are a wakeup call for students and they work harder before the exams and excel their mocks and predicted grades."

"Mock results were not good because I did not treat them as if they were real exams, overall all class assessment based grades were good."

"I've not put enough effort into my Year 11 schoolwork and mock exams because I was only focusing on my GCSE exams, so am worried that my predicted grades will not fully reflect my true potential."

"...His Mocks weren't great but jolted him into action. He had begun to put his head down, go to revision classes and start to revise with gusto. We expected his final grades to reflect this. We are now concerned because he will only be graded on his work when he was struggling. Many many students cram and work better during the final few months. He is taking a year off before applying to uni. We are concerned that estimated grades will disadvantage him."

"Students often don't work for mocks and work intensely from Easter, that's a result of an exam based system so some students effort up to this date will not reflect their potential grade. This could potentially discriminate against boys. Also, a school I know has already told the kids some of their grades - how can that be? Where is the moderation? I suspect grades will be higher than normal. A major concern is the year 10 and 12 students, they will have missed half a year of face to face teaching - what allowances will be made for them next year? They also have no idea if they will return to school in September so are experiencing additional stress."

"It's unfair worked hard and I believe I didn't pay much attention on my mocks because only mocks and I knew it wasn't there really thing."

"As my mocks or previous exams do not show my full potential as they were only mocks. Not everyone tries they best at mocks as they not the actual GCSE exams. My mocks are much lower than my full potential."

"For my mocks I didn't revise because I thought they ain't important."

"My child was very laid back when he did his mocks in January but when he got the results (which were disappointing) he study hard from January all the way to the start of the lockdown. I tested him with a past paper and all I can say he did astonishing he went from grade 2's to grade 8's. This is why predicting a child using previous work is totally wrong."

These comments demonstrate that the exam centred culture within the British education system has moulded some students to work harder for their actual examinations due to the understanding that final grades rest on the performance of the final examinations. The grades prediction system as it currently stands does not accommodate for this, as a result of which hundreds of thousands of students will potentially be subjected to under-prediction.

4.2.2 Learning style

Attitude towards mock exams was closely interlinked with learning style, a concern raised by 17.6% of participants. This was also in some ways line with the literature cited in chapter 2, while in other ways it provided new insights into the ways in which exam pressure, and the months in the lead-up to exams, provide many students the motivation to work harder. Some of the concerns raised in this regard were as follows:

"Students sometimes go throughout the whole year doing minimal revision but when it comes to real exams they put their heads down and go for it."

"When final exams are due I may have put in more effort than mock exams."

"My performance over the past 2 years isn't a reflection of what I am truly capable of, intensive revision had just started for me and that's when I peak. Also having good relationships with teachers is very important and I feel like my relationship isn't as strong therefore may lead to an unfair grade."

"During now to exams we had quite a long time and frequently this is the main stage where children put their heads down from now to exams and they end up getting better then predicted and I don't see this as being fair"

"It may not be an accurate representation of what I could have done in real exams as nobody takes mocks too seriously. I perform far better under pressure, as do most students."

"Some kids do better under exam pressure"

"Given GCSE results may not fair because some students intended to put in much more effort into taking GCSE's rather than in the mock period."

"I don't know how teachers will simply use past performance. Near the exam season revision gets much higher which would have allowed me to get much higher grades than I am predicted."

"After mock exams, I began to work very hard on independent studying with the intentions of achieving high grades for the GCSE exams, therefore I'm afraid that teachers may grade me lower for any class work I hadn't done to my usual standard. I had prepared myself for the GCSEs, so I'm concerned that teachers might not see that and give me grades lower than what I deserve."

"I'm currently sitting A Levels. I'm generally a relaxed student, who doesn't take unit tests, or mocks seriously as nearly 99% of the time they're not used to indicate your actual a level grade. Unfortunately, this time it's different. Although, I worked hard for my predicted grades last year AAB, my grades throughout year 13 ranged between As and Es. So I have no idea what my A level grades could be. I did the same in GCSEs I was predicted majority 6s (B), a few 5s (C) and a couple 7s (A). And for my actually GCSEs I worked very hard and achieved seven 8s (A), and the rest 7s (A)."*

"I believe a lot of students my age particularly boys don't always pull their weight during mock exams but do significantly improve in the lead up to exams. I personally know people who have even improved by two whole grades, therefore if the predicted grades are grades that were assigned from 6months+ previously I don't believe it necessarily reflects the potential of the students. I believe the grades should be an amalgamation of mock/predicted grades any previous assessed work as well as coursework."

"I agree that I have performed not quite good in my set of mocks and tests in school but that is because I didn't revise for those as I thought they weren't important and I have been revising soooo much for my actual a level exams which are now sadly cancelled "

"As most students do, she was putting her maximum efforts in these last months to go above and beyond her expected grades , well above her efforts in previous internal exams at school. Now with exam cancelled all her efforts will not be reflected in grades."

"My son was immature and did not work hard in the first year. He only realised the importance of us a levels in his second year and knuckled down in October last year. We therefore fear that his grades will be lower than what he would have achieved as his first-year grades do not reflect his potential."

"My son didn't do his best in his mock exams as he assumed it just a mock he has been putting more effort in to it and improved his grade."

Some participants raised leaning difficulties and conditions such as Autism as affecting learning ability, which are not currently accounted for by the grades prediction process.



"Autistic child. Finally getting act together in the home strait (like he did for GCSEs)."

These comments show that there is diversity in learning styles and those that work better under pressure are particularly disadvantaged by the grade predictions process. The grade predictions system as it currently stands does not accommodate for the variety of learning styles, as a result of which hundreds if not thousands of students are at risk of grade under-predictions. We recommend an online test to be devised, which is completed by all GCSE and A-level students that ascertains the type of learner they are, which should then be factored into the predicted grade for each student.

4.2.3 Progress made since mock exams

Learning style and attitude towards mock exams were closely interlinked with progress made since the mock exams. 20.7% of participants stated that they had made progress since the mock examinations and that this was not going to be factored into the predictions they would receive. As a result, they felt predictions were unfair and not an accurate reflection of their achievements. Some of the concerns and comments in this regard included:

"My son's mocks were in November last year and he has been working exceptionally hard since. I fear that the school haven't collected enough data for all subjects and the predictions will not be a true reflection. Some teachers did not like my son and I'm also worried that they make predictions based on emotions."

"As I feel the work I've put in won't be accounted for as teachers don't see work at home or in holidays and I know I've made a lot more progress."

"My child is putting in effort based on feedback from his past and mock exams to plug the gaps identified. He has been working extra hard throughout the holidays to try and push up his grades and all his extra tuition indicates that his grades would actually be higher had he taken his GCSEs."

"My daughter's mock grades were not as high as her predicted grades although she has had much higher grades on work done since."

"Poor mocks, worked very hard since."

"My son is putting a lot of effort in studying but predicted grades were low and he was working very hard to get best possible grades."

"My son as a typical teenager wasn't taking his studies seriously at first but the after his mock exams realised and had started putting in much more effort and was beginning to get much better results with his personal tutor at home."

"Because my child has been working hard these last months nonstop it hasn't been the case the first year."

"My son has working hard every day since Christmas to prepare for his final GCSE exams and now this opportunity is taken away so hence his true GCSE grades will not reflect on his hard work."

"The students would have had many weeks of revision before taking the actual exams where they would've been able to improve on their mock results. It's extremely unfair."

"Worried it won't be an accurate representation of the work put in since the last mock tests also due to the lack of effort that is put into homework and class work as we did not know it would count towards our final grade the actual grade maybe an underestimate of our potential."

"Boys tend to leave studying to the end few months and my son had started studying as was concerned that he needed to do more work to get his required grades...also he was doing one subject in one year so not sure if they have enough evidence to predict his grades."

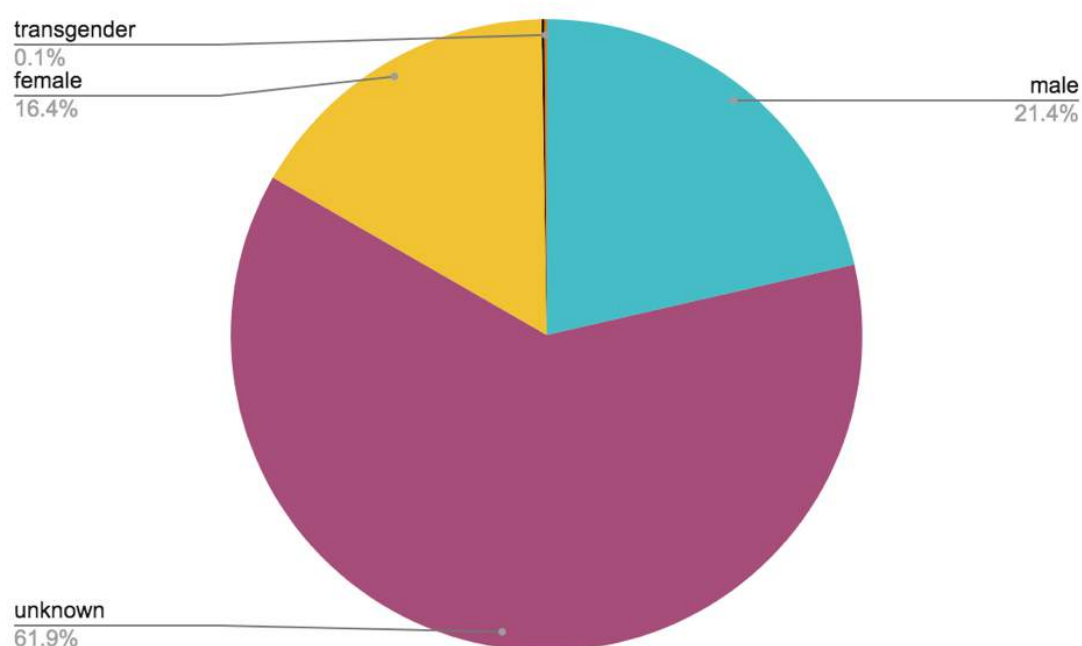
"My son mocks were not very good we put on additional tuition, school interventions etc and they saw a huge input. His teachers have said if he did take the exams he would have got better grades but as they are using his mocks as an indicator it will fail him and it wasn't what he could have got in May 2020 if he took the test as he had progressed two folds."

"Mock exam tests were not fantastic but son has studied hard since."

"Using mocks as a starting point these were taken first week in January. Not a fair reflection of the learning effort that has happened since then. Other schools have had repeat mocks more recently."

The qualitative extracts above demonstrate that students can employ their mock exam grades as part of an iterative process of learning. The current prediction system has no way of measuring the progress made since the mock exams were taken. Furthermore, there seems to be a gendered aspect to learning style, attitude towards mock exams, and progress made since the mock examinations. While the study did not directly ask about the gender of participants, during data analysis we found there to be a positive correlation between the number of students and parents that used the terms "he/his" in expressing concerns about bias surrounding bad behaviour, attitude to mock exams, and learning style. We decided to therefore decipher the gender participants based on the qualitative aspects of the study (gender pronouns, reference to gender, type of school i.e. girls or boys school, name provided). While gender was unknown in the majority of responses (61.9%), we did find that there was greater concern in boys and the parents of boys (21.4%) compared to girls (16.4%) (see Chart 13 below). Although we aim to better explore gender differences in our follow up studies, this data does to some extent confirm the literature on 'laddish' behaviour, which suggests that boys will work harder outside of the school environment for fear of conformity and use pressure as a motivator. In its current form, the grades prediction system does not accommodate for gendered differences to learning approaches, nor the progress made since mock examinations. While we understand it to be difficult if not impossible to factor progress made into predicted grades, we do believe that a personality/learning styles test issued to students electronically should be factored into the predicted grade.

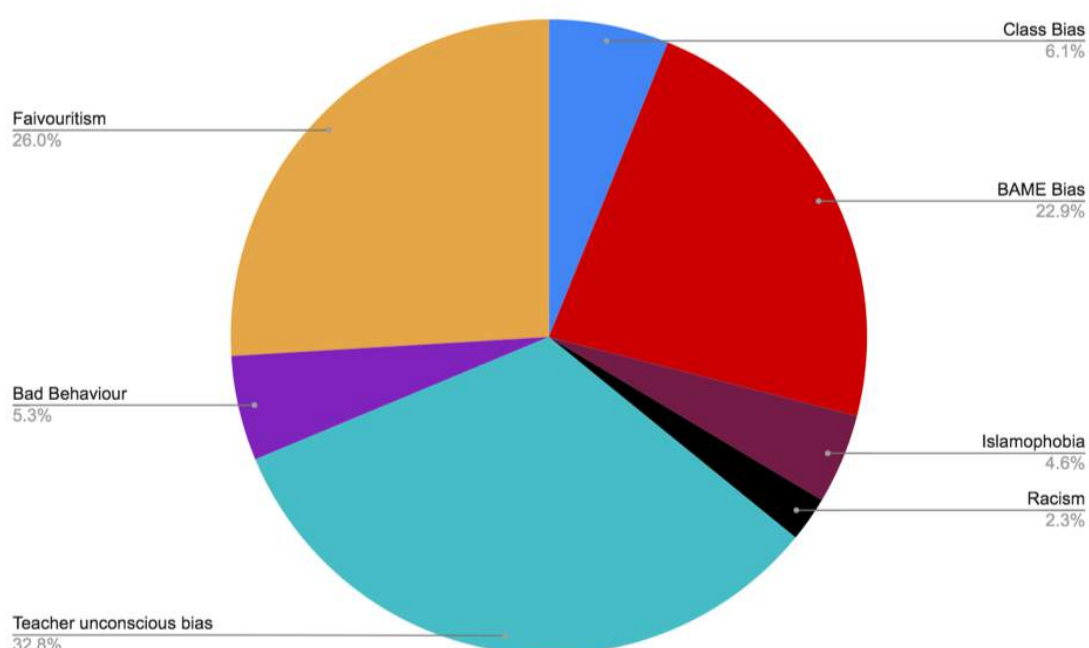
Chart 13: Student responses by gender.



4.2.4 Concerns as per type of bias

Of 642 participants, 128 (19.9%) stated concerns relating to bias. We analysed the data within this category further. The chart below shows the nature of concerns as per bias type. Of the 19.9% (128) of participants that stated bias to be a concern, we found that 26% were concerned that favouritism would be a source of bias, 22.9% stated BAME background as a concern, 6.1% stated class as a source of bias, 5.3% stated bad behaviour as concern for bias from teachers, 4.6% stated Islamophobia/anti-Muslim sentiment as a source of bias, and 2.3% stated racism as leading to bias.

Chart 14: A breakdown of the concerns relating to the nature of bias.



4.2.4.1 BAME Bias

We can nuance the data further by taking a closer look at the qualitative comments that participants included in their responses to the survey. Bias based on BAME identity constituted 22.9% of the concerns for which comments included:

"Teachers often under-predict BAME students grades, as they have intrinsic biases and lower expectations of BAME students."

"It is a known fact that teachers have conscious and unconscious bias which leads to the under prediction of grades of BAME children, which actually exceed. Given that this year children will be receiving grades based on their teachers conscious and unconscious bias, all BAME childrens' life chances will be significantly reduced. This is unfair, wrong and must be stopped."

"Biases against minorities."

"Although I do not wish to undermine teachers' judgement, I feel there may be un/conscious biases which could taint how grades are awarded - I feel this may negatively impact my son and other students of BAME background potentially. My son did ok in his mocks, but performs much better in exams and has not had a chance to truly show off his capabilities - he feels 'robbed' of an opportunity to prove himself."

"People of colour will be disproportionately affected by teacher's predictions. Often, they are people just like me, from low income families and it is important that young people get the results that they deserve."

"I don't want to be graded unfairly because of BAME. Everyone is equal."

"Fair grades not base on ethnicity."

"My children are black. Historically, black children are set lower and given lower predicted grades than they deserve due to implicit bias. This has been well documented and evidenced over the years. There is generally a jump in grades for GCSE as they are externally and anonymously marked."

"Teachers are racist."

"Bias from teacher due to personal like or dislike, ethnic background."

"School has never displayed welcoming attitude towards ethnic minorities."

"Without sounding negative there are some teachers who don't believe in their students as much as you would hope for them to."

"I am extremely concerned that I could be discriminated for being BAME."

"She may not get the grades she deserves due to being from ethnic and religious background."

"My child is an ethnic minority and particularly concerned that an unconscious bias might actually influence the decision maker when they decide my child's grades."

"I feel that children from BAMER backgrounds and social/economically deprived areas will be hindered as they may be predicted lower grades, this is something that does happen and there is research on this. Also children who didn't do well in mock exams may have worked really hard to achieve a higher grade will not get the chance to show this change. There are a high number of cases where mock results and actual results have a massive disparity."

"All my life I have had to work harder to get where I am today and quite frankly I am tired of the fight. I worry that my child will have the same battles as I, but now with the added disadvantage of someone's unconscious bias grading my child's future!"

As we see above, the comments provide a more nuanced insight as to the nature of concerns relating to BAME background. Many participants felt prejudice and discrimination towards BAME students is entrenched into the education system and featured heavily in the school culture. Furthermore, the comments also point towards the indication of BAME as an identity marker tied with class and religion, which will be explored in more detail below.

4.2.4.2 Islamophobia

There is a rich body of literature available on Islamophobia (see Bi: 2020a) which demonstrates that Islamophobic attacks are on the rise. In classroom situations this has been particularly highlighted by (Bi: 2019) in the way a graphic, 18-rated video was shown to 11 year-old BAME students who were largely Muslim (see also Bi: 2020h). The intersection of BAME and religion has also been highlighted in the investigation of the disproportionate number of deaths in the BAME community during the COVID-19 pandemic, as Public Health England appointed Trevor Phillips to an investigation panel. Bi (2020g) argues that given the intersection, the term BAME should be amended to BAMER to include religion (see also: Bi: 2019). The comments of respondents as part of this study further reflect the need for this amendment to be made.

"Even liberal white teachers are subconsciously racist & Islamophobic, given the media and & culture, & look at BAME community as underachievers."

"Teachers know my Muslim name whereas the exams are marked anonymously so I'm being marked for my ability not my religion."

"I am also one of a very small number (less than 5) of Muslims in the sixth form. On parents evening, she [teacher] asked me what I intended to apply to university for. Honestly, I knew before I spoke but her reaction would be and I could hardly get my words out. When I said "medicine" she laughed. She told my mum that I "wasn't medicine material", that she couldn't envisage me achieving this and that I should reconsider my choices as I would not be get any offers if I tried. She was quite rude and dismissive to my mum too. My mum did challenge her to give reasons as to why she thought I couldn't get in to medical school and she said it was because of my "poor GCSE language grade" (I have a grade 7 in this - an A). I got a bit upset and didn't want a fuss in front of everyone, I know my mum sensed this so left it there. She did speak to the school afterwards though, about the way she spoke to us and she did improve after that. Her behaviour did impact me though. That first year in her lessons were awful. I have had to work really hard to make up for that, even self-teaching a lot of her lessons because I found it so hard to be around her. I did manage to get a medicine offer, at my first choice university, but I am scared about what she will do now that my future is in her hands. I have lost my chance to prove her wrong about me."

"Last year, I had to complain to my son's school about the behaviour of a staff member towards my son. The teacher seemed to hold negative stereotypes about my son based on his ethnicity/ religion and where we live. He is not typical of the rest of the cohort but won his place at the school because of his very high GCSE results. Despite this, she continually spoke about him as being mediocre and unlikely to achieve."

The grades predictions system makes it easier to discriminate against already marginalised religious minorities such as Muslims, as student names are not anonymised. There is a wide body of literature that provides robust evidence that demonstrates that Muslim job applicants are penalised during recruitment processes as a result of their Muslim names. The current grades prediction system does not mitigate for this in any way, which is a significant concern given that Muslims are already experiencing difficulties in employment and career development (Bi: 2020a).

4.2.4.3 Class

Another form of bias that was raised was social class as a source of prejudice that some respondents expressed could translate into lower grade predictions. It is important to emphasise that while this is closely linked with BAME groups, a large proportion of participants were from household incomes that exceeded the national average. Furthermore, collectively BAME groups made-up 85% of respondents, the second largest ethnic group to take part in the study was White British. Thus, we ought to exercise care when analysing the data, to ensure that the most robust recommendations and subsequent intervention(s), can be made. Some of the comments included:

"Pupils from less disadvantaged backgrounds will be under-predicted grades especially compared to peers from more affluent backgrounds due to subconscious bias."

"...I am also from a working class background and I have felt that I haven't been giving the same opportunities as my peers when it came down to accessing materials or revision resources even when asking for help."

"The school has a largely affluent student body (representative of the area that it's located in) and we live slightly further away in a town with significant deprivation...I worry this will result in my teachers subconsciously thinking less of me and resulting in them issuing lower predicted grades for me."

"The fact that neither of my parents went to university or college and that we're not well off means that I have not been able to have the same access to equipment and knowledge as others my age, especially those in more well-off areas. Sitting the exam would have allowed me to prove my ability, but now that we're going to be predicted our grades, i 'm not worried that I am going to receive much less than others my age."

"Private schools have continued their online education, they're preparing their students not only for university but also for people who wish to do the exams again in August and October whereas, a lot of the state schools stopped teaching (some of them even before lockdown), and then to expect them to come back after six months and sit those exams and compete with students who completed their syllabus and had those resources available to them shows how social class will worsen attainment gaps."

At present the grade predictions process does not mitigate for the class bias either at the level of possible unconscious/conscious bias by teachers, or the material disadvantages that present with lower class/socioeconomic backgrounds, such as lack of resources.



4.2.4.4 Favouritism

Favouritism was raised as a concern by 26% of participants, for which the comments included:

- "My grades might be condoned by the favouritism of teachers."*
- "Teachers are not the best to judge. They have their favourites. It will be unfair."*
- "We are concerned because the teacher may not like the students as much and give them a bad grade."*
- "Teachers may use favouritism and also give lower grades to students they don't like."*
- "Some teachers might not want me to achieve a good grade."*
- "Teachers who may not like the child deciding to play god with the grade awarded."*
- "The teachers don't like me for some reason they will sabotage the grades of some people in the class and give others they like a*. They will try make it look realistic but it actually is not."*
- "Teacher not liking me."*
- "Teachers are not the best to judge. They have their favourites. It will be unfair."*
- "Progress can be made since the mock exams. Also favouritism might play a factor."*
- "...teachers have favourites so may favour these when making their final predictions."*
- "Teachers did not like me, I believe they won't give me a good grade."*
- "Some teachers may not get on with their students and so may give some biased reviews."*
- "I haven't had the best relationship with my school, and I am concerned that my school could be 'vindictive' towards me and give me a lower grade."*

As with many of the aforementioned factors, the grade prediction system is not equipped at present to mitigate teacher favouritism. In our submission to Ofqual in April (Bi: 2020f), we recommended that teachers undergo bias training prior to calculating predicted grades for students. Based on the results, we recommend that this be made mandatory for all teachers.

4.2.4.5 Bad behaviour

Concerns regarding bad behaviour resulting in bias made up 5.3% of the concerns raised, and were also interlinked with teacher favouritism. Some of the responses included:

- "Because my behaviour is not good so my teachers try get me back by giving me bad grades."*

"Due to having poor relationships between many staff members including my subject teachers"

"He had had some behaviour issues over the years with being disruptive in lessons or not paying attention. He has been doing better and the teachers all agree he is a bright student but I am concerned his attitude towards the teachers and vice versa might impact his grades negatively."

"Teachers did not like me, I believe they won't give me a good grade."

"Some teachers may not get on with their students and so may give some biased reviews."

"I am concerned as one of my sons is at a school which was struggling anyway and due to lack of contact my son will not get the required grades to go to university. I am also concerned that teachers may use this opportunity to blacklist some children and base their final grading on other aspects apart from teaching. ie behaviour etc."

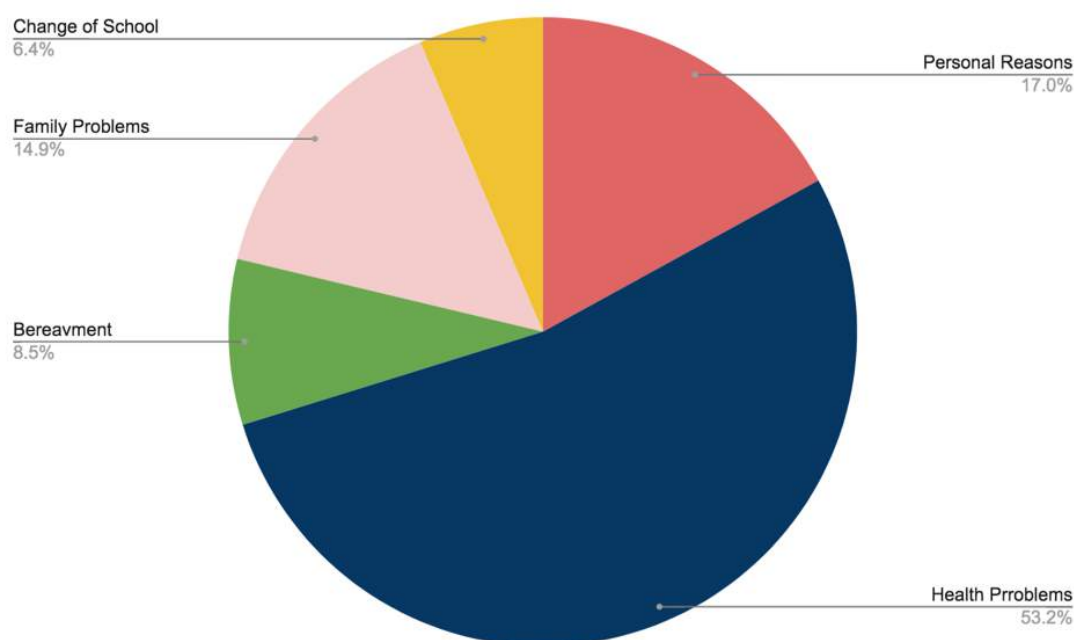
"He had had some behaviour issues over the years with being disruptive in lessons or not paying attention. He has been doing better and the teachers all agree he is a bright student but I am concerned his attitude towards the teachers and vice versa might impact his grades negatively."

As with the aforementioned forms of bias, bad behaviour as a source of prejudice is not currently recognised by the grade predictions system in place. This further points to the urgent need for bias training to be made mandatory but for the training to be inclusive of factors beyond race, ethnicity, and religious background such as favouritism and bad behaviour.

4.2.5 Concerns as per the nature of mitigating circumstance(s)

6.1% (39) of respondents stated mitigating circumstances as having negatively impacted their classroom and mock exam performance. Per Chart 15 below, we found that 6.4% of this group experienced a change of school, 14.9% experienced family problems which impacted their performance negatively, 17% stated 'personal reasons', 8.5% stated bereavement as having impacted their performance negatively, and 53.2% said that they had experienced health complications (including mental health, hospitalisation and organ transplant) which had reduced their ability to complete mock exams and class participation. In our recent submission to Ofqual (Bi: 2020f), we also highlighted the need for mitigating circumstances provisions (such as a form) to be made available to all students and parents if they wished to declare any such circumstances that negatively impacted their previous performances. This would allow teachers to take into consideration any factors before making predictions. Our findings further underscore the need for such an intervention to be made available.

Chart 15: A breakdown of the concerns relating to the nature of mitigating circumstances.



The qualitative extracts that relate to mitigating circumstances include:

"I feel I may have done so much better as I would have put more effort and revision in to my exams and some teachers may not have noticed why some students have been slacking due to personal reasons."

"My child has lost three members of his family during mock exams. His predicted grades went down. He has only just got started to improve with the help of therapy. Unfortunately, the exam boards don't see grieving as an excuse. My child is a high achiever, but this is going to go against him."

"At the start of the mocks my grandad passed away, so my performance wasn't good as a result so solely basing on mocks and predictions is unfair."

"...during My AS year my dad nearly died in an ambulance on the way to hospital as his kidney were not working correctly. A few months later he was diagnosed with cancer (all can be backed up with paper work/documents). So I was constantly visiting him in ICU/hospital and had no motivation to revise, yet with all this going I still managed to scrape predicted AAB which were my mock results not based off that academic year. He's doing much better now, so imagine what I could really get and how hard I'm working now. Before the cancellation, I was working very hard for my a levels which I knew I would achieve 3As, however due to the cancellation of A levels I have no idea what my A level grades will be due to my lack of consistency throughout the years. Lastly, due to my B in my predicted grades I did not receive any offers (I still applied with one low grade as I knew I would get my 3As on result day and I hoped for a place through clearing). If not, I planned on getting my 3As and taking a gap year and reapplying the following year but with the uncertainty around A level grades, will I be forced into another gap year?"

"Had some rough time at home so mocks didn't go great I KNOW I can do better to what ever my teachers predict me. I had a plan."

"Child parent has terminal cancer - exam board usually take this into account for increased marks ... school will not and exam board not involved."

These extracts demonstrate that complex family dynamics and the health of family members, including bereavement, can disrupt learning and prevent students from achieving their full potential. Many students and parents also raised their own mental health or the health conditions that their children were suffering from which impacted their school performance negatively. Example of such accounts are as follows:

"My son has health problems over the years whereas his missed school quite a bit and had not worked well in class works better at home his been revising every day for his grades but the teacher said it will be based on class work with has upset him really he wishes if there is a way he can sit his exams."

"I've had mental health conditions throughout the year, that significantly impacted my studies"

"My son missed a lot of school due to illness. I don't think the teachers have a good sense of his abilities because this."

"Because he is an external student and has diagnosed mental health difficulties which meant he could no longer attend college."

"My child is Dyslexic and just received the pen reader for exams in March. We only just received information about the support he will get coming up to the exams. I feel the predicted grades are extremely low and my son has not had the opportunity to benefit from quality intervention to raise his capabilities. I feel his life chances are being diminished and I am incredibly concerned of his further education prospects."

"My mental health brought my grades down at the beginning of year 13. I had been trying to get them up but I'm not sure if my teachers saw all the work I was doing behind the scenes studying every evening and weekend as my grades only improved by a small amount in the most recent mocks."

"Has Aspergers co parented with Grandparents didn't understand the significance of the mocks as with many boys was a wake up call."

"My brother was waiting for a dyslexia test and / or learning support from week 6 of year 12 for an entire year ... we noticed an A star student slip from A to Ds very suddenly. We finally got him tested privately in September of year 13. He tested positive. The school wasn't giving study skills support until the school confirmed the results. Ultimately it wasn't until November that he was given those study skills and started learning the skills and applying. A rise in his grades in the short space of time was seen but these things take months to adjust to not weeks. We also enrolled him onto intense another learning skills program where they work with the students around 4 hours a day intensely and was truly transformational already and he only began a week before lockdown! If teachers base his predictions on his past as opposed to what he could have got with the new study skills he was picking up on and practicing to use from November till June... things would have been very different - especially since they had already taken a year to test and have him supported since they were short staffed. He now has an offer from the LSE but we don't what they will predict him and how they will possibly consider the progress he would have made. Also his friends at grammar schools or private schools have classes continuing even past the second extension of the lockdown, so making exams available to everyone is also not fair later as some have access to education and e-classes whilst others stopped"*

teaching with disruptions well before lock down. His math for example stopped weeks before lockdown and this was followed by biology. Normalising doesn't handle exceptional cases like this either."

"My child has a learning disability that affects his ability to learn at the same pace as everyone else. He gets extra time to submit assignments and gets extra support in class but this is impossible during test time. If they base the grade on his class test results then he will get a lower grade than he would at a real exam because at that time he would receive extra time in the exam hall, to complete the exam, he would have TA with him to read his questions out, he would be in a separate setting to other students and the marker would be aware of his extenuating circumstances when marking."

"I'm transgender. I've been out to the school for years but some teachers still aren't very accepting. I'm also worried that I won't get my fair grade because I've suffered mental health issues in the past. The mock exams are helping our teachers with grades but the past two mocks have been after I attempted to take my life. Therefore I didn't do my best."

"It has taken a term to settle in, college recently realised he needed extra measures to support dyslexia. His mocks were low and now all efforts from half of spring term and all of summer term will not be realised."

"My son doesn't actually study for mocks and only ever really starts to work when it really counts. He has some learning difficulties, but when it matters he works hard."

"My son is on the autistic spectrum and I am concerned that the predicted grades may not reflect his true abilities."

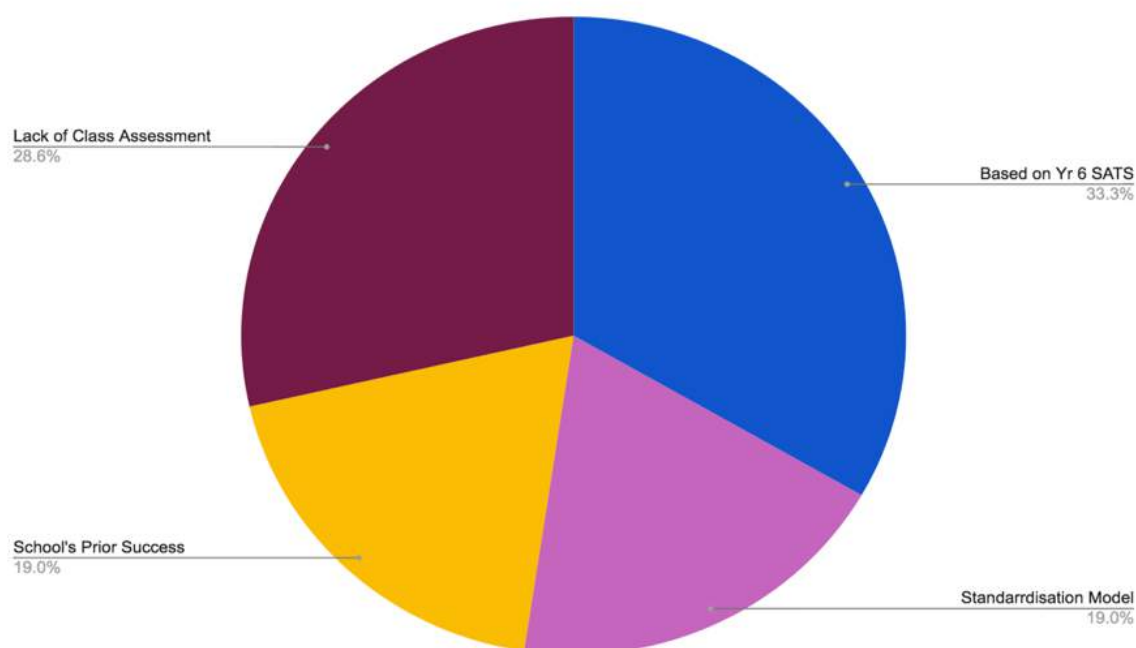
"My son has SEN (ABI). A huge amount has changed for him since his mocks in December. He has moved from a supported class to mainstream classes, he started medication to manage his anxiety and fatigue. There has been a vast improvement in his progress since mocks. He has been able to do hours of revision a day when previously he would have struggled just with the school day. He has put in huge amounts of revision that the school will be unaware of. In most subjects they have not done any assessments since the mocks in December. So his grade will not reflect any of the progress/changes/revision he has done. This in turn will effect his options for Post 16. The government's option for children to be able to take exams in the autumn or next summer is not appropriate for my child. He would not be able to manage to continue to revise for GCSEs whilst taking on an A-level courses. And grades for any exams will come too late for this year's options. This is devastating for my child. This isn't what he signed up for, he expected and focused on taking exams and NOT teacher assessed grades. It is clear from the governments documentation that SEN children are often downgraded by teachers as opposed to their achieved grades."

As we can see from the above extracts, it is clear that a range of mitigating circumstances negatively impact students' performance for mock examinations and classroom assessments. We have previously stated in both our evidence to Ofqual (Bi: 2020f) and our policy briefings that a process must be implemented where students and/or parents can declare any such circumstances that had a negative bearing on their performance (Bi: 2020c, 2020d) and that these should be taken into consideration when predicting grades.

4.2.6 Concerns as per the basis of prediction

A breakdown of concerns as per the basis of prediction is also provided and demonstrated by Chart 16 below. Of 3.2% (21) of participants who raised this as a concern, 28.6% stated that there was a lack of class assessment, as a result of which any predictions made would be unfair and inaccurate. A further 33.33% stated that their predictions were based on what they had achieved in their year 6 SATS, which were outdated and did not reflect the progress made and their capability. 19% of participants mentioned that they had concerns regarding the standardisation model, namely that the ranking of students is unfair and does not capture individual potential and progress. A further 19% of participants stated that some schools were predicting grades using past exam performance of schools, which would be unfair to students from schools in less advantaged areas and/or those from lower socio-economic backgrounds. In our recent submission to Ofqual's public consultation (Bi: 2020f), we strongly objected to basing predictions on the past performance of schools, and also highlighted a number of flaws in the standardisation model, namely that individual potential is eliminated from the process.

Chart 16: A breakdown of the concerns relating to the basis of predictions



The qualitative comments in relation to the above mentioned concerns for the way in which grades are predicted include:

"Worried that the standardisation process will not be fair and will not predict what my actual grades would've been. The Standardisation process sees students as figures rather than individuals. Basing grades on past school performance and on previous students attainment is not in any way an accurate representation of the student. Private schools and grammar schools will be awarded the highest grades and students from a more disadvantaged (WP) background will again be even more disadvantaged even though they may be extremely high performers! Universities and schools have been trying to break these boundaries for many years however this will just stop the process and back trace the progress that has already been made. High performing students from a disadvantaged background should be looked at individually. I don't want this to jeopardise my future career."



The above comment demonstrates that the standardisation model reinforces the already entrenched divides in the British education system, many of which intersect to produce exacerbating effects, as we have thus far demonstrated. In our Ofqual evidence submission (Bi: 2020f) we advised against the standardisation model as individual circumstances are not accounted for. We also advised against taking into account the past performance of the schools as this particularly disadvantages talented students from schools that have performed less well historically. Participants who took part in our study also raised this issue:

"I fear for children from disadvantaged backgrounds with the proposal that past school results will also be taken into account."

Participants also raised concerns that their grades were being predicted based on their SATS performance at the primary school level, which for many at GCSE level would be outdated predictions by five years. As we saw previously, the level of progress students can make in the months and weeks leading up to exams is notable, particularly those who work best under pressure as their preferred learning style. Predictions based on five-year-old test performance risks severely jeopardising the futures of hundreds and thousands of young people. Extracts from the survey include:

"This is because my predicted grades are very low because they were based on my SATS grade. And knowing that our GCSE results will be our SATS grades is really going to affect my future and college placement. I wanted to do my GCSE exams to show I couldn't get the best possible grades then my predicted."

"My daughter has worked really hard during the whole of her time in secondary school and this has been reflected in the grades she's been getting for pieces of work and in tests. However, I had to challenge the school recently as they were still using the predicted grades she entered the school at Year 7 with based on her SATS performance when she was 11 years old. They did succumb to my argument and revised her grades up but still not to the level that she's been achieving. I know she would have outperformed even these grades had she had the opportunity to sit her exams. I'm concerned that she won't get full recognition for the hard work she's put in over the years to secure herself a strong foundation for further study at A Level and beyond. My daughter is of mixed heritage - Black Caribbean and White."

In addition to the above concerns, participants also stated that they had not yet completed all components of required coursework, and as a result were concerned that their grades would not be predicted accurately.

"Some of our BETEC coursework or even GCSE English work hasn't been done fully yet so the teachers only have what we have done so far and I feel as if we could still do better. We are weaker in some things and stronger in others so the ones we are stronger in might not have been looked at yet."

"The course-work was not completed & so mock results at Christmas reflect lower grades than that which would be achieved in June exams. School marks low to incentivise pupils to work harder for summer exams but now has only low marks to show."

"Lack of teacher knowledge of pupils. I have a teacher who will be predicting my grades yet hasn't taught me for over a year..."

Together, the above extracts from the study demonstrate that there are many issues with the grade prediction system in itself that complicate matters further. There is an urgent need for a procedure where students and/or parents are able to declare mitigating circumstances that will allow for the grade predictions process to take into account individual variations and, ultimately, create a fairer process where students and their families do not feel they are being penalised for extenuating situations that have negatively impacted their educational achievements.

4.2.7 Concerns for the future

This chapter has thus far demonstrated the broad range of concerns regarding the grades predictions process. 80% of participants stated they were concerned; however, while the nature of concerns differ, the core reasoning that underpins these concerns are that futures of young people are at risk. In their words, the government's decision to predict grades is not as simple as predicting grades. Rather, the crux of the issue lies in predicting students' futures. The following extracts from the survey demonstrate some of the concerns regarding the risk to futures.

"I'm concerned that the teachers might give lower grades to my son which might have an impact on his A levels entry as well as university applications. My son is planning to study medicine and I'm worried that he was not able to work according to his potentials and receive the grades in his GCSE due to which he might not get into medicine."

"My daughter has mental health issues and refused to go to school because of this. The last 10 months her attendance at school dropped to 60%. She missed out on a lot and I am very worried for her as I know she will struggle again if she gets low grades which were not in her control."

"I'm concerned about the outcome of the generated grade, about how it will effect my future. I've been working hard for my GCSEs and have had no break from my study for almost 2 years. I hope they take these exceptional circumstances into consideration and give us a fair chance to step into next phase of our education."

"Might get a lower grade which will affect my choice going forward."

"I am worried that the grades predicted for me will not meet my university conditions."

"I think this would be detrimental to my career as I have been preparing day and night for my A level exam. I am disappointed that there will not be any exam and decision about my career would be made by my teacher. I am sure I would be better prepared and will secure better results if I sit in my A level exams in June 2020. I might lose this opportunity to get admission in University if decision is left to be made by my school which might ruin my career. Therefore I will not be impressed by the new plan and I fear that the school might discourage me from joining university in September 2020. Therefore, this grading system would not be fair."

"I think this would be detrimental to my son who has been preparing day and night for his A level exam. I am sure he would be better prepared and will secure better results if he sits in his A level exams in June 2020. He might lose his opportunity to get admission in University if decision is left to be made by his school which would ruin his career. Therefore, I won't be happy as a parent to leave my son at the mercy of school decision."

"Because I am concerned I won't get the grades to go to sixth form."

Given that the futures of young people are at risk, it is critical that the system works hard to mitigate negative consequences that may result from predictions. The current proposed process fundamentally lacks design features to mitigate for these.

4.3 Conclusion

In this chapter of the report, findings have not only been presented but analysed in detail, which has provided nuanced insights as to the background of those concerned about the government's decision to predict grades, as well the nature of concerns. We have demonstrated that 80% of those who took part in the study said that they had concerns about their grades being predicted. Of this group, nearly 60% stated two or more reasons for concern. We also found that BAME groups collectively represented 85.8% of all participants and the rate of concern was 71% amongst BAME groups (average of 16 groups). Concerns were varied and broad and related to learning style, lack of resources and support, attitude towards mock exams, mitigating circumstances, and an array of biases including those not previously highlighted. Significantly, we found that the concerns around bias extended beyond bias around BAME students to also included Islamophobia, favouritism, bad behaviour and socio-economic background and class, as sources of bias, which have elsewhere been underrepresented in the discourse surrounding the government's decision to predict grades. We also found that socio-economic background was not positively correlated with greater concern, as 43.2% had a household income that was greater than the national average of £28,500, while 30.2% had a household income below the national average. These findings have placed student and parent concerns at centre stage, further advocating the urgent need to implement these in decision-making processes about grades. Ultimately, as the majority of our respondents have rightly highlighted, these grades impact the futures of young people. Our study is seen to be representative of an more than 4.6 million students (estimated) in the country and therefore, the decisions made this summer as to grades predictions are in fact predicting the futures of more than 4.6 million students.



5. PROTECTING FUTURES

The results have clearly demonstrated that those from BAME and religious backgrounds are concerned about their grades being predicted and that the sources of bias include but are not limited to ethnic and racial identities, religious identity (i.e. islamophobia), class, bad behaviour, learning style. Mitigating circumstances also featured prominently, with many students having experienced extenuating circumstances such as bereavement, mental health issues, and difficult family situations that applied additional stress and pressure for students. With 4.6 million students at risk of grade under-predictions, it is incredibly important that we ensure that bias is mitigated, as this is about more than predicting grades, but predicting futures; futures that are predominantly limited for BAME and religious minority, and disadvantaged students, which are at greater risk as a result of the decision to predict grades in light of exam cancellations due to the Coronavirus. This section of the report therefore focuses on protecting futures, which our efforts must be concentrated towards especially as the findings of the report demonstrate BAME students are at great risk of having their futures jeopardised.

In light of the results detailed in the previous chapter, we recommend that strategies to protect futures of young people at this current time requires a focus around streamlining the grade predictions process to ensure that factors that would exacerbate bias are not used to predict grades. This includes: making bias training a mandatory task for teachers to complete prior to predicting grades, issuing all GCSE and A Level students an electronic test that calculates their learning style and for this to be factored in to their predicted grades, and to issue all parents and students a form providing an opportunity to declare mitigating circumstances that are also accounted for in the final predicted grades.

5.1 BAMER Index

In our evidence submission to Ofqual in April 2020 (Bi: 2020f), we recommended that the heads of centre assessments should make a commitment to equality and integrity not only by way of statements, which can at times be performative tick box exercises, but by providing clear evidence of where they have adhered to equality and integrity practices, such as through the completion of bias training prior to making student grade predictions. We recognise that the evidence for bias training is conflicting, as some evidence suggests that it can be counterproductive (Duguid and Thomas-Hunt: 2015). However, as Emerson (2017) shows, bias training can be useful if tailored for the context and industry. Building on this we propose that if teachers were made aware through training of the different types of bias – as per the results in the previous chapter – that they would be more conscious of under-predicting. Furthermore, since bad behaviour and favouritism were raised as significant forms of concerns by respondents, we recommend that all teachers declare any such conflicts with students, and for those students to be graded by teachers who they did not have a negative relationship with.

To mitigate for race, ethnicity, religious bias, we recommend devising an index that calculates the percentage increase for students who are at a disadvantage for the aforementioned characteristics and that this should be in the region of a 1-10% grade inflation. The components of the calculation of this index should include (but not limited to) using (a) educational disparity for each ethnic group from the average GCSE and A-Level attainment levels and (b) earning in employment disparity for each ethnic group from the average salary at 25. We also recommend that the historic performance of assessment centres should not be taken into consideration when predicting grades, as this approach excludes individual circumstances of students as well as inflating student performances in affluent areas compared to those in less affluent areas with fewer resources. We argue that this strategy would exacerbate the disadvantage for capable and talented students from less advantaged and affluent areas in particular. Some of these factors have been raised in the study responses (chart 15).

5.2 Learning Style Index

Our study revealed that 17.6% of students had concerned about their learning style, namely that they worked harder under pressure nearer to the exams and after their mock exams had taken place, 12.6% said that they did not take mock exams seriously or that they used the mock exams to highlight areas they needed to improve on, and a further 20.7% participants stated that they had made significant progress since sitting their mock exams and that teachers were unaware of this progress. This data together suggests that half of 50.9% of all respondents' concerns related to the way in which they processed information and prepared for their examinations. Since such a large proportion of respondents felt this way and since at present the grade prediction system does not accommodate for learning styles, we recommend issuing all GCSE and A-level students with an electronic survey that they can complete in the comfort of their homes, while adhering to social distancing guidelines. The survey would comprise of questions pertaining to their personality and learning style (deduce whether students are visual, auditory, kinesthetic or reading/writing learners), include questions pertaining to the length of time spent revising, at what point prior to examinations do students begin to work hard, whether they view mock exams as an opportunity to improve. After completing the survey, a score would be calculated which would then be added on to their predicted grade. In other words, we propose a learning style index to be devised that would mitigate the differences in the way students learn and prepare for exams. We suggest that the test In this way, students that excel under pressure will not be penalised for their learning and/or cognitive style. This would be particularly helpful for a large cohort of BAME students (particularly boys) who stated that they work best under pressure and in the weeks and months running up to the exam period.

5.3 Mitigating Circumstances Index

Mitigating circumstances such as family dynamics, bereavement, and health complications including mental health issues were raised by a number of respondents. Due to the often taboo nature of such issues especially surrounding mental health in BAME communities, we believe these figures to be underreported. Furthermore, given that BAME students come from backgrounds that are more likely to be unstable, the family dynamics and issues surrounding family and household may also be underreported. As a result, Ofqual and the DfE must instill a culture where declaring mitigating circumstances is normalised. For the current situation we find ourselves in and to protect the futures of our youth, it must be made mandatory for all assessment centres across the country to provide

mitigating circumstances forms to students and parents/guardians to complete, if they wish to declare any such circumstances that they feel has negatively impacted the student's performance for class assessment and mock exams. We recommend the form should include questions such as, when did the circumstance/difficulty begin, was the school previously notified, do you have any supporting materials (i.e. medical notes), provide details as to how this impacted educational attainment and/or performance. This form should be returned to the student's assessment centre and factored in the grade predictions process by way of inflating the grade in the region of 1-10% to account for the negative impact.

These circumstances should be taken into consideration when making grades predictions for students, in a similar fashion to the previously mentioned BAMER and learning style index, we propose that an index for mitigating circumstances also be devised to eliminate further bias. At present, the proposed guidelines do not allow for grades predictions to account for such circumstances to be factored in, however implementing such an index, enables the system to account for individual circumstances thereby negating the bias entrenched in the standardisation model.



6. CONCLUSION

The aim of this report was to centre the voices of students and parents as to the government's decision to predict grades in light of exam cancellations due to the coronavirus pandemic. We received 803 responses to the electronic survey we shared between 5th April 2020 and 1st May 2020. We found that 85.8% of the respondents were BAME (16 groups). Overall, 80% of all respondents were concerned about their grades being predicted and while the rate of concern varied for each BAME group, the average rate of concern for BAME groups as a collective was 71%. Furthermore, we found that 80.9% of respondents did not receive free school meals and 30.2% were from backgrounds where the household incomes below the national average of £28,500, which suggests that students from all socioeconomic backgrounds—though at differing rates—were concerned about their grades being predicted. We also found that student and parental concerns about grade predictions related to a number of factors, which included BAME identity bias, attitude towards mock exams, learning style, progress made since mock exams, mitigating circumstances, Special Educational Needs (SEN), disrupted schooling, lack of resources (impacted by teacher attrition rate and intersectionality of class and race/ethnicity), English as a second language, and basis of prediction. More than half of participants (58.82%) were concerned for two or more reasons, which also indicates that BAME students are likely to have more complex life circumstances and experiences that can negatively impact educational performance. In analysing some of the concerns further, we found that concerns around bias transcended BAME identity and included favouritism, bad behaviour, Islamophobia, and class. These factors have not received attention in the mainstream discourse surrounding grade predictions. Furthermore, we also found that mitigating circumstances such as bereavement, health conditions (including mental health), family issues, and what some respondents referred to as personal reasons, have all significantly impacted student performance.

All of the above-mentioned factors are not currently accounted for in the grades prediction system, but aspects of the proposed process for predictions exacerbate these factors, such as the standardisation model and the decision taken to employ a school's past performance in the predictions. These proposals severely risk the futures of young people who are from disadvantaged and/or BAME backgrounds, as they will likely not have attended schools in affluent areas that have performed well in previous years, and their individual circumstances are not accounted for. Thus, it is paramount that the Department for Education and Ofqual consider the findings of this report as well as our submissions to the Ofqual public consultation (Bi: 2020f), submitted in April 2020, to make changes to the grade predictions process, in order to mitigate bias. In light of the findings, we make the following recommendations:

1. BAMER Bias Index: In order to mitigate bias against Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic and religious groups, we recommend devising an index that calculates a grade inflation between 1-10% which should be added to the final predicted grades for students from these backgrounds.

2. Learning Style Index: We recognise that students have varied learning styles and those from BAMER backgrounds are likely to employ social and community capital to work towards the exams. We also recognise that boys from BAMER backgrounds are more likely to work harder outside of the space of the school due to 'laddish' behaviour norms. Students also highlighted that they work harder under pressure and nearer to the exams. As a result, we recommend that a learning style test be devised by DfE (on which we would be happy to consult) and for this to be sent to every GCSE and A-level student. The score obtained from the test should be used to inflate the predicted grade between 1-10% based on the learning style.

3. Mitigating circumstances Index: Given that BAMER students are more likely to have unstable family backgrounds exacerbated by an array of intersectional factors, we recommend that to account for individual circumstances that have negatively impacted student performances, all students be provided a form on which they can declare any such circumstance(s) that have hindered their academic performance. This form should be returned to their assessment centre and factored in the grade predictions process by way of inflating the grade in the region of 1-10% to account for the negative impact.

4. Bias Training for Teachers: In order to mitigate bias towards BAME students, we recommend that all teachers involved in grade predictions undertake bias training before doing so. Furthermore, since respondents stated that favouritism and bad behaviour may also play a role in bias and under-predictions, any teachers who are involved in the predictions of grades for students with whom their relationships have been strained should excuse themselves from the process for those students and allow another teacher to make the prediction in an independent way. These measures should be declared as having been conducted and adhered to in the assessment centre's equality and integrity statements when the grades are sent to the exam board. If these recommendations have not been complied with, we recommend that the grades for the students from the centre in question not be accepted.

5. Practice Grade Predictions: We also recommend that all assessment centres and teachers working within them practice making predictions for students on test cases before they attempt to make predictions for actual students. Feedback should be provided for each test case and only after the practice grade predictions are of an acceptable standard should the teachers be permitted to predict grades. This is a method already employed by exam boards for examiners who mark exams and should therefore not be difficult to replicate or introduce across the board.

6. Independent Appeals Process: We recommend that a centralised and uniform appeals process is applied for all exam boards and assessment centres, in order to avoid conflicting information and increase ease of access for students and/or their parents/guardians. We recommend that in the event that students wish to appeal their grades, they contact their assessment centre in the first instance however, if the centre refuses to appeal the result then the student(s) be provided the opportunity to contact the exam board directly. Further, appeals should be treated on a case by case basis and these should not lead to the grade decrease of other students (see also Bi: 2020f).

Our report findings demonstrate that the process of grade predictions is about more than predicting grades, but rather is also about predicting the futures of our young people. As demonstrated clearly in this report, the current process severely risks the futures of young people, particularly those from BAMER backgrounds. The recommendations above, then, are an attempt at protecting the futures of these students.

We understand that the recommendations are time sensitive and we therefore urge the DfE and Ofqual to implement them as a matter of urgency so that bias can be eliminated from the process as much as humanly possible. We will monitor student concerns and the educational, employment, and social outcomes after the summer of 2020 to evaluate the predictions process and ensure that if young people have been negatively impacted by the grade predictions system, we will seek to understand the issues and offer tailored solutions to continue to protect their futures. There is a strong imperative for this action and action on behalf of Ofqual to ensure that the global pandemic does not form an additional structural limitation to young people fulfilling their potential and achieving their dreams.



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