

# Equality Act Review Campaign Policy Briefings

To inform Government and Parliamentary Debate

## Grade Prediction Predicament: How to Mitigate Disadvantage for Students during the Coronavirus Pandemic.

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In 2010 when I applied to University via UCAS from an inner-city disadvantaged area in Birmingham, **I was told by my sixth form careers advisor that I would receive rejections from all five university options. If I had my grades predicted by my teachers, I would never have been able to study at Magdalen College Oxford University, let alone complete a PhD and teach at SOAS University of London.**

The purpose of me retelling this very personal experience, is to demonstrate how **under-prediction of BAME applicants is a real occurrence that can have dire consequences on a young person's future educational, employment, and social outcomes.** Due to the coronavirus all **GCSEs, AS, and A Level exams have been cancelled** and the government has called for **teachers to issue predicted grades** based on their assessments of students' performance thus far. I am **severely concerned about the government's decision, as the research in the area is clear; there is widespread under-prediction of achievements for BAME applicants** (see Wyness: 2017).

In a recent report titled *"Empowered Employment: Unlocking the Workplace for Muslim women"* (Bi: 2020a), **a significant loss of aspiration and talent between the ages of 14-22 was reported. Where 79 of 425 women wanted to be doctors at age 14, at age 22, only 1 of 79 became a doctor.** This age span is inclusive of the GCSE, AS and A-Level assessments that have been cancelled due to coronavirus. Heath and Li (2015) have also reported that British Muslims are already disadvantaged in the labour market, **earning £350 less per month than any other religious group. The widespread underprediction of grades during the coronavirus pandemic could severely inflate the earning differentials between ethnic and religious minority groups for decades to come.**

Furthermore, research conducted with students who studied at alleged Trojan Horse Affair schools in

inner-city Birmingham (Bi: 2020), demonstrated that there were **heightened levels of anxiety and depression amongst the student body, due to potential discrimination they may be subjected to as a result of their schooling backgrounds.** It is therefore important to ensure the way in which grades are predicted in light of the exam cancellations, **do not further inflate the mental health experiences** that young persons from BAME/disadvantaged backgrounds are likely to already be experiencing. **It is important that equality of opportunity is extended to all as well as the equality of aspiration to achieve.**

We therefore make the following **recommendations** for the Department for Education, Schools, Ofqual and Universities:

1. Provide teachers with information and training on conscious and unconscious bias prior to predicting grades, in order to mitigate the discrepancies.
2. Raise awareness about mitigating circumstances applications amongst students and teachers.
3. Consider increasing grades for students from BAME/disadvantaged backgrounds to be applied to final predicted grades.
4. Encourage Universities and Sixth Forms to lower their grade boundaries for BAME/disadvantaged students.

### Selected References and Resources

Bi, S. 2020a. [Empowered Employment: Unlocking the Workplace for Muslim women](#). *Muslim Women Connect*.

Bi, S. 2020b. Double-Edged Panopticons: Increased Anxiety, and Deflated Islamic Identities: A child-centred perspective of the Trojan Horse Affair. *Journal of Muslim Minority Studies*, Issue 40:2.

Heath, A. & Li, Y. 2015. [Review of the relationship between religion and poverty - an analysis for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation](#). CSI Working Paper.

Wyness, G. 2017. [Rules of the Game: Disadvantaged students and the university admissions process](#). *The Sutton Trust*.