

Yorkshire and Humber Youth Voice Steering Group
 c/o Youth Work Unit – Yorkshire & Humber
 Stringer House, 34 Lupton Street
 Hunslet, Leeds
 LS10 2QW

Sir, Madam

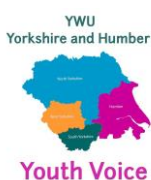
I am writing to you today on behalf of the Yorkshire and Humber Youth Voice Steering Group. We have worked with young people across the region to compile this document on their concerns about what is happening with the education during this period of uncertainty.

In this document, the young people have expressed concerns in a range of topics from exams to support and guidance to UCAS. Within each section there will be a keynote to take from each part but will also be all the statements that the young people made. Alongside this there will be a question section that the young people have asked and would like some guidance with.

We would be extremely grateful for any response from this document and any answers we can get to the questions or statements that have been made. We would like any responses to this document by the week commencing 6th July.

Kind Regards

Yorkshire and Humber Youth Voice Steering Group.



Introduction

The Yorkshire and Humber Youth Voice Steering Group (YHYVSG) have collated information from young people and created this paper on the issues and concerns young people have regarding education. This was supported by the Youth Work Unit Yorkshire & Humber.

The YHYVSG is a group made up of one young person from each Local Authority alongside young people representing national boards e.g. DCMS Youth Policy group, Bank of England Youth Forum. These young people run events like the BYC conventions and other regional events.

The education document is a chance for young people to voice their concerns and questions about education throughout COVID-19.

Key Points

We have devised some key points to take away from the paper. These are:

- The provision of education has been sporadic across the Yorkshire and Humber region. It has been based on what school you are at.
- Not all young people have been able to fully access education from home due to a lack of internet access and digital equipment.
- Some young people have been sent 10 hours' worth of work a day compared to others which have been sent little to nothing.
- Young people are concerned with how they will be graded for their exams.
- Some young people have received no guidance from their school or college about their next steps.

Exam Technique

Each student incorporates their own exam strategies. For current Year 11 and 13's, a large emphasis has been placed on the grading of recent mocks completed close to the exam season. These mock grades are now much more important than students initially realise or could have ever anticipated.

Some students who were set to take exams this year (including myself), placed a larger emphasis on continuing to cover the whole curriculum during mock-exam week, in terms of their revision, even though students were only assessed on a few topics of work. By refusing to confine themselves to the mock exam subjects, these students are generally awarded a lower grade in their mocks while in their external exam, their awarded grade is much higher. This is because, in their revision, students continue to cover the whole course- rather than mock-exam topics.

This is one of the many reasons why mock exam results can vary significantly from actual exam results, or the final results that a mock may telegraph.

In summary, teachers must be advised to use their professional judgement appropriately and recognise that each student approached their mock exams slightly differently and a lower grade may not indicate poor performance, but an ability to sacrifice their time for something more important to them; the final external exam grade.

- Robin Gibbons (Sheffield Youth Council)

In speaking to many young people, in both Y11 and Y13, in my constituency, I have found there to be great concern about the use of mocks to inform the 'predicted grades' which students will get to replace what would have been their final exam grade at the end of the academic year.

There are a whole host of reasons why there is often a disparity in the academic competence that is displayed in a mock exam in contrast to a final exam, and it is difficult to explain concisely, due to all the factors at play. What is clear, however, is that mock exams are too much of a faulty foundation to build an end-of-year estimated grade for students off. The folks I talked to fully understand that other things, as well as mock performance, will be taken into account when the teachers come to make these decisions about their end of course grades. Having said that, they plead for more certainty and information as to how exactly the government intends mock exam grades to be taken into account, and what role it will play in the final decision.

- Joseph Ward (York Youth Council)

Key points:

- Students are told to revise the whole curriculum just before their mocks to then be assessed on just a handful of those topics. Therefore, the grade that some of the students receive are lower in the mock exams than their potential and what they would receive from their actual GCSE exam.

- Teachers must be advised to use their professional judgement and recognise students approaches their mock exams slightly different, so the slightly lower grade does not indicate poor performance.
- Clarity of information surrounding how exactly the government intends mock exam grades to be taken into account, and what role it will play in the final decision.

Exams

Revert to the old GCSE ways, be less reliant on exams and have coursework or open book exams to give a true representation of the child's potential. It makes it easier to track and predict grades, this causes less stress and anxiety which could help decline mental health related issues.

- Isobel Andrews (North Lincolnshire Youth Council)

One of the things that the young people of York have expressed disgruntlement with, is the constant reshaping of the GCSE system. GCSEs are incredibly important as, not only are they the prerequisites to A-levels in terms of practicing technique, informing your decisions and qualifying your further education, but they even carry weight in your adult life too. It seems then, that it is a fair assumption to make that the GCSE system should be designed to allow students to unlock their potential and flourish academically.

However, one of the main issues with the current system that the folks who I spoke to have, is that the current assessment system is too heavily based on examination, with the relatively recent removal of coursework for a great number of subjects.

If the function of the GCSEs is to prepare us for education and employment in later life, then why don't reflect those things in their assessment? In further education, exams slowly become less significant the further along you go, with coursework becoming increasingly relevant, and in employment you find that the structure of coursework fits much more with the work that most people do, rather than that of exams. Therefore, it seems counter-intuitive that GCSEs should move more towards exams than coursework, and contrary to their purpose - to prepare us for the academic and cognitive challenges of life that are yet to come.

- Joseph Ward (York Youth Council)

I know it has been stated that results day will remain the same, but does this leave enough time for people to appeal their grades, decide if they want to resit or move forward with the grades they were awarded?

- Rosie (North Lincolnshire Youth Council)

Again, results day is remaining the same, meaning we don't have much time to evaluate whether or not we should re-sit or not. As well as this, if the resits are to be held around September-November time, this will leave us inadequate time to revise. How will we deal with the pressure of having to juggle intense a-level study with GCSE re-sit revision?

- Olivia (York Youth Council)

The ambiguity of 'teacher assessment' is highly concerning for many students. Also, how are Yr. 11 students supposed to remember their content without teacher aid if they choose to resit in Autumn. The appeal system seems unclear and overall causes mental distress for all students at this time.

- Evie C (Leeds Youth Council)

This crisis has made a universal truth clear; our schools, colleges and universities are education factories, more interested in preparing us to pass exams than developing us as critical thinkers and global citizens. Our education system often teaches us to compete with our rivals, not to collaborate with our friends. This inaccessible, competitive environment - influenced by the devastating marketisation of our education sector - is an obvious indication that our schools are not fit for purpose. The whole concept of exams themselves are ridiculous, and whether you are fond of them personally or not, everyone can agree that they are an unfair, invalid showcase of a student's ability. A shift back towards continuous, drawn-out work - such as coursework - or just a complete overhaul of the GCSE system in exchange for this. Not only do multiple trade unions support this, but so do so many young people. Our education must be shaped by those who use it.

- Jude Daniel Smith (Sheffield Youth Council)

The effect this may have on people who are planning to take a gap year before university- I've been told to wait until results day to defer, but with no reason why, so does this mean potentially I may not be able to take a gap year? Also, if A-Level students received a grade they were unhappy with and wanted to challenge it and take the autumn exam-if they came out with a lower result than that which their teacher predicted them, which grade would they have to stick with? And finally, for those wanting to go to university this year- with them being told by some universities that their first semester will or may be online, will this reduce the amount of fees they have to pay?

- Shona (Sheffield)

Key Points:

- Be less reliant on exams and have more coursework or open book exams in GCSEs to give a true representation of the young person's potential. With coursework it makes it easier to track and predict grades.
- Make GCSE on par with further education as when you go further into education, people are tested more with coursework than exams as it proves what the individual can do more than one or two exams at the end of the year.
- Will students have enough time to go through the appeals process to decide if they want to resit or go forward with the grades they have been rewarded.
- The appeal system seems unclear and can cause mental distress for all students at this time.
- Our education system must be shaped by those who use it.
- Will university students that have to do some of their studies online have a reduced tuition fee for that time?

Response to announcement on the opportunity to take exams the following year if you disagree with your result:

“I think it’s really annoying that all they seem to be doing is giving us the chance to re-sit, if you’re going into college whether you’re doing A-levels, a BTEC or an apprenticeship how do they expect us to fit in all our college work and then revise and have the added stress of sitting exams? for me, it almost leaves me with no choice, I’m just going to have to take the grades I get.”

“think I’ve got an idea of what grades I’m going to get ish from my mocks, but I’m probably going to be disappointed with some grades, knowing I could’ve done better in the final exams, but it would be practically impossible for me to re-sit”

(Liv York)

“We literally have to enrol and decide what we’re doing either the day of results or a couple of days later depending on which college we go to”

“it leaves students not enough time to decide choice and prepare as it’s less than a month before college starts” (Dylan – Filey)

“Aren’t they most likely to grade down as well?” (Aimee – Richmond)

“Yeah, I saw something literally the days before yesterday about teachers grading too high, and now I’m some cases grades getting put down by 1/3” (Liv – York)

Key points:

- Young People and Parents need clear information on next steps and how they will be supported going forward.
- Business need clear information so young people aren’t penalised in the jobs market.

Year 10s and 12s

It is vital that the government issues a clear contingency plan, and detailed information as to how, if at all, the policy on Y10 and Y12 mock and final exams are to change.

The closure of schools has meant that Y10s and Y12s have had to teach themselves, to different degrees, the most crucial parts of their A-level and GCSE courses. They are doing this in the face of much uncertainty, and completely in the dark about how they will be expected to perform, and if any special considerations will be made. There is no doubt that GCSEs and A-levels for Y10s and 12s will be significantly more difficult for each year respectively, than the year before, as the quality of learning when teaching oneself, is in no way equivalent to being taught at school.

The government needs to be clear on what their plans are for these two-year groups who are faced with this huge challenge which our education system was fundamentally unprepared for.

- Joseph Ward (York Youth Council)

I think the Year 10s and 12s need more support going forward because they will have missed many months of teaching and are still expected to sit exams.

- Rosie (North Lincolnshire Youth Council)

It would be massively reassuring if some advice were given about what sort of exam situation the year 10s and 12s would face (reduced grade boundaries, teachers being able to only teach a smaller portion of the courses etc), particularly for Y12 who need the grades for university

- Charlotte M (Leeds Youth Council)

A clear plan and guidelines as to what support will be given to Year 10s and 12s to ensure that they're successful in their exams needs to be issued asap. At the moment a lot of students are essentially teaching themselves their GCSE and A level courses and all over the country people are in completely different situations with some students having lots of support with scheduled lessons and others with minimal support and an overwhelming amount of course material just being sent to them at the beginning of the week. I simply just do not know how they are expected to sit their exams the same as previous years, apply to universities without any open day visits and not enough prep time for applications, it isn't fair and considering this is the next generation of workers the government isn't addressing young people at all.

- Julija Solovjova (North Lincolnshire Youth Council)

I think we should work on getting students back to a sense of normality especially in exam years. I agree that it is a good idea to aim to get students back to lessons before Summer where possible. Dependent on circumstances, this could be carried out as soon as possible to limit damage to education but also help students with their mental health. Whilst schools provide education, which many continue to give during this period, the support mentally from teachers and classmates should not be underestimated. I feel this is compromised at the moment as although the internet allows for some connection, this is limited.

- Liberty (Leeds Youth Council)

Key Points:

- A clear plan needs to be published about how Y10 and Y12 mock and final exams are going to change.
- More guidance needs to be published about what will happen in September for Y10 and Y12

Support and Guidance from schools

Our school is not teaching. They are just sending PowerPoints and worksheets expecting the students to teach themselves. This has meant I am spending my week teaching my sisters their GCSEs.

The staff are also not online to provide help during the allocated lesson period meaning the students are having to work beyond normal school hours just to get the work completed as there is no support online when they need it.

Could the schools be supported in delivering virtual lessons rather than just expecting the students to teach themselves?

- Rosie (North Lincolnshire Youth Council)

Before the school closures a teacher at my school said that online schooling will never work. There will never be a guarantee that teachers or students will have a solid connection to WIFI, even though our school has provided such resources for students who maybe don't have access to such things like WIFI or electronic appliances. Different schools also are doing different kinds of online learning, some of a worse quality than others due to their home learning policy.

I don't see how it's fair that some students are getting 5 hrs of daily 'face to face' support, being guided through their studies - whilst others are just being given power points or worksheets and expected to just work through them alone - possibly putting their future grades in jeopardy, this is literally giving some students significant advantage over others.

- Olivia (York Youth Council)

The lack of a standardised national policy on home-schooling and online learning in the face of Covid-19 has not only created unequal opportunity but it has put the students of a number of schools in a position where they are unable to attain the academic success that they could be, or that children in other schools are.

The way that schools are teaching their students during this crisis has not been nationally standardised, which means that different schools are making, unfortunately, varying efforts to have their kids learn the relevant content. This is not good enough. Some schools are making an effort with zoom calls and online classes. Some schools are just sending their students resources and expecting them to teach themselves content of varying degrees of difficulty, all the way up to A-Levels.

What these young people need from the government is official and standardised advice to schools on how to conduct their online learning so that pupils and students across the nation get the best standard of education possible.

- Joseph Ward (York Youth Council)

Year 11 and Year 13 should be the VERY last group to go back to school (if they have to). Why should important teachers waste their time teaching lessons to students who no longer have exams?

What is going on with Y11's NVQs? We still have not had an answer yet.

- Finnan (Hull Youth Council)

Lots of students are being given unrealistic amounts of work/deadlines on their work. For me personally I've had two days to do a 47 slide PowerPoint for one of my classes, which should have taken an hour but took closer to three. This is giving me concern for my peers who are already struggling mentally during these times, but when given a high volume of work they're really struggling. Students should be able to give their teachers feedback on how much work is being set to keep the balance.

- Charlotte M (Leeds Youth Council)

Having "bridging" work set for current year 11 and 13s for their next step is fine. However, many students are finding this unrealistic to balance with work they are still being set for exams that they will never do. I think lots of exam year students would prefer to be able to focus on only the most necessary learning right now.

- Charlotte M (Leeds Youth Council)

Work for Year 11s/13s should absolutely not be based around the exams we will no longer do - it would be helpful if we knew which post 16 provider we were attending before August, so we could contact them directly for bridging work.

- Evie C (Leeds Youth Council)

Key Points:

- Some schools are not teaching. They are sending out PowerPoints expecting students to teach themselves. Staff are not online to help students in the allocated lesson time which is resulting in students having to work outside of school hours.
- It was stated before school closures by teachers that online learning will not work as there isn't digital connectivity yet for everyone because some students don't have access to WIFI or laptops.
- There isn't a clarity of teaching between schools, so students are getting different quality of teaching.
- There should have been a national standard/policy of home teaching and since there hasn't been one it has created an unequal opportunity for students.
- Students are being given an overload of work by their teachers so they can get the course finished early, but it is causing the students to fall further behind and causing damage to their mental health.
- Y11 & Y13 students are being given work for exams that they are not going to be sat but given no support from the staff.

Induction

Virtual university open days are not adequate for current Year 12 students. They should simply be moved to later in the year so they can be in real life. It's too much of a commitment for students to make to apply to university in a city they have never visited.

Many young people who are moving from primary to high school, or from high school to sixth form/college are receiving no induction for their next step. This is the same case for 4-year olds who will be going to primary school for the first time. Lots of stress and anxiety will be caused as pupils are thrown into the deep end.

- Charlotte M (Leeds Youth Council)

Key Points:

- Virtual open days are not adequate for students as students are expected to choose from a virtual day then move and spend the next three years of their lives there. Open days should be moved to later dates.
- Students are not getting their induction day when they move to a new school, so it is causing a lot of anxiety and stress.

UCAS

I have spoken to many year 12 students in North Lincolnshire and they have all expressed the view that the UCAS deadlines should be pushed backwards. None of the year 12s have been able to attend university open days. This means they have not been able to make an informed decision about what course they want to study or where they want to go. Many have not received any support from their school/college with regards to their personal statement. I believe that current deadlines are unrealistic and should be pushed back to allow students the time to attend open days and help them to make fully informed decisions.

- Rosie (North Lincolnshire Youth Council)

Key points:

- UCAS deadlines should be pushed back as no students have had chance to attend open days. This causes them not to make an informed decision.

Educational Institutions and Staff

The varied experienced of youth people, might be partly down to similar issues experienced by young people when engaging with the non-formal education sector – youth work.

While there has been an acknowledgement that young people may struggle to engage online due to a range of barriers; limited or no access to technology, WIFI / data, dislike of working online, poor emotional well-being.

Learning from the Youth Sector suggests these barriers can equally be applied to Staff.

These challenges are exacerbated by the use of various conferencing / learning platforms by different agencies (statutory vs voluntary / school vs youth work provider vs health) in response to safeguarding, a desire to protect children and young people's GDPR and cost.

For example, some platforms are being utilised as they come free as part of inhouse software packages (e.g. teams and skype are part of 365). Agencies without this platform, are utilising other either free or paid for platforms.

The majority of platforms are aimed at 16+ and require the devise owner's permission to download. Although there can be confusion with regards to US and UK GDPR age requirements.

Key points:

- Have all staff been provided equipment and access to WIFI – to be able to work from home?
- Have all staff been trained to deliver online, including understanding the pros and cons of different platforms, GDPR and online safeguarding?
- Are all staff comfortable and confident to deliver online?
- Do organisations have resources to do this?

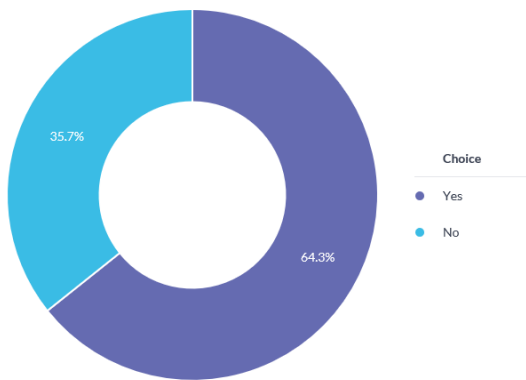
Additional evidence / information provided by Barnsley Youth Council.

COVID-19 Pandemic Home Education Survey 2020

After a recent Yorkshire and Humber meeting with other Youth Councillors from across the region, Barnsley Youth Councillors created a survey to gather the wider youth voice of Young People within Barnsley on how schooling and education has been handled during the COVID-19 pandemic. This survey was put out on social media and had 14 responses and below is the data.

Q1 Did you get sent a work pack at the start of lockdown from your education setting?

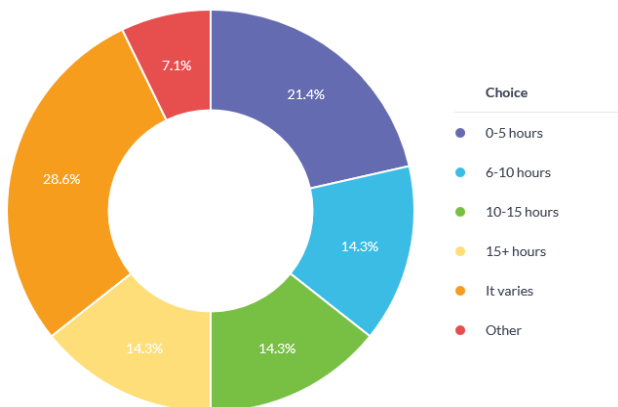
Q1 Did you get sent a work pack at the start of lockdown from your education setting?
Multiple Choice



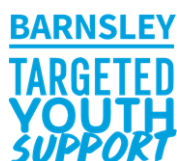
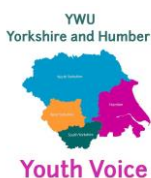
Yes	9
No	5
Unanswered	0
Answered	14

Q2 On average how much work did/do you get per week from your education setting?

Q2 On average how much work did/do you get per week from your education setting?
Multiple Choice

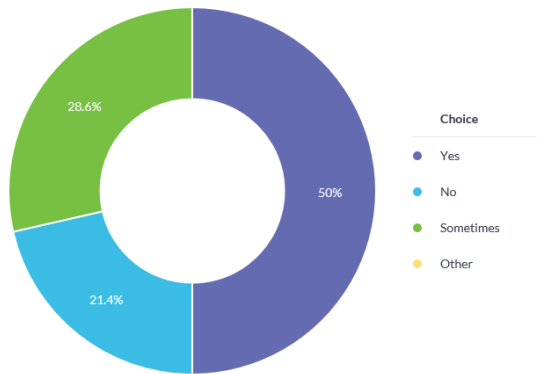


Choice	Total
0-5 hours	3
6-10 hours	2
10-15 hours	2
15+ hours	2
It varies	4
Other	1



Q3 Were/are you able to access support from staff members if needed to help with your work?

Q3 Were/are you able to access support from staff members if needed to help with your work?
Multiple Choice



Choice	Total
Yes	7
No	3
Sometimes	4
Other	0

Q4 What could/would have made learning from home easier for you? Answers from 14 respondents

- work suited for me as it was a general pack for everyone
- getting lots of help from teachers
- getting work or help my mum set it all and she wasn't very good
- some work that I could do on my own
- having help if I needed it
- more online support
- Another laptop
- Learning session
- Zoom classes
- Zoom calls !!!!
- NA
- Support with coursework because it contributes to our final grade.
- To have more resources available online
- not having any :)

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SUPPORT

Q5 What did/do you enjoy about learning from home?

Answers

being at home

getting 1 to 1 help from my teacher

not much

no annoying kids

quiet

no annoying kids

No distractions

Not travelling over 2 hours a day.

Going to the toilet when I need to Having enough food at lunch Waking up at my own time Learning at my own pace sometimes faster sometimes slower Having google to give me definitions Wearing what I want Not commuting Not having teachers constantly saying pointless stuff making lessons 10x longer

Being in my own space

N/A

You can do it at your own pace and in your own time

seeing some of my teachers

Q6 Is there anything else you would like to tell us about how it has been/is learning from home during this time?

missed my friends

made learning easier as no silly kids

more structure

being able to do some work without silly people

missing my mates but not missing getting told off by teachers

less distractions missed my mates

Worried about the impact of taking exams next year, hope grading marks will be taken into consideration and not set as high in previous years

University need a better approach to teaching.

Okay

Absolutely great Keep it this way

Nope

It's just tough getting through weekly work/tasks.

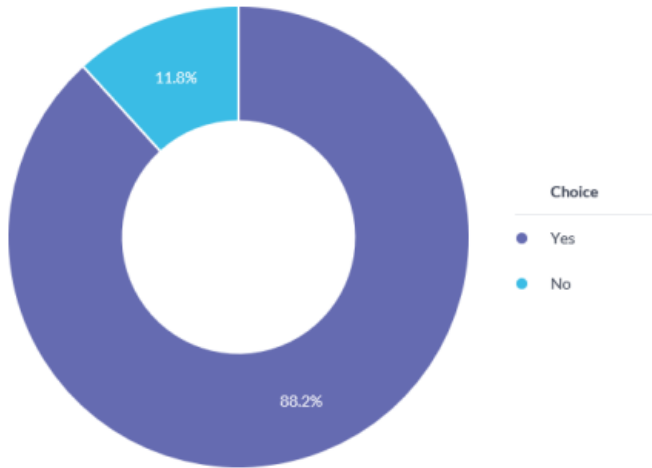
it's been hard because i haven't had my friends to ask for help.

COVID-19 Pandemic Home Education Survey 2020

After a recent Yorkshire and Humber meeting with other Youth Councillors from across the region, Barnsley Youth Councillors created a survey to gather the wider youth voice of Young People within Barnsley on how the exam and results process has been handled during the COVID-19 pandemic. This survey was put out on social media and had 17 responses and below is the data.

Q1 Were you due to take exams that have been cancelled due to COVID-19?

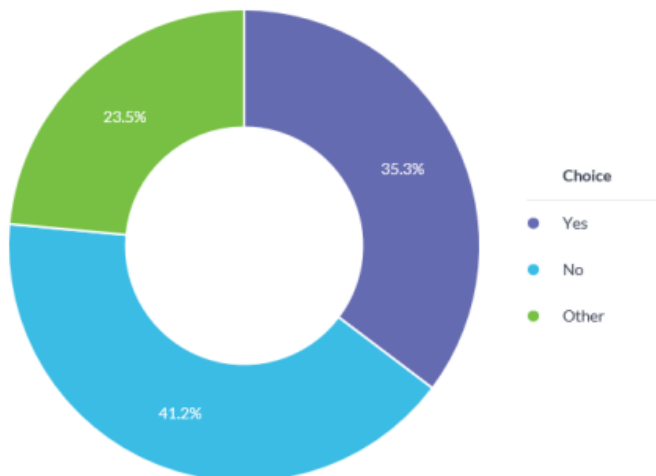
Q1 Were you due to take exams that have been cancelled due to COVID-19?
Multiple Choice



Choice	Total
Yes	15
No	2

Q2 Do you think that the way grades will be decided this year is the correct way to do so?

Q2 Do you think that the way grades will be decided this year is the correct way to do so?
Multiple Choice



Choice	Total
Yes	6
No	7
Other	4

Q3 How would you have liked grades to have been decided?

sit exams later

online exams

online exams

The way that it is now I think it works fantastically

I think for university, they should choose between average grade from year 1 or actual grades. This would ensure people who have issues and feel they couldn't do it as well as computer it would be great.

Not by teacher Judgement

On the last set of mocks we did

I wouldn't have it any other way as it will show what students work hard and do well and others who only think that the final exams matter.

By doing the actual gcse exams

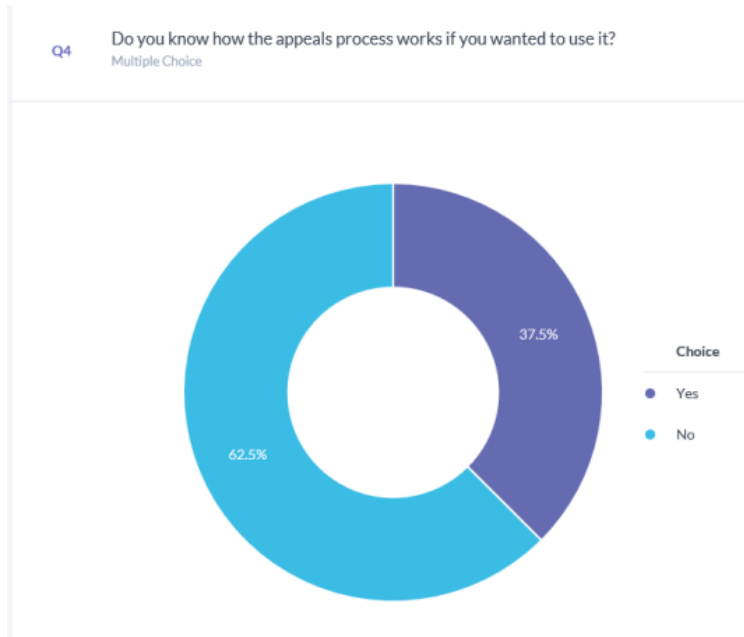
i think this was is fair, but if we feel like we need to resit the exams we should be able to for free instead of having to pay

Using %. So Expected grade 30% Mock exams 45% Classwork 25% Or similar

Exams social distanced

by sitting online exams

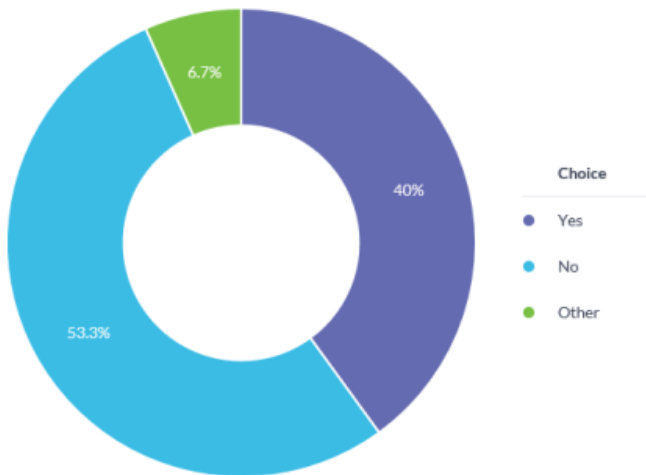
Q4 Do you know how the appeals process works if you wanted to use it?



Choice	Total
Yes	6
No	10

Q5 Do you think the appeals process is set up correctly? If so why?

Q6 Do you feel you have been supported through this process by your educational setting?
Multiple Choice



Choice	Total
Yes	6
No	8
Other	1