UK government U-turns over exam results fiasco

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The United Kingdom has made a U-turn over the system it used to award exam grades for students hoping to attend university. The government had decided on using a controversial algorithm to determine the grades of students who were unable to take exams due to COVID-19. The algorithm gave students results that were a grade or two lower than the results predicted by teachers. About 40 per cent of the final results were downgraded. The results hit the headlines as the scores for students who live in poorer areas were downgraded. Many of these students did not get into university as a result, despite not taking an exam. Scores for richer students attending private schools were higher than predicted.

The algorithm turned into a scandal for the government as it was accused of favoring the rich. Parents and students were furious with the government for what they saw as gross incompetence and for ruining the future, dreams and aspirations of England's young people. One commentator said the algorithm was designed by the elite for the elite. In its latest U-turn, the government announced that grades will now be awarded based on the predictions of teachers. Gavin Williamson, the UK Education Secretary, said: "I am sorry for the distress this has caused young people and their parents but hope this announcement will now provide the certainty and reassurance they deserve."

Sources: *bbc.com / metro.co.uk / thetimes.co.uk*

Writing

Everyone should continue studying into higher education. Discuss.

Chat

Talk about these words from the article.

U-turn / system / award / university / controversial / algorithm / results / headlines / scandal / the rich / furious / incompetence / aspirations / elite / prediction / sorry

True / False

a) The UK government has cancelled all exam results it awarded last week. T / F

b) The government has now decided to use a new algorithm. T / F

c) All exam results were downgraded by 40 per cent. T / F

d) Exam grades for richer students were higher than expected. T / F

e) Parents and students accused the government of favoring the rich. T / F

f) Someone said the exam algorithm was designed for the elite. T / F

g) The U-turn means grades will now be based on teacher's predictions. T / F

h) The UK Education Secretary said there is no need to apologise. T / F

Synonym Match

(The words in **bold** are from the news article.)

1.	**U-turn**	a.	upper class
2.	**controversial**	b.	lowered
3.	**determine**	c.	merit
4.	**downgraded**	d.	decide
5.	**attending**	e.	disgrace
6.	**scandal**	f.	forecasts
7.	**incompetence**	g.	about-face
8.	**elite**	h.	ineptitude
9.	**predictions**	i.	disputed
10.	**deserve**	j.	going to

Discussion – Student A

a) What do you think of exams?

b) Are exams the best way to assess students?

c) What were your exam results like?

d) How can a system give exam grades if students haven't taken exams?

e) What is the best way to pass exams?

f) What do you think of poorer students being downgraded more?

g) How unfair is it an algorithm can stop a student getting to university?

h) How important is going to university?

Phrase Match

1. made a U-turn	a. incompetence
2. a controversial algorithm to	b. headlines
3. results that were a grade	c. predicted
4. hit the	d. or two lower
5. higher than	e. a scandal
6. The algorithm turned into	f. this has caused
7. it was accused	g. over the system it used
8. gross	h. elite for the elite
9. designed by the	i. of favoring the rich
10. I am sorry for the distress	j. determine the grades

Discussion – Student B

a) What do you think about what you read?

b) What scandals has your government had?

c) Do you think your government has ever favored the rich?

d) Has your government ever been grossly incompetent?

e) What are the good and bad things about a government making U-turns?

f) Is it better to use teachers' predictions for the exam scores?

g) Do you think the apology is enough?

h) What questions would you like to ask the UK government?

Spelling

1. using a ocsreilaortvn algorithm

2. hoping to atnted university

3. dmrteneie the grades of students

4. final results were aedwnrgdod

5. tseidpe not taking an exam

6. higher than itrpdcede

7. accused of fnroavgi the rich

8. gross nimctcopenee

9. the future, dreams and aasinpristo

10. designed by the itele

11. he tisrssed this has caused

12. reassurance they edveser

Role Play

Role A – Practice Tests

You think practice tests is the best way to study. Tell the others three reasons why. Tell them what is wrong with their ways. Also, tell the others which is the least effective of these (and why): writing notes, YouTube or sleeping enough.

Role B – Writing Notes

You think writing notes is the best way to study. Tell the others three reasons why. Tell them what is wrong with their ways. Also, tell the others which is the least effective of these (and why): practice tests, YouTube or sleeping enough.

Role C – YouTube

You think YouTube is the best way to study. Tell the others three reasons why. Tell them what is wrong with their ways. Also, tell the others which is the least effective of these (and why): writing notes, practice tests or sleeping enough.

Role D – Sleeping Enough

You think sleep is the best way to study. Tell the others three reasons why. Tell them what is wrong with their ways. Also, tell the others which is the least effective of these (and why): writing notes, YouTube or practice tests.

Speaking – Studying

Rank these with your partner. Put the best ways to study at the top. Change partners often and share your rankings.

- YouTube
- Practice tests
- Sleep well
- Don't panic
- Read
- Write
- Make notes
- Flash cards

Answers – Synonym Match

1. g	2. i	3. d	4. b	5. j
6. e	7. h	8. a	9. f	10. c

Answers – True False

a F	b F	c F	d T	e T	f T	g T	h F

Answers to Phrase Match and Spelling are in the text.