



The
Economist

EDUCATIONAL
FOUNDATION

EXAM UNCERTAINTY

PART 1: IN THE KNOW

Nadezda Murmakova / Shutterstock

LEARNING INDEPENDENTLY?

Check out this week's
introduction video

bit.ly/NewsCycleVidMar9

KEEN TO HAVE YOUR SAY?

Share your opinion on
this week's News Cycle

bit.ly/NewsCycleMar9

ALGORITHM = a set of rules that are followed to help make a decision

NEWS CYCLE

WHAT'S HAPPENED SO FAR?

What's the best way to give grades in a pandemic?



The pandemic has disrupted education around the world. Schools and universities have been closed, students have been faced with the challenges of home learning and now governments must decide how to give end-of-year grades.

Last summer, thousands of A-level students in England were disappointed when a government-backed algorithm awarded them lower results than their teachers had predicted. In some cases, these lower marks would mean missing out on places at university. Following upset from students and teachers, Ofqual, the exams regulator for England, allowed students to choose whether to accept their calculated grade or take their teacher-predicted grade instead.

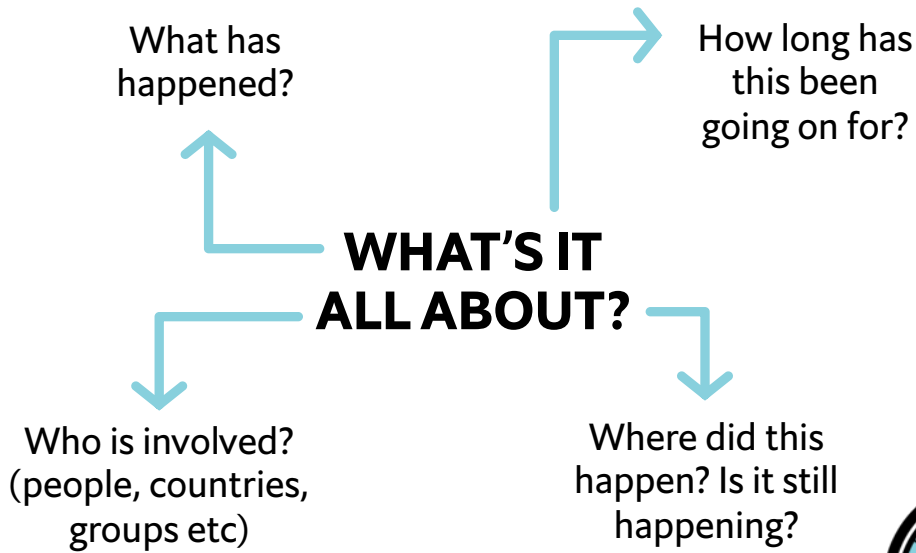
This summer, the government has scrapped exams and the algorithm. Students in England will be graded by their teachers through coursework, essays or mock-exams.

However, some educators from around the globe are beginning to question whether students can be fairly assessed at all.

UNESCO, a United Nations body that promotes education and culture, believes that globally, more than 1.5 billion students are or have been affected by school and university closures due to the covid-19 pandemic - and lockdown learning has been different for everyone. Whereas some students might have preferred to work from home, others have struggled without the right technology or support.

After such a chaotic year in education, is it right to assess students? And if so, how can it be done fairly?

Want to know more? Look here: [bbc.co.uk/newsround/56193383](https://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/56193383)



NEWS SCALE

Do you think teacher-grades are a fair solution?
Mark your opinion on the scale below with an X.
What about a former A-level student? Where would they put their X? What about a teacher?

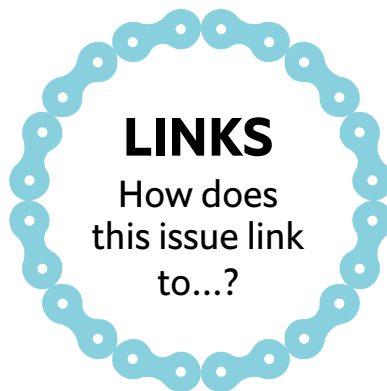


*NEWS
CONCEPT:
justice?*

Your life?

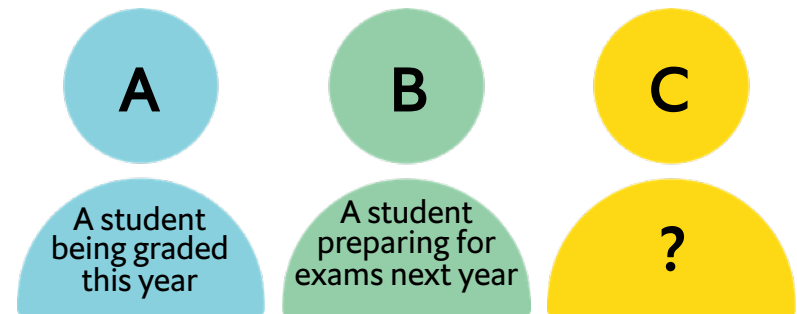
*NEWS
CONCEPT:
power?*

*A different
news story?*



PERSPECTIVE FLIP

What would Person A think about this issue?
How are they affected by the issue? Now flip to Person B and think about the same questions.
Are any perspectives missing?



CHALLENGE: how is this issue developing in the news?

The background is a light blue grid with various blue line drawings of school and science items. These include a pencil holder with pencils, a stack of books, a spiral notebook, a magnifying glass, a clock, a test tube, a beaker, a lightbulb, and a globe. The equation $e=mc^2$ is also drawn in blue ink.

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EXAM UNCERTAINTY

PART 2: THINKING HARDER

LEARNING INDEPENDENTLY?

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bit.ly/NewsCycleVidMar16

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NEWS CYCLE WEEK 2 OF 2 **THINKING HARDER**

First, limber up by thinking about everything you learnt last week:

- What was the key information about this issue? (Who? What? When? Where? Why? How?)
- Why was this issue news? (How big was this piece of news? How many people does it affect? Is it global or local news?)
- What did you think about it? Did everyone you talked to have the same opinion?
- What have you seen about this in the news? How is this issue developing?

Then, take a ride through this week's activities.

WHAT'S THE FULL STORY?

In 2020, an algorithm in England combined the grades that teachers predicted for their students with their school's average exam grades to give a final result. It ended up lowering

40%

of grades. High-achieving students from schools with lower results were more likely to have their results downgraded than students from other schools.

In 2020, the French government cancelled exams and allowed teachers to grade their students.

95%

of students passed their exams - many more than normal - and 10,000 more university places had to be created.

If students in England are unhappy with the grade that their teacher gives them this coming August, they can choose to sit normal exams in the autumn. Last year,

60%

of GCSE students who took an autumn exam improved their grade.

UNESCO has released a report showing that between March 2020 and January 2021, students around the world lost, on average,

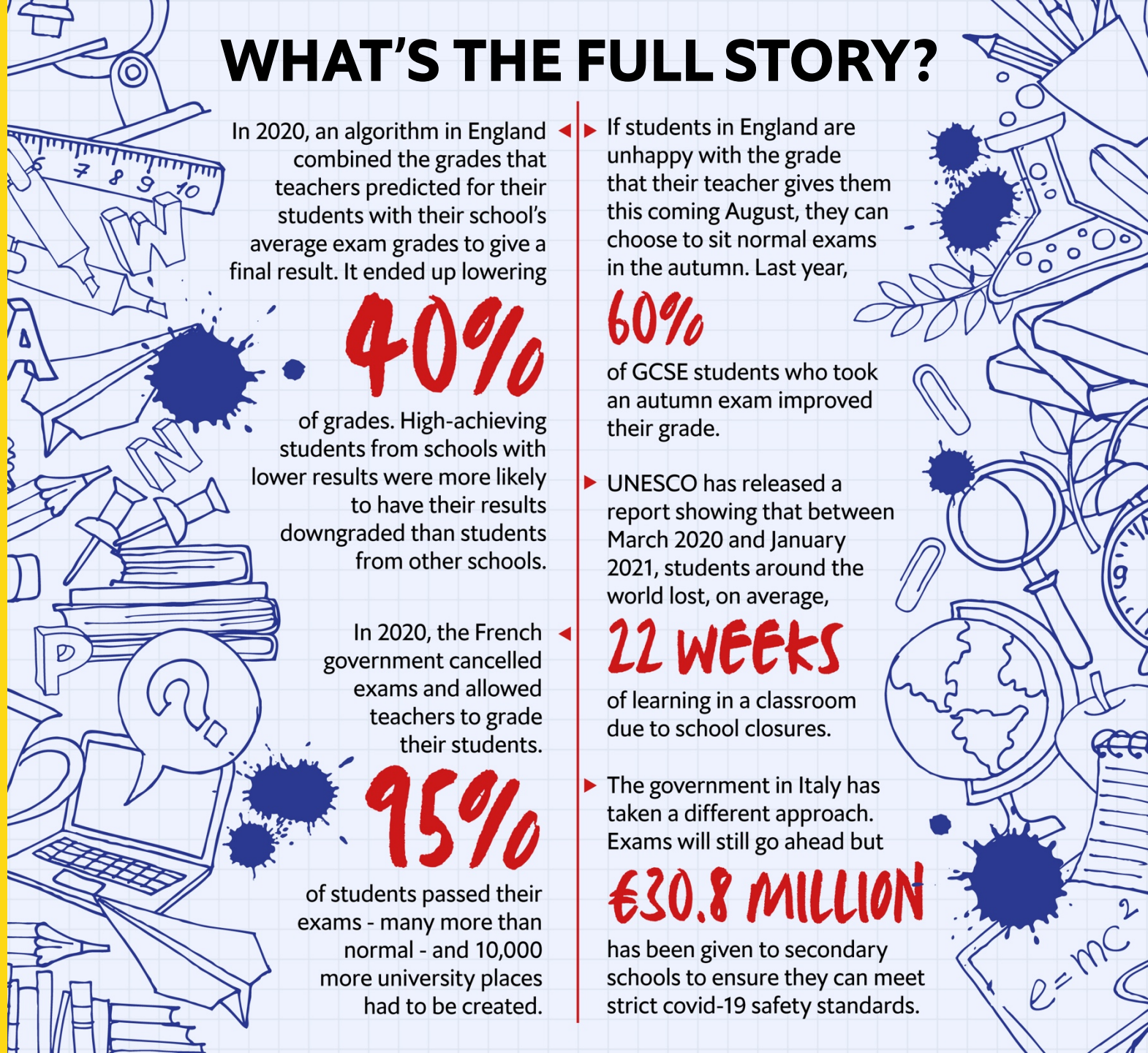
22 WEEKS

of learning in a classroom due to school closures.

The government in Italy has taken a different approach. Exams will still go ahead but

€30.8 MILLION

has been given to secondary schools to ensure they can meet strict covid-19 safety standards.



TURN THE COGS

1. This issue is about more than exams in England. Can you explain the bigger picture?
2. Look at the facts on the previous page.
 - Would you expect exam results to be higher or lower this year? Why?
 - Were teacher-grades the only solution for cancelled exams?

Support your answers with a fact and explain why.

SHOW OFF YOUR SKILLS



If a teacher was going to grade you in June this year, what would you ask them now?



Can you summarise this issue in one sentence?



What advice would you give to a student whose exams were cancelled?



What would the consequences be if students didn't get graded at all?

PUSH YOURSELF

Students are tested differently all over the world at the end of secondary school.

In England students generally take 15-20 exams in different subjects. In Finland, students take one big exam that covers all of their learning and is spread across a week.

- What are the pros and cons of each system? Which do you prefer?
- Is there a better way for students to prove what they know?

TYRE CHANGE

Brakes on! Let's change the scenario.



Two students from different countries want to be accepted into the same university?



A teacher is biased about a student?



Students didn't have the technology needed for home learning during school closures?

Challenge: can you spot this issue in the news? How has the issue developed since last week?