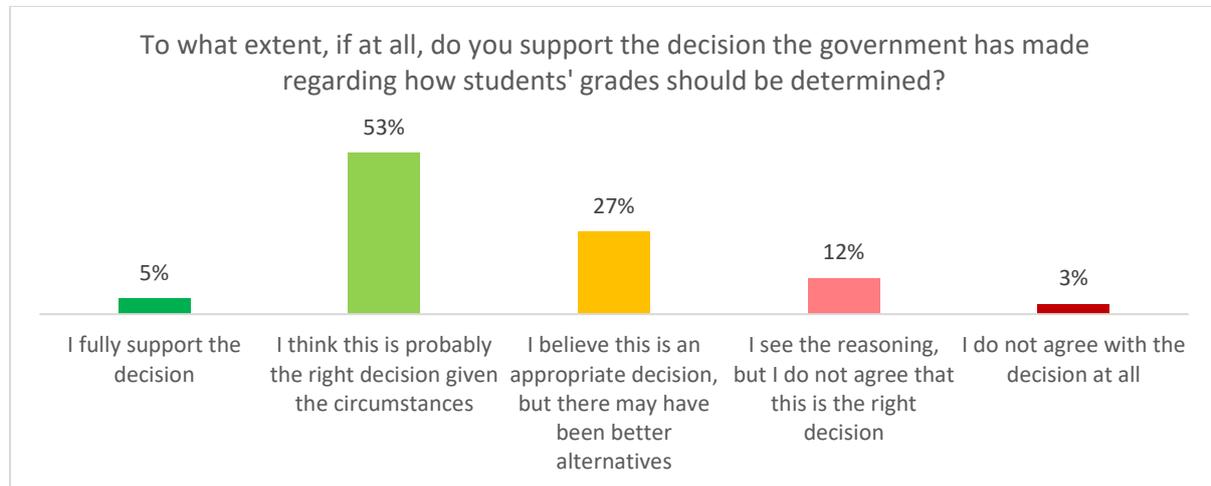


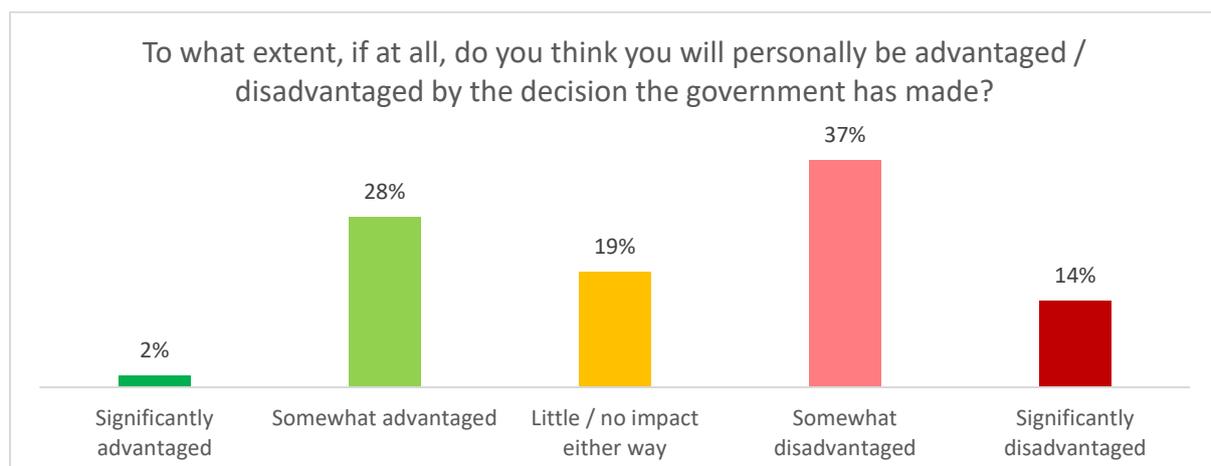
We have conducted a survey of 200 year 13s in London to get their reaction to the coronavirus pandemic and the decisions that have been made around how their final grades will be determined. We've explored their perceptions of how the situation will impact them, how it might change their future plans and what they need from universities at this time. Our main findings are outlined below.

Students largely support the decisions the government has made



- We find that the majority of year 13s support the decision that has been made with regard to how their final grades will be decided (85%).
 - This is more from the perspective that it's 'the best thing to do in the circumstances' than actually feeling positive about the decision; as shown below, many feel negatively about the consequences of the decision for them.
- Almost all support closures, though most have been left feeling bored, anxious and lost
 - The majority believe closures will have a positive impact on minimising the spread of COVID-19, but most also believe the impact will be negative on their future prospects, academic outcomes and – most of all – their mental health and wellbeing.

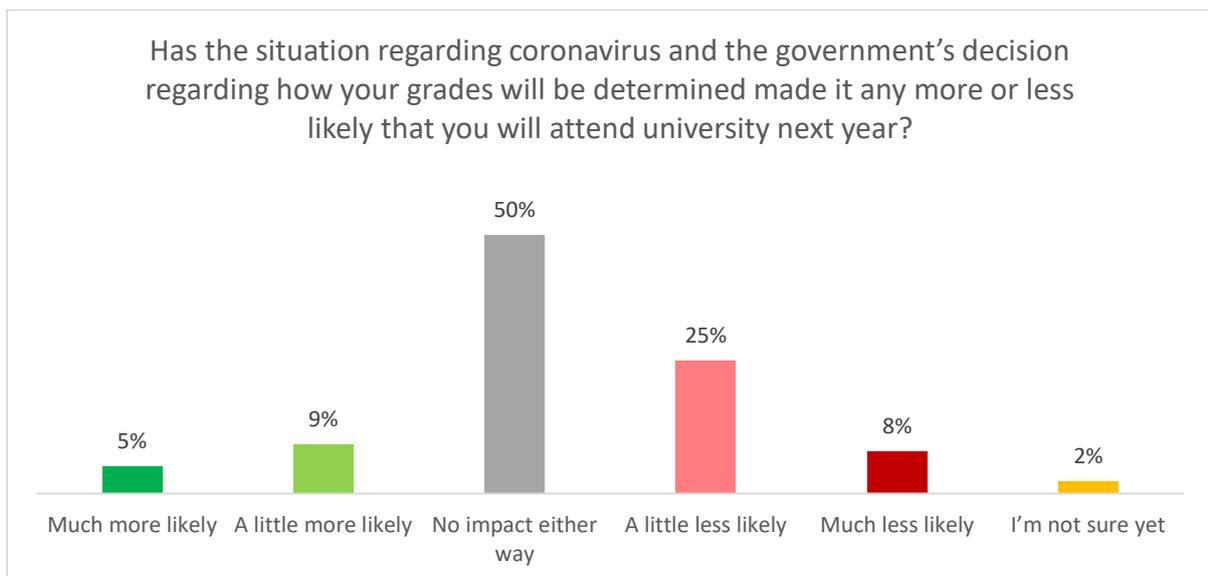
Many anticipate a negative impact on their outcomes and therefore their prospects



- Around half believe they will be personally disadvantaged by the decision about grades – particularly those with lower predicted grades and, unsurprisingly, those who believe they would have exceeded their predicted grades.

- Those who feel the decision is advantageous to them are generally relieved they no longer have to worry about exam stress, though many still feel they may have got better results if they had taken their exams. They may already have unconditional offers or be satisfied that their work to date will get them to where they want to be.
- Students are frustrated they have lost control over their final results, with many feeling their performance up until now is a poor reflection of their true ability; many admit to not having taken mock exams seriously, for example, or to having been shocked into working much harder in the run up to the real thing as a result of a disappointing grade – hard work they feel is now invisible and inconsequential to their final outcomes.
 - *“I am frustrated that I will not have the chance to sit the exam and prove that I can do better than I have been doing over the last year.”*
 - *“I am no longer in control of my grades which not only frustrates me but upsets me dearly as my future will be impaired - I may not get into university as my predicted grades do not reflect how hard I am working nowadays.”*
 - *“Through sheer hard work I’ve managed to more than make up for [poor performance earlier in the year] by studying heavily at home. Of course, I am devastated by the fact that I will not be able to prove any of my efforts.”*
- Many students are also concerned about the potential impact of teacher bias in determining their grades and their futures.
 - *“I feel that having my teachers assess and attempt to predict what grade I would have got in the exam is disastrous. As a person, I am quiet and don’t always contribute in class and struggle to go to teachers for help or bond with them.”*
 - *“Worried about certain grades due to negative preconceptions by teachers and bias in regards to ethnicity and gender”*
- Many would have preferred to see exams sat remotely this summer / delayed for all, or the chance to submit additional coursework so they still had an opportunity to improve their grades.

Significant numbers are thinking twice about attending university this year



- While the vast majority of our sample were definite about attending university prior to the outbreak, **as many as a third say they are less likely to attend this year** as a result of the current situation; this includes a quarter of those with predicted grades AAA+.

- At the same time, there is a smaller proportion who say they are more likely to attend; these tend to be students with lower predicted grades who believe they would have failed to achieve their predicted grades had exams gone ahead.

What can universities do?

- Students would like to see universities being more communicative about how they are responding to the situation, and what it means for applicants; this could mean:
 - Simply **acknowledging the challenging situation** at hand and assuring students they are working to address it
"I have had no communication from universities and feel very lost and unsure"
"I would like reassurance that they're aware of the current situation and are at the very least discussing how to handle admissions going forward"
 - **Addressing common concerns** and talking points; students are aware universities may have to make tough decisions, and they want answers sooner rather than later
"I am unsure how universities will be able to take in all the students they have given out offers to – whether or not they will withdraw offers they have already given"
"What their plans are if the pandemic carries on until next academic year"
"Reassurance our places are held if we choose to sit our exams later on in the year."
 - **Responding to students' fears that grades will undermine their ability** by demonstrating an open-mindedness around entry requirements and a willingness to consider grades within a broader context; some would welcome admissions tests to prove their potential, though others would dislike this
"The department should tell us whether they're willing to soften entry requirements"
"Consider factors other than just the new predicted grades in making their decisions, e.g. look at GCSEs as well"
"They should look at coursework if the student has any to determine if they would be capable of taking the course"
 - **Facilitating the transition period** in lieu of 'normal' activities
"Offer more guidance to settling into university as sixth forms most likely didn't have the time to prep students"
"Virtual tours and more info on the uni for those of us who didn't get to an open day"
"Encouraging / helping with study sessions over the summer to help applicants"
"It would be very nice to receive some recommended reading for the course so we can prepare with all this spare time"

We will be continuing to gather insights from year 13s as the situation develops, and will also extend our study to examine the experiences and perceptions of final year university students. We look forward to sharing further data with you in due course. If you have any specific comments or queries, please don't hesitate to get in touch.

Many thanks,

Zoe Revell

Associate Director, Red Brick Research
zrevell@redbrickresearch.co.uk