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**Educational Assessment has gone  
'viral': An Interpretive  
Phenomenological Analysis of  
Students' discourse on assessment-  
related tweets during Covid-19.**

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## Abstract

Educational assessment practices were significantly disrupted in England during Covid19. Students experienced changes to how they engaged with assessments due to school closures, the implementation of remote learning, the cancellation of external examinations and significant changes to the awarding of their external qualifications. These changes occurred against a background of increased social media usage by key stakeholders (i.e., students, teachers, parents) who used platforms such as Twitter to narrate their experiences.

This study investigated A-Level students' assessment experiences during Covid19 by observing their hermeneutic interpretations of assessment-related tweets. Four online focus group interviews were organised with 22 A-Level students (aged 16-18), and they discussed a selection of eighteen assessment-related tweets presented to them at the interview. The data were analysed using interpretive phenomenological analysis resulting in four superordinate themes which captured students' interpretations of assessment-related tweets and the essence of their lived experiences. The results suggested that participants' educational experiences during Covid19 influenced their perceptions of assessment practices, such as anxiety, fairness and teacher-student relationships. Students' assessment experiences also affected how they viewed themselves, their teachers, the government, and their futures. Common to their collective experiences was the function of social media during Covid19 and their recognition of its role in amplifying their voices to give feedback on the fairness of assessment processes and outcomes.

Educational professionals can use the present findings to respond to the student-led social media activism about assessments and inform practice. In addition, the implications for the institution studied and others are that the pedagogical development of teachers' knowledge in the design and evaluation of summative assessments is critical to increase confidence and reduce unease among assessment users. As the world of assessment continues to evolve post-Covid19, the expectations regarding assessment processes, practices, and outcomes must be explicitly articulated as early as possible in students' journeys.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

### 1.1 Context

“You’re on mute”.

“I can’t see you; turn your video on”.

“Please mute your microphone”.

“Use the chat to share your answers”.

“Your assessment will take place on MS Teams”.

These are phrases teachers and students in England and globally would have never imagined would become part of their daily school lives due to the coronavirus (Covid19) pandemic (Gustine, 2021). The sudden onset and spread of Covid19 from 2019 onwards closed school buildings and pushed students and teachers into novel teaching, learning and assessment environments. However, there were no microphones to mute or laptops to participate in remote learning for some children because they lacked the digital resources. Others fell ill and were unable to engage with remote learning. But for most, the logistical issues of moving schools online soon became aligned with concerns about the new pedagogy - the impact of remote learning on the quality of education and student progress. It is only recently that some of this impact is emerging with studies of “lost learning” or “learning loss” and “Covid19 catch-up”, all part of the Covid19 lexicon now settling into educational settings.

“Lost learning”<sup>1</sup> refers to the amount of time students did not spend learning compared to the time usually spent learning before the pandemic; and how students have fallen behind the expected attainment for their age group (Ofqual, 2021). In a Times Education Supplement (TES) article, Lough (2020) reported that the severe learning loss of secondary and sixth form students is illuminated through mock exams and assessment results, indicating that many students will need considerable support to

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Lost-learning’, ‘loss learning’, ‘learning loss’ are terms that may be used interchangeably throughout this report.

“catch up.” Ultimately, the burden of ‘catching up’ students rests on educators and Sharp, Nelson, Lucas, Julius, McCrone and Sims’ (2020) research on learning during the pandemic showed that 98% of teachers surveyed said that their students were behind, and 44% said students would need rigorous catch-up interventions, such as afterschool lessons, holiday teaching and extending the school day.

Emerging research revealed a plethora of issues, from curriculum design in teacher education (König & Glutsch, 2020; Moorhouse, 2021), to school meals (Rose, Omally, Brown, Bells & Lake., 2021), to confusion about redesigning the entirety of assessment practice by moving online (Carrillo & Flores, 2020) and of course, surrounding it all, the concerns about students wellbeing (Quinn, McGilloway & Burke, 2021), including their perceptions of achievement and motivation to learn (Pettigrew and Howes, 2022).

Furthermore, the increasing publication of educational research conducted since 2020 demonstrates that the overall impact of Covid19 on education is a growing one. Taylor & Francis, for example, has published over 2,700 research journal articles relating to “covid19 education” since 2020. Pokhrel and Chhetri’s (2021) literature review posits that the effects of covid19 on teaching and learning will continue to be felt in the short term and the long term. However, their review also shows that the current background literature (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2020; Tam, 2021) provides a foundational view of teachers and students experiences, but their generic focus has meant that research into the impact of Covid19 on assessment practices was rudimentary.

During the pandemic, educational assessment practices changed. The cancellation of external high-stakes assessments made students, teachers, and schools uncertain about the future of assessments. The English government and teachers were under scrutiny concerning remote education, assessment decisions and practices. Moreover, all these changes, experiences and reconceptualisations of the assessment context took place under the influential backdrop of the online world, specifically, the national press and social media, where students and teachers actively self-reported their experiences.

Social media sites such as Twitter are microblogging platforms that allow users to share written or image posts, called “tweets”. Tweets are shared publicly via non-private accounts and are accessible by 192 million Twitter users worldwide (Statista, 2021). Ofcom’s (2021) Online Nation report revealed that the pandemic changed the online behaviour of adults in the UK. Adults spend 4 hours a day on average on social media, increasing from the 3-hour average in 2019. Twitter is popular among 16- to 24-year-olds, and 54% reported using social media as the most important source of information for coronavirus news (Ofcom, 2021, p. 164). In periods of remote learning, students may have been on ‘mute’ during the awkward live video lessons, but they and their teachers were undoubtedly not on mute on social media platforms. Social media platforms like Twitter became thriving cultural communities for which students and other educational stakeholders immersed themselves.

Conversations about educational assessment that may have typically taken place in school, directly between students, their peers, and their teachers, now have an online component that makes them important and worth following. As seen in Dike-Oduah's (2018) content analysis of students' Twitter discourse on assessment, we are in an era where students create, engage with and respond to education-related online content. Social media is part of who young people are today, and they use social media as a microphone to self-report their everyday experiences (Bicen & Cavus, 2012), including academic experiences (Dike-Oduah, 2018; Liu, Zhu, & Young, 2018).

However, the existing literature (Pettigrew & Howes, 2022; Sharp et al., 2020) has not considered the interplay between teachers’ and students’ social media engagement and assessment experiences during Covid19. Both coexisted during that time, both are inextricably linked given the increased use of digital technology during 2020 (Ofcom, 2021), and therefore, both deserve to be given attention in research.

The present study was exploratory, to better understand the lived experiences of students affected by Covid19 within the assessment context. Considering the background, the literature review chapter will draw attention to students' experiences in the world of social media concerning assessment and how it has led to contemporary dialogues about assessments, achievement, and teachers.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

The literature review draws out some of the relevant literature for this thesis to contextualise the role of social media in how students conceptualised and narrated their assessment experiences during covid19. Specific research that combines assessment, the covid19 context, and social media is limited, if not absent. Hence, this chapter draws on three key themes: high stakes assessment, student perceptions and the social media and education research context. While the latter is very new to educational research, my previous projects during this doctoral programme (Dike-Oduah, 2021) and Master's thesis (Dike-Oduah, 2018) provided a foundation for understanding how assessment is discussed on social media and its emerging impact on students and institutions. Therefore, this literature review evaluates the previous methods used to investigate student perspectives and proposes a novel way of understanding students' assessment experiences using social media posts. Finally, assessment practices significantly changed during Covid19; therefore, a description of those changes is provided and linked to the existing literature about assessment practices to exemplify the changes.

### 2.1 High-stakes assessment

Of all the aspects of education, high-stakes assessment, specifically national examinations, were significantly impacted by Covid19. England's secondary and post-secondary education systems comprise of linear curricula whereby students engage in the instructional learning required for their chosen school-leaving qualifications: General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE), Advanced-level General Certificate of Education (A-Level/GCE) or Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC). Ofqual (Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation) regulates GCSE and A-Level qualifications in England. These qualifications are mostly exam-based, and students sit exams provided by examination boards at the end of their course.

GCSEs and A-Level examinations are regarded as high-stakes assessments because while the exam takes place in schools, the marking and standardisation of these tests are done externally and regulated by Ofqual. Moreover, students assessment outcomes determine their next steps, such as access to further education,

higher education and employment (Connelly, Murray & Gayle, 2013; Sia, 2013). For context, in 2019, the examination year before covid19, over 5.1 million students took GCSEs, and 745,000 students took A-Levels in England (Ofqual, 2019).

### *2.1.1 Changes to the high-stakes assessment practice in 2020*

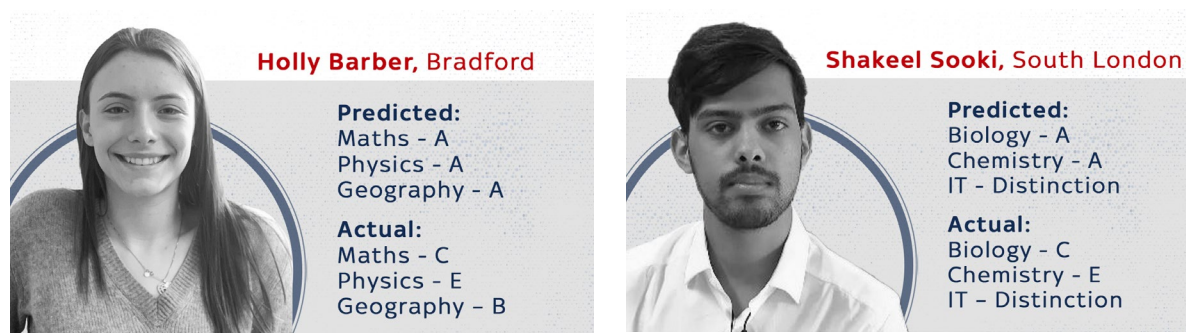
A new approach to practice around high-stakes assessment emerged when examinations for summer 2020 were cancelled in England and replaced by Centre Assessed Grades (CAGs) for GCSE and A-Level qualifications. Schools had to provide an estimated grade for *all* GCSE and A-level candidates. This was only the start of the process; the grades were then standardised by the exam boards and Ofqual (2020) using a statistical algorithm, a typical method for standardised assessments.

In the absence of students actual grades (actual grade refers to students sitting a standardised assessment and achieving a result) and no opportunity to develop and implement a national standardisation system, Ofqual created a new process (Ofqual, 2020, p. 46):

1. Analysed CAGs and compared them to each school's 3-year historical exam performance.
2. Ofqual's analysis of CAGs revealed that national results would be "implausibly high; the percentage of A\* A-Level grades increased from 7.7% to 13.39%" (Ofqual, 2020, p. 6), leading to a higher number of students achieving top grades than previous years. Consistent with research that shows teachers overestimate students outcomes (Brackett, Flowman, Ashton-James, Cherkasskiy, & Salovey., 2013; Malouff & Thorsteinsson, 2016; Snell, Thorpe, Hoskins, & Chevalier., 2008).
3. CAGs were dismissed, and awarding experts proposed a further step which implemented the 'Direct Centre Performance Model' (DCPM) algorithm to adjust and ensure that CAGs would be congruent with the school's past performance without exams.

The algorithm designed to complete these steps did what it was supposed to do: find a fair way to maintain attainment standards against historical outcomes (Shaw &

Nisbet, 2021). However, this was not the result; the outcome was that in August 2020, 40% of students' A-Level grades were lower than their CAGs. This outcome exposed inequalities between schools in deprived versus affluent areas and between state and private schools as an unintended consequence of the DCPM algorithm. Examples of inequality and anger flooded public news (see Figure 1 below, Sky News, 2020), where high-achieving students from underperforming schools or a deprived area appeared to be penalised for their schools' status/location and were more likely to have their potentially strong results downgraded.



*Figure 1: Student profile comparison of predicted CAGs 'predicted' grades and their calculated algorithm grades Image Source: (Sky News, 2020)*

The issues with high-stakes assessment in 2020 did not remain in schools; it spilled out into public settings with protests, debates and political U-turns forced by an angry public response. The following section will discuss how such discourses played out in various places.

### *2.1.2 The role of the media and social media in the algorithm debate*

The national and international press conveyed the public's outrage at the algorithmic injustice in educational assessment practice, with headlines ranging from "algorithms can drive inequality" (CNN, 2020) to "an algorithm threw their future into chaos" (Sky News, 2020). These headlines and hundreds more were not enough for students and other stakeholders at the centre of this crisis (BBC News, 2020a; Quinn & Adams, 2020; Satariano, 2020 ). So, in the spirit of the times, students, teachers, parents and many others used their social media accounts to self-report their experiences and expressed the perceived injustice of this assessment process online.

On 13 August 2020, A-Level Results Day, seven Twitter hashtags appeared to dominate the discussions, as seen through my use of Twitter on that day and a review of historical tweets (Appendix G, Vicinitas, 2022):

- #ALevels,
- #ALevels2020,
- #ALevelResultsDay
- #ALevelsProtest,
- #Ofqual,
- #ExamShambles,
- #Algorithm.

Table 1 (below) provides four examples of how these hashtags were used to anchor discussions about the algorithm debate on Twitter.

No.	Tweet	Hyperlink to tweet
1	<p>How can a student with a predicted grade of A be downgraded to a D, or a B to an E? What manner of algorithm is this? Does anybody out there have a logical answer? I dread to think what's going to happen with GCSEs next week <a href="#">#alevels</a> <a href="#">#OFQUAL</a> <a href="#">#Shambles</a></p> <p>11:10 PM · Aug 15, 2020 · Twitter for iPhone</p>	<a href="#">Link to tweet</a>
2	<p>If I am hearing this right it seems the algorithm used to moderate exam grades is favouring teachers in posh schools with small cohorts. This would be the complete opposite to my 20 years experience as a moderator. The posher the school the more often marks are too high.<a href="#">#alevels</a></p> <p>4:10 PM · Aug 14, 2020 · Twitter Web App</p>	<a href="#">Link to tweet</a>

3	<p>It's one thing to not do as well as you hoped in your A Levels (because you sat them), it's another to have school canceled &amp; someone guess how you might do and then an arbitrary algorithm to lower it. 🙄 #alevels</p> <p>6:06 PM · Aug 13, 2020 · Twitter for iPhone</p>	<a href="#">Link to tweet</a>
4	<p>Got downgraded a grade on two of my A levels by the Governments 'fair' algorithm because I didn't go to private school or live in a big house..... cheers @BorisJohnson</p> <div data-bbox="391 600 1052 848" style="border: 1px solid #ccc; padding: 10px; margin: 10px 0;"> <p>Your CAGs are as follows:</p> <p>Film - B History - C Media - B</p> </div> <p>1:25 PM · Aug 14, 2020 · Twitter for iPhone</p>	<a href="#">Link to tweet</a>

Table 1: Example of tweets shared during Summer 2020 Algorithm Exams debate

The role of this type of Twitter data will be explored later in the literature review because these discourses affronted me and encouraged curiosity in the active role that social media discourse on assessment had on assessment practices in Covid19. The self-reported outcry of students and teachers on social media helped change the Covid19 assessment policy, which moved from a technical algorithm grading approach to a human teacher-led approach.

### *2.1.3 The repurposing of formative assessment for summative purposes*

The public outrage about the algorithm injustice led the English Government to announce on 17 August 2020 that, "Students in England will receive the *higher* of their centre assessed grade or algorithm adjusted grade for GCSEs, and A-Levels in 2020" (BBC News, 2020b; Petitions. UK Government and Parliament, 2020). It was unsurprising that Ofqual decided not to use the controversial DCPM (Direct Centre Performance Model) algorithm for GCSE and A-Level candidates during the Summer 2021 exam series, following the reversal to use CAGs U-turn in summer 2020. Instead, they took a human-led approach, awarded students grades based on teacher assessed



grades (TAGs), and stated that teachers could use a range of assessment evidence quality assured by examination boards (DfE, 2021).

Yet this created another wave of hysteria around assessments concerning increased teacher workload, teacher bias and fairness between schools' selection of assessment evidence. The number and type of assessment evidence varied between schools, with some using mock exams and others using a blend of essays, online tests, and 'seen' content (Adams, 2021; Shaw & Nisbet, 2021).

There are many types of assessments, yet formative and summative assessments dominate teachers' assessment practices. The purpose of formative assessment is to monitor and stimulate student learning by providing ongoing feedback to students; it is assessment *for* learning. In contrast, summative assessment evaluates student learning at the end of a unit by comparing their performance against predetermined levels or benchmarks; it is assessment *of* learning (P. Black, 1993; Broadfoot & Black, 2004).

Dirksen (2011, p. 28) offers this illustration to differentiate the two types of assessments and their purposes, "When the cook tastes the soup, that's formative: When the guests taste the soup, that's summative." Therefore, when students take in-class tests, quizzes, or internally marked assessments and receive feedback, they are formative because they encourage further learning. Conversely, when students take high-stakes external exams like A-Levels, they are summative because they are not used to 'improve' learning.

Before Covid19, mock exams were typically used as a formative assessment to check students' knowledge and skills at that time point and use their attainment to drive forward their learning. However, since 2020 in the Covid19 context, formative assessments such as mock exams, essays and end of unit tests were repurposed as summative assessments to secure the evidence needed for TAGs which would inform students final qualifications. The pandemic not only changed the standardised high-stakes assessment landscape, but it has changed the in-school formative assessment landscape.

One way to manage the uncertainties brought by Covid19 has meant that secondary schools and sixth forms have appeared to place a greater emphasis on the frequency and importance of formative assessments (Adams, 2021). For example, in Heights School (pseudonym), the focal institution for this study, year 13 students who had missed eight months of consistent face-to-face schooling sat 'mock exams' in the first two months of the new academic year 2021 (see appendix A for the school's letter to parents). Heights School's (2020) assessment policy was based on the contingency arrangements published by Ofqual and the Department for Education (Ofqual & DfE, 2021), which included regular assessments as a contingency in case of further disruptions to assessment from the pandemic.

Examination boards published guidance for assessing students in school (AQA, 2021), and this advice resembled the methods used during standardised high-stakes summative assessments. For example, students could not repeat an assessment to improve their marks in response to feedback. Such recommendations challenge the value of feedback as centre to formative assessment and learning (Black & Wiliam, 2012; Wiliam, 2011). Furthermore, AQA (2021), Ofqual, and DfE (2021) suggested that assessments should be sat under exam-like conditions. Exam-like conditions are typically reminiscent of 'exam halls' without displays or posters to ensure that students' work is authentic. Finally, before each 'formative' assessment, students were informed that their performance would be used as evidence towards their final grade if exams were cancelled (Ofqual & DfE, 2021).

This shift in the purpose of formative assessments communicates powerfully to teachers and students that formative assessments have changed; they are now summative, and mock examinations hold the same weight as official examinations. Harlen and James (1997) challenge the assumption that an amalgamation of formative assessments can form summative evaluations of students learning, which is exactly what the summer 2021 examination results were based on. However, a review of the literature by Lau (2016) indicates that research has unintentionally created a harmful dichotomy between formative and summative assessment and that they can work simultaneously to achieve mutual learning outcomes.

Nevertheless, regardless of whether formative assessments are seen as dichotomous or complimentary, students' experiences of assessments have changed. As I sat in October 2021 with a pile of year 13 mock examination papers to mark, I wondered how students were experiencing these changes, what it meant to them and what kind of practical and wellbeing-centred support they might need as they navigate the shifts in assessment practices.

#### *2.1.4 The impact of covid19 assessment practices on students' mental health*

The impact of Covid19 has been harsh on young people's mental health. The Department of Health and Social Care's (2021) Covid19 mental health and wellbeing report found that 39% of 6-18-year-olds experienced deterioration in mental health during the pandemic. Furthermore, the uncertainty around assessment exacerbated the decline in young people's mental wellbeing. A GCSE student told ITV News (2020) that the governments' decision to use the algorithm "damaged young people's mental health".

Children's wellbeing charity ChildLine reported a spike in the number of students calling about exam stress during the pandemic; reporting that the number of young people who rang with worries about exam stress soared from 861 between April and June in 2020 to 1,812 in 2021 over the same period (Allegretti, 2021). It is significant to note that students called about "exam stress" when the Government cancelled exams in 2020 and 2021. So, the question is, what exactly was stressful for these students? Was it the lack of exams? Was it the replacement of official examinations with TAGs? Is there an additional layer that encourages us to look at how students' engagement with the online media discourse on assessment may have contributed to their feelings of stress?

I explored this question in the Methods of Enquiry small scale study during the first year of my doctoral programme (Dike-Oduah, 2021). I created a scale to measure 60 students' responses to tweets on assessment on three dimensions: attitudinal, behavioural, and emotional. Students were presented with assessment-related tweets and asked to indicate their level of agreement on several Likert scale items for each tweet. For example, in response to the statement, 'I feel worried about future

assessments after reading this tweet', nearly a quarter (23.6%) of respondents selected "strongly agree or agree". The results suggest that there may be a dynamic, emotive consequence to students reading tweets about assessment that is worth exploring qualitatively. While investigating how students respond to assessment-related tweets is interesting, it is essential to uncover what was shared on social media about assessment during Covid19, as discussed in the next section.

## 2.2 Online discourse about assessment during Covid19

As a teacher-researcher who feels very much in a liminal, transitional period between Covid19 and post-Covid19, I am compelled to look back and uncover what was said about assessment during the pandemic on social media. Before Covid19, Dike-Oduah's (2018) content analysis of over 3,000 assessment-related tweets shows that students and teachers use social media to self-report their experiences with assessment. The kinds of experiences reported ranged from positive and negative commentary about exams. Students shared numerous tweets about their teachers, schools, examination boards and experiences of test anxiety. One implication of Dike-Oduah's findings was that educational professionals should consider using social media to monitor students' experiences with high-stakes assessments and support students. Hence, the powerful display of students' online voices through their protest against the rapid changes in assessments, as seen earlier in Table 1, compelled me to act on Dike-Oduah's (2018) recommendation. In the next section, I explored the assessment discourse on Twitter during covid19 and how students used their voices to impact their educational experience.

### *2.2.1 Student voice online and offline*

The reality is that an algorithm mistakenly advertising the wrong product has fewer implications than an algorithm giving you the 'wrong' grade, which had profound consequences. Students experienced the implications, such as losing university offers; however, they knew who to confront for a change using their voice, offline and online.

As England was still dealing with the Covid19 pandemic, and restrictions on social gatherings remained in place, it can be argued that the online space for these discussions on assessment was speculatively more necessary than in previous years.

In some respects, the heavy social media discourse mobilised students and other educational stakeholders to set up petitions (Petitions. UK Government and Parliament, 2020) and take the discussion offline by arranging physical protests about assessment changes across England.

Examples of how social media, specifically Twitter, were used to organise in-person protests during the pandemic were seen through the creation of Twitter accounts like, '@2020results' and '@Honourthegrade'. The operators of these accounts and many others shared protest flyers, with the unified aim of "calling on the government to sort it out." The metrics of these tweets (Figure 2 below) posted just a day after A-Level results day indicate strong traction. Protests took place over three consecutive days all over England, where hundreds of students and supporters implored the Government to relent on the algorithm (Hockaday, 2020).

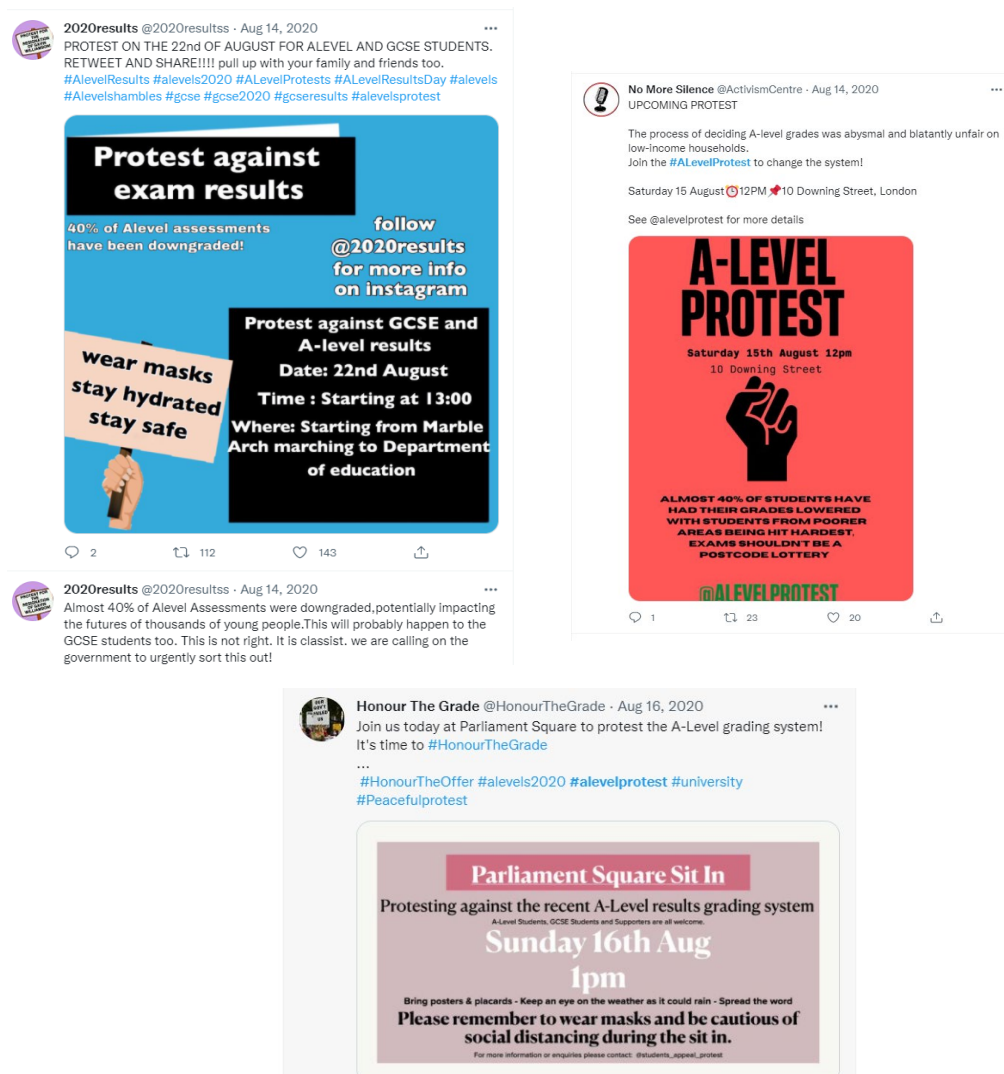


Figure 2: Protest Invitation/Flyer via Twitter Account (Twitter Post by @2020results, 2020; Twitter Post by @Honour The Grade, 2020; Twitter Post by @No More Silence, 2020)

On 17 August 2020, the Government conceded, and awarding was based on the higher of the students' centred assessed grades or algorithm grade. (BBC News, 2020b; Petitions. UK Government and Parliament, 2020). The U-turn on the grade awarding process may be attributed to the social media activism and the physical protests led by students, which epitomises the power of students' voices. The Protest placards (See Figure 3) that read, "trust teachers, not classist Tories", "judge my work and not my postcode", and "social distancing should not apply to grades" and, the tweets in Table 1 (Section 2.1.2) all signpost students' collective plea against the uncertainty and perceived unfairness of statistical models that produced unfair outcomes. Their protests

online and offline pushed towards fair, human-centred processes to make students feel heard and validated (Shaw & Nisbet, 2021).

The profound impact of students' use of social media to share their voice and drive institutional change is seen in Nguyen's (2019) study, where a Texan university was pressured to include diversity, equity, and inclusion content within their curriculum because of students sharing their personal stories on Twitter and using hashtags to group their public discussions.



Figure 3: Student Algorithm Protests. Source Reuters (BBC News, 2020b)

It was interesting to read the protest placards that plead the Government to “trust teachers” in awarding grades because teachers' perceptions constantly changed during the pandemic. Ambivalent views of teachers' were observed in the national press and the online discourse explored in the next section.

### *2.2.3 Online Perceptions of teachers during Covid19*

Teachers have always been subject to public critique, stretching back decades (Popham & Greenberg, 1958). YouGov's (2019) last annual teachers survey confirmed that teachers are critiqued by the government, accountability regulators like Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education) and other stakeholders. The critique is mostly on

teachers' students' outcomes (YouGov & Ofsted, 2021), their perceived failure to address societal inequities in their classroom, and their lack of professionalism (Clegg et al., 2017).

Ingersoll and Collins (2018) compared the professional status of teachers with other professions like medicine and found that teachers fell short on several characteristics associated with professionalisation, such as qualification, autonomy (decision-making authority), remuneration and prestige.

On the tenet of qualification, the recent reform to teaching in England is said to have impacted the intellectual rigour and prestige of the profession (Gibbons, 2021). The DfE and Walker's (2021) review of initial teacher education (ITE), chiefly provided by universities, indicated a shift from the university-centred *education* of teachers to the in-school-based *training* of teachers; suggesting that teachers should be 'trained' in preference to 'educated.' This reform was met with criticism for being rushed and potentially reducing the quality of teacher education and thereby the quality of teachers (Loughran & Menter, 2019). The argument is that one would not expect a doctor to be fully qualified from just *training* in a hospital; they must be *taught* medicine in an institutional context. Therefore, we should not expect teachers to be fully qualified from just *training* in schools; they must be *taught* pedagogy, the science of teaching. It could be argued that reforms such as this undermine the status of teachers in England compared to countries like Finland, which develop excellence in their teacher workforce through their master's degree ITE programmes, which translates to international admiration for Finnish teachers (Sahlberg, 2011) but opens critique for English teachers.

Furthermore, the accountability structure in England judges' schools and teachers on student outcomes and Ofsted inspections (Ball, 2003; Jones & Tymms, 2014). Consequently, publicly accessible accountability measures such as outcomes-based league tables and Ofsted reports put teachers and schools under public scrutiny. The mediums used to comment on these accountability measures have evolved from what Crozier (1998) described as the surveillance of schools through parental conversations, to the press, and now to social media – the people's press.



During Covid19, teachers were affronted by criticism about their profession online more than ever before (Rice & Deschaine, 2021). The nature of the critique appeared to centre on three areas during Covid19:

- Teachers' response to decisions about schools' reopening' after the period of closure,
- Media reports around lost learning and student attainment and
- The credibility of teacher's assessment practices.

In the popular press, headlines said things such as "Covid19 has made heroes of many of our frontline workers... but not teachers" (Liddle, 2020). In the TES, teachers were presented as 'lazy', 'whingeing', and 'work-shy' during the pandemic (Civinini, 2020). Contrastingly, The Guardian shared an article celebrating 'Britain's teacher heroes' (Blackall, 2020), as did the Jack Petchey Foundation, for which I was a recipient of the teacher 'Lockdown Hero Award' (Jack Petchey Fdn Twitter Account, 2021; Jack Petchey Foundation, 2021).

Research from Asbury and Kim (2020) summarised such headlines as the teacher 'hero or villain' narrative. Their interviews with 24 state schoolteachers explained that the messaging around schools 'reopening' in June 2020 and the 'lost learning' crisis were highly misleading in the media. The lost learning narrative implied that students were not learning at all and, worse still, that teachers had not been working since March 2020. To highlight the role and impact of social media in the critique of teachers, one participant said:

"You shouldn't read anything because you could get horribly depressed. If you are a Twitter user, oh my goodness, you could be torturing yourself" (Asbury & Kim, 2020, p. 11).

It was unsurprising to read that Asbury & Kim's participants reported feeling depressed and 'tortured' by the Twitter rhetoric about teachers. This quotation and the erroneous online discourse about teachers' roles during the pandemic struck a chord with me as a teacher and researcher whose work was immersed in the pandemic; and who, like her

students, had to adapt and learn new ways of doing things and had never worked so hard.

Reading comments such as “teachers are lazy sods” or “teachers were on an extended break during the pandemic” (Asbury & Kim, 2020, p. 9) made me think about how students reading such may reconcile their own experiences in education during the pandemic, especially given the rhetoric about their teachers on multiple media platforms. Like the Twitter posts, did students believe that their teachers were lazy? Did students feel as though their teachers were on an extended break? These questions could only be answered by presenting students with these kinds of social media posts and asking them directly how they felt reading them and what it meant for how they conceptualised their own experience with education. This leads me to the research context chapter, where I discuss the methods that were used to uncover students' experiences with education during Covid19 and highlight the gap for new methods to emerge.

### **Chapter 3: Research Context**

This chapter sets the scene for the current research and focuses on the methods used to investigate students' experiences during Covid19. As method development was central to the present research's aims, this chapter needed to precede the methodology chapter because the readers' understanding of the research context is essential for understanding the later methodological decisions explained in the methodology chapter.

This chapter is divided into three sections to review previous quantitative and qualitative methods used in Covid19 student research and highlight the gap for new methodologies using Twitter data, leading to the research aims chapter.

#### **3.1 Survey method (quantitative and qualitative)**

Various research methods were used to investigate students' education experiences during Covid19. Mansfield, Jindra, Geulayov, and Fazel (2021) gained quantitative insights into students' experiences through their large-scale survey of over 19,000 primary, secondary and sixth form students in the UK during the first lockdown in 2020. Two-thirds of students reported negative impacts of school closures on their

wellbeing, happiness, and schoolwork management, while one third reported positive experiences of feeling and sleeping better. The results of Means and Neisler's (2020) quantitative survey of undergraduate students' perceptions of remote learning complements these findings. Students revealed issues with self-motivation (48%) and feeling too unwell emotionally and physically to engage with remote learning during Covid19 (21%).

The survey method used offers generic understandings of students' experiences during the pandemic; however, the artificial nature of this self-report technique limits the external validity of the findings. Hecht (1993) and Krosnick (1999) list several issues with surveying students, including problems of social desirability bias because the compilation of researcher-selected questions creates an environment for an artificial response. Surveys struggle to obtain the 'true' response of participants present thinking; instead, they gather a latent response influenced by the internal coercion to select the most socially acceptable answer. Krosnick (1999) posits that this bias is more present when respondents are forced to limit their expression to the limited choices offered by closed questions. These limitations suggest that quantitative self-report methods may not produce an accurate understanding of students' experiences and that alternative methods which allow for students' full expression are needed.

Howcroft and Mercer's (2022) conducted a thematic analysis of the open-ended survey questions they presented to 201 students transitioning from sixth form to university. Their analysis produced seven themes and concluded that most students' education experience during Covid19 had an undercurrent of the fear of the unknown and poor mental health. Similarly, Spinks, Metzler and Kluge's (2021) qualitative analysis of students' narratives in a cross-sectional survey on their education experiences during Covid19 revealed themes of loss of motivation, autonomy, and competence. While the analysis of open-ended survey questions is a step forward from previous quantitative surveys (Mansfield et al., 2021), it is argued that written responses may limit the full expression of students lived experiences as there was no opportunity for follow-up questions to increase the validity of the findings. Furthermore, writing is seen as forced and unnatural, whereas oral communication is rich in emotion, efficient

and accessible. Phonic (2021) found that the average British English-speaking speed is 190 words per minute, compared to 40 words per minute typing. Bowling's (2005) systematic review of the literature found that oral responses to open-ended questions are better quality than text and that the highest quality data was generated when there was a rapport between the interviewer and the participant, as the interviewer could clarify questions, probe, and note down non-verbal behaviours during the research process. Therefore, to truly capture students' experiences during Covid19, we must give room to hear their voices, unrestricted by written responses to structured questions.

### 3.2 Qualitative methods: Interviews and Focus group

The survey-based studies in the previous section reported generic findings on a range of students' experiences of education during Covid19 remote learning, assessments, their teachers, and peers (Mansfield et al., 2021; Means & Neisler, 2020; Spinks et al., 2021), however, their survey methods did not provide depth to explaining these experiences. Moreover, given how significant the disruption to assessment practices was during Covid19, it is surprising that these studies did not explore how students experienced the disruption to assessment, nor did they provide an in-depth exploration into students' current perceptions of assessments.

Tam's (2021) semi-structured interviews of nine undergraduate students on remote learning practices and online assessments addressed the gap. Their qualitative interview method and focus on students' assessment experiences provided rich insights into this phenomenon. Students discussed the challenges and benefits of remote assessments and shared their perceptions of how online assessment design affected their learning experiences. This research was valuable as their detailed qualitative reports allowed researchers to develop well-informed pedagogical implications and direction for future research on post-Covid19 assessment practices.

The pluralisation of 'student' highlights the complexity and nuanced nature of students' assessment experiences. Though students were physically isolated from their peers during the pandemic, they were not alone in their experiences. Therefore, it was important for researchers to capture their individual (Tam, 2021) and collective experiences. Sandvik, Smith & Stromme (2021) used the focus group method to

investigate 24 students' collective perceptions of assessment and teaching practices during Covid19 in a Norwegian secondary school. Their findings showed that students valued the teacher-feedback element of formative assessments but felt that summative assessments were unfair and that student involvement in assessment design was lacking. In addition, most students emphasised an increase in written (computer processed) individual assessments and said that it amplified feelings of loneliness and missed peer work with other students. Sandvik et al's. (2021) focus group method allowed students to hear other perspectives and make sense of their own experiences. In addition, focus groups reflected how discussions about assessment experiences are typically held between students and how they form their judgment through coalescing around consensus. The overt meaning-making process is not easily visible in individual interviews. However, group interviews allow group dynamics, agreements, and disagreements to be observed, which are essential for understanding students lived experiences and how they reconstruct their experiences in a group setting.

Sandvik et al's. (2021) study presents focus groups as a suitable method for investigating students' experiences with assessment. However, as explained in the Literature review, students assessment experiences were not limited to remote education, nor were their discussion of assessment experiences limited to just between peers from their school. In fact, their assessment experiences and discussions of assessment extended to how assessment was discussed in the national press and on social media. This is an area not yet explored in the recent research on students Covid19 experiences , and so begs the question; how does what was shared on social media about assessment practices compare to students lived experiences, and what is the best way to investigate this?

### [3.3 Using Twitter Data: Interpreting texts as a method](#)

Research cannot claim to thoroughly investigate the student experience during Covid19 if it stops when they engage with social media content. It is essential to investigate the social media world of education and continue the investigation when students walk back from that world. Potential connections between online and offline experiences should be explored through questions such as, how do students interpret

social media posts on assessment? What feelings are associated with reading assessment-related tweets? How do they make sense of their own experiences after reading about the experiences of others on social media?

The tweets shared in table 1 (Section 2.1.2) exemplify how Twitter users provided a written narrative of their lived experiences. According to traditional phenomenological hermeneutics founded by Heidegger (1988), the text produced in assessment-related tweets have their own meanings, and as Lindseth & Norberg (2004, p. 151) wrote, “there is a world behind the text and in front of the text, revealed by the text”. When students read tweets on assessment, it is their way of participating in the world of assessment.

Written narratives impact us when they illuminate our lived experiences. Hermeneutic phenomenologists Ricoeur (1981), Lindseth & Norberg (2004) and Van Den Hengel (1982) concur that readers of texts do not simply react to the text; they react to the meanings that they attach to it. It is these kinds of reactions to Twitter texts that the present study seeks to uncover for students by asking: What meanings do students attach to assessment-related tweets? How do students participate in the world of assessment through the narratives shared on Twitter? The present study sought to answer these questions by drawing upon the online world in which students lived, to have rich, nuanced discussions and insights into students’ assessment experiences not seen in Covid19 research before.

## **Chapter 4: Research questions**

The research has been designed and structured with the primary objective of investigating how sixth form students in an Outer London school engage with tweets on assessment posted during the Covid19 pandemic. The research focuses on answering the following questions:

- What is the lived experience of sixth form students in the Covid19 context, as they discuss educational assessment with their peers' using tweets on assessment as artefacts to anchor their discussions?
  - What are the range of experiences expressed?

The challenge was to discover a way to address the gaps exposed in the literature concerning existing research on students' assessment experienced during Covid19. I required a research method suitable for the research aims, and the research context chapter showed that this method did not exist in a complete form. Therefore, a novel method was developed, drawing upon hermeneutics (interpretation of texts) (Heidegger, 1988; Ricoeur, 1981) and qualitative research methods (Bernard, 2013; Creswell & Poth, 2016). The goal was to elucidate essential meanings behind students' assessment experiences as it was lived and interpreted by students. Therefore, the assumptions of phenomenological hermeneutics were important in grounding the research method.

In the next chapter, the method developed is presented as a phenomenological hermeneutical method suitable for education research and digital social studies. The theoretical foundation for the method is explained, and its practical implementation for research purposes is described.

## Chapter 5: Methodology and Method

This chapter outlines the methodological rationale and methods used to conduct the study. Justification for using a qualitative phenomenological approach is provided, beginning with a rationale for qualitative inquiry. A critique of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) follows as an effective methodology to analyse the data produced in the online focus group interviews with students about their assessment experiences with the backdrop of assessment-related tweets. Data collection and analysis procedures are outlined, including ethical considerations to ensure scientific rigour.

### 5.1 A qualitative phenomenological approach

Qualitative inquiry is an investigative method that explores and describes participants' experiences, and in simple terms, phenomenology aims to describe the meaning of participants experiences - both in terms of **what** was experienced and **how** it was experienced (Teherani et al., 2015). The research focused on understanding students' lived experiences with educational assessment and their

interactions with assessment-related tweets during Covid19; therefore, interpretative phenomenology was chosen as the most appropriate qualitative approach for understanding this phenomenon.

Exploring the essence of a phenomenon like 'online discourse on assessment' from the perspective of students who have and are experiencing it required a generation of rich, detailed data that establishes the participant's voice (Creswell & Poth, 2016). This could not be achieved using the quantitative methods underpinned by nomothetic aims described in Chapter 3.1. Uher (2021) argues that quantitative methodology is reductionist because it ignores the complexities and uniqueness of individual experiences. In contrast, this research sought to amplify personal student experiences and document new meanings and insights to inform or re-orient how we understand their experiences. The research questions, context, and evolving research domain of educational assessment align well with a qualitative phenomenological approach to exploration and data collection.

## 5.2 Phenomenological approaches

There are two dominant approaches within phenomenology, Descriptive (Transcendental) phenomenology and Interpretive (Hermeneutic) phenomenology (Neubauer et al., 2019). The descriptive phenomenological approach requires total researcher objectivity – the need for a researcher to suspend their beliefs and attitudes and solely focus on the participants' experience of the phenomenon (Lopez & Willis, 2004; Moustakas, 1994). However, a descriptive phenomenological approach was not suitable because the research focus was on the lived experiences of sixth form students at my institution, and because I am part of the phenomenon under scrutiny, it would have been challenging to separate myself from the situation or to take an objective stance.

Interpretive phenomenology appreciates that both the researcher and the researched cannot be separated from their lifeworld. This was crucial for the present study as students' experiences with educational assessment are inextricably linked with teachers' experiences and the socio-political context (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Hence, the research took an interpretive phenomenological stance because the objective rigour



required for a descriptive phenomenological approach was not feasible nor compatible with my research aims and the intended dissemination of this study. However, in line with Moran's (1999) guidance for phenomenological research, I engaged in reflective practice throughout this thesis and openly acknowledged how my worldview, research interests and professional identity were part of the research process.

### 5.3 Choosing the data collection methods

Heidegger's (1988) foundation for the interpretive hermeneutic phenomenological approach is that hermeneutics is all about interpreting texts. The present research sought to gather students' **interpretations** of assessment-related tweets and observe how they used them to share their experiences with assessment. This section will describe the rationale for using the focus group method and justifies using tweets as the focal stimuli within the focus groups.

Studies have shown that IPA can be used for focus groups, primarily when participants sufficiently discuss their own lived experiences (Smith, 2004; Thompson et al., 2017). However, Webb and Kervern (2001) suggest that using phenomenological approaches to analyse focus groups is incompatible as the group interview method contaminates the individual's essence, and is why individual self-report interviews remain the most popular data collection method in phenomenological studies (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Nevertheless, Spiegelberg (1975, p. 25) confirms the validity of selecting the focus group method:

“There is nothing in the nature of the phenomenological approach that confines it to isolated practice; it can be performed in groups as well as in isolation, and that these groups could and should communicate.”

Spiegelberg argues that group communication does not overlook the individual experience. Similarly, Bradbury-Jones, Sambrook & Irvin, (2009) suggest that individual lived experience can be preserved in a group context if well facilitated to produce individual subjective accounts that are challenged, stimulated and attuned in the presence of other subjective accounts; creating what Spiegelberg (1975, p. 32) called “intersubjectivity”.

### *5.3.1 Constructivism as a feature of Group Phenomenology*

Intersubjectivity is used within the paradigm of constructivism, which assumes that knowledge (reality) is co-constructed by participants. The ontological view that our subjective realities are actually co-constructed realities is supported by critical thinkers such as Sartre (1984), who argues that all subjectivity is intersubjectivity and that we only know what we know through our social relationships and our cognisance of how others reify our knowledge (Guba & Lincoln, 2005)

To this end, constructivism complements the group phenomenology approach to these focus group interviews, as phenomenological constructivism permits me to appreciate the individual contribution of each student participant while recognising that their knowledge is constructed from their experience and interaction with the other participants in the group, their peers, families, teachers, schools, social media and more.

### *5.3.2 Focus Groups*

The study used semi-structured focus group interviews to present a selection of assessment-related tweets to students and observed their responses to semi-structured questions about such tweets. Focus groups are discussion-based interviews that produce verbal data and qualitative evidence via group interactions (Breen, 2006; Millward, 2006). Qualitative researchers in educational settings have used focus groups to generate conversation among participants (Sandvik et al., 2021; Walls & Hall, 2018). The late Dr Lynne Millward (2006), my undergraduate research methods lecturer, suggested that focus group interviews can help to achieve a deeper understanding of the target phenomenon under study because they have the unique advantage of using the groups' interactions to produce data. This was desirable for the present research as individual, and collective reconstructions helped establish consensus and diversity about how assessment was characterised on Twitter and what it meant for students (Stokes & Bergin, 2006).

### *5.3.3 Online Focus Groups*

Focus groups were conducted online synchronously (in 'real-time') using Microsoft Teams video conferencing platform. Online focus groups (OFGs) are considered a suitable alternative to the traditional face-to-face approach (Fox et al., 2007; Millward, 2006; Moore et al., 2015) and the literature on using conferencing platforms like Microsoft Teams, Zoom or Skype for research is a limited but growing area of research (Archibald et al., 2019; Santhosh et al., 2021).

Synchronous online focus group methods allow real-time interaction through video, sound, and written text via the 'chat'. Therefore, OFGs replicate features of face-to-face (FTF) focus groups, such as the ability to respond to verbal and some non-verbal cues, which strengthens their utility as an alternative method. However, while most participants in Zwaanswijk and van Dulmen (2014) preferred OFGs to FTF focus groups, they argued that OFG discussions were limited because of the absence of nonverbal and social context cues, which reduce the opportunities for nuance and clarification. However, Abrams et al. (2015) found that people use alternative ways of communicating nonverbal cues, for example, saying, "I disagree" instead of head-shaking; or as seen in the present study, by explicitly expressing agreements using the chat and responsive emoticons (e.g. raised hands emoticon).

Abrams et al. (2015) also compared OFGs and FTF focus groups on a range of criteria and found that OFGs produced similar data richness to FTF focus groups. The word count analysis showed that OFGs produced more words and quality themes than FTF groups. These findings confirmed the suitability of the online focus group method in the present research, which was conducted in a constructionist vein whereby participants dynamic discussions and interactions were essential to understanding how students engage with assessment-related tweets.

Lastly, conducting synchronous focus groups online is a relatively new phenomenon (Moore et al., 2015; Zwaanswijk & van Dulmen, 2014), and apart from using online video conferencing for remote teaching, I had no experience in facilitating research using this platform. Therefore, two pilot focus group interviews were conducted to inform the revisions required concerning the focus groups' logistics, implementation,

and analysis. These pilot studies will be referred to throughout the remainder of the method chapter.

#### *5.3.4 Assessment-related tweets as the focal stimuli*

Millward (2006) refers to 'focal stimuli' as the focusing element in focus group research. It sets the parameters and encourages discussion around a chosen stimulus. Research in the social sciences demonstrates that a range of stimuli can be used, from role-play scenarios (Henderson & King, 2021; Waters, 2016), interventions (Thompson et al., 2017), concepts, word-association tasks. Storgaard Flovén & Asfadai (2017) used focus groups to investigate students' judgements of news-related tweets as the focal stimuli. Therefore, I used the present study as an opportunity to contribute to the limited literature on the use of tweets as focal stimuli in educational research with students.

Furthermore, Millward (2006) says that using focal stimuli in focus groups are a helpful way to generate discussion about semi-public issues that might otherwise be difficult to obtain from young people in one-to-one interviews. Educational assessment has always dominated public discourse. While students may have found it tricky to discuss their experiences of this public matter, the decision to use focus groups is supported by previous focus group research with young people on semi-public issues such as obesity and video-game policies (Olson et al., 2008; Sylvetsky et al., 2013). A description of how assessment-related tweets were selected and organised is provided in the Data Collection section of this chapter.

### 5.4 Participant Recruitment

The institution-focused study was conducted on students from Heights School, a co-educational academy in Outer London. Heights School has 1800 students aged 11-19, of which 500 are in Sixth Form.

A combination of opportunity and volunteer sampling was used to obtain the participant sample. Opportunity because as a teacher in a co-educational Academy Trust school in Outer London, I had access to the target group of 500 A-Level students. To be clear, while I had the 'opportunity' of being an employee at Heights School with access to Sixth Form students, I was accountable to my Headteacher and sought

permission from him before approaching any participants for my research (see appendix B for headteacher approval).

Volunteer sampling was employed as approach emails, and the schools' virtual learning platforms were used to request students' participation in the study (see appendix C for approach letters). Potential participants then emailed the first author who responded with detailed information about the study (purpose, participation requirements, and start date) with a consent form. After receiving the consent form, participants were sent a questionnaire (see appendix D) to complete electronically and return before the online focus group began.

Twenty-seven students volunteered to participate and completed the questionnaire and consent form electronically; however, only 22 participated. Respondents were screened, and to participate, they had to be a year 12 or year 13 student at Heights School during the academic year 2020-21. Respondents indicated their availability for the synchronous online focus group and were allocated to each group based on their availability. Three students actively withdrew due to testing positive for covid-19, and three passively withdrew as they did not respond to follow-up communication about the study.

### 5.5 Participants

Twenty-two students aged 16-19 volunteered to participate in the study. Table 2 below illustrates the participant numbers for each group by gender and year group. Three were in year 13, and nineteen were in year 12. Three students were male, and nineteen were female.

Purposive sampling methods were used to ensure that each group was homogenous in terms of the year of study for the participants, as it was thought there could be relative age effects on the nature of their school experiences (Cobley, Jim, Joseph & Nick, 2009).

Focus Group No.	Total pps. per group	Male	Female	Year 12	Year 13
1	2	-	2	-	2
2	8	3	5	7	1
3	6	-	6	6	-
4	6	-	6	6	-
Total	22	3	19	19	3

Table 2: Participant gender and year group split for each focus group

While homogeneity was achieved for groups 3 and 4, comprising of year 12 students, it was not achieved for Group 1 (the pilot focus group), which intended to have three year 13 students in the focus group, but instead had two due to availability. The year 13 student who was unavailable for Group 1 participated in Group 2; hence, Group 2 was heterogeneous as it contained seven year 12 students and one year 13 student.

Group 1 was significantly smaller than other groups as the pilot focus group. However, Starks and Trinidad (2007) argue that large samples are not necessary to generate rich qualitative data; instead, the aim is to have a sample that fulfils the purpose of the study. The final sample recruited participants who represented a diverse mix of Level 3 A Level and BTEC courses and had experienced the phenomenon of educational assessment and social media discourse during covid-19, thereby fulfilling the research goals.

Each student received a certificate for their participation (See appendix E).

## 5.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical clearance was granted in April 2021 from University College London, Institute of Education Ethics Committee. Social science research's most fundamental ethical principles are beneficence and protection from harm. Allan and Love (2010) define 'beneficence' as the moral duty researchers have to act in the best interests of

others, and this section outlines the ethical considerations made which attained beneficence for participants.

#### *5.6.1 Sensitive topics*

Discussions around Covid19 and the educational assessment context were identified as sensitive topics. Therefore care, and attention was given to participants by using sensitive interviewing techniques such as 'signposting', for example, "we are about to read a tweet where the author shares XYZ". This was a method to safeguard their wellbeing before discussing potentially stressful topics.

#### *5.6.2 Power relations*

As an insider researcher, I acknowledged the imbalance of power relations between students (participants) and myself (researcher) (Bazzul, 2017; Karnieli-Miller, Strier & Pessach, 2009). The majority of the participants were students I teach, and I realised that the students could not engage with the research independently from me as their teacher, and I could not be impartial (Mercer, 2007). Cognisant of these subjectivities, I ensured that participants did not feel coerced to participate or that they ought to provide answers that they thought I wanted to hear. I did this by reminding participants of the value of their perspectives. I explicitly referred to them as my 'co-researchers' to minimise the power relations imbalance and maintain a sense of professional detachment by reducing (but not eradicating) my role as a 'teacher', and foregrounding my role 'researcher'.

#### *5.6.3 Consent and Right to Withdraw*

Participants were provided with clear information about the study. The consent form (appendix D) clarified participants' roles; how their contributions would be used and gave them the autonomy to volunteer or withdraw their participation.

However, Walker (2007) argues that participants in phenomenological studies cannot provide *true* informed consent because they are unaware of how the focus group interview would unfold. In the present study, it was hard to predict what type of information the in-depth interview would produce, as the data produced could fall outside the scope of the original research aims that the participant agreed to. To

address this, I followed Sim and Waterfield's (2019) strategy and ensured that participants were regularly reminded of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without prejudice.

#### *5.6.4 Debrief*

Participants were debriefed at the end of each focus group, whereby the study's aims and how their contributions would be used were reiterated. I checked how the participants were feeling and directed students to the appropriate support services that could help, should they wish to talk further about any issues that may have arisen (e.g., School Safeguarding Team, School wellbeing hub, Childline). The effectiveness of the debrief and ethical considerations for this study is exemplified in an email received from a student (see Appendix E2), who took the time to provide feedback on their experience:

*"I actually really enjoyed being a co-researcher, which I was surprised by. This is because I am an individual who wouldn't usually contribute due to struggling in social settings, so I'm giving positive feedback since your research allowed me to take part without feeling uncomfortable."* (Participant SF)

#### *5.6.5 Anonymity and Confidentiality*

Pseudonyms were used for each participant in the interview transcripts to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. All data relating to the present study (video recordings and transcriptions) are stored securely via my password-protected 2-factor authentication UCL account and an encrypted external hard drive for backup.

#### *5.6.7 Social Media*

Another dimension to the ethical considerations made for this study is concerned with the use of Twitter data. Twitter users are aware that their public posts are in the public domain (Twitter, 2021). However, after consulting Townsend and Wallace's (2017, p. 197) social media ethical framework, I anonymised all the tweets used in the study by redacting the username and profile image associated with each tweet. This ethical measure acknowledges that the Tweet authors could not provide 'informed



consent', thereby affording them a level of privacy and dignity (Anderson & Simpson, 2007)

### *5.6.8 Dissemination*

The outcome of this study is a written report as part of the EdD programme to be shared with my supervisors, UCL Library and will be available on request to the participants involved. These findings are for academic purposes and the furtherance of knowledge in this niche field. However, as Zwozdiak-Myers (2020) posits, there is an ethical layer to writing and dissemination, which encourages me to remain authentic to the language used by participants in the interviews. Therefore, I was sensitive to the future selves of the participants in my reporting, as the cross-sectional nature of this study acknowledges that participants are allowed to change and evolve their views.

Once the study research fulfilled the ethical guidelines set out by BERA (2018), an internationally respected association for educational research, I was ready to commence the data collection process.

## 5.7 Data Collection Procedure

Participants took part in online focus groups during June and July 2021. They all took place after school between 5-6 pm and lasted approximately one hour, led by one facilitator. Each focus group was held on MS Teams and was video and audio recorded for transcription, which was the primary source of qualitative data alongside the chat transcripts. Participants were shown tweets on assessment on screen and were asked a series of semi-structured open-ended questions.

### *5.7.1 Interview Guide*

Focus group interview guides (see Appendix F) with lists of semi-structured questions and focal stimuli (assessment-related tweets) were used to structure the group discussions (Millward, 2006). There were four focus groups, and each group had an interview guide with slight variations between them. For example, Mentimeter (2021), a polling tool, was only introduced in focus groups 3 and 4, following the two pilot focus groups. Eighteen tweets were presented across all groups, with 10-11 tweets used per group.

### 5.7.1.1 Selecting Tweets for the focus group

Sixteen hashtags were selected based on the events that occurred on:

- 13 August 2020 - A-Level Results Day
- 17 August 2020 - U-turn from algorithm grades to centre assessed grades (CAGs)
- 20 August - GCSE results day

These topics were manually researched on Twitter to find the most frequently used hashtags, as identified in Table 3 below. These hashtags dominated and centralised online discourse around assessment and the algorithm crisis within the covid-19 context and continued to be used beyond August 2020.

<b>Twitter Trending Topics within Educational Assessment from Aug 2020 – May 2021</b>	<b>Hashtags</b>
Exam results – general comments about exam results in August	#ALevels, #ALevels2020, #AlevelResultsDay, #ALevels2021 #GCSEs2020 #GCSEs2021 #GCSEResults #GCSEs
Algorithm Crisis – comments about the use of algorithms to adjust and determine students A-Level grades	#ALevelsProtest, #Ofqual, #ExamShambles, #Algorithm
Assessment processes – comments about assessment experiences and practices during covid-19 for GCSE and A Level (year 12 and year 13 students)	#TAGs #TeacherAssessedGrades #CAGs #CentreAssessedGrades

Table 3: Selected topics with their respective hashtags

An online Twitter analytics tool Vicinitas (2022), was used to index both real-time and past tweets within user-specified search dates (August 2020 – May 2021), words

and hashtags (Specified in Table 3). For example, in May 2021, the hashtag “#ALevels” was indexed and exported 367 tweets to a Microsoft Excel Spreadsheet where Tweets were screened to eliminate tweets that were irrelevant to the study’s aims; for example, tweets that were not in English or that were considered as spam. The parsing process streamlined the “#ALevels” tweets from 367 to 12 for consideration in the study. This process was repeated for all the hashtags (see appendix G), and 18 tweets were selected in total using Vicinitas (2022) and manual parsing.

A limitation of this process is that I can reflectively assume that there were tweets that were at the top of the search results due to Twitter’s algorithm (displaying tweets with specific metrics), and there were tweets that I read that were more striking to me based on my role as teacher-researcher; hence my selection of tweets may have been biased. Nevertheless, subjectivity is not shunned but is welcomed in phenomenological research as long as the researcher is reflective, explicit and transparent about their subjectivities in the research process (Heidegger, 1988; Moran, 1999; Spiegelberg, 1975; Van Manen, 2016). Furthermore, each tweet included in the interview guide was carefully selected to provoke discussion among participants; the pilot focus groups helped identify which tweets needed to be reviewed or replaced based on participants engagement and the fluidity of the focus group interviews.

### *5.7.2 Online Focus Group Interview Process*

All participants accessed Microsoft Teams through a compatible device and were encouraged to join from a location free from distractions.

At the start of the focus groups, I introduced myself to the participants and thanked them for agreeing to participate in the research. I reiterated the study’s aims and stated the voluntary nature of their participation, including their right to withdraw at any time and to decline to answer any questions they did not feel comfortable answering (Sim & Waterfield, 2019). Participants were reminded of their role as co-researchers in interpreting the assessment related tweets while sharing their narratives. I assured them that there were no right or wrong responses and that their genuine opinions were valued.

A protocol was established to manage behaviour during the focus group:

- Cameras off to avoid distractions
- Microphones muted (when not contributing) to minimise unwanted noise and interruptions
- Use of the 'raised hand' feature to indicate their desire to contribute orally
- Appropriate use of the chat for their written contributions

Once I was confident that all participants fully understood the focus group procedures and their rights, I advised them that the focus group would be recorded and started the discussion.

General questions were asked at the outset to put students at ease. Learning from the pilot study, I used Mentimeter (2021) to collect responses to social media use questions. Figure 4 shows an example of the Mentimeter polls, and the complete interview guides are in appendix F.

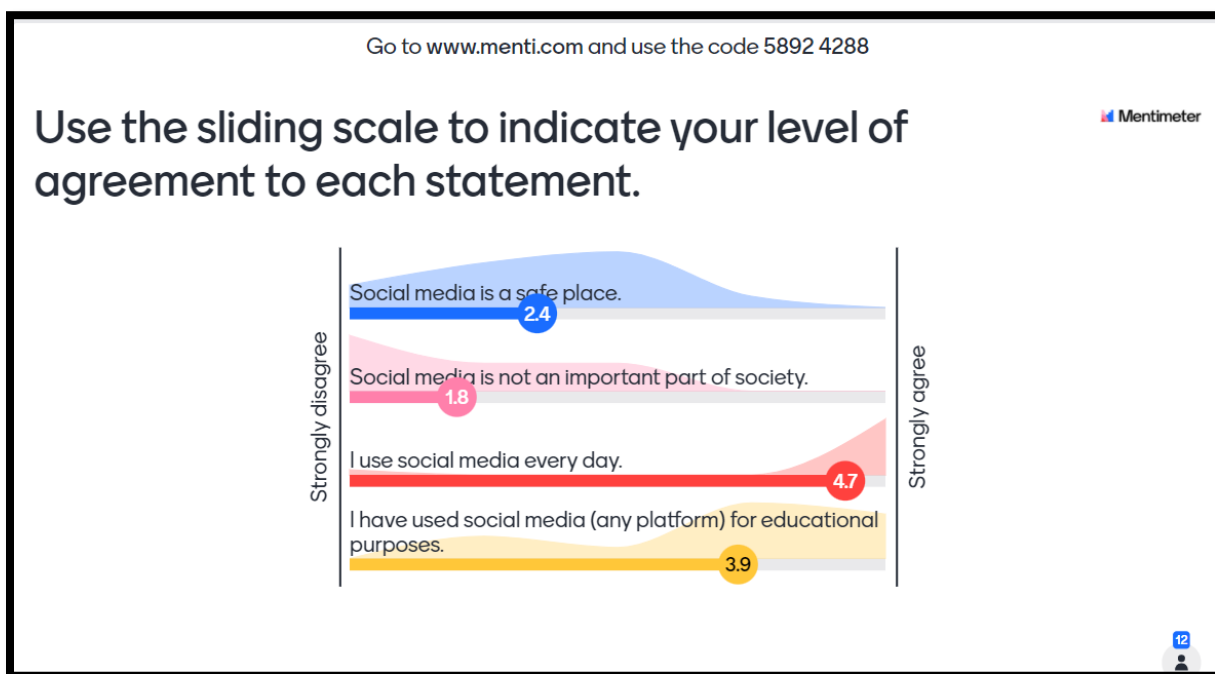


Figure 4: Example of Mentimeter response poll to questions about social media use.

### *5.7.3 Tweet discussions*

I read each tweet aloud and then invited discussion on the tweets through open-ended questions (Appendix F). Follow-up questions were used to encourage participants to elaborate on their comments orally and in the chat.

Each focus group's video and audio recording provided an accurate record of the discussion and allowed me to pay attention to the participants without getting overwhelmed by taking notes. Appendix I shows the notes taken during the focus groups were brief critical points used to generate responsive questions and denote the prominent themes highlighted during the discussions. Furthermore, Mortari (2015) suggests that taking notes is beneficial in phenomenological research to support transcription, analysis, interpretation, and reflection on the research process.

At the end of the focus group, participants were debriefed and thanked for their participation. After debriefing, the focus group interview concluded; I ended the conference call, saved the chat text and video recording for transcription.

## **Chapter 6: Data Analysis**

### 6.1 Computer-based analysis or manual analysis?

The qualitative data produced across all focus groups were rich and complex, and the use of Nvivo (2022), a computerised qualitative data analysis software (CQDAS), was considered to support analysis and manage the large volume of data. However, after reviewing critical commentary on the use of such software, I agreed with Banner & Albarran (2009) and García-Horta & Guerra-Ramos, (2009), who say that these programs could impede effective data analysis as they prevent good immersion in the data and are overly distracted with creating computer-generated codes instead of data-based meanings.

Despite CQDAS being an efficient tool for managing qualitative data, the methodological concerns outweighed the benefits. Denzin and Lincoln (2017) and Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2011) remind us that the researcher is the primary tool for

analysis in qualitative research. Therefore, I opted against using CQDAS for the present study and used manual interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA).

## 6.2 Procedure for Interpretative Phenomenological (Online Focus Group)

### Analysis

The present study tailored existing interpretive phenomenological analysis frameworks and developed a framework for using IPA with “**online**” focus group data. Love et al. (2020), Palmer, Larkin, de Visser & Fadden (2010) and Tomkins & Eatough (2010) all respectively adapted Smith, Flowers & Larkin’s (2009) IPA framework to use IPA on focus group data.

However, as the literature about IPA for **online** focus groups is limited (Santhosh, Rojas & Lyons, 2021), I reviewed and integrated elements of the existing focus group IPA frameworks and created an 8-step analysis process for the present research. The analysis involved thorough engagement with each focus group transcript to yield themes that represented the assessment experiences of students during Covid19 with the backdrop of social media. The implementation of the 8-step analytical procedure is outlined below, and a comprehensive summary table of the data analysis process is provided in Appendix M, which will benefit future research that desires to use IPA for online focus group data.

#### *Step 1: Immersion in the data*

I used the audio and video recording to transcribe the four focus group interviews verbatim, which amounted to over 44,000 words. Participants' anonymity and confidentiality were maintained in the transcriptions by assigning pseudonym initials instead of real names (see appendix M for example transcript).

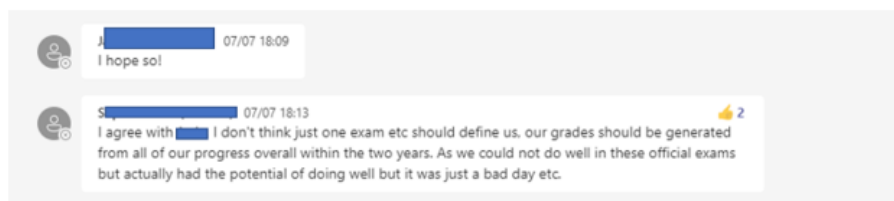
Participants' quotations were referenced to the transcript in this format: Focus Group Number/Tweet Number/Line number, participant pseudonym initials. For example, “FG2/T2/L22, EM” indicates that the quotation was from focus group 2, regarding tweet 2 (focal stimuli) on the interview guide (Appendix F), starts on line 22 and is by participant ‘EM’. Quotations from the moderator were referenced in the same format, with the initials ‘KDO’.

In addition, the transcriptions documents included participants time-stamped comments in the chat, and as advised by Santhosh et al. (2021), chat comments were read aloud by the moderator (KDO); see figure 5 below.

816 EM: Sorry. I sort of feel like the fact it's got like question three at the start just shows that there's like  
 817 so many questions like there's so much uncertainty like clearly this is in a list like a long list of  
 818 questions that this person has, and actually that everybody has and kind of going back to the  
 819 linear versus module assessment. I sort of feel like if you have it where it goes over two years  
 820 and you're constantly working for exams that I don't know, but I'd feel like I'd burnout so quickly if  
 821 I was constantly trying to do things. Then equally feel like having the one big assessment like JD  
 822 says like you could have one day where it just completely goes wrong and and I completely agree  
 823 with AB. Like I know my parents are like totally confused at the minute of what's going on and  
 824 what's gonna happen for 2022. And I think that it's just like again so uncertain for everybody.

825 KDO: Thank you so much EM. I'm gonna read SF's comment in the chat.

826 **(1:10:14) – Participant comment in the chat about examinations**



827

828 KDO: It says I agree with JD. I don't think just one exam etc. should define us. Our grades should be  
 829 generated from all our progress overall within the two years as we could not do well in these  
 830 official exams but actually had the potential of doing well...But it was just a bad day.

831 **(1:10:36) – Conclusion, Debrief, Thanks and Feedback**

832 KDO: Honestly ladies I must say and I don't even wanna end. I don't wanna stop by need to honour  
 833 your time. I'm so thankful for your contributions and what I'm going to do. Now I'm going to take  
 834 you to the debrief, which is of course you know the intention behind our focus Group interview,  
 835 which is I'm interested in how students interpret tweets on assessment and whether or not they  
 836 may shape future assessment practices.

Chat comment  
read aloud by KDO

Figure 5: Example of chat comment in transcript

### *Step 2: Identify the researcher's position and possible bias*

During and after transcription and in my supervisory meetings (see appendix J), I reflected on my orientation towards the research. My reflective notes (see appendix I) captured my reflexivity as I recognised my position as an insider-researcher.

Robson (2015) and Van Manen (2016) posit that being aware of your identity and its potential influences on your research is crucial for meaningful data. Furthermore, Heidegger (1988) highlights that interpreting the lived experiences and meanings

constructed by participants can only be achieved by an observer who is an active participant in their social world. As mentioned, I am a Head of Department whose students' grades were affected by the algorithm situation. I am a black woman who identifies with the biases within the education system that adversely affect disadvantaged black students (Kirby & Cullinane, 2016). Moreover, I am a researcher whose interest lies in media and assessment. Therefore, my identities were located in the same environment as the present research and were central to the research process. My reflections helped capture how the findings' interpretation was co-constructed between myself (the teacher-researcher) and the participants (my students) and how my position may have influenced the meaning-making process as expanded in step 3.

### *Step 3: Initial noting*

In this step, I read the transcripts several times and highlighted significant phrases, words, and narratives that had phenomenological qualities to capture participants' meaning using MS Word's commenting feature. Consistent with Smith et al. (2009) and Santhosh et al. (2021), the initial noting comprised comments which were:

- Descriptive – focused on the content of participants' discussions and narratives, both verbal and in the chat.
- Dynamic – focused on participants interactions with other participants in the group.
- Linguistic – focused on the participants' use of language, e.g., colloquial, nuanced words, metaphors, emotive language and tone.
- Conceptual – focused on my initial interpretations and concepts for further exploration.
- Logistical – focused on the use of online web video conferencing for research and the experience for the moderator.

An example of how these initial noting comments were derived is illustrated in the extract below (Figure 6), where JD, EM and HM discussed their confidence in the Government's decisions around assessment. Each student shared their narrative



(descriptive) but agreed on the presence of uncertainty and a lack of fairness (conceptual). Emotive language (linguistic) was used with EM reporting feelings of

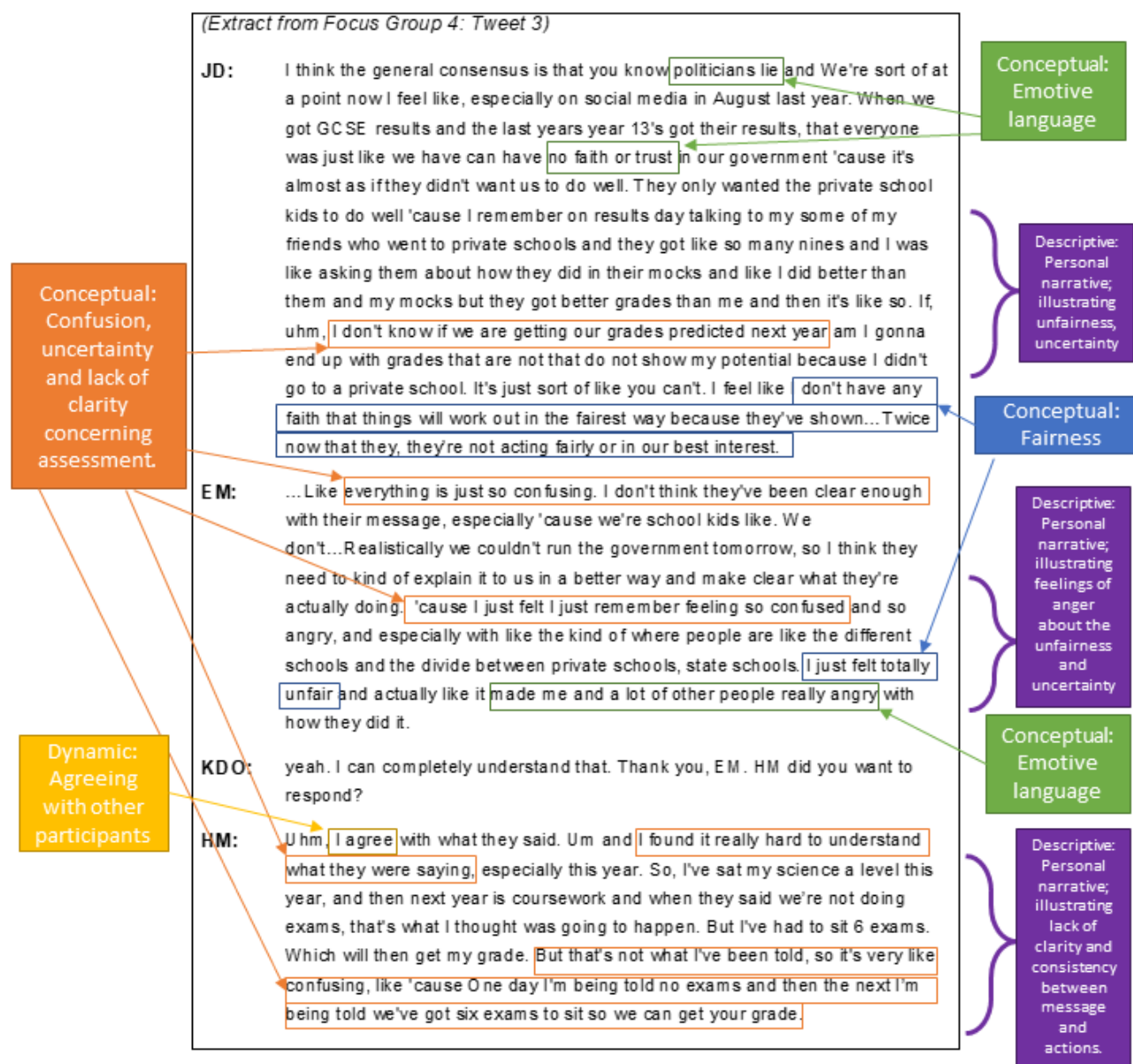


Figure 6: Extract from Focus Group 4 - Tweet 3 - example of initial noting

'anger' about the inconsistency between private schools and state schools, and JD expressed 'no faith or trust' in the Government. This discussion continued when I (KDO) invited HM to share in response after seeing her 'hands raised' (logistical). HM agreed with the previous comments (dynamic) and provided a personal narrative describing how she eventually sat six exams despite being told that there would be no exams.

#### *Step 4: Identify emerging themes*

In this step, I used the initial notes for all four focus groups to identify patterns and themes in each transcript. I did this by extracting the comments made on the MS Word document into a table (see appendix K) and reviewed these comments and the respective highlighted transcript to identify the emerging themes. This process linked the micro-level data (transcript) to macro-level interpretations (meanings and context)(Love et al., 2020).

#### *Step 5: Cluster the themes and identify superordinate themes for each focus group*

I created superordinate theme labels to capture participants' experiences as succinctly as possible. Consistent with Smith et al. (2009), it involved clustering similar emerging themes (step 4) together based on their context and frequency in each focus group; and assigning a heading to categorise the emergent themes

Figures 7 to 11 illustrate steps 4 and 5. PowerPoint was used to show the initial themes, cluster them, and present the superordinate themes developed for each focus group.

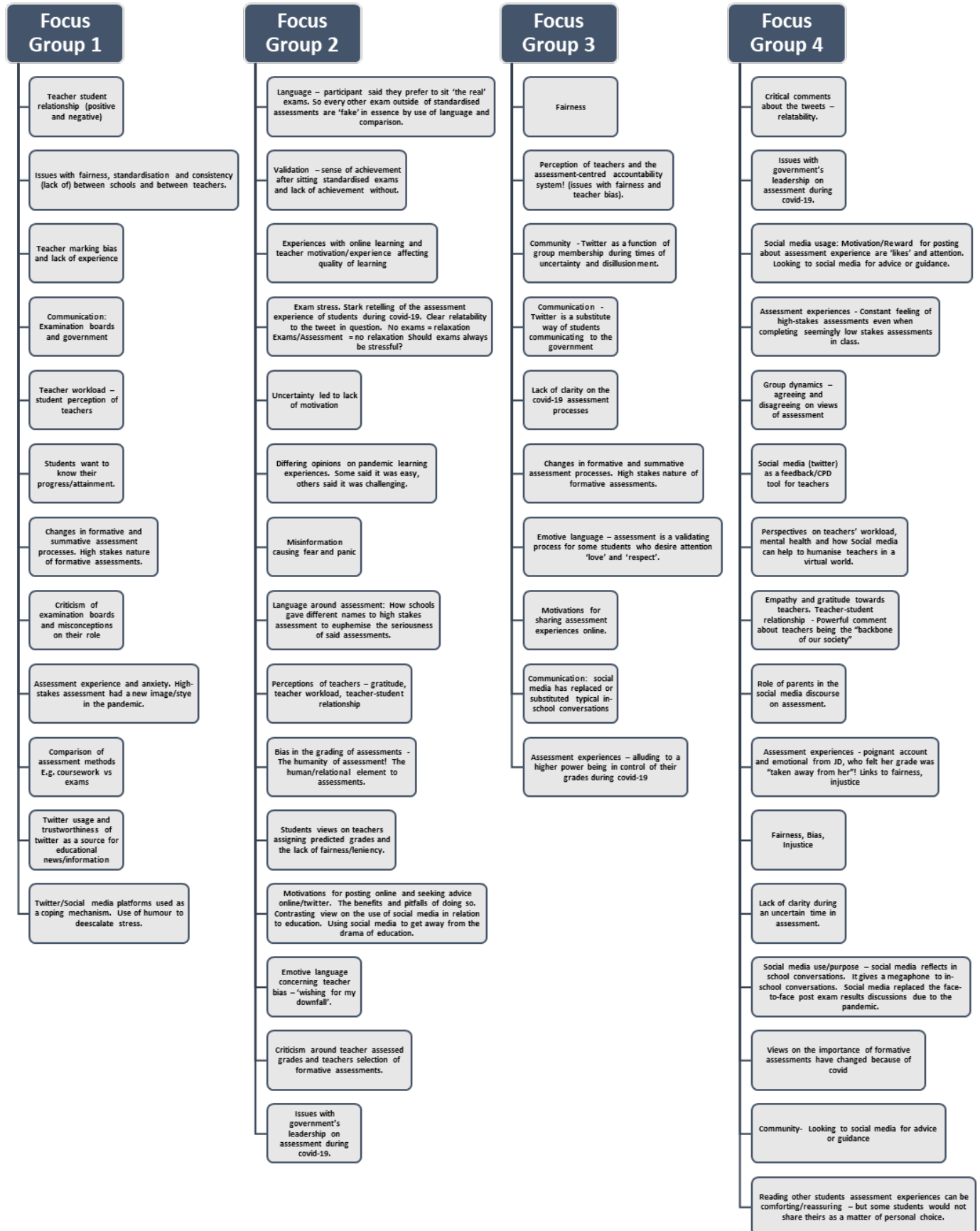


Figure 7: Emerging themes for each focus group (Step 4)

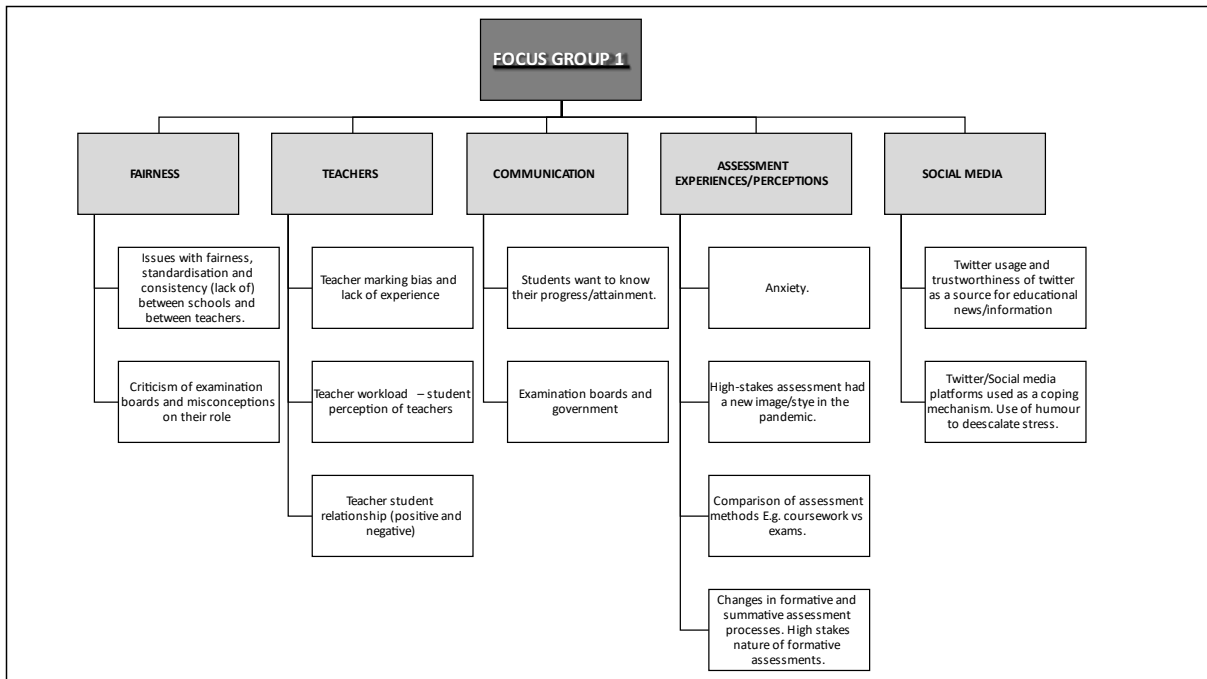


Figure 8: Focus Group 1 analysis showing superordinate themes (shaded - upper case) and the emerging themes (unshaded - lower case)

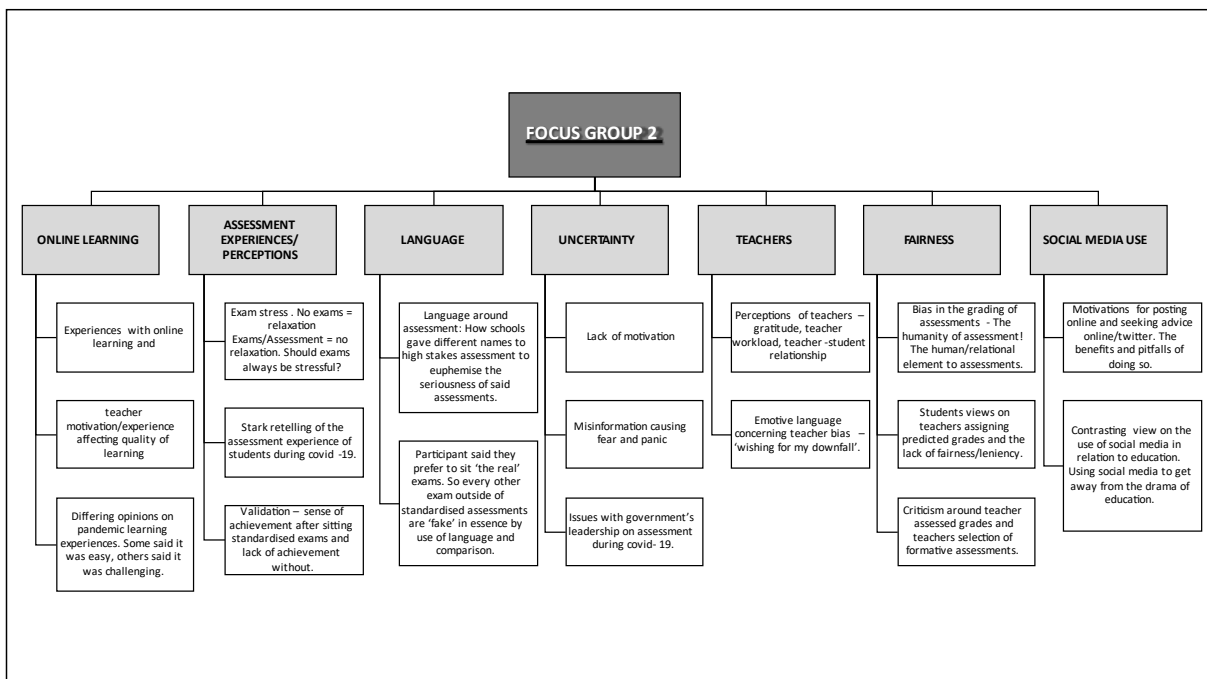


Figure 9: Focus Group 2 analysis showing superordinate themes (shaded - upper case) and the emerging themes (unshaded - lower case)

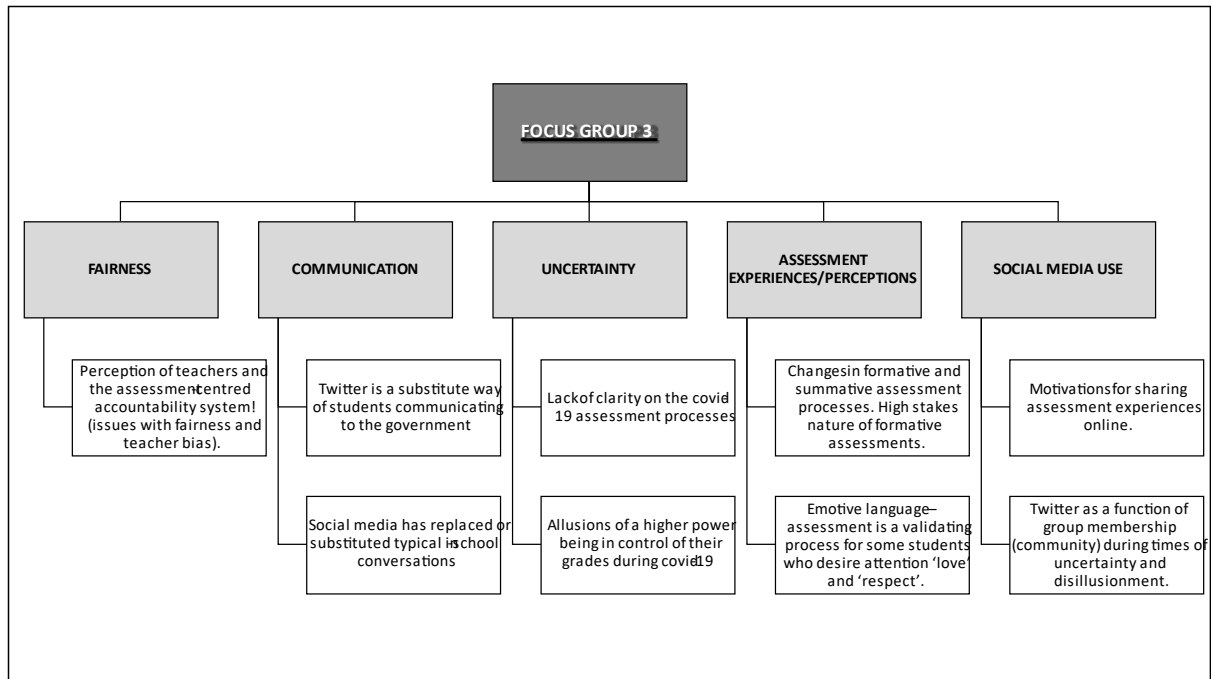


Figure 10: Focus Group 3 analysis showing superordinate themes (shaded - upper case) and the emerging themes (unshaded - lower case)

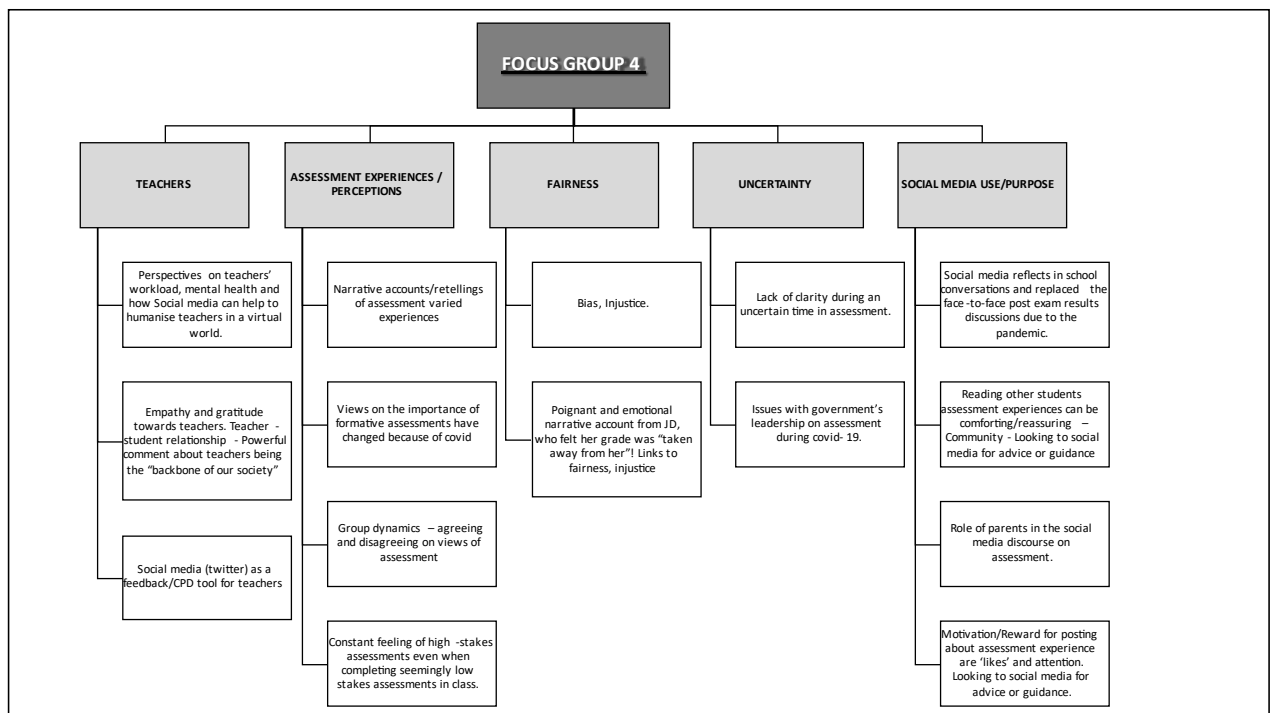


Figure 11: Focus Group 4 analysis showing superordinate themes (shaded - upper case) and the emerging themes (unshaded - lower case)

*Step 6: Check for consistencies of the superordinate themes across all focus groups (horizontal analysis by Palmer et al., 2010) and individuals.*

The data was rich, and several superordinate themes emerged for each focus group. I evaluated the consistency of the superordinate themes by using Tomkins and Eatough's (2010, p. 250) "additional iterative loop" to check the prevalence of each superordinate theme in the transcripts and whether each participant was represented, as Smith et al. (2009) recommend that each theme should represent at least a third of participants.

There is no prescriptive way to perform an "iterative loop"; however, research suggests reading and rereading transcripts (Palmer et al., 2010; Tomkins & Eatough, 2010). I decided to use the "find word" feature in MS Word to search for words related to the superordinate themes against each participant for supporting quotations. For example, in Focus Group 2, 'fairness' was identified as a superordinate theme; therefore, words like 'unfair, fair and bias' were search terms on MS Word. The search results highlighted participants' supporting comments, with all participants contributing to the discussion on 'fairness'; thus, verifying the superordinate theme. A clear audit trail of supporting comments was stored via the researcher comments tracking document (see Appendix K).

When superordinate themes were consistent within each focus group, like Palmer et al. (2010) proposed, I performed a horizontal analysis to integrate the multiple focus group data. This involved looking for patterns and differences in the superordinate themes and themes across all focus groups.

All four focus groups contained shared superordinate themes about assessment experiences, and they were: fairness, teachers, social media use and uncertainty. Figures 8 – 11 were printed in colour code for each focus group, and the superordinate themes and themes across all focus groups were cut up and amalgamated together, as seen in Figure 12 below.

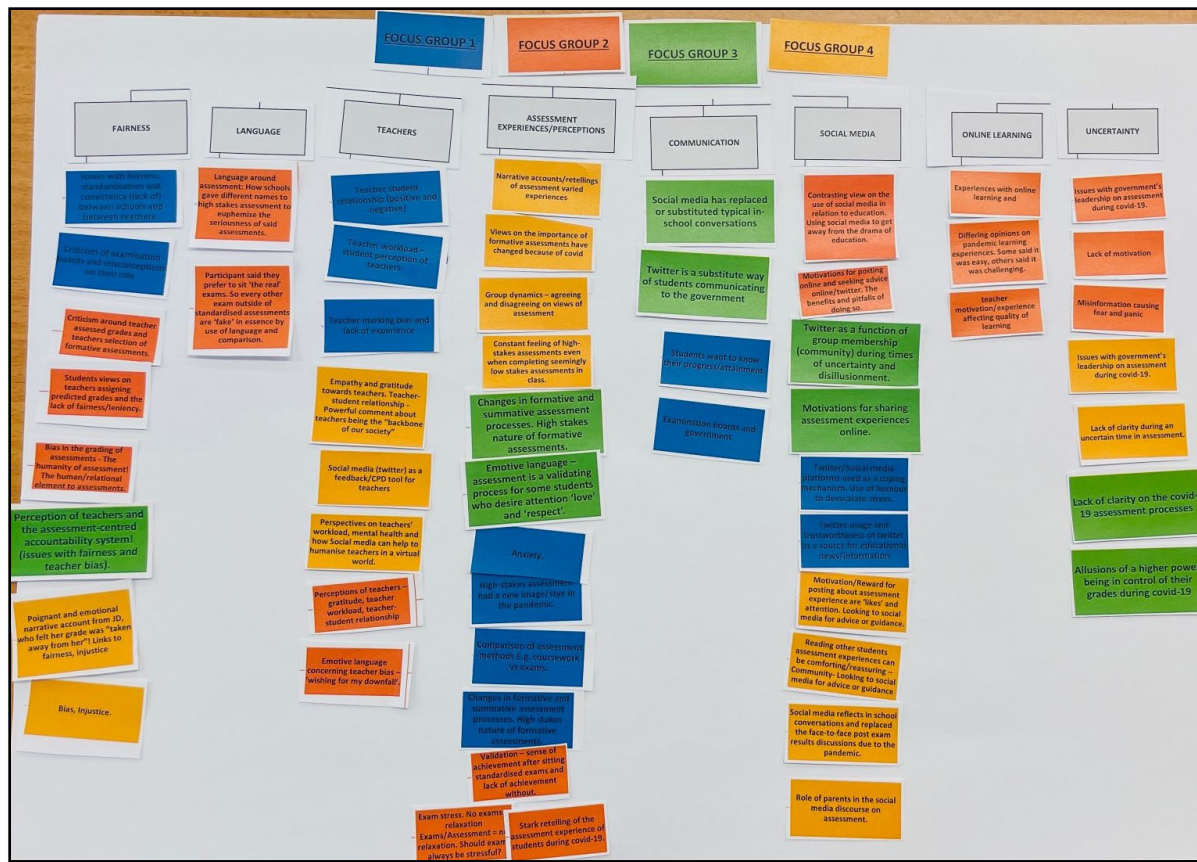


Figure 12: Photo which captures the amalgamation of themes process. Each focus group is colour coded, and the grey boxes represent the superordinate themes across all groups at this stage.

The amalgamation process removed duplicate themes and condensed some theme names for clarity. Two superordinate themes were demoted where there was no substantial evidence of their prevalence across all four focus groups. For example, “Language” and “Online Learning” were originally superordinate themes derived from Focus group 2, but were not identified as superordinate themes in any other focus group. After rechecking transcripts using the “additional iterative loop” method in step 5, “language” was moved under “perceptions of assessment” as participants often expressed their perceptions of assessment using nuanced vocabulary. In addition, “Online Learning” was expressed by participants in Focus Group 2 in the context of ‘teacher-student interactions’, so it was moved under the superordinate theme of

“perception of teachers”. Finally, superordinate themes “communication” and “social media” shared similarities and were merged into one superordinate theme called “social media”; with communication as one of its subthemes, among others. Figure 13 was produced as the first draft of integrated superordinate themes and subthemes.

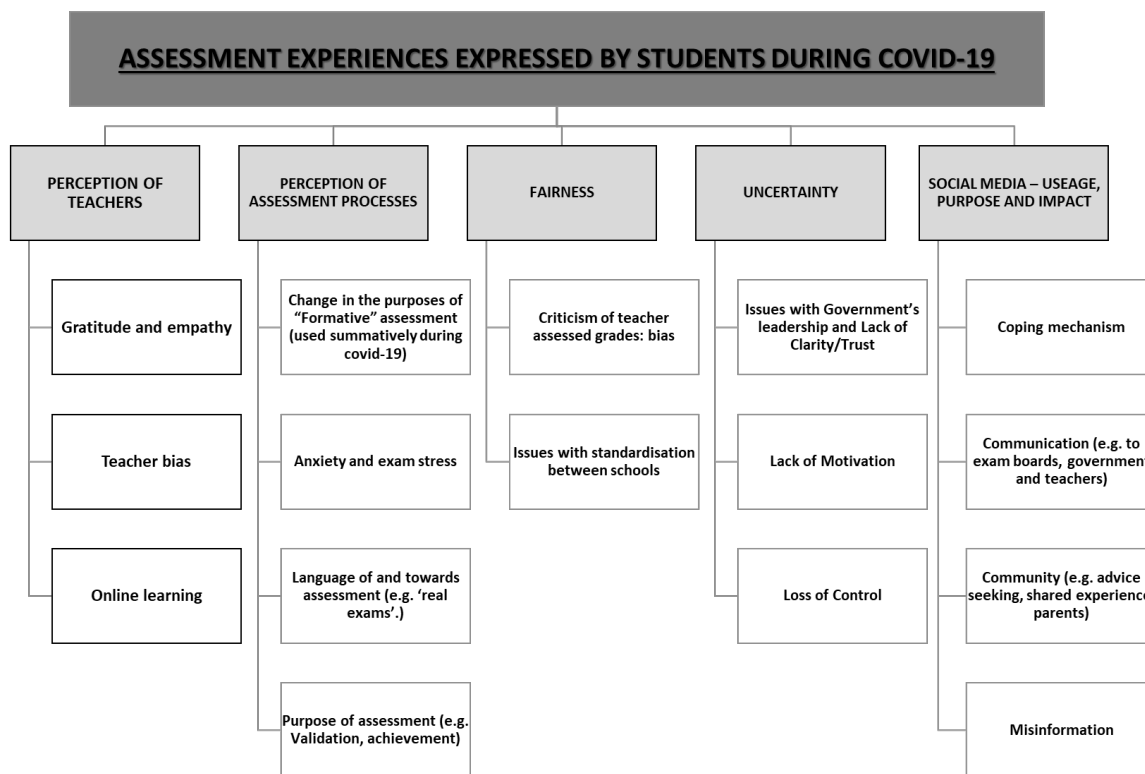


Figure 13: First draft of integrated superordinate themes and themes across all four focus groups.

### *Step 7: Analysis rigour checks*

I checked whether the identified themes were credible representations of participants accounts and that the process of determining the themes was rigorous and comparable to the standards outlined in IPA literature (Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Love et al., 2020; Smith et al., 2009).

For instance, I completed thorough research training in qualitative data analysis and online research (See Appendix L for research training log). I used iterative methods in steps 5 and 6 to check the credibility of themes in representing the essence of participants experiences. Finally, the superordinate themes and themes were discussed



with my supervisors, and in November 2021, I presented the preliminary research process and findings to two research groups; AQA's research advisory board and UCL's Educational Assessment Group (UCL, 2021). These settings comprised assessment experts and students, so their questions about the analysis process helped me articulate, justify, and reify my claims as done in this section.

### *Step 8: Create a taxonomy of themes*

Five superordinate themes were developed and redrafted in a logical sequence (Love et al., 2020; Smith et al., 2009); see figure 14.

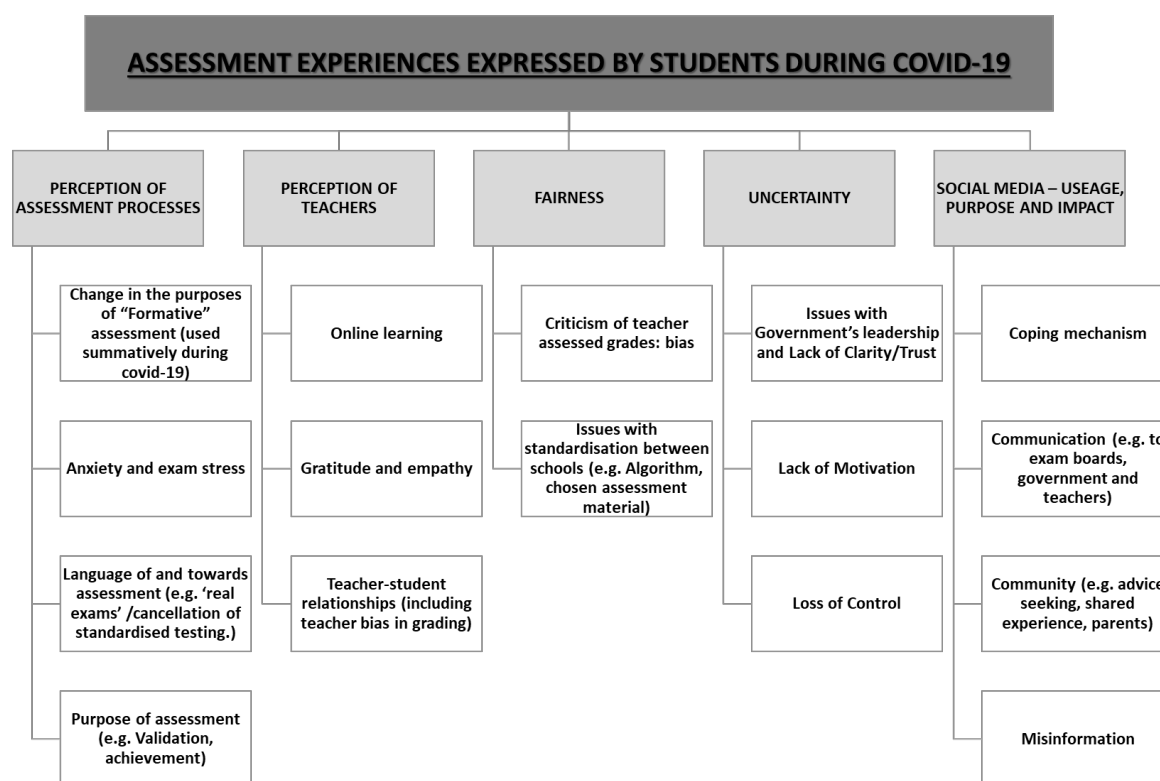


Figure 14: Second draft of integrated superordinate themes and themes across all four focus groups.

The logical sequencing was based on the story-telling nature of students' discussions which followed a particular chronology of their assessment experiences during Covid19. From the cancellation of exams and perceived changes in assessment processes to views about teachers including bias; and issues around the fairness and uncertainty of assessments; finally, the role of social media in navigating the change and precarious nature of assessment practices during Covid19.

The chronological retelling of participants lived experiences is evident in the final taxonomy of themes (Figure 15), where the use of arrows indicates the connections between and overlapping of superordinate themes, consistent with participants stories (Smith, 2015; Smith et al., 2009). For example, perception of teachers and fairness often converged but differed in how participants expressed their respective experiences; hence they are individual superordinate themes. Further analysis checks helped identify 'uncertainty' as a by-product of students' perceptions of fairness; thus, 'uncertainty' became a subtheme of fairness.

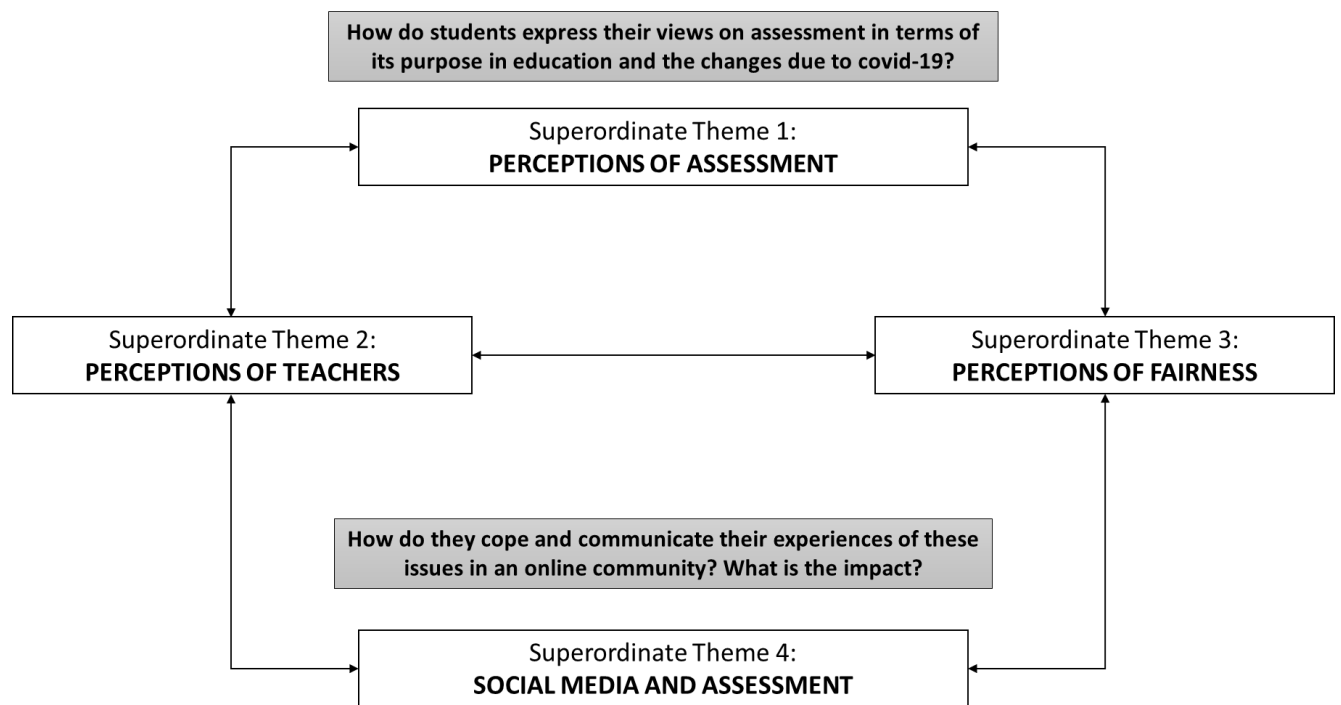


Figure 15: Final Taxonomy of superordinate themes. The arrows reflect the identified connections between superordinate themes and the questions

## Chapter 7: Results

Following the data analysis, four themes emerged in response to the primary research aim: to understand students' assessment experiences during Covid19 using assessment-related tweets as artefacts to anchor their narratives. The results are presented by theme with quotations to illustrate the findings: Perceptions of Assessment, Perceptions of Teachers, Perceptions of Fairness and, social media and Assessment.

### 7.1 Perceptions of Assessment

Students' perceptions of their assessment experiences during Covid19 took a range of forms, and these were explored using assessment-related tweets.

Participants discussed formative assessments such as mock exams and in-class tests, which they took in preparation for high-stakes assessments (summative). Additionally, the purpose of assessments was a key theme in their perceptions, as the following sections demonstrate.

#### *7.1.1 Frequency of formative assessments used for summative purposes*

Participants perceived a change in formative assessments' purpose, frequency, language, and importance. They described frantic assessment timetables during the pandemic: *"it has felt like it's exam, after exam, after exam"* (FG3/T6/L401, EC), and EM agreed,

*I feel I've just been on a roundabout of constant assessment...it doesn't feel like GCSE, where it was just a simple end of topic test or assessment and not so important. (FG4/T6/L742, EM).*

Other Year 13 students emphasised the increased frequency of assessment. For example, EE shared,

*all of a sudden, we're getting thrown with multiple tests, and we have about two weeks or a week to learn between each test and the tests are all piled up... (FG2/T3/L275, EE).*

In addition to frequency, some students acknowledged a change in the assessment lexicon. The study's institution renamed assessments used for teacher assessed grades (TAGs) evidence as 'reviews of learning'. This was a new language entering the assessment discourse for students who were used to formative assessments being called 'mock exams'. To illustrate, EE said,

*Just like we did in the last bit of our A-Levels where you're constantly doing quote unquote reviews of learning, constantly, every two weeks is basically an assessment, but they're just not gonna call it that. (FG2/T6/L472, EE)*

Participants also used the chat (Figure 16) further to express their views on the continuous nature of assessment experienced during Covid19, "HK has put in the chat, 'no teaching of content, just straight exams'" (FG2/T6/L479, KDO).

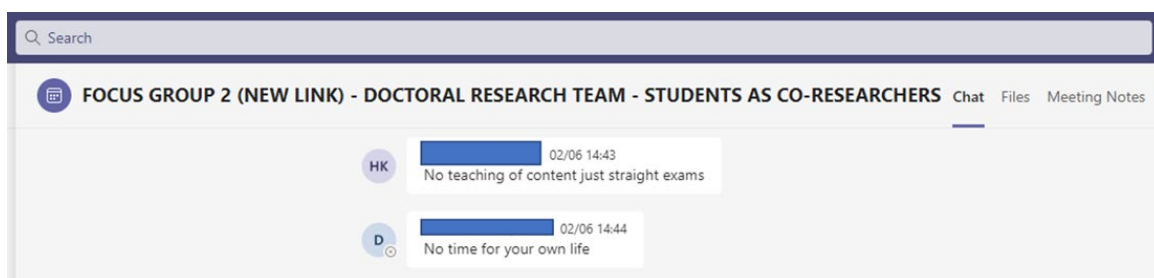


Figure 16: Participants comment in the chat about the continuous nature of assessment during Covid19 (Focus Group 2; Tweet 6)

Year 12 students across focus groups 2, 3 and 4 collectively shared how their perception of the importance of formative assessments had changed and used their experiences with their recent end of year assessments (reviews of learning) to convey this. Their discussions were prompted by focal stimuli Tweet 3 (Figure 17)

to any of my followers who just finished year 13/ have done a levels, how important are the year 12 end of year exams pls

Figure 17: Tweet 3 (focal stimulus)

One student stated, *“with these exams; it was never really expressed how important these end of years really were. Like, they're important, but how important?”* (FG3/T1/L185, AF).

The question of the importance of assessments appeared several times:

*There's been like an emphasis on the importance of assessments and how we come up to them and treat them. With the recent assessments, I wouldn't have been as stressed as I'd been about them if it had not been for the fact that we didn't get our GCSE grades in the normal way... It's been made clear that all grades matter at this stage, and so reading that tweet made me feel really overwhelmed. Like, oh God, this is awful, but I do think many people do feel as if the importance of assessments has really gone up.* (FG3/T6/L392, MB)

Others agreed,

*I think that every exam is important, especially after we've seen with Covid19. all of these exams now will probably go towards our end grades if we don't sit exams”* (FG4/T2/L351, EM) and *“I've felt like every single assessment has been important. I don't know whether that's my mindset because of what's happened in the last 12 months, but I just constantly feel like I'm working towards exams all the time* (FG4/T6/L742, EM).

Such comments indicate a shift in the way students perceived the purpose of formative assessments compared to experience.

### *7.1.2 Teacher assessed grades or exams - Purpose of assessment (Validation and achievement)*

In the context of TAGs, students' perceptions of formative assessments were juxtaposed by their views of summative assessments. Their discussions revealed preferences for summative assessments as the favoured means of (a) taking an assessment and (b) recording academic achievements.

Students said things like: *“I would prefer to sit the real exams”* (FG2/T8/L610, DT). The language used by DT is nuanced as “real exams” is what DT used to mean standardised summative assessments.

RC illustrated a similar sentiment regarding formative assessments not holding validating qualities and said:

*I'd also like to sit the exams because... after we got our GCSE grades, it kind of felt like we didn't do anything to deserve them* (FG2/T8/L598, RC)

She was supported by HK, who said,

*I prefer to just sit the exams 'cause I feel like in the back of my head, it's like I don't even know my own ability. Like did I really deserve those grades?* (FG2/T8/L584, HK).

Their comments suggest particular beliefs about assessment such as validation, deservedness, and sense of achievement that some students experience and associate with standardised summative assessments.

However, through discussing Tweet 9 (Figure 18), one student passionately refuted any claim that grades attained through TAGs formative assessments are undeserving.

I am a private candidate, year 12 , and I want summer 2021 exams to run normally, like cambridge board .  
Cancelling and giving assessment are unfair options .  
Last year students got all A\* without even opening a single book, based on the bribed teacher assessed grades

Figure 18: Tweet 9 (focal stimulus)

EC retorted,

*It's all evidence-based. So, saying that they've all got A\*s without doing a single bit of work is fundamentally wrong. I mean, we all got GCSEs through teacher assessments, and I think I can speak for all of us when we say we worked hard for those. (FG3/T8/L474, EC).*

Contrary to their peers, AD believed that students:

*would slightly want to have teacher assessed grades because no one wants the pressure from actual exams... We've not done GCSEs, so we don't actually know what exam pressure feels like, and we wouldn't be acclimatized to it or adapted to it. I think we all just like really want teacher assessed grades. (FG2/T8/L575, AD)*

All participants agreed that assessment experiences could be stressful and increase anxiety about school.

### *7.1.3 Anxiety/Stress*

This pressure was exemplified in the way participants discussed their assessment experiences, with one year 13 student advising the year 12 participants in the group with these words,

*I don't want to cause fear in anyone, but A-Levels have been the death of me ... especially if you do sciences, A-Levels are gonna be the death of you. Well, you're gonna get through it, once you write the exams, you're gonna feel more relaxed, but A-Levels will be the death of you. (FG2/T7/L500, EE)*

For this student, relaxation comes after examination and EE's comments were supported by other students who said that A-Levels,

*can get very stressful because there's such an emphasis on assessment rather than the quality of learning. It's more about how you do in an exam rather than how well you understand material in class and how you're doing on a non-assessment level. (FG3/T6/L416, AD).*

AD implied that exams do not capture how well they understand the subject outside of a summative assessment context and that this was stressful.

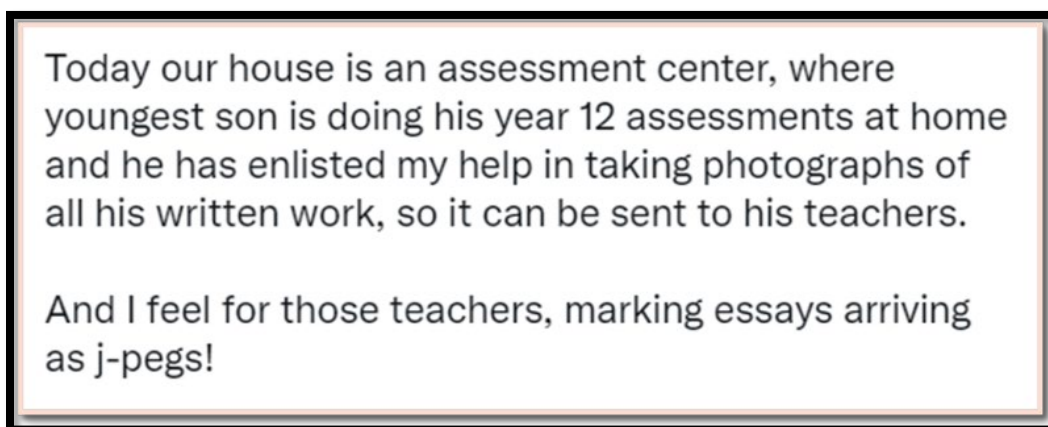
Furthermore, participants expressed that in standardised assessments, “*you can get into the exam, and there are whole topics gone like they're not even in there*” (FG3/T8/L589, AD). This example of construct underrepresentation in assessment materials contributes to students’ experiences with exam stress and has influenced the way students perceive their teachers’ roles in preparing them for standardised tests.

## 7.2 Perceptions of teachers

Participants’ discussions revealed various perceptions about their teachers during Covid19, related explicitly to assessment-driven teaching and learning practices. Their discussions included the transition to online assessments, their relationship with teachers and their understanding of the challenges faced by teachers during Covid19.

### *7.2.1 Online Teaching and Learning (Assessments)*

When presented with tweet 12, participants discussed experiences of completing formative assessments at home as part of remote learning during the school closures.



*Figure 19: Tweet 12 (focal stimulus)*

Participants related to the tweet and discussed how such posts online highlighted the challenges around completing assessments at home. EC said,



*I certainly had to do some assessments at home during lockdown, so I relate on that level because it's really hard to do assessments at home. I mean, there's so many distractions. (FG3/T11/L612, EC)*

Other participants reflected on how their A-Level subjects and the associated assessment methods had influenced their Covid19 experience with formative assessments. MB said, *"I do three essay subjects, and essays that I would have to write by hand under time conditions; I learned to write them by having to type them"*.

MB then described the transition from typing essays to now hand-writing essays in her recent year 12 assessments and what it meant for her practically.

*Doing these assessments over the last few weeks has actually shown me that I've got to start writing by hand again. It sounds like a really weird thing, but I've become so accustomed to the very efficient way of typing, and technology has actually affected my ability to handwrite an essay." (FG3/T11/L623, MB)*

Students made practical suggestions about how teaching methods should adapt or respond to students Covid19 assessment experiences. *"I think there's got to be an awareness that we've devolved a little bit as students. We have to learn how to be able to write quickly and efficiently again" (FG3/T11/L636, MB).*

### *7.2.2 Teacher-student relationships and their interplay with perceptions of teacher bias*

Several assessment-related tweets (Appendix H) provoked participants across all focus groups to reveal thoughts on teacher-student relationships as a precursor for teacher bias within the context of TAGs processes during Covid19.

Participants expressed concern about the effect of teacher-student relationships on TAG outcomes. Some participants shared their frustration through retelling their eyewitness accounts,

*Yeah Miss, I actually do think sometimes the teacher-student relationship affects the grade because I've personally seen it in my previous school... I've seen students like put in so much work. But then because there's just some spiteful*

*teachers out there that just don't like their job, they just gave him like one of the worst grades. (FG2/T4/L361, AD)*

The description of teachers as 'spiteful' and the like was not isolated, another participant admitted that sometimes they feel,

*Teachers don't want us to succeed. I would not lie to you, because there are teachers like you that try to help us and there's other teachers that just tell you, you have an exam, like just learn and they don't want to give any advice...it's almost like you're wishing for my downfall. You don't want me to get into university. (FG2/T4/L325, EE)*

The language used to describe their perception of teachers linked to concerns about how teacher-student relationships affect their post-16 university prospects. Also, students' perceived lack of guidance from teachers around assessments was seen as unhelpful and, put frankly, 'wishing for their downfall.'

Participants shared their first-hand experiences of perceived teacher bias and fraught teacher-student relationships. One student described how the discrepancy between her mock exam grade and final TAG produced negative feelings towards her teacher.

*When I got my mocks results, I got a 9 in chemistry, and that day when I got the test back, I was so proud of myself because I worked so hard...and then on results day, he gave me a 7, and it felt like he thought I didn't deserve that 9 that I had worked so hard to get, so he sort of took it away from me, and even now talking about it really upsets me because I worked so hard and it felt like I there was no recognition. (FG4/T4/L551, JD).*

Other students continued the discussions on perceived teacher bias in the chat (Figure 20), and in FG4 AB wrote, “*teachers may be bias (sic) unknowingly, no amount of training can separate us from human tendencies*”, a comment which was ‘liked’ by other participants.



Figure 20: Focus Group 4 Participants' comments in the chat concerning teacher bias.

However, these views on teachers' attitudes were not consensus across all focus groups. Other students confidently stated their annoyance at the idea of teacher-student relationships, namely students' personalities affecting their grades.

*I just want to make the point that I don't particularly understand why students think that teachers are going to give them grades based on their personality when it's really the work they're putting in that counts towards their grade... if there's a good relationship, it means that the student will probably work harder. (FG2/T4/L341, CL)*

CL's comments revealed confidence in the grading system and that positive teacher-student relationships improve students' motivation.

Discussions around teacher attitudes continued in other focus groups, and students empathised with the views shared in Tweet 5 below.

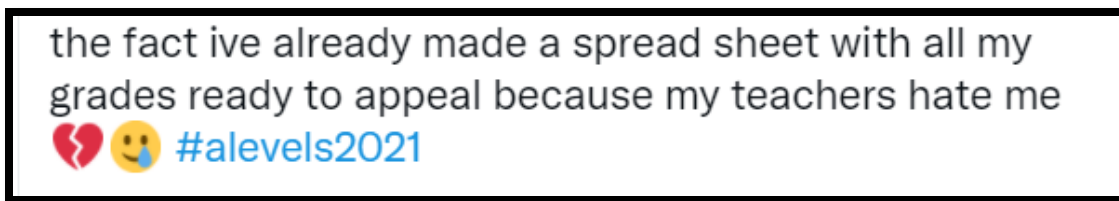


Figure 21: Tweet 5 (focal stimulus)

LB said,

*I think it's really strong to say your teacher hates you, but it shows that students don't feel like their teachers are on their side and want to give them the best possible grade they can get. (FG1/T2/L191, LB)*

Similarly, NN agreed that despite having never felt as though a teacher hates her, she recognised that some students “don't have as great of a relationship with their teachers, because you hear it all the time even in school like, ‘this teacher hates me’, like as if they have it out for them” (FG1/T2/L183, NN).

Despite their inability to relate to the experience of the fraught teacher-student relationships expressed in the tweet and by other students, their comments show how participants sought to rationalise the feelings of students who said they had been victims of biased grading on social media.

One student viewed tweets on teacher-student relationships as “attention-seeking” and said,

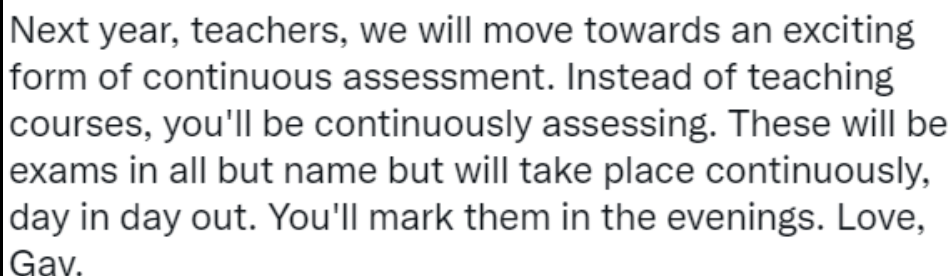
*I would roll my eyes at it because I feel like it was within the teacher's interest to give their students the best grades. Because I mean that's their job. I mean, their employers are looking at the grades they are producing, so it's not like they're going to give you a bad grade just 'cause they hate you. (FG3/T4/L315, EC)*

EC's comment moved the issue from focusing on feelings of perceived 'hate' from teachers and illuminated students' views on the transactional economic role they understand teachers play when assessing.

### 7.2.3 Empathy /Sympathy with teachers

Further discussions revealed how students understood teachers' experiences with assessment and teaching during Covid19. Participants considered tweets about teacher bias from the perspective of teachers and admitted that it would be “disheartening” for teachers to read because it is “*setting the blame onto the teacher*” (FG1/T5/L310/NN).

Moreover, participants perceived teachers' workload to have increased during the pandemic. When presented with Tweet 7 (figure 22), one student visualised teacher workload and said, “*This tweet creates an image in my mind of a teacher behind their desk sitting like surrounded by all these piles of exam papers or assessments.*” (FG2/T9/L644, DT)



Next year, teachers, we will move towards an exciting form of continuous assessment. Instead of teaching courses, you'll be continuously assessing. These will be exams in all but name but will take place continuously, day in day out. You'll mark them in the evenings. Love, Gav.

Figure 22: Tweet 7 (focal stimulus)

Another student believed that “*teachers are just over it*” and are “*tired of constantly having to mark papers every two weeks...and having to moderate different people's tests*” (FG2/T9/L633, EE).

Like EE, other participants showed an awareness of the additional tacit tasks of teachers and shared their observations of the teachers around them during the Covid19 assessment context,

*Teachers were visibly distressed and overwhelmed with the situation; they were all over the place. I remember, my history teacher said, ‘oh, everything with year 13 is like up in the air. I don't even know what's happening’, and I just felt so bad for them.* (FG4/T5/L675, JD)

Identical to JD's remarks above, participants in all focus groups voiced sympathy towards the perceived plight of teachers with repeated use of the phrases "*I feel quite bad*" (FG3/T9/L539, AD) and "*I do feel kind of bad*" (FG1/T10/L539, NN). Their choice of words indicates that students' perceptions of how their teachers coped with the assessment processes during Covid19 consequently affected how they reified the teaching profession.

Some students said they felt guilty about not thinking about their teachers during that time.

*I never once, not even for a second, thought about how much my teachers hated it and how hard it was for them, and now that I think about it, it makes me feel really bad. (FG4/T5/L700, JD).*

Other participants used their feelings of guilt to focus on how teachers' experiences, specifically teachers' mental health, workload, and remuneration, were overlooked during Covid19. For example, AD said,

*There's been lots of discussions over how bad the pandemic is for students' mental health and how bad it is for their grades and education. But I think people have neglected to really think about how teachers are experiencing the whole situation because they're the ones providing us with the education. I mean, their wellbeing is important because if it's bad, then the quality of our education won't be good. (FG3/T9/L539, AD)*

AD linked the quality of education to teachers' well-being, and the same advocacy for teachers' mental health continued in several participants' chat comments (Figure 23).

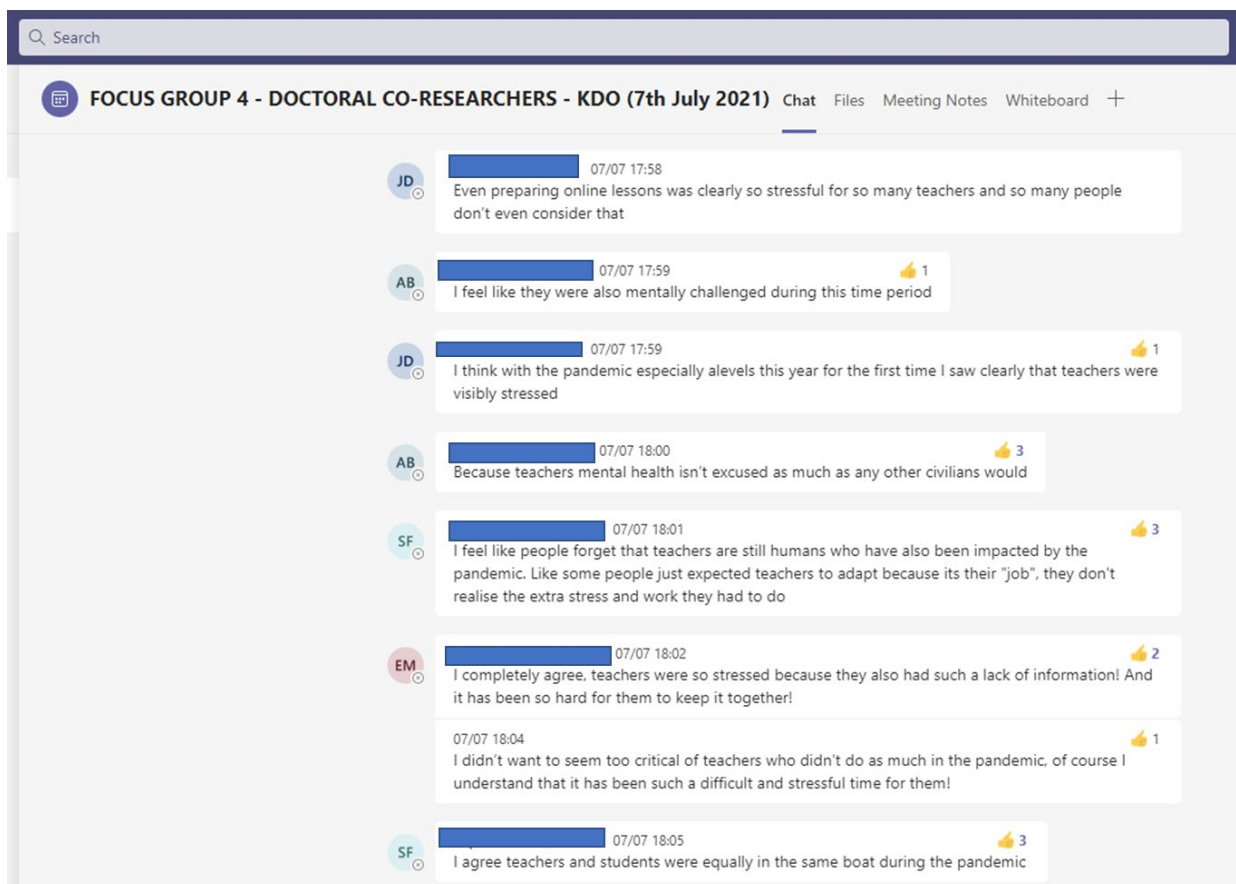


Figure 23: Participants comments in the chat about teachers' mental health, workload and stress

The chat comments conveyed students' collective empathy for teachers as they reflected on their experiences. SF wrote in the chat, *"I feel like people forget that teachers are still humans"*, a statement that three other participants liked.

The focus of this discussion revealed a moment where students realised their experiences were not so different to that of their teachers. JD said,

*We never think about how much teachers' mental health and how the school environment or the workload affects them. Like it must affect teachers the same way that it affects us. But we never think about stuff like that, and we never have conversations about that kind of thing" (FG4/T5/L675, JD).*

### 7.2.4 Gratitude

Participant's conversations evolved from empathetic comments to remarks of gratitude for teachers, seen in statements such as, *"thanks to teachers, our society works"* (FG2/T5/L435, DT) and *"teachers are like basically the backbone of our society"* (FG4/T5/L604, JD).

The theme of gratitude was accentuated when participants interpreted stimulus tweet 6 and conveyed the importance of thanking their teachers within the Covid19 context.



Figure 24: Tweet 6 (focal stimulus)

For example, EM used an example of my role (KDO) as her teacher during the pandemic to justify why she felt it was essential to thank teachers. She said,

*They do so much for us...especially with Covid19. Like the amount of time I definitely know that you (KDO) have spent marking exams and, I think teachers*



*work so hard to make sure that we get what we deserve and saying ‘thank you’ is so important. (FG4/T5/L614, EM)*

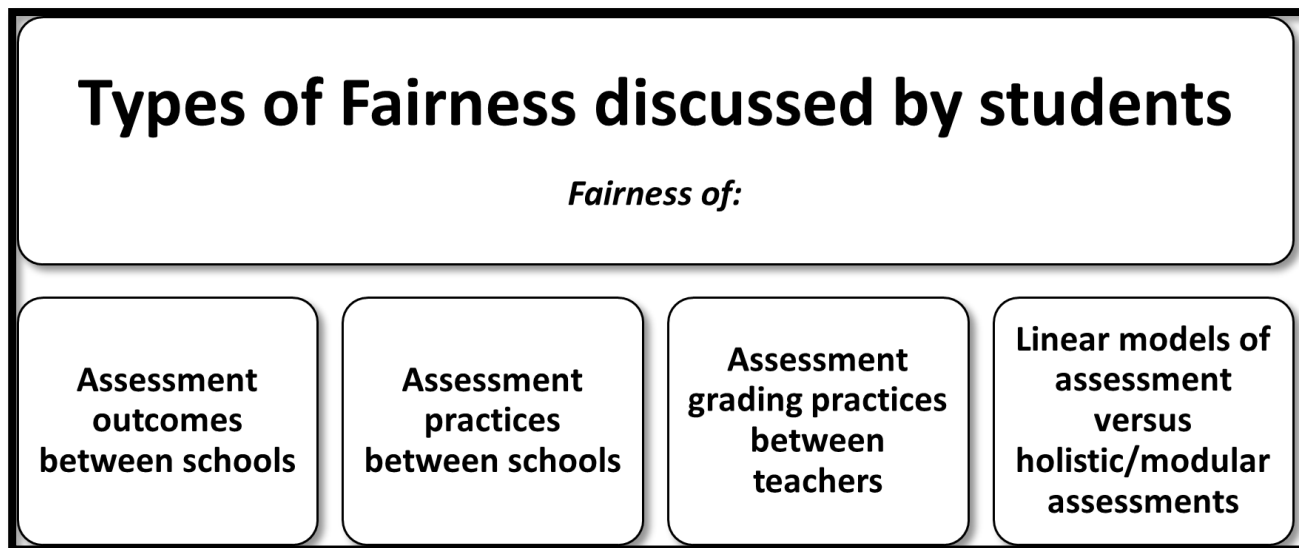
While most students agreed on the importance of gratitude, a year 13 student jovially pointed out that students’ gratitude towards teachers during the Covid19 assessment context may have ulterior motives. LB said,

*There’s been an ongoing thing on social media saying that you basically have to be super nice your teachers to get the grades you want... You have to thank them, but also basically like be on your knees saying how much you want a certain grade [giggle] (FG1/T4/L236, LB).*

This comment revisits the previously discussed issue of teacher bias, as it appears that some students understood gratitude as a form of bribery.

### 7.3 Fairness

Participants’ discussions about assessment unveiled the many types of ‘fairness’ understood and experienced by students during Covid19 (See Figure 25).



*Figure 25: Types of fairness discussed by participants*

#### *7.3.1 Fairness of assessment practices between schools*

Participants discussed the fairness of assessment practices between schools regarding the provision given to students in preparation for TAGs assessments. They

talked about the perceived lack of consistency between schools. For example, LB stated,

*I think it's just completely unfair because if you have other schools providing lots of help for their students, it puts them in an advantage compared to another school who are basically sitting A-Levels with no help on what it might be about (FG1/T2/L150, LB).*

LB's comments are in the context that some schools were providing advanced information of topics included in the assessments for students to target their revision. In contrast, other schools treated these assessments as close to official examinations as possible by not providing advanced information, which was seen as “*completely unfair.*”

### *7.3.2 Fairness of assessment outcomes between schools*

The discussion developed into frustrated comments about the fairness of outcomes between private and state schools. Several students discussed the algorithm debate from 2020 and shared its effect on them through their narratives. JD said,

*They only wanted the private school kids to do well. On results day, I remember talking to some of my friends who went to private schools, they got so many nines and I asked them how they did in their mocks, and I did better than them in my mocks, but they got better grades than me. (FG4/T3/L432, JD).*

To JD, her final grades were unfair compared to her private school counterparts. She believed that the government favoured private schools and were not “*acting fairly*” (FG4/T3/L432, JD).

There was a shared assumption that in the context of Covid19, mock exam grades were supposed to indicate their potential and consequently their final grade; however, this was not their experience. Students reported that their academic potential and abilities were replaced with ‘labels’ of being ‘disadvantaged’ because of where they went to school. SF described,

*Now with my results, quite a few of my grades got lowered from what I actually got in my mocks, so I still felt like the government weren't really looking at us or*

*our potentials. They were just labelling us as to where we came from so I felt like we're all just stuck being disadvantaged, rather than actually being looked at for what we can get. (FG4/T3/L447, SF)*

### *7.3.3 Fairness of assessment grading practices between teachers*

Discussions on fairness progressed from the lack of consistency between schools to the lack of consistency between teachers. Participants showed awareness of exam board marking and assumed that the rigour, quality, and trustworthiness of teacher-marked formative assessments were linked to teachers' level of experience with marking official summative exam board assessments. One student stated,

*You've got some teachers with exam board marking experience who are undoubtedly more rigorous, which puts you on edge because you think of all the other teachers that haven't had that experience and wonder if they're more generous with their marks and grades. You think someone in the same situation as me may get a better grade than me solely based on how their teacher marks. (FG1/T10/L558, LB)*

Other students agreed that it is "stressful" when you think of unfairness in this way; however, they showed some tolerance about the situation and said, "*the exam board can't train all teachers now to suddenly know how to mark exam papers*" (FG1/T10/L566, NN).

### *7.3.4 Fairness of linear versus modular models of assessment*

When discussing Tweet 11 (Figure 26), participants considered the fairness of linear assessment practices (i.e., completing summative assessments at the end of the 2-year course). They considered how returning to this mode of assessment might affect them in the future if reinstated after two years of TAGs, where multiple assessments throughout the course were eligible to be used as evidence.

Question 3 : will the current year 12 assessment be part (percentage) of the overall result in A level next year in 2022 rather than consolidate 2 years into one exam series?

Figure 26: Tweet 11 (focal stimulus)

Students said that linear exams “*should not define them*” and that their grades should be “*generated from their progress of the two years and not just two or three exams*” (FG4/T7/L824, SF). Others argued, “*regardless of whether we’re in a pandemic or not, it is not fair that the last two years of your life boils down to this one day of exams*” (FG4/T7/L784, JD).

### 7.3.5 Uncertainty about future assessments

Students’ perceptions of fairness were the precursor to their discussions of experiences with uncertainty, both past, present and future. JD said,

*I don't know if we are getting our grades predicted next year. Am I going to end up with grades that do not show my potential because I didn't go to a private school...? (FG4/T3/L432, JD).* Others said the lack of guidance from the government about next year’s grading process has made them feel “*concerned*” and “*anxious*” (FG3/T9/L563, TB).

### 7.3.6 Uncertainty about assessments during Covid19 (past)

As participants reviewed Tweet 2 (Figure 27), they remembered the uncertainty they experienced concerning assessments during Covid19.

Officially finished the horrible year that yr13 has been but so proud of myself for doing double the exams we were promised were cancelled [#alevels2021](#)

Figure 27: Tweet 2 (focal stimulus)

They recalled the conflicting messages they received about assessment: “*One day I'm being told no exams and then the next I'm being told we've got six exams to sit so we can get your grade*” (FG4/T3/L477, HM).

*Others added,*

*The government didn't really have a plan. Because one minute they were saying all exams are cancelled because of lockdown...and then next minute you come back to school, and you're told 'Oh you've got exams [tone is sarcastic/annoyed].* (FG2/T3/L297, RH)

The incongruence between the said cancellation of exams and students' experiences of sitting multiple exams for the TAGs process made the government appear as “*messing students around*” (FG3/T3/L226, EC) and heightened students' feelings of uncertainty.

Consequently, participants said that the authors of the tweets they discussed were justified in sharing their thoughts and experiences with assessment via Twitter as “*a good way of letting the government know how they feel*” (FG3/T3/L227, EC). This introduces the last section of the results chapter, where I uncovered how and why participants used social media to share their assessment experiences during Covid19.

## 7.4 Social media and assessment

### *7.4.1 Advice seeking and misinformation*

Participants discussed how Twitter was used to seek clarity and advice during a time of uncertainty about assessment. Their discussions of tweets 3 (Figure 28) and 11 (Figure 26) identified Twitter as an alternative for gaining information about assessment processes instead of directly from their schools and teachers.

to any of my followers who just finished year 13/ have done a levels, how important are the year 12 end of year exams pls

Figure 28: Tweet 3 (focal stimulus)

One student suggested that Twitter was a place for students to seek advice from other students in a comparable situation said, *“I feel like they may not have got answers in schools, and have turned to Twitter to find others in the same situation and get an answer”* (FG1/T6/L345, NN).

Another example was observed when year 13 student EE discouraged the year 12 students in the focus group from asking their teachers for advice during Covid19. She recalled her own experience with teacher advice and said,

*I disagree with the approach of asking your teacher because even though it's your teacher, I feel like it's better to hear it from someone closer in age to you because sometimes I feel like teachers exaggerate or they underplay certain things.* (FG2/T2/L244, EE)

Similarly, RC agreed that *“asking people's opinions online is so much easier than asking in real life because it eliminates, like the fear factor”* (FG2/T2/L254, RC); highlighting that there was a comfortability and convenience about assessment discourse online than in person.

Whereas others challenged the idea of using Twitter for advice to ‘eliminate fear’ and instead saw the approach as *“creating like more of a sense of panic than anything else”* (FG2/T2/L493, AD). Others used metaphors to support this view and said,

*I think it's similar to trying to find out what disease you have by looking up the symptoms on the internet. It is better to ask advice from a teacher who has taught many students, not someone on the internet.* (FG2/T2/L229, DT)

Thus, DT used illustrative language to describe his distrust towards social media as a source of assessment-related information and compared it to how searching illness symptoms online and self-diagnosing may misinform.

Participants had polarised views on social media as an advisory network. Some said, *“I wouldn't ask how other people's experiences were online”* (FG2/T2/L197, CL), while others admitted, *“I use Twitter a lot, and it's good to seek advice because it brings a sense of relief, as you're hearing the advice from your peers who have been in the same situation”* (FG2/T2/L220, HK).

#### *7.4.2 Community*

As divergent as their views were, participants acknowledged the online Twitter community existed among students during Covid19 and shared their narratives about being part of that community and its impact.

The use of hashtags in the assessment-related tweets (Appendix H) was recognised as a way of students finding people to relate to as a coping mechanism. MB and NN described it this way,

*By using a hashtag, you're connecting with a larger group of people, and you're kind of like a little collective, so I think it's almost like they want to belong to this group of people that have been really disillusioned by what's happened with the exams.* (FG3/T3/L238, MB).

NN said,

*With the hashtag ‘A-Levels 2021’, you can click on it to find like people to relate to what you're going through, and I think for some people in stressful situations, the easiest way to cope is to like see that other people are going through it too.* (FG1/T2/L124, NN)

She continues to explain that *“sometimes you don't want to talk to like your friends in school because you know they're stressed out,”* and so, for many participants, the online community was an extension of the in-school face-to-face community during Covid19.

JD aptly stated, “the conversations that we have on social media clearly reflects the same conversations that we’re having in school about exams”. FG4/T2/L377, JD).

Other participants shared how students repeated post-exam discussions on social media platforms for broader engagement and support. For example, AB explained,

*After they finish an exam, they will type in the hashtag, ‘a levels 2021’ to see everyone’s opinions and get a feeling of reassurance through seeing what other people thought, without having to ask friends. (FG4/T3/L406, AB).*

Participants interpreted hashtags as a signpost to locate the assessment experiences of other students; and that the author of these assessment-related want their tweets to be seen and engaged with. AD stated,

*The hashtag shows that they really want the post to be found. They’ve put it onto a really big collective group online, so they want it to be seen, and they want people to interact with it” (FG3/T3/L245, AD).*

#### 7.4.3 Sharing exam results on social media

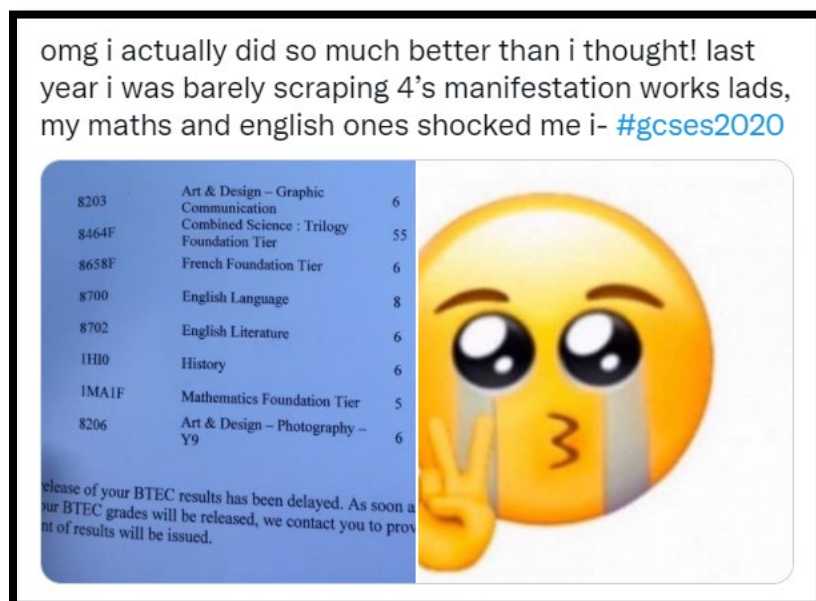


Figure 29: Tweet 1 (focal stimuli)



They agreed that validation was a significant motivator; *“I agree with the validation thing, and I think that quite a lot of people went on social media to like try and to make themselves feel really good about their results.”* They also considered how the online discourse around sharing exam results was reflective of typical pre-Covid19 offline conversations as EC continued, *“in lessons when you get exams back, you talk to each other and say oh, ‘what did you get?’ and this could be their way of doing that in a pandemic over social media”* (FG3/T1/L133, EC).

Participants pointed out that the *“feeling of pride”* (FG3/T1/L111, MB) and *“to show off”* (FG4/T1/L304, AB) were motivators for sharing assessment outcomes online.

Though, as participants considered their own experiences, some recalled that there was no pride attached to the grades achieved during Covid19 because exams were cancelled. The value of sharing online diminished, which meant their networks shared fewer exam results day related posts. For instance, AB said, *“My school friends didn't really care about results day. A lot of people didn't post because they didn't actually do an exam to get their grade”* (FG4/T1/L296, AB).

Interestingly, several participants said that while they felt comfortable seeing other students' exam results online, they did not publicly share their results.

*I wouldn't be comfortable doing it, but I'd feel comfort in someone else doing it because if someone was to post that maybe science didn't go well for them and science didn't go well for me. I just would feel like...OK, so it wasn't just me.*  
(FG4/T1/L212, AB)

Others saw their exam results as a *“really personal thing”* (FG4/T1/L238, EM) and would only post them on *“close friend's stories via Snapchat and Instagram”* but not on *“Twitter and Facebook, where a lot of people can see what you post”* because *“it can feel quite daunting”* (FG4/T1/L247, EM).

However, while students may have shared their discomfort about posting their exam results online – they admitted in the chat (Figure 30) that their parents shared their exam results on social platforms like WhatsApp and Facebook.



Figure 30: Participants comments in the chat about parental social media use in the context of assessment.

## Chapter 8: Discussion

This study aimed to explore how students engaged with assessment-related tweets and used them as artefacts to share their experiences with assessment during Covid19. The interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) suggested that students' assessment experiences during Covid19 were 1) varied and 2) interconnected in many ways.

In this discussion chapter, I take IPA's double hermeneutic approach as I acknowledge participants' experiences (the phenomena) from their perspective as students and my angle as a researcher to bring a theoretical depth and anchor what participants shared in the context of literature. The four themes that emerged in response to the research aims will be discussed under four headings, followed by a section on the study's limitations with recommendations for future research.

### 8.1 Perceptions of assessment

The results unveiled an incongruence between what was expected and what students experienced. Before the pandemic, students had expectations about formative assessments regarding the:

- Purpose
- Language used to describe the types of assessment
- Level of importance compared to high-stakes assessments.

However, their perceptions of assessment changed in these interconnected areas and are further discussed below.

A significant finding was that students perceived assessments were being used for unintended purposes. Several students recalled how 'mock exams' and 'in-class' tests were renamed 'reviews of learning'. The change in the language of assessment during Covid19 indicated a change in the purpose of these formative assessments. Some researchers argue that any assessment used for diagnostic learning purposes is formative, including mock examinations (Vaden-Goad, 2009), while other researchers contend that the act of assigning a mark transforms the assessment into an evaluation

of performance and is therefore summative (Harrison, Könings, Schuwirth, Wass and Vleuten, 2015).

Mock exams in the institution studied are typically used diagnostically to inform students of where they are and encourage responsive learning. The exams are returned to students to make corrections, and misconceptions are addressed through responsive teaching. However, under the regime of 'reviews of learning', students discussions emphasised the ongoing debate between educational assessment researchers about the unclear distinction between formative and summative assessments. The term 'reviews of learning' is eerily similar to 'assessment of learning', which is how many researchers describe summative assessments (P. Black & Wiliam, 1998, 2012; Broadfoot & Black, 2004). Therefore, it was unsurprising to hear students' reports of experiencing heightened stress and test anxiety because, during Covid19, these assessments (i.e. reviews of learning, in-class tests, essays) straddled between being formative yet being used for summative purposes to inform their final qualifications through TAGs.

Harrison et al. (2015) supports the link between the use of summative assessments and strong emotions of anxiety, even when the summative assessments are used for formative activities. This highlighted another issue around using assessments for unintended purposes (Messick, 1994). To students, their year 12 end-of-year assessments were designed for the purpose of assessing their abilities at that time point and not for generating their final A-Level grades. The use of students' historical performance on assessments not designed for teacher assessed grades (TAGs) to generate TAGs was an issue that students vocalised.

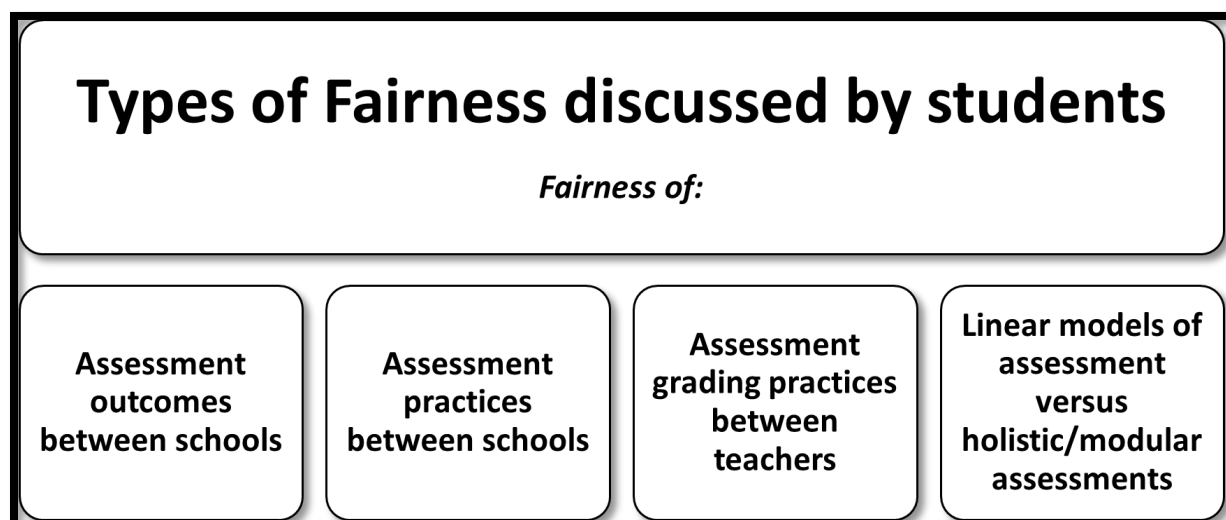
The way assessment methods were constructed was important for students' perceptions of assessments (Weurlander et al., 2012). This was apparent as many students revealed a preference for high stakes standardised summative assessments over TAGs. They referred to standardised exams as 'real' exams that would validate their attainment. The student's use of the word 'real' inadvertently suggests that every other assessment outside of standardised assessments is 'fake'. In other words, in-

class teacher assessments do not hold validating qualities for students, and it is worth exploring why and whether this view is consistent across other institutions and students.

Students' tensions around assessment highlight how existing literature may have unintentionally created a harmful dichotomy between formative and summative assessment (Black, 1993; Harlen & James, 1997). In addition, it invites assessment experts to consider how formative and summative assessments can operate in harmony (Lau, 2016; Vaden-Goad, 2009), as doing so might clarify students' perceptions of the purpose and fairness of assessments of which the latter is further discussed below.

## 8.2 Perceptions of Fairness

Students' perceptions of the fairness of assessments were layered. Four areas of 'fairness' emerged in their discussions, as seen in Figure 25 (reposted from Section 7.3)



The findings complement Shaw and Nisbet's (2021) inquiry into the views of assessment fairness in the Covid19 context. In the absence of external exams, students felt that TAGs and CAGs lacked fairness and credibility and highlighted their perceptions of high-stakes summative exams as 'real', 'fair' and 'validating'. Rarely have exams been so praised as in their absence, with many students invertedly agreeing with the previous education secretary that the best and fairest form of assessment is a proper form of examination. (DfE UK, 2020).

Similar to Harlen (2005), Hartell and Strimel (2019), and Ofqual (2013), students questioned the reliability and validity of teacher-developed summative assessments in terms of content and ability. In addition, differences between teachers' examination marking experience were considered a threat to fairness, as exemplified in Sach's (2012) study, which found that teachers' years of experience positively correlated with their confidence in developing and marking assessments.

However, as much as there was a preference for external exams, the assessment literature underscores students' lament about what Messick (1994) described as "construct underrepresentation" in high-stakes assessment design. The idea is that a single assessment cannot adequately represent an entire domain, and therefore, even high-stakes assessments may 'unfairly' neglect some content. In my opinion, this begs three significant questions:

- Could the return to continuous modular assessments provide acceptable construct representation with exams focusing on small units within a domain and provide students with a credible affirmation of learning?
- Are students unhealthily dependent on high-stakes assessments for validation and motivation for learning?
- Could mixed assessment practices improve students learning attitudes and assessment experiences?

Vocal distrust of the government and teachers was a common protective mechanism that students used to shield themselves from being labelled and misrepresented academically. Their distrust resulted from the 2020 algorithm crisis and made students question the fairness of assessment outcomes and practices between schools and teachers. Firstly, focusing on teachers, some students believed teachers were biased in providing TAGs lower than students perceived performance; others demonstrated their insight into the teacher accountability system. They argued against the presence of teacher bias in the TAG process by suggesting that teachers know their employers are looking at the grades they are awarding; therefore, they will not unfairly assign low grades. Still, this shows how the current accountability system is a threat to fairness because arguably, as seen in research (Malouff & Thorsteinsson, 2016) and

the non-exam series of 2020 (Ofqual, 2020), TAGs were overinflated compared to previous exam years. This led me to question whether accountability might be a hidden driver for teacher bias and whether teachers overinflate their grades because of accountability?

Furthermore, allied to the algorithm discussion, students identified the significance of unfairness with Ofqual's (2020) standardisation process, where 40% of English students' grades were downgraded by the algorithm that was 'designed to be fair' by mirroring their school's past performance. However, many students considered their centre assessed grade (CAG) results unfair and ignorant of their individual experiences. Their perceptions reflected wider structural 'unfairness' and inequities within education, such as the stark difference between state and private schools; and schools in poorer versus affluent areas regarding cohort sizes, resources and performance. Observing how algorithms drove inequality had a significant impact on students' emotions as well as the lack of clarity concerning the importance of future assessments and their impact on their post-16 opportunities. The amount of change and disrupted expectations experienced by students led to heightened stress and anxiety. (Shaw & Nisbet, 2021)

Nevertheless, there are significant implications for future pedagogical and broader education practice. This includes equipping teachers with in-depth pedagogical knowledge of the construction and validity of assessments (Mertler, 2009). Additionally, as previously recommended in a House of Commons (2008) report, the government should continue to consider how to separate external assessment from accountability measures and place greater prominence on summative teacher assessments so that TAGs are not left behind when we move out of the pandemic; instead, TAGs become one of many 'Covid19 keeps' for assessment practices. Finally, given the level of change, uncertainty, and anxiety felt by A-Level students, I would argue that the need for practical and supportive guidance concerning assessments has never been greater. The findings suggest that explicit articulation of expectations regarding assessment processes, practices, and outcomes is essential as early as possible in students' journeys post Covid19.

### 8.3 Perception of teachers

This study intentionally focused on A-Level students' assessment experiences within the online setting because the pandemic amplified the presence of educational assessment practices online. The Covid19 assessment space was a unique setting in which students experienced changes to in-school assessment behaviours such as typing essays instead of writing them by hand, and completing class tests and 'reviews of learning' (mock exams) via Microsoft Forms, with their teacher invigilating them remotely on Microsoft Teams.

While some saw remote learning as evolutionary for students and teachers (Ofsted, 2021), many A-Level students in this study acknowledged that they had 'devolved' in terms of skills-based assessment practices such as the skill of speed writing assessments by hand instead of typing. My results echo the findings from other studies that indicate clear challenges for students transitioning from online to face-to-face learning. Golding (2021) found that Level Mathematics students reported lower preparedness and confidence for continuing their studies and that the pandemic impacted their ability to develop critical skills in their A-Level courses, such as critical thinking and problem-solving. As for the implementation of government-backed initiatives such as 'Covid19 catch up', it appears that for post-16 students, the catch up they desired was not so much on 'lost learning' in terms of content but more on skills for face-to-face learning and assessment.

The interactive and dynamic nature of the focus groups meant that students actively tried to reify their own experiences by comparing them to the differing experiences of others. This was evident in students' perceptions of the effect of the teacher-student relationship and teacher attitudes on assessment outcomes. Several students shared that they believed teachers were biased during the TAGs process because their mock exam grades did not reflect their final TAG. As they discussed their first-hand experiences, it was interesting to observe that when students learned that they had different views to the group about perceptions of teacher bias in grading, they made various attributions to understand why their experience was different. The most concerning attributions were made by students who decided that teachers did not want



them to succeed and were 'spiteful' (Section 7.2.2). This is an example of what cognitive psychologists Kennedy (2010) and Tetlock (1985) called a causal attribution error, whereby internal causes are erroneously displaced to others. It highlights the loss of control that students felt concerning assessments as some even attributed their academic attainment during Covid19 to a 'higher power'. This causal attribution error and perceived loss of autonomy could damage students' confidence and self-esteem; moreover, it is indicative of how vital clarity and positive student-teacher relationships are to students above the neoliberal marketisation of education which views teachers as 'service providers' and 'students as consumers' (Furedi, 2010).

McCulloch (2009) posits that students should be seen as 'co-producers' in the student-teacher relationship, with shared goals and responsibilities towards academic success. The present study extends this view to the importance of teachers and students having a shared understanding and empathy for each group's mental health. Students are engaging in cognitive and emotional work when assessment-related topics are discussed online and what permeated all students' experiences was their recognition of their teacher's increased workload and additional strains to mental health.

Students surprisingly expressed deep empathy for the plight of teachers during Covid19 and raised the critical point that teachers' mental health and wellbeing are not formally discussed with students in schools, hence the discussion of such topics on the online space (Section 7.2.3).

Asbury and Kim (2020) explored teachers' experiences during Covid19 and found that teachers who engaged with Twitter discourse reported negative and positive effects on their mental health. The present study showed that students who engaged with teacher assessment-related tweets developed greater empathy for their teachers and realised they were also going through a challenging time.

Could it be that there should be an openness about teachers' mental health with senior students (post-16) to re-humanise teachers in a profession that has been the target of discouraging public messaging about their role in assessment processes and beyond (Asbury & Kim, 2020)? Schools are responsible for creating environments that

foster respectful discussions around sensitive topics, yet meaningful discussions with students about teachers' mental health have not been explored. A beneficial enquiry would be to examine teachers perceived challenges in having these vulnerable discussions.

#### 8.4 Social media and assessment

The thematic discussion section will conclude with the interplay between social media and students' assessment experiences as it ties all previous discussions together. The interaction between social media and assessment was the cornerstone of the initial research aims set to explore how students interpret assessment-related tweets; instead, the novel research method of asking students to interpret tweets yielded data beyond the initial research questions. The very act of research is creative, and my research questions innovatively developed after the pilot focus group, to now explore how students engage with assessment-related tweets and use them to discuss their Covid19 assessment experiences with their peers.

Amid the change and uncertainty of Covid19, students used social media to seek clarity on assessments, and doing so was comforting, validating, and supportive. Their online discussions about assessment built a community among students, and participants acknowledged how hashtags were a powerful tool for centralising discussions and establishing a collective student voice (Chukwuere, 2021; Watson, 2020). Like Nguyen (2019) observed in Texan undergraduates, students in our study reflected on how Twitter was a tool for activism and was foundational for the 'U-turn' in the assessment outcomes following students use of Twitter hashtags to protest, connect with other like-minded individuals and get their voices heard by those in power who were accessible via Twitter. Consequently, there are implications for governments, examination boards and schools globally to confidently consider the benefits of collating student voice through platforms where students are already organising their views on educational assessment topics.

The authenticity of students' social media posts may be questioned compared to their actual offline experiences; however, Howlett (2021) and de Seta (2020) confirm that the divide between people's online and offline presentations is less prominent.

Furthermore, students 'real lives' happened and continue to happen virtually because of Covid19, such as isolating students still receiving statutory remote education provision two years on (DfE, 2022); and discussions about assessment still prominent online under new Twitter hashtags like #Alevels2022 (Twitter, 2022b) and #advancedinformation (Twitter, 2022a) following Ofqual's (2022) release of exam content for the 2022 summer exam series.

The overlap between online and offline lives explains how students' online communities provided a space for typical offline discussions about assessment to take place online because of the availability of diverse forms of communication during Covid19. Twitter and other social media platforms appealed to post-16 students because they could discuss challenging topics, which they reported were often harder to have in-person given the heightened emotions of their peers during Covid19. Students' assessment experiences included online discussions reminiscent of post-exam talk and sharing exam results. However, students were polarised in their views about sharing their exam results online, with many seeing their results as personal and not for public appraisal. Interestingly, students felt comfort reading about other students' and teachers' experiences and felt that it justified their own experiences.

A telling finding was how students placed greater value and trustworthiness on the advice received by 'unknown' peers on social media than the advice provided by schools and teachers about assessments during Covid19. Social media is full of unregulated speech and yet has so much influence on the minds and behaviours of young people. Research has shown the negative impact of how social media propagated misinformation during the pandemic (Shahi, Dirckson & Majchrzak, 2021) and how it was used to share ill-founded views about teachers and education (Asbury & Kim, 2020)! Therefore, these findings emphasise that as well as fighting the pandemic, schools and decision-makers in education must fight the 'infodemic' to reduce the effects of misinformation. Tackling misinformation about assessment can be achieved by rebuilding trust between students and teachers by providing more explicit guidance about assessment expectations and media literacy education (Hwang, Ryu, & Jeong, 2021). Moreover, as the universities did in Nguyen's (2019) research, educational

stakeholders with decision-making powers should actively address any misinformation using their social media accounts for greater impact as they engage with students where students are located – online!

### 8.5 Study limitations

The present study's qualitative research methodology produced rich descriptive data, which facilitated a detailed examination of students' assessment experiences. Furthermore, the focus group research design and phenomenological analysis enabled interpretations to be derived from the students' lived experiences and generated a good representation of their experiences. However, whilst the research method encouraged credible analysis of the phenomena, there are some limitations of the study which are discussed below.

#### *8.5.1 Sample*

The present study's results came from a small sample of students in one institution; thus, it may not be generalisable to other state school students in England. However, the research design incorporated some of the views of other students shared on Twitter during Covid19, and the discussion of the findings above indicate that the results may apply to several A-Level students in England (Dike-Oduah, 2021) and globally (Hörbo et al., 2021; Sirisakpanich, 2022).

One of the four focus groups was considerably small and may have affected the ability of that group to generate adequate data for the research aims. Thankfully, the group in question was a pilot and confirmed that increasing group size was necessary for the remaining focus groups. Still, consistent with Onwuegbuzie and Leech's (2007) recommendations for qualitative power analyses, the small group yielded quality data, and all focus groups produced data to take the overall data to the point of saturation where no new themes emerged.

The sample of students studied was predominantly female, and research suggests that gender plays a role in shaping students' engagement in educational assessment (Bonneville-Roussy, Evans, Verner-Filion, Vallerand & Bouffard et al., 2017). Therefore, future research should recruit samples with an equal gender

distribution and consider having homogenous gender focus groups to investigate if gender shapes students' perceptions and experiences of online discussions about assessment.

#### *8.5.2 Validity of retrospective data*

It is essential to note that the participants lived through the experience and were now reflecting and noticing the emotions they felt at the time. It was not a direct observation of their experience; instead, it was an observation of their constructions of how they understood what they went through during Covid19. Thus, their retrospective reflections may affect the validity as retrospective self-report data is prone to inaccuracies and demand characteristics (Orne, 1970; Rosnow, 2002). Some students may have adopted a neutral stance or dismissed their strong opinions on some of the topics discussed because they were in the presence of their peers and teacher and perhaps did not want to appear hypersensitive. However, feedback from participants supports the internal validity as they were open and confidently engaged with the research process, even to the point of expressing their gratitude for participating (See appendix E). Therefore, participants' responses can be considered valid and authentic representations of students' assessment experiences during Covid19. Nonetheless, real-time engagement with students and social media discourse about assessment will allow future research, schools, examination boards and the government to observe the lived experiences of many students that may not have been seen otherwise.

#### *8.5.3 Follow-up interviews*

The duration of each focus group was intentionally limited to one hour to maximise participation and respect students' academic and social commitments. Wolgemuth et al., (2015) suggest that qualitative researchers can enhance the validity of their research findings through follow-up interviews and allowing participants to reflect on the interview process. Unfortunately, due to this time constraint, it was unfeasible to strengthen the validity of the rich findings using follow-up questions and individual interviews; however, this is a strong recommendation for future research, which will be implemented in the final doctoral thesis.

#### *8.5.4 Tension between nomothetic and idiographic processes in IPA*

The potential need for follow-up interviews leads to the final limitation, which considers the drawback of IPA analysis. The research aimed to understand students' experiences with assessment and social media discourse during Covid19 using focus group methodology, and IPA appealed because of its structure. Using a phenomenological inquiry meant that interpretations derived from the students' lived experiences rather than restricted to pre-determined categories of assessment experiences. Yet, as Wagstaff et al. (2014) describe, there was tension between the idiographic nature of IPA, which seeks to highlight individual experiences and the nomothetic element of IPA, which emphasises the commonality of experiences to develop themes.

The contrived nature of developing superordinate themes meant that some participants stories were left behind as I pursued what I deemed as good IPA analysis practice. This meant that imposing 'common' themes on the meaningful, detailed, and nuanced data from individual participants in the groups may have resulted in valuable losses of 'uncommon' yet noteworthy data. Future research using IPA with focus group methodology may seek to identify shared group themes and a superordinate theme for each participant to recognise individual experiences, but this would require a smaller participant sample than the present study (Tomkins & Eatough, 2010).

To summarise, I adapted Aristotle's famous words as "*the whole experience is greater than the sum of the themes*". The present study yielded data beyond the scope of the four themes identified and is worthy of its own investigation, so I am in a unique and exciting position further to explore the phenomena in my final doctoral thesis. For example, I would like to further explore the teacher-student relationship rhetoric on social media and how conversations about teachers' mental health can be brought to the fore in schools. Furthermore, within the realm of assessment post-Covid19, I intend to monitor students and teachers social media discourse about the recent high-stakes assessment changes, such as Ofqual's (2022) release of advanced information for the Summer 2022 exam series.

## Chapter 9: Conclusion

Educators and researchers are now in a position to consider what assessment practice might look like following Covid19, and questions around students' experiences with assessment during the pandemic are fundamental. Furthermore, we must acknowledge that students' lives are being lived online; hence it was essential to use methods that reflect the participants' world, which is precisely what this study did. The inclusion of the Twitter data in the focus group design allowed unexpected themes to emerge from the data, honouring IPA's inductive epistemology and foregrounding hermeneutics in students' interpretations of Twitter texts (Heidegger, 1988; Ricoeur, 1981).

Participants in each focus group discussion expressed that educational assessment is an issue of public and personal importance. The findings suggest that assessment practices and outcomes during Covid19 affected how students viewed themselves, their teachers, the government, and their futures. What permeates all students' experiences was the function of social media during Covid19 and their recognition of its role in amplifying their voices on assessment-related topics such as CAGs, TAGs and remote learning assessment practices. Moreover, social media helped them build an influential online community, where hashtags were considered the bedrock for social activism concerning assessment outcomes. Students used social media as a source of assessment-related news, more so than their schools and teachers, showing its prominence in their lives, yet with several implications for the institution.

The results provide a unique insight into students' complex emotional and cognitive challenges when engaging with assessment-related posts. Based on these conclusions, I would argue that practitioners need to consider how to minimise the cognitive load experienced by students due to uncertainties, unfairness, and incongruent expectations around assessment. Teachers who lack experience and pedagogical skills around summative assessments lose their students' confidence, but teachers are at the mercy of the government. Therefore, the government must put students' and teachers' emotional well-being at the forefront of every post-pandemic

educational assessment decision or reform. The study shows that substantial teacher education and professional development in summative assessments may be critical to increase credibility and confidence in teachers' professional judgment among assessment users. Finally, all educational stakeholders must be intentional about meeting students where they are – online.

Considering the results and literature in the field, I argue that students' digital storytelling and meaning-making should remain at the forefront of research and practice. A case has been made for attention to be directed towards the way students discuss assessment-related topics so that strategies and responses can be provided in ways that benefit all students online and offline.



## Personal Reflections (Unstructured)

- On reflection, because my thesis was so connected to my work, even though I had competing responsibilities and contending demands on my time they somewhat complemented each other, and it made the incredibly challenging writing process that little bit easier
- One of my concerns was that because my research method was relatively novel, in that I asked students to interpret tweets and this did not follow a typical focus group interview structure in essence, they were discussing among themselves, and I was there to prompt them in terms of questioning, I was concerned that they might be hesitant or reticent to engage in this creative process, but to my pleasure and surprise, they engaged so well and yielded data that even went beyond my research questions, giving me a position to thrive in my future work in my final doctoral thesis.
- The very act of research is creative. I was inherently creative throughout the process, and I learnt new skills, pivoted, innovated, and embraced the complexity of my research.
- I wanted to write in a way that was accessible to the students that I teach, the students who participated in your research, and my colleagues teach. I was conscious that academia is often littered with long words and complexities, and I just wanted it to be simple. I felt uncomfortable writing in the first-person voice, also known as the active voice, but it was necessary because this was my work; this was my choice; this was my research, and I needed to spotlight that. I wanted to write in a coherent voice, slightly different from the norm but still intelligible, and I hope I did that! And for me, the moment I found the voice of my thesis, the writing got easier.
- The beauty of my research is that I was able to ask students questions that I wouldn't typically ask them in school, and it made me think why we don't talk about these things more in school. Why don't we talk more about teachers' mental health in school with our students?

- Even while listening to a sermon in church, assessment practices and my IFS were on my mind! But switching off is part of the research process. I got those eureka moments in those quiet times when I didn't think so deliberately about the challenge or tasks ahead.
- Collaboration is necessary in the research journey. 'The wisdom of crowds'. I am grateful for the opportunity to share my research at UCL's Educational Assessment Group seminar and with AQA, and I gleaned so much from that experience.
- I had plenty of what I liked to call 'vomit drafts', and I iteratively went back and refined it in response to my supervisors' gracious feedback; and it became this final piece that is beautiful, and I am proud of.
- My research was very much about working **with** students rather than **for** students. I got them to do the thinking, they were doing the hard work, and I observed the way that they discussed the important issues to them.
- The scope of doctoral research is very exciting; however, the scale is intimidating. Especially when you think about how massive the work is, how far it can go, the different pathways it can take. It is scary, and I think I had to come to terms with the fact that this project was bigger than me, but I became bigger in the process, I became a stronger researcher in the process, and I became someone who could handle this level of academic study.
- It was important for me to conduct this research because let's be honest, life doesn't really give you second chances for a unique enquiry like this!

## Glossary of Terms

Sources: (P. Black, 1993; Education Reform, 2013; Ofqual & Stratton, 2021)

Centre assessed grades (CAGs)	Centres were asked to submit to exam boards' judgements of the grades they believed candidates would have been most likely to achieve if exams had gone ahead. Centres were asked to provide a grade for each candidate in each subject taken. These grades were referred to as Centre Assessment Grades (CAGs).
Formative assessment	Formative assessments are in-process evaluations of student learning typically administered multiple times during a unit or academic course. The general purpose of formative assessment is to give educators in-process feedback about what students are learning or not so that teaching approaches can be modified accordingly.
High-stakes assessments	High-stakes assessments are typically standardized tests used for accountability and progression. In general, "high stakes" means that important decisions about students, teachers, schools are based on the scores students achieve on a high-stakes test, and either punishment (negative publicity, not accessing further studies like university or apprenticeships) or accolades (league tables, public celebration, positive publicity) result from those grades.
Ofqual	The Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation is a non-ministerial government department that regulates qualifications, exams and tests in England.

Summative assessment	Summative assessments are used to evaluate student learning after a specific instructional period—typically at the end of a unit, course, semester, program, or school year. Summative assessments are graded tests, often high stakes assessments, that are used to determine whether students have learned what they were expected to learn during the defined teaching period.
Teacher assessed grades (TAGs)	The teacher’s professional judgement of the grade the student would most likely have achieved if they had sat exams this summer and completed any non-exam assessment. It is based on our teachers' understanding of each student's abilities and draws upon a range of evidence outlined by JCQ.

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... #HonourTheOffer #alevels2020 #alevelprotest #university #Peacefulprotest  
<https://t.co/Y6WM7fhGPP> [Tweet]. @HonourTheGrade.  
<https://twitter.com/HonourTheGrade/status/1294922664461639683>

Twitter Post by @No More Silence. (2020, August 14). UPCOMING PROTEST  
 The process of deciding A-level grades was abysmal and blatantly unfair on low-income households. Join the #ALevelProtest to change the system! Saturday 15 August 🕒 12PM 📍 10 Downing Street, London See @alevelprotest for more details  
<https://t.co/Zc9XBOCxqv> [Tweet]. @ActivismCentre.  
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Appendix A – Excerpts of Heights school communication about mock exams to parents

SCHOOL
.sch.uk

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Our ref: MPT/mmb/off/6<sup>th</sup>/corr/21-22/yr13tt

17<sup>th</sup> September 2021

Dear Parent/Carer/Student

Please note that Year 13 students will sit two periods of PPEs (mock exams) this academic year. These are to take place during the two weeks beginning 4<sup>th</sup> October 2021 and 3 March 2022. The rationale for students sitting two PPE exams this year is to help prepare them for public examinations and become more comfortable with the process, given that they have not sat public exams before.

The timetable for the October PPEs can be found attached.

Students who have exam clashes will sit their exams on 13<sup>th</sup> October in room MGM/L as indicated on the exam timetable.

Below is a list of expectations that we have for students during these exams.

Exam Expectations 2021/2022

Teachers may have already communicated, and will continue to explain, to students what this means moving forwards, making adjustments and refocusing teaching and revision accordingly. We can also confirm that changes to the planned content of mock examinations are also being made to reflect this advance information in readiness for the next set of mocks due to take place after the half term break

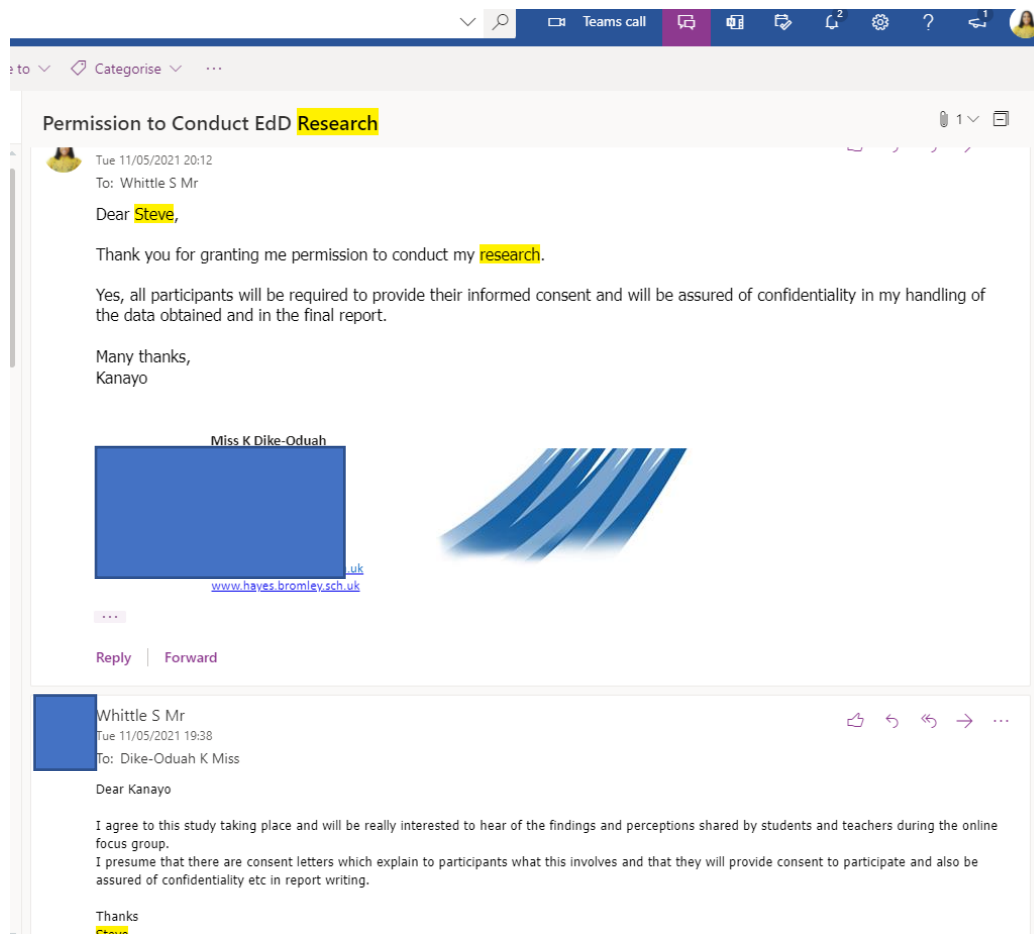
In the case of our vocational learners studying for BTEC and Cambridge National/Technical qualifications, arrangements in support of the disruption they have experienced due to the pandemic are slightly different. Although vocational qualifications were not included in the publication of advance information this week we have already seen changes to course content with options for the removal of some units and the formulation of mid-flight Teacher Assessed Grades (where applicable) which were assigned last summer by teachers, supporting all learners to achieve a fair grade.

Finally a reminder of the dates for the upcoming Year 13 Mocks which will take place from Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup> March to Tuesday 15<sup>th</sup> March inclusive. Please be advised that in the unlikely event that examinations are cancelled this summer these mocks will be used to partly inform any Teacher Assessed Grade should this be required.

Should you have any questions in relation to the advance information or content/coverage of examinations in the summer please contact your child's teacher or respective Head of Department in the first instance who will be able to answer any queries.

Yours faithfully,

## Appendix B – Head teacher of Hayes School approval




The screenshot shows an email interface within a Teams application. The top navigation bar includes icons for Teams call, chat, and other functions. The email subject is "Permission to Conduct EdD Research".

**Miss K Dike-Oduah**  
Tue 11/05/2021 20:12  
To: Whittle S Mr  
Dear **Steve**,

Thank you for granting me permission to conduct my **research**.

Yes, all participants will be required to provide their informed consent and will be assured of confidentiality in my handling of the data obtained and in the final report.

Many thanks,  
Kanayo

**Miss K Dike-Oduah**  
  
[www.hayes.bromley.sch.uk](http://www.hayes.bromley.sch.uk)

...  
Reply | Forward

**Whittle S Mr**  
Tue 11/05/2021 19:38  
To: Dike-Oduah K Miss

Dear Kanayo

I agree to this study taking place and will be really interested to hear of the findings and perceptions shared by students and teachers during the online focus group.  
I presume that there are consent letters which explain to participants what this involves and that they will provide consent to participate and also be assured of confidentiality etc in report writing.

Thanks  
**Steve**

at Search

Categorized - Flagged - Important - Include Deleted Items - Close Search - ...

**Permission to Conduct EdD Research**

Dike-Oduah K Miss  
To: White S Mr

KDO IFS PROPOSAL APPROVED BY (Richardson, Mary and Fargher, Mary).pdf  
245 KB

Tue 11/05/2021 10:34

Dear Steve,

I am writing to request permission to conduct a research study at Hayes School. I am in the second year of my EdD course at UCL Institute of Education and am ready to embark on my Institution Focused Study (IFS), for which the output is a 20-000-word report. My IFS study is entitled "The virus that changed the discourse on educational assessment. A qualitative enquiry into students' and teachers' interpretations of assessment-related tweets during the COVID-19 pandemic". This research has been endorsed by UCL and AQA's research advisory board.

I would like to recruit approximately 20 to 30 A-Level students (Year 12 and Year 13) and 10 to 20 teaching staff from the school to participate in an online focus group interview via MS Teams. Interested students and staff, who volunteer to participate, will be given a consent form to be signed and returned before the interview process.

Semi-structured focus group interviews are a meaningful method of gathering students' and teachers' perceptions of abstract concepts such as educational assessment Twitter discourse. Focus groups are more efficient than one-to-one interviews and have the unique advantage of using the groups' interactions to produce data. This is particularly desired for the present research, whereby individual and collective reconstructions may be useful in coalescing consensus and diversity on how assessment is characterised on Twitter and what this means for teachers and students in practice. Therefore, focus group interviews will be used to present a selection of assessment tweets to teachers and students; and to observe their response to critical questions about such tweets.

I must stress that if approval is granted, despite school buildings reopening, student and staff participants will complete the focus group interview online. This is consistent with UCL's Covid-19 research guidelines and ensures that researchers and participants remain protected during the pandemic. Conducting focus groups online is a new phenomenon, and while it will have its challenges, I hope that this research can contribute to the literature on online research methodologies. The interview process will last between 60-90 minutes and will be scheduled outside our school working hours. The interviews will be transcribed, and the participants, including Hayes School, will remain confidential through the use of pseudonyms in my reporting. In addition, I have completed UCL's GDPR training and have outlined the fundamental ethical considerations for this study in my approved proposal (attached for your review).

Your approval to conduct this study will be greatly appreciated. I am happy to answer any questions that you may have, and if you wish to discuss any of this with my supervisors Dr Mary Richardson and Dr Mary Fargher, please contact them using the email addresses below.

**If you agree to the study, please email me, acknowledging your consent and permission to conduct this study at Hayes School.**

Many thanks,

Kanayo Dike-Oduah  
EdD (Year 2 – Candidate), MA, PGCE, QTLS, BSc

Under the supervision of  
Dr Mary Richardson | [mary.richardson@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:mary.richardson@ucl.ac.uk)  
Dr Mary Fargher | [m.fargher@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:m.fargher@ucl.ac.uk)

All folders are up to date. Connected to: Microsoft Exchange Automatic Replies

14:21  
27/12/2021

## Appendix C – Participant Recruitment Approach Text, Emails (screenshot), Psychology Newsletter (screenshot) and VLE -Satchel One post

### *VLE - Satchel one post*

The screenshot shows a Satchel One interface for a VLE post. On the left is a dark sidebar with navigation options: Dashboard, My classes, Calendar, Timetable, Behaviour, Detentions, My drive, Community resources, My resources, Reports, Notice board, Support, and Logout. The main content area is titled 'DOCTORAL CO-RESEARCHER (INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH) 134/Ec1'. It includes a search bar, a notification bell with '2251', and a language dropdown set to 'EN'. Below the title are tabs for 'Description', 'Insights', 'Assess', and 'Discussion'. A notification states: 'Miss K. Dike-Oduah set this assignment for group 134/Ec1 - Independent Study'. Two buttons indicate 'Set on Tue 18 May' and 'Complete by Fri 21 May'. There are two share buttons: 'Share to Classroom' and 'Share to Microsoft Teams'. The 'Task description' section contains the following text:

PLEASE READ THE BELOW AND COMPLETE THIS FORM: [https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=VuiRjA2\\_ZkujR7u6LWjKHnqMWhgVipDgmtT5E83RmtUOPVaSzU0S1QzSVUwUzJPWUXNVZVQ1NC554u](https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=VuiRjA2_ZkujR7u6LWjKHnqMWhgVipDgmtT5E83RmtUOPVaSzU0S1QzSVUwUzJPWUXNVZVQ1NC554u)

Dear Student,

I am a second-year doctoral student at UCL, Institute of Education. I am currently researching how students/teachers interpret tweets on educational assessment tweeted between March 2020 and March 2021 (during the COVID-19 pandemic). This research has been endorsed by UCL and AQA's research advisory board.

I would like to invite you to participate in an online focus group (small discussion group) via Microsoft Teams (Time and Date TBC) to discuss tweets on educational assessment. The focus group will include other students in Hayes School and should last no longer than 60 minutes. Your participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any stage. However, your participation in this study as a co-researcher could further our understanding of social media's role in shaping students' and teachers' perceptions of assessment, including exams, results, achievement, and wellbeing.

If you would like to take part in the focus group. Please indicate so by completing the FORM LINK ABOVE where you will be provided with further details about the study, complete a consent form and select your preferred date and time for the focus group interview.

I am happy to answer any questions that you may have. If you wish to discuss any of this with my supervisors Dr Mary Richardson and Dr Mary Faragher, please contact them using the email addresses below.

I look forward to your invaluable contribution to this study.

Many thanks,

Miss K Dike-Oduah  
 Doctoral student (EdD – Year 2)  
 MA, PGCE, QTLS, BSc  
 University College London, Institute of Education  
 Email: strvkpd@ucl.ac.uk // kanayo.dike-oduah.15@ucl.ac.uk // KDO@hayes.bromley.ac.uk

Under the supervision of  
 Dr Mary Richardson | mary.richardson@ucl.ac.uk  
 Dr Mary Faragher | m.faragher@ucl.ac.uk

## Email

Year 13 **Doctoral** Co-Researchers Need for 60 minutes

Dike-Oduah K Miss

To Class 131/Sy1; Class 132/Sy1; Class 133/Sy1

[↩ Reply](#)
[↩ Reply All](#)
[→ Forward](#)

Mon 17/05/2021 08:42

**YEAR 13 THANK YOU MESSAGE VIA SWAY:** <https://sway.office.com/pv0Af8Kr2W8Hb1E?ref=Link>

PLEASE READ THE BELOW AND COMPLETE THIS FORM: [https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=VuIRJA2\\_ZkuJR7u6LWJKHNqMWhgVipDgmtT5E83RmtUOFVaSzU0S1OzSVUwUz2JPWUXNVZQ1NCSS4u](https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=VuIRJA2_ZkuJR7u6LWJKHNqMWhgVipDgmtT5E83RmtUOFVaSzU0S1OzSVUwUz2JPWUXNVZQ1NCSS4u)

Dear Student,

I am a second-year **doctoral** student at UCL, Institute of Education. I am currently researching how students/teachers interpret tweets on educational assessment tweeted between March 2020 and March 2021 (during the COVID-19 pandemic). This **research** has been endorsed by UCL and AQA's **research** advisory board.

I would like to invite you to participate in an online focus group (small discussion group) via Microsoft Teams (Time and Date TBC) to discuss tweets on educational assessment. The focus group will include other students in Hayes School and should last no longer than 60 minutes. Your participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any stage. However, your participation in this study as a co-researcher could further our understanding of social media's role in shaping students' and teachers' perceptions of assessment, including exams, results, achievement, and wellbeing.

If you would like to take part in the focus group. **Please indicate so by completing the FORM LINK ABOVE** where you will be provided with further details about the study, complete a consent form and select your preferred date and time for the focus group interview.

I am happy to answer any questions that you may have. If you wish to discuss any of this with my supervisors Dr Mary Richardson and Dr Mary Fargher, please contact them using the email addresses below.

I look forward to your invaluable contribution to this study.

Many thanks,

Miss K Dike-Oduah  
**Doctoral** student (EdD – Year 2)  
 MA, PGCE, QTLS, BSc  
 University College London, Institute of Education  
 Email: [stnykpd@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:stnykpd@ucl.ac.uk) // [kanayo.dike-oduah.15@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:kanayo.dike-oduah.15@ucl.ac.uk) // [KDO@hayes.bromley.ac.uk](mailto:KDO@hayes.bromley.ac.uk)

Under the supervision of  
 Dr Mary Richardson | [mary.richardson@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:mary.richardson@ucl.ac.uk)  
 Dr Mary Fargher | [m.fargher@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:m.fargher@ucl.ac.uk)



Miss K Dike-Oduah  
 Head of Psychology  
 Hayes School  
 West Common Road  
 Hayes, Bromley  
 BR2 7DB  
 020 8462 2767  
[KDO@hayes.bromley.sch.uk](mailto:KDO@hayes.bromley.sch.uk)  
<http://www.hayes.bromley.sch.uk>



## Psychology newsletter

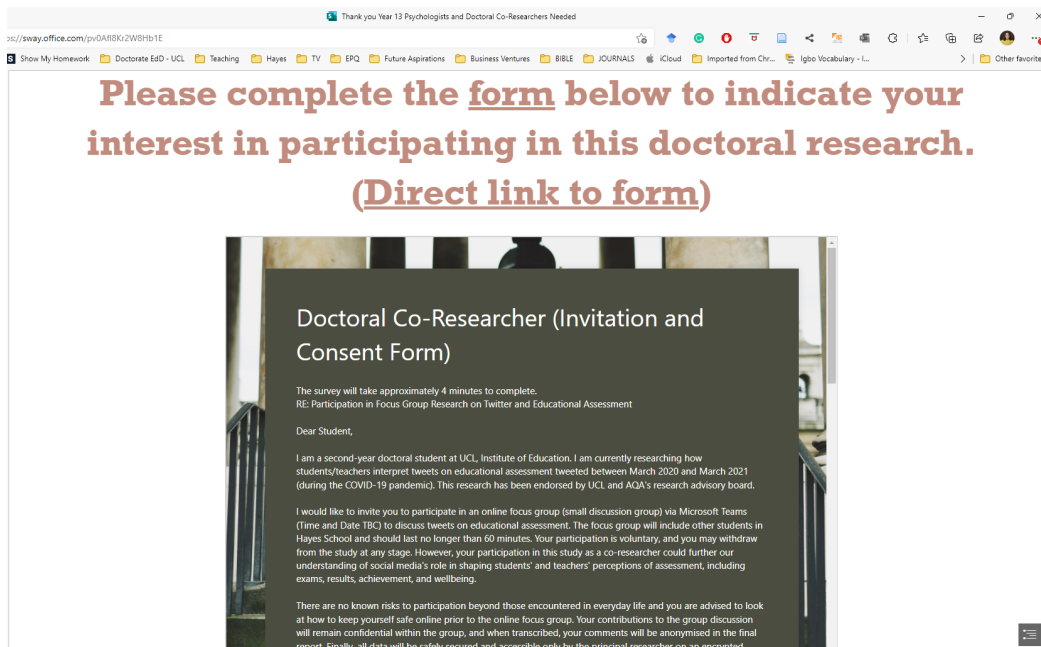
Thank You Year 13 Psychologists and Doctoral Co-Researchers Needed

://sway.office.com/pv0Af8Kr2W8Hb1E

Show My Homework | Doctorate EDD - UCL | Teaching | Hayes | TV | EPQ | Future Aspirations | Business Ventures | BIBLE | JOURNALS | iCloud | Imported from Chr... | Igbo Vocabulary - L... | Other favourites

## Doctoral Co-Researchers needed for research endorsed by UCL and AQA's Research Advisory Board

I would like to invite you to take participate in an **online** focus group (small discussion group) via Microsoft Teams (Time and Date TBC) to discuss tweets on educational assessment. The focus group will include other students from Hayes School and should last 60 minutes. Your participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any stage. However, your participation in this study as a co-researcher, could help could further our understanding of the role that social media has in shaping students' perceptions of assessment, including exams, results, achievement and wellbeing.



*Email 'text only.'*

[TEXT BEGINS]

PLEASE READ THE BELOW AND COMPLETE THIS

FORM: [https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=VuIRjA2\\_ZkuiJR7u6LWjKHNqMWhgVipDgmtT5E83RmtUOFVaSzU0S1QzSVUwUzJPWUtXNVZVQ1NCSS4u](https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=VuIRjA2_ZkuiJR7u6LWjKHNqMWhgVipDgmtT5E83RmtUOFVaSzU0S1QzSVUwUzJPWUtXNVZVQ1NCSS4u)

Dear Student,

I am a second-year doctoral student at UCL, Institute of Education. I am currently researching how students/teachers interpret tweets on educational assessment tweeted between March 2020 and March 2021 (during the COVID-19 pandemic). This research has been endorsed by UCL and AQA's research advisory board.

I would like to invite you to participate in an online focus group (small discussion group) via Microsoft Teams (Time and Date TBC) to discuss tweets on educational assessment. The focus group will include other students in Hayes School and should last no longer than 60 minutes. Your participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw

from the study at any stage. However, your participation in this study as a co-researcher could further our understanding of social media's role in shaping students' and teachers' perceptions of assessment, including exams, results, achievement, and wellbeing.

If you would like to take part in the focus group. Please indicate so by completing the FORM LINK ABOVE where you will be provided with further details about the study, complete a consent form and select your preferred date and time for the focus group interview.

I am happy to answer any questions that you may have. If you wish to discuss any of this with my supervisors Dr Mary Richardson and Dr Mary Fargher, please contact them using the email addresses below.

I look forward to your invaluable contribution to this study.

Many thanks,

Miss K Dike-Oduah

Doctoral student (EdD – Year 2)

MA, PGCE, QTLS, BSc

University College London, Institute of Education

Email: [stnvkpd@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:stnvkpd@ucl.ac.uk) // [kanayo.dike-oduah.15@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:kanayo.dike-oduah.15@ucl.ac.uk) //

[KDO@hayes.bromley.ac.uk](mailto:KDO@hayes.bromley.ac.uk)

[ENDS]



## Appendix D – Consent Form, Information Sheet and Questionnaire

### Forms

The survey will take approximately 4 minutes to complete.

RE: Participation in Focus Group Research on Twitter and Educational Assessment

Dear Student,

I am a second-year doctoral student at UCL, Institute of Education. I am currently researching how students/teachers interpret tweets on educational assessment tweeted between March 2020 and March 2021 (during the COVID-19 pandemic). This research has been endorsed by UCL and AQA's research advisory board.

I would like to invite you to participate in an online focus group (small discussion group) via Microsoft Teams (Time and Date TBC) to discuss tweets on educational assessment. The focus group will include other students in Hayes School and should last no longer than 60 minutes. Your participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any stage. However, your participation in this study as a co-researcher could further our understanding of social media's role in shaping students' and teachers' perceptions of assessment, including exams, results, achievement, and wellbeing.

There are no known risks to participation beyond those encountered in everyday life and you are advised to look at how to keep yourself safe online prior to the online focus group. Your contributions to the group discussion will remain confidential within the group, and when transcribed, your comments will be anonymised in the final report. Finally, all data will be safely secured and accessible only by the principal researcher on an encrypted device.

If you would like to take part in the focus group. Please indicate so by completing the online reply slip where you will be provided with further details about the study,

complete a consent form and select your preferred date and time for the focus group interview.

I am happy to answer any questions that you may have. If you wish to discuss any of this with my supervisors Dr Mary Richardson and Dr Mary Fargher, please contact them using the email addresses below.

I look forward to your invaluable contribution to this study.

Many thanks,

Miss K Dike-Oduah

Doctoral student (EdD – Year 2)

MA, PGCE, QTLS, BSc

University College London, Institute of Education

Email: [stnvkpd@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:stnvkpd@ucl.ac.uk) // [kanayo.dike-oduah.15@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:kanayo.dike-oduah.15@ucl.ac.uk) //

[KDO@hayes.bromley.ac.uk](mailto:KDO@hayes.bromley.ac.uk)

Under the supervision of

Dr Mary Richardson | [mary.richardson@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:mary.richardson@ucl.ac.uk)

Dr Mary Fargher | [m.fargher@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:m.fargher@ucl.ac.uk)

## Section 1

1.First Name

2.Surname

3.What year are you in?

Year 12

Year 13

4.What is your school email address?

5.What is your personal email address (in case there are issues with access via your school email)?

Section 2

Consent Form

University College London, IOE  
Curriculum, Pedagogy and Assessment

Researcher: Miss K Dike-Oduah

TITLE OF RESEARCH PROJECT: Students' and Teachers' interpretations of assessment-related tweets during the covid-19 pandemic.

I have been asked to participate in a focus-group based research study investigating how students and teachers interpret tweets on educational assessment. The results of this research could help further our understanding of the role that social media has in shaping students'/teachers' perceptions of assessment, including exams, results, achievement and wellbeing.

Please read the following and confirm that you have read and consent to each statement:

- I confirm that I am over 16 years of age.
- I agree to participate in the focus group carried out by Miss Kanayo Dike-Oduah of

UCL, Institute of Education, to aid with the research into interpretations of assessment-related tweets during the covid-19 pandemic.

- I have read the information provided and understand the aims of the project.
- I understand that this focus group will take place online via Microsoft Teams due to the current safety measures around covid-19.
- I am aware of the topics to be discussed in the focus group and that it will take approximately 60-90 minutes.
- I am fully aware that I will remain anonymous throughout the data reported.
- I am fully aware that data collected will be stored securely, safely and in accordance with GDPR and the British Educational Research Association's ethical guidelines.
- I am fully aware that I am not obliged to answer any question but that I do so at my own free will.
- I agree to have the focus group recorded on Microsoft Teams, so it can be transcribed after the focus group is held. I am aware that I have the right to edit the transcript of the Focus Group once it has been completed.
- I understand that there are no discernible benefits to me personally, although the results of this study will help expand our knowledge of the role that social media plays in students' and teachers' perceptions of assessment, exams, results and wellbeing.
- Any questions about my participation in this study will be answered by Miss K Dike-Oduah ([stnvkpd@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:stnvkpd@ucl.ac.uk)) Any questions or concerns about this study should be addressed to Miss K Dike-Oduah's supervisors; Dr Mary Richardson ([mary.richardson@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:mary.richardson@ucl.ac.uk)) and Dr Mary Fargher ([m.fargher@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:m.fargher@ucl.ac.uk))
- My consent is given voluntarily without being coerced. I may refuse to participate in this study or decline to contribute to any part of this study, and I may withdraw at any time, without prejudice to my relationship with Hayes School or with any future contact with UCL.

If you agree with the stated above and would like to participate in this study, please check the box in question 5 below to indicate your agreement and proceed to the questionnaire on your preferred focus group interview date and time.

6. Please read the consent form above and indicate your agreement below:

- I have read the information provided and I give my informed consent to participate
- I have read the information provided and I do not give my informed consent to participate.

### Section 3

#### Online Focus Group Date and Time Selection

7. Please select all the dates that you are available for. Please note that you will only be invited to one 60 minute session via MS Teams.

If none of the proposed dates work for you, I will contact you about potentially arranging another session so that your ideas can be heard! You can use the 'other' box to suggest a date and time that work for you.

DATE: WEDNESDAY 30TH JUNE (AFTER SCHOOL) ; TIME: 5-6PM OR 6-7PM

DATE: WEDNESDAY 7TH JULY (AFTER SCHOOL) ; TIME: 5-6PM OR 6-7PM

DATE: WEDNESDAY 14TH JULY (AFTER SCHOOL) ; TIME: 5-6PM OR 6-7PM

8. If you have any questions about my research with UCL and AQA, please note them below. If not, please submit the form and you will receive a copy of your responses via email.





## Appendix E – Certificate of participation in research



## Appendix E2 – Student Debrief Email

[Reply](#) [Reply all](#) [Forward](#) [Archive](#) [Delete](#) [Set flag](#) [...](#)

**Re:**

 **Dike-Oduah K Miss** <KDO@hayes.bromley.sch.uk>  
07/07/2021 18:58 

██████████

Dear ██████████

You are amazing. Thank you so much again for participating. Your email and your feedback have warmed my heart. Honestly, this is the best outcome of my research. Aside from the 20,000 word report that is pending, to know that you felt even more confident sharing your views is absolutely incredible. Thank you again darling, and have a lovely evening

Many thanks,

Miss K Dike-Oduah  
Head of Psychology  
Hayes School  
West Common Road  
Hayes, Bromley  
BR2 7DB  
020 8462 2767  
KDO@hayes.bromley.sch.uk  
<http://www.hayes.bromley.sch.uk>

Get [Outlook](#) for IOS

---

**From:** ██████████ <██████████@hayes.bromley.sch.uk>  
**Sent:** Wednesday, July 7, 2021 6:35:14 PM  
**To:** Dike-Oduah K Miss <KDO@hayes.bromley.sch.uk>  
**Subject:**

Hi Miss K,

Thankyou so much for allowing me to take part in your research. I actually really enjoyed being a co-researcher, which I was surprised by. This is because I am an individual who wouldn't usually contribute due to struggling in social settings so I'm giving positive feedback since your research allowed me to take part without feeling uncomfortable.  
Hope you have a lovely evening,  
██████████

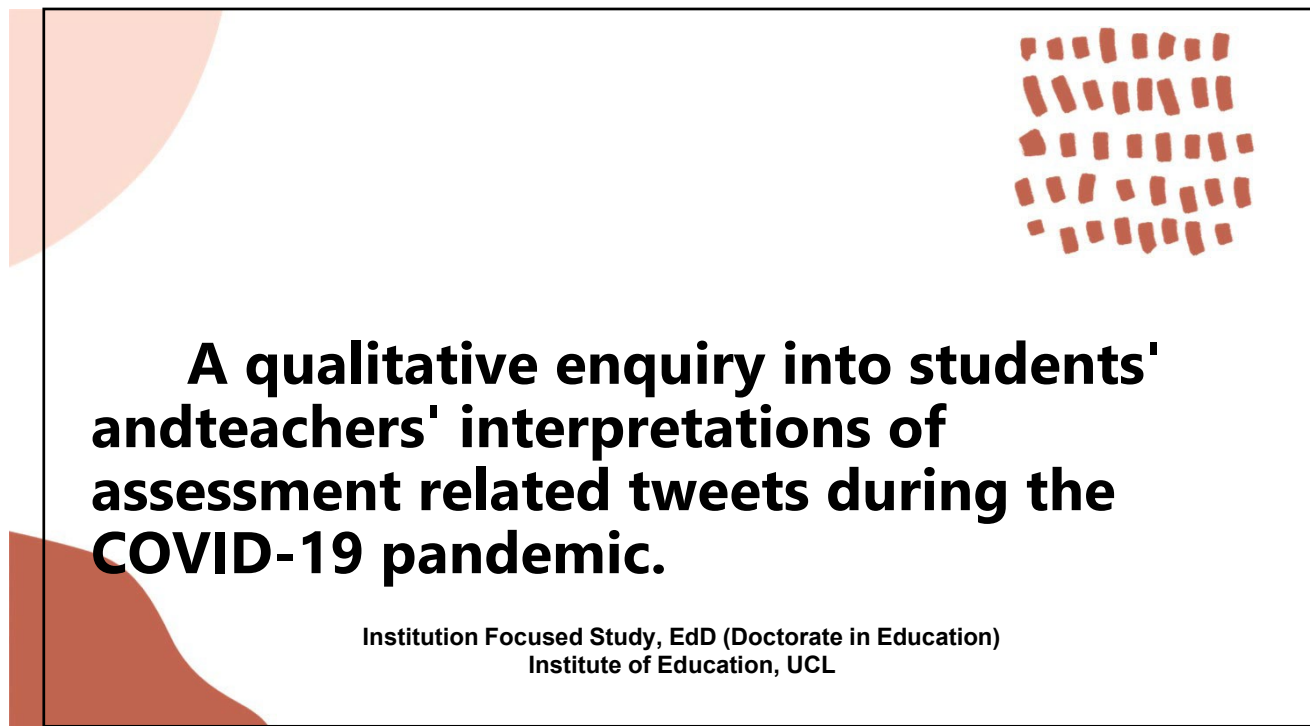
Get [Outlook for Android](#)

---

Hayes School respects the work life balance of its staff. If this email has been sent outside of normal working hours, there is no expectation for you to provide an immediate response.

## Appendix F – Interview Guide

Focus Group 1 – Year 13 – Pilot – 1<sup>st</sup> June 2021



**A qualitative enquiry into students' and teachers' interpretations of assessment related tweets during the COVID-19 pandemic.**

Institution Focused Study, EdD (Doctorate in Education)  
Institute of Education, UCL





## Year 13 Focus Group Interview

2

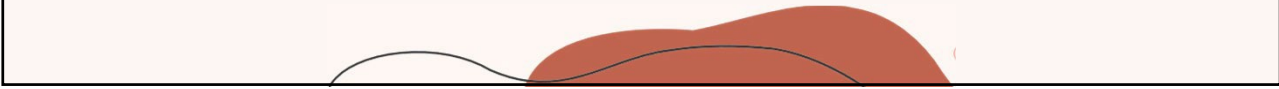


## Welcome and Introduction


Standardised instructions

Reminder of consent, confidentiality and right to withdraw

Guidance on how to use Microsoft Teams and Mentimeter



3

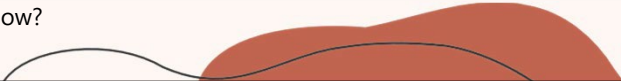


## **Questions about general experiences with Twitter (and any other social media platform) during the academic years affected by COVID-19 (2019-2021)**

In your own words, describe your use of social media during the COVID-19  
pandemic?

General use, education related use, fact checking use, new updates,  
community, humour?

Why, Where, When, How?



## Presentation of assessment related tweets followed by questions for each tweet.

### Tweet 1

when people say that we didn't have exams this year  
[#GCSEs2021](#) [#alevels2021](#)



#### Read the tweet and consider the following questions as part of your discussion:

What do you think is the core message of this tweet?

Can you relate to this tweet? How?

Why? OR Why not?

How does reading this tweet make you feel, and why?

What does the image on this tweet mean to you?

Finish this sentence...For me, the tweet means that XXXX (Why do you think this tweet was shared on Twitter? Would you share something similar on Twitter?)

Think back to the time when the Prime Minister made the announcement about exams for this year.

© 2021,

© 2021, [doctorkanayo.com](http://doctorkanayo.com)

## Tweet 2

Officially finished the horrible year that yr13 has been but so proud of myself for doing double the exams we were promised were cancelled #alevels2021

Read the tweet and consider the following questions as part of your discussion:

What do you think is the core message of this tweet?

Can you relate to this tweet? How? Why? OR Why not?

How does reading this tweet make you feel, and why?

What does the image on this tweet mean to you?

Finish this sentence...For me, the is tweet means that XXXX (Why do you think this tweet was shared on Twitter? Would you share something similar on Twitter?)

Think back to the time when the Prime Minister made the announcement about exams for this year.

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7

## Tweet 3

the fact ive already made a spread sheet with all my grades ready to appeal because my teachers hate me

💔😞 #alevels2021

Read the tweet and consider the following questions as part of your discussion:

What do you think is the core message of this tweet?

Can you relate to this tweet? How? Why? OR Why not?

How does reading this tweet make you feel, and why?

What do the emoji's on this tweet mean to you?

Finish this sentence...For me, the is tweet means that XXXX (Why do you think this tweet was shared on Twitter? Would you share something similar on Twitter?)

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8

## Tweet 4

Read the tweet and consider the following questions as part of your discussion:

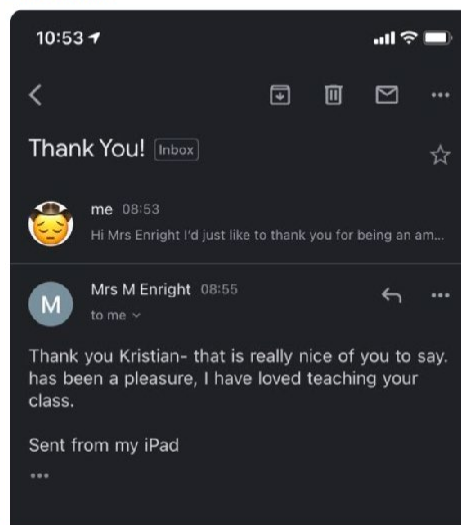
What do you think is the core message of this tweet?  
 Can you relate to this tweet? How? Why? OR Why not?  
 How does reading this tweet make you feel, and why?  
 What does the image on this tweet mean to you?

Finish this sentence...For me, the is tweet means thatXXXX (Why do you think this tweet was shared on Twitter? Would you share something similar on Twitter?)

How do you think other students/teachers will respond to this tweet?

What is your view on the role of teachers during the covid-19 pandemic in relation to assessment?

Remember to thank your teachers, it's been a tough time for them too. They will really appreciate it.  
[#alevels2021](#)



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9

## Tweet 5

Read the tweet and consider the questions as part of your discussion:  
 What do you think is the core message of this tweet?

Can you relate to this tweet?  
 How? Why? OR Why not?

How does reading this tweet make you feel, and why?  
 What does the image/link on this tweet mean to you?

Finish this sentence...For me, the is tweet means that XXXX (Why do you think this tweet was shared on Twitter? Would you share something similar on Twitter?)

How do you think other students/teachers/parents will respond to this tweet?  
 What is your view on the role of teachers during

Meanwhile, parents are contacting lawyers over concerns that this year's teacher-assessed grading process for [#GCSEs](#) and [#alevels](#) will lead to lower marks, as [@CathImogenLough](#) reports



GCSEs 2021: Parents contact lawyers over grading 'bias'  
 There could be legal difficulties over the range of approaches schools have taken to arrive at grades, lawyers warn  
[tes.com](#)

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10

Got my A Level "assessments" back. In chemistry 2/3 exams went well and I got B's but in the organic exam I got a D. Will this bring down my grade?  
[#Alevels](#) [#Alevels2021](#)

## Tweet 6

Read the tweet and consider the following questions as part of your discussion:

What do you think is the core message of this tweet?

Can you relate to this tweet? How? Why? OR Why not?

How does reading this tweet make you feel, and why?

Finish this sentence...For me, the tweet means that XXXX (Why do you think this tweet was shared on Twitter? Would you share something similar on Twitter?)

How do you think other students/teachers/parents will respond to this tweet?

What is your view on the role of teachers during the covid-19 pandemic in relation to assessment? [kanayo.com](#)

11

## Tweet 7

Half the class is falling asleep with [#gcse](#) [#alevels](#) period 5 at 2pm. [@educationgovuk](#) you think this will work 🙄 You need to be making [#gcse](#) [#alevels](#) abit easier by introducing coursework back etc inline with international averages. Incompetences will not lead you anywhere!

Read the tweet and consider the following questions as part of your discussion:

What do you think is the core message of this tweet?

Can you relate to this tweet? How? Why? OR Why not?

How does reading this tweet make you feel, and why?

Finish this sentence...For me, the tweet means that XXXX (Why do you think this tweet was shared on Twitter? Would you share something similar on Twitter?)

How do you think other students/teachers/parents will respond to this tweet?

Should assessments be reconsidered for future years in light of the covid-19 pandemic? [21, doctorkanayo.com](#)

12

## Tweet 8

A-levels are going to be the death of me. This is more pressure than what would've happened every other year. But don't worry we've only been through three lockdowns and a global pandemic, college students will be fine. #alevels2021 #alevels

Read the tweet and consider the following questions as part of your discussion:

What do you think is the core message of this tweet?

Can you relate to this tweet? How? Why? OR Why not?

How does reading this tweet make you feel, and why?

Finish this sentence... For me, the tweet means that XXXX (Why do you think this tweet was shared on Twitter? Would you share something similar on Twitter?)

How do you think other students/teachers/parents will respond to this tweet?

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## Tweet 9

Tomorrow my 18yr old will be given her #assessments grades. Letter from college warning them not to contact teachers about them & that they are not in any way a gauge as to final grades is mad - why on earth give them out? They've been through enough stress surely? #alevels2021

There are a few important things you need to be aware of about this process:

- We are not allowed to share the final grades we are submitting to the awarding bodies under any circumstance, and teachers will not engage in any discussions about final grades.
- For Art and Design courses, and the Extended Project we are not allowed to share the marks or grades for the non-examined assessments with you. This is because there is only one body of work being assessed and the overall grade submitted would be clear from the grade for that one assessment.
- If you think that something has gone badly wrong in the recording of the grades on the system, please make your teacher aware, by email, as a matter of urgency. For example, if you have achieved A in every piece of work on the course to date, but one of the new grades is a U (and there was nothing when you were sitting the assessment that made you think you would not do well), please bring this to the attention of your teacher. It is important to note that this is not an opportunity to ask for your assessments to be re-marked. This is a check that the grades have been recorded correctly. Your teacher will confirm by email whether the grade in question was correct or they have been changed. If one of your grades in the evidence basket is changed, the teachers will review your overall grade as well.
- Teachers have been instructed not to engage in any discussion with students or parents about the marks and grades awarded or grade boundaries for the final assessments. Please do not ask them to. We have adopted a very open process for the awarding of grades in sharing the final assessments, but we are not allowed to extend these discussions to include the awarding process.

- You must be careful not to over-interpret the grades, as there will be a number of marks that carry the same grade. Some B grades will be borderline A grades and others will be at the C borderline. The process of considering your final grade will be sensitive to where you were within a grade. The marks and grades in the evidence basket are what your teachers will refer to when considering your grade. We are providing the grades to you so you have a general idea of the level at which you have performed.
- Please do not assume that simply averaging the grades for the various pieces of work will give you the final grade. Subject teams will be placing different amounts of weight to particular assessments: those completed under exam conditions, and those completed towards the end of the course will carry most weight. Having said that, seeing how you performed in the various assessments used in the process should give you a general idea of where your final grade will lie.

Finally, could I remind you that A level results will be issued on Tuesday 10 August, and GCSE results will be two days later on Thursday 12 August. I will write to you again with information about the arrangements for appeals, before results day.

Read the tweet and consider the following questions as part of your discussion:

What do you think is the core message of this tweet?

Can you relate to this tweet? How? Why? OR Why not?

How does reading this tweet make you feel, and why?

Finish this sentence... For me, the tweet means that XXXX (Why do you think this tweet was shared on Twitter? Would you share something similar on Twitter?)

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## Tweet 10

I used to be the kind of geeky teacher who really enjoyed marking exam papers but now I don't think I ever want to see another one... EVER! #TAGs

Read the tweet and consider the following questions as part of your discussion:

What do you think is the core message of this tweet?

Can you relate to this tweet? How? Why? OR Why not?

How does reading this tweet make you feel, and why?

Finish this sentence...For me, the tweet means that XXXX (Why do you think this tweet was shared on Twitter? Would you share something similar on Twitter?)

How do you think other students/teachers/parents will respond to this tweet?

What is your view on the role of teachers during the covid-19 pandemic in relation to assessment? [doctorkanayo.com](https://www.doctorkanayo.com)

15

## Tweet 11

I've reached a point where I'm waking up at 5am after dreaming about exam results. #tags #GCSEs2021 #edutwitter #historyteacher

Read the tweet and consider the following questions as part of your discussion:

What do you think is the core message of this tweet?

Can you relate to this tweet? How? Why? OR Why not?

How does reading this tweet make you feel, and why?

Finish this sentence...For me, the tweet means that XXXX (Why do you think this tweet was shared on Twitter? Would you share something similar on Twitter?)

How do you think other students/teachers/parents will respond to this tweet?

What is your view on the role of teachers during the covid-19 pandemic in relation to assessment? [© 2021, doctorkanayo.com](https://www.doctorkanayo.com)

16





## Post focus group interview task

Using a survey, participants will reflect on their participation and will be allowed to share any additional comments that they may have wanted to share in the group interview. Participants will also provide relevant demographic information such as courses taught/studied, year group, socialmedia experience etc.

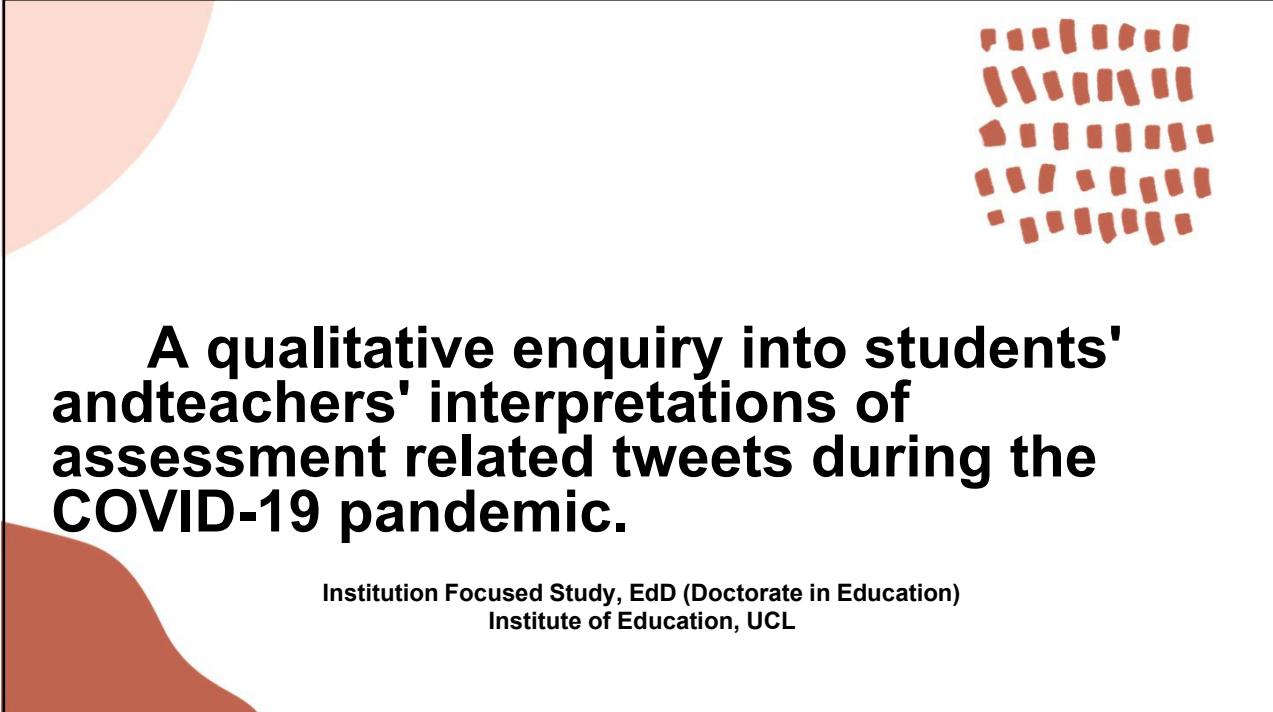
17



## Debrief and Thank You

18

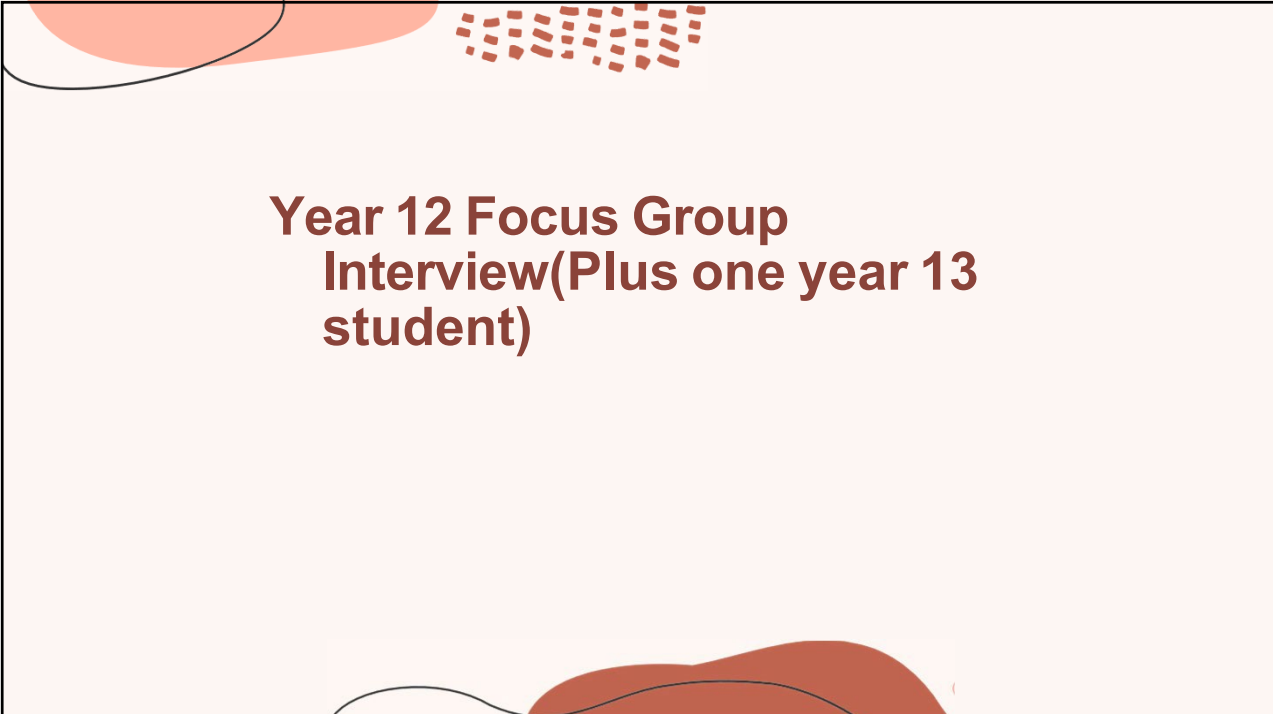
Focus Group 2 – Year 12 (and 1 year 13 student) – Pilot - 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2021



**A qualitative enquiry into students' and teachers' interpretations of assessment related tweets during the COVID-19 pandemic.**

Institution Focused Study, EdD (Doctorate in Education)  
Institute of Education, UCL

1



**Year 12 Focus Group  
Interview(Plus one year 13  
student)**

2

## Welcome and Introduction

### Standardised instructions

Reminder of consent, confidentiality and right to withdraw  
Guidance on how to use Microsoft Teams and Mentimeter

3

## Questions about general experiences with Twitter (and any other social media platform) during the academic years affected by COVID-19 (2019-2021)

In your own words, describe your use of social media during the COVID-19  
pandemic?

General use, education related use, fact checking use, new updates,  
community, humour?

Why, Where, When, How?

4

## Presentation of 10 assessment related tweets followed by questions for each tweet.

5

### Tweet 1\*

*Including a reply from the author of the original tweet*

Read the tweet and consider the following questions as part of your discussion:

Think back to your own GCSE results day and share your thoughts on this tweet.

What do you think is the core message of this tweet?

Can you relate to this tweet? How? Why? Why not?

How does reading this tweet make you feel, and why?

What does the image on this tweet mean to you?


In the chat: Finish this sentence... "For me, the tweet means that XXXX"

Why do you think this tweet was shared on Twitter? Would you share something similar on Twitter?

How do you think other students/teachers/parents will respond to this tweet?

omg i actually did so much better than i thought! last year i was barely scraping 4's manifestation works lads, my maths and english ones shocked me i- #gcses2020

8203	Art & Design – Graphic Communication	6
8454F	Combined Science : Trilogy Foundation Tier	55
8658F	French Foundation Tier	6
8700	English Language	8
8702	English Literature	6
1110	History	6
1MA1F	Mathematics Foundation Tier	5
8296	Art & Design – Photography – Y9	6



Please note your BTEC results has been delayed. As soon as the BTEC grades will be released, we contact you to provide the results will be issued.

Replying to [redacted]

as if i got a 55 in science when all i did was go on my phone, talk and stare out the window 😊

6

## 2\* Tweet

to any of my followers who just finished year 13/ have done a levels, how important are the year 12 end of year exams pls

Read the tweet and consider the questions as part of your discussion:

What do you think is the core message of this tweet?

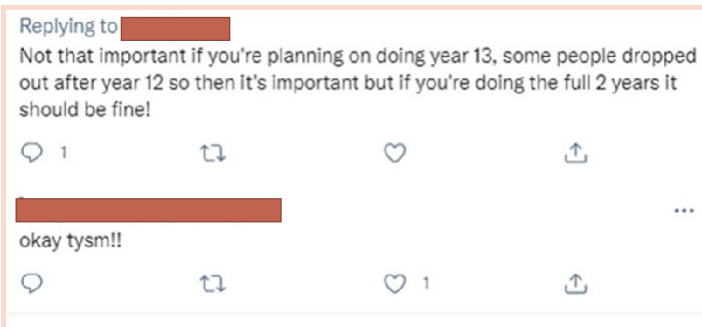
Can you relate to this tweet? How? Why? OR Why not?

How does reading this tweet make you feel, and why?

Finish this sentence...For me, the tweet means that XXXX (Why do you think this tweet was shared on Twitter? Would you share something similar on Twitter?)

How do you think other students/teachers/parents will respond to this tweet?

What is your view on the role of teachers during the covid-19 pandemic in relation



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7

## Tweet 3

Officially finished the horrible year that yr13 has been but so proud of myself for doing double the exams we were promised were cancelled #alevels2021

Read the tweet and consider the following questions as part of your discussion:

What do you think is the core message of this tweet?

Can you relate to this tweet? How? Why? OR Why not?

How does reading this tweet make you feel, and why?

Finish this sentence...For me, the tweet means that XXXX (Why do you think this tweet was shared on Twitter? Would you share something similar on Twitter?)

Think back to the time when the Prime Minister made the announcement about exams for this year.

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8

## Tweet 4

the fact ive already made a spread sheet with all my grades ready to appeal because my teachers hate me  
 🧡😓 #alevels2021

Read the tweet and consider the following questions as part of your discussion:

- What do you think is the core message of this tweet?
- Can you relate to this tweet? How? Why? OR Why not?
- How does reading this tweet make you feel, and why?
- What do the emoji's on this tweet mean to you?
- Why do you think this tweet was shared on Twitter?
- Would you share something similar on Twitter?

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9

## Tweet 5

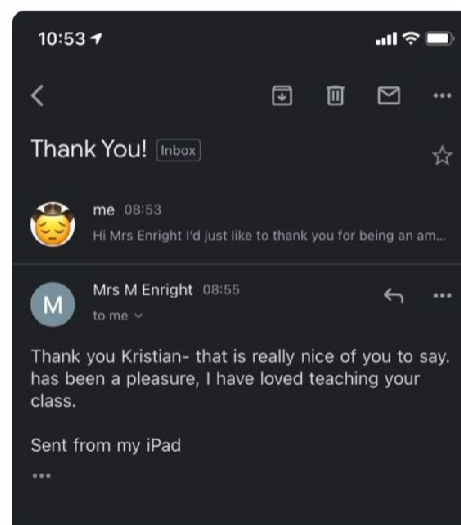
Read the tweet and consider the following questions as part of your discussion:

- What do you think is the core message of this tweet?
- Can you relate to this tweet? How? Why? OR Why not?
- How does reading this tweet make you feel, and why?
- What does the image on this tweet mean to you?
- In the chat: Finish this sentence... "For me, the tweet means that XXXX"

Why do you think this tweet was shared on Twitter? Would you share something similar on Twitter? How do you think other students/teachers will respond to this tweet?

What is your view on the role of teachers during the covid-19 pandemic in relation to assessment?

Remember to thank your teachers, it's been a tough time for them too. They will really appreciate it.  
 #alevels2021



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10

## Tweet 6

Next year, teachers, we will move towards an exciting form of continuous assessment. Instead of teaching courses, you'll be continuously assessing. These will be exams in all but name but will take place continuously, day in day out. You'll mark them in the evenings. Love, Gav.

Read the tweet and consider the following questions as part of your discussion:

- What do you think is the core message of this tweet?
- How does reading this tweet make you feel, and why?
- What does the image on this tweet mean to you?

Finish this sentence...For me, the tweet means that XXXX (Why do you think this tweet was shared on Twitter? Would you share something similar on Twitter?)

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11

## Tweet 7

A-levels are going to be the death of me. This is more pressure than what would've happened every other year. But don't worry we've only been through three lockdowns and a global pandemic, college students will be fine. [#alevels2021](#) [#alevels](#)

Read the tweet and consider the following questions as part of your discussion:

- What do you think is the core message of this tweet?
- Can you relate to this tweet? How? Why? OR Why not?
- How does reading this tweet make you feel, and why?

Finish this sentence...For me, the tweet means that XXXX (Why do you think this tweet was shared on Twitter? Would you share something similar on Twitter?)

- How do you think other students/teachers/parents will respond to this tweet?
- Should assessments be reconsidered for future years in light of the covid-19 pandemic?

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12

## Tweet 8

I am a private candidate, year 12 , and I want summer 2021 exams to run normally, like cambridge board .  
Cancelling and giving assessment are unfair options .  
Last year students got all A\* without even opening a single book, based on the bribed teacher assessed grades

Read the tweet and consider the following questions as part of your discussion:

What do you think is the core message of this tweet?

Imagine the tweet said '2022' instead of '2021' - Can you relate to this tweet? How? Why? OR Why not?

How does reading this tweet make you feel, and why?

Should assessments be reconsidered for future years in light of the covid-19 pandemic?

Finish this sentence...For me, the is tweet means that XXXX (Why do you think this tweet was shared on Twitter? Would you share something similar on Twitter?)

How do you think other students/teachers/parents will respond to this tweet?

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13

## Tweet 9

I used to be the kind of geeky teacher who really enjoyed marking exam papers but now I don't think I ever want to see another one... EVER! #TAGs

Read the tweet and consider the following questions as part of your discussion:

What do you think is the core message of this tweet?

Can you relate to this tweet? How? Why? OR Why not?

How does reading this tweet make you feel, and why?

Finish this sentence...For me, the is tweet means that XXXX (Why do you think this tweet was shared on Twitter? Would you share something similar on Twitter?)

How do you think other students/teachers/parents will respond to this tweet?

What is your view on the role of teachers during the covid-19 pandemic in relation to assessment?

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## Tweet 10\*

Today our house is an assessment center, where youngest son is doing his year 12 assessments at home and he has enlisted my help in taking photographs of all his written work, so it can be sent to his teachers.

And I feel for those teachers, marking essays arriving as j-pegs!

Read the tweet and consider the following questions as part of your discussion:

What do you think is the core message of this tweet?

Can you relate to this tweet? How? Why? OR Why not?

How does reading this tweet make you feel, and why?

Finish this sentence...For me, the tweet means that XXXX (Why do you think this tweet was shared on Twitter? Would you share something similar on Twitter?)

How do you think other students/teachers/parents will respond to this tweet?

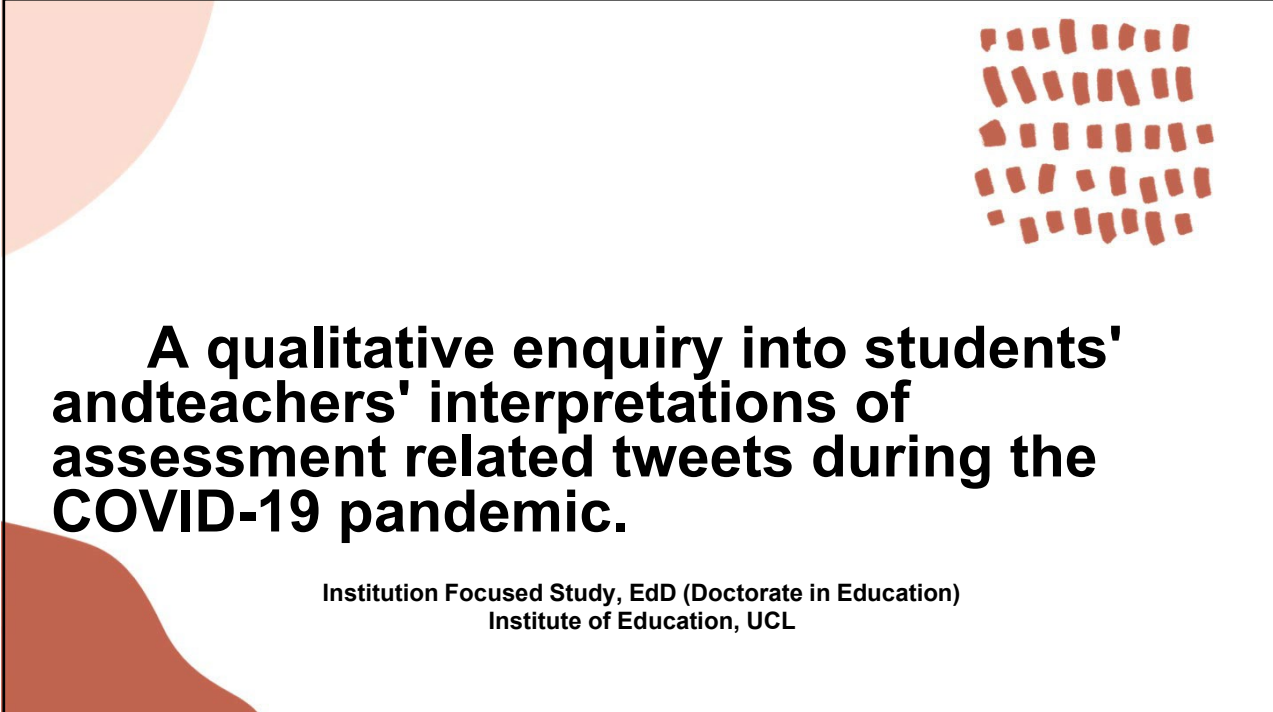
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## Debrief and Thank You

16

Focus Group 3 – Year 12 – 30<sup>th</sup> June 2021



**A qualitative enquiry into students' and teachers' interpretations of assessment related tweets during the COVID-19 pandemic.**

Institution Focused Study, EdD (Doctorate in Education)  
Institute of Education, UCL

1



**Year 12 Focus Group Interview**

*Semi-structured*

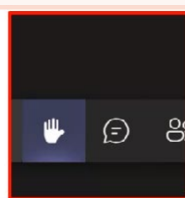
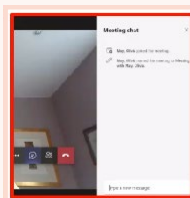
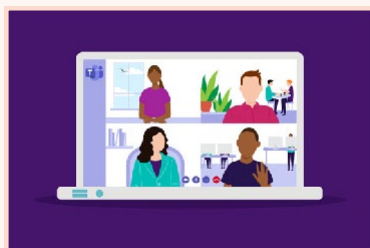
2

## Welcome and Introduction

Standardised instructions

*You are my co-researchers; semi-structured questioning; free-flowing conversation, including the use of the chat.*

Reminder of consent, confidentiality and right to withdraw  
Guidance on how to use Microsoft Teams and the chat function.



3

## Questions about general experiences with Twitter (and any other social media platform) during the academic years affected by COVID-19 (2019-2021)

Mentimeter link for poll: <https://www.menti.com/xmupfompko>

Menti.com | Code: **2635 2118**

In your own words, describe your use of social media during the COVID-19 pandemic?


General use, education related use, fact checking use, new updates, community, humour?

4

Go to [www.menti.com](http://www.menti.com) and use the code 5892 4288

Use three words to describe how you are feeling this afternoon/evening. (Please enter the three words separately.)

Mentimeter



A word cloud visualization of responses. The most prominent words are 'tired' (blue), 'stressed' (red), 'happy' (yellow), 'emotional' (orange), 'calm' (pink), and 'interested' (green). Other visible words include 'exhausted', 'positive', 'neutral', 'content', 'excited', 'decent', 'sad', 'alright', 'grounded', and 'indifferent'.

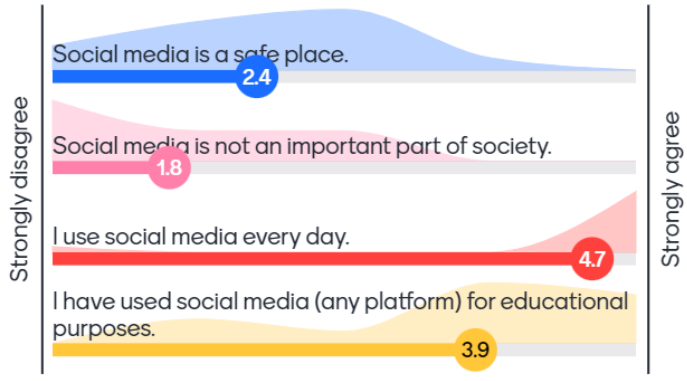
12

5.1

Go to [www.menti.com](http://www.menti.com) and use the code 5892 4288

Use the sliding scale to indicate your level of agreement to each statement.

Mentimeter



A chart showing four statements with a sliding scale from 'Strongly disagree' to 'Strongly agree'. The scale is represented by a horizontal line with a colored area above it indicating the distribution of responses. The average score for each statement is shown in a circle on the line.

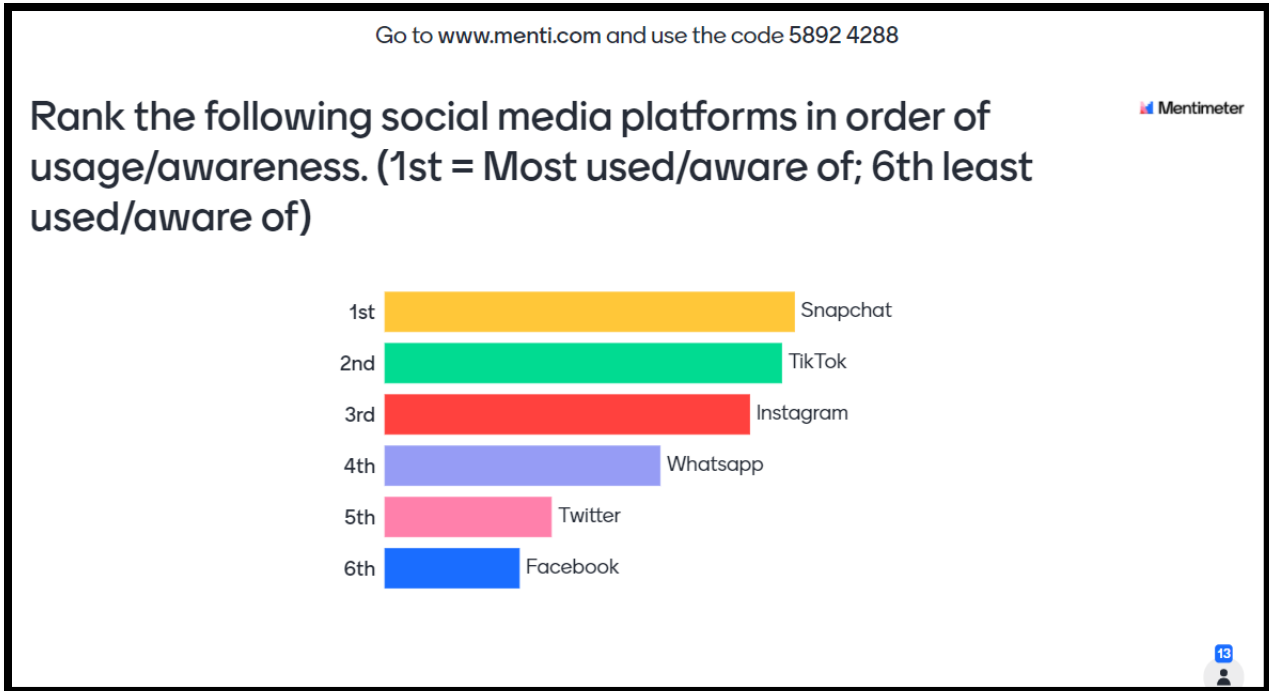
Statement	Level of Agreement (Average Score)
Social media is a safe place.	2.4
Social media is not an important part of society.	1.8
I use social media every day.	4.7
I have used social media (any platform) for educational purposes.	3.9

Strongly disagree

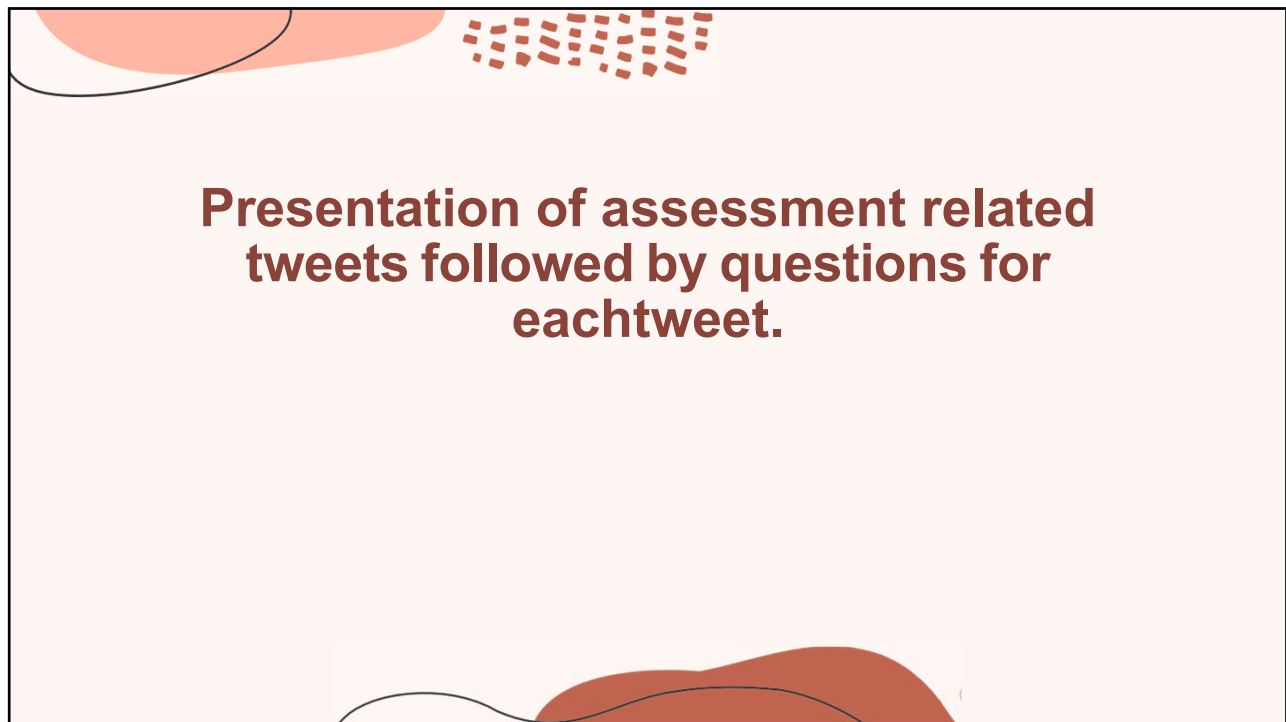
Strongly agree

12

5.2



5.3



6

## Tweet 1\*

Including a reply from the author of the original tweet

Read the tweet and consider the following questions as part of your discussion:

Think back to your own GCSE results day and share your thoughts on this tweet.

What do you think is the core message of this tweet?

Can you relate to this tweet? How? Why? Why not?

How does reading this tweet make you feel, and why?

What does the image on this tweet mean to you?

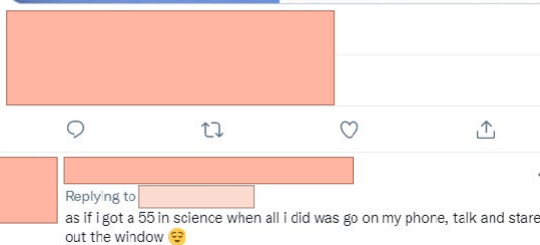
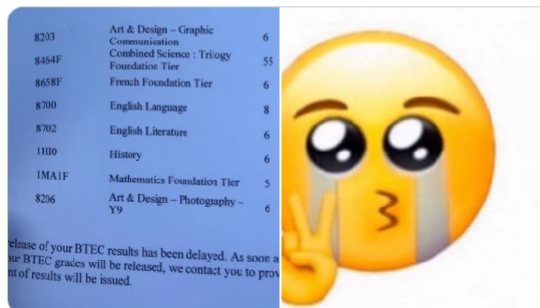
In the chat: Finish this sentence... "For me, the tweet means that XXXX"

Why do you think this tweet was shared on Twitter? Would you share something similar on Twitter?

How do you think other

students/teachers/parents will respond to this tweet?

omg i actually did so much better than i thought! last year i was barely scraping 4's manifestation works lads, my maths and english ones shocked me i- #gcses2020



7

2\*

## Tweet

to any of my followers who just finished year 13/ have done a levels, how important are the year 12 end of year exams pls

Read the tweet and consider the questions as part of your

What do you think is the core message of this tweet?

Can you relate to this tweet? How? Why? OR Why not?

How does reading this tweet make you feel, and why?

Finish this sentence... For me, the tweet means that XXXX (Why do you think this tweet was shared on Twitter? Would you share something similar on Twitter?)

How do you think other students/teachers/parents will respond to this tweet?

What is your view on the role of teachers during the covid-19 pandemic in relation

Replying to [redacted]

Not that important if you're planning on doing year 13, some people dropped out after year 12 so then it's important but if you're doing the full 2 years it should be fine!



okay tysm!!



8

## Tweet 3

Officially finished the horrible year that yr13 has been but so proud of myself for doing double the exams we were promised were cancelled [#alevels2021](#)

Read the tweet and consider the following questions as part of your discussion:

What do you think is the core message of this tweet?

Can you relate to this tweet? How? Why? OR Why not?

How does reading this tweet make you feel, and why?



Finish this sentence...For me, the tweet means that XXXX (Why do you think this tweet was shared on Twitter? Would you share something similar on Twitter?)

Think back to the time when the Prime Minister made the announcement about exams for this year.

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9

## Tweet 4

the fact ive already made a spread sheet with all my grades ready to appeal because my teachers hate me  
  [#alevels2021](#)

Read the tweet and consider the following questions as part of your discussion:

What do you think is the core message of this tweet?

Can you relate to this tweet? How? Why? OR Why not?

How does reading this tweet make you feel, and why?

What do the emoji's on this tweet mean to you?

Why do you think this tweet was shared on Twitter?

Would you share something similar on Twitter?

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10

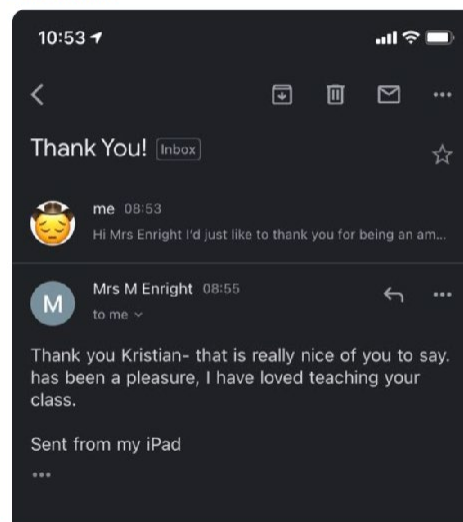
## Tweet 5

Read the tweet and consider the following questions as part of your discussion:

What do you think is the core message of this tweet?  
 Can you relate to this tweet? How? Why? OR Why not?  
 How does reading this tweet make you feel, and why?  
 What does the image on this tweet mean to you?  
 In the chat: Finish this sentence..."For me, the is tweetmeans that XXXX"

Why do you think this tweet was shared on Twitter? Would you share something similar on Twitter?  
 How do you think other students/teachers will respond to this tweet?  
 What is your view on the role of teachers during the covid-19 pandemic in relation to assessment?

Remember to thank your teachers, it's been a tough time for them too. They will really appreciate it. #alevels2021



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11

## Tweet 6

Next year, teachers, we will move towards an exciting form of continuous assessment. Instead of teaching courses, you'll be continuously assessing. These will be exams in all but name but will take place continuously, day in day out. You'll mark them in the evenings. Love, Gav.

Read the tweet and consider the following questions as part of your discussion:

What do you think is the core message of this tweet?  
 Can you relate to this tweet? How? Why? OR Why not?  
 How does reading this tweet make you feel, and why?  
 What does the image on this tweet mean to you?  
 Finish this sentence...For me, the is tweet means that XXXX (Why do you think this tweet was shared on Twitter?)  
 Would you share something similar on Twitter?  
 Think back to the time when the Prime Minister made the announcement about exams for this year.

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12



## Tweet 7

Read the tweet and watch the video clip included in the tweet. Consider the following questions as part of your discussion:

What do you think is the core message of this tweet?

How does reading this tweet make you feel, and why?

What does the video attached to the tweet mean?

Finish this sentence...For me, the tweet means that XXXX (Why do you think this tweet was shared on Twitter? Would you share something similar on Twitter?)

How do you think other students/teachers/parents will respond to this tweet?

Should assessments be reconsidered for future years in light of the covid-19 pandemic?

When you find out grades are going to be teacher assessed and now you have to defend your Year 12 class assessment results... #alevels2021



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13

## Tweet 8\*

I am a private candidate, year 12, and I want summer 2021 exams to run normally, like Cambridge board. Cancelling and giving assessment are unfair options. Last year students got all A\* without even opening a single book, based on the bribed teacher assessed grades

Read the tweet and consider the following questions as part of your discussion:

What do you think is the core message of this tweet?

Imagine the tweet said '2022' instead of '2021' - Can you relate to this tweet? How? Why? OR Why not?

How does reading this tweet make you feel, and why?

Finish this sentence...For me, the tweet means that XXXX (Why do you think this tweet was shared on Twitter? Would you share something similar on Twitter?)

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## Tweet 9

I used to be the kind of geeky teacher who really enjoyed marking exam papers but now I don't think I ever want to see another one... EVER! #TAGs

Read the tweet and consider the following questions as part of your discussion:

What do you think is the core message of this tweet?

Can you relate to this tweet? How? Why? OR Why not?

How does reading this tweet make you feel, and why?

Finish this sentence...For me, the tweet means that XXXX (Why do you think this tweet was shared on Twitter? Would you share something similar on Twitter?)

How do you think other students/teachers/parents will respond to this tweet?

What is your view on the role of teachers during the covid-19 pandemic in relation to assessment?

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15

## Tweet 10\*

Question 3 : will the current year 12 assessment be part (percentage) of the overall result in A level next year in 2022 rather than consolidate 2 years into one exam series?

Who do you think is the author of this tweets?

Why do you think they wrote and shared this tweet?

Who do you think is the intended recipient (audience) for this tweet?

How does reading this tweet make you feel, and why?

Finish this sentence...For me, the tweet means that XXXX (Why do you think this tweet was shared on Twitter? Would you share something similar on Twitter?)

How do you think other students/teachers/parents will respond to this tweet?

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## Tweet 11\*

Today our house is an assessment center, where youngest son is doing his year 12 assessments at home and he has enlisted my help in taking photographs of all his written work, so it can be sent to his teachers.

And I feel for those teachers, marking essays arriving as j-pegs!

Read the tweet and consider the following questions as part of your discussion:

What do you think is the core message of this tweet?

Can you relate to this tweet? How? Why? OR Why not?

How does reading this tweet make you feel, and why?

Finish this sentence...For me, the tweet means that XXXX (Why do you think this tweet was shared on Twitter? Would you share something similar on Twitter?)

How do you think other students/teachers/parents will respond to this tweet?

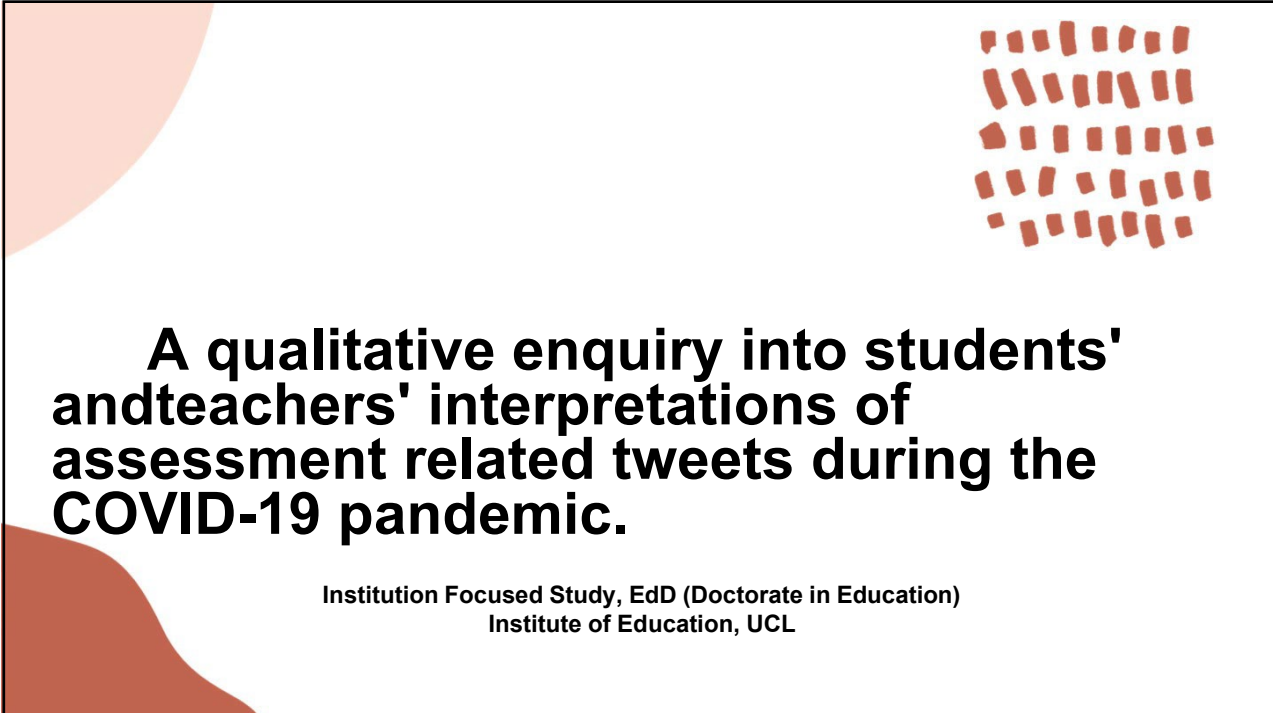
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## Debrief , Thank You and Feedback

18

Focus Group 4 - Year 12– 7<sup>th</sup> July 2021



**A qualitative enquiry into students' and teachers' interpretations of assessment related tweets during the COVID-19 pandemic.**

Institution Focused Study, EdD (Doctorate in Education)  
Institute of Education, UCL

1



**Year 12 Focus Group Interview**

*Semi-structured*

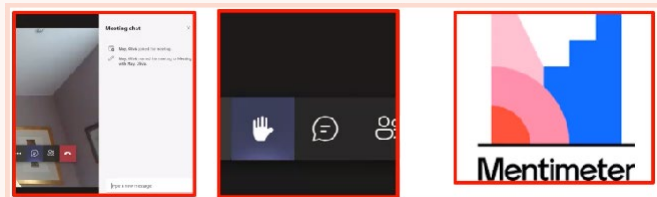
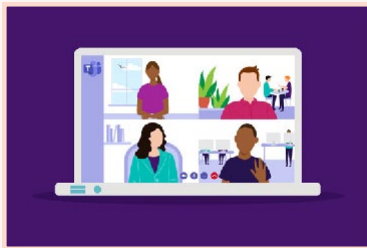
2

## Welcome and Introduction

Standardised instructions

*You are my co-researchers; semi-structured questioning; free-flowing conversation, including the use of the chat.*

Reminder of consent, confidentiality and right to withdraw  
Guidance on how to use Microsoft Teams and the chat function.



3

## Questions about general experiences with Twitter (and any other social media platform) during the academic years affected by COVID-19 (2019-2021)

Mentimeter link for poll: <https://www.menti.com/xmupfompko>

Menti.com | Code: 2635 2118

In your own words, describe your use of social media during the COVID-19 pandemic?


General use, education related use, fact checking use, new updates, community, humour?

4

Go to [www.menti.com](http://www.menti.com) and use the code 5892 4288

Use three words to describe how you are feeling this afternoon/evening. (Please enter the three words separately.)

Mentimeter



A word cloud visualization of responses. The most prominent words are 'tired' (large blue), 'stressed' (large red), 'calm' (medium pink), 'happy' (medium yellow), 'emotional' (medium orange), 'interested' (medium green), and 'decent' (small blue). Other smaller words include 'exhausted', 'positive', 'neutral', 'content', 'excited', 'sad', 'indifferent', 'alright', and 'grounded'.

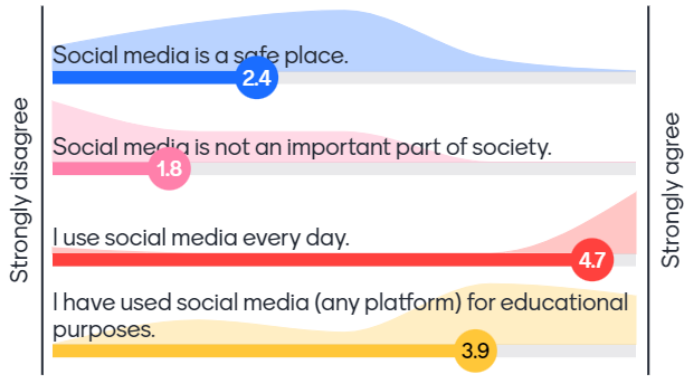
12

4.1

Go to [www.menti.com](http://www.menti.com) and use the code 5892 4288

Use the sliding scale to indicate your level of agreement to each statement.

Mentimeter

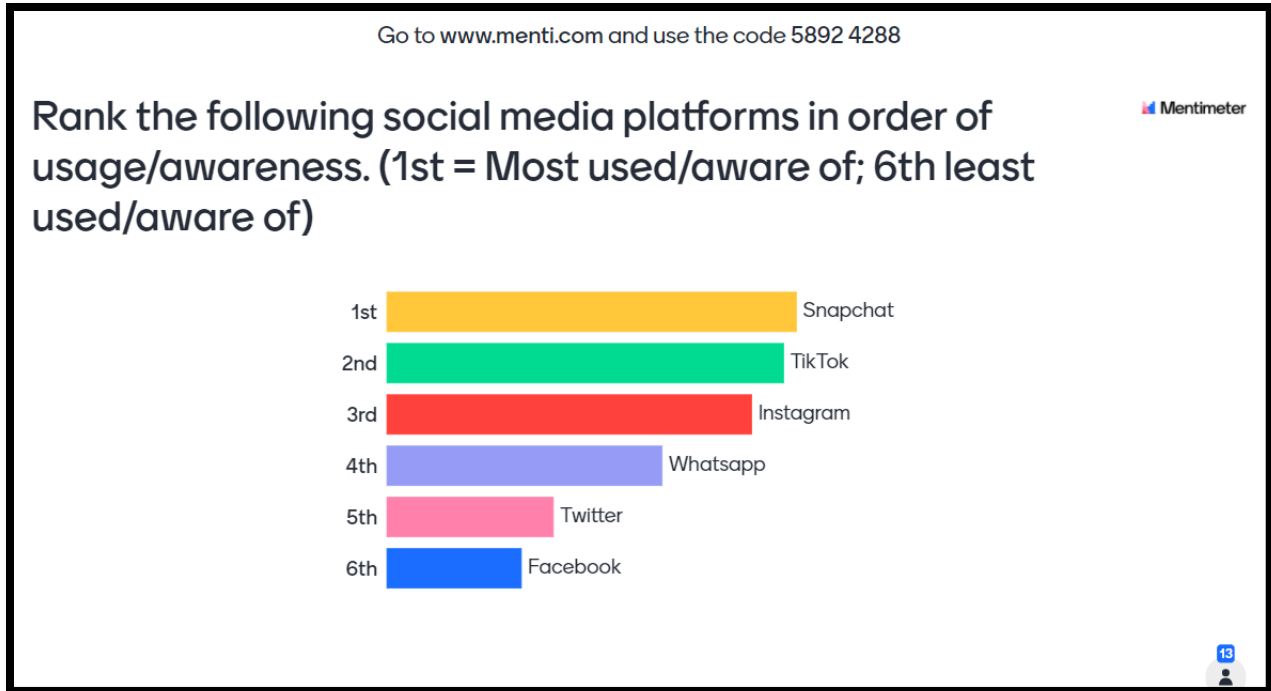


A sliding scale chart with four statements. The scale ranges from 'Strongly disagree' on the left to 'Strongly agree' on the right. Each statement has a colored bar representing the distribution of responses and a numerical value indicating the average level of agreement.

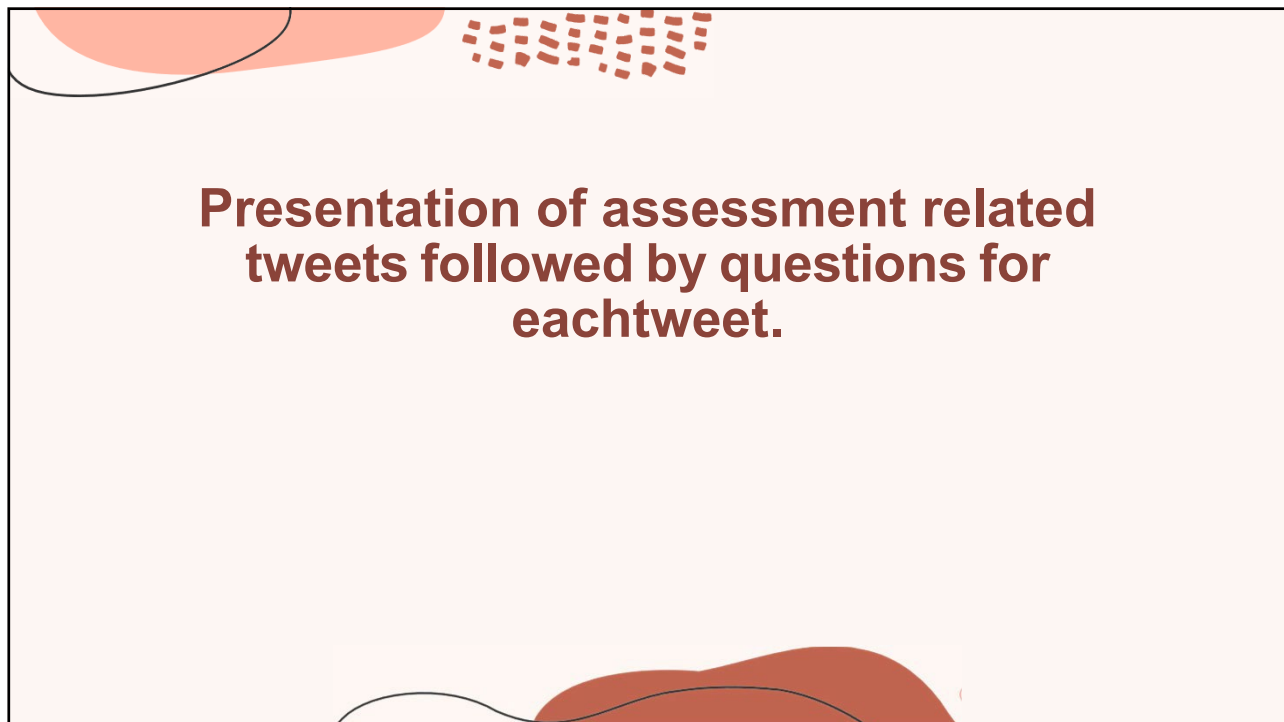
Statement	Level of Agreement (Average)
Social media is a safe place.	2.4
Social media is not an important part of society.	1.8
I use social media every day.	4.7
I have used social media (any platform) for educational purposes.	3.9

12

4.2



4.3



5

## Tweet 1\*

*Including a reply from the author of the original tweet*

Read the tweet and consider the following questions as part of your discussion:

Think back to your own GCSE results day and share your thoughts on this tweet.

What do you think is the core message of this tweet?

Can you relate to this tweet? How? Why? Why not?

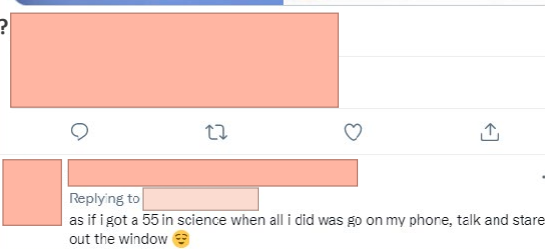
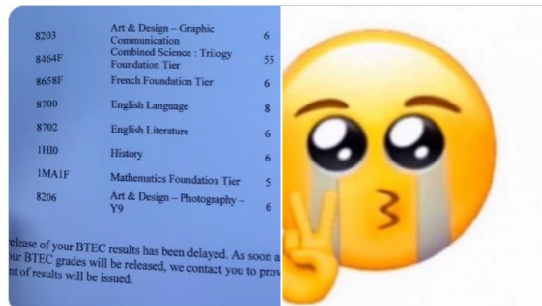
How does reading this tweet make you feel, and why?

What does the image on this tweet mean to you?

In the chat: Finish this sentence... "For me, the tweet means that XXXX"

Why do you think this tweet was shared on Twitter? Would you share something similar on Twitter?

omg i actually did so much better than i thought! last year i was barely scraping 4's manifestation works lads, my maths and english ones shocked me i- #gcses2020





## Tweet

**2\***

to any of my followers who just finished year 13/ have done a levels, how important are the year 12 end of year exams pls

**Read the tweet and consider the questions as part of your**

**What do you think is the core message of this tweet?**

**Can you relate to this tweet? How? Why? OR Why not?**

**How does reading this tweet make you feel, and why? Finish this sentence...For me, the is tweet means that XXXX (Why do you think this tweet was shared on Twitter? Would you share something similar on Twitter?**

Replying to [redacted]

Not that important if you're planning on doing year 13, some people dropped out after year 12 so then it's important but if you're doing the full 2 years it should be fine!

1    [retweet icon]    [heart icon]    [share icon]

[redacted]

okay tysm!!

[reply icon]    [retweet icon]    [heart icon] 1    [share icon]

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7

## Tweet 3

Officially finished the horrible year that yr13 has been but so proud of myself for doing double the exams we were promised were cancelled [#alevels2021](#)

**Read the tweet and consider the following questions as part of your discussion:**

**What do you think is the core message of this tweet?**

**How does reading this tweet make you feel, and why?**

**Finish this sentence...For me, the is tweet means that XXXX (Why do you think this tweet was shared on Twitter? Would you share something similar on Twitter?**

**Think back to the time when the Prime Minister made the announcement about exams for this year.**

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8

## Tweet 4

the fact ive already made a spread sheet with all my grades ready to appeal because my teachers hate me

💔😓 #alevels2021

Read the tweet and consider the following questions as part of your discussion:

- What do you think is the core message of this tweet?
- Can you relate to this tweet? How? Why? OR Why not?
- How does reading this tweet make you feel, and why?
- What do the emoji's on this tweet mean to you?
- Why do you think this tweet was shared on Twitter?
- Would you share something similar on Twitter?

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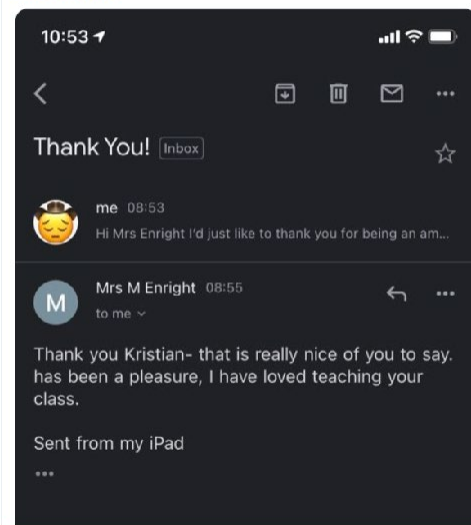
9

## Tweet 5

Read the tweet and consider the following questions as part of your discussion:

- What do you think is the core message of this tweet?
- Can you relate to this tweet? How? Why? OR Why not?
- How does reading this tweet make you feel, and why?
- What does the image on this tweet mean to you?
- In the chat: Finish this sentence..."For me, the tweet means that XXXX"
- Why do you think this tweet was shared on Twitter? Would you share something similar on Twitter?
- How do you think other students/teachers will respond to this tweet?
- What is your view on the role of teachers during the covid-19 pandemic in relation to assessment?

Remember to thank your teachers, it's been a tough time for them too. They will really appreciate it.  
#alevels2021



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10

## Tweet 6

Next year, teachers, we will move towards an exciting form of continuous assessment. Instead of teaching courses, you'll be continuously assessing. These will be exams in all but name but will take place continuously, day in day out. You'll mark them in the evenings. Love, Gav.

Read the tweet and consider the following questions as part of your discussion:

What do you think is the core message of this tweet?

How does reading this tweet make you feel, and why?

What does the image on this tweet mean to you?

Finish this sentence...For me, the tweet means that XXXX (Why do you think this

tweet was shared on Twitter? Would you share something similar on Twitter? [doctorkanayo.com](http://doctorkanayo.com)

11

## Tweet 7\*

Today our house is an assessment center, where youngest son is doing his year 12 assessments at home and he has enlisted my help in taking photographs of all his written work, so it can be sent to his teachers.

And I feel for those teachers, marking essays arriving as j-pegs!

Read the tweet and consider the following questions as part of your discussion:

What do you think is the core message of this tweet?

Imagine the tweet said '2022' instead of '2021' - Can you relate to this tweet? How? Why? OR Why not?

How does reading this tweet make you feel, and why?

Should assessments be reconsidered for future years in light of the covid-19 pandemic?

Finish this sentence...For me, the tweet means that XXXX (Why do you think this tweet was shared on Twitter? Would you share something similar on Twitter?

How do you think other students/teachers/parents will respond to this tweet?

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12

## Tweet 8

I used to be the kind of geeky teacher who really enjoyed marking exam papers but now I don't think I ever want to see another one... EVER! #TAGs

Read the tweet and consider the following questions as part of your discussion:

- What do you think is the core message of this tweet?
- Can you relate to this tweet? How? Why? OR Why not?
- How does reading this tweet make you feel, and why?
- Finish this sentence...For me, the is tweet means that XXXX (Why do you think this tweet wasshared on Twitter? Would you share something similar on Twitter?
- How do you think other students/teachers/parents will respond to this tweet?
- What is your view on the role of teachers during the covid-19 pandemic in relation to assessment?

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13

## Tweet 9\*

Question 3 : will the current year 12 assessment be part (percentage) of the overall result in A level next year in 2022 rather than consolidate 2 years into one exam series?

- Who do you think is the author of this tweets?
- Why do you think they wrote and shared this tweet?
- Who do you think is the intended recipient (audience) for this tweet?
- How does reading this tweet make you feel, and why?
- Finish this sentence...For me, the is tweet means that XXXX (Why do you think this tweet wasshared on Twitter? Would you share something similar on Twitter?
- How do you think other students/teachers/parents will respond to this tweet?

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14

## Tweet 10\*

Today our house is an assessment center, where youngest son is doing his year 12 assessments at home and he has enlisted my help in taking photographs of all his written work, so it can be sent to his teachers.

And I feel for those teachers, marking essays arriving as j-pegs!

Read the tweet and consider the following questions as part of your discussion:

What do you think is the core message of this tweet?

Can you relate to this tweet? How? Why? OR Why not?

How does reading this tweet make you feel, and why?

Finish this sentence...For me, the tweet means that XXXX (Why do you think this tweet was shared on

Twitter? Would you share something similar on Twitter?

How do you think other students/teachers/parents will respond to this tweet?

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## Debrief , Thank You and Feedback

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# Appendix G – Tweets Sifting Process via (Vicinitas, 2022)


The screenshot shows a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet with the following columns: Text, Name, Screen Name, UTC, Created At, Favored, Retweeted, Language, Client, Tweet URL, Hashtags, Mentions, Media, and Media Size. The data is sorted by 'Created At' in descending order.

ID	Text	Name	Screen Name	UTC	Created At	Favored	Retweeted	Language	Client	Tweet URL	Hashtags	Mentions	Media	Media Size
13987156	I HAVE MY FIRST A LEVEL MOCKS IN A WEEK AND I AM GOING TO CRY RIGHT NOW #alevels2022 #alevels	Dio Brando	CoronalsMuda	2021-05-2	Sat May 29 18:59:3	0	0	en	Twitter	https://twitter.com/CoronalsMuda/status/13987156	#alevels2022 #alevels	2	0	
13981878	College #ALEVELS #Apprenticeships #Jobs https://t.co/VmXH7aVueg	Birmingham Careers	BhamCareers	2021-05-2	Fri May 28 08:02:2	2	1	en	Twitter	http://bit.ly/3g3oCqjPV	#ALEVELS #Apprenticeships #Jobs	4	0	photo https://pbs.twimg.com/media/E2dcb7cXoAEGaIg.jpg
13980055	The last few weeks summed up in one photo. Thankfully, my school exams are almost finished! @Kings_Ely #year13 #alevels #exams #revision #organistlife https://t.co/OKTDBDuC1	mjr_organist	mjr_organist	2021-05-2	Thu May 27 19:57:5	25	0	en	Twitter	https://t.co/OKTDBDuC1	#year13 #alevels #exams #revision #organistlife	5	1	photo https://pbs.twimg.com/media/E2a2goxXoAYHyTW.jpg
13976517	24/26 exams are done and I could cry #alevels #year13 #alevels2021	Harriet Cowell	harrietcowell12	2021-05-2	Wed May 26 20:31:1	1	0	en	Twitter	https://twitter.com/harrietcowell12/status/13976517	#alevels #year13 #alevels2021	3	0	
13976025	Meanwhile, parents are contacting lawyers over concerns that this year's teacher-assessed grading process for #GCSEs and #alevels will lead to lower marks, as @CathmopenLough reports https://t.co/yWwuoSKaU	Dave Speck	Specktator100	2021-05-2	Wed May 26 17:16:1	4	1	en	Twitter	https://twitter.com/Specktator100/status/13976025	#GCSEs #alevels	2	1	
13975755	Four in five GCSE and A-level exam appeals led to grade change: #exams #gcse #alevels https://t.co/eipJhPbrA https://t.co/QNtmRcGcJ	Independent School Ma	ISM_Plus	2021-05-2	Wed May 26 15:29:2	0	0	en	Twitter	https://twitter.com/ISM_Plus/status/13975755	#exams #gcse #alevels	3	0	photo https://pbs.twimg.com/media/E2Uvh_CK0Ag7W4J.jpg
13972586	New data released by @ofqual on grading appeals in the 2019-20 academic year, has shown that 80% of GCSE and A level grades changed upon appeal, some by as much as 6 grades. Via @CathmopenLough in @tes #gcse #alevels https://t.co/OGUFRHdOk	Get Career Confident	GCConfident	2021-05-2	Tue May 25 18:30:0	0	0	en	Twitter	http://ow.ly/3g3oCqjPV	#gcse #alevels	2	3	
13971372	Got my A Level 'assessments' back in Chemistry 2/3 exams went well and I got B's but in the organic exam I got a D. Will this bring down my grade? #ALEVELS #ALEVELS2021	F_kawther	Firi_12	2021-05-2	Tue May 25 10:27:3	0	0	en	Twitter	https://twitter.com/Firi_12/status/13971372	#ALEVELS #ALEVELS2021	2	0	
13971283	A-levels are going to be the death of me. This is more pressure than what would've happened every other year. But don't worry we've only been through three lockdowns and a global pandemic, college students will be fine. #alevels2021	sammy	samanthaaa626	2021-05-2	Tue May 25 09:52:1	3	0	en	Twitter	https://twitter.com/samanthaaa626/status/13971283	#alevels2021	2	0	
13969222	Half the class is falling asleep with #gcse #alevels period 5 at 2pm. @educationgovuk you think this will work. You need to be making #gcse #alevels abit easier by introducing coursework back etc inline with international averages. Incompetences will not lead you anywhere! https://t.co/55DovUE5	Arun	aaronb6660	2021-05-2	Mon May 24 20:12:1	0	0	en	Twitter	https://twitter.com/aaronb6660/status/13969222	#gcse #alevels	4	1	
13968929	Fully expect the negative narrative and scapegoating of teachers continuing. Exam boards are profiting. #Exams2021 #GCSEs2021 #ALEVELS #Schools https://t.co/NXTJBFcXBF	Brian McHugh	BrianMcHugh2011	2021-05-2	Mon May 24 18:16:1	2	0	en	Twitter	https://twitter.com/BrianMcHugh2011/status/13968929	#Exams2021 #GCSEs2021 #ALEVELS #Schools	5	0	
13967782	Final piece of #alevels ever and again I've got to teach it to myself. Not like I need to know it for the degree I'm starting in September or anything https://t.co/vkRthMy8F	PinkMochi	mcndaremyhoes	2021-05-2	Mon May 24 10:40:4	1	0	en	Twitter	https://twitter.com/mcndaremyhoes/status/13967782	#alevels	1	0	photo https://pbs.twimg.com/media/E2JaYQ6WYAQF9jx.jpg



Ready 12 of 366 records found






## Appendix H - Tweets used in Focus Group Interviews


Twe et no.	Tweet text and URL (hyperlinked	Selection criteria (Researcher notes)	Screenshot
1	<p><a href="#">el   saw NWH x2</a>  <a href="#">on Twitter: "omg i</a>  <a href="#">actually did so much</a>  <a href="#">better than i thought! last</a>  <a href="#">year i was barely</a>  <a href="#">scraping 4's</a>  <a href="#">manifestation works lads,</a>  <a href="#">my maths and english</a>  <a href="#">ones shocked me i-</a>  <a href="#">#gcses2020</a>  <a href="https://t.co/qCflljdbCU">https://t.co/qCflljdbCU</a>" /  <a href="#">Twitter</a></p>	<p>Reference to assessment, pertinent for year 12 participants who would have been in a similar position last year with GCSE results.</p>	

2	<p><a href="#">IG:gcsememe on Twitter: "when people say that we didn't have exams this year #GCSEs2021 #alevels2021 https://t.co/p4zxjwzkqW" / Twitter</a></p>	<p>Reference to exam changes and targeted at year 13 students who had just completed their a levels and year 12 students who would have completed their gcse in 2020</p>	<p>when people say that we didn't have exams this year #GCSEs2021 #alevels2021</p> 
3	<p><a href="#">i on Twitter: "to any of my followers who just finished year 13/ have done a levels, how important are the year 12 end of year exams pls" / Twitter</a></p>	<p>tweet selected based on the inclusion of key words such as assessment and year 12</p>	<p>to any of my followers who just finished year 13/ have done a levels, how important are the year 12 end of year exams pls</p>
4	<p><a href="#">Josie on Twitter: "Officially finished the horrible year that yr13 has been but so proud of myself for doing double</a></p>	<p>Reference to exam changes/cancellation and targeted at year 13 students</p>	<p>Officially finished the horrible year that yr13 has been but so proud of myself for doing double the exams we were promised were cancelled #alevels2021</p>



	<a href="#">the exams we were promised were cancelled #alevels2021" / Twitter</a>	who had just completed their a levels	
5	<a href="#">CharlieED on Twitter: "the fact ive already made a spread sheet with all my grades ready to appeal because my teachers hate me 💔 😬 #alevels2021" / Twitter</a>	Reference to exam changes/cancellation; teacher assessed grades.	<div style="border: 1px solid blue; padding: 5px;"> <p>the fact ive already made a spread sheet with all my grades ready to appeal because my teachers hate me    #alevels2021</p> </div>

6	<p><a href="#">large krissy on Twitter: "Remember to thank your teachers, it's been a tough time for them too. They will really appreciate it. #alevels2021 https://t.co/rBqczOjth1" / Twitter</a></p>	<p>Reference to hashtag #alevels2021 and teachers</p>	<p>Remember to thank your teachers, it's been a tough time for them too. They will really appreciate it. #alevels2021</p> 
7	<p><a href="#">Michael Rosen</a>     on Twitter: <a href="#">"Next year, teachers, we will move towards an exciting form of</a></p>	<p>Reference to teacher assessed grades, assessment changes</p>	<p>Next year, teachers, we will move towards an exciting form of continuous assessment. Instead of teaching courses, you'll be continuously assessing. These will be exams in all but name but will take place continuously, day in day out. You'll mark them in the evenings. Love, Gav.</p>

	<p><a href="#">continuous assessment.</a></p> <p><a href="#">Instead of teaching courses, you'll be continuously assessing.</a></p> <p><a href="#">These will be exams in all but name but will take place continuously, day in day out. You'll mark them in the evenings.</a></p> <p><a href="#">Love, Gav." / Twitter</a></p>		
8	<p><a href="#">Dave Speck on Twitter: "Meanwhile, parents are contacting lawyers over concerns that this year's teacher-assessed grading process for #GCSEs and #alevels will lead to lower marks, as @CathImogenLough reports</a></p>	Reference to teacher assessed grades, assessment changes, parents	<div data-bbox="1213 789 1772 1300" style="border: 1px solid blue; padding: 5px;"> <p>Meanwhile, parents are contacting lawyers over concerns that this year's teacher-assessed grading process for <a href="#">#GCSEs</a> and <a href="#">#alevels</a> will lead to lower marks, as <a href="#">@CathImogenLough</a> reports</p>  <p>GCSEs 2021: Parents contact lawyers over grading 'bias' There could be legal difficulties over the range of approaches schools have taken to arrive at grades, lawyers warn <a href="#">tes.com</a></p> </div>

	<a href="https://t.co/yy6vuo5KaU">https://t.co/yy6vuo5KaU</a> <a href="#">/ Twitter</a>		
9	<a href="#">Mariam on Twitter: "@ofqual I am a private candidate, year 12 , and I want summer 2021 exams to run normally, like cambridge board . Cancelling and giving assessment are unfair options . Last year students got all A* without even opening a single book, based on the bribed teacher assessed grades" / Twitter</a>	Reference to exam changes/cancellation; teacher assessed grades; key words such as assessment and year 12	I am a private candidate, year 12 , and I want summer 2021 exams to run normally, like cambridge board . Cancelling and giving assessment are unfair options . Last year students got all A* without even opening a single book, based on the bribed teacher assessed grades
10	<a href="#">Sophie S on Twitter: "I used to be the kind of geeky teacher who really enjoyed</a>	Reference to teacher assessed grades, assessment	I used to be the kind of geeky teacher who really enjoyed marking exam papers but now I don't think I ever want to see another one... EVER! #TAGs


	<a href="#">marking exam papers but now I don't think I ever want to see another one... EVER! #TAGs" / Twitter</a>	changes, teachers perspective	
11	<a href="#">Parents Voices in Wales CIC on Twitter: "@wgmin_education @dotdavies1 @BBCRadioWales @AbbieWightwick @WalesOnline Question 3 : will the current year 12 assessment be part (percentage) of the overall result in A level next year in 2022 rather than consolidate 2 years into one exam series?" / Twitter</a>	Reference to exam changes/cancellation; teacher assessed grades; key words such as assessment and year 12	<div style="border: 1px solid blue; padding: 5px;"> Question 3 : will the current year 12 assessment be part (percentage) of the overall result in A level next year in 2022 rather than consolidate 2 years into one exam series? </div>


12	<p><a href="#">Imelda Almqvist on Twitter: "Today our house is an assessment center, where youngest son is doing his year 12 assessments at home and he has enlisted my help in taking photographs of all his written work, so it can be sent to his teachers. And I feel for those teachers, marking essays arriving as j-pegs!" / Twitter</a></p>	<p>Reference to year 12, assessments, teachers, marking</p>	<p>Today our house is an assessment center, where youngest son is doing his year 12 assessments at home and he has enlisted my help in taking photographs of all his written work, so it can be sent to his teachers.</p> <p>And I feel for those teachers, marking essays arriving as j-pegs!</p>
13	<p><a href="#">Got my A Level "assessments" back. In chemistry 2/3 exams went well and I got B's but in the organic exam I got a D. Will this bring</a></p>	<p>Reference to assessments, hashtags included #alevels #alevels2021</p>	<p>Got my A Level "assessments" back. In chemistry 2/3 exams went well and I got B's but in the organic exam I got a D. Will this bring down my grade? #Alevels #Alevels2021</p>

	<a href="#">down my grade?</a> <a href="#">#Alevels #Alevels2021</a>		
14	<p><a href="#">Arun on Twitter:</a>  <a href="#">"Half the class is falling asleep with #gcse #alevels period 5 at 2pm. @educationgovuk you think this will work 🙄 You need to be making #gcse #alevels abit easier by introducing coursework back etc inline with international averages. Incompetences will not lead you anywhere!" / Twitter</a></p>	<p>Reference to  hashtags #alevels #gcses;  assessment types  and learning.</p>	<p>Half the class is falling asleep with <a href="#">#gcse #alevels</a> period 5 at 2pm. <a href="#">@educationgovuk</a> you think this will work 🙄 You need to be making <a href="#">#gcse #alevels</a> abit easier by introducing coursework back etc inline with international averages. Incompetences will not lead you anywhere!</p>

15	<p><a href="#">sammy 🐼 on Twitter: "A-levels are going to be the death of me. This is more pressure than what of would've happened every other year. But don't worry we've only been through three lockdowns and a global pandemic, college students will be fine. #alevels2021 #alevels" / Twitter</a></p>	<p>Reference to assessments, pandemic, hashtags included #alevels #alevels2021</p>	<p>A-levels are going to be the death of me. This is more pressure than what of would've happened every other year. But don't worry we've only been through three lockdowns and a global pandemic, college students will be fine. <a href="#">#alevels2021</a> <a href="#">#alevels</a></p>
16	<p><a href="#">Mrs S History on Twitter: "I've reached a point where I'm waking up at 5am after dreaming about exam results. #tags #GCSEs2021</a></p>	<p>Reference to exam results, hashtags #gcses2021</p>	<p>I've reached a point where I'm waking up at 5am after dreaming about exam results. <a href="#">#tags</a> <a href="#">#GCSEs2021</a> <a href="#">#edutwitter</a> <a href="#">#historyteacher</a></p>

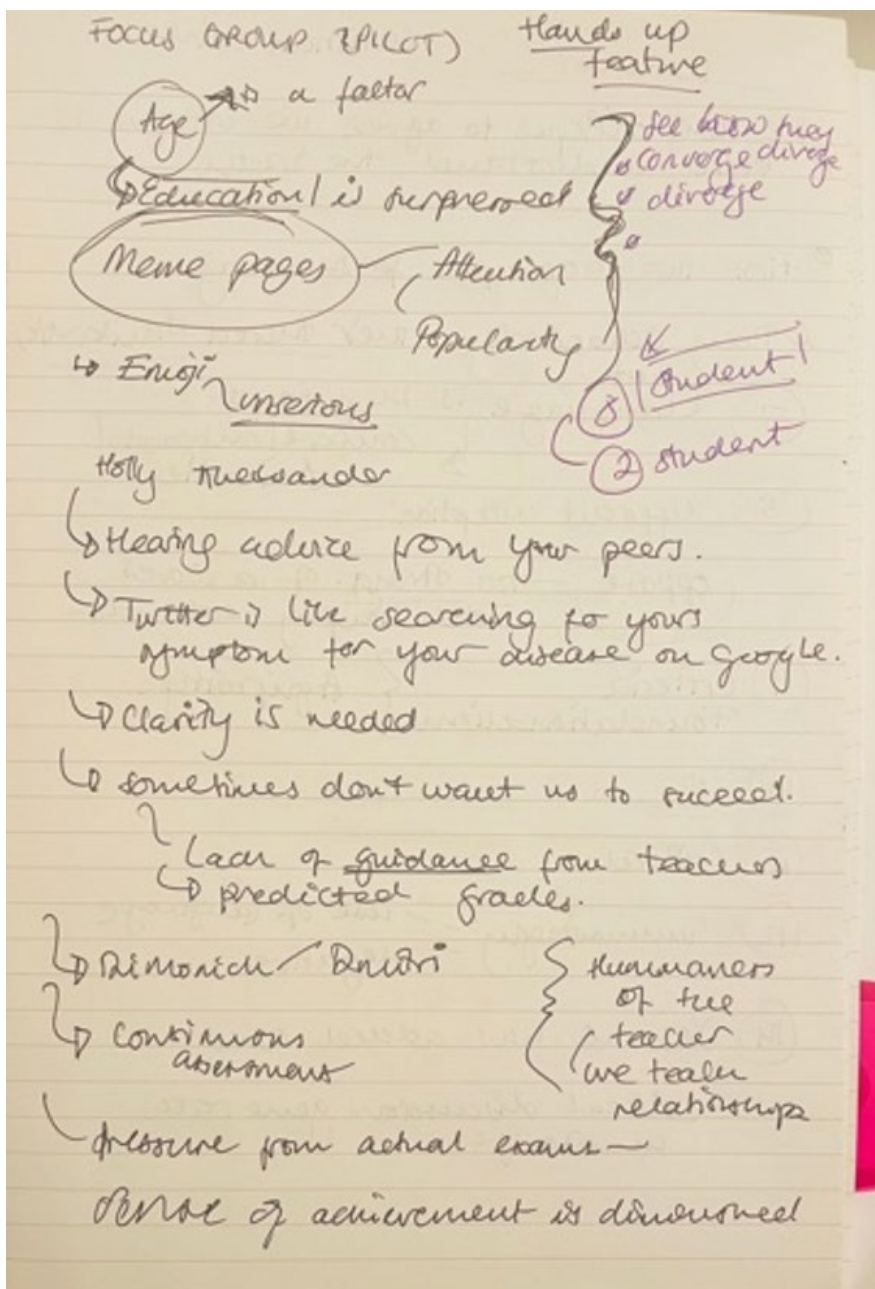


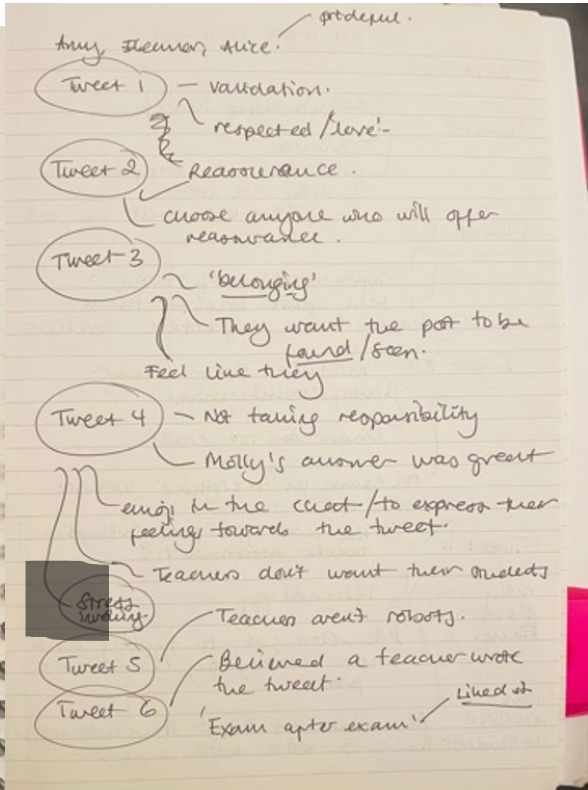
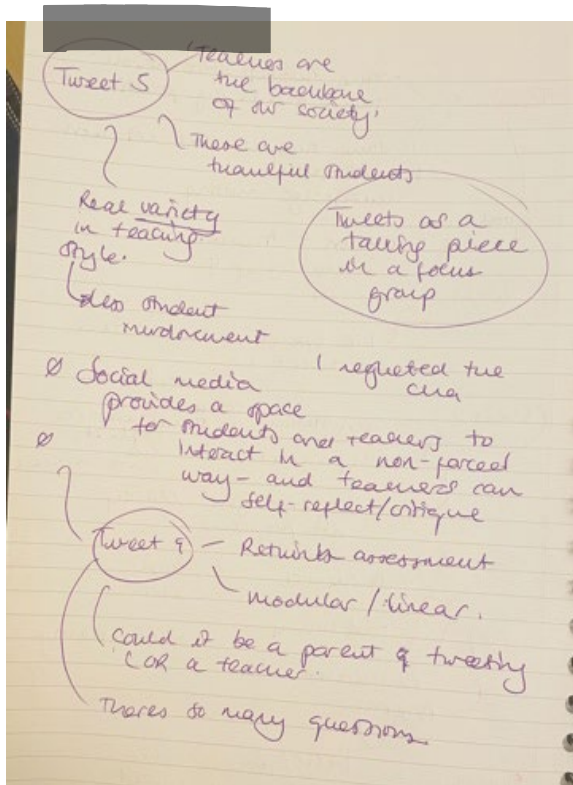
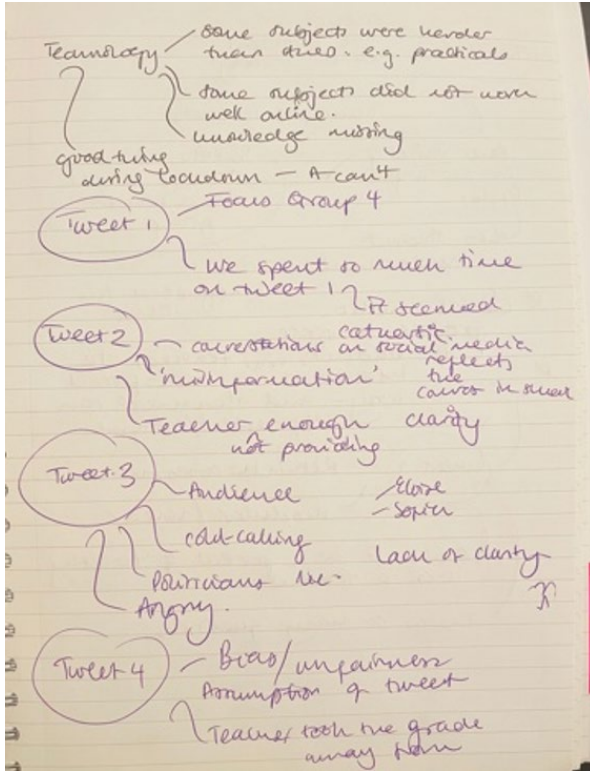
	<a href="#">#edutwitter</a> <a href="#">#historyteacher"</a> / Twitter		
17	<p><u><a href="#">Bill on Twitter:</a></u>  <u><a href="#">"When you find out grades are going to be teacher assessed and now you have to defend your Year 12 class assessment results... #alevels2021</a></u>  <u><a href="https://t.co/dDm5BRUWF3">https://t.co/dDm5BRUWF3"</a></u> / Twitter</p>	<p>Reference to teacher assessed grades, hashtag #alevels2021,</p>	<p>When you find out grades are going to be teacher assessed and now you have to defend your Year 12 class assessment results... #alevels2021</p> 

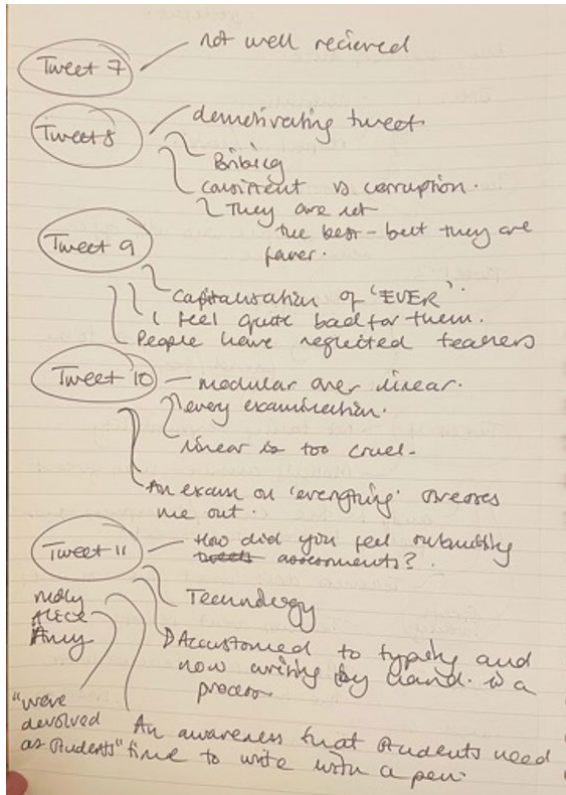
<p>18</p>	<p><a href="#">Jennie Maizels</a> </p> <p><a href="#">on Twitter: "Tomorrow my 18yr old will be given her #assessments grades. Letter from college warning them not to contact teachers about them &amp; that they are not in any way a gauge as to final grades is mad - why on earth give them out? They've been through enough stress surely? #alevels2021 https://t.co/V6l2nmINV3" / Twitter</a></p>	<p>Reference to assessments, pandemic, hashtags included #alevels #alevels2021</p>	<div data-bbox="1213 212 1696 833" style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 10px;"> <p>Tomorrow my 18yr old will be given her <a href="#">#assessments</a> grades. Letter from college warning them not to contact teachers about them &amp; that they are not in any way a gauge as to final grades is mad - why on earth give them out? They've been through enough stress surely? <a href="#">#alevels2021</a></p> <p>There are a few important things you need to be aware of about this process:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We are not allowed to share the final grades we are submitting to the awarding bodies under any circumstance, and teachers will not engage in any discussions about final grades.</li> <li>• For Art and Design courses, and the Extended Project we are not allowed to share the marks or grades for the non-examined assessments with you. This is because there is only one body of work being assessed and the overall grade submitted would be clear from the grade for that one assessment.</li> <li>• If you think that something has gone badly wrong in the recording of the grades on the system, please make your teacher aware, by email, as a matter of urgency. For example, if you have achieved A in every piece of work on the course to date, but one of the new grades is a U (and there was nothing when you were sitting the assessment that made you think you would not do well), please bring this to the attention of your teacher. It is important to note that this is not an opportunity to ask for your assessments to be remarked. This is a check that the grades have been recorded correctly. Your teacher will confirm by email whether the grade in question was correct or they have been changed. If one of your grades in the evidence basket is changed, the teachers will review your overall grade as well.</li> <li>• Teachers have been instructed not to engage in any discussion with students or parents about the marks and grades awarded or grade boundaries for the final assessments. Please do not ask them to. We have adopted a very open process for the awarding of grades in sharing the assessment plans for each subject, and the marks and grades in the final assessments, but we are not allowed to extend these discussions further. We are required to inform awarding bodies of any consistent pressure applied by students or parents, as this is viewed as an attempt to interfere with the awarding process.</li> </ul> </div>
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## Appendix I – Example photos of my notes during some focus group interviews.

NB: Names are redacted for confidentiality.







## Appendix J – Supervisory Meeting Record – An example of reflective practice

Supervisory Meeting Record		<p>NAME: Kanayo Dike-Oduah</p> <p>DATE: 13/10/2021</p>
<p><b>Overview</b></p> <p>Key Issues Discussed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ KDO shared a document which outlines how she identified the themes from the 3 out of 4 focus groups transcribed.</li> <li>■ Focus is now on the writing; specifically the literature review.</li> <li>■ KDO shared that Phenomenology is her Key epistemological stance after reading key texts on choosing a thematic analysis approach (Stark et al, 2013).</li> <li>■ MR advised that clear justification must be given, with a short acknowledgement of why other approaches were not selected.</li> <li>■ MF advised that it is more the 'interpretivist' branch of phenomenology.</li> <li>■ Categories are quite descriptive at the moment, but need to be grouped into broader groups; using my analytical approach. Avoid being too descriptive and ensure that you are analytical about your themes.</li> <li>■ KDO shared on her experience of delivering presentation to AQA's research advisory board and the sense of achievement she felt after mapping her research journey right from the MA through till now.</li> </ul>	<p>Recomm ended Readings or additional materials</p> <p>The authority gap - BOOK</p> <p>Training n/a</p> <p>Further Action Points</p>	

- MF answered question about covid context being mentioned at the start of the IFS report (i.e. context/background headings) and not necessarily in the literature review.
- Importance of making clear links between my research and the professional context. How does my research influence my professional practice/identity? Ensure that this is communicated in the context/introduction, literature review, discussion etc.
- Being more audacious as a strong female researcher. Choose to be cautious and analytical but I should not downplay or apologise for my work. 'DON'T USE ADDITIONAL QUALIFIERS!' I must confidently use my voice.
- MR – “Every time you read something, write something”.

### **Activities**

Transcribe final focus group by 31<sup>st</sup> October

Literature review – sketch it out in a organogram style and identify key themes (big themes and sub themes). Ensure that your research questions are in the centre of your diagram.

Context of high-stakes testing and its role within educational assessment

Social media use in education

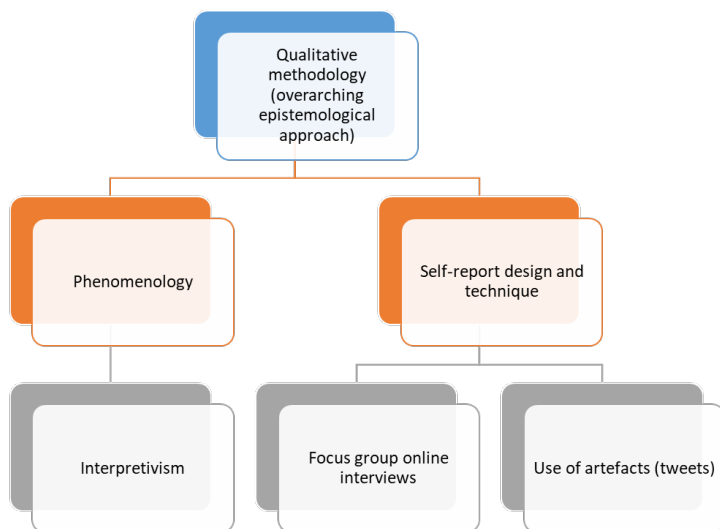
The themes that emerge from the data

Include some key names as well.

Capture the moment as a teacher, researcher and assessor (positionality). Write about the context as though I am writing for someone who knows nothing about this at all. Write about my experiences/feelings as a teacher in a narrative style. What am I getting from my pupils on a day to day basis? What

do I think is coming out of the data? This narrative write up will form part of the introduction.

Refine methodology section – by mid-November. Create a diagram first to clarify process. Use language such as ‘I did this because...’. MR encouraged KDO to remember that she has already chosen the methodology and my method! I need to simply tell the reader what I did!



MR to identify who the second marker of the IFS report will be.

### Additional Notes

Key questions, comments and feedback from the meeting:

#### Is phenomenology the right choice?

- Yes, it is a side arm of interpretivism. I am understanding the lived realities of students. It isn't grounded theory because I do have a clearer understanding of the landscape.
- There is no one way to do this, but if I feel that this is where it comfortably sits, then it is a good sign for me as a researcher to pursue my research driven intuition.



**Is it important for me to acknowledge that the research could have been done in different ways?**

- IFS is a short report; so I need to be succinct with this part. I.e. one paragraph could follow along the lines of: ***The questions that I have asked and the way that this particular domain of research is evolving now means that it sits most comfortably in this domain of research. So using qualitative approaches, we're trying to interpret and understand these lived realities. I appreciate that there are a range of ways that we could do this (the IFS) but certainly it would be unlikely to use quantitative methods in this approach because this is not what I want to find. At the moment, I need that rich detailed data which is establishing the voice of the participant which cannot be done using quantitative data. (arguably, I have already engaged in quantitative elements during the content analysis).***
- ***Grounded theory and discourse analysis do not fit my research questions or aims. MF said, I could say 'I tried grounded theory and it is not for me lol 😊***
- Then focus on what you are going to do and write about it.

**My research is an example of the things that happening in the field of educational assessment but little to no attention has been given to it and so this is how it is being talked about.**

**AQA Presentation**

- KDO was advised by AQA's social media manager to consider including the most popular A Level subjects such as A Level Biology, in future content analyses as they have seen interesting social media discourse.
- AQA shared their support for my research and they were really impressed that research is being done in this area.
- MR said that this is really my corner and that other exam boards should and would be interested. There is a strong potential to publish too!
- Important to build connections between education organisations, teachers and researchers.

**What are my hunches at the moment concerning the data?**

- Directly from the students; I do get this sense of injustice when it comes to assessment but also a strong desire for assessment. You've got a mix of students who only feel validated in terms of achievement; once they have done an exam and you've got those who actually doing an exam gives them no validation at all, they believe the system is completely unfair and that teachers are biased. You've also got a thread of students who are incredibly compassionate towards teachers and that came across strongly in their discussions where they discussed teacher workload and marking. But, what surprised me is students' awareness of how flawed high-stakes standardised assessments are. They were sharing things that I could put an academic key term to. E.g. construct underrepresentation. Students were voicing how it is unfair that they had studied X amount of content but only 10% came up in the exam.
- How might the covid pandemic influence the data collected?

**Will I need to make known to the reader that my research context is within a pandemic? And therefore students responses are entrenched/embedded in that context? A lot of students are speaking about how they've 'lost learning' and how 'it is not the same'.**

- Context is important – we are still in extraordinary times and we must be honest in our research. The data that was collected, straddled a global pandemic. The effect that the pandemic had on education as a whole was remarkable and it did change the assessment landscape. Secondary schools have gone assessment crazy, take my school as an example of 'continuous relentless assessments' where year 13's sat mock exams in the first two months of their year 13 academic year. Schools rationale is that students need the exam experience and they need to be assessed 'just in case' of another pandemic. Is this fair on the students? Does it drive forward their learning?
- In the introduction, I need a statement that explains the 'where we are'. Of all the aspects of education, it is high-stakes assessment in particular that has been most impacted by covid. Even to take stock and note all the new words around assessment; e.g 'learning loss'. There are new words entering our vocabulary when we talk about assessment that we weren't using two years ago (refer to Tina Isaacs upcoming research where she asks parents what they understand by learning loss etc.). These words have been created in response to covid which interestingly came from schools and not just policy makers, as with other forms of assessment (e.g. TAGs, CAGs).
- The hysteria around assessments is bound to have influenced how my respondents/participants talk about assessment.

### **Positionality**

- Positionality can and should be fleshed out a bit more in my introduction and as justification for my methodology (phenomenology). I am right there in the zeitgeist (spirit of the times); sitting with my pile of year 13 mock exam papers as a teacher who has taught throughout the pandemic. I'm right in the moment, as teacher in the thick of it writing about her experience with an authentic voice. I am a teacher researcher which is a powerful combination and I am doing something completely original. I am working in my workplace finding things out! Positionality will make things rich.

### **Where should I start referring more to the research questions? Will it be in each section? OR is it going to be a standalone section?**

- It may be good to acknowledge the RQs earlier, even in the analysis. E.g. in response to RQ1 this is what my data in connection with the literature review is starting to tell me.
- Do it in a subtle way – to make it less formulaic.

### **How much space should I give to acknowledging my research contributions to the online focus group methodology?**

- I used online focus group method because of the covid context. Should my appraisal and recommendations of the online focus group method with adolescents be given much room? And where in the structure?
- MR – said to write as much as I need to write now and then they will support with reigning in the content.

### **Importance of being a reflective researcher**

- Positionality - Reflective researcher. Highlight in the introduction and in the method the lack of objectivity. Potential for bias in research overall. Bias (though reel in this word – use an alternative) is inevitable as I am in the research. I am aware of the possibility for over-interpreting because I am right in the research. We hear the things that we want to hear; confirmation bias, its worth me openly reflecting on this.
- Wanting the answers to my research questions may stop me from seeing other things and actively seeking confirming data (confirmation bias). When I go through the methods that I have employed, I should write about being aware of researcher bias and the potential for unknowingly priming Participants. I'm drawing on my expertise as a teacher of psychology and I'm aware of these

biases that can occur in the research context and beyond, due to the relationship dynamics.

**Appendix K – Example of my extracted comments on the transcript for Focus Group 2 (To illustrate Step 4 of IPA online focus group analysis.**

Page	Line	Highlighted text from transcript	Comment
5	33	people aren't speaking very much about education on their on their social media platforms, because they actually want to use their social media platforms almost to get away from the drama of education	<p>Contrasting view on the use of social media in relation to education. Using social media to get away from the drama of education.</p> <p>However, this is from their perspective and what we see on social media is really down to who we follow and algorithms...are students following education-based accounts or not.</p>
6	5	When its exam season you're seeing screenshots and everything on Snapchat everywhere. So even though it's not a constant conversation, there is times where it's mainly about education. Even on Instagram all the meme pages are Posting quotes from Twitter	Participant makes a good point that when it comes to education related posts it may not be a constant theme/conversation throughout the year, but it is time relative to exam season etc.

		<p>about what people said about the exams. On Snapchat, people are saying how they feel. So is...it might not seem like it's about education, but there are certain times when is solely centered around education</p>	<p>Also a point about the transferability from on social media platform to another. How what is posted on twitter is also posted on snapchat and or Instagram.</p>
6	11	<p>That is really interesting that you brought that up because you know the thing that really fuelled my desire to research this area of why students in particular self-report on their experiences with exams on social media was because in 2018 there was a biology student. She had just set her biology a level and she went onto YouTube and she literally she recorded herself, crying her eyes out because the exam was so difficult and I thought this is really, really peculiar. Like why would someone record themselves Responding to their exam experiences and post it online for everyone to see?</p>	<p>There is something about the research sharing the driving force behind their research and make it plain for participants/co-researchers to understand the context and purpose of the research.</p>

6	23	You're prepared but you're not. You're not prepared in like your mind if you get what I mean. And you feel like you're prepared; 'OK yeah, I'm gonna go in there and give it my all' but when you're actually sitting there. You feel everything. Because the environment is so nerve racking	'You feel everything' – powerful comment about exam experience and perhaps supports the explanation as to why students may take to social media to share what they have felt. Exam stress.
7	6	I think there's someone waiting in the lobby. Let me just let them in,	RC joined in again as she was having IT issues
8	8	put yourself back into last year	Contextual questioning – online focus group skill
8	13	comments in the chat	Important to respond to participants comments in the chat – openly, so that they know they have been heard and are an active member of the group
8	15	What do I mean by core message?	Responding to question in the chat – online interview skills

8	29	sometimes it's just for attention. I think Twitter is like a popularity contest. Your trying to get as many likes and retweets as possible	Motivating factors and reasons why students share their assessment experiences online has been interpreted as for attention!
9	1	I'm going to ask. HK, RC, GM, DT have a look at the images that have been attached specifically The crying face emoji with a peace sign. What do those images mean to you? What does it communicate to you in relation to the tweet?	Direct questioning was used here to encourage those who had not shared in the focus group interview yet.
9	11	I think the picture they're using I think they're trying to convey like relief, 'cause obviously they would have been really stressed out before	Use of images and emoji in tweet , can convey a sense of relief.
10	5	OK 'TYSM', which I believe translates to. Thank you so much.	Note on the importance of the moderator/interviewer being aware of slang/abbreviations/phrases when engaging with this type of data.



10	7	<p>Why do you think a year 12 student has gone to Twitter to ask Year 13 students about their assessment experiences or their, their future assessment experiences. Is this something that you would do? DT and then CL.</p> <p>DT: Well, I don't think I would do something similar, but maybe this person thought that year 13 would have much more experience in these exams and they know better, so...</p>	<p>Motivation for posting on Twitter about assessment</p>
10	25	<p>Yeah, don't take everything people say word for word because am I just come bite you in the back and you're just gonna be the one left in trouble.</p>	<p>(pitfalls) of seeking advice via twitter concerning assessment</p>
10	27	<p>AD and then HK 'cause your hand was up earlier.</p>	<p>Important for the moderator to keep an eye out for the hands up feature being used on MS Teams. Online focus group etiquette</p>

10	28	<p>Yeah miss. I also think that tweets like this is like from students that are unsure about the year 12 exams and especially how we haven't done obviously GCSE's so they start feeling stressed and they don't know like how much to prepare so they start asking year 13s but then when they start saying that it isn't that serious, they they lower their efforts towards the year 12 exams and then therefore they might get like lower grades.</p>	<p>(pitfalls) of seeking advice via twitter concerning assessment and reasons why students sought for advice using this platform during covid-19</p>
10	37	<p>like EE said you</p>	<p>Reference to comment from other participant (online focus group etiquette/process)</p>
11	36	<p>I was just going to say like I use Twitter a lot and that's probably something that I would do, but I think like EE said you should just take everything with a pinch of salt because at the end of the day, like someone else's experience</p>	<p>(benefits and pitfalls) of seeking advice via twitter concerning assessment. This participants relates to the tweet and agrees that this is something they would do. Motivation for posting on Twitter about assessment</p>

		isn't going to be yours. But it's always good to still seek that advice.	
11	3	yeah, this is true, and when you when you have sought out that advice in the past. Does it bring a sense of relief to you or does it increase anxiety?	Good probing question to HK, to find out the outcome of seeking advice via tweets like Tweet 2.
11	5	Nah. I would say it brings a sense of relief because you're hearing the advice from your peers like they've been in the same situation. So, it's likely going to be similar for you,	(benefits) of seeking advice via twitter concerning assessment. Relieves anxiety etc.
11	8	I think it's a bit similar case to trying to find out what disease you have by looking up the symptoms on the Internet like. It's better to ask an advice from a teacher who actually like taught many students and not someone on the Internet.	Interesting analogy to compare advice seeking via social media in the context of assessment. Pitfalls etc.

11	17	<p>I think the thing about twitter is when you post something, you're expecting multiple interactions from different people, so the person who posted that tweet was probably looking for a variety of different perspectives from people rather than just one person</p>	<p>Motivation for posting on Twitter about assessment</p>
11	23	<p>I kind of disagree with the approach of asking your teacher because even though it's your teacher, I feel like it's better to hear it from somewhere closer in age to you because sometimes I feel like teachers exaggerate and or they underplay certain things 'cause. For instance, in my chemistry lessons we were told none of our exams were that important, and in the end, it turned out to be very important. So, I'd have rather taking the advice from people that were in year 13 and said oh your exams are important, don't listen to what like everyone is saying. Of course, you have to listen to the advice from your teachers, but I feel like it's</p>	<p>Motivations for seeking assessment advice from other students via social media.</p> <p>Issues with teacher clarity, accuracy in the description of assessment experiences and the importance of assessments.</p> <p>A 'connectedness' is achieved when hearing the experiences of those close in age to you.</p> <p>'I kind of disagree' ... It seemed like EE was tentative to disagree on this but eventually</p>

		better (emphasis on this word) to hear from people that have recently done it	spoke with conviction and shared her own example too.
11	33	Um, I feel like asking people's opinions online is so much easier than asking in real life. Because it eliminates like the fear factor.	Motivation for seeking assessment advice via twitter. 'Eliminates the fear factor' which is often experienced in real-life/offline
12	1	. Like anyone can create a Twitter profile put on a random picture, have a random username and I guess ask questions freely without judgement, awesome.	Motivation for seeking advice via twitter concerning assessment
12	6	Let's have a look at this tweet. So this is from a year 13 student says officially finished The horrible year that year 13 has been but so proud of myself for doing double the exams we were promised were cancelled. Hashtag A levels 2021. Now for context. And I can see EE just put in the chat 'righttttt'	Participant EE immediately uses the chat to indicate her agreement/relatability to the tweet in question. It is a powerful display of relatability and one which may have been missed if the chat function was not used to paid attention to well by the moderator!!  Online focus group etiquette/process

12	14	I'm going to come to EE first, 'cause she's all year 13 student and it will then be interesting to see how it makes you feel as year 12 students going into year 13 knowing that we are still in an uncertain time surrounding assessment. How seeing a tweet like this makes you feel. So EE, I mean, can you just share your thoughts on this tweet	Directed questioning – good for when you have identified the participant make up of your group and you are able to push questions towards certain individuals first.
13	18	Ummm. I completely agree with that tweet because I really, really wanted to write my exams. First of all, I know what I'm going into, and I know how much effort I need to put into my work. So when you tell me my exams are cancelled, of course I'm gonna relax a little bit and then all of a sudden we're getting thrown with multiple tests and we have about 2 weeks or a week to learn between each test and the tests are all piled up, so it's just a lot to do even though we were given topics, it was still really	<p>Stark retelling of the assessment experience of students during covid-19. Clear relatability to the tweet in question.</p> <p>No exams = relaxation</p> <p>Exams/Assessment = no relaxation</p> <p>Should exams always be stressful?</p>

		hard to revise for all those tests in such little time.	
13	6	so, I think please just revise for all your exams like you're actually writing them. Even if you don't know if you're writing them or not because it's gonna come bite you in the back.	EE pleads with the year 12 participants in the focus group call to revise for all assessments, including what might seem like formative assessments...in case it comes to bite them in the back.  Language.
13	12	And now over to the year 12 students. So we've got quite a good number of you on the on the call today. I'm interested to know when you see a tweet like this and you hear the experiences of EE which she just shared as a year 13 student. How does it make you feel knowing that the government have said one thing and something different has happened so 'the government has said A but we are doing B'. How does that make you feel?	Good question to link the experiences shared by our sole year 13 student back to the year 12s on the call to hear their thoughts on the tweet and EE's advice

13	1	<p>I just think personally. the government, didn't really have a plan. I mean because one minuet they were saying all exams are cancelled. Because we didn't have, because of lockdown and stuff like, we didn't really have time. If you get what I mean and then next minute you come back to school and you're like 'Oh no By the way you have got exams' [tone is sarcastic/annoyed] and it and you just think so you told me actually 'no, exams are cancelled' I can kind of like chill out a bit, focus on what's going on at the moment. And then you're telling me 'actually nah, you are doing exams and now I'm panicking because I've now got to revise everything in a short amount of time I just think that they could have planned it in a different way and I think they should have just been more clear.</p>	<p>Issues with government's leadership on assessment during covid-19.</p> <p>Themes of uncertainty, lack of clarity and a sense of frustration.</p> <p>Again, exams = no relaxation/ No exams = relaxation, chilling.</p>
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## Appendix L – Research Training Log

<b>Name</b>	<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Provider</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Skills</b>
Basic Statistics for Research: e-learning Course	University College London	Organisational Development	2020-10-05	RDF A1: Knowledge base, RDF A2: Cognitive abilities
Women in Research: Daring greatly (unleashing your entrepreneurial spirit)	University College London	Organisational Development	2021-03-18	RDF B3: Professional and career development, RDF D3: Engagement and impact
The Writing Series: Methodology	University College London	Organisational Development	2021-05-21	RDF D2: Communication and dissemination
Storytelling Skills for Teachers & Presenters (Part 1 and Part 2)	University College London	Organisational Development	2021-03-22	RDF A3: Creativity, RDF D2: Communication and dissemination
Introduction to qualitative analysis: Interviewing	University College London	Organisational Development	2021-03-10	RDF A1: Knowledge base, RDF A2: Cognitive abilities

Women in Research: Daring greatly (unleashing your entrepreneurial spirit)	University College London	Organisational Development	2021- 03-18	RDF B3: Professional and career development, RDF D3: Engagement and impact
Online Research Methods	University College London	SAS	2021- 03-11	RDF A1: Knowledge base, RDF C2: Research management
Writing an Introduction	University College London	SAS	2021- 03-09	RDF A1: Knowledge base, RDF A2: Cognitive abilities, RDF A3: Creativity
DSD: Sway, Microsoft's modern presentation tool - Workshop	University College London	ISD	2021- 03-05	RDF A1: Knowledge base
DSD: Excel tips and tricks	University College London	ISD	2021- 03-08	RDF A1: Knowledge base
Introduction to Doctoral Skills Development Programme (DocSkills) and the Research Log	University College London	Organisational Development	2021- 03-11	RDF A1: Knowledge base, RDF B3: Professional and career development

Webinar: Writing a Literature Review - Saturday 20 March 10:00-11:00 UK Time	Curriculum, Pedagogy and Assessment	UCL Academic Writing Centre	2021-03-20	RDF A1: Knowledge base, RDF C2: Research management, RDF D2: Communication and dissemination
Academic literacies as Praxis: forging a space in academic evaluation regimes	Curriculum, Pedagogy and Assessment	UCL, Academic Writing Centre	2021-03-25	RDF A3: Creativity, RDF B3: Professional and career development, RDF D2: Communication and dissemination
Overcoming the Imposter Phenomenon (ONLINE)	Curriculum, Pedagogy and Assessment	UCL	2021-05-05	RDF B1: Personal qualities, RDF B3: Professional and career development, RDF D2: Communication and dissemination
Becoming a Creative Researcher (ONLINE)	Curriculum, Pedagogy and Assessment	UCL	2021-05-26	RDF A3: Creativity, RDF B1: Personal qualities, RDF D2: Communication and dissemination
Introduction to qualitative analysis: Thematic Analysis	University College London	Organisational Development	2021-10-01	RDF A1: Knowledge base, RDF A2: Cognitive abilities



## Appendix M – 8 Step Procedure for Interpretative Phenomenological Online Focus Group Analysis (Dike-Oduah, 2022)

Step number	Process	Description <i>Italicised emboldened text in the description box indicates Dike-Oduah's specific adaptation to IPA for online focus groups.</i>	Source
1	Immersion in the data	Verbatim transcription of the data using MS Word, including participants tone and group dynamics. <b><i>For online focus groups where the chat function has been used, transcription should include the chat commentary and any use of emoticons.</i></b>	(Love et al., 2020; Santhosh et al., 2021; Smith et al., 2009)
2	Identify the researcher's position and potential bias	The researcher should reflect on their position, bias and perception of the focus group topics and their relationship with the participants. Any subjectivities or biases should be presented in the analysis and the keeping of reflective notes after each focus group.	(Palmer et al., 2010; Robson, 2015)
3	Initial noting	Read the transcripts several times and use MS Word to annotate (comments feature), highlight, underline, colour code salient words, phrases and comments made by participants. The researcher should scrutinise the transcripts to understand the participants considering the RQs and make notes of any nuanced language; how participants share their narratives, how they agree/disagree and how the facilitators' interactions in the focus group may have influenced the participants' contributions. <b><i>Make notes concerning the 'chat commentary', including the use of emoticons.</i></b> Extract all analysis notes for each focus group into an MS Word document.	(Larkin et al., 2006; Love et al., 2020; Santhosh et al., 2021; Smith et al., 2009)

4	Identify emerging themes	Convert the transcript notes from step 3 into initial specific themes or phrases which capture the essence of what participants had said. These themes can be based on consensus issues/experiences, individual, meaningful portions of the data, stand-out comments (use of language), <b>group dynamics online and reference to the focal stimuli (tweets)</b> . These themes should be coded using the desired system, such as comment-extraction, colour-coding, numerical-coding, or CQDAS. The emerged themes can be presented as a hierarchy flowchart via PowerPoint or list format to be clustered in the next step.	(Love et al., 2020; Palmer et al., 2010; Smith et al., 2009)
5	Cluster the themes and identify superordinate themes for each focus group	Cluster themes from step 4 based on their similarity to become superordinate (main/chief) themes. Themes can become superordinate based on the frequency (how often they are mentioned), intensity (how significant the theme was to participants' response, and the Research Questions). Update the colour/numerical coded transcripts to reflect the application of the superordinate themes to each focus group transcript.	(Smith et al., 2009; Tomkins & Eatough, 2010)
6	6a. Check for consistencies of the subordinate themes within and across all focus groups via a horizontal analysis (Palmer et al., 2010).	Reread the transcripts ( <i>including the chat commentary</i> ) to check the recurrence of superordinate themes (step 5) and themes (step 4) at the individual participant level and the focus group level. Based on Smith et al.'s (2009) recommendation that each theme should represent at least a third of participants, consider whether the themes adequately represent each individual or whether additional themes are required to fully represent individual voices and the group voice. Perform a horizontal analysis by integrating the superordinate themes and themes across all focus groups. Update the transcript notes to reflect the application of the superordinate themes (including new ones) across all focus groups and catalogue supporting quotations for each theme from each focus group. The output of	(Palmer et al., 2010; Smith et al., 2009; Tomkins & Eatough, 2010)

		this horizontal analysis will be an overall taxonomy diagram of superordinate themes and themes across the entire data set.	
7	Analysis rigour checks	Critically discuss the development and description of the themes with research supervisors. This is to check whether the themes are credible representations of participants accounts (valid).	(Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Love et al., 2020; Smith et al., 2009)
8	Create a taxonomy of themes	Using MS PowerPoint, organise superordinate themes into a flowchart to represent a logical sequence and connection (if any) between the themes for all focus groups.	(Love et al., 2020; Smith et al., 2009)

## 1 **Appendix N – Excerpt of raw transcription from Focus Group 3**

2 Access to the full transcripts for each focus group can be given on request, once  
3 ethical considerations are made.

### **Focus Group Title: Student Focus Group 3 (Focus Group Interview)**

**Focus Group Location: Online, Microsoft Teams, UK**

**Date: 30/06/2021**

**Start time: 16:54**

**Number of Participants: 6**

**Label for participants:**

- **TB (female – year 12),**
- **NP (male – year 12),**
- **AF (female – year 12),**
- **MB (female – year 12),**
- **EC (female – year 12)**
- **AD (female – year 12)**

**Name of Moderator: Kanayo Dike-Oduah (KDO)**

**Name of Transcriber: Kanayo Dike-Oduah (KDO)**

**Transcription Style: Verbatim, with inclusion of periodic time-stamps and still-images from the online focus group presentation. Questions asked by the moderated are in red-text and emboldened.**

**Duration of focus group interview: 1 hour 6mins 1 second**

**Link to full audio/video: <https://web.microsoftstream.com/video/936265fa-005b-4c66-8e9d-7432cfd0ab1>**

4 KDO: OK. So this is my I'm focused interview focus Group interview for my doctoral studies. So I'm in  
5 my second year and the output of the second year is to write a 20,000 word report. I've written  
6 20,000 words plus when I did my masters, but this is taking a different shape because of course it  
7 is for a PhD level study.



8 I'm focusing on what students say about assessment on social media, but more  
 9 importantly, how are the things I put out there on social media about assessment. How are they  
 10 interpreted by students like yourself? So this is a qualitative inquiry into students and teachers  
 11 Interpretations of assessment related tweets during the COVID-19 pandemic, and it's important  
 12 that you do know that as well as having focus group interviews with you as my students, I'm also  
 13 having them with a few teachers from our school. So you guys are my year 12 focus group  
 14 interview group. I've done it with the year 13 group and I did a pilot study with a year 12 group as  
 15 well, a smaller year 12 group.

16 (01:14) – Slide – Welcome and introduction

**Welcome and Introduction**

- Standardised instructions
- ***You are my co-researchers; semi-structured questioning; free-flowing conversation, including the use of the chat.***
  - Reminder of consent, confidentiality and right to withdraw
  - Guidance on how to use Microsoft Teams and the chat function.

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17

18

19 KDO: Just to give you a nice background, so all of you are familiar with Microsoft Teams, but just a  
 20 heads up again and it's important that you are able to use your microphone 'cause of course it's  
 21 part of being a focus group interview. I want to hear your voice is so if that is possible. If you're  
 22 able to unmute at certain points that would be amazing in terms of how the focus group will work  
 23 because we can't see each other.

24 Even if we had our cameras on, it's hard to tell when someone's about to talk. So please  
 25 use the hands raised feature or simply feel free to unmute yourself and and share. And remember  
 26 that you are my Co researchers, so you will be the ones interpreting these tweets that I show you.

27 I think we've got a few people in the lobby. Yes, AF just joined.

28 So you will be my Co researchers. You'll be interpreting these tweets that I show you and  
 29 we will have a candid discussion about them and heavy on the word 'candid'. So I want it to be an  
 30 honest interpretation about what you think these tweets are communicating.

31 We of course can use the chat function as well, so please feel free to put in comments in  
 32 the chat. Feel free to also react to each other's comments so if someone puts something out  
 33 there, if you like it literally, hit the 'like' button. If you 'love' it, hit the 'love'. If it's hilarious, hit that  
 34 as well because that would be really useful for me to see the metrics for any particular comments  
 35 that are more, I guess, more popular among you all.

36 (02:41) – Mentimeter Introduction Slide

**Questions about general experiences with  
 Twitter (and any other social media  
 platform) during the academic years  
 affected by COVID-19 (2019-2021)**

Mentimeter link for poll: <https://www.menti.com/xmupfompko>  
 Menti.com | Code: **2635 2118**

- In your own words, describe your use of social media during the COVID-19 pandemic?
  - General use, education related use, fact checking use, new updates, community, humour?
  - Why, Where, When, How?

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37

38 KDO: We are also going to be using mentimeter and just to warm us up, I'm going to copy and paste  
 39 this link and put it in the chat and I would like you to answer all of the questions on that  
 40 mentimeter link. So let me copy and paste it into the chat. [long pause]

41 And I forgot to mention and some of my psychology students will be able to remind me of  
 42 this, but I forgot to mention that of course you are volunteering to take part in this study. If at any  
 43 point you need to leave, that is absolutely fine. If at any point you feel uncomfortable and you  
 44 want to withdraw from participating, that also is absolutely fine, and there will be no adverse  
 45 consequences for that. And just a reminder that I value your time. And I'm very, very grateful.

46 So please click on that link and you will be taken to a site called Mentimeter. Where you'll  
 47 be asked to vote and share your ideas, your thoughts on a few things. And I will put it on my  
 48 screen so that we can see each other's responses as well.

49                    So I can see a few responses already, I'm going to share it on this big screen. [long  
 50 pause – sharing screen]  
 51 (04:09) – Mentimeter Q1 – Describe how you are feeling?

Use three words to describe how you are feeling this afternoon/evening. (Please enter the three words separately.)




52  
 53 KDO: So just to start off with, I'm asking people to share and describe how they are feeling this  
 54 afternoon or evening. And if you have any issues with the link, let me know.

55                    Some of you are 'tired', some of your 'neutral, calm'. [long pause]

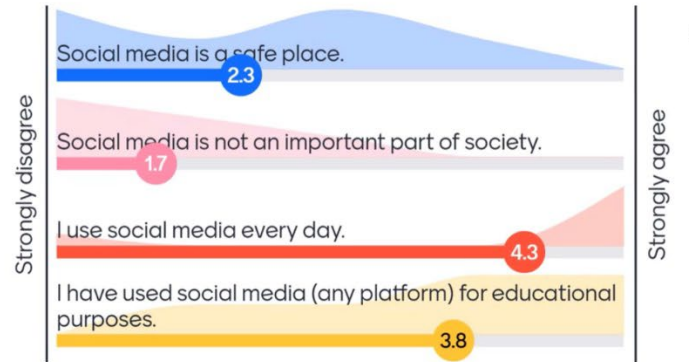
56                    Some have said 'stressed'. I can relate to that as well. [long pause]

57                    Cool. OK, so thank you for sharing how you're feeling excited, neutral. 'Tired' seems to  
 58 be the most popular one. 'Calm, interested'. I'm glad that you're interested in today's task.

59 (05:15) Mentimeter Q2 – Opinions about social media



Use the sliding scale to indicate your level of agreement to each statement.



60

61 KDO: let me put up the next slide so that you can answer so for the next one you should be able to use  
 62 the sliding scale to indicate your level of agreement to each statement and the first statement  
 63 says 'social media is a safe place'. You've got 'strongly disagree' on one side, 'strongly' agree on  
 64 the other side. So for each of those statements drag it to where you feel. Your level of agreement  
 65 is for each statement. [long pause]

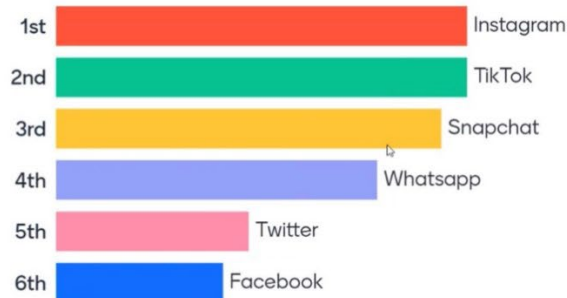
66 So as people are responding, we can see that it's shifting. And once you've done all of  
 67 those statements, you can hit submit as you've already done.

68 And then we've got one final...one to have a look at.

69 (06:31) – Mentimeter Q3 – Ranking Social media in order of usage or awareness

Rank the following social media platforms in order of usage/awareness. (1st = Most used/aware of; 6th least used/aware of)

Mentimeter



70

71 KDO: So I've got six different types of social media platforms and what I would like you to do is rank it.  
 72 So rank these different social media platforms in order of your personal usage or your awareness  
 73 of it. So, for example, if you don't use Facebook, but you feel like it's got a prominent place in  
 74 society and you might rank it 5th, you might rank it 4th just in relation to all these other social  
 75 media platforms. [long pause]

76 Lovely, I can see the different rankings. And then once you've done it, you can hit submit.  
 77 [Long pause]

78 Brilliant thank you all for doing that. So it's interesting to see that Instagram seems to be  
 79 number 1. Twitter is actually second to last. Which is an interesting find among your group. OK,  
 80 brilliant.

81 So we're going back to the PowerPoint now. And this section of the Focus Group  
 82 interview. In fact, the rest of the focus Group interview is going to focus on tweets on  
 83 assessments. Tweet on assessment tweeted during the COVID-19 pandemic. And just really  
 84 checking how we interpret these tweets as year 12 students. And of course for myself as one of  
 85 your teachers.

86 (08:28) – Tweet 1

## Tweet 1\*

*Including a reply from the author of the original tweet*


Read the tweet and consider the following questions as part of your discussion:

- Think back to your own GCSE results day and share your thoughts on this tweet.
- What do you think is the core message of this tweet?
- Can you relate to this tweet? How? Why? Why not?
- How does reading this tweet make you feel, and why?
- What does the image on this tweet mean to you?
- In the chat: Finish this sentence... "For me, the is tweet means that XXXX"
- Why do you think this tweet was shared on Twitter? Would you share something similar on Twitter?
- How do you think other students/teachers/parents will respond to this tweet?

omg i actually did so much better than i thought! last year i was barely scraping 4's manifestation works lads, my maths and english ones shocked me i- #gcses2020

4283	Art & Design - Graphic Communication	6
4440	Combined Science - Trilogy Foundation Tier	55
46187	French Foundation Tier	6
4700	English Language	8
4792	English Literature	6
11180	History	6
13413	Mathematics Foundation Tier	5
4216	Art & Design - Photography - Y9	6

Because your BTGC results has been delayed. As soon as we BTGC grades will be released, we contact you to provide of results will be issued.



Replying to [redacted]  
as if i got a 55 in science when all i did was go on my phone, talk and stare out the window 😂

87

88 KDO: So we've got the first tweet here. We've got the first tweet here, and what I would like you to do  
89 please is have a read of his tweet. What I've done is I've redacted the author of their tweet and  
90 the date that it was tweeted, but it says here: "Oh my God. I actually did so much better than I  
91 thought. Last year I was barely scraping 4's manifestation works lads. My maths and English  
92 ones shocked me, I and then they put hashtag GCSE's 2020.

93 I want you to start off just in the chat. In the chat Can you say whether or not this tweet is  
94 relatable to you? So if you put yourself back in your in those shoes of last year where you did not  
95 sit any official exams? Can you relate to this tweet? Were you shocked by the outcome of your  
96 GCSE grades at all? So start off with putting any comments in the chat [long pause]  
97 (09:43) – Comments in the chat - Tweet 1 – Relatability

**FOCUS GROUP - DOCTORAL RESEARCH TEAM - KDO** Chat Files

NP [redacted] Paddington 30/06/2021 17:10  
no

AF [redacted] a Boardman 30/06/2021 17:10  
not really

AF [redacted] Finch-Hawkes 30/06/2021 17:10  
Partially

AD [redacted] Alice Dyer 30/06/2021 17:10  
I think that I can, I was really worried that the government wouldn't pass me on maths and combined science

MB [redacted] Molly Barrow 30/06/2021 17:10  
I wasn't necessarily completely shocked but I do agree that it felt like some 'higher power' like manifestation was at play

EC [redacted] Thor Coysten 30/06/2021 17:11  
I was surprised by one or two of my results but most of them i was expecting

98

99 KDO: NP says he cannot relate to the tweet. Not really. [long pause]

100 AF says 'partially'. AD says, 'I think I can. I was really worried that the government  
101 wouldn't have pass me on maths and combined science'.

102 MB says 'I wasn't necessarily completely shocked, but I do agree that it felt like some  
103 higher power, like manifestation, was at play'. That's really interesting.

104 EC says 'I was surprised by one or two of my results, but most of them I was expecting'.

105 OK, thank you all for sharing. Thank you for sharing.

106 KDO: I wanted to probe you a little bit more. So, I'm interested in why this student felt that they should  
107 bring this information to Twitter. What do you think might have been? Some of the driving forces,  
108 driving factors that encouraged them to post this on Twitter of all places? And for this, please feel  
109 free to raise your hands or feel free to just literally unmute and share. For this I want to hear your  
110 voices. So what? What are your thoughts? Why do you think this student has come to Twitter to  
111 share Their experience?

112 Uhm, let's have MB to go first, then NP and then AF.

113 MB: Maybe it was for like validation from other people to say 'well done' for how hard they  
114 work.

- 115 KDO: So that validation aspect. Would you say also sometimes on social media validation can come  
116 across...well seeking validation can come across as just attention seeking, if that makes sense.
- 117 MB: Yeah definitely, but I think it's very difficult to tell because some people may generally feel pride  
118 while others are really seeking that external validation just for attention. I suppose it...it might  
119 depend on what's going on at home. Perhaps their parents haven't congratulated them enough,  
120 or something like that.
- 121 KDO: Right. That's quite interesting. Umm, NP, are you able to share?
- 122 NP: Yeah, yeah, I...I think it's just someone trying to flex. Flex their grades. If I'm honest, just trying to  
123 get a bit of attention. I don't really think they're looking out for community or whatever, they're just  
124 kind of flexing it if I'm honest.
- 125 KDO: And it's interesting that you say that 'cause you see the reply to this tweet. It says as if I got a  
126 grade 55 in science when all I did was go on my phone, talk and stare out the window. Would you  
127 say that this is part of them really...just as you say, flexing?
- 128 NP: Yeah, she's basically saying I literally didn't do anything and I still got like really quite good  
129 grades. So I thought it's just a bit. Yeah,
- 130 KDO: Thank you for sharing NP. AF and then EC and then AD.
- 131 AF: Yeah no, I agree. I sort of think it's like you've done good and maybe you are seeking validation,  
132 but at the same point, it's kind of really like 'look at what I've done and look, I really didn't do  
133 much work for it, but I really got there' and I think in some ways it's sort of like a... 'Guess what I  
134 might have done better than you, even though I might not have meant to sort of thing', is what it  
135 kinda feels like.
- 136 KDO: So almost a little bit prideful,
- 137 AF: yeah, definitely.
- 138 KDO: Yeah, thank you AF. EC over to you.
- 139 EC: I agree with the validation thing. I think that um, quite a lot of people, especially this person, went  
140 on social media to like try and to make themselves feel really good about their results. But I also  
141 think it could be a way of like cos in lesson when you get exams back, you kind of talk to each  
142 other and say oh, 'what did you get?' 'What you get,' 'what you get' and this could be their way of  
143 doing that in a pandemic over social media.
- 144 KDO: right? So perhaps, social media is almost taken up that that classroom space and the, the post  
145 exam talk is literally just taking place online? But in this case its with people who don't really know



146 you so we are here like analyzing their tweets, but we've got no knowledge of who they are.  
 147 There's no relationship to them. Yeah, thank you, EC. Umm AD?

148 AD: And I agree with a lot with what MB and EC said um 'cause results day is quite a big day. And if  
 149 you like go home, you talked to your parents, they don't really give you much validation and  
 150 neither do your friend, like you kind of maybe go to other places to seek it. So I think maybe if  
 151 they didn't receive enough validation from like kind of physical interaction then they might actually  
 152 feel the need to bring it to Twitter because it's like such a big day, they want to feel respected and  
 153 they want to feel like loved on that day.

154 KDO: Yeah, and it's interesting that you've used the words you know 'to feel respected'. To get that  
 155 response even feel some sort of 'love' and 'attention'. Thank you.  
 156 (14:32) – Tweet 2

## Tweet 2\*

Including a reply

to any of my followers who just finished year 13/ have done a levels, how important are the year 12 end of year exams pls

Read the tweet and consider the following questions as part of your discussion:

- What do you think is the core message of this tweet?
- Can you relate to this tweet? How? Why? OR Why not?
- How does reading this tweet make you feel, and why?
- Finish this sentence...For me, the is tweet means that XXXX (Why do you think this tweet was shared on Twitter? Would you share something similar on Twitter?)
- How do you think other students/teachers/parents will respond to this tweet?
- What is your view on the role of teachers during the covid-19 pandemic in relation to assessment?



157

158 KDO: OK, let's move on to the next tweet.

159 This tweet also includes a reply. It says to any of my followers who just finished year 13  
 160 or have done A-levels, how important are the year 12 end of year exams please? And the reply to  
 161 this tweet says 'not that important if you're planning on doing year 13. Some people dropped out  
 162 after year 12, so then it's important. But if you're doing the full two years, it should be fine'.

163 My question to you, as year 12 students, would you go on to Twitter To ask any other  
 164 year 13 student who's just completed their a levels, would you ask them for advice such as this  
 165 on Twitter? and if you would, let me know why. If you wouldn't also let me know why.

- 166 EC?
- 167 EC: I think I would because I mean we've just done our end of years and I personally got very  
168 stressed about them. I mean, I still am stressed about getting my results back and I feel like  
169 knowing that maybe it doesn't have as much as an impact as I think it does now would actually  
170 calm me down and make me feel a lot better in everyday life.
- 171 KDO: So it is that sense of reassurance from people who have gone before you.
- 172 EC: Yeah
- 173 KDO: Does it matter that you don't personally know the person who is giving the advice?
- 174 EC: Uhm, no. I feel like if it just came from one person and other people replied differently, then yes,  
175 but I feel like if there was a consensus then, it wouldn't matter to me.
- 176 KDO: Thank you EC. Is there anyone who wants to come and share. Oh I can see some hands up so  
177 I'm gonna go to AD, then AF then TB? If that's OK.
- 178 So AD you can start us off again.
- 179 AD: Uhm, I think a lot of Year 12 students like I do, I get quite worked up about exams and I start like  
180 thinking of all the possibilities and maybe like oh 'I might like fail'. 'I might have to go somewhere  
181 else'. I think kind of seeking this validation from people that have done it makes you kind of think  
182 like oh maybe I won't have to do these things. Maybe if they tell me one thing that everything will  
183 be fine like I think you'll really choose anyone in that circumstance when you're stressed like so a  
184 year 13 student from another school like it doesn't really mean anything when you're in that kind  
185 of situation.
- 186 KDO: Yeah, you're just wanting to hear someone reassure you regardless of who they are, regardless  
187 of what school they go to.
- 188 That's really interesting. Can I go to AF and then TB?
- 189 AF: I think I probably would, but it definitely wouldn't be my only source of the question. I definitely  
190 agree that it doesn't particularly matter if you don't know them necessarily, because if you get it  
191 from other people as well as your teachers, 'cause sometimes I feel like, especially with these  
192 exams, it was never really expressed how important these end of years really were. Like they're  
193 important, but how important? So I think sometimes going and seeking other year 13's who have  
194 been there, it can really put things in perspective and allow you to really decide how much time  
195 you're going to put into it.
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