

19 January 2021

Dear Parent(s)/Carer(s):

We hope that you are coping with 'lockdown' and keeping yourselves safe. This letter serves as a further update on some important matters in relation to COVID-19.

### **Examination grades 2021**

Last year, the examination series was cancelled. Following a failed attempt to generate grades using an automated system (the so called 'mutant algorithm') based on lots of factors that had nothing to do with students' knowledge, skills and abilities, schools' own judgements ('centre assessed grades') were ultimately used instead.

This year, the Government had hoped that the summer exam season would have been able to go ahead. However, the recent decision to close schools for at least six weeks (and the uncertainty over when face-to-face teaching might resume), in combination with the significant amount of disruption already experienced by students in the exam cohorts, led to a decision that the summer exams could not be held in a way that would be perceived to be fair. An announcement was also subsequently made that written exams for vocational qualifications scheduled for February and March were also no longer considered viable.

Ofqual have now launched a joint consultation exercise, with the Department for Education (DfE), to hear the views of students, parents/carers, teachers and others over a range of proposals regarding how grades should be awarded this year. The consultation period runs until Friday 29 January '21 and the consultation documents can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofqual>. There are two documents – one relating to GCSE and A level examinations and another that covers vocational qualifications.

The relevant key principles in the proposed approach are as follows:

- Students' grades would be based on their teachers' assessment of the standard at which they are working. [This approach is distinctively different to the CAG approach in 2020, when schools/teachers were asked what grades students might have been expected to get if they had been able to take their exams].
- Students who did not believe that the grade awarded reflected the evidence (of the standard at which they were performing) would be able to appeal.

The proposal relating to GCSE and A level qualifications also includes the following features:

- Exam boards would provide schools/teachers with guidance, training and sets of assessment papers to use as part of the assessment process. Mock exam results and other substantial candidate work would also influence the grade awarded, but greater weight would be given to work completed closer to the time of the final assessment.
- Teachers would continue to manage/assess Non-Exam Assessments (NEAs), where they were part of the course specification. However, students would not be penalised for failing to complete an NEA, due to reasons beyond their control.
- Students would be assessed on the areas of content they had covered, whilst ensuring sufficient breadth of coverage, so as not to limit progression. Teachers, therefore, would have some choice over which assessment papers students sat.
- Final assessment decisions would be made around the time when students would ordinarily have taken their exams (May/June).
- Students would not be told the grades that had been submitted to the exam boards.
- Exam board quality assurance processes would be ongoing throughout June. Changes to teachers' grades would be the exception and would only be changes as a result of human judgement, not by an algorithm.
- Results would be issued to students in early July.
- Appeals could be submitted immediately following the issue of results.

The implications of this approach would be that students would need to continue to engage fully with their education for the remainder of the academic year.

If the conditions of the pandemic prevented some, or all, students from taking further assessments near the end of their course, it is proposed that they might need to take these remotely, either under a form of supervision or else by signing a declaration that they had completed them at home without unauthorised assistance.

With regard to vocational qualifications in schools (including BTECs, Cambridge Nationals and Cambridge Technicals), the following proposals (covered in a separate document) are made:

- From April onwards, written exams for vocational exams would also not take place. Nevertheless, on-demand, on-line exams could potentially be used, where appropriate
- Where assessment had already taken place, this would be taken into account when awarding a grade.
- Internal assessment would continue remotely (where relevant) for all learners, wherever possible.
- Exam boards would be able to make awards (within certain constraints) where not all internal assessments had been completed, as well as where exams had not taken place. In some circumstances, in addition to using partially completed work, more evidence might be needed in the form of a portfolio of work and/or the completion of standardised tasks.
- Where learners carried forward calculated results from summer 2020, these results would be recognised and considered in any minimum evidential requirement.
- Where possible and appropriate, approaches to assessment and awarding would be similar to those used for GCSEs and A levels. As far as possible, adaptations made for vocational qualifications should be neither advantageous, nor disadvantageous for learners, in comparison with general (GCSE and A level) qualifications.
- Exam boards would put in place quality assurance arrangements for marking and determining grades.
- The approach taken for appeals would be similar to that taken for GCSEs and A levels.

The content above summarises the Ofqual proposals (as they relate to schools like ours), which are subject to consultation, and so the position in relation to some of these issues may change. Nevertheless, it seems likely that the approach adopted will be broadly along these lines - in part, because they seem more reasonable than the proposals that were originally laid out in 2020. However, in some areas 'the devil may well be in the detail', which is not yet clear.

### **Risk assessment**

In the context of a national 'lockdown', restricted school attendance and a new on-site testing programme, there have, of course, been many changes recently that relate to the safety of the school community and the measures that we put in place. Our COVID-19 Risk Assessment and Action Plan and the linked Social Distancing and Infection Control Policy have been revised to reflect these changes. These can be accessed from the school website.

Best wishes and thank you, once again, for your exceptional level of support:

**Stuart Jones**  
**Executive Headteacher**

**Nicola Mason**  
**Head of School**