

Wednesday 6 January 2021

Dear Parents and Carers,

I am writing further to my [letter of yesterday](#), and particularly in relation to the confirmation made by the Secretary of State for Education in his [statement to Parliament this afternoon](#) that 'GCSEs, A-Levels and AS-level exams will not go ahead this summer'. I write also further to my email to all Y11 and Y13 students and their families yesterday afternoon regarding the change in advice from the Department for Education (DfE) in relation to the public exams scheduled to take place this month.

Summer 2021 Exams and Awards

After the Prime Minister's [announcement](#) on Monday that 'it is not possible or fair for all exams to go ahead this summer as normal', Ofqual (the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation) yesterday stated that whilst they 'know how difficult this must be for students, teachers and lecturers, [they] wish at all costs to avoid arrangements for this summer's GCSEs, A levels and VTQs [Vocational and Technical Qualifications] inflicting further disadvantage on students'. The interim Chief Regulator for Ofqual reaffirmed this in his [statement this morning](#), confirming also that Ofqual 'will provide further updates as soon as [they] can'. And we will, of course, keep you promptly updated and as fully informed as and when we can.

The Secretary of State for Education [today](#) acknowledged to the House of Commons that '[a]lthough exams are the fairest way we have of assessing what a student knows, the impact of this pandemic now means that it is not possible to have these exams this year'. Whilst GCSEs, A levels and AS level exams will therefore not go ahead this summer, and although we are short on detail, the Secretary of State also confirmed that students will be awarded 'a form of teacher-assessed grades' instead, with 'training and support provided to ensure these awarded fairly and consistently across the country'.

Whilst we have attempted since our return in September to gently prepare students for such an eventuality, in the absence of further detail I do not want to contribute to any escalation of the worry students will invariably be dealing with now as a result of this announcement by speculating further. Nonetheless, I do want to emphasise the following for our students:

- Your hard work will be recognised.
- None of your efforts so far, or indeed in the coming months, will be wasted.
- The grades you will be awarded will retain the same value as formal grades that come from exam results and will hold the same status as grades awarded in any other year.
- Your future aspirations and ambitions will not be affected.

- You will still be able to progress to your next stage, whether that will be to post-16 education, an apprenticeship, university, or employment.
- The assessments your teachers will arrive at will be fair, reasonable, and carefully considered objective professional judgements based on a wide range of evidence that is considered through a robust, transparent and self-critical process. And they will be moderated, carefully.
- There will be opportunities to appeal if you are disappointed with any grade you are awarded, and there will very likely be an opportunity to sit an actual exam later in the autumn of 2021.

January 2021 Exams

As I outlined in my [letter yesterday](#) morning, after the move into [National Lockdown](#), schools were advised that all public exams and vocational assessments scheduled to go ahead this January were to go ahead as planned. (Any non-public assessments scheduled for January were postponed and we contacted students to this effect on 4 January.) However, the DfE late yesterday changed this advice 'in light of the evolving public health measures' and updated their guidance, subsequently informing schools and colleges that they 'can continue with the vocational and technical exams that are due to take place in January, where they judge it right to do so'. The interim Chief Regulator for Ofqual confirmed this with a public [statement](#) made this morning, as did the Secretary of State for Education in his [statement to Parliament this afternoon](#).

Whilst there has, however, been no further detail provided as yet, we have considered the situation carefully and I confirm that the examinations scheduled to take place this January will go ahead as planned, but if a parent or carer feels it would be unsafe for their child to attend College to sit the examinations, they should inform us (via exams@okehamptoncollege.devon.sch.uk) and we will withdraw the student from the exam. Based on the reassurances that we have received today directly from exam boards, which I outline below, no student's progression should be disadvantaged as a result of such a decision.

The two overriding factors we have considered in making such a decision — on the basis of the albeit limited information available to us — are a) ensuring the safety of students who may sit the exams, and b) ensuring that no student is disadvantaged in any way by any decision. To elaborate:

Firstly, we are confident that the protective measures we have in place for the running of the exams this January are strong. Our measures adhere to the [public health guidance provided by the DfE to support exams](#), with protocols in place for the arrival and departure of candidates, invigilation, cleaning, and set up of the exam room. Equally, given that the numbers of students involved in the January exams are relatively low, we are able to space exam desks beyond the [advice from the Joint Council for Qualifications](#) (para 11.9 p21) of '1.25m in all directions from centre to centre of candidates chairs', assuring at least a 2m distance.

Secondly, whilst we await further detail about exactly how students will be graded this summer, we have been in contact today with the DfE, Ofqual and respective exam boards for advice regarding potential impact on students' progression. Whereas the interim Chief Regulator of Ofqual has [stated](#) that sitting exams this January 'may be particularly important for vocational and technical qualifications which require a 'licence to practise', which can only be fulfilled through practical assessment' — and thus which underpins the reason not to cancel the January exams — it is important to understand that this does not apply to any of the qualifications examined at the College this January.

Moreover, whilst both exam boards have stated that they will produce further guidance as soon as they can, we have been reassured by OCR that 'if a candidate does not feel safe sitting the exam for public health reasons [the College] can withdraw them', and that 'no candidate will be disadvantaged in any way' as a result. Edexcel Pearson have confirmed that they will 'certificate any learner who is unable to take their assessments in January and has enough evidence to receive a certificate that they need for progression, and that learners unable to take their assessment this January may be able to take their assessment at a later date [or] if that is not possible, we will put in place arrangements to ensure no learner is disadvantaged'. The Secretary of State for Education also committed to Parliament this afternoon to 'ensur[ing] all students are able to progress fairly', irrespective of whether or not they sit the exams as scheduled this January.

The examinations and assessments this January that this applies to are as follows (if students intend on sitting the exam, please arrive 10 minutes before the scheduled start time):

- 07/01/2021 | AM | iGCSE Mathematics | 1 candidate
— Exam board Pearson Edexcel, code 4MA1F
- 11/01/2021 | PM | Cambridge National Level 1/2 Health & Social Care | 43 candidates
— Exam board OCR, code R021
- 12/01/2021 | PM | BTec L3 Extended Certificate in Applied Science Biology | 7 candidates
— Pearson Exam board Edexcel, code XDG17
- 13/01/2021 | AM | BTec L3 Extended Certificate in Applied Science Chemistry | 7 candidates
— Exam board Pearson Edexcel, code XDG17
- 13/01/2021 | PM | BTec L3 Extended Certificate in Applied Science Physics | 7 candidates
— Exam board Pearson Edexcel, code XDG17
- 13/01/2021 | PM | iGCSE Mathematics | 1 candidate
— Exam board Pearson Edexcel, code 4MA1F
- 18/01/2021 | AM | Cambridge Technical L3 Extended Certificate in IT Unit 3 | 5 candidates
— Exam board OCR, code 5839

Students, we know how demanding and unrelenting this pandemic has been for you, and we are proud of the way you have conducted yourselves throughout. Your work has been continuously disrupted since March last year and I know the cancellation of your exams this summer is difficult and worrying for you, but I also know that your teachers will guide and support you as best they can for the rest of the year, whether remotely or face-to-face. So just keep going. Turn up. Step up. Or, in the message for students from the interim Chief Regulator for Ofqual, 'continue to engage as fully as you can in your education', whether remotely or face-to-face, because 'this will put you in the best position, whatever arrangements are made for your qualifications'. Take everything on board; accept the fact that we are living through an extraordinary time, with chaotic messages and seemingly everchanging plans, and just keep going. Just keep trying. We have your back. Complete your remote learning, keep working hard, and know now that everything you do has the potential to make a difference.

May I once again take this opportunity to thank you wholeheartedly for your understanding and ongoing support in helping us to manage this unprecedented situation. Please do not hesitate to contact us should you require any further information, but may I ask for your patience as we navigate our way through the information that will come our way in the coming days and weeks. We will, of course, keep you as promptly updated and fully informed as we can.

As ever, keep safe, and keep looking after yourself and each other.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. Brett', is positioned above the printed name.

Derrick Brett (Principal).



Important

Advice for schools

CORONAVIRUS SYMPTOMS IN CHILDREN

A CHILD WHO DEVELOPS ONE OR MORE OF THE FOLLOWING SYMPTOMS SHOULD BE CONSIDERED AS A POTENTIAL CORONAVIRUS CASE:



NEW CONTINUOUS COUGH

This means coughing a lot for more than an hour, or three or more coughing episodes in 24 hours (if the child usually has a cough, it may be worse than usual)



FEVER (TEMPERATURE OF 37.8°C OR HIGHER)

The child will also feel hot to touch on their chest or back



A LOSS OR CHANGE TO SENSE OF SMELL OR TASTE

this means the child has noticed they cannot smell or taste anything, or things smell or taste different to normal.

MOST CHILDREN WITH CORONAVIRUS HAVE AT LEAST ONE OF THESE SYMPTOMS.



If a child is unwell with one or more of these specific symptoms they should be told not to come into school or sent home as soon as possible and advised to get a coronavirus test. **ONLY** those children with one or more of these symptoms or those advised by their clinician or Local Authority should get a test.



Children reporting other symptoms such as a headache, sore throat, runny or sniffly nose, earache, itchy eyes, lethargy or tiredness **WITHOUT** a fever should **NOT** be treated as potential coronavirus cases or advised to take a test.

If the national guidance on symptoms of coronavirus in children changes, updated information will be provided at a local level as soon as possible. This information about coronavirus symptoms in children can be shared with all school teaching and administration staff as well as parents and carers where necessary.

For further guidance on coronavirus testing for schools, please read the letter from PHE and NHS Test and Trace to school and college leaders at: bit.ly/phe-schools

ENGLAND LOCKDOWN

STAY AT HOME

**THE NEW VARIANT OF CORONAVIRUS IS SPREADING FAST.
WE ALL NEED TO PLAY OUR PART TO STOP THE SPREAD.**

▶ LEAVING HOME

You must not leave, or be outside of your home or garden, except for a very limited set of exemptions e.g. to shop for basic necessities, exercise, go to work if you cannot do so from home, or to escape risk of harm.

▶ MEETING OTHERS

You cannot leave your home to meet socially with anyone, except with your household or support bubble (if eligible to form one). Stay 2 metres apart from anyone not in your household or support bubble.

▶ EXERCISE

You may exercise on your own, with your household or support bubble, or with one person from another household (when on your own). Stay 2 metres apart from anyone not in your household or support bubble.

▶ BARS, PUBS AND RESTAURANTS

Hospitality closed aside from sales by takeaway (until 11pm), click-and-collect, drive-through or delivery. Alcohol cannot be purchased through takeaway or click-and-collect from hospitality venues.

▶ RETAIL

Essential shops can open. Non-essential retail must close and can only run click-and-collect and delivery.

▶ WORK AND BUSINESS

Everyone must work from home unless they are unable to do so.

▶ EDUCATION

Early years settings open. Primary and secondary schools and colleges move to remote provision except for vulnerable children and children of critical workers. Most university students to move to remote learning.

▶ LEISURE AND SPORTING FACILITIES

Closed, with limited exceptions.

▶ ACCOMMODATION

Closed, with limited exceptions.

▶ PERSONAL CARE

Closed.

▶ ENTERTAINMENT

Closed.

▶ OVERNIGHT STAYS

You must not stay overnight away from home. Limited exceptions apply e.g. to stay with your support bubble.

▶ WEDDINGS AND FUNERALS

Funerals of up to 30 people permitted. Weddings up to 6 people permitted in exceptional circumstances. Wakes and other linked ceremonial events of up to 6 permitted.

▶ PLACES OF WORSHIP

Places of worship can remain open and communal worship is permitted, but you must not mix with those outside your household or support bubble.

▶ TRAVELLING

You must stay at home. If you do leave home for a very limited set of exemptions, you should stay local in the village, town, or part of the city where you live where possible. Do not travel abroad unless an exemption applies.

▶ CLINICALLY EXTREMELY VULNERABLE

Shielding reintroduced across England. You should not travel to work, school, college or university and should limit the time you spend outside the home. You should only go out for medical appointments, exercise or if it is essential.

▶ CARE HOME VISITS

Visits can take place with arrangements such as substantial screens, visiting pods, or behind windows. Close-contact indoor visits are not allowed. No visits will be permitted in the event of an outbreak but end of life visits are permitted in all circumstances.