

Friday 13 November 2020

Dear Parents and Carers,

I write to provide you with an update on what we currently know with respect to the arrangements for examinations this coming summer 2021, and to provide you with some information — and hopefully reassurance if required — regarding upcoming mock examinations. Whilst there remains some uncertainty with respect to some aspects of the summer 2021 examinations, and much often unhelpful speculation in the media, I would like to assure you that we are monitoring developments scrupulously, daily, and are in regular communication with the Department for Education and Ofqual.

### Summer 2021 examinations

Whereas the Welsh Government have recently [announced](#) that ‘there will be no end of year exams for learners taking GCSEs, AS levels or A levels’ in summer 2021, and whereas the Scottish Government have [announced](#) that ‘National 5 exams [equivalent of GCSE] will be replaced by a system where grades are awarded based on coursework and teacher judgement’, in England the Government have [stated](#) their ‘commitment to ensuring that GCSE, AS and A level exams go ahead’ — because ‘they are the fairest and most accurate way to measure a pupil’s attainment’.

Whilst it would be irresponsible to contribute to any speculation, and thus exacerbate any anxieties that our students and/or you may already understandably have, it is nonetheless beholden of us to anticipate and thus prepare as best as we can for any eventuality. I am writing to this end, and in the hope that by providing you with the information we have — and sharing with you some of the complications we and our colleagues in schools across the country are addressing — I will be able to offer you some reassurance.

What we *do* know is that the summer 2021 examinations have been [pushed back by three weeks](#) (you can access the timetable of *provisional* dates [here](#)), and that some ‘grade inflation’ will be allowed to cater for missed and disrupted learning: In a recent [letter](#) to the Secretary of State for Education (which I encourage you to read), the Chief Regulator of Ofqual has stated that they are ‘looking at what further steps we could take to make these exams less daunting a prospect for students’, and that the intention is ‘to compensate for the baleful impact of the pandemic for all students qualifying in 2021 (and possibly beyond), by setting national performance standards more generously than in normal times’.

We [also know](#) that use of Centre Assessed Grades (i.e. grades which schools assess students are most likely to achieve in exams) has not yet been ruled out as part of the contingency plans currently in development, and that the use of mock exam results is also being discussed. Ofqual have [stated](#) that they ‘expect to be in a position to provide advice [for the Secretary of State for Education] to then allow [him] to determine and confirm contingency arrangements with the sector [by the end of this month]’, and we will, of course, clarify and confirm everything for you as soon as everything has been clarified and confirmed for us. (If you wish to give your views to Ofqual on the summer 2021 examinations, or if you wish to participate in a focus group regarding the exams, please email: [learning.loss@ofqual.gov.uk](mailto:learning.loss@ofqual.gov.uk).)

For your further information, as a result of the [decisions](#) that *have* been published by Ofqual regarding changes to the assessment of GCSEs, AS and A levels in 2021, Ofqual have also recently confirmed the detail of the changes made to the usual curricula for certain subjects, along with changes to the assessment arrangements in some. Our subject leads and teachers are of course aware of these changes and our practice has been adapted accordingly, but should you wish to see these changes in detail for yourself you can access them here:

- [GCSE subject-level conditions in subjects with changes for 2021](#)
- [GCE \(AS and A-Level\) subject-level conditions in subjects with changes for 2021](#)
- [Conditions and requirements for the assessment of MFL GCSEs in 2021](#)

### **Mock examinations**

We have scheduled two rounds of mock examinations for this academic year, as, indeed, we normally do. The first round takes place over the next two weeks and the second set are provisionally scheduled to take place later in February (given the ongoing volatility of the situation, confirmation of these dates will follow in due course).

Under normal circumstances, each round of mock examinations would be a full set of full past papers — or specimen, sample or mock exam papers provided by exam boards — covering the full subject curriculum / syllabus. Given that these are not normal circumstances, by any stretch of the imagination, and given the time in College lost as a result of the national school closures last academic year, we have decided that the first and upcoming round of mock examinations will assess students only on the aspects of each subject's curriculum / syllabus that has been covered up to this point. As such, all upcoming mock exams will either be past exam papers or select questions from past exam papers — or other specimen, sample or mock exam papers provided by exam boards — modified by subject leaders and teachers to take account of the content that has not yet been addressed.

We have ensured that as far as is practicable, we have scheduled affected mock A-Level examinations at times when the twenty-seven Y13 students who are currently in isolation return. For all other Y13 or Y11 students who are absent from any mock examination, including those students who remain in isolation for coronavirus related reasons, we will arrange a time for them to sit their respective mock assessment on their return to College. For any student who is Clinically Extremely Vulnerable and is shielding, we will give them the opportunity to complete their mock examinations remotely.

Whilst, to reiterate, it is the Government's position that 'exams will go ahead next summer, underpinned by contingencies for all possible scenarios', several parents, carers and students have understandable concerns that I think it would be apposite to address. As such, and given that — as I outlined earlier — contingency plans for summer 2021 examinations have yet to be confirmed, I clarify below some key principles that I believe will position us well to respond:

- The mock examinations taking place over the coming weeks will form *one part* of the evidence that teachers would use *should* we be required to submit Centre Assessed Grades for Y11 and/or Y13 students this coming summer. Mock examinations are just one form of assessment that schools use when estimating students' performance, and this remains the case in these circumstances.

- The results from mock examinations that we have scheduled to take place in February / March would also form part of this evidence, but they will have greater weight than the mock examinations taking place over the coming weeks. This is because the February / March mock examinations *will* be a full set of full past papers (or specimen, sample or mock exam papers provided by exam boards), and by simple virtue of students having had more time in school, as well as being closer in time to the actual examinations, results will provide a more accurate basis from which to make judgements about likely attainment.
- If we are required to *submit* mock examination grades to exam boards, it is likely that — to ensure some form of consistent standard across the country — exam boards will provide us with the assessment materials to use, and so the mock examinations taking place over the coming weeks would not be fit for such purpose. If we are required to submit mock examination grades to exam boards but schools are *not* provided with the assessment materials to use, we will use the results from the full set of full exam papers scheduled to take place in February / March.

Given also the albeit welcome statement from Chief Regulator of Ofqual that ‘national performance standards [will be set] more generously [this coming summer] than in normal time’, and given that when grading mock examinations we adhere to the grade boundaries set and published by exam boards, in reporting results of mock examinations to our students (which we will do before the end of the term) we must now also endeavour — in the absence as yet of further detail or guidance from Ofqual about what ‘generously’ will mean in practice — to ensure that we are clear and open about our ‘grading’ of mock examinations. To this end, when reporting results of the upcoming mock examinations to our students we intend to provide the following information:

- The raw mark achieved in the mock exam.
- The total marks that it was possible to have been achieved in the mock exam.
- The proportion of the whole award that the mock exam represents.
- The grade these marks would represent had the full set of full papers (including any non-examined components) been taken — *using respective past exam board grade boundaries*.
- An estimate of the grade the teacher expects the student to achieve in the summer should the progress evident from the mock and other sources be replicated for the curriculum content that remains to be addressed.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you require further information. I thank you again very much for your continued support.

As ever, keep looking after yourselves, and each other.

Yours sincerely,



Derrick Brett (Principal)

