

Thursday 21 January 2021

Dear Parents and Carers,

I write further to my letters of [13 January](#) and [15 January](#) to keep you up to date with the developing situation regarding alternative arrangements for exams in 2021.

Shortly after distributing my letter of 15 January, the Department for Education (DfE) and Ofqual published their joint consultation on '[how GCSE, AS and A level grades should be awarded in summer 2021](#),' and on '[alternative arrangements for the award of VTQs and other general qualifications in 2021](#).'

Ofqual and the DfE have emphasised the importance for all those affected to be afforded the opportunity to comment on proposed arrangements, and 'want to hear the views of students who were due to take their exams, their parents and carers, their teachers, school and college leaders and others who have an interest, including further and higher education providers, and employers.' The views of 'students who would have sat exams this year and their parents and carers' are particularly important. As such, if you would like to respond to the consultation on how GCSE, AS and A level grades should be awarded in summer 2021, please follow [this link](#). If you would like to respond to the consultation on alternative arrangements for the award of VTQs and other general qualifications in 2021, please follow [this link](#). Both consultations close at 11:45pm on 29 January 2021. I have also written separately to all students in Y11 and Y13 to provide them with the same information I have provided you here.

For your convenience, and updating the points made in my letter of 15 January, I have carefully summarised below the key proposals from the consultation proposals as they apply to our students and the qualifications they are working towards.

For GCSE, AS and A Levels

- It is proposed that students due to sit A level, AS level or GCSE exams this summer, will be awarded grades based on 'teachers' assessments of the evidence of the standard at which their students are performing', and these grades will be 'indistinguishable from grades issued by exam boards in other years.'
- The proposed approach for summer 2021 does not require that teachers 'be asked to decide the grade a student might have achieved had the pandemic not occurred,' nor 'what grade a student might have received if they had been able to take their exams.' Instead, it is proposed that teachers will assess students 'on the areas of content they have covered and can demonstrate their ability, while ensuring sufficient breadth of content coverage so as not to limit progression.'

- To assist teachers in making ‘evidence-based assessments about students’ deserved grades,’ it is proposed that exam boards will ‘make available a set of papers’ for teachers to set (either on a compulsory or optional basis) and mark. It is proposed that teachers will be able to ‘choose from a set of shorter papers, based on topics... to take account of content that has not been fully taught due to the disruption.’ These papers will be sat in the school, but if this proves to be impossible because of the pandemic, it is proposed that they may ‘be completed at an alternative venue, including a student’s home, where that is an option.’ If this is the case, and if these papers cannot be sat under the supervision of a teacher, either directly or remotely, ‘the student (and anyone supervising them) would be required to make an appropriate declaration that they had not received unauthorised assistance.’
- In subjects that include non-exam assessments, it is proposed that students will be given time to complete such, in full or part, ‘to contribute to the evidence teachers use to determine the grade the student should receive,’ but students ‘should not be penalised if they have been unable to complete their non-exam assessment for reasons beyond their control.’
- It is proposed that teachers should also ‘draw on a range of broader evidence of a student’s work in making their final assessment,’ including formal tests, mock examination results, and other examples of ‘substantial candidate work... which relates to the qualification specification, and where [teachers] are confident it was completed without support / external support’. The extent to which ‘work done earlier in the year should be taken into account by a student’s teacher in assessing their grade’ is questioned in the consultation, but the underlying principle is that if such evidence is to be taken into account, ‘greater weight should be given to evidence of a student’s performance that is closer to the time of the final assessment.’ Exam boards will ‘provide guidance on how teachers should take account of other evidence of the standard at which the student was working and of factors that might have affected their performance in the papers.’
- It is proposed that students are ‘taught for as long as possible [to] cover as much of the curriculum as possible,’ including content delivered remotely. As a result, ‘final assessments of the standard of students’ performance’ will be made ‘towards the end of the academic year, at about the time students would have taken their exams... during late May and early June.’ This will also ensure that a) there is sufficient ‘time for teachers to assess their students and for the necessary internal and external quality assurance measures to be taken,’ and b) that ‘students’ progression at the start of the next academic year’ is not delayed. The proposed timeline is thus that:
 - Students are assessed by teachers from May into early June.
 - Teachers submit grades to the exam boards by mid-June.
 - External quality assurance by exam boards takes place throughout June.
 - Results are issued to students in early July.
 - Any student appeals can be submitted immediately following the issue of results.

- As part of external quality assurance to confirm that the ‘process and evidence used to award a grade is reasonable,’ it is proposed that if an exam board, through sampling, finds that ‘appropriate quality assurance arrangements’ had not been used by a school, or that ‘the exam board’s requirements had not otherwise been followed,’ then the exam board will ‘not issue a result for the affected students’ until ‘satisfied there was evidence to support the submitted grade(s).’ Moreover, if an exam board finds that ‘the evidence of a student’s performance did not support the grade a teacher submitted,’ it would require the head of centre ‘to investigate and make any necessary changes to the grade before finally submitting to the [exam] board.’ Any changes to grades as a result of external checks should be ‘exceptional’, and only made ‘if those grades cannot be justified, rather than as a result of marginal differences of opinion’.
- It is proposed that teachers do not tell students the grade they submit to exam boards, but once results have been issued, any student who believes their teacher has made an error when they assessed their performance can appeal to the College to have the evidence reviewed. This review would be undertaken by a ‘competent person’ appointed by the College ‘who had not been involved with the original assessment,’ and any ‘error’ identified would be corrected, with teacher assessments adjusted up or down as necessary. Once the outcome of the appeal from the College is known, it is proposed that students will also be able to appeal further to respective exam boards on procedural grounds, i.e. ‘on the grounds that the school or college had not acted in line with the exam board’s procedural requirements, either when assessing the standard at which the student was performing or when considering the student’s appeal.’ A student ‘could not appeal to the exam board on the basis that either the teacher assessment or the appeal decision was not a reasonable exercise of academic judgment where the correct procedure had been followed.’

For Vocational and Technical Qualifications (VTQs)

- Written exams for VTQs scheduled for February and March have been cancelled, and it is proposed that written exams scheduled from April onwards for VTQs used for progression to further study instead of, or alongside, GCSEs, AS and A levels (such as BTECs and Cambridge Nationals and Cambridge Technicals) are also cancelled.
- It is proposed that VTQs and other general qualifications that are taken alongside or instead of GCSEs, AS and A levels (such as BTECs and Cambridge Nationals and Cambridge Technicals) will ‘be subject to similar arrangements to GCSEs, AS and A levels.’
- Regarding exams and assessments scheduled for January, alternative regulatory arrangements will be implemented by Ofqual to ensure that students ‘are not disadvantaged and can receive results, irrespective of whether they sat an external examination in January’ or not.
- It is proposed that ‘where internal assessment has already been completed... this is to be taken into account when awarding results, and that internal assessment should continue as far as possible during 2021,’ including ‘remotely, where relevant, for all learners where possible,’ with awarding organisations adapting such assessments to mitigate the impacts of disruption on teaching, learning and assessment that has occurred or may occur.

- Where it has not been possible for internal assessments to 'have been completed, as well as where exams have not taken place,' it is proposed that awarding organisations still be permitted to make awards. It is proposed that exam boards will do this by deciding 'whether there is a need to replace the missing assessment evidence or if there is sufficient minimum evidence from other assessments... upon which to award a qualification grade.' If additional assessment evidence is required, this could take the form of 'a portfolio of learner work, ...achievement on an awarding organisation or centre designed standardised task, ... partially completed internal assessments.'
- It is proposed that 'on-demand' assessments 'of shorter, focused qualifications such as Functional Skills that can be delivered in line with public health guidelines, including remotely, should be permitted to continue to proceed.' Where students 'are unable to access [such] assessments, an alternative method of awarding these qualifications may be needed to ensure these learners can progress.'

In preparation for the decisions from the consultation, and the detail that will subsequently follow, we have begun drafting an 'Exceptional Arrangements' policy for 'Summer 2021 Awards of GCSE, AS, A level, and Vocational and Technical Qualifications.' We will confirm our 'approach to assessment' through this policy, in line with exam board requirements, providing clear protocols and guidance for teachers around the evidence on which submitted grades will be based, and an explication of the quality assurance arrangements we will implement. This policy will be developed to ensure the robust and transparent process that is necessary to command the confidence of students and their parents and carers — that teachers will make objective, reliable, carefully considered and consistently applied 'evidence-based decisions about the grades they recommend their students be issued.' We will amend and ratify the policy once dates and decisions are confirmed from the joint DfE and Ofqual consultations, and once further detail and guidance is provided. We will then share this policy with you.

We will continue to keep you fully updated and promptly informed as and when we are provided with more detail and, indeed, as and when we are able to respond to such. We will also schedule a virtual presentation evening in the near future to talk through the arrangements for awarding grades this summer, and will contact you in due course with details. In the meantime, please do not hesitate to contact us should you require any further information.

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

Yours sincerely,



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 sniffling 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.