

Tuesday 24 March 2020

Dear Parents / Carers

Let me begin by wishing you the very best in these extremely challenging and understandably worrying times. Make sure that you keep safe during this period of temporary school closure, follow HM Government's advice (see the links we have collated for your convenience at the end of this letter), and look after each other. We are all thinking of our students and their families and are already looking forward to the day when we can reopen.

I am writing this rather lengthy letter to update all our parents and carers specifically in relation to 'GCSE, A-Level and other examinations', the support we have arranged for children and families eligible for 'Free School Meals,' and ensuring that all students are able to access remote learning activities. Please do take the time to read this letter, particularly if your child is directly affected. Whilst the details in the letter may not directly affect all families, I do think it is important that everyone knows what we are doing as a community to look after each other.

GCSE, A-Level and other examinations

I write further to my 2nd letter of 20 March 2020, where I outlined the Department for Education's initial response to the confirmation that all assessments and examinations have been cancelled for this academic year and provided you with some detail about the intended way forward. I want to ensure that you are fully informed about the current situation, what we know and, importantly, what we don't know yet. Moreover, I want to ensure that you can navigate your way through the choppy waters of rumour and speculation about the process Ofqual and exam boards will take when awarding students their grades.

In summary:

- GCSE, A and AS level students will be awarded 'calculated' grades through a process being developed by Ofqual, the independent qualifications regulator.
- This process will not be 'simply using predicted grades,' because that 'would not be fair to all students'. As such, students' final, calculated grades may 'not necessarily reflect their predicted grades'.
- Calculated grades will be formal grades, with 'equal validity to the grades awarded in other years and should be treated in this way by universities, colleges and employers.'
- Whilst we do not know the precise details about how the grade students will be awarded will be calculated, we do know that it will consider a broad range of evidence, including:
 - ⇒ The grade submitted by Teachers that they believe the student would have received if exams had gone ahead.
(*Note that while we await the clear guidance all schools will receive from Ofqual to ensure that this grade is estimated 'fairly and robustly,' I outline more detail for your information and reassurance later in the letter.)
 - ⇒ Students' prior attainment.
 - ⇒ Results of any non-examined assessments already completed.
 - ⇒ Mock examination results.
- The process arriving at the calculated grade is also likely to include 'measures that reflect how much progress a student would have been likely to have made' at the College, taking the recent past performance of the school into account.
- The process arriving at the calculated grade will also 'ensure that the distribution of grades follows a similar pattern to that in other years, so that this year's students do not face a systematic disadvantage as a consequence of these extraordinary circumstances.'
- The aim is that all students will receive their calculated grades by the end of July.
- Students will be able to appeal if they do not believe a correct process has been followed. Otherwise, if students do not feel that 'their calculated grade reflects their performance, they will have the opportunity to sit an exam, as soon as is reasonably possible after schools and colleges open again. Students will also have the option to sit their exams in summer 2021.'
 - ⇒ **Given this, i.e. that your child may decide to sit exams in the future depending on the 'calculated' grades they receive, we advise students who were due to sit examinations this summer to continue their preparations and continue to work at home. Teachers will continue to provide education for students in Y11 and Y13 remotely during this period of temporary school closures, in the manner I outlined again in my letter yesterday.**

- Regarding vocational and technical qualifications, where students may have already completed non-exam assessments which would provide evidence to award a grade, Ofqual is currently 'working urgently' with respective exam boards 'to explore options' and will provide more details soon.

The grade submitted by teachers (A Level)

At A-level, we are well-practiced in the provision of predicted grades for students, and our current Y13 students are of course already aware of the predictions we have made. Before we are required to make our submissions to respective awarding bodies, we will of course review these predictions considering the progress students have made since teachers made them.

I should note at this point that you may have read some reports that some Universities have been changing their offers to students since the decision by government to cancel examinations this summer. In some cases, Universities have been converting conditional offers to unconditional offers, or otherwise changing entry requirements, which in turn in some instances is causing some students to feel pressurized into accepting offers. The Universities Minister yesterday (see link at the end of the letter) asked all Universities to cease this practice for two weeks, to 'allow time for further advice to be given to students and [schools] about how the new system of awarding A-Level grades will work, and how the admissions arrangements will work.' In addition, it should be remembered that '[s]tudents who accept an unconditional offer will be able to release themselves as part of the UCAS self-release process [introduced last year] to explore other options during Clearing.'

The grade submitted by teachers (GCSE)

At GCSE and equivalent, historically, there was always a requirement for schools to submit 'estimated grades' to examination boards just before students sat examinations proper, until January 2015, when this requirement was removed. At the College, however, we have continued to require teachers to estimate the grades they consider students would be most likely to achieve in their examinations proper, to share such with students and their parents and carers, and to submit them to the Leadership team for analysis and evaluation — because we value the process as an important aspect of our professional practice.

We use teachers' estimations of students' likely grades to identify potential underachievement, inform our interventions, and as part of our internal quality assurance processes. As such, you can be reassured that this process is not unfamiliar to us. We undertook a significant amount of development work last academic year with all teachers in focusing on the accuracy of teachers' estimations of students' likely grades in their examinations proper, to the extent that teachers' estimations in 2019 were very closely correlated with the grades that the students actually achieved.

I can assure you, therefore, that we will approach this process of providing teacher estimations with experience, rigour and integrity — endeavouring to ensure fairness for all our students. Before submission to the respective awarding bodies, we will rigorously review and moderate the all teachers' estimated grades, ensuring that there is a consistent and coherent application of available evidence across subjects and teachers.

In summary, in arriving at their estimate of the grade each student would have been most likely to receive if examinations had gone ahead as normal this summer, teachers will consider a range of evidence and data about students' performance, including:

- Teachers' estimations in December 2019 of what they believed the student was likely to achieve in their summer 2020 exams, (as shared with you in reports and parent/carer evening).
- Teachers' estimations in February 2020 of what they believed the student was likely to achieve in their summer 2020 exams, (as shared with you in reports and parent/carer evening).
- Students' grades achieved in their December 2019 mock grades.
- Students' grades achieved in their February 2020 mock grades.
- The progress students have made between the two mock examinations.
- The rates of progress students typically make from mock to examination performance in the College in respective subjects (in recent years and considering observed changes in practice this year).
- The progress students make in their lessons.
- Students' completion of any homework set and the quality of such.

- Students' attitude to learning and their response to feedback.

We will of course update you once Ofqual provide us with the 'clear guidance on how to [estimate grades] fairly and robustly.'

Free School Meals

As I outlined in my letter of 19 March, HM Government have confirmed that they are 'developing a national approach to providing support through supermarket and shop vouchers [and] will provide further details shortly'.

In the meantime, we are working alongside our colleagues in the Dartmoor Multi Academy Trust's central team to provide families of our children eligible for free school meals with a hamper of food. We intend on providing the hamper once a week for as long as possible, starting with the next three weeks in the first instance, and dependent, of course, on our ability to source the food.

The hamper will contain items such as potatoes, carrots, satsumas, apples, fruit pots, soup, baked beans, pasta, rice, tuna, sausages, fresh bread, biscuits, fruit juice, and cheese, but please note that not every item listed will be included, and we cannot facilitate requests for specific items. Local providers have been incredibly generous in supporting our efforts in this regard, and we will of course thank them publicly at a more appropriate time. I am sure you can appreciate the considerable coordination this requires, not least in sourcing the food, so I would please ask you to be understanding if it doesn't all go as smoothly as we hope!

Given the stricter rules on 'staying at home and away from others' (see link that follows), as announced by the Prime Minister yesterday evening, we will be asking one family member to collect their hamper when ready, on Thursday or Friday, but will arrange delivery to very isolated locations for families who may be particularly vulnerable. A survey is being prepared to send to families affected tomorrow, to gather details.

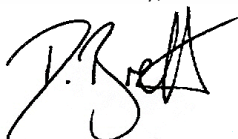
Support to access remote learning

We are doing everything we possibly can to ensure all of our students and families are supported through this period of temporary school closures, and are endeavoring to ensure that all students are able to access the remote learning we are providing for them daily. If your child is experiencing any difficulties accessing the various platforms, please contact datacheck@okehamptoncollege.devon.sch.uk, where a member of our IT team will be able to support and troubleshoot any access issues. Additionally, if you are facing difficulties accessing the Remote Learning because of a lack of hardware, e.g. access to computers / laptops, or do not have internet access, please do contact us and we may be able to offer support.

I thank you again very much for your continued support in these extraordinary times. If you have any further concerns that you feel we may be able to help with, please do not hesitate to contact us. Please do adhere to the advice from HM Government, and continue to regularly monitor this advice, using the links I provide again on the page that follows.

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

Yours sincerely,



Derrick Brett
Principal