



19<sup>th</sup> March 2021

Dear Parent/Carer

## **Update on GCSE, AS, A-Level and vocational qualifications – Summer 2021**

Following my letter dated 8<sup>th</sup> March, I wanted to provide an update on our plans to assess students who will be completing GCSE, AS, A Level and vocational courses this summer. We did not consider it to be in our students' interests to bring them back into school and immediately conduct a series of exams. However, as we were unable to hold Mock Exams in January, it is important that we provide students with the important opportunities to demonstrate what they know and can do. Therefore, we plan to hold Exams after Easter for all students who will complete their course this summer. This is especially important since students typically do much better in assessments towards the end of the course. This will therefore, alongside other evidence, support our students to achieve the grades that they deserve and are capable of achieving. We have set out below a timeline of key dates, which also indicates when Exams will be held after Easter.

<b>19<sup>th</sup> to 26<sup>th</sup> April:</b>	<b>Year 13 Exam Week</b>
<b>23<sup>rd</sup> April to 7<sup>th</sup> May:</b>	<b>Year 11 Exam Fortnight (including Year 10 GCSE RE)</b>
<b>28<sup>th</sup> May:</b>	<b>Last day of lessons for Year 11 and Year 13</b>
<b>28<sup>th</sup> June to 1<sup>st</sup> July:</b>	<b>College VI Induction (for Year 11 students transferring to College VI in September 2021)</b>
<b>10<sup>th</sup> August:</b>	<b>A Level Results Day</b>
<b>12<sup>th</sup> August:</b>	<b>GCSE Results Day and College VI Enrolment</b>

Teachers will provide information on what will be included in the exams to support students' preparation for these assessments. Grades from these exams will not be shared with students, parents or carers. An examination timetable will be sent to all students, parents and carers before Easter providing detailed information of when these assessments will be taking place. Outside of the exam periods, students will continue to receive teaching to prepare them for their next steps and may also have further in-class assessments or Practical Assessments. Advance notice will be given to students of any additional assessments.

It is important that students revise thoroughly so they are fully prepared for every exam and assessment. However, it is important to reiterate that these exams are not the sole determinant of a student's grade but will form part of the evidence that we will use to formulate the grades that we will submit to Exam Boards. We will consider a range of assessment evidence, which demonstrates students' performance and justifies the award of a final GCSE, AS, A Level or vocational grade, against a national standard. Please find attached supplementary information addressing some Frequently Asked Questions, as produced by Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL).

## College VI Induction

To support the transition from Year 11 to College VI we will run an enhanced College VI Induction from 28<sup>th</sup> June to 1<sup>st</sup> July. The Induction will provide students who are progressing onto College VI A Level and BTEC courses with information about College VI, taster lessons and support to prepare them for their College VI courses. We will provide full details nearer the time.

We have been so impressed with the engagement and effort from students since our full re-opening and we continue to advise students to put their best effort into all lessons, revision and independent study.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "D A Osborne". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'D'.

Mr D A Osborne  
Deputy Principal



## **GCSE, AS, A-Level and Vocational Qualifications Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) Summer 2021**

### **How will grades be awarded this summer?**

Grades for GCSEs, A levels, and most other qualifications including BTEC and Cambridge National/Technical qualifications will be based on a process involving teacher assessment against national standards, internal quality assurance, and external quality assurance by the exam boards.

The national process defined by the Department for Education and the exams' regulator, Ofqual is as follows:

1. Teachers will **assess students against a national standard**, which will be defined by the exam boards before the Easter break.
2. Departments will submit grades which will be **quality assured by the school**. This internal quality assurance process will have to be signed off by the exam board to ensure it is rigorous and in line with national standards.
3. Our school results will be **quality assured externally** by the exam boards, which may include random sampling of our school's evidence.
4. If the exam boards are confident in our submitted results, **then the exam boards will award students their final grades**.
5. If students do not think their results are accurate, they will have the right to **appeal**.

### **So, do teachers award the grade?**

Simply: no. The grade students achieve will start with their teacher's assessment of their performance across a range of evidence. This is against a nationally-defined standard, not the teacher's own opinion. This assessment is then subject to both internal and external quality assurance before the final grade is awarded by the exam body as usual.

### **Does this mean grades are decided by an algorithm?**

No, unlike last year, students' grades will not be changed by a formula. The internal and external quality assurance measures will all be done by humans, not an algorithm. There is no limit on the achievement of students, **providing they have sufficient evidence that they are working at that grade**.

### **What about loss of learning/impact of Covid?**

This year, teachers will only assess students on content they have been taught – because of the continued disruption of the pandemic. This means students will not be disadvantaged if they individually, their whole class or whole year group have been unable to complete their full course. However, grades can only be submitted on the basis of the evidence we have of students' performance, even if that evidence covers less of the course than usual. Students who would usually have extra time in the exams will benefit from the same arrangements in teacher assessment.

### **Will grades be different between different schools and colleges?**

No, the standard against which teachers will be assessing students is set nationally by the exam boards. This is the standard that will be used during external quality assurance and appeals to ensure consistency and fairness across the system.

### **What evidence will be used?**

Teachers are able to draw on a range of assessment evidence from across a student's study of the course, up until the end of May. This may include non-exam assessment (NEA), essays, end of unit assessments, mock exams, and papers set by the exam boards. This may include evidence from before the second lockdown, as well as evidence from March – June. The exam boards are still producing assessment materials that will be sent to us before Easter. Different departments may use different sources of evidence, and there is no requirement for any one type of assessment to be used – it's about a performance across a range of evidence.

### **The exam boards are only giving out past papers, how is this fair?**

Most of the assessments provided by the exam boards will be drawn from past papers, although there will be new questions as well. There is significant research that even if students have seen assessments questions before, it does not reduce the validity of the assessment. Furthermore, exam board questions are only one of the many pieces of evidence we will use to assess students this summer.

### **Can students and parents make the case for why a student should get a higher grade?**

Our teachers are already using their professional expertise to assess students on the content they have been taught. Teachers are unable to submit higher grades for students unless they have the evidence that they are consistently working at this level. If teachers submit higher grades without evidence they are committing exam malpractice.

In 2020, if a student or parent placed undue pressure on teachers to increase grades this was also considered exam malpractice. It is likely to be the same for 2021. If students or parents are found to be putting teachers or leaders under undue pressure to increase grades, then this matter will be referred to the exam boards and an investigation into malpractice may ensue. This may result in the student's certificate being removed entirely if malpractice is deemed to have taken place.

### **Can students discuss their grades with teachers?**

Teachers will be able to discuss which evidence they are using to inform their judgement with students, including marked or graded pieces of work. However, we are not allowed to disclose their final submitted grade we give to the exam board.

Students should not attempt to second-guess the grade submitted, as teachers will be using a range of evidence to inform their final judgement. Students must not pressure teachers to reveal the grades they are submitting, or to increase the grades, as doing so may be considered exam malpractice.

### **What should students do to improve their grades?**

The best thing students can do is to continue to attend classes, learn, act on feedback from their teachers, revise, and read around their subject. Their grade will be based on their performance, and so their outcomes are ultimately in their hands.