

Email sent to Year 11 and Year 13 Students, Parents and Carers on 07/01/2021

Dear Students, Parents and Carers

I am writing to update you with information regarding the Education Secretary's decision to cancel this summer's GCSE and A-Level exams - the situation with Btecs is less clear.

Yesterday, we received the following statement from Simon Lebus, Interim Chief Regulator, Ofqual:

"We know that this is a difficult time for students, their parents and carers, teachers and trainers. Our message to students is this: please continue to engage as fully as you can in your education. That will be online for the majority of students, or face-to-face for those students still going in to their school, college or training provider. This will put you in the best position, whatever arrangements are made for your qualifications. It's important that teachers and students can focus on the knowledge and skills needed to equip students to progress to the next stage, whatever form that might take – whether to college, an apprenticeship, university or employment.

The way ahead is not straightforward: exams and standardised assessments are the fairest way of determining what a student knows and can do. We need to consider a wide range of qualifications – from A levels and GCSEs to many different vocational and technical qualifications – and the solution won't be the same for all. Following the government's announcement on Monday evening, we also need to consider how alternative arrangements will work for different students, including those who are independent learners. We are discussing alternative arrangements with the Department for Education. We know that many are seeking clarity as soon as possible. We will provide further updates as soon as we can.

The government has announced that schools and colleges can continue with the vocational and technical exams due to take place in January where it is right to do so. This may be particularly important for vocational and technical qualifications which require a 'licence to practise', which can only be fulfilled through practical assessment".

We have decided to continue with our Btec exams this January and our Exams Officer, Miss Hallam, has already been in touch with all relevant students. If a student decides that they do not wish to sit their Btec exam: that is absolutely fine. Ofqual have promised that they will not be disadvantaged in any way.

Clearly, there is a long way to go before we are in a position to plan for whatever system Ofqual and the Department for Education (DfE) produce. In the meantime, it is important that students continue to work as hard as they can on the work set for them by class teachers. We are working to the curriculum and assessment plans that students would have worked to, had they been in school. All courses and assessments will be completed as planned.

I would respectfully ask all parents and carers, not to bombard us with questions about Centre/Teacher Assessed grades or the moderation process aired by the DfE - questions that at this stage, we have no answers to. We will continue to do what we have always done, which is to carry out assessments in line with curriculum plans as robustly as you have come to expect. It may well prove to be the case that additional assessments are expected - but we will all have to await further direction from Ofqual on these matters.

I will also make the same request to all students - what you need to do is to work as hard as you can on the work set.

We will be setting up a dedicated email address for parents and carers to post questions about any CAG system and will answer them in due course in a more systemised way, when we have further information to share. The email address will be made available early next week and will be communicated to you via Schoolcomms.

We will act with integrity throughout this process and robustly and fairly use all the evidence at our disposal to arrive at any final grades; whatever the system Ofqual decide we use. I cannot allow staff to be unduly pressurised or influenced in this process and they will not answer questions about CAGs at this stage.

Year 11 Parents' Evening on 19/01/2021 will go ahead, remotely, as planned. This will be an opportunity for class teachers to discuss with you, the progress that your child has made in the autumn term, their mock GCSE performance and what students need to do in order to continue their progress. Due to the nature of the on-line platform we are using, appointments are strictly timed for 5 minutes - please do not spend this time trying to engage staff in conversations about how we will assess final grades - we do not yet know. I promise that we will keep you updated as further information and guidance comes to light.

Next week, Year 11 will also receive their reports, which will contain their mock GCSE results, effort grades and barriers to learning. I need to make it clear, given what I have said above, that mock exam grades will not be final grades. The mock exam data will be just one element of the evidence we will use for any Centre Assessed grades. On past evidence we know how well students progress from mocks to final grade - so rest assured, these are not your final grades! The report will also show the target grade that was set at the start of the GCSE course. This target grade is based on national formulas and teacher judgement and is the target that students were working towards for the end of their course in May. Again I stress, target grades will not be used for final grades - they help us gauge progress, and are largely aspirational in nature.

To our Year 13 students, I am aware that there has been some chatter on social media that final grades will be heavily weighted towards mocks. This is simply not true - we have no information yet on how Ofqual will ask us to arrive at final grades. The planned mock exams for Year 13 have been postponed, but if we are able to reschedule them, we will give you as much notice as we can, both of the timing and of any new content that may be included in the papers. This means Year 13 students, should focus on the new content of subjects

currently being taught and current unit tests, rather than on some mocks exams that as yet, we do not know when they may take place. Focus on the work in hand - leave the rest to us - don't listen to social media rumours - we will update you when we know more!

It's important that students in Year 11 and Year 13 continue to work as they have done this week. Attendance at online lessons has been great and I thank parents for all the positive feedback about our remote provision; please continue to feedback to the relevant Head of Year, any concerns or questions.

Some students have also been asking when the end of their school year will be! Normally it would be the end of May, but I am unable to confirm that at this stage. Ultimately there will be a date in which we have to submit data to exam boards and we will again inform you of those key dates when we can.

I realise that there are a lot of unknowns here - we are not keeping anything from you - the announcements you have heard over the last few days, from the Prime Minister and the DfE, are exactly the ones we hear - we don't get the information before you and any additional information we subsequently receive, we will share. Try not to worry, focus on the work in hand - we are with you on this and will keep you fully informed as more information is released.

Once again, thank you for your ongoing support.

D P Jones

Headteacher

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