

28th January 2021

Dear Parents, Carers and Students

Ofqual Consultation: Awarding of GCSE, A Level and Vocational Grades Summer 2021

I am writing to you to provide an update on the consultations that are taking place with regard to the awarding of grades for GCSE and A-level qualifications as well vocational awards such as BTECs and OCR Nationals. The consultations close tomorrow (Friday) and I will be responding to them in full on behalf of the school. At this point, there are a number of points that I wish to share with you in this communication.

The proposals in the consultation are extensive and, having listened to a number of colleagues from the school leadership unions, it is clear that some issues have ignited significant debate. However, what is clear is that there is some general consensus regarding what are being seen as some of the more positive aspects of the consultation. The unions are working together to ensure that they are able to present Ofqual and the DfE with an agreed position that best reflects the views of school leaders and best serves the interests of our students.

I think that it is important to reflect on why the examinations were cancelled. In essence, the fact that students in different schools in different parts of the country have had their education disrupted in different ways has meant that it was no longer possible to hold an examination season in a fair way. Given this, the Department for Education has decided that an alternative system be established for the awarding of grades for this summer.

As previously mentioned, there are a number of proposals that have been broadly welcomed. These are as follows:

- Teacher assessment to play a significant role in the final grades awarded to students;
- Assessment to be based on what students have actually been taught. This differs from CAGs in 2020, where schools were asked to calculate a grade based upon what they thought a student would achieve had they sat their exams in the summer;
- Assessing students relatively late in the academic year to maximise teaching and learning and maintain engagement;
- Grading calculated by drawing on a broad range of assessments with clear guidance from the exam boards;
- Schools to be provided with training and support from exam boards;
- Some form of externally set assessment to be included;
- Robust quality assurance processes both within schools and at exam board level to ensure consistency within schools and across different centres;
- Grades to only be changed by exam boards following human intervention. There will be no use of algorithms to moderate grades.

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Of the points listed above, the issue that is causing the most debate is that of externally set assessments. Clearly, with students in different schools potentially covering different amounts and areas of the subject content, it may be difficult to set a single standardised assessment for any given subject. However, there is a possibility that this could happen with students choosing certain questions or sections to answer (optionality), or it could be the case that the papers are entirely optional and used by some schools as one part of their internal assessment framework.

Another nagging issue is that of data (e.g. trial examinations) that has been collected by schools to date and the role that this data may or may not play in the grading process. It is clear from the meetings that I have attended that there are many schools who had planned to run their trial exams in January or even March and, due to cancellation, these schools simply will not have that data to hand. In addition, the prevalence of the virus at the end of December (including within our own school) meant that some children who were due to sit a full set of exams were unable to do so due to being unwell or having to self isolate.

The key message here is that students, parents and carers should not be concerned about missed trial examinations. It will be the role of schools in collaboration with exam boards and Ofqual to ensure that every student has the opportunity to demonstrate the standards that they are working going forwards and particularly in May / June when we anticipate grades will be finalised. We will be designing an internal assessment framework to support this and will share this with students and parents shortly.

It does appear that there has been an unprecedented response to these consultations already, which may mean that the final response might not be shared with schools until at least mid-February. I will write to all parents, carers and students as soon as we have received and reviewed the relevant documents.

In the meantime, it is important that students and their parents / carers try not to worry unnecessarily about this process. There are no perfect solutions. However, I am given optimism by the fact that the DfE and Ofqual have included schools in the process and have stated that their main goal is fairness to all students given the current context. I would politely ask that students, parents and carers do not contact their classroom teachers regarding this matter.

Students should continue to work as hard as they can in each of their subject areas. This is a factor that students can control and it will have a positive effect on their outcomes regardless of the assessment and grading framework that is decided upon. In addition, it is important that students continue to make progress as this will help to establish the foundations for the next stage of their education.

My final point at this stage is that, as challenging as this situation is, it should not be one that ultimately defines our young people. This is a moment in time which, with the help and support of the wider school community, they can come through and continue to thrive in the future.

Please do contact us if you require further support.

Yours sincerely,



Gary Mullings
Headteacher