

13th October 2021

Dear Parents/Carers and Year 11 students

Exams Update

We are writing to share an update on recent announcements about the adaptations being made to exams for Year 11 and 13 students in the summer of 2022. There is quite a lot of detail in the announcement made last week, and the picture varies significantly from subject to subject. Your teachers will guide you through the implications for each individual subject, but this overview is intended to highlight the main changes and our broad plans to support you over the coming months.

The appendix to this letter provides links to all the detailed documentation published by OFQUAL and the DfE should you wish to refer to that.

The key points from the changes are as follows. We have provided an interpretation of the guidance in italics where appropriate, or where we feel this might be helpful:

Adaptations to exams

- There will be optional topics and content in GCSE English literature, history, ancient history and geography.
Teachers will advise their classes about which topics will be selected for assessment in due course. This element of choice means that the amount of content that would normally be covered has been slightly reduced.
- Exam boards will provide advanced information about the focus of the content of exams for all GCSE, AS and A level subjects except GCSE English literature, history and geography by **7th February 2022** at the latest. This could be released earlier 'if circumstances require'.
This means that guidance on the topics due to be covered in exams will be shared with students ahead of time. The practise/mock GCSE exams due to take place at the end of February will be planned to take this information into account.
- Centres will be allowed to assess the Common Practical Assessment Criteria (CPAC) across the minimum number of practical activities required to enable students to demonstrate their competence in A level biology, chemistry, physics and geology.
This means that it is likely students will undertake fewer practical assessments than in a normal year.
- Students taking GCSE, AS and A level art and design will be assessed on their portfolio only.
This means there will not be a final art exam; instead students will be given consolidated time to complete a high-quality portfolio. That will be scheduled at set time(s) through the year.
- Students will be given a formulae sheet for GCSE mathematics and a revised equation sheet for GCSE physics and combined science.
This means that students will have slightly more information with them in the exam than they would otherwise have had access to in a 'usual' year.

Grading

- 2022 will be a 'transition year' to reflect the fact that we are in a pandemic recovery period and students' education has been disrupted.

- Ofqual will therefore aim for grades in 2022 to reflect a midway point between 2021 and 2019. This means that **results overall next year will be higher than in 2019 but not as high as in 2021.**
- Exam boards will use data as a starting point, to align their standards in a subject. But the grade boundaries for each specification will be set by the senior examiners after they have reviewed the work produced by students.
- When predicting grades for UCAS this year, Ofqual recommends that teachers use the 2019 standard as the basis, but that they give borderline students the benefit of any doubt.
When setting and moderating practise or 'mock' exams our teachers work with other colleagues across our Trust (CMAT) to benchmark the assessment and ensure that the grades awarded reflect the profile of attainment across a wide sample of students. This will enable staff and parents to have greater confidence in the grades awarded because they are checked against and compared with peers across our family of schools. The 'grade boundaries' or standards from the last series of full examinations in 2019 will almost certainly not be the same as those that will eventually be applied in the summer of 2022.
- Organisations awarding VTQs (E.g. BTEC, OCR Nationals) are expected to take account of the approach for GCSEs and A levels when setting standards in their own qualifications.
This means we will take a similar approach to grading assessments and exams in these qualifications as that described above for GCSEs and 'A' Levels.
- In 2023, Ofqual aims to return to results that are in line with those in pre-pandemic years.
This means that there will be slightly fewer top grades awarded in 2023 than was the case in 2021; the 'pass rate' and allocations of grades will be gradually reduced over the next two years to bring down the slight grade 'inflation' that took place in 2020 and 2021.

Results days

Results for exams next year will return to their normal format, with AS and A levels being released on **18th August**, and GCSEs on **25th August**. VTQs (Eg BTEC and OCR Nationals) used to progress in a similar way will be issued on or before the same days, and other VTQ results will continue to be issued throughout the year.

Contingency plans

- The government has launched a two-week consultation on what contingency arrangements should be put in place if GCSE, AS and A level exams cannot go ahead as planned in 2022.
- The government's proposal is essentially a tweaked TAG (*Teacher Assessed Grades*) process, with tighter guidance on the evidence on which TAGs would be based. Specific suggestions include:
 - planned assessment points from which to gather evidence (e.g. once in each of the late autumn, spring and early summer terms)
 - the use, at these assessment points, of approaches which replicate exam board papers and exam conditions.
- It is likely that the government will produce guidance on this process, once the consultation is complete and the final approach is agreed.
- Guidance on contingency arrangements for VTQs has already been published, as part of this package. This advises:
 - using TAGs for those VTQs which are most similar to GCSEs, 'AS' and 'A' Levels;
 - delaying VTQ awards that require students to demonstrate occupational/professional competence, to ensure that students are able to demonstrate the full set of knowledge and skills required.

Working in partnership with our family of schools across CMAT, we have already established two practise /mock exam windows for Year 11 in November and late February/Early March. Practise Exam windows for Y13 are planned for November.

Students and parents need to be aware that, while this seems unlikely at present, should the Government cancel exams again, then the work completed by students *could* be used as part of the TAG (Teacher Assessed Grade) process.

Should there be a need for further assessment to be planned in the summer due to the cancellation of exams then we would arrange this in as timely a way as possible following any such announcement.

Below is an extract of our assessment and monitoring calendar so you can see the dates of our exam windows and when students are due to receive reports home with updates on progress and predicted grades.

Yr 11 Assessment and Monitoring Calendar 2021-22

Two-week Yr 11 mock window	Week commencing 15 th November 2021
Yr 11 tracking point 2 reports home	6 th January 2022
Yr 11 parent/tutor evening	18 th January 2022
Two-week Yr 11 mock window	Week commencing 28 th February 2022
Yr 11 tracking point 3 reports home	31 st March 2022
GCSE exams	Commence 16 th May 2022

Prior to 2020 and the pandemic, we were very confident in our ability to forecast end of course exam grades with a strong degree of accuracy. We should warn students and families that this will be a more challenging process in 2022, when the standards and boundaries will not be finally set until after the exams have been sat in the summer. We are doing everything we can to mitigate this by collaborating with partners within and beyond CMAT, ensuring we build as accurate a picture of where students are and, most importantly, communicate what they need to do to improve their knowledge, understanding and skills as they revise and prepare for the summer exams.

Finally, we would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your ongoing support and engagement; we fully recognise the challenges faced by our students, and the disruption they have experienced. Should you have any questions please do not hesitate to get in touch, in the first instance with either with your form tutor or class teacher.

Yours faithfully



Simon Warburton
Principal

APPENDIX: Government Publication Links

The DfE and Ofqual published several documents setting out plans for GCSEs, AS levels, A levels, and vocational and technical qualifications next year. These include the following:

- A '[decisions document](#)' setting out what changes will be put in place for GCSEs, AS and A levels in 2022, following the recent DfE/Ofqual consultation on this.
- An [article](#) by new Chief Regulator Dr Jo Saxton, explaining Ofqual's approach to grading next year, and a [blog](#) setting this out for students.
- A [consultation](#) on the contingency arrangements for GCSEs, AS and A levels.
- [Guidance](#) on the contingency arrangements for vocational and technical qualifications.