



28 January 2021

Dear Fifth Form and Upper Sixth Boys and Families,

I hope this finds you safe and well. I write by way of update on qualifications and to outline our plans for assessment opportunities for boys after half term.

Ofqual Consultation on GCSE and A Level

The joint Ofqual and Department for Education consultation on how grades should be awarded closes tomorrow evening. The link was in the recent bulletin and can be found again [here](#). Whilst we have submitted the school's response, this consultation is open to all so please do contribute your views as an individual (if you wish to and have not already).

Frustratingly for us all, almost everything about the arrangements is under consultation and final decisions are not scheduled until the week of 22 February (i.e. after half term).

Central to the proposed arrangements is the principle that grades should reflect what a student knows, understands and can do; unlike the arrangements for Summer 2020, they will not be 'predictions'. The emphasis appears to be on evidence of a student's performance in a subject close to the time of the final assessment, but that evidence from elsewhere might also be permitted. The proposed timeline for the summer term is as follows (but remains a proposal at this stage):

- students would be assessed using a variety of evidence including supervised assessment papers (issued by the exam boards) taken in school in late May and early June
- schools would submit grades to the exam boards in June following internal quality assurance
- external quality assurance by the exam boards would also take place
- results would be released to students once the quality assurance process is complete, possibly in early July
- student appeals could be submitted immediately following the issue of results and would first be considered by schools

You will recall that under the exam timetable previously scheduled for the summer there was a contingency window for exams until 16 July. Whilst these contingency exams are now unlikely to take place, we would continue to caution against committing to travel plans until the final timeline for qualifications is confirmed.

IGCSE and IB Update

The position of our IGCSE boards and the IBO (i.e. that they are preparing for exams to go ahead) has not changed and we are unlikely to see any further developments until the final decisions on GCSE and A Level are communicated at the end of February. As such, teachers are continuing to prepare boys for these examinations as scheduled. For IB, the importance of coursework remains paramount (whether exams proceed or not).

Preparation Assessments in March

Given the likely focus on written assessments under controlled conditions in May/June, we feel that a more structured opportunity for practising assessments under timed conditions would be beneficial for boys before Easter. We also know that boys remain keen for some form of trial exams to go

ahead, to assess their revision and to receive feedback on areas to develop in their revision for final assessments.

As such, we will be running a period of off-timetable 'Preparation Assessments' from **Monday 1 March** for Fifth Form and A Level Upper Sixth boys. For A Level boys we are aiming for all papers to be completed within this week (i.e. Monday 1 March to Saturday 6 March). For Fifth Form boys some papers will need to be scheduled in the following week given the number of different subjects boys study. A full timetable of papers will be released next week.

For IGCSE subjects, these preparation assessments are likely to replicate the trial exam papers scheduled for the start of this term (with the view that exams may proceed as planned). For GCSE and A Level, the preparation assessment papers will be shorter and may focus on a reduced syllabus content. Boys will receive full details from their teachers next week about the content and format of these papers.

Whilst there will not be a formal period of study leave before these preparation assessments, boys will have consolidation and revision lessons during the week after half term (i.e. 22 to 27 February) and no additional prep tasks will be set in this week.

Whilst we had hoped these preparation assessments would take place on the school site, the latest government announcement indicates that schools are unlikely to return until 8 March at the earliest. As such, we are developing an online solution that will allow boys to sit these papers remotely and we will be in touch with more information about these arrangements and any specific software boys may need for these assessments. We feel that delaying these preparation assessments until later could limit the time available to complete coursework and prepare boys for the final assessments in the Summer.

It remains unclear to what extent we would be able to use information from these assessments within the arrangements for final grading – but, clearly, we would recommend boys prepare for these assessments as they did for the trial exams and aim to show their best work.

For IB boys, we know that early March contains important coursework deadlines, so boys will be given opportunities for preparation assessments within lessons (or on Games afternoons) around the coursework deadlines, such that they are well prepared for exams but also produce the best coursework of which they are capable. For all Upper Sixth boys, it is hoped the feedback from the preparation assessment will also support university offer decisions.

Parents' Evenings

We hope that you all find the upcoming parents' evenings helpful to discuss progress and the specific areas of content learning or skills that boys should be developing ahead of the preparation assessments. Given so many of the arrangements for grading remain unclear, please understand that teachers will not be able to give information about how evidence or grading will work in a particular subject – nor will we be able to give grade predictions or projections in the way we might in a normal year.

Information Events for Boys and Families

Although full arrangements will not be published until the end of February, we know that boys and families have many questions about qualifications this summer. We will be holding online information events between 5.00pm to 5.45pm on Monday 8 February (Upper Sixth) and Tuesday 9 February (Fifth Form) in which we will explain the key areas from the consultation document and answer questions about what we can know, at this stage, from the proposed arrangements. There will also be an event on Wednesday 10 February between 7.30am and 8.15am for international boys and families. The links

to the online events will be sent in the weekly bulletin and a transcript will be made available for boys and families who are unable to attend.

Welfare

Finally, we know that the uncertainty surrounding qualifications will be playing heavily on your minds and we encourage you to use all the [support networks](#) in school as much as you need. At this time “controlling the controllable” remains our maxim, and we hope the upcoming preparation assessments will give additional structure and motivation to boys’ preparation – alongside providing important feedback on how to develop ready for the final assessments in the summer term.

With best wishes,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "S. Baldock".

Sam Baldock
Deputy Head (Academic)