



8 January 2020

Dear Fifth Form Boys, Upper Sixth Boys, and Parents/Guardians

I hope this finds you safe and well.

I write by way of update following the Secretary of State's announcement on GCSE and A Level qualifications to set out the current situation with each of our qualifications and to share some principles we will be using at Bedford School to support you all through the months ahead.

Firstly, at this stage we expect the **IB Diploma** examinations will proceed as expected, in early May. As a genuinely international qualification, this qualification has inbuilt mechanisms to acknowledge the shape and circumstances of academic arrangements in different countries, and so is less liable to disruption at a national level. If there is a change to examinations, all boys have completed coursework in each of their subjects (and core component) which will contribute to grades under any circumstances. IB boys should continue to assume that exams will go ahead (and prepare accordingly) but also continue to give particular focus and determination to any incomplete coursework so that they can ensure this is of the highest quality.

Bedford School, like many independent schools, runs a mix of IGCSE and GCSE qualifications. Our **IGCSE** qualifications are offered by two different awarding bodies: *Pearson Edexcel* and *Cambridge Assessment International Education* (commonly known as CAIE). At time of writing, Pearson Edexcel does intend its IGCSE examinations to proceed as scheduled in the UK. CAIE say that it is monitoring the situation very closely, but that it expects exams to continue as planned. A summary of which awarding body is used for each subject is given in a summary table following this letter. I should reassure that IGCSE and GCSE grading is normally pegged together, so there should be no disadvantage for grading if some exams proceed and others do not.

The government announcement on Wednesday covered **GCSE** qualifications and all **A Level** qualifications. The situation remains rather more nuanced than the "exams cancelled" headlines – we know that students will not sit exams but the alternative mode of assessment is yet to be confirmed. The Department for Education would like this to involve some form of teacher assessment, but it will be for Ofqual (the qualifications regulator) to consult on and determine these arrangements.

The consultation on GCSE and A Level is scheduled to begin next week and – based on our experience of other consultations – is likely to give a sense of the direction of travel (although the full details will not be confirmed until the consultation ends and decisions are communicated). I am genuinely sorry that this is all so unclear and may be prolonged. I want to be upfront that the uncertainty on the specifics may continue for some time yet – but regardless of what is decided there will be assessment and there will be grades. Boys preparing for GCSE and A Level must therefore proceed with full effort and ambition – and their teachers will be working to keep them 'match fit' for whatever is arranged. We will continue to progress through our courses and will continue to assess and give feedback to boys as we ever would.

I feel I should caution against looking too closely at the arrangements for awarding grades last year as an indicator of how GCSE and A level might be assessed this year. You will be aware of the large number of issues that plagued the 2020 qualifications arrangements (that the regulators and exam boards will be quick to avoid) and, most importantly, last year the national lockdown occurred at the very end of the Spring Term.

The Spring Term is a hugely important period for students to make progress - we will expect all boys to be able to 'do things' in their subjects by the end of March that they cannot yet – and we remain confident that the arrangements will allow schools to capture this and show students at their best. Indeed, Ofqual's statements over recent days have consistently encouraged students to continue to work hard and (as you would expect) we wholly endorse this.

You will be aware that the **trial examinations** scheduled for the start of term have not taken place – and we are fully aware that boys have worked hard over recent weeks in preparation for these. We do know, however, that preparation is never wasted and keeping ourselves ready will be essential for whatever may follow. Where a public examination is confirmed to take place, at this stage we intend to run trial examinations under arrangements that replicate the format of the real examinations when the boys have returned to school.

For those qualifications where arrangements remain unclear, we would not wish to disadvantage boys by committing now to spending a fortnight on off-timetable trial exams if this will not prove as helpful as spending time on other forms of assessment. We aim to be upfront about what we are asking of boys and why - if internal examinations form part of the arrangements for awarding grades at GCSE and A Level then we will say so, prepare boys accordingly and explain how these assessments will be used. As you know, we always seek to avoid too many clashes for boys completing coursework or assessed performances in different qualifications and we intend to factor this all into our plans.

Arrangements for the **EPQ** qualification and **Level 2 Further Mathematics** remain unclear, and we will write to relevant boys and families as we learn more.

Finally, I will return to an analogy that I used with boys facing changed arrangements last year: although the train to results has been cancelled, a replacement bus is on its way. It may not be as comfortable and it may take a bit longer, but it will get there – and we will be doing our very best to support you along the whole journey towards getting grades that represent your achievements. As ever - and I know this can be difficult to acknowledge amid this uncertainty - qualifications are just one component of your education: the values, skills and attributes you acquire will allow you to thrive as the fine young men we know you all to be.

I will continue to write with updates as we learn more about the arrangements for different qualifications.

With best wishes



S Baldock
Deputy Head (Academic)

Table of IGCSE and GCSE Subjects

<i>Qualification</i>	<i>Awarding Body</i>	<i>Subjects</i>	<i>Current Position</i>
IGCSE	Pearson Edexcel	Biology; Chemistry; Chinese; Dual Science; English Language; English Literature; History; Physics	Do intend for exams to go ahead
	CAIE	French; German; Spanish; English as a Second Language; DT	Monitoring GCSE arrangements, but planning for exams
GCSE	AQA, OCR, Pearson Edexcel	Art; Ancient History; Computer Science; Drama; Geography; Latin; Mathematics; Music; Religious Studies	Students will not sit exams as planned, alternative mode of assessment to be confirmed