

20th April 2020

Dear students, parents and carers

Re: exam grading for GCSE and A' level students, 2020

Ofqual have launched a [consultation](#) on the details of proposals for GCSE and A' level exam grading this summer. Whilst nothing will be absolutely confirmed for another few weeks, it seems sensible to assume that this now forms the basis of what will happen. We are waiting for further information on specific vocational (e.g. BTEC) courses but we expect the same process will apply for all the courses we run at Lymm High School.

The key points suggested in the consultation documents are as follows:

- Schools must provide exam boards with the grades we think students were most likely to receive in each subject, alongside a rank order of all students doing each subject.
- When submitting this information, schools need to make 'holistic judgements' using everything we know about students. This includes, for example, classwork, homework, performance in tests, mock exams and any coursework completed (or partially completed) so far.
- It is important to understand that schools will use all this information to make a judgement about what grades students were most likely to get *if schools had not been closed and exams went ahead as usual*. This means, for example, we need to consider the fact that we would have had plenty of time for revision in school and at home.
- It certainly does not mean we just use mock exam grades as the grades we recommend to the exam board. We understand that most students would have improved since doing mock exams. We also know that, for lots of reasons, some students will not have performed as well in the mocks as they might have done. This is why we will look at *everything* we know about a student's performance, not just mock exams, and make a judgement on what we think they would have ended up with.
- It is very important for students and parents to be aware that Ofqual are being very clear that schools are not allowed to share the information we submit to the exam boards. This is to prevent a situation where schools are put under pressure by families to influence the process. In fact, Ofqual go so far as to say any attempts to influence school judgements "may be investigated by an exam board and found to constitute malpractice, which may result in sanctions".
- We therefore respectfully ask parents and students to avoid contacting teachers to press individual cases and to understand that, in such situations, teachers have been instructed not to engage in any discussions. If you feel there is something especially important and unique to an individual's circumstances that the school doesn't already know about, please email the relevant Head of Year who will consider any information as appropriate.
- The reason schools have to provide a rank order of students as well as expected grades is that the exam boards will apply various statistical measures to prevent schools exploiting the system by predicting grades that are unrealistically high. If schools do submit grades that are considered to be 'inflated', then the exam boards will intervene and change the grades, whilst keeping the rank order the same.

- To ensure the overall number of grades given out remains fair and in line with previous years, exam boards will consider the performance of this whole cohort at KS2 (to give an indication as to whether more or fewer grades at each level should be awarded this year compared to last) and the typical pattern of grades in different subjects.
- They will also consider the performance of individual schools, which is good news for our students because it means they are recognising that students in schools with very high value added scores (like Lymm High School) would have been expected to perform significantly better than students of similar abilities in other schools this summer.
- The intention is to allow students who believe they would have got higher grades than they are awarded in the summer to be able to sit exams in the autumn. Perhaps understandably, there are no details available on this yet. It is possible, for example, that exams will only be available in some subjects. However, students will be able to sit any or all exams in the summer of 2021.
- There seems to have been a change of mind by the government/Ofqual regarding early entry students, which affects English Literature for **Year 10 students**. It seems that students will now be able to receive a 'calculated grade' this summer. We will write to Year 10 parents about this separately once we have considered the implications for Lymm High School students.
- Exam results days will be published by 13th August for A' levels and 20th August for GCSEs.
- Sixth form enrolment will therefore go ahead broadly as usual and, as far as we are aware at the moment, so will the UCAS process for university applications. We will be in touch about both nearer the time, as we normally would.

In conclusion, it is of course stating the obvious to say that this situation is far from ideal. On the other hand, for what it is worth, my opinion is that the proposals are as fair and reasonable as they can be under the circumstances. This is a view shared by the vast majority of headteachers.

We have already had extensive discussions within school about how to ensure the information we submit to the exam boards is as fair, consistent and robust as it is possible to be. Departments will be working very hard over the next few weeks to make their judgements. The process they follow and the conclusions they draw will be monitored very closely by the senior leadership team and, ultimately, by myself.

It is worth bearing in mind that it is unlikely that students' progression routes will be significantly affected in the long run. Sixth forms and universities are well aware of the issues and will, I have no doubt, be trying hard to ensure individuals are given the benefit of the doubt wherever possible. We must also remember that there will be options to sit exams where students feel the grades they are awarded do not reflect their ability. It might even be worth pointing out that, whatever the issues this summer, exams themselves are hardly without problems when it comes to identifying precisely how good students are in any given subject.

I hope this provides sufficient information for the time being. If anything changes, we will let you know as soon as possible.

Kind regards



Gwyn Williams