

November 2021

Dear Year 13 students, parents and carers

The Department for Education and Ofqual have now published information about their contingency arrangements (the so-called “Plan B”) in the event that exams are cancelled again next summer. [Click here](#) if you want to read the full details from the government. Otherwise, the key points to bear in mind at the moment are as follows:

- The expectation is that GCSE and A’ level exams *will* take place and most people seem to think that is by far and away the most probably scenario. As a school, we are therefore planning on the basis that exams are highly likely to go ahead and will be doing all we can to ensure that contingency plans don’t impact preparations for those exams.
- If exams cannot take place, then teacher assessed grades will be used in a way that will be similar (but not identical) to last year.
- In order to provide evidence to support teacher assessment in such a situation, schools are expected to assess students in exam conditions at various points during the year.
- The guidance suggests three assessment points during the year as being a sensible approach – once before Christmas, once in the spring term (which will be the mock exams we already have planned) and once in the first half of the summer term. This is only guidance, but will form the starting point for planning.
- Overall, these assessments will broadly equate to the amount of time the exams are planned to take.
- The assessments will cover a wide range of content, but not all assessments will require knowledge of the whole course – i.e. each assessment will focus on certain parts of the course, which students will be informed about beforehand.
- Non-exam assessments (i.e. coursework) should be completed as normal and this should be used as evidence to inform a teacher assessed grade. The same is true of vocational courses where coursework forms the bulk of the assessment process.

There is a fair degree of flexibility as to how and when assessments take place – necessary because we cannot be sure how the pandemic will continue to play out and how much disruption we might face at Lymm High School. For this reason, there is no point making detailed plans for every possible eventuality at the moment and, in any case, we intend to spend a good deal of time thinking through the implications of possible options before committing to anything.

What matters most in the short-term is that we have taken the decision to move the Year 13 assessment week planned for next week back to the week commencing 6th December and that students understand these assessments would be used as evidence should exams be cancelled. In order to ensure that students in different classes don’t see assessment materials before other classes, we will collapse the Year 13 timetable for that week and students will have study leave rather than normal lessons.

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Further details will follow, but it is important to understand that students do not need to panic or spend too much time preparing for these assessments beyond that which they would have done for the original assessment week. The assessments are unlikely to be longer than 45-60 minutes each and students will be given clear guidance as to which areas of the course they will focus on. Even if exams are cancelled and evidence from this assessment week is to be used, this would not be the only pieces of evidence – so it is absolutely not an ‘all or nothing’ situation. In practice, we don’t think this actually changes anything much from a student perspective at this stage; they ought to be working hard in preparation for the assessments anyway because this will help them perform better at the end of the year.

We will be in touch later in the year (probably after Christmas) about when other assessments will take place, making sure of course that plenty of notice is given for any necessary revision. The intention is to do this in a way that ensures these assessments double as useful preparation for exams. With this in mind, we see no reason at the moment to change the mock exams planned for the week commencing 28th February – the only real difference would be that students will need to understand that evidence from these mock exams would contribute to teacher assessment in the unlikely event that exams are cancelled in the summer.

It might also be worth reminding you that [changes to A’ levels](#) to help take account of the impact of the pandemic have already been confirmed, as well as Ofqual’s approach to the [grading of exams](#) next summer. As we have said before, we feel these changes will go a long way to ensuring students get a fair deal. Moreover, our observations of Year 13 so far this year strongly suggest that there is no reason why they cannot perform exceptionally well in the summer exams.

We hope this letter provides sufficient information for the time being. We are mindful of not over-loading people with too much detail, but please do get in touch with Mrs Jennings if you have any questions about this. If it appears there is the demand for it, we will run an information evening to allow the chance for more questions and discussion.

Kind regards

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Gwyn Williams', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Gwyn Williams