

Dear Year 11, 12 and 13 Parents / Carers,

The aim of this letter is to summarise the approach for the awarding of grades this summer 2021. I imagine that many of you have been worrying about this matter and it is easy for me to empathise as I happen to have a son in Year 13 and one in year 11 myself this year.

We are cautiously optimistic about the national qualification strategy this summer as we think that the outline plan is probably the best and fairest approach possible in the circumstances. We are confident that we are well placed to be able to ensure that our students have every chance of getting the grades that they deserve. The following outlines this process whilst attempting to anticipate and answer your questions:

How will grades be awarded this summer?

Grades for GCSEs, A levels, BTECs and most other qualifications will be based on a process involving teacher assessment against national standards, internal quality assurance and external quality assurance by the exam boards. The national process defined by the Department for Education and the exams' regulator, Ofqual is as follows:

1. Teachers will **assess students against a national standard**, which will be defined by the exam boards before the Easter break (we don't yet have these standards).
2. Departments will submit grades which will be **quality assured by our school**. This internal quality assurance process will have to be signed off by the exam board to ensure it is rigorous and in line with national standards.
3. Our school results will be **quality assured externally** by the exam boards, which may include random sampling of our school's evidence in some or all subjects.
4. If the exam boards are confident in our submitted results, **then the exam boards will award students their final grades**.
5. If students do not think their results are accurate, they will have the right to **appeal**.

So, do teachers award the grade?

Simply: no. The grade students achieve will start with their teacher's assessment of their performance across a range of evidence. This is against a nationally-defined standard, not the teacher's own opinion. This assessment is then subject to both internal and external quality assurance before the final grade is awarded by the exam body as usual. We will be internally moderating all grading processes across departments and this process will ultimately be checked by our Assistant Head for Data and Assessment, the Deputy Head and me. The exam boards then check our processes.

Are grades decided by an algorithm?

No, unlike last year, students' grades will not be changed by a formula. The internal and external quality assurance measures will all be done by humans, not an algorithm. There

is no limit on the achievement of students, providing they have evidence that they are working at that grade.

What about loss of learning / impact of Covid?

This year, teachers will only assess students on content they have been taught because of the continued disruption of the pandemic. This means students will not be disadvantaged if they individually, their whole class or whole year group have been unable to complete their full course. However, grades can only be submitted on the basis of the evidence we have of students' performance, even if that evidence covers less of the course than usual. Students who would usually have extra time or other access arrangements in the exams will benefit from the same arrangements in teacher assessments. If students can't take an assessment due to the pandemic – because they have to self-isolate for example – we must and will take account of this and ensure that they are not disadvantaged.

Will grades be different between different schools and colleges?

No, the standard against which teachers will be assessing students is set nationally by the exam boards. This is the standard that will be used during external quality assurance and appeals to ensure consistency and fairness across the system.

What evidence will be used?

Teachers are able to draw on a range of assessment evidence from across a student's study of the course. This may include internal assessments and papers set by the exam boards; it may include evidence from before the second lockdown, as well as evidence from March onwards. The exam boards are producing assessment materials that will be sent to us before Easter and it is not until this stage that we will confirm which sources of evidence we will use. Different subjects may use different sources and there is no requirement for any one type of assessment to be used – it's about performance across a range of evidence. We will let students reacclimatise to school and establish where they are in terms of their knowledge and understanding before finalising what we will use to further assess students. This means that we are very likely to be running the bulk of assessments which will be drawn upon to decide on grades in the latter half of the April-May half term, so from May onwards. It is likely that assessments will run up until the May half-term, (28 May), but they could also take place in early June. We have to send our grades to the exam boards by 18 June.

The exam boards are only giving out past papers, how is this fair?

Most of the assessments provided by the exam boards will be drawn from past papers, although there will be new questions as well. There is significant research that even if students have seen assessments questions before, it does not reduce the validity of the assessment. Furthermore, exam board questions are only one of the many pieces of evidence we may use to assess students this summer.

Can students and parents make the case for why a student should get a higher grade?

Our teachers will be using their professional expertise to assess students on the content they have been taught. Teachers are unable to submit higher grades for students unless

they have the evidence that they are consistently working at this level. If teachers submit higher grades without evidence they are committing exam malpractice. Any undue pressure by student or parent placed on teachers to increase grades could also be considered exam malpractice, which could ultimately lead to the disqualification of a student. Students will be able to appeal their grades in August if they do not believe them to be fair and representative of their ability.

Can students discuss their grades with teachers?

Teachers will be able to discuss which evidence they are using to inform their judgement with students, including marked or graded pieces of work. However, we are not allowed to disclose their final submitted grades that we give to the exam boards. Students should not pressure teachers to reveal the grades they are submitting or attempt to second-guess the grades submitted as teachers will be using a range of evidence to inform their final judgement.

When will students get their results?

The results days this year have been brought forward and will be on Tuesday 10 August for A-Level and level 3 qualifications and on Thursday 12 August for GCSE and level 2 qualifications.

When will Year 11 and 13 students finish school in the summer term?

We do not currently know and have asked this question of the government. We hope to have an answer soon.

What should students do to improve their grades?

The best thing students can do is to continue to attend classes, learn, act on feedback from their teachers, revise (particularly when they know what assessments to prepare for), and read around their subjects. Their grades will be based on their performance, so their outcomes are ultimately in their hands.

I know that many students will want to know exactly what the sources of evidence for the grading in each subject are. I am sorry that we can't decide on and confirm this until the exam boards have released their grading standards, advice and banks of assessment materials to us. Please be assured that we will clarify this as soon as we can. If you do have urgent queries or concerns, these can be addressed to:

- Assistant Head, Mr Humphrey (phil.humphrey@teignmouth.devon.sch.uk),
- Deputy Head, Mrs Atkinson (samantha.atkinson@teignmouth.devon.sch.uk),
- or me (james.oconnell@teignmouth.devon.sch.uk).

Yours sincerely,



James O'Connell
Principal