



FAO: Parents & Carers of Students in Year 11

RE: Clarification regarding the awarding of grades this summer

Dear Parents & Carers

I hope this letter finds you and your loved ones safe and well at this time.

I would like to begin by praising the students in Year 11 regarding their attitude and engagement upon their return to the classroom this week. Year 11 have been fully focussed on learning and their teachers have commented on their determination to achieve well as we move into the last few months of their time at Denton Community College.

For some the return to school was very brief as our lateral flow testing identified several positive cases of Covid-19 within our Year 11 cohort. This has resulted in a number of students having to self-isolate and return to online/remote learning. Whilst this is very unfortunate, it is a timely reminder that we are still living with lockdown restrictions due to the global pandemic. The enforced self-isolation of students is, as always, to safeguard the health and well-being of all students, their loved ones and the staff at the school.

Whilst the self-isolation of students is very unfortunate, particularly in Year 11, this was expected hence the decision made by the Government earlier in the year to cancel the GCSE examinations this summer. Students and parents should be reassured by this, as the grades they will be awarded will not be based upon a one off examination. The face-to-face education that has been missed due to self-isolation, illness and the closure of schools will be taken into account so that students are not disadvantaged with regards to their outcomes.

In recent weeks, we have received a number of questions from students, parents and carers regarding the awarding of grades this year. I would like to take this opportunity to answer some of the most frequently asked questions and clarify some of the common misunderstandings:

How will grades be awarded this summer?

Grades for GCSEs, A levels, and most other qualifications, including vocational subjects, 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:

- Teachers will assess students against a national standard over the coming weeks.
- Individual subjects will submit grades which will be quality assured by the school.
- Our school or college results will be quality assured externally by the exam boards, which may include random sampling of our school's evidence.
- If the exam boards are confident in our submitted results, then the exam boards will award students their final grades.
- If students do not think their results are accurate, they will have the right to appeal.

So, do teachers award the grade?

No, the grade students achieve will start with their teacher's assessment of their performance across a range of evidence. The work is moderated against nationally defined standards, which students will be made aware of, not the opinion of the individual teacher. The assessment is subject to both internal and external quality assurance before the usual awarding of a final grade by the exam body.

Does this mean grades are decided by an algorithm?

No, unlike last year students' grades will be internally and externally moderated by humans. This means 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 due to the impact of Covid-19?

Due to the continued disruption because of the pandemic, teachers will only assess students on content they have been taught. This means students will not be disadvantaged if they have not been able to complete the full course due to absence, self-isolation and the closure of schools. However, grades can only be submitted where we have evidence of a student's performance, even if that evidence covers less of the course than usual. Students who would usually have extra time in the exams will benefit from the same arrangements in teacher assessment.

Will grades be different between different schools?

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 'Home Learning' tasks, mock examinations, individual assessments and papers set by the exam boards. This may include evidence from before the most recent lockdown, as well as evidence collected from **March to May 2021**. The exam boards are producing additional assessment materials that will be sent to us before Easter. Different departments may use different sources of evidence. There is no requirement for any one type of assessment to be used, this process is about collecting a range of performance evidence.

When is the deadline for the submission of evidence?

The final date for the submission of evidence will be **Friday 28th May 2021** at the latest. Individual subjects may set different deadlines for separate pieces of evidence, which will be communicated to students well in advance. This is to allow for the final marking and moderation of evidence prior to the national grade submission deadline of **Friday 18th June 2021**.

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 assessment 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 will use to assess students this summer.

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

Our teachers are already 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.

In 2020, any undue pressure placed on teachers by students or parents to increase grades was also considered exam malpractice. It is likely to be the same for 2021. If students or parents are found to be putting teachers or school leaders under undue pressure to increase grades, then this matter will be referred to the exam boards and an investigation into malpractice may ensue. If malpractice is deemed to have taken place it may result in a student's certificate being removed entirely.

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. I must stress however, we are not allowed to disclose the final submitted grade we give to the exam board.

HEADTEACHER: Mr G Rule

Students should not attempt to second guess the grade submitted, as teachers will be using a range of evidence to inform their final judgement. Students and parents must not pressure teachers to reveal the grades they are submitting, or to increase the grades, as doing so may be considered exam malpractice.

What should students do to improve their grades?

The best thing students can do is to continue to attend classes if not self-isolating, if they are self-isolating then continue to engage with the online learning that they are set by their teachers, act on any feedback they are given, revise and read around their subject.

The measures that the Government and Ofqual have put in place does mean students should not be disadvantaged due to the pandemic. Their grade will be based on a portfolio of evidence that demonstrates their performance. This means that whilst their future is not yet written, their outcomes are ultimately very much in their own hands.

I would like to once again thank you for your continued support in the education of the young people of Denton and Tameside.

Yours sincerely



Greg Rule
Headteacher