

22nd March 2021

Dear Parent/Carer

Last week Mrs Rahn and I led an assembly with all Year 11 and Year 13 students, detailing how their grades will be produced this year in the absence of external examinations. In the assembly, we took students through our guiding principles, the timeline for April and May, the arrangements for the assessments and the appeals process.

To summarise:

- Grades will be calculated from a mixture of pre-assessment evidence from earlier in the course and classroom-based assessments done after the Easter holidays - there will be no formal internal examinations taking place in the sports hall.
- The classroom-based assessments after Easter will take place between Monday 19th April and Friday 21st May. For GCSE they will usually be shorter than 1 hour whilst A level assessments may be longer.
- The assessments after Easter will be based on prior exam board assessment materials, mark schemes and grade boundaries.
- The assessments will only cover the areas of the curriculum that have been properly delivered through face-to-face teaching and not affected by COVID lockdowns.
- There will be a school-wide checking and moderation process to ensure that assessments have been accurately marked. This will be supported by external checking through the Areté Trust and by the individual exam boards.
- Students who are entitled to exam access arrangements will have these.
- The grades will be given to students during the week beginning 9th August. Sixth Form students will receive their grades on Tuesday 10th August and Year 11 students will receive theirs on Thursday 12th August.

This week, all students will be provided with a detailed calendar showing the timings of all the classroom-based assessments during the period after Easter. Students will therefore know when they are going to be assessed and which modules/units of the curriculum these assessments will cover.

To support students in preparing for these assessments, we will be running a range of revision sessions during the second week of the Easter holiday. Students will receive a timetable of the sessions that are on offer before the end of this week. There will be a booking system in operation that will be shared with you before the end of this week - places on the Easter revision programme must be booked for - students are not allowed to just turn up.

Finally, I have included a section below giving the answers to some common questions that schools have been receiving from students and parents.

Yours faithfully



Mr A. Wilkinson
Deputy Headteacher
Northallerton School and Sixth Form College.

How will grades be awarded this summer?

Grades for GCSEs, A levels, and most other qualifications including applied generals 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.
2. Departments will submit grades which will be **quality assured by the school/college**. 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 or college results will be **quality assured externally** by the exam boards, which may include random sampling of our school or college's evidence.
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.

Does this mean grades are 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 in the exams will benefit from the same arrangements in teacher assessment.

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, up until the end of May. This may include homework tasks, mock exams, and papers set by the exam boards. This may include evidence from before the second lockdown, as well as evidence from March – May. The exam boards are producing assessment materials that will be sent to us before Easter. Different departments may use different sources of evidence, and there is no requirement for any one type of assessment to be used – it's about a performance across a range of evidence.

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 by students or parents who placed undue pressure on teachers 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 leaders under undue pressure to increase grades, then this matter will be referred to the exam boards and an investigation into malpractice may ensue. This may result in the student's certificate being removed entirely if malpractice is deemed to have taken place.

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 grade we give to the exam board.

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 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, learn, act on feedback from their teachers, revise, and read around their subject. Their grade will be based on their performance, and so their outcomes are ultimately in their hands.