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10th March 2021

Re: Year 11 & 13 Grades Summer 2021

Dear Parents / Carers,

I hope you and your families are well. Thank you for all of your hard work and support over the past few months whilst students have engaged in remote learning. It has been fantastic to see them back in school this week having kept up with work so impressively. Teachers have been very complimentary overall about the positive atmosphere in the Year 11 and Year 13 cohorts.

Thank you also for your patience whilst waiting for more clarity about the process for awarding grades in Summer 2021. The government released some guidance recently, which we have been busy interpreting. I am sure that you will understand the need to not rush into decisions but to carefully plan systems that are right for Wallingford School. It is worth noting that we are still waiting for exam boards to release more specific details on the process for each individual course. If there are any changes to our plans or there is more information to share, we will make sure that this is communicated to you as promptly as possible.

Below are some key questions and responses – hopefully they cover the majority of points that you need to be aware of at this stage. It may be that Mr Lyons (Head of Year 11) and Ms Mummery (Head of Sixth Form) get in contact with you with more general updates too. If you have further questions about the 'Awarding Qualifications' process, please get in contact with me at lambn@wallingfordschool.com.

Yours sincerely,

Mr N Lamb
Deputy Headteacher
Wallingford School

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How will grades be awarded this summer?

Grades for GCSEs, A-levels, 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.
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. Guidance is clear that the grade should not indicate potential future performance but current performance using the evidence available.

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.

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 exam concessions will benefit from the same arrangements in teacher assessments where possible, or an appropriate adjustment will be made.

We will ask families to share information with us if they think there are mitigating circumstances that should be taken into account when teachers are finalising the grades to be submitted.

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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?

Wallingford School 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 Term 5. Primarily, this is likely to include mock exams, assessments, tests, NEA (coursework) and practical performances – we consider this 'primary evidence' and will have the greatest impact on final grade. We may also include 'secondary evidence' in our decision-making process where required, such as classwork, homework, work completed during remote learning period, student progress records. 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.

Are exam boards giving out past questions or new exam papers?

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 will use to assess students this summer.

Will students be sitting exams this summer?

No, there won't be formal exams this summer in school. Instead, teachers on most courses will be setting a number of smaller assessments for students to complete. This work will be added to the work students have completed previously so that teachers have evidence on all areas of the course that they need it for.

Assessments will be marked by staff in school following exam board mark schemes and grade boundaries. Where possible, there will be moderation within the school and with colleagues at other schools, to make sure that our marking is accurate.

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 student or parent who placed undue pressure on teachers to increase grades was also considered to be committing 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.

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We ask that students and their families trust our staff to be following the guidance, using their professional expertise and that they will act with a sense of moral purpose at all times in order to be accurate and fair.

Can students discuss their grades with teachers?

Teachers will be able to share which evidence they are using to inform their judgement and we hope to do this in the coming weeks. Students will also be able to discuss their marks or grades for individual 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.

How do students or parents appeal a grade?

Currently, the appeals process has not been shared by exam boards. As soon as possible, we will finalise the details of the process at Wallingford School and share this with you. This is most likely to be after the Easter break.

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. Teachers will be doing everything they can to give students the best chance of success. A student's grade will be based on their performance, and so the final outcomes are ultimately in their hands.

When do Year 11 & Year 13 students leave school?

As things currently stand, students will not be required to complete any work beyond the end of Term 5 (ends Friday 28th May 2021). We will share the specific date and details for Leavers Days in due course.

When are Results Days?

Students will receive their results for A Levels on the 10 August and GCSEs on the 12 August. These will be organised in accordance with any Covid restrictions at that time.

We intend to hold a result clinic in school the day after each results day, to support students with their next steps decision-making.

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