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Dear students, parents, and carers,

Information from the DfE and Ofqual regarding Summer 2023 Examinations

As you will already be aware all of our Year 10 students will sit their GCSE in RE at the end of this academic year. This gives students a first experience of sitting a GCSE examination, as well as helping to reduce the number of examinations they will sit in Year 11. Over recent years students have achieved exceptionally well in the RE examinations and found it a beneficial opportunity to develop their study skills. The information below has been shared with schools regarding examinations in 2023, and as your child is also sitting an external examination we felt it appropriate to share this with you as well as with our Year 11 and 13 parents/carers.

You may have seen headlines over the last week or two regarding decisions that have been made about exams in summer 2023. I am writing to explain more fully what this means for students preparing for GCSEs, AS, A levels and VTQs this year.

The government, the exams regulator Ofqual and the exam boards have confirmed the following:

- At a national level, grades will be in line with grades in 2019. This was always likely to be the case this year, after a one-year transition year when exams returned in 2022.
- However, there will be a safety net to ensure that, nationally, grades are not lower than they were in 2019.
- This means that, generally speaking, students have the same chance of getting a grade A* or C at A level, or a grade 9 or 5 at GCSE, as in 2019.
- Exams in vocational qualifications such as BTECs will also return to a 2019 grade profile.
- There is currently a consultation happening regarding whether formula sheets will be provided in the GCSE maths, physics and combined sciences exams, meaning that students will not need to memorise these formulae or equations. We will know more about whether this will go ahead later this term.
- Advanced information about where to focus revision, which was provided in 2022, will **not** be provided this year. Students will need to learn and revise the whole specification as normal. Any topic could come up in the exam.
- If a student has studied the whole course but is ill during the exam period they may be able to receive a grade by sitting one paper in the qualification rather than the previous rule of 25% of the assessment, although certification of illness will be needed. More information about absence from exams will be sent at the start of summer term.
- The exam boards are currently consulting on the exam timetable. In most qualifications, there is at least a week between the first and last exam paper to ensure that if students are ill for one paper they are able to sit another.
- They are also consulting on what contingency arrangements to take this year in the unlikely case exams are cancelled in summer 2023. We will share updates on this as we become aware.

FAQs

Is it fair to return to 2019 grading?

Last year, the Department for Education and Ofqual announced their intention to return to a national pre-pandemic grade profile in summer 2023, so we were aware this was coming.

The decision means that, at a national level, grades will be roughly the same as they were in 2019 (pre-pandemic).

However, the government has put an additional safety net in place to ensure that, overall, grades in 2023 are not lower than in 2019. Because this cohort of students' learning was affected by the pandemic (although they weren't subject to national school closures during Y10 and 11, unlike the previous three cohorts), we might expect the standard of work in exams to be lower than in 2019. However, the safety net will ensure that, overall, grades are not lower than in 2019, even if the quality of work is lower at a national level.

Colleges, universities and apprenticeship-providers are aware of the changing grade profile year on year and will factor this into their decision making. Because students are largely competing for places with other students in the same year, they are not disadvantaged by this policy.

Why were grades in 2020 – 2022 higher than normal?

In 2020, schools and colleges were asked to provide a centre-assessed-grade for students. Initially, these were then rounded up or down by an algorithm. After that, the initial centre-assessed-grade was used. This was during the national lockdown.

In 2021, schools and colleges were asked to provide a teacher-assessed grade based on the work that students produced throughout their course. Because the nature of the assessment was different, and schools were told to give students the benefit of the doubt when they were between two grades, this saw a higher proportion of students nationally achieve top grades and pass grades at A level and GCSE than in normal exam years.

In 2022, the government decided to have a transition year, with grades nationally at a midpoint between 2019 and 2021. At a national level, this is what happened in the summer.

What if I or my child has been particularly affected by Covid-19?

There is no current provision to give a different grade if a student has been particularly affected by Covid. The best thing students can do is to catch up with any learning they may have lost, and to talk to their teachers about any aspects of the subject they don't understand or may have misconceptions about.

Students and teachers are no longer encouraged to test themselves for Covid. If students have symptoms, they are encouraged to isolate for three days (five days for teachers), so the impact of any Covid-related illness is likely to be a week at most.

Students may be able to receive special consideration if they are ill for one or more exam in the summer, but they must have studied the whole course to be eligible for this.

Other long-term illnesses should be discussed with your year leader. Exam boards will only award grades where a student has been able to sit an examination following long term illness. More information on special considerations protocols which are applied due to specific issues arising only at the time of examination will be shared in Summer term when published.

How can we best prepare for exams next summer?

The best way of getting ready for next summer's exams is simple: full attendance; trying hard every day; completing all classwork and homework; revising regularly; acting on feedback and marking from teachers; and reading around your subject or asking for extension work.

Mrs McGwinn and the RE department will work closely with Mr Atkins, Mr Butler and the Form tutors to ensure that all students are supported in developing both their RE specific revision strategies as well as general revision techniques as this year develops. If you have any subject specific questions, please e-mail the class teacher directly at any time.

Yours sincerely

Ms. Michelle Foy
Deputy Head teacher – Curriculum, Data and Assessment