

Queen Mary's Grammar School



QMGs updates 17-6-20

Dear parents and students

First word

I have been most encouraged to receive support and further contributions, following Mrs McPhee's think piece on the *Black Lives Matter* topic last week. I will be featuring these over the coming weeks.

We have welcomed back some members of Year 12 today and will be doing so with some of Year 10 tomorrow. As I have explained in my letter to parents of students in these year groups, we have focussed our attention on those students who have not engaged as well with the online learning. For the remainder of the students in these years, along with those in Years 7-9, the online learning continues and will do so for the remainder of term. I hope that the students are continuing with good routines and please continue to communicate with us on issues.

We have also expanded our provision for key worker children and those with vulnerabilities (across all year groups) and this week has seen the most students on site since the lockdown began. I am grateful to all staff for their part in the rotas and for the innovative practice that is happening online.

Mr Larvin has provided a thought-provoking piece for this week, considering the geography of examinations in a pandemic.

A think piece for the week

Testing Times – The Geography of Examinations in a Pandemic (Mr Larvin)

After many hours deliberating and determining grades for Year 11 and Year 13 (and rightly so) I was surprised to learn of the varied response of governments and educational systems around the world as they reacted to the COVID-19 pandemic. We might share products, music and movies around the world but despite decades of globalisation there are vast differences in examinations sat around the world.

The largest examination in the world, the Gāokǎo in China is sat by 10 million students each year determining university places. By comparison there are approximately 250,000 students sitting A-Levels each year! Over the two days when the exams are taken, construction near schools is halted, traffic diverted and the honking of horns banned. It is emblematic of the education system in China; tough but fair. The notion of an exam determining one's trajectory in life can trace its roots back to the Chinese civil service examinations of the 7th Century that laid the foundation for all educational examinations today.

Whichever country is under the lens their culture towards examinations will reflect history, values and the purpose of education in society whether that is to reward hard work or enhance social mobility. Their importance and value has been highlighted by the pandemic with some countries seemingly putting examinations ahead of health. The Gāokǎo has been delayed by one month with extra credit given to children of front-line healthcare workers in Wuhan. Hong Kong's Diploma of Secondary Education are underway with students required to report early for temperature checks, submit a health declaration and sit at a socially-distance desk, 1.8 metres away from a peer. Given the circumstances, do we even need exams? The role of teachers setting grades in the UK has stirred debate but for many educational systems this is the norm. Italy has cancelled all written examinations and will instead continue their traditional oral examinations with a smaller teacher panel. French students will not sit the Baccalaureat exam in its traditional form for the first time since its introduction in 1808 and students will instead receive an average score derived from classwork. In Norway, classwork normally accounts for 80% of a student's grade so the cancellation of written exams is manageable. The act of testing children was considered so detrimental in Norway that it was against the law until recently. By contrast, England (ranked 19th globally, one place ahead of Norway in the PISA education rankings) will introduce the 'Reception Baseline Assessment' introduced in England to measure progress. This is in addition to phonics tests in Year 1, and standardised tests in Year 2. The desire to measure performance to create accountability is a key driver of our examination culture in the UK and reflects the huge influence of neoliberalism on society and the world. Even in Estonia, a country that is ranked 8th in PISA (the highest in Europe), there is a pressure to adopt progress tests in high schools.

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The pandemic has put the purpose of our examinations under scrutiny and the attraction of examinations being fair and meritocratic has been questioned. It has accentuated the different approaches to gathering evidence in determining whether a young adult is ready for their next stage of study/life, whether by classroom activities or high-stakes examinations such as in the UK. All these examinations reflect what is valued by society; they create and shape what is measured and determine what happens in the classroom. These exams have the potential to make people.

Ofqual, the UK's examination regulatory body has reached out to other bodies around the world has been in dialogue with similar organisations around the world throughout the pandemic in a way never seen before. After highlighting vast differences in educational systems around the world, will COVID-19 change anything? Will we see a more global approach to examinations or will the 'new-normal' of exams just being more of the same?

Partial re-opening, DfE guidance and home learning

For those not required in from Years 10/12, along with all students in Years 7-9, the emphasis on home learning will continue for the summer term and we will maintain to our support via Teams and other online sources. It is important that students engage with this content and liaise with staff if there are issues. We will be issuing a timetable for Years 7-9 later this week, in order to help structure and space out learning. This will be sent to all parents and students in these year groups on Friday.

We have promoted e-safety and have given advice on online learning in previous updates (link from 1st April updates below), but please do take the time to discuss as a family these important matters, including appropriate filters and age-restrictions.

https://qmg.s.walsall.sch.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/2020_qmgs_info_updates.pdf

The DfE have also published information, guidance and support for parents and carers of secondary school age children who are learning at home during the coronavirus outbreak:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/help-secondary-school-children-continue-their-education-during-coronavirus-covid-19>

There is also new guidance on travel:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-safer-travel-guidance-for-passengers>

I will, of course, continue to keep you up to date with changes and developments.

Microsoft Teams: A guide for parents by Mrs Round

Mrs Round has recorded an explanatory video for parents on the workings of Microsoft Teams. Please take the time to watch this, in order to best support the online learning going on:

<https://youtu.be/2cGenlmhJgk>

Policy updates and risk assessment

As a result of the partial re-opening, we have updated a number of school policies, including safeguarding, behaviour, assessment and attendance. We have also published our overall risk assessment for re-opening:

<https://qmg.s.walsall.sch.uk/policies/>

It is important that all students and parents read these updates, including the acceptable use agreement (attached separately to this email) and complete the simple forms survey below to confirm this:

<https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=E1T1PdfoSEuPbjC8TawIT3BJaE5hQ4BGiUJstzCZV9ZUMzlySTdWVDBPSFITUUFWWTg1VEpNSENyVC4u>

Year 9 GCSE options (Mr Lax)

I am pleased to inform Year 9 pupils in that they have all got their first choice subjects. This is because we have expanded the number of groups in some subjects in order to accommodate the increased numbers coming through.

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If any pupils would like to change their options before September, Mr Lax may be able to accommodate some shifting but cannot guarantee that for everyone, as obviously groups will be pretty close to capacity. A parental email to Mr Lax would suffice at m-lax@qmgws.walsall.sch.uk

Walsall for All Youth Ambassador Programme and Kooth (Mrs McPhee)

Please find attached the details of a Walsall Youth Ambassador programme, where you can get a £100 grant to bring Walsall communities together - something which, given the increasing awareness of racism, is an appropriate time to be getting involved with. One QMGS pupil is already involved with this, and I know there are plenty more among you who are passionate about making positive change in the local community. Only over 13s are allowed to apply though, I'm afraid.

Also, please find at the end of this email, a reminder of mental health services that Kooth provides, especially during Pride month this month for LGBT young people, and also more general information about the organisation below: Kooth is a free, award-winning and innovative online counselling and mental health support service for young people.

Kooth gives children and young people the opportunity to access online counselling and support from qualified counsellors and emotional wellbeing practitioners who are available from 12 noon until 10pm Monday-Friday and 6pm-10pm on Saturday and Sunday, 365 days per year.

Young people can drop in for one-to-one instant text-based chats or book a session in advance. The service encourages peer to peer support via moderated discussion forums and self-help through reading or submitting content. Children and young people can also write in an online journal and use a goals tracker.

It is a safe, confidential and anonymous way for young people to access emotional wellbeing and early intervention mental health support.

Updated student loan guidance

There is some updated guidance related to student finance:
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/guidance-for-prospective-students>

Supervision of vulnerable children and those with key workers as parents

We have continued to support these children throughout half term and this week. All provision is now based at QMGS from 9am-3pm. This will not be in the form of taught lessons, rather providing a structured environment to continue with distance learning. The sessions are based in the Sixth Form centre and are supervised by our staff. Please do contact us at enquiries@qmgws.walsall.sch.uk if you would like to use this service.

Pastoral matters

We have continued our 'safe and well' calls across all year groups. Please contact Mr Collins/Mr Brown directly or refer to the website with any concerns: <https://qmgws.walsall.sch.uk/safeguarding-and-welfare-concerns/>

Mr Farnell is available from 2-4pm each week day on a school mobile (07849398033). Mrs Chatwin Can be reached between 10am-midday each week day on 07592 376697. This service is being provided for students who would like to talk to a member of the pastoral team with any concerns or worries that they might have.

QMA

Please don't forget the **Easy Fundraising scheme** – a great way of raising money for the school with very little effort during online shopping. Make sure you register, if you haven't already, at:
<https://www.easyfundraising.org.uk/causes/queenmarysgrammar/>

Final thoughts

To finish today's updates, I have been forwarded a piece of fiction writing by Mr Fadden. The work is by Jayan Bhalla of 7G and proves we can all live in hope!

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The COVID battle

Once upon a time, in a little town near the sea, was a boy called Virat. He lived near the dark, desolate cave of the monster called Covid. Covid would terrorise the town by spitting venom that would give you a deadly disease called Covid-19. Virat hadn't been infected with this disease yet, but he still felt like he had been infected with a virus, loneliness. Ever since Covid had been around, no one was aloud outside. The streets were as desolate as the furthest desert from here. Virat didn't like the idea of playing with his friends on a tiny screen. He wanted to go out and play with them in person. Life for him was hard. And he was only 8.

One day, while looking for a snack, he found a green looking substance that looked like spinach. He adored spinach, so naturally, he ate it. It tasted horrible. Nothing like spinach at all. Then he started turning green, he had a new belt full of vaccines and he had the name Vaccine Man on his chest in big, bold, bright blue letters. He turned into a superhero! He had one look at his name and posed. He solemnly swore he would defeat Covid.

As Vaccine Man flew outside, Covid came out to. His maroon coating of fur was deeper than the deepest well. His purple spikes were as sharp as a dagger. His venom was as blue as the ocean. His eyes gave a cold, dark stare at the opponent he was facing. As the battle commenced between Vaccine Man and Covid, everyone hid behind their curtains, afraid to look at this ferocious battle. The title of the battle was going everywhere. Sometimes Vaccine man was winning; sometimes Covid was winning. No one could decide who would win. But, after many close calls, Vaccine Man won the battle. Everyone cheered for him. He was their hero. Just like he dreamed. Everyone would now live happily ever after. And no more tiny screens.

THE END

With warm regards and best wishes



Richard Langton

Headmaster

Queen Mary's Grammar School, Walsall

01922 720696

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