



## Queen Mary's Grammar School

Headmaster: R J Langton, M A

12<sup>th</sup> March 2021

### **Re: Information for Year 11 and Year 13 students and parents on grading of GCSEs, A-levels and other qualifications in Summer 2021**

Dear parents and students,

It has been wonderful to welcome students back to school this week and we are very proud of the maturity that all students have shown in their approach to the Lateral Flow Tests carried out as part of the school's re-opening.

We understand that students and parents will have many questions regarding the awarding of GCSE and A Level grades this Summer. We have included some 'Frequently Asked Questions' intended to address those concerns. In addition, Ofqual has published more information [here](#).

The guidance issued by OFQUAL on Thursday 25 February gives schools some freedoms to use assessments in the widest sense to contribute towards the awarding of grades this Summer.

We still have to wait for further guidance from all exam boards, due to be released by the end of March, before we can give any further information about how and what assessments can be used towards issuing grades. This will include very important information on how teachers across the country should make grade judgements based upon the subject material that has been covered.

Rest assured, we are doing all that we can behind the scenes to ensure that all our students will be given opportunities to be awarded the grade that they deserve. Please do not contact the school or individual teachers regarding how we are going to be awarding GCSE or A Level grades this Summer. We realise that this is a particularly challenging time for all students but staff need time and space to respond to the changed landscape and are working hard to establish how previous assessments might be used and how we can use the time we have left in school to conduct further assessments in light of the guidance that has already been released and is going to be released by exam boards at the end of March. Students will be informed which assessments will be used to form their grades, before grades are submitted to the exam boards.

No assessments conducted between the return to school on March 8th and the Easter holiday will contribute towards the grade awarded. This will allow staff and students to continue to identify gaps in learning, without the additional pressure of high-stakes assessments. The important message to all students is to keep working hard, to focus upon learning new materials and to revisit previous topics in order to perform to the best of their ability in all future assessments.

Yours sincerely,

Richard Langton, Headmaster



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## Frequently-asked Questions

### 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. 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 – June. The exam boards are producing assessment materials that will be sent to us before Easter. Different



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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.

### **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 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.

### **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 student or parent 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.