

11th January 2021

Dear Year 11/12/13 Parents and Carers,

Many of you will have heard the recent announcement by the Secretary of State for Education that this summer's GCSE and A-Level exams will be determined by "teachers' assessed grades" rather than the artificial algorithm that was proposed last year and ultimately failed. We are really pleased to hear that we will be able to have significant input into the grading process.

I feel that it is important to stress that at this stage we don't know what supporting evidence will be required, and that students should not assume that their latest report grade or indeed their mock exam grades (which are due to be with you in the coming weeks), will be that which is eventually submitted.

Over the coming weeks, as we learn more about what information is required, we will start to seek this evidence from students. Last year's evidence involved a mix of classwork, homework, as well as assessments completed throughout the GCSE, A-Level or Vocational course.

I want to be clear that students that work hard over the coming months, including this lockdown period, can still make significant gains and improve their grades from our current estimates. Equally if students were to become complacent and allow their focus to drift it is quite likely that their grades could decline from their current position. Last year schools were asked to submit their evidence in late May / early June so there is plenty of time for students to shape their final outcomes. Please do encourage your child with this information.

I have recorded a brief video message for Year 11 and Year 13 students, which you and they can see here:

<https://vimeo.com/498409872/description>

Another reason for them continuing to fully apply themselves at this time is so that when they take up their final Sixth Form, College, University or Apprenticeship place in the Autumn term, they will arrive there with a really strong knowledge and skills base, raring to go – so they not only survive on their chosen courses but are ready to thrive on them.

I am delighted, once again, that we will support any Year Holyrood 11 student, regardless of the process by which their grades are allocated, to join our Sixth Form from September 2021, provided that their grades match the requirements of their courses as closely as possible. If you have any questions then you should contact Mrs Challis, Head of Sixth Form.

Students do not deserve to be disadvantaged by any process to allocate grades and although I am more confident that this year's methods will be fairer than last year's, we are determined that our students will be on the right courses next year. If interested, please encourage your child to apply here by 29th January:

<https://www.holyroodacademy.com/academy/sixthform/apply-for-sixth-form/58/>

HOLYROOD
ACADEMY



Address

Zembard Lane
Chard, Somerset
TA20 1JL

Contact

tel: 01460 260100

Email

sch.517@educ.
somerset.gov.uk

Web

www.holyrood
academy.com

Headteacher

Dave MacCormick
B.Sc Hons, M.Ed, MRes

Senior Deputy Headteacher

Sam Davison
BA Hons, MA

Deputy Headteacher

Jonathan Black
BA Hons

Deputy Headteacher

Robert Crocker
BA Hons

Assistant Headteacher

Joanne James
BA Hons

Assistant Headteacher

Greg Ireland
B.Sc

Business Manager

Tina Coles
DSBM





Mrs Challis and the Sixth Form Team will be happy to discuss options and support any young person in Year 11.

We will ensure that over the coming months the focus of our teaching is predominantly on learning (in readiness for progression to post-16 learning for Year 11 and University for Year 13) rather than endless assessments, although as I have explained there must be some of this. I would hope that students will therefore see this change in plans for their GCSEs or A-Levels as a positive from which they can each benefit.

Finally, I know that many students have been waiting for news of the BTEC exams that were due to take place in the next few weeks. Having carefully reviewed the options for Year 11 students, we have decided not to proceed with the exam in IT at this time. We feel that with the interruptions to learning that some experienced at the end of last term, combined with the impact of the Christmas break and the current lockdown, many students would go into these exams with less preparation than we would want in order for them to be successful. If students are required to sit the exams at a later point, we will enter them for the next sitting in May when hopefully things will have settled down considerably. If students are not required to complete them, then we have been assured by the exam board that they will accept evidence from the other parts of the course to still be awarded their grade in the subject.

We have, however, decided to proceed with allowing our Year 13 students to sit their January vocational exams. This is because the number of entrants is much smaller and therefore social distancing during these exams is achievable. Our Year 13 students have had focussed time with their teachers to prepare for their exams since September and both we and the students feel confident to sit them.

I will be back in touch as things progress. Until then, please direct any questions about exams or grade allocation to Mr Crocker (rcrocker@educ.somerset.gov.uk) or your child's year leader (Mrs Challis or Mr Reid).

Yours sincerely

Mr Dave MacCormick

Address

Zembard Lane
Chard, Somerset
TA20 1JL

Contact

tel: 01460 260100

Email

sch.517@educ.somerset.gov.uk

Web

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