

Hele's School

A great place to learn. A great place to grow.



Wednesday, 31 March 2021

Dear Parent/Carer,

Summer 2021 GCSE, AS, A Level and VTQ Qualifications

A lengthy letter I'm afraid, but in response to detailed guidance published by JCQ (Joint Council for Qualifications) last Friday afternoon, I'm now able to provide an overview of the most important information that you need to know about how grades will be awarded this summer.

As shared in previous communications, following the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the UK government has decided that the Summer 2021 examination series will not go ahead as planned. Instead, teachers will determine grades - known as Teacher Assessed Grades (TAGs). The TAGs will be based upon a range of evidence and will reflect your child's performance on content they have been taught. The final TAGs for each subject will be verified through strong internal and external quality assurance processes before grades are confirmed by awarding bodies in August.

In line with guidance from the exam boards, Ofqual and the Department for Education, Hele's School has developed a robust approach to ensure fair and accurate grading. Exam boards will provide schools with exemplification materials from 12th April and we will then be able to share with you further information about exam assessment materials that will be used, how and when. In the meantime, this letter serves to detail our developing approach.

JCQ published [guidance for students and parents](#) on Friday 26th March, which you may find helpful in reading to understand the context of our planning.

What is happening and when?

Hele's School is currently compiling our Centre Policy for awarding grades, which will be submitted to JCQ by **30th April**. This policy details a range of information on our approach to training of staff, using appropriate evidence, quality assurance, objectivity and addressing disruption from COVID-19, among other things. The policy will be published on the 'Awarding GCSE and A level grades – Summer 2021' section of our website, which will be live by the end of April and explicitly signposted to parents and carers.

Currently, your child's teachers are continuing with course content and completing fortnightly assessments as part of their teaching. Teachers continually assess learning to support their planning and they will continue to do so throughout Term 5, both as part of normal teaching and learning and also through supervised in-class classroom assessments. Exam boards have today securely released additional assessment materials to schools and so at the start of next term, we will be selecting some of these external materials for in-class assessment under controlled conditions - this will contribute to the portfolio of evidence we are gathering for each child to support our awarding of grades.

Assessment will take place in classrooms as part of normal lessons (except for learners with specific access arrangements) and the majority of assessment will be carried out between **Tuesday 4th May** and **Friday 21st May**. We will share with students the themes of their assessments in each subject, although we clearly won't be able to share the specific questions that will be set. Each assessment will be preceded with high-quality teaching, teacher-supported preparation and targeted revision to give students every opportunity to show what they know, understand and can do, in line with the spirit of guidance published. Teachers will receive further training on ensuring unconscious bias doesn't impact upon the grades awarded.

We will undertake moderation and standardisation in school alongside the process of assessment during the latter part of May and across the Westcountry Schools Trust in the early part of June, prior to submitting grades to the various awarding bodies by **June 18th**. ***We are instructed not to share these recommended grades with the students or their parents or carers.***

Throughout the end of June and through July, the examination boards will check our work. They will select some schools to visit so they can look in depth at portfolios and processes. Exam boards can require us to decrease or increase grades for the whole cohort and can change the grades for individual students.

In the **week of 10th August**, your child receives their results and we discover what changes the examination board made to the grades we submitted. **A level/Level 3** results will be released on **Tuesday 10th August** and **GCSE/Level 2** results will be released on **12th August**. We will decide during the summer term on how to release results and whether this will be face to face or electronically - this will depend on the government's progress against the published 'roadmap' and any restrictions in place. We will, of course, communicate arrangements as soon as we are able.

The last day of Year 11 and Year 13 involving teaching and assessment for GCSE and A level (and equivalent) courses will be **Friday 28th May**. We will be providing remote transition activities during June for students in Year 11 moving on to post-16 study and/or training, and the schedule for this will be released as soon as possible in May. We will also plan to provide optional personal development opportunities for Year 13 students during June to support them in their further study, training and/or employment.

How will students be assessed?

Teachers will initially determine grades, which will then be reviewed by heads of departments and senior leaders. The professional judgement of teachers will only be based on **what has been taught** and teachers will use a **range of evidence from across the course** of study to make their decision. Teachers do not need to assess students on every aspect of each subject.

In most cases, the range of evidence that teachers use to inform grades will be consistent across the whole class or cohort for each qualification. However, it is possible for centres to decide that a different range of evidence may be more appropriate to fairly inform an individual's grade, if, for example, they have mitigating circumstances which may have affected performance in specific assessments. Students will not be disadvantaged due to the pandemic; the evidence we use will be based only on what they have been taught.

Once we have reviewed the materials provided by awarding organisations earlier today, we will finalise the range of evidence we will use and discuss this with students throughout Term 5. We will also inform parents and carers which pieces of work will be used as evidence to inform the overall grade for each subject.

The range of evidence that we use will most likely include the following but may vary depending on the subject. For example, the evidence we will use in music and art will differ to that we will use in maths or geography.

Approved materials
Student work produced in response to additional assessment materials provided by the exam board, including: past papers; the groups of questions being provided to support evidence gathering this summer; or similar materials, such as practice or sample papers.
Where applicable, non-exam assessment (NEA) work (often referred to as coursework), <i>even if this has not been fully completed</i> . For GCSE Art and Design, the TAG will be based on the student's portfolio only.
Student work produced in centre-devised tasks that reflect the specification, that follow the same format as exam board materials and have been marked in a way that reflects exam board mark schemes. This could include substantial class or homework (including those that took place during remote learning), internal tests taken by pupils and mock exams taken over the course of study.
Records of a student's capability and performance over the course of study in performance-based subjects such as music and PE.
Records of each student's standard of work over the course of study.
For vocational qualifications (BTEC, CNAT, etc.) – evidence from completed units including examined components that have been sat previously.

For GCSE English Language and GCSE Modern Foreign Languages a separate grade or result for the spoken language is to be submitted, based on the work completed.

The range of evidence we use will be as broad as possible (meaning that there won't be excessive emphasis placed on one particular piece of work or exam question or exam paper). We will need to share the evidence we gather with the relevant awarding body in the case that they request it as part of the quality assurance process, which is why we will be retaining all evidence of student work **from 24th March**. This, in conjunction with all other sources of information we have, will allow teachers to reach an evidence-based decision to award a grade.

Teachers will not be able to discuss overall grades with students or parents and should not be asked to do so, although they will be able to discuss marks for a particular task in the spirit of supporting improvement and learning. The grade assigned for each subject will be grounded in the standard a student is performing at based on a wide range of evidence, and not on potential. It is imperative therefore, that students continue to focus on giving the very best account that they can of themselves over the coming weeks, demonstrating with commitment and hard work what they know, understand and can do.

The process we will have gone through leading up to assigning a grade can be summarised as follows:

Step 1	Consider what has been taught so that students aren't assessed on something that hasn't been taught.
Step 2	Collect the evidence from as broad a range of sources and based on as much of the qualification specification as is fair and possible.
Step 3	Evaluate the quality of the evidence so that the grade assigned at the end of the process is objective and fair.
Step 4	Establish whether the proposed range of evidence is appropriate for all students and make adjustments in the cases it isn't.
Step 5	Assign a grade using exam board grade descriptors.

When will students be assessed?

We are building a schedule of supervised in-class assessment that will take place between **Tuesday 4th May and Friday 21st May**. The reasons we are doing this are:

- to give all students every opportunity to show what they know, remember and can do so that the grade awarded is fair and the process consistently applied
- to ensure that students are not overloaded by moving from one assessment to the next each day of the in-class assessment period
- if a student qualifies for reasonable adjustments and/or access arrangements, we can ensure that they have these arrangements in place
- the benefit of this approach is that students will have the opportunity during the space between assessments to prepare for them with the guidance of a teacher, rather than facing lengthy papers covering a wide range of content in a large exam venue.

How is the evidence used?

No single piece of evidence will necessarily be more important than another, as teachers will be assessing students based on a range of evidence that can give an overall picture of their performance, however it is expected that student performance at the end of the course i.e in the assessments to be undertaken in Term 5, will be the strongest performance for most students. As such, students should continue to work hard preparing for these assessments and using it as an opportunity in each subject to show what they are capable of at this terminal point. Whilst teachers will be bringing together a portfolio of evidence for each student which includes numerous opportunities for your child to show their abilities, this final opportunity to shine should not be overlooked.

Ofqual has issued separate [guidance to schools about the submission of teacher assessed grades](#), including the evidence that can be used. At Hele's School, each department has gone through a rigorous process of identifying the best evidence available for their cohort. As explained above, this information will be shared after the Easter break.

Determining grades

Once all the evidence is selected and assessments are complete, teachers will decide on an overall grade. They will do this objectively – so, if a student is performing consistently at a specific grade e.g. a grade B at A Level, they should be awarded a grade B. We know that exam boards will also provide further advice and guidance to show the standard of work expected for particular grades, including additional grade descriptors, to supplement those previously published by Ofqual.

Subject teachers will bear in mind that many students normally achieve a higher grade on their Non-Examined Assessment than in their examinations; this will be considered when coming to the overall judgement. These points will also be kept in mind during subsequent moderation processes.

In coming to the holistic judgement, subject teachers will use their professional judgement to balance the full range of evidence available for each student and will only use evidence that they are confident reflects a student's own work. At the end of the assessment period, students will be asked to sign and date a declaration to confirm that the work contributing to the portfolio of evidence is their own and any work that has been completed in respect of Non-Examined Assessment (NEA) has been completed in line with guidance issued by the Awarding Body.

It is important to say that much like with exams in normal years, the grades issued by teachers this year will not take account of student potential but rather will be a snapshot of the standard a student is performing at based on a wide range of evidence. It should be no easier or harder for students to achieve a grade this year based on their performance than in previous years.

What happens after teachers determine a grade in each subject?

Once a teacher has determined each grade, it will be reviewed by other teachers at Hele's School, including Senior Leaders, so grades are determined consistently with our Centre Policy. Exam boards will check these policies to make sure they meet their requirements. There will also be a 'high level' consideration of our grades and the evidence base at Trust Board level, and appropriate challenge given.

Reasonable adjustments, access arrangements and special consideration

Where students have special educational needs, and/or are disabled, and require reasonable adjustments, Hele's School will have ensured that these were in place when formal assessments took place, such as mock exams. Where appropriate reasonable adjustments were not in place for informal assessments and those assessments are being used as evidence, teachers will take that into account when determining grades. In such circumstances, it may be pertinent to consider whether alternative evidence should be used instead for specific individuals.

Given that special consideration requests will not apply this summer, subject teachers will take into account where illness or other personal circumstances might have temporarily affected performance. It is important that any such instances are raised before Hele's School submits the final grades and a further reminder of this will be provided in the communication after Easter alongside the evidence base for each subject.

In the meantime, if you have any questions about how your child's personal circumstances will be taken into account or want to raise anything with us, now is the best time to make contact. For students in Key Stage 4 (Y9-11) contact should be made with Ms Clapham: clapham@heles.plymouth.sch.uk and for students at Key Stage 5, contact should be made with Mr Stone: stone@heles.plymouth.sch.uk. Students, parents and carers should not wait until after results are issued to raise any issues.

When will results be released and what happens next?

- A Level, AS and Level 3 students will receive their results on Tuesday 10th August 2021.
- GCSE students will receive their results on Thursday 12th August 2021.

As detailed above, the details on when and where students will collect results will be issued closer to the time and be based upon the public health advice at that time, taking into account social distancing measures which are still in place in August.

There will also be an appeals process which will run through August and into September. Full details are still to be released, but initial information can be found within the JCQ [guidance for students and parents](#).

In conclusion

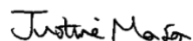
It is important to be clear on the expectation placed upon schools in terms of this process. The process carried out in normal times largely by awarding bodies has now become the responsibility of schools. The grades that we submit to awarding bodies are subject to acceptance once our processes are checked and following internal and external quality assurance, including the checking of evidence.

The fact that we now carry the responsibility for awarding grades does not mean that we will be able to award grades without firm evidence of what students know, understand and can do in each of their subjects. *We will not be able to make judgements based upon potential*; achieving a grade 7 on one exam paper once on the course might indicate potential, but without broader evidence it won't be the sole determiner of the grade submitted for that student.

We understand that securing GCSE and A Level qualifications marks an important milestone in your child's life and we offer assurances that the process will be conducted fairly, with transparency and with the gravitas it deserves and to allow your child to confidently progress to the next stage of their education or into employment.

I will write with further information to keep you updated as soon as possible and practical following the Easter break, which I hope - for our students in particular - is a restful one.

Kindest regards,



Justine Mason

Principal

Principal: Justine Mason

Seymour Road, Plympton, Plymouth, Devon PL7 4LT

Telephone: 01752 337193 Fax: 01752 331460

email: heles.school@plymouth.gov.uk website: www.heles.plymouth.sch.uk

Hele's School is part of Westcountry Schools Trust. Registered address: Harford Road, Ivybridge, Devon PL21 0AJ
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