



Date: 7<sup>th</sup> July 2021

Dear Parents and Carers,

## **LETTER FOR PARENTS REGARDING EVIDENCE FOR TEACHER ASSESSED GRADES 2021**

I am writing to share important information about the awarding of qualifications this year. This includes detail regarding:

- how grades have been calculated in 2021 for GCSE and A Level students
- how they can appeal those grades
- the Result Day process for both A Level (10<sup>th</sup> August 2021) and GCSE (12<sup>th</sup> August 2021).

### **How has my child been graded this year?**

Grades for GCSEs, A-levels, and most other qualifications including applied generals have been based on a process involving teacher assessment against national standards, internal quality assurance, and external quality assurance by exam boards.

At Durham Johnston, like other schools, we have used a range of evidence to reach a holistic judgement for each student in each subject. This includes formal assessments sat under controlled conditions, as well as a selection of non-exam assessments (coursework) and practical performances for some subjects where appropriate.

For almost all subjects, this evidence was the assessments completed in the period from the 12<sup>th</sup> April until 24<sup>th</sup> May 2021 by Year 11 and 13 students. For subjects where there was a non-exam component (coursework), this was scaled appropriately to reflect content coverage and contributed to the overall grade. Some subjects also included the October/November mock exams if this meant more of the course was assessed and the inclusion created an evidence base that was more representative of the ability of students in the cohort.

However, for most students demonstrating their ability is most easily done at the end of a period of study, as has been the case for the vast majority of our students this year despite the impact of the pandemic on their learning.

In some instances, different evidence may have been used where a student was eligible for special consideration, for example if they suffered the bereavement of a family member during the period of assessment. In these cases, we have looked for alternative sources of evidence, where appropriate, to ensure that those students had the opportunity to demonstrate their full ability. We regularly requested that parents and carers contacted us with any personal circumstances that may have impacted upon the assessment period for individual students.

You can read our Centre Policy, which has been fully approved by the relevant examination boards on behalf of the JCQ and Ofqual, [here](#). This explains the approach that we have taken as a school and is in line with the approach taken by the majority of schools in England.

### **Why were there assessments when exams were cancelled?**

National exams were cancelled in January 2021, and schools had flexibility about how to arrive at a fair and robust grade for each student in each of their subjects.

In April and May 2021, we used exam-style controlled assessments, drawing on the assessment materials provided by exam boards, as we believed this would produce the most reliable, and therefore fairest, evidence for our students.

### **What evidence has been used in each subject?**

Our [Centre Policy](#) details the rigorous approach we have taken as a school.

If there were any reasons why you think certain evidence should not be used (e.g. your child missed out on learning content for that assessment), your child must let the school or college know as soon as possible. This should be done by contacting [assessments2021@durhamjohnston.org.uk](mailto:assessments2021@durhamjohnston.org.uk), so that we can apply the mitigating circumstances to the relevant qualifications. We were very thorough when identifying appropriate assessments and considered fair and relevant content very carefully.

Please note, that teachers and leaders used their professional judgements about how to respond to mitigating circumstances; and this may have varied between subjects depending on the impact it had on the assessment sat. Any subsequent adjustments will be made in line with JCQ and Ofqual guidance and the details recorded.

### **My child usually has access arrangements (e.g. extra time) in exams. Have they this year?**

If a student was eligible for access arrangements as part of their SEND provision, these were in place for both the October/November mock examinations and for the assessments completed between 12<sup>th</sup> April until 24<sup>th</sup> May 2021.

If a student who was eligible for access arrangements did not have them for a particular assessment that is being used to inform their grade, then you can raise this with the school by contacting [assessments2021@durhamjohnston.org.uk](mailto:assessments2021@durhamjohnston.org.uk). Any subsequent adjustments will be made in line with JCQ and Ofqual guidance and the details recorded.

### **Can we know the grade submitted?**

No, we are legally obliged not to share submitted grades with students, parents or carers before the results days in August, Tuesday 10<sup>th</sup> August for A Level and Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> August for GCSE.

### **The assessments you're doing were different from other schools. How is this fair?**

Schools and colleges have been given a lot of flexibility in how they decide and reach a holistic teacher assessed grades this summer. This means that it is likely that assessments will look different in different schools and colleges, even those in the same area. This was outlined nationally at the start of the process by Ofqual.

As students should only have been assessed on what they had been taught, to account for variations in lost learning due to the pandemic, the range of evidence will differ between schools and colleges, and even, in a small number of cases, between students within our school.

Our approach has been approved by the exam boards; but many different approaches have also been approved. This does not mean one approach is better than the other and it is very difficult to compare the results achieved in different schools on that basis.

### **I don't think my child's teacher will judge them fairly?**

All staff at Durham Johnston Comprehensive School have undergone objectivity and bias training. This is detailed in our Centre Policy, which has been approved by the exam boards on behalf of the JCQ and Ofqual.

All of the grades have been signed off by two members of staff, including the Subject Lead, for each individual subject. All grades went through an internal quality assurance process involving all members of the school's senior leadership team and were finally signed off by the Headteacher, Mr O'Sullivan.

As part of the process, we were also required to send off a number of samples of assessed work to the exam boards to ensure that our grades are fair and accurate.

## **My child needs a particular grade for university / college; what can I do to make sure they get it?**

It is important that neither students nor their parents or carers put undue pressure on classroom teachers or Subject Leads to submit a certain grade. If a member of staff feels that pressure is being applied, we will first raise this with you directly.

If the pressure continues, we have been instructed to report this (whether from parents or students) to the exam boards as potential malpractice.

If you want to raise genuine mitigating circumstances with us, then please do through the channels outlined above.

### **What is exam malpractice?**

According to JCQ, exam malpractice this year includes students fabricating evidence (e.g. claiming plagiarised or copied work as their own), they or their parents placing undue pressure on teachers to submit a certain grade, as well as teachers fabricating evidence.

If malpractice is proven, the exam boards may decide to withhold the qualification altogether.

Our approach to authenticating evidence is set out in our [Centre Policy](#).

### **How can I appeal?**

If your child is unhappy with their grade this summer, they will have the opportunity to resit all GCSEs and A-levels in the autumn term. These will be externally assessed examinations.

There is also the option to appeal a grade on the following grounds:

- **an administrative error** – you think the school has submitted the wrong grade for you;
- **procedural error** - you think the school did not follow our process correctly;
- **error of academic judgement** – you do not think the grade submitted reflects a reasonable judgement on either the evidence that was used, or the grade arrived at.

All appeals will first be processed as a centre review. Following the outcome of a centre review, students can choose to take forward an appeal to the exam board(s), which we will do on their behalf. Details of how to request a centre review will be available before results days on our website.

**Please note that at any stage of the appeals process a student's grade(s) could go up or down.** *If the appeal process decides that the submitted grade was too high, students will **not** be able to keep the higher grade.* We will require students to sign a declaration saying that understand this before they submit an appeal. All appeals should be considered very carefully on this basis, but appeal is an important right for all students.

### **My child has work at a higher grade than the work used as evidence. Can they appeal?**

Just having a higher-graded essay is not, in itself, grounds for mitigating circumstances – although this request will be recorded.

When it comes to appeals, exam boards will be considering whether any teacher acting reasonably could have used the same evidence and reached the same judgement. This is different to whether other alternatives would have been equally as valid.

### **How will my child find out their results this year?**

#### **A Levels**

A Level Results day is **Tuesday 10<sup>th</sup> August 2021**. Year 13 students should come into school where they will be able to collect their results in person from 8.30a.m.

**Please note** – the atrium floor in the main school building is being replaced throughout the summer period, limiting access. Students will be directed to enter the building via the Sports Hall.

Students who require additional support and guidance in relation their results will be able to receive it on the day from the 6<sup>th</sup> Form team and, for those who need it, this process will continue the following afternoon or early in the next week.

**Year 12 students will receive any AS results electronically on that day and should not travel into school.**

Year 12 students should continue to monitor their school email account where they will receive additional information about the process, including if we are forced to make any changes due to the ongoing pandemic. We will also post any updates on the school website.

### GCSEs

GCSE Results day is **Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> August**. Year 11 should come into school where they will be able to collect their results in person from 8.30am.

**Please note** – the atrium floor in the main school building is being replaced throughout the summer period, limiting access. Students will be directed to enter the building via the Sports Hall.

There will be a flowchart in the results to help students with what they should do next. Students who are intending to continue their studies at our 6<sup>th</sup> Form will have two choices.

1. If they are happy to continue with the A Level courses they have already chosen, they will be able to engage in a fast-track enrolment process, in the Sports Hall i. at the same time as collecting their results.
2. If they wish to discuss any aspect of their application, for example they are considering studying a different combination of subjects than those previously selected, they should attend an individual interview in the Activity Studio at the following times:

APPLICANT - Individual interviews ( <b>Surname A - C</b> )	9.00
APPLICANT - Individual interviews ( <b>Surname D - G</b> )	9.45
APPLICANT - Individual interviews ( <b>Surname H - L</b> )	10.30
APPLICANT - Individual interviews ( <b>Surname M - O</b> )	11.15
APPLICANT - Individual interviews ( <b>Surname P - S</b> )	12.00
APPLICANT - Individual interviews ( <b>Surname T - Z</b> )	12.45

Year 11 students should continue to monitor their school email account where they will receive additional information about the process, including if we are forced to make any changes due to the ongoing pandemic. We will post updates on the school website

Yours faithfully

**A J O'Sullivan**  
Headteacher



**Headteacher:**

A J O'Sullivan BA, MA

**Deputy Heads:**

J Bell BSc, MA  
R McFadden MEng  
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