



26 March 2021

Dear Students, Parents and Carers,

Our GCSE and A level students have settled into routines again very quickly and deserve real credit for working hard with their teachers since their return. They have been completing work, asking questions and consolidating prior knowledge.

We have also been working very hard, as instructed by Ofqual, to plan a programme of school assessment for the summer term. Mr Wright shared our planning with Year 11 students via an assembly yesterday and Mrs Lennon has written to Year 13 students and has visited form classes to discuss next steps.

We now want to share our plans with parents and carers. There are a number of key points that we hope will provide clarity about the guidance and support that we will offer our students between 12<sup>th</sup> April and 28<sup>th</sup> May 2021. Many students will complete their assessments prior to the 28<sup>th</sup> May, but families should also note that the timings of assessments may need to change if, for example, the pandemic disrupted schooling yet further.

**Key Point 1: We have created a programme of assessment that is fair, robust and intended to offer all students a number of chances to succeed and to demonstrate their ability.**

- Each department has set out a programme of subject specific assessment opportunities.
- Each departmental programme has been shared via Teams and explained by class teachers.
- The programme of assessment will run between 12<sup>th</sup> April and 28<sup>th</sup> May and will allow time to revise, to practise exam technique, to address any misunderstandings and for students to complete a range of assessments in the classroom.
- Students will not be judged on individual pieces of work, but will build up a portfolio of evidence that will be used as an endorsement of their ability and potential.
- Our programme of assessment will be based upon students providing evidence of their ability in a supportive environment that prioritises their well-being.

**Key Point 2: Ofqual have been very clear that schools need to be given time to plan and work closely with students; any attempts to influence grades should be viewed as malpractice.**

- Ofqual have identified that Headteachers, *"should be careful to avoid teachers being put under pressure from students, parents or carers to submit grades that are higher than the evidence supports. They should keep records of such cases and might be required to report to the exam boards any cases where they believe inappropriate pressure is being put on teachers"*.
- We will follow this guidance as instructed, but it is important that parents and carers are fully aware that we will do all that we can to support students and want the best possible outcomes for them. We have created an assessment programme that provides a number of opportunities to succeed. Please trust that we will do this in a professional and well planned manner.

**Key Point 3: We have created a programme of school assessment, not individual teacher grading. We are working within a national system.**

- We have a whole school programme of assessment that will be based upon evidence that will be reviewed and checked a number of times. Each student will be treated fairly and we will consider as much evidence as possible before assigning any school awarded grade.
- The assessment programme involves a series of subject specific assessments completed in class.
- Those assessments will be different in terms of number and length based upon the demands of each subject. For example, some subjects have practical elements, others have coursework.
- Assessments will be marked and moderated by a range of teachers within departments. This is to ensure fairness and is in line with guidance from Ofqual in terms of best practice.
- The assessment programme is one part of a wider jigsaw that includes a range of evidence. It includes optional assessments from a 'toolkit of resources' created by exam boards. Exam boards have promised to make these available via their websites in April.
- We will work closely with Ofqual, a range of exam boards, professional associations and other schools to ensure that our assessment programme is fair and ethical.

**Key Point 4: There are a number of important things to be aware of that might seem confusing based upon some national coverage of the process. We'd like to offer clarity here.**

- Our Year 11 and 13 students are not completing a set of high stakes external exams, where they only have one chance to succeed. They will have a number of opportunities, will be in school and will be able to work with their trusted teachers throughout the April and May period. This will be a unique experience and is not something that you will be familiar with as a parent or carer with older children.
- Our assessment programme has been designed to create a number of opportunities for students to provide evidence of their ability across a broad range of questions. This is an evidence based whole school assessment programme.
- Final grades will be based upon a range of evidence, not a single assessment or piece of work. Students have covered different amounts of content, therefore the evidence that we use may differ.
- We are a high performing school and our students consistently achieve excellent results. We expect the assessment programme that we have designed to give our current students the opportunity to repeat that traditional success.

**Key Point 5: This will be a supportive process for all students, both in school and nationally.**

- We have arranged assemblies for all Year 11 and 13 students in the week beginning 12<sup>th</sup> April. Mrs Lennon, Mr Wilbraham, Mr Bowman and Form Tutors will offer consistent daily support. We will work hard to prioritise their wellbeing throughout.
- Students should start to revise, plan and practise over the Easter holiday. Organisation is key to success. We will offer regular advice and guidance throughout the assessment period via the website and with shared materials in class and in Teams.
- As parents, you can encourage your child to eat healthily, stay hydrated, to take regular breaks and to get enough sleep.

- There will be opportunities for after school revision, support and physical exercise. To make sure that all of our students can access this provision, we have arranged for additional buses to be available to transport students home, leaving at 4.30 p.m. every Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday between 12<sup>th</sup> April and 20<sup>th</sup> May. One of the buses will travel in the direction of Brandon, the second towards Shincliffe. There will be no charge for students. This is expensive for the school and difficult to sustain without sponsorship, but we want students to be able to access our support if needed. Other year groups will also be able to access this additional provision.

**Key Point 6: This will be a very busy period of time for the school, but we will continue to prioritise communication.**

- We have created a fair and robust assessment programme that will support our students and help them to succeed. We will work incredibly hard during the next half-term to offer support and guidance and our teachers will be undertaking a considerably higher volume of work. We are happy to do so, as it will directly benefit our students. Teachers will need time to complete this work.
- Please direct any queries to the following email address: [assessments2021@durhamjohnston.org.uk](mailto:assessments2021@durhamjohnston.org.uk) and do not write directly to individual teachers or departments. The programme of assessment will be co-ordinated at a whole school level and we have been advised to keep a record of all communication by Ofqual.
- We will continue to offer weekly updates for parents and carers. We are expecting important updates over Easter and on the 16<sup>th</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> April.

**Key Point 7: It has been a difficult year and there might be things that we are unaware of concerning your child.**

- In a normal year we often write to exam boards seeking 'special consideration' if a student has had a serious medical illness or if their family has suffered a bereavement. We are already aware of many difficult experiences that our students have had since March 2020 and have offered considerable support. It is very important that we are made aware of similar experiences that your child may have had, but that you have not shared with us. Quite clearly, coping with bereavement or serious medical illness is very difficult. Please write to us using the following email address, [assessments2021@durhamjohnston.org.uk](mailto:assessments2021@durhamjohnston.org.uk), if you have not had the opportunity to inform us of a major medical illness or family circumstance that you feel is important. Please use the phrase 'Special Consideration' in the title of your email and, if appropriate, attach any relevant medical documentation

**Key Point 8: We have a clear plan and are also keen for you to understand the timescale that we will be working to.**

- **8th March to 26th March** – Consolidation in school and assessment programme planned.
- **27th March to 12th April** – Revision and organisation at home.
- **12th April to 28th May** – Programme of assessment completed for each subject in school.
- **12th April to 18th June** – Internal checking to ensure fairness and accuracy. This will be a consistent aspect of the process.
- **18th June to 14th July** – Possibility of external visit(s) from exam boards to check fairness and accuracy.
- **10th & 12th August** – A Level and GCSE results days.

**Key Point 9: There is additional information that students have been patiently waiting for.**

- School life is usually based upon rituals and school years usually end with important rites of passage. We are working with the venues that we have booked to see if there is any likelihood of either a Year 11 Prom, or Year 13 Leavers' Ball going ahead. If not, we will arrange for a celebration in school if at all possible. Please don't buy any expensive clothes or make arrangements yet, but we are hopeful that we will be able to celebrate with our students in June or July.
- Similarly, we hope to be able to announce leaving dates soon. We are currently waiting for a national announcement and working with other local schools to co-ordinate our planning.

I'm aware that this is a long letter, but we have been working very hard to create a fair programme of assessment that will afford all students the opportunity to succeed and to take their next steps. I hope that the information is useful.

I'll conclude by noting something that I hope is obvious, but that cannot be stated too frequently; I and all the staff of the school have the best interests of our students at heart, as do you as families. We know your children well and we share and support their ambitions as you do. Everyone involved in this process will need to work hard but no one will be denied an opportunity to be successful. I thank you for your support as I know your children will be grateful of that too.

Yours sincerely,

*A J. O'Sullivan*

**A J O'Sullivan  
Headteacher**

