



HAMPSTEAD SCHOOL

Learning together Achieving together

19 August 2020

Dear student, parent/ carer

I hope this letter finds you well and those close to you also.

I write to inform you of the current situation of the awarding of qualification grades this summer and to provide some clarity in ways forward subsequent to receiving those grades. I apologise for the length of this letter, but feel the detail contained within is necessary to fully inform and advise on any resulting decisions or choices subsequent to the issuing of grades.

You will be aware from recent news and media reports of the confusion and controversy surrounding the grades awarded to students who would have taken examinations this year. Last Thursday 13 August was Level 3 results day, mainly for Years 12 and 13 and the awarding of A- and AS-Level grades. This week, Thursday 20 August, will be Level 2 results day, mainly for Year 11 and the awarding of GCSE grades.

It may help to give some background to the current situation and the decision announced by the Secretary of State for Education on Monday 17 August regarding which grades count as the award of the qualification taken this summer.

When schools were closed on 20 March 2020 due to the Covid-19 lockdown the government also made the decision to abolish the summer examination series. They then charged schools with the task of submitting a 'teacher assessed' predicted grade for each student in each subject examination they were due to take. We had to estimate the *most likely grade they would have achieved* if they sat the examination this summer (a Centre Assessed Grade or CAG). They also asked us to uniquely rank all students with the same grade from most secure to least secure at that grade (a Single Rank Order or SRO). We, as a school, undertook this duty with a robust, objective and fair process of moderation, standardisation and discussion of every student in every subject taking into account key assessment performance in pre-public examinations, continual assessment results, classwork, homework and a whole host of other relevant information and data. We also estimated, by comparison with previous years, a cautious but likely improvement from the time schools were closed until the usual examination time period given the student's prior attainment and attitude to revision and studies, for example. This is the form of the teacher assessments you may have heard so much about in the media in recent days. This work was undertaken during April and May during lockdown and submitted as required to examination boards in early June.

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The examination boards, regulator and government then applied a national system of statistical moderation and standardisation based partly on a school's prior performance, student's prior attainment and other factors to try and ensure 'comparable' outcomes and modify the CAG submitted by schools. This is the, until recently, *unpublished algorithm* mentioned in the media that has reportedly downgraded approximately 40% nationally of A-level grades from those submitted by schools in June. At Hampstead, we saw individual grades downgraded by 1 or more grades in many cases.

Just before the release of Level 3 results last week, the government announced they would allow appeals of the final awarded grades, if students felt they had been treated unfairly by the system. Students could use a better previously achieved mock examination result if it met certain criteria. They would not allow the previously submitted CAG teacher assessments to stand, even though these are, in our case, partly based on those mock results. The allowable mock examination criteria were subsequently published and then retracted over the weekend. Students could also opt to sit an actual examination in an extraordinary examination season in the autumn if they choose to do so.

There has been much reporting and lobbying to change the arrangements last week as being unfair and resulting in many individual injustices as the statistical moderation applied to large cohorts do not take into account individual students circumstances or performance. The effect of the statistical techniques applied appears to have been beneficial to schools with smaller classes in/or minority subjects and detrimental to those with larger classes/ cohorts such as large comprehensive schools like Hampstead.

All of this has culminated in the announcement on Monday 17 August **reinstating** the CAG submitted by teachers as the key modifier to any final awarded grade published last Thursday for A- and AS-levels and will now also be the case for the GCSE grades awarded this Thursday. **Whichever is the higher grade will stand.**

To summarise:

Valid grades:

- **For Level 3 A- and AS- level** students already with awarded grades, will have these **re-issued**:
 - A-Level students – the CAGs submitted are available for collection at the school reception. Year 13 students may wish to collect to use in conversations with universities regarding course placements for this autumn. When examination boards have re-issued the new corrected grade these will be sent to students via post this week.
 - Continuing AS-Level students – you will have already been contacted if the advice from last week has changed given the revising of the grades awarded. Please contact Mr Ackland or Mr Hague if this is the case or if there are any further queries.
- **For Year 11 students** (e.g. GCSE) – the grade awarded on Thursday 20 August will be **whichever is higher** of the final awarded grade or the CAG. **This will count** and will be used for progression to 6th form placements.

Appeals

We are currently awaiting details on the appeals process, especially following the latest announcement concerning the awarding of grades. However, we believe, any appeal will only be possible against the process of arriving at the grade, not the value of the grade awarded. It will only result in a changing of grade if an error has been made in the process. If so, this may require consent. In order to speed up this potential process **please complete the informed consent slip**, by default, so we can organise any request without delay (see end of this letter).

As at the time of writing, we believe any appeal will not incur cost as in previous years. To make an appeal you must do so through the school and have clear evidence on what basis you are making the appeal. More details may follow on this matter and please talk to the examination office, in the first instance, to explain this.

Extraordinary Examination Series:

Students, parent/ carers may wish to choose to sit an actual examination in the extraordinary examination season that will take place this autumn (A & AS level from 5 – 23 October and GCSE from 2 to 23 November). If this is to be the case, entries must be made by:

- Level 3 - A Level or AS level by 4 September 2020
- Level 2 GCSE (excluding English Language and Maths) by 18 September 2020
- Level 2 GCSE English Language and Maths by 4 October 2020

To do so, please email the examinations office and provide payment for the cost of the examinations to be taken.

I must make students and parents/ carers aware – due to Covid-19 restrictions and guidance, it is not guaranteed that the school will be a venue for this extraordinary examination series in the autumn. This is mainly due to social distancing restrictions whilst conducting the usual term time provision with all students returning to school in September. As yet, these details are not finalised and will partly depend on numbers requesting to sit the examinations. Further details will follow regarding this provision when finalised. However, entries will be made through the school as an examination centre.

As yet, BTEC courses have not been subject to the changes detailed for the A-level or GCSE courses regarding the awarding of grades and the only grade we are aware that will count is that which has been or will be awarded by the examination board. This is partly due to the different assessment profiles (some elements may have already been verified, for example) and a slightly different process being undertaken in the determination of teacher assessed components of any final grade. As such, if students feel unfairly marked then they will need to make an appeal through the school to the examination board to investigate the process undertaken in determining the grade. This may result in the grade not changing, being raised or lowered following any subsequent appeal. Again, please complete the consent form following this letter to speed up the processing of any requests.

I hope this letter helps in informing all about how grades have been arrived at and what is now a valid grade given all the media coverage. I also hope it simplifies the choices available to students, parents/ carers subsequent to the issuing of grades this summer. We recognise this has been a concerning and potentially confusing time for our students in a fast changing and uncertain situation where information has not always been clear.

As always, if unsure please contact the school and we will endeavour to help with your query as quickly and as expediently as possible. However, please also recognise, we may not have been made aware of all the information that may be required to fully answer your query or advise.

Yours faithfully



Dr Adam Hadley
Assistant Head

Informed Consent for Appeal

We are still waiting for information from the Government about the appeals system but in the meantime (and if nothing changes) the JCQ regulations state the following:

“Any action taken by the awarding body to rectify an error identified as the result of an appeal could result in grades being raised or lowered or remaining the same for those candidates on whose behalf the appeal has been made. A centre must therefore obtain the written consent of all candidates for whom an appeal is being submitted and keep a record of that consent.”

By completing the below details you will be giving consent and acknowledgment of the above.

Name:

Signature:

Date: