



Our Ref: IDW/SJT/EST

Date: 19 March 2021

Dear Students, Parents & Carers

In our last update we shared with you the broad outline of how exam grades will be awarded this summer for our Year 11 and Year 13 students. We can now share more information about this process and how it will operate at George Stephenson High School.

Overview of how grades will be awarded this summer

Formal exams will not take place this summer and grades for GCSEs, A levels, and most other qualifications will be based on a process involving teacher assessment against national standards, internal quality assurance, and external quality assurance by the exam boards.

The national process defined by the Department for Education and the exams' regulator, Ofqual is as follows:

1. Teachers will **assess students against a national standard**, which will be defined by the exam boards before the Easter break.
2. Departments will submit grades which will be **quality assured by the school / college**. This internal quality assurance process will have to be signed off by the exam board to ensure it is rigorous and in line with national standards.
3. Our school or college results will be **quality assured externally** by the exam boards, which may include random sampling of our school or college's evidence.
4. If the exam boards are confident in our submitted results, **then the exam boards will award students their final grades**.
5. If students do not think their results are accurate, they will have the right to **appeal**.

How this will work at George Stephenson High School

Although we are still waiting for further information from the exam boards and JCQ, we are sharing our outline plans with parents and students at this stage because we want to give students, parents and staff some clear guidance as we approach the end of term and the Easter break. If we were to wait for the exam boards to release their assessment materials, we are concerned that there would not be sufficient time for adequate preparation on all sides, which would be unfair to our students. Our plan is therefore as follows;

- Most subjects will carry out assessments between Easter and May half term (7 weeks). These will provide evidence towards awarding final grades. Although we already hold

Southgate, Killingworth, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE12 6SA

T: 0191 216 1115

E: enquiries@gshs.org.uk

W: www.gshs.org.uk

Headteacher: Ian D Wilkinson BA (Hons) MEd
Deputy Headteacher: Peter Douthwaite BSc (Hons)
Deputy Headteacher: Kathryn Williams BA (Hons)

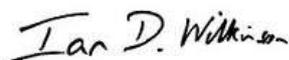
some assessment evidence, this varies between subjects and students, and we want to provide students with further opportunities to do the very best they can.

- We will be using our own assessment materials for the first assessment and students will be given further details about these by their subject teachers before the Easter holiday. These assessment materials will be standardised across each subject and will usually consist of past paper tasks or questions. We want to provide students with a clear focus for their revision and preparation over the Easter holiday and this will not be possible if we wait for exam board materials to be released.
- Most subjects are then planning to use the exam board assessment materials for subsequent assessments, but at the moment we do not know what these will look like, so things may still change. These materials are not due to be released until Easter so teachers will need to have a close look at these before providing further information to students.
- Assessments will take place in lessons and classrooms and not in larger venues. They will be supervised by teachers who will ensure that the work produced is the students' own.
- Teachers will give students advance notice about when assessments will take place. Assessments will be shortened to fit them comfortably into lesson time. This means that students may complete several short assessments in a subject rather than a couple of longer ones. This will give students several 'chances to shine' in a subject. Assessments will cover only the content covered.
- We will ensure that those students who qualify for access arrangements such as extra time will receive the support that they need.
- Teachers will mark the assessments and the school will have internal quality assurance processes in place to make sure that teachers' grades are not too harsh or too lenient.
- Exam boards will also quality assure the school's work as it is they who ultimately award the grades. They will check that our internal processes are as fair as possible and may ask to review evidence in one or more subjects.
- Teachers are allowed to inform students about how they have done in assessments, but are not allowed to tell students the final grade they have submitted. Parents and students should not place teachers under pressure to provide grades, or make them feel uncomfortable with grade decisions.
- Results days have been brought forward to the 10th August (A-Levels) and 12th August (GCSEs).
- An appeals process will be in place as will an autumn exam series for students unhappy with their grade. It is important to note that an appeal can result in grades going down as well as up.

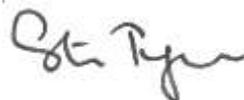
We hope that you will find this information useful. We believe that these plans will give all of our students the chance to do their very best and as staff we will do our best to support and guide our students through this process. Students should continue to attend school, work hard, revise and listen to the advice and guidance from their teachers in order to give

themselves the best possible chance of success. We would like to wish all of our students the very best of luck in their assessments.

Yours sincerely



MR I.WILKINSON
Headteacher



MR S.TYSON
Assistant Headteacher

Awarding of Exam Grades Summer 2021 - Frequently Asked Questions

So, do teachers award the grade?

The grade students achieve will start with their teacher's assessment of their performance across a range of evidence. This is against a nationally-defined standard, not the teacher's own opinion. This assessment is then subject to both internal and external quality assurance before the final grade is awarded by the exam body as usual.

Does this mean grades are decided by an algorithm?

No, unlike last year, students' grades will not be changed by a formula. The internal and external quality assurance measures will all be done by humans, not an algorithm. There is no limit on the achievement of students, providing they have evidence that they are working at that grade.

What about loss of learning / impact of Covid?

This year, teachers will only assess students on content they have been taught – because of the continued disruption of the pandemic. This means students will not be disadvantaged if they individually, their whole class or whole year group have been unable to complete their full course. However, grades can only be submitted on the basis of the evidence we have of students' performance, even if that evidence covers less of the course than usual. Students who would usually have extra time in the exams or other access arrangements will benefit from the same arrangements in these assessments.

Will grades be different between different schools and colleges?

The standard against which teachers will be assessing students is set nationally by the exam boards. This is the standard that will be used during external quality assurance and appeals to ensure consistency and fairness across the system. Schools maybe using different evidence but the standards should be the same.

What evidence will be used?

Teachers are able to draw on a range of assessment evidence up until 28th May. Different subjects may use different sources of evidence, and there is no requirement for any one type of assessment to be used – it's about a performance across a range of evidence. We have given more details on our plan for carrying out these assessments above.

The exam boards are only giving out past papers, how is this fair?

Most of the assessments provided by the exam boards will be drawn from past papers, although there may be new questions as well. There is significant research that even if students have seen assessments questions before, it does not reduce the validity of the assessment. Furthermore, exam board questions are only one part of the evidence we will use to assess students this summer.

Can students and parents make the case for why a student should get a higher grade?

Our teachers are already using their professional expertise to assess students on the content they have been taught. Teachers are unable to submit higher grades for students unless they have the evidence that they are consistently working at this level. If teachers submit higher grades without evidence they are committing exam malpractice.

If students or parents are found to be putting teachers or leaders under undue pressure to increase grades, then this matter will be referred to the exam boards and an investigation into malpractice may ensue. This can have serious consequences if it is deemed to have taken place.

Can students discuss their grades with teachers?

Teachers will be able to discuss which evidence they are using to inform their judgement with students, including marked or graded pieces of work. However, we are not allowed to disclose the final submitted grade we give to the exam board.

What should students do to improve their grades?

The best thing students can do is to continue to attend classes, learn, act on feedback from their teachers, revise, and read around their subject. Their grade will be based on their performance, and so their outcomes are ultimately in their hands. The first assessments will take place after Easter. Students should listen carefully to what their teachers tell them about the timing and details and prepare fully for assessments to give themselves the best possible chance of success.