

18 March 2021

Dear Parents and Carers

I am writing to update you on the approach and general principles that HSDC will be taking to the awarding of teacher assessed grades (TAGs) for summer 2021.

I must stress from the start that although the government has published the outcomes of its consultation, we still await individual exam board guidance which we expect at the end of March or beginning of April.

However, with so much anxiety for students, parents and staff and the level of misinformation in the public domain, I felt I should set out the parameters we are working to.

Firstly, it is vital that students continue to engage with their studies. After so much disruption to studying we now have 8-9 weeks of classroom teaching ahead of us and I would ask that you please encourage your sons and daughters to make the most of this to continue their learning, develop skills and take any further opportunities to demonstrate their abilities and indeed to successfully progress to university or employment.

HSDC is collaborating with national and local networks of colleges to ensure our implementation of Ofqual's guidance is both accurate and in alignment with the sixth form/FE sector.

We are closely following the guidance provided by Ofqual's consultation decisions on how GCSE and A level grades will be determined in summer 2021.

At present, teachers are working together with managers to ensure the range of assessments contributing to the evidence base for assessed grades enables students to show their best abilities. This will be tailored to the needs of the subject but will consistently be in line with the requirements set by Ofqual.

Ofqual advises that teachers "can use evidence of a student's performance from throughout the course to inform their judgement". We are also required to "determine the grades as late in the academic year as it is practicable and not be confined to a defined window, to **enable teaching to continue for as long as possible**". Evidence will therefore include past assessments and we will ensure students have further opportunities to show us what they are capable of achieving.

The system developed by the Department for Education and Ofqual requires us to gather a range of evidence about each student in each subject and come to a professional judgement about the grade they have attained.

The process of putting together the best range of evidence is on-going and will be a considered, moderated process over the next few weeks. Once we are satisfied the best possible portfolio of opportunity has been created for each course, we will share it with students. However, this does not mean we will be telling students their TAGs, which of course we cannot enter into.

This could include:

- student work produced in response to assessment materials provided by the exam board, including groups of questions, past papers or similar materials such as practice or sample papers
- non-exam assessment (NEA) work (often referred to as coursework), even if this has not been fully completed
- 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
- substantial class or homework (including those that took place during remote learning)
- internal tests taken by pupils
- 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, drama, and PE
- records of each student's progress and performance over the course of study

Not everyone will like or agree with every aspect that is included in the evidence base, but I assure you it will be considered carefully by the teachers to ensure a balanced approach by individual subject.

What happens in individual subjects will vary according to the specific needs of that subject and the assessment that is needed at the end of the course will be shaped by how that course is organised, and by assessments that have already taken place.

Once the agreed evidence is complete the teachers concerned will come to a view about the grade they feel the student should be awarded, informed by the evidence base. Ultimately the grade awarded is a teacher's professional judgement.

A key parameter set by Ofqual is that "Overall, it will be no easier or harder for a student to achieve a particular grade this year compared to previous years." A Levels and GCSE students of previous years achieved grades within timed conditions without resources available at the time of assessment: the overall range of evidence that goes towards the setting of TAGs must respect that.

The College will complete internal quality assurance processes on the grades awarded. Our processes will ensure that we have the evidence to substantiate the grades that are awarded.

Awarding bodies will conduct external quality assurance once the grades have been submitted.

The arrangements for vocational subjects such as BTECs, Cambridge Technical qualifications and WJEC Diplomas are different, but follow the same general principles as A level and GCSE. Teachers will be required to set a teacher assessed grade for every student, but these grades must be set with reference to the unit assessments that students will have completed during their course. It is vital that students on vocational courses continue to work towards these assessments. There will be no written assessments under exam conditions for the majority of BTEC or Cambridge Technical qualifications, but there will be some exceptions including written exams for the Criminology and Medical Science diplomas, Level 3 Health Care and other provision leading to licence to practice. Again, students will be informed at a course level by their teachers.



I again stress that individual exam boards have yet to publish their guidance and so there may be some adaptations to what I describe.

I ask for your continued patience whilst the college agrees with teachers their plans for the evidence base for individual subjects and again ask that students continue as they have been with their learning in their range of subjects.

Regarding results, for Level 3 qualifications, including AS Level, A Level and Level 3 Vocational and Technical Qualifications the results will be issued on 10 August 2021.

For Level 2 qualifications such as GCSEs and Level 2 Vocational and Technical Qualifications the results will be issued on 12 August 2021.

It has been great to welcome students back; I have personally spoken to many during the testing process and the overarching response to being back on campus has been positive. Of course, there are still understandable ongoing concerns and anxieties but in working collectively we can ensure students do achieve and meet their potential. They have been overwhelmingly brilliant in continuing to engage through to this point and it is so important that their resilience and determination does not in any way lessen at this point.

Thank you again to all who have written in with their letters of support and encouragement. They have made such a difference to my staff.

Kind regards,



Mike Gaston
Principal and Chief Executive

