



Dear all,

I am writing to update you on the situation regarding the cancellation of the summer exams. I shall never forget talking to most of you last week when the announcement was made. Despite telling you that you would likely have 6 months off school and not have to sit any exams, not one person reacted with anything other than maturity, thoughtfulness and with genuine concern about what this meant for the future. The staff present felt heartbroken that your hard work seemed to be about to count for nothing; 50 of you attended school on Saturday mornings doing everything possible to give yourselves the best future. I know many of you were very upset and could not see past this, compounded by the circumstances surrounding the cancellation that we have all struggled with in some way.

Throughout the day though, it became clear that we are right to be proud of you and I increasingly believe that despite this incredibly unfair situation, the resilience, character and, quite frankly, class that so many of you showed will get you through this and you will be fine. I genuinely believe this and stand by the comments I made to you that morning:

- We will continue to do everything we possibly can to ensure you get the grade you deserve.
- No student will be denied entry to the Marsh Academy Post 16, based on their results being lower than expected.
- Where students are applying to other local provisions, for example college or apprenticeships. I will personally call the organisation to support your application if this is needed. This also applies to Post 16 students applying to universities.
- We will do everything we can to make sure the end of your Year 11/Post 16 can still be celebrated (even with short notice) and I hope you felt we gave you the opportunity for a goodbye, despite the circumstances. We will still do Leavers' Hoodies and I commit to still giving Year 11 a Prom, even if the change in date means some of you are in your twenties!

We now have some idea of how grades will be allocated, but there are still far more questions than answers and we do not know the detail. Essentially, the government say they are aiming for grades to still be awarded to you for all the qualifications you have been taking. They also aim to provide these grades to you by the end of July and ensure that the grades reflect fairly the work you have put into your subjects.

This is clearly a challenging task and, in my view, there is unfortunately no way to do this so that everyone can feel that it is completely fair. However, it is also true that assessing students solely on end of course exams, may not have been the fairest way to award grades for some of you.

How will they produce the grades?

- They will ask your teachers to make a judgement about the grade they believe you would have got if you had sat the exams.
- This judgement will take into account mock exam results, classwork as well as any non-examined assessment you have completed as well as in some vocational courses, units that have been completed and moderated.
- They will then combine the judgements made by your teachers with other data which is available on students (e.g. Key Stage 2 results where these are available).
- These two sets of information will be part of what is used to calculate your final grade in each subject.

What happens if I am not happy with the grade I am awarded?

- You will be able to appeal if you believe the grade awarded is too low.

- You will also be able sit an exam 'at the earliest opportunity' in each subject if you are still unhappy with the grade (the timing of this will depend on when the virus outbreak is contained and things return to 'normal'.)
- You will also be able to sit your exams in summer 2021 if you wish to.

Things to note:

- We are unsure from the government's document how many exams you will need to take in each subject if you decide to sit them 'at the earliest opportunity' or in summer 2021.
- These proposals are sketchy and more details are going to be released soon.

I am asking all of your teachers to look at all evidence they have and make a judgement of what grade each student in each qualification 'deserved to get'. It may be that we need to provide evidence of how we came to that judgement, so please keep any mock papers, exercise books, tests etc that you have as these may be useful if we need to justify your grade. It may be that individual teachers ask you to help with providing evidence of your work, but until we know more, my advice is to try not to think about it too much and wait until the detail is published.

Asking teachers to make judgements is in many ways the fairest thing to do in these very unusual circumstances, but also puts them in a difficult position. Of course they want you to do well and get a grade you are happy with, but it must also be the grade you deserve, and not every student can achieve an A grade or a 9. So I am very clear that teachers need to be able to do this objectively and without pressure, so I have asked staff to let me know if they feel that any parent or student is pressurising them to give a higher grade, however subtly this is done and I shall have no choice but to pass this on to the exam boards as an example of malpractice. I am sure this won't be necessary because I am confident that you can trust the staff to make fair judgements, although it is clear that it is not as simple as you being given the grade your teacher predicts.

We are told that grades awarded will have the same status as grades in any other year, will be accepted by Universities/Colleges in the same way and will look no different on your CVs and job applications in the future. University representatives have already confirmed that they expect universities to be flexible and do all they can to support students to ensure they can progress to higher education.

I realise this will not yet ease your fears, but hope it gives you some idea of the process. We will shortly be updating advice on what work is most useful for you to be doing over the upcoming weeks and months while you are not in school. We produced an incredible quantity of work for you last week, for example there are still now individual packs of revision in school for each Year 11 student that were created to support you in the lead up to your exams. However, now the exams are cancelled we are looking at better ways for you to use the time in preparation for your next step, for example where students in year 11 are going to study A Levels, providing work that will specifically help prepare for those courses, rather than simply revision for courses you had almost finished and are now not going to be examined on. Of course we must also not lose sight of the fact that your learning has an intrinsic value above and beyond that which is measured by exams.

I hope that this letter can give you even the smallest piece of reassurance and please rest assured that as we get more information we will pass it to you and are committed to supporting you to get the best grade possible that you deserve.

Take care and try to stay positive.

Shaun Simmons
Principal