

January 2021

Dear Student, Parents & Carers

We know that you will have many questions about what is happening with your qualifications, and at this stage there is a good chance that we do not have clear answers as the picture is changing so quickly but we wanted to share with you what we know and some guidance.

### **Assessments and final grades**

#### **Examinations and grading**

While we know examinations will not be going ahead as planned this year for A Levels, the Government has not yet explained in depth the process that will be used. There will be a consultation period and the exact details of how grades will be assessed will not be clear for a few weeks at least.

#### **Ongoing assessment**

Remember that every Teams lesson and assessment set by staff can be seen as a chance to build on the evidence of your progress that we already have. We know there may be technical problems at times but do your best to attend on time, ask good questions if the lesson is live, and complete the assignments that are set on time and to the highest standard you are capable of.

Remember also that help is available from your teachers and Senior Tutor if you need it.

#### **Remote learning**

We are a lot more advanced in our understanding and delivery of remote learning than we were last March. Below are a few key lessons we have learned that you can use to help you to perform as well as possible:

#### **Routine is key**

You should work in line with your normal day and your normal lesson times. Many staff will stream live lessons, but even where they set work you should do this at the time the lesson would have happened. Work for your lessons will be uploaded to Teams. Following your timetable will help establish a strong routine.

One key lesson from last year was that when students fall behind they often tend to bury their heads and make the issue bigger. As we are at the start of lockdown you can minimise this risk by working steadily and following your school timetable. If this is an issue we have resources that can help - please just ask.

#### **Engage**

As a teacher Teams lessons can sometimes be quite lonely and you wonder if the students can hear you and are understanding. Engage. Ask and answer questions, either via your mic or through chat depending on what the teacher has asked for. The more you engage, the easier it is for the teacher to assess how things are going and respond to concerns. This means if your mic and camera are not working it is important to resolve these issues if possible.

#### **Communicate**

If there are concerns, either personally with health or mental health, or with work or technology it is vital that you let your Senior Tutor know. Support is always available but we can only help and respond (and we really do want to) if we know what is bothering you. Some of you are really reluctant to ask for help but it is vital, now more than ever.

## Summer Exams

### In his statement on Monday the Prime Minister stated:

'We recognise that this will mean it is not possible or fair for all exams to go ahead this summer as normal. The Education Secretary will work with Ofqual to put in place alternative arrangements.'

### On Wednesday, the Secretary of State for Education, Gavin Williamson announced the following in parliament:

"I can confirm that GCSEs, A-Levels and AS level exams will not go ahead this summer. This year we are going to put our trust in teachers rather than algorithms... I can confirm now that I wish to use a form of teacher assessed grades, with training and support provided to ensure these are awarded fairly and consistently across the country."

### Ofqual (the exams regulator) has also published the following message:

"Our message to students is this: please continue to engage as fully as you can in your education. This will put you in the best position, whatever arrangements are made for your qualifications. It's important that teachers and students can focus on the knowledge and skills needed to equip students to progress to the next stage, whether to college, an apprenticeship, university or employment.

The way ahead is not straightforward: exams and standardised assessments are the fairest way of determining what a student knows and can do. We need to consider a wide range of qualifications – from A levels and GCSEs to many different vocational and technical qualifications – and the solution won't be the same for all. We know that many are seeking clarity as soon as possible. We will provide further updates as soon as we can."

From these statements, it is clear that exams will not go ahead as planned this summer and grades will be awarded by some form of teacher assessment instead. However, there are no further details available to schools at this stage. As more information is published from central government, we will communicate the key messages quickly.

However, we would echo Ofqual's advice to all students and especially to our **Year 13 students and students in Year 12** who were due to sit external examinations this year – **it is important that you continue to fully engage with all aspects of your education.** We understand that this is very challenging in the current national situation but until there is real clarity around how the teacher assessments will be formulated from Ofqual and the examination boards, every piece of work that you complete can help us to give the best judgement of your most likely outcome.

It is important that you don't enter into discussions with teachers about what grade you may be awarded. None of us knows the exact process that will determine grades and even when we do it will be vital that teachers make decisions following the process outlined and are not subject to outside pressure.

We do understand the concerns you will be feeling but the most important approach you can take is to attend lessons, whether they involve live or uploaded work, hand work in when you have been asked to and continue to fully engage with all your subjects.

We wish you well in this challenging time: please remember that the Sixth Form team is here to support you.

Kind regards,

Mr C Kidman  
Head of Sixth Form, St Aidan's

Mr J Sharpe  
Director of Sixth Form, St John Fisher