



21st January 2021

Dear parent/carer,

You will be aware that Ofqual and the DFE have launched a joint consultation on the awarding of GCSEs and A Levels this academic year.

Whilst the Secretary of State for Education, Gavin Williamson, has said that this year's examinations are cancelled and teachers will be trusted to award grades, it is important that we all understand what is proposed and respond to the consultation accordingly.

In this long consultation document, the main proposal and area of controversy is that exam boards would set 'papers' to be 'sat' in May-June and marked by teachers as part of the awarding process. It is suggested that teachers would be able to choose from 'papers' made available by exam boards and even select certain questions. Currently we are being consulted on whether these papers would be compulsory for schools to use.

It is completely understandable that, this year, an evidence based approach is required and that teachers' judgements are very well supported by evidence of students' work. We would also welcome the scrutiny of external moderation of our assessments to ensure they are fair and accurate.

However, many concerns arise from this consultation including:-

- There is little acknowledgement that some or all students may not be able to sit these papers in school due to isolating or the ongoing impact of the pandemic and no proper plans are given for students to be able to sit these assessments at home. This is particularly concerning for students with special educational needs who would usually get special support for examinations in school.
- Students have been told that their exams are cancelled and although Ofqual are describing their proposal as 'papers' and 'assessments', it is anticipated that these will be completed as exams in examination conditions.
- There is very little time to understand the new requirements and prepare students for these papers; even with the flexibilities proposed.
- The continued uncertainty and lack of a plan B earlier continues to add to the stress and anxiety of students unnecessarily.
- If the 'papers'/'assessments' are weighted more than other evidence, which is one proposal, this is not fair to students and teachers who have not had enough prior notice of these. Some students who may be isolating or suffering the effects of the pandemic more during the assessment period may be disadvantaged disproportionately.
- Teachers' workload will be excessive in fulfilling all the training and requirements as well as marking the 'papers' in a very small time period. This will impact on the teaching and learning of others in the school.

We believe that in the spirit of the Government's announcement, teachers should have the flexibility to assess students without externally imposed 'papers'. We believe these papers may be a helpful tool if they are optional alongside a range of other evidence used to determine final grades. We would welcome clarity and support from examination boards/Ofqual about what evidence is required as soon as possible; including exemplars. We believe that evidence from throughout the students' course should be able to be used if it demonstrates their highest levels of achievement.

The consultation document and a link to be able to complete your response can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/consultation-on-how-gcse-as-and-a-level-grades-should-be-awarded-in-summer-2021>

The consultation is open until 23:45 on Friday 29th January. The document is extensive, but you are able to answer some of the questions and may choose to concentrate on those that are most relevant.

Parents, carers, students, school staff and any other interested parties can respond. Please do take the time to respond and have your views contribute. It is so important that the authorities get this right for this year's cohorts of Year 11 and Year 13 students who have suffered so much and in order to do so they need to understand all the implications of their proposals for everyone affected.

Yours sincerely.

Lealands High School Senior Leadership Team