
PONTELAND HIGH SCHOOL

Aiming for our students to be happy, feel safe and secure, and achieve exceptionally well

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Dear Parents

In my previous letter (5 January 2021) I indicated that I would be back in touch once we had more information regarding plans for exams this summer. I had hoped that the statement from the Secretary of State, Gavin Williamson MP, yesterday would provide some much needed guidance but sadly, and not altogether surprisingly, that was not the case.

What we do know for certain is that GCSE and A-level exams will be cancelled this year and that teacher generated grades will be used instead. This means that it is essential for all Y11 and Y13 students to remain fully engaged in online lessons and focused on doing their very best in all learning tasks. All of this effort will inevitably pay dividends as we move towards the summer term.

It was made clear in the Secretary of State's statement that Ofqual are set to launch a 2-week consultation period on their proposals for the process of awarding grades this summer. I believe it is important that we await sight of these proposals before making any firm decisions about current or planned assessment processes in school. This approach has informed our decisions about upcoming vocational exams, mock exams and internal assessments. In the information below I have tried to clearly set out our immediate steps and plans.

Summary

1. Vocational exams (scheduled for week beginning 11 January 2021)

- 1.1. The government has stated, *'In light of the evolving public health measures, schools and colleges can continue with the vocational and technical exams that are due to take place in January, where they judge it right to do so.'*
- 1.2. This approach has not been helpful at all and has just placed the burden of decision-making on to schools. Regardless of the decision we take, I am acutely aware that it will not please all of our students; some will wish to take their exams having prepared well for them, some will be pleased they are not taking place for educational and health related reasons.
- 1.3. For the sake of clarity, and after much discussion within school, I have taken the decision to cancel the vocational exams planned for next week.
 - 1.3.1. The more that I considered this situation the less I was convinced of strong arguments to continue with the exams especially when so many students across the country will not be sitting them.
 - 1.3.2. We'll retain the exam papers (where we have access to them) and may use them as internal assessments in the future.



2. Mock exams (Y13 and Y11)

- 2.1. We are going to postpone Mock Exams for the time being and teachers will return to teaching the relevant syllabus for each course.
- 2.2. During this time of pause we are going to do two things:
 - 2.2.1. Await the proposals from Ofqual to gauge what the implications are for our assessment processes in school
 - 2.2.2. Explore the use of online assessments should the school closure period extend beyond February half term.

3. Internal assessments (Y10 and Y12)

- 3.1. These are being postponed and teachers will return to teaching the relevant syllabus for each course
- 3.2. If we do trial online assessments we are likely to do so with these year groups in the first instance. This may be before the February half term break, however, the need to proceed with this approach will depend to a large extent on Ofqual's proposals.

Message to Y11 and Y13

I know this will be a time of frustration and confusion for students but my message to them is to take stock and re-focus on doing your very best in your online lessons and when we return to school in due course. Teachers will be using all available information to support any grade setting process; this includes lesson engagement, quality of classwork and homework as well as assessment information.

Online assessments

I am reluctant to launch quickly into online assessments without giving it due consideration. We need to ensure the integrity of any online assessment system as well as providing something that is easy to administer, easy for students to engage with and ultimately provides accurate and meaningful information. I trust you will bear with us as we explore these options.

I know that all of this creates a degree of anxiety and worry but we will do our best to take a balanced and thoughtful approach that best serves the needs of our students.

Yours faithfully



Kieran McGrane
Headteacher