

Upper Sixth Summer Exams FAQ's

We are sure you will have many questions regarding the government proposals for the awarding of grades this summer. They are purely proposals at present and the eventual government instructions may differ, but we have tried to set out answers as clearly as we currently can to some of the key questions we think you might have.

1. We think that not everyone will have been able to maintain full exam conditions in the mocks, how has that been dealt with?

Any grades achieved in exams sat at home obviously cannot be treated in the same way as grades achieved in full exam conditions at school. Being moved to the home setting, the mocks were primarily an opportunity for students to test their knowledge and reflect on their experience so they can be even better prepared for the tests that lie ahead. That will of course have been most effective for students who relied entirely on their own learning and memory.

Dr Pyne has prepared Mock Evaluation booklets for the students so they can record their reflections and their teachers will be going through the papers with them in class. Teachers are marking the work that has been submitted and where they have suspicions of malpractice, they are discussing it with the students concerned and may also contact home.

2. When will we receive the grades for the mocks? How will the online Parents' Evening work?

The Upper Sixth Mock Reports will be issued to you on Friday 5 February. The Upper Sixth Parents' Evening on Thursday 4 March will take place online using Teams. You will be sent a link to book in with your child's teachers and the system will generate links for you to access each meeting. We have used it for a number of events now very successfully and we hope you enjoy the experience and convenience of being able to meet with the teachers from the comfort of your own home. Please make sure that you and your son or daughter attend together.

3. Are the government proposing that teachers award grades in the same as they did last summer?

No, this year the government proposals are asking for something slightly different. Last year teachers were asked to imagine what would have happened had the student sat the exam. This year, the proposals suggest that teachers grade students based on 'demonstrated knowledge, understanding and skills'. This difference is rooted in the government's recognition that the current Year 11 and Upper Sixth pupils' education has been disrupted for longer than last year's exam groups. They are proposing that grades this year should **not** be based on full coverage of the specification (see next question).

4. If they happen, what exactly are these proposed externally set tests likely to look like? Will they cover the whole course? Have we covered enough of the specification?

We don't yet know the precise details of the tests but please be reassured that we are well ahead of the vast majority of schools in the country in terms of what we have been able to cover during lockdown.

Heads of Department have already been working on reducing their specification coverage to generate even more time to review and consolidate material that has already been covered. If the tests go ahead, as soon as we hear from the Exam Boards what the tests will cover, we will immediately review our plans to ensure that we are fully focussed on preparing the students as best as possible for them.

The proposals make it explicitly clear that whatever tests are set, they must give students the opportunity to demonstrate that they are able to work at the highest level so all of our students will be able to achieve the grade they deserve.

5. Will the proposed tests be compulsory?

We don't yet know. This is raised as a question in the consultation. We will have to wait and see what the government's ultimate decision is. If we are presented with a choice, we will review the options and communicate to students and parents our proposals.

6. Will children who have Access Arrangements have their usual arrangements if these tests go ahead?

The proposals are explicitly based on the assumption that the tests will be done in school. That means we would be able to run the tests as proper external exams, providing all the usual Access Arrangements and support.

7. What will happen to these tests if we are put into lockdown in May/June?

If we are placed in lockdown and the tests cannot go ahead as originally planned, the government proposals provide for tests being sat at home. Students and those supervising them would have to sign a declaration stating that no unauthorised assistance had been received. We are also evaluating some software that supports maintaining exam conditions remotely.

8. How will the practical subjects like Art or Drama be examined? What about other NEA?

The proposals suggest that NEA should be taken account of when deciding the final grades, whether or not it is complete. Departments who use NEA are well on track so will have very good evidence from which to draw their TAG.

9. Can evidence other than these tests be taken into account when deciding on the TAG?

Yes. These tests are intended to significantly inform the grade but not determine it. The proposals suggest that more weight should be put on assessments the nearer they are to the time of the final assessment. The boards will issue guidance on the relative use of different kinds of assessment. As with last year, we expect that evidence gathered in controlled conditions will attract significantly more weight than other non-controlled tests.

10. What is the external quality assurance that the government refers to? Is there any internal quality assurance?

The proposals suggest that grades would be internally quality assured first through a process of standardisation within the school. External quality assessment would take place firstly through checking a school's internal quality assurance processes and the secondly through sampling: schools would have to provide evidence of the tests sat and show how they were marked.

11. I am worried about the impact of these constant changes on my child's wellbeing and motivation. How can the College help with that?

The welfare of all the students is our primary concern and we fully understand the negative impacts of these changes and uncertainty. The Sixth Form Tutors and Sixth Form Leadership Team are keeping a particularly close eye on the students and all teachers are regularly being asked to raise any pastoral or academic concerns. Do please keep in close touch with your child's tutor – there are lots of things that we can do to help if students are having difficulty.

Keeping connected through form time, actively engaging in lessons, getting involved in House competitions and keeping the basics in place like good food and hydration, plenty of sleep and regular exercise are all important elements of maintaining wellbeing.

Most importantly, students should keep thinking about their goals. Be it securing their place at university, get that prized apprenticeship or whatever else the next step may be, staying focussed on that prize and getting the best possible grades they can to make sure they achieve it is crucial to their motivation.

12. Given these changes, how is the process for University Admissions entry going to work?

The process for university admissions is due to run in exactly the same as in other years. It is possible that the results day will be earlier but we are waiting for confirmation of this and will update you as soon as we know anything.

As in other years, universities will offer final places to students once the results are received. College staff will be available on results day and the days following to advise and assist any students who do not achieve the grades needed for their offer or who have a change of heart.

13. What is going to be put in place for the Upper Sixth once the exams are over? Are they going to have bridging courses to help them prepare for their next steps? If they have covered a reduced specification will that disadvantage them for their degree?

Our plan is to offer a bridging course to the U6 after their exams and the half term holiday. We will tailor the programme to suit the needs of our students. We have already consulted the students as to what they might like included in this programme and it could include work experience that we will help with, online courses to gain further qualifications, bridging work for particular degree courses and leadership training.

14. You mentioned that the students would get a couple of weeks' break; is that still the plan?

Our original plans included a two-week break for the students leading up to the summer half-term. If the external tests now fall in that window of time, it will have to be reviewed. It might be appropriate to include an additional two-weeks' break in the second half of the summer term, perhaps finishing a couple of weeks early, and this is something we will consult upon.

15. Will term end on 6 July for the Upper Sixth?

As mentioned in the question above, it might be the case that Upper Sixth students would have a few weeks' bridging course following the Summer Half Term and then draw their year to close slightly early to enjoy a very well-earned break.

16. Will they have a Leavers Ball? How about hoodies?

Yes!! Government guidelines permitting, we will do everything we can to make sure that Upper Sixth Leavers can enjoy the usual end of Sixth Form festivities. The Sixth Form Team are well underway preparing the hoodies, the leavers' books and the ball. On Friday 2 July we are planning for the Headmaster's U6 Thanksgiving Service which is always a very special event and Wednesday 7 July is in the diary for the U6 ball.

We hope these FAQs have addressed the key questions you have. If you have any further questions or concerns, do please get in touch; we are here to help.

We are absolutely committed to the students getting the best grades they deserve. Whatever arises from the consultation process, we will continue to do all we can to give the students the strongest possible support.

Ben Collie, Head of Sixth Form

Dr Michael Reddish, Deputy Head (Academic)

Ed Hester, Headmaster