



Dear Parents and Carers, and Students

RE GCSE / A LEVELS 2021

Thank you for your patience over recent weeks as we have taken time to reflect upon the Government's guidance to devise a fair, consistent and robust system for teachers to award Grades. I wanted to provide an update on the information that we currently have that will hopefully answer some of the questions you have.

How will grades be awarded this summer?

Grades for GCSEs and A levels will be based on a process involving teacher assessment against national standards, internal quality assurance, and external quality assurance by the exam boards.

The national process defined by the Department for Education and the exams' regulator, Ofqual is as follows:

1. Teachers will **assess students against a national standard**, which will be defined by the exam boards before the Easter break.
2. Departments will submit grades which will be **quality assured by the school / college**. This internal quality assurance process will have to be signed off by the exam board to ensure it is rigorous and in line with national standards.
3. St Nicholas Catholic High School results will be **quality assured externally** by the exam boards, which may include random sampling of our school or college's evidence.
4. If the exam boards are confident in our submitted results, **then the exam boards will award students their final grades**.
5. If students do not think their results are accurate, they will have the right to **appeal**.

So, do teachers award the grade?

No. The grade students achieve will start with their teacher's assessment of their performance across a range of evidence. This is against a nationally-defined standard, not the teacher's own opinion. This assessment is then subject to both internal and external quality assurance before the final grade is awarded by the exam body as usual.



Does this mean grades are decided by an algorithm?

No. Unlike last year, students' grades will not be changed by a formula. The internal and external quality assurance measures will all be done by humans, not an algorithm. There is no limit on the achievement of students, providing they have evidence that they are working at that grade.

What about loss of learning / impact of Covid?

This year, teachers will only assess students on content they have been taught – because of the continued disruption of the pandemic. This means students will not be disadvantaged if they individually, their whole class or whole year group have been unable to complete their full course. However, grades can only be submitted on the basis of the evidence we have of students' performance, even if that evidence covers less of the course than usual. Students who would usually have extra time in the exams will benefit from the same arrangements in teacher assessment

Will grades be different between different schools and colleges?

No, the standard against which teachers will be assessing students is set nationally by the exam boards. This is the standard that will be used during external quality assurance and appeals to ensure consistency and fairness across the system.

What evidence will be used?

Teachers are able to draw on a range of assessment evidence from across a student's study of the course. This may include homework tasks, mock exams, and papers set by the exam boards. This may include evidence from before the second lockdown, as well as evidence since March. The exam boards are producing assessment materials that will be sent to us before Easter. Different departments may use different sources of evidence, and there is no requirement for any one type of assessment to be used – it's about a performance across a range of evidence.

Departments are currently finalising their plans and we hope to be in a position to write to you next week outlining our confirmed plans. **We are looking into the possibility of additional assessment opportunities but these will not take place before Easter.** To this end we will provide a timetable of the windows for these assessment with a revision booklet with the key topics within these assessments.



The exam boards are only giving out past papers, how is this fair?

Most of the assessments provided by the exam boards will be drawn from past papers, although there will be new questions as well. There is significant research that even if students have seen assessments questions before, it does not reduce the validity of the assessment. Furthermore, exam board questions are only one of the many pieces of evidence we will use to assess students this summer.

Can students and parents make the case for why a student should get a higher grade?

Our teachers are already using their professional expertise to assess students on the content they have been taught. Teachers are unable to submit higher grades for students unless they have the evidence that they are consistently working at this level. If teachers submit higher grades without evidence they are committing exam malpractice.

In 2020, any undue pressure by student or parent who placed undue pressure on teachers to increase grades was also considered exam malpractice. It is likely to be the same for 2021. If students or parents are found to be putting teachers or leaders under undue pressure to increase grades, then this matter will be referred to the exam boards and an investigation into malpractice may ensue. This may result in the student's certificate being removed entirely if malpractice is deemed to have taken place.

Can students discuss their grades with teachers?

We will be informing students before we submit the grades which evidence we are using to inform our judgement with students. However, we are not allowed to disclose their final submitted grade we give to the exam board.

Students should not attempt to second-guess the grade submitted, as teachers will be using a range of evidence to inform their final judgement. Students must not pressure teachers to reveal the grades they are submitting, or to increase the grades, as doing so may be considered exam malpractice.

What should students do to improve their grades?

The best thing students can do is to continue to attend classes, learn, act on feedback from their teachers, revise, and read around their subject. Their grade will be based on their performance, and so their outcomes are ultimately in their hands.



In addition to writing to you with our confirmed plans we will also be writing to you with regards to Special Consideration and the process for applying for this. Thank you all for your continued understanding and appreciation that this is a difficult time for all. We are working hard to ensure that all students at St Nicholas Catholic High School are able to receive the grades that they have earned.

Results day

Specific guidance and instruction on both GCSE and A Level results day will be communicated during the summer term. However, it is important you are aware that results day for all students will be earlier than in previous years. **A Level results** day will take place on **Tuesday 10th August**, with **GCSE results** on **12th August**. As always there will be plenty of support on hand to ensure students a smooth progression to their next steps.

Many thanks for your ongoing support during this difficult time.

Yours sincerely

H Pardoe

Mrs H Pardoe

Associate Assistant Headteacher- Head of Year 11

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