

16th August 2020

Dear Year 13 and Year 14 parents and carers

I am sorry to send a letter at the weekend, but given the significant national attention being focussed on the A level results and the discovery that the exam boards did not use the promised methodology to award grades, I thought it was appropriate to contact you as soon as possible. I know this has left many students and families feeling extremely anxious. I have written to Chris Loder MP and Richard Drax MP to share my deep frustration at the situation and they have both expressed a desire to support our students. Headteachers in Dorset, and further afield, have done likewise. The Trust is also writing to the Department for Education directly on behalf of all its schools. Budmouth's constituency MP, Chris Loder, has written an open letter to students offering his support, which is attached to this letter.

Before I comment any further on that I would like to congratulate all our students who collected results on Thursday. It was certainly the strangest of the twenty Post 16 results days that I have now been involved with. Results days always reveal a mixture of emotions from sheer joy to disappointment, and this year perhaps, a little confusion and anger as well. We were certainly relieved that despite all of the prior speculation, on the day itself 95% of students had been able to secure a place at one of their first two preferences and in the days that followed other students were able to confirm new places. Some students, as expected, used the situation to their advantage and were able to 'trade up' to a different university and course that released new places. It seems to be the case that the most prestigious universities, who often take more overseas students, had more places available. If any students still require advice and support regarding their next steps, please do contact a member of the 6th Form Leadership Team and they will be happy to help.

The awarding of grades

From the very start of this process back in March, I have openly shared all of the information we were given relating to how grades would be awarded. In the spirit of that I would like to share a little more detail that has come to light about the final process that exam boards used to issue grades. This became apparent on Friday and has now been picked up by some of our national press. I think this is important as it differs significantly from the decision that Ofqual made following their comprehensive consultation. There was never going to be a perfect solution this year and whether one liked it or not, the final decision in awarding a 'Calculated Grade' based on a combination of the teacher issued Centre Assessment Grade (CAG) and the use of a statistical model to help standardise schools, did have some merits. However, we have now become aware this approach was not used for all students. I believe that students should be aware of this and in some cases it might help them to better understand how a final grade was reached. We had some students confused about why some subject grades had been adjusted, but not others. The final model used for all schools actually took the cohort size into account. Specifically:

- Subjects with 5 or fewer entries had their CAGs left unaltered.
- Subjects with 6-14 students had their CAGs considered alongside the statistical model. In other words, the system that had been confirmed by Ofqual.
- Subjects with 15+ students were only decided using the statistical model and not the CAG.

The result of this across the country is that subjects with larger numbers of students have been more greatly affected as CAGs had less, or even no impact on the result. Indeed, larger schools (and most especially some big 6th Form Colleges) have been more greatly affected. It has hit higher performing students the most. At Budmouth we have seen a trend in more greatly reduced results from the subjects with more than 15 entries. Much smaller schools, including small independent schools, have seen much less interference with the CAGs that the teacher recommended. I have been in regular contact with Headteachers across Dorset with 6th Forms and the variance from school to school and subject to subject has been significant.

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Obviously this is an issue that is much wider than one individual student. We will be exploring any avenue we may have for a wider appeal in subjects that had more than 15 entries and where it is discovered that the promised methodology was not used. Being in a larger school, or taking subjects that were more popular in number, is not the fault of the student! Budmouth also has a high proportion of what are called 'high ability' students and nationally it does appear as if these have been hit the hardest.

Individual Appeals

As you may recall I wrote to you last week to confirm that the government had introduced a late change to the system by way of what they called a 'Triple Lock' guarantee. This meant that if there were students whose mock grades were higher than the 'Calculated Grade' they had been awarded by the exam board, then we could appeal on their behalf. We were advised that the detail on how this would work would be published on Monday 17th August. However, you may be aware that yesterday afternoon Ofqual released confirmation of this and I know this came as a relief to many students and schools. Ofqual confirmed what would constitute a mock exam and it also confirmed that if mock exams had not been taken then other forms of 'non exam assessment' could be used so that schools who were due to do mocks after shutdown were not unfairly disadvantaged. I was hoping to be able to share the final detail with you tomorrow and make an immediate start on appeals. I still am.

However, we then encountered yet another 'U-turn'. You may also have seen that by 10.50pm last night Ofqual had in fact removed its guidance published earlier that day. The BBC was reporting on this in its late night bulletins. It is not yet known why the policy has been pulled and when we get further detail, we will share it with you. The Ofqual statement said:

'This policy is being reviewed by the Ofqual Board and further information will be published in due course'

The following link contains more detail on the original statement and its removal. <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/ofqual-removes-mock-exam-appeals-policy-just-hours-after-publication/>.

I want to reassure you that we will do all we can to support any process that enables us to help ensure that all of our students are able to receive a higher grade wherever possible. We are aware that some students are urgently awaiting the appeals process to be confirmed and that some universities are holding places open to enable this to happen. Sadly, not all universities have been able to wait for this process to unfold.

Thank you for your support.

Yours sincerely



David Herbert