

25.03.2021

Email to Year 13 – A level grading

Dear Parent / Carer

I am writing to inform you of the details of the approach that NSB will be taking to the grading of A levels this summer. In addition to the information set out in this email the school will also be holding a webinar on the grading process on Wednesday, April 21st between 5.30 pm and 6.30 pm (please note this date has moved from the previously advertised date of April 19th) – further details on this webinar will be sent out at the beginning of next term. Any questions arising from the detail below should be directed to the Director of Sixth Form, Mrs Bradley-Brophy sbradley-brophy@nsb.northants.sch.uk in the first instance.

The approach outlined is in line with the current DfE / Ofqual guidance however may be subject to change if the national guidance changes. The school has designed the approach to fit in with the requirement that all final grades are delivered to the Exam Boards by a national deadline date of June 18th. The school will be undertaking an intensive internal moderation of the grades before they are submitted during the two weeks leading up to June 18th. The school is aware that some other schools are following a similar approach to NSB however due to the nature of the national guidance there will be flexibility of approach across different institutions. We believe that the system that we are putting in place will give NSB students the best chance of realising their potential when the grades are released.

Overall Aim of the Approach

Teachers will submit a final grade for each student, based on an objective, holistic assessment of the standard at which they are performing – the final grade must be a working at grade backed by evidence, not a prediction. Teachers will consider suitable evidence which meets the Exam Board criteria for usable evidence from across the two years of study to award this grade. Ofqual have been clear that it is solely the school that determines which evidence can be considered – it is not a matter for negotiation between the school and parents or between the school and students. In line with the current draft Ofqual guidance the school will be considering evidence which meets the following criteria - the Exam Boards are due to confirm this criteria officially by the end of March:

- 1. Student work produced in response to assessment materials provided by the Exam Board, including groups of questions, past papers or similar materials such as practice or sample papers*
- 2. Non-exam assessment (NEA) work (often referred to as coursework) in relevant subjects*
- 3. Student work produced in centre-devised tasks that reflect the specification, that follow the same format as Exam Board materials and have been marked in a way by the teacher that reflects Exam Board mark schemes. This can include substantial class or homework, internal tests / exams taken by pupils – this will include End of Term NSB assessments*
- 4. Records of a student's capability and performance over the course of study in performance-based subjects such as music, drama, dance and PE*

Students will be informed of the evidence which has contributed holistically to their final grade. This information will be released to students once the Exam Boards have officially confirmed the criteria as indicated above. Students who undertake Art or Photography A Level will be graded only on their coursework portfolio.

Work undertaken with a private tutor cannot (in line with national guidance) be considered as evidence.

Term 5 Assessments

Due to the pandemic the students in Year 13 have not sat formal end of year examinations at the end of Year 12 nor any formal mock examinations in Year 13. Therefore, in order to support the evidence gathering process and in consideration of the Ofqual recognition that *'more recent evidence is likely to be more representative of student performance'*, students will sit a range of assessment tasks in their subjects during Term 5. These tasks will be set and marked by NSB teachers, but they will be rigorously tied into the Exam Board specification.

The tasks will consist of past paper questions and new questions based on support materials to be released to schools for each subject by the Exam Boards at the end of March. Questions set will enable the most able students to be suitably challenged so that they can demonstrate responses at the highest grades and questions will also be suitably accessible for the lowest ability students.

In recognition of the disruption of the pandemic the questions set in the assessment tasks will be formulated only on the content that the students have been taught. To further support preparation for the assessment tasks, students will also be told the topics on which the questions will be based and these topics will be narrowed down, although students will not be told the actual questions in advance. The total time given to the assessment tasks will generally be significantly less than the normal aggregate time that a student would be sitting public examination papers for in any individual subject.

A Level – for each subject, students will sit up to 3 assessment tasks with an aggregated total assessment time of all tasks combined, depending on the subject, between two hours fifteen minutes and four hours. The assessment tasks will be split over two separated half days for each subject during the window of Thursday, April 19th to Friday, May 21st. During the assessment half days, students will be with a specialist subject teacher which in most cases will be their normal teacher. Students will sit between 45 minutes and no more than 2 hours of assessment tasks in any single half day session and we will seek to minimise the number of students who have to sit two half day sessions in different subjects in one day.

During the Term 5 assessment task period, Y13 students will still be able to attend school for drop in support from their teacher at the normal timetabled time (or support remotely) outside of their assessments if they wish, however they may also choose to study at home - students who have, for example, a History assessment on the Wednesday will not necessarily want to attend a Sociology lesson in school on the Tuesday.

The timetable for the NSB A Level assessment tasks is in the process of being finalised and will be released shortly.

Grading Process

NSB teachers will grade the Term 5 assessment tasks (using Exam Board marking support materials) and balance the performance in these tasks with any relevant coursework grade to

give an overall Term 5 assessment grade. The teacher will then look holistically at all other suitable evidence from across the two years of the course (which meets the exam board criteria) to determine whether the Term 5 assessment grade should be raised higher. The Term 5 assessment grade will not be lowered. When all relevant evidence has been holistically looked at this will generate the teacher's final grade for the student in the subject. This grading approach will benefit students in two ways:

1. Students who have achieved high grades consistently in relevant assessments throughout the duration of the course to date will have strong evidence to counter any under performance in the Term 5 assessment tasks
2. Students who have achieved lower grades consistently in relevant assessments throughout the duration of the course to date still have an opportunity to demonstrate their real potential in the Term 5 assessment tasks

Once the final grade has been holistically determined by the subject teacher then it will be subject to a rigorous school moderation process at two levels. Firstly, the grades will be subject to a departmental moderation process where the grade will be checked for accuracy against the evidence by at least two specialist teachers and then secondly there will be a whole school moderation process undertaken at Senior Staff and Head of Centre level. This moderation will take place in the two weeks beginning June 7th with the final grades being sent to the Exam Boards by June 18th.

Exam Boards will then undertake a quality assurance of the school's submitted marks which will include a check on every school's systems and processes for grading and potentially a check on the quality of the evidence supporting a student's grade.

Isolating students

Students who must isolate during the assessment window will sit a reserve assessment task for the relevant subject during the week beginning May 24th - 28th or where necessary June 7th – 11th.

Access Arrangements

In line with the Ofqual Guidance, Term 5 assessments will be subject to normal access arrangements. Mrs Topping Shaw (responsible for Exams) will write to all relevant parents / carers closer to the assessment dates.

Special Consideration

If students are affected by difficult personal / domestic circumstances during the Term 5 assessments, then teachers will take this into account during the grading process. Parents / carers may also highlight personal difficulties a student has faced over the duration of the course which may have impacted their performance in assessments undertaken over the two years. Mrs Topping Shaw will write further to all parents / carers regarding the Special Consideration process and how to apply for it. Parents / carers who have any concerns regarding their child's mental health or approach to the assessment tasks should not hesitate to contact the school and we will do all we can to support.

Results Days

A Level Results Day is Tuesday, August 10th

Further details regarding A Level Results Day will be sent out before the end of the academic year

Appeals

Students will be able to request that the school appeals their final grade to the Exam Board if they believe that the grade that they have been awarded is not a reasonable exercise of academic judgement by the school against the evidence that has been used to formulate their grade.

Leaving date

Students will only have to attend school after their last assessment if staff request students to come in to complete any practical coursework in the week of May 24th -28th. Any student who is required to isolate during the assessment window may be asked to sit a reserve assessment task up to Friday, June 11th.

The school recognises that this is a difficult and stressful time for Year 13 students across the country and we will continue to do everything that we can to support our students positively through the coming months.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "R. Bernard". The signature is written in black ink and has a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Richard Bernard
Headmaster
Northampton School *for Boys*