



St Ursula's Convent School

A Humanities College and Teaching School

Crooms Hill, Greenwich, London, SE10 8HN

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Headteacher: Mrs Catrina Hamilton NPQH, Bed.Hons, Accredited SENCO

Dear Year 11 Students and Parents/Carers of Year 11,

I am writing to give you more information about **how GCSE grades will be awarded this summer**.

Grades for GCSEs 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 (DfE) 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 holiday.
2. Departments will submit grades which will be **quality assured by the school**. 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. The GCSE results at St Ursula's will be **quality assured externally** by the exam boards, which may include random sampling of our school's evidence.
4. If the exam boards are confident in our submitted results, **then the exam boards will award students their final grades** on the 12th August 2021.
5. If students do not think their results are accurate, they will have the right to **appeal**.

So, do teachers award the grade?

Simply: 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 we have evidence that they are consistently working at that grade.

What about loss of learning / impact of Covid?

This year, teachers will only assess students on the 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 assessments.





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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. The evidence used 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 from March – June. 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 student's performance across a range of evidence.

Is St Ursula's running another set of PPE / mock style examinations?

Since receiving the guidance from the DfE and Ofqual we have been in discussions about the best way to gather evidence for our students, and have decided that **running a two-week mock exam period is not the best solution** for our context. The guidance asks us to determine grades as late in the Academic Year as practicable and not to confine these to a specific window. We must also draw on a **broad range of evidence**. At St Ursula's we will therefore be **gathering evidence largely in lessons**, in order to continue teaching students for as long as possible and to make the best of the time available. We hope this will alleviate the intensity of a mock exam fortnight and enable students to demonstrate their ability across a period of time, rather than under high-pressure exam conditions.

What should students do to improve their grades?

The best thing students can do is to continue to attend all lessons, 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.

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 a student or parent 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.





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Can students discuss their grades with teachers?

Teachers will be able to discuss the evidence they are using to inform their judgement with students, including marked pieces of work.

However, we are not allowed to disclose the 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.

We will be keeping our exams page of the website updated regularly with newly released information so please visit this page to keep up-to-date:

<https://www.stursulas.com/curriculum/exams/>

If you have any questions or queries please contact us via admin@stursulas.com.

We are delighted to have welcomed our students back this week and look forward to working hard together to gather the evidence required to secure the GCSE grades they deserve.

With best wishes,

Ms N Johnson

Director of Curriculum & Assessment

