

10th March 2021

Dear candidate,

Thank you for your application to ensure your eligibility for grades for the academic year 2020-2021 at Ealing Independent College.

Please take the time to go through this particular correspondence carefully. It is important that you understand both the process and the rationale for the plans which the College has in place to determine Teacher Assessed Grades (TAGs) for students this academic year.

In the letter sent by Education Secretary Gavin Williamson to Simon Lebus, the Chief Regulator of Ofqual on 23rd February, guidance was set out covering government policy on examinations in the summer series of 2021. I am sure that you are aware that the exams themselves are cancelled in favour of a form of Teacher Assessed Grades. It is my intention in this letter to provide clarity on how the assessment sessions will be scheduled, and to provide advice on some frequently asked questions which may arise from this.

### **Assessment session 1**

The Easter Assessment series, which will take place from **April 19th-30th** will be a full exam series in that there will be the same number of papers that would be found in a formal exam series. A timetable for this has been prepared and is enclosed within the email you have received from the Exams Officer. Exam papers will be prepared by subject teachers and Heads of Department at the College, and these will follow the style of the exams set by the particular exam board which each candidate has entered for. These papers will be set, marked and graded by experienced subject specialists.

### **Assessment session 2**

The Summer Assessment series will take place from **June 1st-June 15th** and will follow the pattern of the Easter Assessment series in that the number and style of examinations will replicate the formal exams. Again, the papers will be set, marked and graded by experienced subject specialists.

All grades will then be centralised, moderated and sent to the exam boards by **June 18**.



This is an unprecedented step for the College in that we are welcoming students in for two assessments. This is being done in order to provide sufficient data for the College to award TAGs in a fair and standardised manner. We are doing our very best in difficult circumstances to provide a system which affords all students who wish to emerge from this academic year a fair chance.

I strongly believe this is the right way forward, largely as it provides a solution as close to the rules and regulations of the courses which students have set out to attain a grade in. It also ensures that they will move on to the next stage of their education, be that university in the case of Year 13, or A Levels in the case of year 11, with confidence, feeling ready to meet the challenges which the next steps bring.

### **Frequently asked questions:**

#### **Why do I have to do the final assessments? I thought these were optional.**

The government has been clear that Private Candidates should be assessed 'in a similar way to other students' and that they should have 'the same opportunity as other students'. Students at the College will be following exactly the same procedure, and so, in the interests of fairness and standardisation of grades, this is the path we have set out for Private Candidates. Schools and colleges have been given the option to decide what work is undertaken. We have an option - a choice - about whether to use the materials produced by the exam boards or our own materials in these assessments. We will almost certainly use a combination of both, and that balance will be decided by individual departments.

#### **Why two assessments and not one? I don't feel that I thrive in exam situations.**

We are fully aware of the pressure of exams, and the stress which they cause. This is why we have elevated the importance of the April assessments. In the past, final exams have always been 'all or nothing' for students. We have worked to provide equal parity between the two assessments, to share that load. If the April assessments don't go to plan, you have another chance. On the other hand, if the April assessments go well, the June assessments can be approached with confidence, looking to improve an already established grade. We are looking for evidence that you are at a certain level which will lead us to the appropriate TAG for each student, and we will always look to give you the benefit of the doubt on a grade. We understand how difficult it has been for students, and particularly Private Candidates, this year. That is why we have made this system to support, and provide an opportunity to succeed.

#### **Do I have to attend both assessments?**

Yes. These assessments are being run in order for candidates to provide sufficient evidence in order to give staff accurate data from which to award grades. Prior to these assessments, we have no evidence in place for Private Candidates. The fuller the picture we get, the more accurate the grade can be awarded. Where candidates miss assessments within a series, this will reflect negatively on their overall performance. Where candidates do not attend a whole assessment series, this will likely invalidate their entry.



**What if I was relying on a final push in the last few months of the year to get me to the standards that would get me the grades I want?**

You can do just that with the assessments in April and in June. You still have every opportunity to prove that you are capable of the grades you seek. Students will know that no teacher would ever have advised such an approach as it leaves you with much to do at the end of the course. Last year, students were deprived of the opportunity to sit final exams, and so this opportunity to prove your abilities should be welcomed.

**Why can't you just take the word of my tutor? I have worked well with them over the academic year.**

This would be unfair in that it would make standardisation of grades impossible. Tutors have a range of approaches, a range of assessment techniques, and a range of thresholds around which they would make decisions on grades awarded. With the large number of Private Candidates entering exams at the College, in addition to our own students, we must provide a standardised and fair approach based on comprehensive assessments. This is the only way to determine grades in an impartial manner.

**Will I do assessments on the whole syllabus?**

Yes. We are setting assessments this way in order to ensure that you are ready to face future challenges with confidence. This is the only way to standardise the exams. We can not make decisions on sections to omit from exams as the range of students who have applied as Private Candidates will have studied different areas of the content at different times and at different paces. Exam specifications are freely available on the subject areas of the relevant websites, and past paper assessments are also obtainable from here, so these should aid preparation.

**Where will these assessments be taken?**

The assessments will be taken in College under exam conditions, following JCQ guidelines with invigilation. Again, this has been put in place to ensure fairness and standardisation of our process. The Department for Education, in accordance with government guidelines, have made it clear that schools and colleges are safe environments for students, and so, hosting the exams in as close to the usual environment for exams is planned. The College has successfully embedded the testing of students with Lateral Flow Tests, and all Private Candidates will undergo this testing. This will require the arrival of students 30 minutes before their first exam of the week and their last exam of the week, to ensure testing can take place.

**The exam boards said they'd provide us with topic lists which would be examined. Why can't we get that?**

When the exam boards cancelled the exams, this plan, to support students with clear guidance on what would be included in the assessments, was also cancelled. We believe that the best form of assessment is in assessing a whole course to ensure that students show understanding of all aspects of it. It gives a true reflection of their abilities to proceed to their next level of learning. This is the only fair way to standardise the approach.



I held an extensive meeting last Friday with colleagues across the wider Bellevue Group, of which Ealing Independent College is a part. We have agreed a shared purpose for all schools and colleges: that we will support each other to ensure robust systems are in place to enable fair and equitable assessment; that all students will be rewarded for the work they have put in; and that Private Candidates will be given an equal and fair opportunity to attain the grades which they deserve.

I hope that this clarifies the plan moving forward. Please do let me know if you have any further questions and I will seek to provide answers for them.

Yours sincerely

Allan Cairns  
Principal