

May 2021

Dear Students, Parents and Carers,

I am writing to provide students, parents and carers with an update in terms of the awarding of teacher assessed grades (TAGs) for A level and GCSE courses this summer. We will be providing further information separately in relation to applied general qualifications such as BTEC, CTEC and WJEC qualifications.

We hope you were able to join our online information event about the awarding of grades earlier in the year. If you missed this, please do take a look at our recording of the event at <https://bit.ly/3h1kt6S>

How will grades be awarded this summer

Full details of our arrangements can be found in our Centre Policy which is online at <https://ncpontefract.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Summer-2021-JCQ-Guidance-Centre-policy-New-College-Pontefract-1.pdf>

This policy is in its final draft form, as we await any feedback and formal approval from the Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ). Nonetheless, we thought you would appreciate the opportunity to take a look at this stage, if you wish to. Some of the actions set out in the Centre Policy will be things that will happen between now and the point at which TAGs are submitted to exam boards, or before results day, so should be regarded as our statement of intent at this point. In establishing our Centre Policy we have given careful consideration to the JCQ guidance, and the template Centre Policy prepared by JCQ.

<https://www.jcq.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/JCQ-Guidance-on-the-Determination-of-Grades-for-A-AS-Levels-and-GCSEs-Summer-2021.pdf>

To highlight a few key points in our arrangements:

- Teachers will determine TAGs using Cedar assessments and coursework (NEA) where this is a formal component of the course. In visual and digital arts, TAGs will be determined by final portfolios. In courses where there is a practical component, such as PE or music, this will also be taken into consideration where appropriate.
- There will be no formula, and teachers will use professional judgement to take a holistic view of the evidence. Teachers will place greater emphasis on evidence later in the course, but all will be taken into consideration except those that have been identified as less valid. Information for individual subjects has already been communicated to students.
- Students should continue to work hard for their final Cedar 5 assessments. For exam-only courses, the grade in this final assessment will be the minimum grade awarded, but a higher grade may be possible if there is compelling evidence from the other assessments.

I would like to stress how important it is that students continue to attend their lessons and attend their Cedar 4 and 5 assessments (April and May). If a student does not attend lessons and does not attend these assessments, we may withdraw students from qualifications, unless there are significant mitigating circumstances. We cannot award qualifications to students that choose to discontinue their education and it is vital that we have every opportunity to make fair, informed and consistent judgements when determining teacher assessed grades. The final weeks and the final

assessments provide a great opportunity for students to showcase their knowledge, skills and talents.

Over the course of this week (Tuesday 4 May to Monday 10 May) teachers will be speaking individually with students where the college is aware of significant circumstances and so has adopted slightly different arrangements with respect to the evidence being used to determine TAGs (individual variations).

Individual variations and mitigating circumstances

Individual variations are rare and the college has taken active steps to identify any students for whom it considers there is a sufficient reason to support a variation in the evidence used, and taking account of JCQ definitions of mitigating circumstances, if applicable. For example, the variation in the case of a student not being able to sit an earlier assessment under controlled conditions will mean that assessment not being included within the evidence. An assessment prior to Cedar 5 that was completed late will be given reduced emphasis. For any students with approved access arrangements, we will give reduced emphasis to evidence from before the point those arrangements were introduced if they were introduced part-way through the course. And finally, where there are mitigating circumstances, some evidence may be given reduced emphasis, to avoid a student being disadvantaged.

JCQ defines the mitigating circumstances for special consideration at the time of exams and the timeframes which should be considered. Mitigating circumstances are generally very significant events such as terminal illness of a relative, illness at the time of the exam, bereavement, significant traumatic events, and we must have been made aware of them at the time. Stress and anxiety where medication has not been prescribed, staff shortages or perceptions about quality of teaching, long term illness affecting revision time are all examples of situations that JCQ **does not** consider to be mitigating circumstances. Special consideration cannot be given due to lost teaching and learning. Further information about JCQ definitions of mitigating circumstances can be found on page 6 and 7 of the following document:

<https://www.jcq.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/A-guide-to-the-spec-con-process-202021-Website-version.pdf>

Please note that there is not an expectation by JCQ that uplifts to exam marks are awarded this year by schools and colleges. Instead, centres are encouraged to consider the evidence that they use, and how they use it, in such cases. Where we have identified mitigating circumstances, we will place reduced emphasis on the relevant pieces of evidence so that students are not disadvantaged. If a student is not notified by their teachers between Tuesday 4 May and Monday 10 May that there are individual variations in place for them, this means that the college has not identified any reason to apply individual variations in their case. If a student believes that an error or omission has occurred in this respect, they must notify us using the form below as soon as possible.

<https://forms.office.com/r/J8uJiPaj78>

The information provided through this form will be reviewed by the college and students will be notified of the outcome no later than the first week after the May half term break. The college will determine whether or not any individual variations are required, or whether the planned variations need adjustment. The college's decision will be final. Any notifications from students must be submitted using the form above ideally by 10 May but no later than **Friday 14 May**.

If a student believes there are mitigating circumstances during the time they are completing their Cedar 5 assessments, they must notify their progress tutors no later than Friday 21 May. Again, any cases will be reviewed by the college and students will be notified of the outcome no later than the first week after the May half term break. The college's decision will be final.

The college has worked hard to develop a fair method to determine teacher assessed grades this summer, and to identify and communicate with students where there are special circumstances or variations. We have also taken steps to provide a fair opportunity to students to notify us if they believe we have made any errors or omissions with respect to individual variations so that they can be reviewed and considered. We know that this detailed section about individual variations and mitigating circumstances will only apply to a very tiny minority of students, but we appreciate that it is important to those concerned.

Teaching arrangements up until the end of the year

A level and GCSE lessons will continue up to and including Friday 21 May. When Cedar 5 exams are taking place, students are asked to attend timetabled lessons at the times they are not sitting Cedar 5 assessments. Teachers will be delivering revision sessions if their Cedar 5 assessment is still to take place. Timetables are already on Cedar for Cedar 5 assessments. We will share further guidance about these Cedar 5 assessments, which for most students will take place in the sports hall, a little nearer the time.

Students completing a BTEC course may be signed-off as having completed the qualification at an earlier date, provided they have completed all the necessary work to the appropriate standard. Cedar 5 grades and indicative grades for NEA will be published on Cedar on Friday 11 June. All of the assessment and NEA grades that are used within evidence to determine TAGs will be available to you, as normal, through Cedar. Please remember that teachers will not discuss with students or parents the TAGs they will be awarding, and JCQ requires that TAGs are confidential until the results publication date (10 August for A level, 12 August for GCSE).

We hope this information has been helpful. We will keep you updated with further information and guidance where appropriate, especially as we approach the GCSE and A level results days in the summer. For now, we encourage students to keep smiling and to keep working hard during these final few weeks.

Yours sincerely,



Vicky Marks
Principal