

March 2021

Dear Parents/Carers,

**TSAT Communication regarding Potential Malpractice and External Pressure to Influence Grading for GCSEs, A-levels and other qualifications in Summer 2021**

Understanding and Context

In each of our secondary schools, we recognise the impact on all our learners resulting from the disruption linked to Covid-19, including the removal of exams for this summer.

We also recognise the stresses and anxieties which parents and carers are experiencing as they continue to support their children through these unusual times.

Our Processes

As we have shared in each of our secondary schools, our approach has been to provide some certainty for our Y13 and Y11 students, whilst maintaining their motivation and desire to improve during this crucial time as they come to the end of their A-level and GCSE courses. Alongside this our approach will ensure students in both Year 11 and Year 13 are able to transition to the next step in their education or training without impediment.

Our processes fall roughly into three areas:

1. **Evidence Base:** it is our intention to collect and use a broad body of evidence which allows each of our students to demonstrate their true abilities. We will endeavour to use a range of assessed materials to find evidence of the highest standards reached by our students. Teachers and school leaders must ensure that grading decisions are based on evidence, which is rigorous, fair and also available for external scrutiny by the examination boards.
2. **Grading (based on evidence):** teachers will use a wide range of assessed work to inform the grading process (Teacher Assessed Grades). Assessments sat under controlled conditions (during assessment cycles 1, 2 and 3) will form part of the available evidence base (except for those based entirely on portfolio evidence e.g. art and design). These controlled assessments will utilise board set materials which include graded mark schemes. The completion of the remaining assessments under controlled conditions will ensure there is a level of rigour to the process. Full access arrangements will be put in place for those who would qualify under normal examination procedures. We will consider the results of these assessments in a similar way to trial exams (in a normal examination season). Students generally show an improvement from trials to final exams which we will consider when making our grading judgments. Again, these controlled conditions assessments will form part of the evidence base.

**Any other work** which we include in the portfolio of evidence will be shared with students (and therefore parents/carers) at the point of grading. This will be done towards the final leaving dates, and each school will provide information separately.

3. **Quality assurance:** school leaders will ensure that effective moderation procedures are in place for each subject area. These will assure the consistency of marking across the school according to the guidance provided by each of the examination boards.

## Malpractice and External Pressure to Influence the Process

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 without evidence that they are **consistently** working at this level. If teachers submit higher grades without evidence, they are committing exam malpractice. Teachers and school leaders will be asked to verify that any material considered for grading is the candidate's own work and is representative of their standard of work.

In 2020, any undue pressure by student or parent/carer who placed undue pressure on teachers to increase grades was also considered exam malpractice. This 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. Parents and carers may have read recent coverage [on this matter \(see link\)](#), and our schools want to ensure that this is not the case : such pressure may result in the student's certificate being removed entirely if malpractice is deemed to have taken place.

Teachers will eventually be able to discuss which evidence they are using to inform their judgement with students, including marked or assessed pieces of work. Schools will share this later in the academic year in keeping with the yet unreleased guidance from examination boards. However, we are not allowed to discuss or disclose the grade which we will be submitting 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.

Heads of Centre (Headteachers) will sign a centre level declaration to verify that a fair and accurate process has taken place in their school. It is their responsibility to ensure that any evidence of malpractice is investigated and that, where there are grounds, this is shared with the appropriate exam board. Centres should expect to have external quality assurance provided by the examination boards. There is a risk to all grades awarded by the school if the exam boards find evidence of malpractice within the centre.

## Further Communications

**To meet the expectations, set out above, the following points regarding home-school communications must now be adhered to (with immediate effect):**

- All communications regarding assessment or grading for Y13 and Y11 students must be directed to the central email address **exams@taptonschool.co.uk** Staff, including school leaders, will be asked to forward (without reply) any such communications they receive.
- Any communications which the school considers as malpractice (as explained above) will be sent to the relevant exam board.
- Points of clarification will be answered; however, specific comments and feedback regarding the process of awarding grades will not be answered until after the grading process is complete.

## Next steps

The best thing students can do is to continue to attend classes, 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. We will continue to support all our students in realising their life chances and dreams.

We thank you for your continued support.

Yours Sincerely



Chief Executive Officer



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