



from Tom Lawson MA (Oxon), Headmaster

13 October 2020

Dear Year 11, Upper Sixth and parents,

Yesterday [the government announced](#) its intention for exams to go ahead next summer with a three-week delay. We have been acutely aware of the anxiety that exam year groups must feel not knowing what will happen with exams in the summer series 2021 and therefore how best to pace and direct any preparation. While it is true to say that calm, solid, attentive and diligent work is the right approach whatever transpires, that does not mean the uncertainty is easy to bear.

Although this announcement should bring some clarity, not all questions have been answered and we will have to wait until 'later in the autumn' for specifics on the plan B should pupils be affected by local lockdowns or long periods of self-isolation. To put the government's announcement in context, it is probably that plan B is teacher-assessed grades based on the year's normal schoolwork but it may require a few additional points of assessed and moderated work under exam conditions.

Yesterday's announcement of the anticipated three-week delay to exams will be welcome in some ways but the exam timetable will therefore be compressed. We will publish pupil exam timetables as soon as we know the details. At the College, we feel reasonably comfortable that we can manage the arrangements for these later exams even though it may necessitate unusual end-of-term arrangements.

The ASCL, the school leaders' union, was pressing for the summer exam series to be smaller with more optionality, for example condensing three A-level papers into one with a choice of questions. This was rejected by the government in yesterday's announcement but we cannot rule out a U-turn. For summer 2021, the principle of 'comparable outcomes' is likely to come into play, so the overall results will be moderated to achieve an average grade somewhere between 2019 and 2020 grades. Of course, it was the attempt to achieve 'comparable outcomes' last year with the ill-fated algorithm that led to the U-turn and abandonment of moderation.

So I hope that you feel reassured at least that I have my finger to the ground and ear on the pulse (Eh? Ed.). Even if I cannot give you any definite reassurance about what will happen, I can tell you that the College is well prepared and planning to provide all that is needed for Year 11 and the Upper Sixth to thrive in their exam years.

With very best wishes,

Tom Lawson