

6th January 2021

Dear Parent/Carer,

RE: January and Summer Examination Series Updates

Please accept our apologies for the delay in sending you this much anticipated update regarding the recent changes to the scheduled examination series. We wanted to make sure we had all the information available from the Department for Education and the awarding bodies before writing to you.

You will be aware that England has returned to a national lockdown following an announcement from the Prime Minister on Monday evening. These measures include an immediate switch to online learning for all schools due to rising rates of infection; however, there were mixed reports in the media regarding the scheduled examinations in January and in the Summer. We have now received the necessary information from the DfE and from the awarding bodies to make informed decisions on how we as an academy move forward.

January 2021 Examination Series

On Monday evening, the announcement from the Prime Minister said that the January 2021 external examinations for vocational subjects would go ahead. Yesterday evening, the DfE announced that schools, colleges and training providers would be given the flexibility to decide whether they could safely run this examination series in the current climate.

In order to make an informed decision on whether or not these exams would take place, we have been awaiting updates from the relevant awarding bodies regarding the alternative options available to us and to students.

We have today received confirmation from the awarding bodies of the alternative options available, and these are:

- *There may be an opportunity to take their assessment at a future date. If this is not possible due to arrangements still to be announced for this summer, we'll work with the DfE and Ofqual to make sure they are treated fairly.*
- *If students were going to certificate in January, we'll award a grade to a student if there is enough evidence, to help them progress.*

These options have reassured us that students will not be disadvantaged if they do not sit the exams and that they will still get a grade and final qualification. **With this in mind, we have taken the difficult decision to cancel all January examinations.**

WMG Academy has a higher number of students taking part in vocational subjects than other local settings which means that running this examination series requires a large number of students to travel into the Academy at a time when we generally, for safety have been told to stay at home. A significant number of students have no option other than public transport by which to travel and we feel that it is against current advice and not in the best interests of so many students for them to make these journeys.

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This, coupled with the recent significant national rise in infections and the need for enhanced social distancing measures which would require significant amounts of space and a large number of invigilating staff, means that we do not feel that conducting examinations is the right thing to do for our students.

You will understand that this is a difficult decision that we as teachers have wrestled with and we understand that there will be mixed views amongst our parents and students. Students have worked tirelessly to prepare for the examinations and will be disappointed that they won't be sitting their exam; however, this work is not wasted. Teachers will now use this to inform teacher assessment grades and support students in preparing to sit future assessments should the opportunity present itself. Equally, we know that many parents and students have been anxious regarding the thought of having to come into the Academy to sit these exams and this will have diverted attention away from preparing for them.

Please also be reassured that completed coursework for OCR Nationals and Technicals will still be submitted in January and we anticipate that this will contribute to any final grades.

Summer 2021 External Examinations

This afternoon, the Secretary of State for Education announced that the summer exam series has been cancelled and that the DfE would work with teachers and Ofqual to award grades based on teacher assessed grades. At present, this is all the information available to us and we expect further clarity in the coming days, weeks and months when we will, of course, update parents accordingly.

Next Steps and Ongoing Communication

If you need to contact the Academy throughout this period of closure or in response to this letter, we recommend doing so by email to info@wmgacademy.org.uk. Telephone messages will still be routinely monitored; however, you will receive a response far sooner via email communications.

Parents are also reminded that, despite a switch to online learning, it is important that any student illness, COVID-19 tests or other absences are reported to the Academy via the aforementioned email address or by leaving a message on the absence phone line by calling 02476 464661 and selecting option 1.

This has been a very fluid and fast-moving situation this week and we have been waiting for information and guidance that has only arrived in the last 2 hours. We appreciate the disappointment, upset and stress that this decision will cause and would like to thank you once again for your support and understanding and reassure parents that WMG Academy will continue to go above and beyond to support students.

Yours faithfully,



Mrs K Tague
Executive Principal



Mr M Brady
Associate Principal

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