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Head: Carolyn Roberts
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07 January 2020

Dear Parent or Carer

BTEC Sport exams are proceeding as planned on Monday 11 January and Wednesday 13 January

We are writing to you to explain more about this.

As of today, all A-level exams have been cancelled in the summer and some form of teacher assessment is to be used instead for A-level candidates, although the details are not yet clear.

BTEC candidates, as last year, are presently being treated differently.

The instruction until yesterday evening from Mr Williamson our Education Secretary was that all externally set BTEC exams had to go ahead. In this context 'externally set' refers to exams against the clock where the exam board chooses the date and time when they occur and there is no flexibility about this.

However, yesterday evening the situation about externally set and assessed exams changed again. During the day yesterday the exam boards themselves were reported to have written to Mr Williamson asking that their own exams be cancelled. Then, yesterday evening Mr Williamson's Department for Education issued a statement on their website that said that schools and colleges could now, in fact, continue, or not, with external vocational and technical exams, as they saw fit, thus withdrawing their previous insistence that all external exams for BTEC went ahead.

We have thought about the Sport exams next week carefully and have decided that we would like them to go ahead as we originally planned. This is because we believe, firstly, that it would be in the best interests of the students themselves for this particular set of exams to occur, and secondly, that we can run the exams safely even in this time of heightened alert.

We believe that students will be advantaged if they sit the exams next week for the following reasons:

- They are thoroughly prepared because of last term's teaching.
- They have revised over the Christmas break.
- The material which they are to be tested on is therefore very fresh.

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- If the exam is sat now it will not have to be sat in the summer. At the time of writing A-level examinations have been cancelled for summer 2021 but you will recollect that BTEC students were treated differently by the government and the exam board last year. We do not know at the time of writing how BTEC assessment will be managed this year. The exam board said to us today that as far as they were concerned the current plan is for the summer exams to go ahead as normal.

- Mr Springall's the Head of PE's professional judgement is that the BTEC Sport students are likely to do well in the exam and this will in turn be reflected in the final assessed grade that students are awarded, however it is awarded. He believes that our students will be advantaged in the final reckoning if they sit the exams next week. Last year, the exam board awarded students a final grade that was based on the evidence of the coursework units and exam units already completed.

- As things stand today, any student who does not achieve at the level they desire in the January examination may resit the examination in the May/June exam window. They will have a second opportunity. Our experience is that students who decide to take this second opportunity to sit the exam generally improve their grade.

We believe that we can run the exams next week safely for the following reasons:

- Public transport to and from school, if this is how your child travels, is carrying many fewer passengers. (We do recommend, where possible, that travel to school is made on foot or on a bicycle.)

- The Sport class contains 18 students who will be asked to assemble before the exam in the main school canteen, which is a large space.

- The Exam Venue will be the Sports Hall which is large enough to seat 2000 people. It normally holds approximately 300 exam desks. Students taking the exam will therefore be very widely spaced out.

- We will continue to insist on the standard COVID-safe procedures we have used all year. However, you may take the view that you do not wish your child to sit their exams next week, or your child may be not able to take their exams because they are unwell or isolating. Concerning this, Pearson (the exam board for BTEC) released a statement yesterday evening which says:

- "We will award a grade for any learner who is unable to take their exams and has enough

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evidence to receive a certificate that they need for progression.”

- “Learners unable to take their assessment this January may be able to take their assessment at a later date. If that is not possible, we will put in place arrangements to ensure you are not disadvantaged.”

Mr Springall spoke to the Pearson BTEC helpline today in person to obtain further clarification and we are able to confirm at the time of writing, as in a normal year, that students who do not sit the exam next week for any reason will have one opportunity to take the exams in the standard May/June exam session but will not be able to retake the exam to improve their grade this academic year. Waiting before sitting the exam also means students will have to recap and revise all of the work for the exams unit again in the early summer. These units will not be revised in class. Lastly, each session’s exam contains different exam ‘scenarios’ that students prepare in advance. Should you wish your child to wait until the May/June window to sit the exam the scenarios will be different to those which they are currently working on.

We are extremely sorry that the situation feels so fast-paced, changeable and confusing at the moment. This letter contains the advice we have for your child on the basis of today’s understanding of the state of things. If we are instructed differently we will contact you again.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jon Bradshaw', written in a cursive style.

Jon Bradshaw

Assistant Headteacher: Head of Sixth Form
Thomas Tallis School