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Dear Parent/Carer

Information you must know about your Sixth Form child's BTEC course

Your child is studying BTEC courses at Thomas Tallis. BTEC courses are terrific and our students do superbly at them but BTEC assessment requirements can trip students up. We are writing to you to explain what the risks are so that you can support your son or daughter in avoiding them.

Risk 1: Failing the BTEC Exam

Almost every BTEC subject now has at least one formal exam every year. Few retake opportunities are available for each exam **and for some unit a retake is not possible**. For Year 13 students, the retake opportunity may well be in the summer the year after they have left Tallis, preventing them from going on to university for a year. If a student fails an exam component they will usually fail the whole BTEC qualification, regardless of how well they have done in the other coursework components. As far as passing grades go, students can obtain a Pass (P), Merit (M) or Distinction (D) in the exam component, but it is now also possible to obtain a Near Pass (N) grade in the exam, which can mean that the BTEC qualification is awarded, but at a greatly reduced grade, even if the other coursework components are at Merit or Distinction level.

We do not want our students to be in this position! We will therefore teach them effectively towards the exam each year, show them how to revise for examinations, and arrange suitable revision sessions. However, we **cannot revise for your child**: each BTEC student must be sure to put the right amount of time into exam preparation before each formal exam. Your support with this is vital.

Risk 2: Plagiarism and copying work

BTEC courses are partially assessed through the submission of coursework. When writing coursework some students can be tempted to copy or plagiarise the words, ideas and work of others without acknowledgement. However it occurs, in whole or in part, deliberately or inadvertently, academic plagiarism is not acceptable at Tallis.

We are very clear with students from the beginning that they **must not copy work**. In addition, BTEC students sign a declaration as each piece of coursework is submitted that all the work submitted for the assignment is their own, so they are reminded each time.

Tallis has a 'two strikes and you're out' policy about single instances of plagiarism and we will consider the permanent exclusion of students who persistently copy and submit work that is not their own. We may in some instances not pick up that work has been plagiarised until after a final deadline for examination work has passed by. If this happens, we will in addition treat the plagiarised work as if it had not been submitted, and this may mean that a student fails the unit or is downgraded for it. Students who fail units or achieve lower unit grades run a number of risks about their final grade and these are explained below.

We have explained our policy about plagiarism to your child. Please reinforce our policy to your child so that there can be no confusion about it.

inquisitive • collaborative • persistent • disciplined • imaginative

Risk 3: Failing to meet BTEC Deadlines

Each of your child's BTEC units is made up of a number of pieces of coursework and we are required by the exam board, Pearson, to write a calendar of deadlines for this coursework to be submitted. We also provide and discuss a checklist for each assessment before students start the assessment that clearly specifies each piece of work that must be submitted for a student to pass it.

BTEC deadlines have two stages. An initial deadline is set by staff prior to a final deadline three weeks later. Students who meet the initial deadline can receive feedback from staff and use it to improve their work to passing standard if their work does not pass first time. They must then resubmit it by the final deadline. Nearly all students at Tallis produce work to the right standard first time round.

Students who do not meet the first deadline must submit work for the second deadline. By missing the first deadline, they give up their chance to improve their work and they must accept the grade it receives. They are not allowed to improve it and resubmit it a third time. If the work fails, they fail the BTEC unit. If they submit some work but not all the work that is specified on the assessment checklist, then they fail the BTEC unit. Finally, students who choose not to submit no work by the second and final deadline fail the unit. It is not possible to retake units.

Failing a unit dramatically limits a student's final grade. Some units are 'Core Units' and failing a Core Unit means that a student fails the entire BTEC qualification. We have no alternative qualifications we can offer mid-year. Hence, if a Core Unit is failed, there will be no reason to continue in the sixth form at Tallis because no qualification can be awarded at the end of the year.

In the past this has happened at Tallis. Please help us to prevent this from happening. It is important that your child meets all deadlines for their BTEC work, and that you contact us immediately should a problem arise.

Further details of BTEC assessment arrangements are below:

- We will explicitly teach your child how to do the assessment. Your child may be given a mock assessment so they are better prepared for the 'live' assignments that follow. We can give detailed feedback on this preparatory work.
- Before each 'live' assignment students will be issued with a checklist to ensure that they have a very good understanding of the requirements for a Pass, Merit, Distinction grade.
- The initial deadline for the 'live' assignment will be clarified with students when each assignment is issued, usually by posting them to Insight. Deadlines are also posted to tallispost16.com so that parents are aware of them.
- During the 'live' assessment tasks the teacher **can only give general guidance about the task**. They are not permitted to give detailed guidance to students or to confirm if tasks have been 'passed' or not. This means that students need to ask questions or clarify before the 'live' assessment starts.
- After the assignment is completed, the teacher can indicate which criteria have been achieved and which have not, with reasons for the decision. The teacher cannot provide other guidance as to how to achieve a higher grade e.g. a Merit or Distinction grade.
- Only ONE attempt is allowed per assignment. Exceptionally, the Course Leader for that course may permit a second attempt. This second attempt can only be made if the deadline for the first attempt has been kept to.

- As explained above, deadlines must be met. If they are not met, then the student is immediately at risk of failing the entire qualification.
- If there is a specific reason why a deadline cannot be met then the students must discuss this with the Course Leader for that subject before the deadline is reached. The Course Leader can authorise an extension, but this needs to be recorded formally and must be for a good reason which can be supported with evidence e.g. serious illness, family bereavement.
- If a student repeatedly fails to meet initial deadlines for the submission of work, without sufficient explanation of why this is so, we will regard this as persistent defiance of our behavioural expectations.
- Our Disciplinary Flowcharts are available for you to look at on the tallispost16.com website.

Course Leaders for each BTEC programme

Please contact the course leaders if you have more specific questions you want to ask.

Art & Design: Ms. Phillips – sphillips@thomastallis.org.uk

Media: Ms. McGrath – smcgrath@thomastallis.org.uk

Business: Mr Henderson – shenderson@thomastallis.org.uk

ICT: Ms Russell - srussell@thomastallis.org.uk

Health & Social Care: Ms. Goodrum – kgoodrum@thomastallis.org.uk

Sport: Mr Springall – jspringall@thomastallis.org.uk

Yours faithfully,

Mr. S. Henderson
BTEC Quality Nominee

Mr. J. Bradshaw
Assistant Headteacher: Head of Sixth Form