



22 January 2021

Dear Parent/Carer

I hope you continue to stay safe and well at this time, we are missing the majority of students in College but it has been lovely to “see them” virtually in a wide variety of lessons and activities over the last few weeks. They are doing really well. We have a few points of news this week that may be of importance to you but I am also pleased to also be able to share with you a trial version of Heathfield Highlights.

### **Heathfield Highlights**

This is intended to be a snapshot view of the achievements and reflections of our time so far in lockdown, it is not Headlines. We will aim to provide another version before Half Term so please do encourage your son/daughter to send in their thoughts and ideas. Anything they are proud of or have achieved in these weeks can be considered, or simply their reflections on what has helped. Short and concise is best, it is intended as a positive reflection of how well everyone is doing under challenging circumstances.

### **Tutor time and student support**

We do appreciate that many parents are working hard at this time and students are often having to self-motivate. It isn't easy for anyone and we do appreciate that.

I am also aware that as previously explained due to a number of our pastoral staff being unwell and unavailable over the last week, our ability to offer our usual level of communication to parents has been affected. Hopefully this will be alleviated soon and both tutors and teachers have been reinforcing positive feedback for students who we know are working hard.

Hopefully most students will have enjoyed their tutor time experiences and contact, many of which have also been live check-ins. If you are concerned about your child at this time please do get in touch.

### **Virtual Parents Evenings**

We were in the unfortunate position of having to cancel Year 8 Parents' Evening yesterday owing to technical issues from the company that provides the service. We have run successful online Tutor Evenings and had positive feedback from online Year 11 Parents Evening recently and are frustrated that we were unable to provide the quality evening expected. I can only offer our apologies for any inconvenience caused.



**Distinguished School**

It is a matter of priority currently to re-organise the Year 8 Evening as it is an important component of the Options Process. We will then provide new dates for other year groups as soon as we are able. We are currently in communication with the supplier to clearly raise our concerns regarding the issues and ensure that they are resolved as soon as possible.

### Library Quiz

As you may recall we had intended to run a Library quiz. Those parents who wished to take part had paid £3 cash. Unfortunately, due to the Covid pandemic this was not able to take place. If you require a refund of your £3 please contact [financeoffice@heathfieldcc.co.uk](mailto:financeoffice@heathfieldcc.co.uk) by the February half term and we will be happy to arrange this for you. If we do not have a request for refund by the half term we will treat your £3 as a donation. Any money raised will go towards books for the Library. If you do request a refund, please be aware that we will process a cash refund once the College is open again. We appreciate your understanding with this and look forward to arranging future Library quizzes when circumstances change.

### Update on Positive Covid cases

We are all aware that the cases are currently high in our region. In the last week we have received confirmation of three additional staff cases and three student cases. In all circumstances there were no close contacts within the College community as either social distancing was followed or individuals were not in school. I attach as previously the guidance on what to do if your child experiences symptoms.

We have now trained a body of volunteers to help with Lateral Flow Testing and will be completing more training next week. We have a rota which is already full for the next 3 weeks offering testing to staff every afternoon. This is fantastic support for the College from our community and we are very grateful. If you are interested in getting involved please contact [dstanger@heathfieldcc.co.uk](mailto:dstanger@heathfieldcc.co.uk)

### Exams update

Last week Ofqual (the government department that regulates exams in England) announced a two-week consultation to gather views on their proposed model of “Teacher Assessment” to replace A-Level and GCSE exams in Summer 2021. A second consultation aims to gather views in respect to Vocational and Technical qualifications. Both consultations are open until 23:45 on Friday 29 January; all stakeholders (parents, students and teachers) are invited to take part.

In summary, Ofqual and the DfE propose for GCSE and A-Levels that:

- students would continue with their education during this academic year
- students would be assessed by their teachers in a period beginning in May into early June
- schools would have the option of using optional “*exam board papers*” during this assessment window, in subjects where written exams have been cancelled
- schools would be required to put in place internal standardisation arrangements prior to submitting grades
- teachers would submit grades to the exam boards by mid-June and these would be based on “*evidence of the standard at which students are performing*”
- external Quality Assurance (QA) by the exam boards would be ongoing throughout June
- results would be issued to students once the QA process is complete, most likely in early July
- student appeals could be submitted immediately following the issue of results and would first be considered by schools and colleges

As a College, we have a number of reservations about the approach that Ofqual/DfE is suggesting, namely;

- In 2021 teachers are being asked to provide grades based on “*evidence of the standard at which students are performing*”. This means that students will be assessed on what they know, not what they could have known if the pandemic had never occurred. This is a

departure from last summer's arrangements, when teachers were asked to make judgements on what they thought students would have achieved if exams had gone ahead. Given the disruption to students' education caused by the pandemic, many students nationally may have less secure knowledge and understanding and, as a result, be performing at a lower standard than previous Year 13/Year 11 cohorts. It cannot be fair that these year groups are penalised with lower grades due to significant events outside their control. Year 13 and Year 11 students in 2020 whose exams were cancelled were not penalised in this way.

- “Exam board papers” could be the best way to motivate students to continue with their study, but they will have to be brilliantly designed (with optional questions so that students can select familiar topics). In our view they should also be compulsory, to ensure consistency across the country.
- The “exam board papers”, if used, will be marked by teachers. This, and the training that would be required to carry this out, is an unacceptable increase in workload (given that teachers will still be planning, teaching and assessing all other year groups at the same time). GCSE and A-Level exams are normally marked by paid examiners, who theoretically would still be available this summer.
- Appeals: although it is right that students have the opportunity to appeal, the resulting review of marking by schools could be extremely difficult and time consuming. It would seem sensible that students be issued “provisional grades” first and that it is these that they can appeal, before these are confirmed as “final” results (which would be released to Colleges and Universities).
- Year 10 and Year 12 students completing qualifications in 2021: there is still uncertainty about whether the proposed arrangements will apply to these year groups. We successfully lobbied Ofqual/DfE last year so that the extraordinary arrangements in 2020 applied to these year groups; we will do the same again this year.

We know how important it is that our students get the grades that they deserve which will allow them to access their next destination of choice. As a College, we will respond to these consultations so that Ofqual/DfE are aware of our concerns, listed above. If there is something that you feel particularly strongly about, please take the time to respond to one of the consultation documents:

- The link to the GCSE and A-Level consultation can be found [here](#).
- The link to the Vocational and Technical Qualification consultation can be found [here](#).

The final model of assessment will not be confirmed for some weeks. In the intervening period, we will continue to set high quality, engaging lessons and activities in order to keep students motivated. Our staff understand that the language that we use with students needs to be consistently optimistic and upbeat, given the considerable anxiety that this uncertainty may be causing, and we ask you to do these same. We will keep you updated throughout this process. As soon as we learn more about the final arrangements for the summer I will write to you again.

Thank you for the ongoing support of staff and our young people at this time.

Yours sincerely



**MS C BARLOW**  
Headteacher