

5 January 2021

Dear Parents and Carers

**RE: BTEC Examinations in January 2021 / Remote learning from 5<sup>th</sup> January onwards**

At 8pm yesterday, Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced that England would be placed in a third national lockdown ‘tough enough to contain’ the COVID-19 outbreak. He advised us all that we could only leave home for ‘limited reasons permitted in law, such as to shop for essentials, to work if you absolutely cannot work from home, to exercise, [and] to seek medical assistance such as getting a COVID test’. The Prime Minister also advised that, in order to do ‘everything we possibly can to stop the spread of the disease, primary schools, secondary schools and colleges across England must move to remote provision from tomorrow, except for vulnerable children and the children of key workers.’ His reason for instructing schools to close to the majority of their students is in response to growing concerns that, while ‘schools are not unsafe for children’, they may ‘nonetheless act as vectors for transmission, causing the virus to spread from household to household.’ He recognised that it is ‘not possible or fair for all exams to go ahead this summer as normal’ and added that the Education Secretary would work ‘to put in place alternative arrangements.’

As a result of this announcement, I contacted all parents and carers to inform them we would close to the majority of our students from Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> January and that we would continue to deliver education via our online learning platforms. BOA was not alone in informing parents that the BTEC examinations would not go ahead this January, given the fact that schools and colleges will most likely be shut up until and including February half term.

Unfortunately, I had to contact a number of students and their parents at 10pm last night, as – in the midst of growing confusion over the BTEC examinations – the Department for Education sent out a message at 9.49pm that BTEC examinations would continue as normal.

Firstly, I am sorry for the confusion and worry this has caused a number of parents and students from the BOA community. Secondly, as a school leader, I find myself stuck between a rock and hard place when offering advice to you all. The health and welfare of students and members of staff at BOA (and all respective families) is paramount. So too is the education we offer – and subsequent life chances – to our students. I am at a loss to explain why the DfE wishes the examinations to proceed when the Prime Minister has asked for schools and colleges to close, especially as few schools are in position to carry out lateral flow testing at this point in time.

My advice, at this point, is as follows:

1. If your child wishes to sit the examination and you feel it is safe to travel into BOA, we will continue with our arrangements. Once again, students must wear their face coverings when travelling to and from the academy, as well as observing social distancing rules. In the examination rooms, students will be assigned a dedicated seat or work station, and we will follow our usual track and trace procedures, should we receive news of any confirmed cases.
2. If you do not feel it is safe for your child to travel into BOA, we will contact the exam board to explain the extenuating circumstances. Your child will be entered for the summer examination instead, arrangements for which - as the Prime Minister has stated – are currently being reviewed.

I have also offered students assurances that we will do all we can to support their decisions, as well as working together to ensure all learners receive the grades they deserve.

It is inevitable that there will be updates over the January examination and I will (cautiously) communicate these to you all, as and when.

**Remote learning from 5<sup>th</sup> January 2021 onwards:**

Until we are aware of how students in Year 11 and Year 13 will be awarded grades for the qualifications they would normally complete by the summer, it is wise for all year groups to continue with their learning by engaging with the online sessions and remote learning activities on Microsoft Teams. Students should follow their usual timetable arrangements and teachers are busy uploading resources, as well as sending out invites to online sessions (which can be accessed via the calendar in Microsoft Teams).

As always, please contact me on the email at the bottom of this page if you have any questions.

Yours truly,



**Alistair Chattaway**  
**Principal**

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