

Chief Executive: Eddie Fraser

Telephone: 01563 576019

Email: Eddie.Fraser@east-ayrshire.gov.uk



Grange Academy

Head Teacher: Mr Robert Johnston

Email: robert.johnston@eastayrshire.org.uk

23rd March 2021

Dear S4, S5 and S6,

REFLECTING ON YOUR PROGRESS

Now that your partial return to campus is underway, and your full return to campus is on the horizon, this is a good time to take stock of your progress through the qualifications so far and to reflect on how best to approach the remainder of the school year.

YOUR MARCH REPORT

Please read your enclosed report carefully. We'd like you to have a clear understanding of how your progress is looking at this particular point in time. Clearly, all of your courses are still underway and you still have assessments to sit, so the snapshot provided by your report (written in the first two weeks of March) reflects that.

Please think of this report as a prompt for discussion. In ensuring that you are well-placed to achieve the best possible results you can, it's important to be clear about what your next steps are. For that reason, don't wait until the May assessments are over or until your results certificate arrives to seek clarification or advice – talk with us now if anything is on your mind. If you have a question about a subject, please have a chat with your class teacher. After that, if any questions remain, please speak with the Principal Teacher of the department. Here is a reminder of who the Principal Teacher of each department is:

Sciences: Mrs. McLean

Art, Business, Technologies: Mrs. Cuthbert

English: Mrs. Dunsmuir

Maths: Mr. Taylor

Music, Drama: Mr. Ramsay

PE, Practical Cookery: Mr. Allan

Modern Languages: Mr. Wilson and Mrs. Jackson

Modern Studies, Geography, History: Mr. Gray

In addition, remember that your House team (your House Head and Guidance teacher) are here for you if your questions are not about a specific subject, but are more generally about your overall progress, feelings, or plans. Here is a reminder of your House teams:

Bruce: Mrs. Quinn, Mr. Dixon, Miss MacKinnon

Douglas: Mr. Faulds, Mrs. Causer, Mr. Cowan

Graham: Mr. Bruce, Mrs. Dunsmore, Mrs. Crawford

Hamilton: Mr. Alldridge, Mrs. McDowall, Mrs. Brotherston

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

On my report, what do my Working Grades mean?

Your Working Grades reflect the assessment evidence we hold for you at this point in time. They could still go up or down, depending on your progress for the remainder of the session. Your final grades must be based on assessment evidence (not teacher estimates or predictions).

Will these be the final grades on my SQA certificate?

No, not necessarily - you haven't finished any of your courses yet and still have assessments left to sit. For that reason, your Working Grades could still go up or down. The teacher comment should clarify this.

When will I know whether my Working Grades have gone up or down?

Ask your class teachers any time. You will also receive additional tracking report(s).

When will I find out my final results?

You will receive your results certificate on 10th August. However, at all stages between now and the summer, you should have a clear understanding of your progress. On the final tracking report you receive from school before the summer, your Working Grade will match the provisional grade we have submitted to SQA.

I don't agree that the Working Grades on my report are an accurate reflection of me. What should I do?

It's not about whether your Working Grades reflect your ability or future potential – it's that they match the marks you have achieved so far in certain types of assessments. Remember that there is no teacher estimating or predicting this year – your results are based purely on "demonstrated attainment". We are very keen that you feel comfortable about the fairness of your results so if your Working Grades surprise you, please do speak with your class teachers. They will remind you what assessment evidence they hold for you so that you understand where the grade has come from. (If you think the teacher has made a mistake, show them the assessment evidence you think they haven't taken into account.) More importantly, they will help you to understand, step-by-step, how to rehearse for the assessments you still have left to sit.

During lockdown, there were some pieces of work I didn't hand in and some lessons I didn't join in with. Has that lowered my Working Grades?

Yes, it probably has. Teachers are not permitted to estimate your final grades – they must assess you based on the work you have produced and the knowledge and skills they have seen evidence of from you. Teaching of the SQA qualifications continued all the way though lockdown. For this reason, if there are gaps in your learning, this may have impacted your Working Grades. (There's still time! Stay positive!)

I usually receive very positive ratings for effort, behaviour and homework but on this report, my ratings are not as good. Why?

Ask your teachers about this. Could it perhaps be something to do with your engagement in January and February? Under 'Effort' you may have scored lower than usual if you didn't manage to stay regularly involved with the work the teacher was setting. Under 'Homework', you may have scored lower than usual if you weren't submitting work. If you are in this position, our advice at this stage is don't look back with regrets - lockdown was hard for everyone and your teachers are not interested in judging you for that – they just want to help you to do well going forward. Instead, focus on the plan from here on. Perhaps now that you are partially back on campus, you'll be able to get your effort and homework ratings up in time for your next report. You can do it and we're here to help!

I found lockdown mentally challenging – my mood was lower than usual and I found online learning difficult to stay focused with. Could that be taken into account as a special circumstance for an appeal or an upgrade?

In itself, no. Across Scotland, lockdown was hard for everyone and online learning was not as satisfying or easy to stay patient with as normal school learning. Almost all senior pupils, nationally, will have found it a challenge to stay fully positive and engaged. For this reason, the SQA reduced the content of courses and extended deadlines. Don't look backwards – focus on a clear and manageable plan for moving forward. A very small number of exceptions to this will already be known to the Guidance team. If in doubt – please ask.

I wasn't at my best during online learning in January and February. However, now that we're back on campus, I'm really keen to get my grades up and do well. Have I left it too late?

Not at all! Go for it! You still have time. As above, almost everyone found lockdown hard and you're definitely not alone. The trick now is to get yourself into a determined frame of mind, plan carefully, then work really hard. Use your report as a starting point to have frank conversations with your class teachers about what you need to do to put yourself in a strong position to tackle the May assessments. What needs to be handed in? What should your study focus be? How can you move forward from here? There's no point looking backwards and wishing lockdown had been different. Instead, look forward

and throw all your energy into preparing for the May assessments. Every teacher is on your side and keen to help.

I feel as though when I look through SQA past papers, there are some parts of the course I haven't been taught.

That may be for two reasons. The first is that perhaps if you were not fully participating in the work during lockdown, it was taught then and you missed it. (In which case, your teachers will be very forgiving – just ask for help making up for what you missed.) The second reason is that the SQA has removed bits of the course which were compulsory in previous years – this is to make it fairer for you, so that you have a fair opportunity to complete the courses. In previous years, pupils weren't self-isolating before Christmas or in lockdown in January and February so reducing what is in each of the courses has helped to level the playing field between you and pupils from the years unaffected by Covid.

What will the May assessments be like?

You will be familiar with past papers from the SQA website. They will be similar in format to that. Your teachers are talking about them in class all the time. If you're still unsure, please do ask them.

When will we find out the dates of the assessments?

The post-Easter practices will take place in class time after the holidays. Please consider this letter as advance notice of that. Your class teachers will let you know what is coming up on which days. Before Easter, you will also receive an assessment calendar for the May assessments.

Will there be study leave?

During the May assessment block, there will be a Programme of Study on offer. This will include masterclasses, supervised private study etc. During this time, you may choose to study from home. An outline of what is available will be included when you receive your May assessment calendar.

How exactly will my final grade be decided?

| | |
|--|--|
| Coursework. (Key evidence.) | For example, your N5 English folio is worth 30% of your overall mark; your Higher Music performance is worth 60% of your overall mark, and so on. |
| May assessments. (Key evidence.) | The reason these are so important is because they cover the whole course and they come as late as possible in the year. These two factors give them high status (or "weighting") in terms of what the SQA considers to be appropriate evidence of your knowledge and skills. |
| Post-Easter practices. (Supporting evidence.) | After Easter, you will be doing lots of rehearsals and practices during lessons. You will sit them under exam-conditions (no notes, timed, no advance notice of the questions). The main purpose of these is 1: to practise and 2: to spot gaps in what you understand so that we can fill those gaps. However, we will also keep those practices up our sleeves in case you have an off-day in the May assessments and these ones went better for you. |
| Limited additional evidence from August to December. (Supporting evidence.) | There may be some assessments that you did before lockdown which may be helpful in providing some evidence of your work. However, these will have limited value for two reasons. The first is that almost everyone gets better with time and practice – assessments done early in the course don't show you at your very best. The second is that because you were only halfway through your courses at that point in time, your teachers will have set assessments with more support than you would otherwise have. For example, perhaps you did an end-of-topic test immediately after studying the topic, so the test has not assessed your ability to retain the information over time; perhaps you did a timed essay but you knew the question in advance, so that isn't strictly-speaking SQA conditions, and so on. |

Once I've finished my last May assessment, is the term basically over?

Absolutely not! (Unless you are in S6.) The timetable will change at the start of June and we will be moving straight into your new courses. It's important that you attend.

Will I be able to appeal my final result?

The SQA appeals process for 2021 has not yet been published. (See the school app for a link to the consultation of views.) However, my advice is that on an ongoing basis from now until summer, you already know your Working Grades, so there's nothing to wait for - if you wish to appeal, appeal now.

The benefit of this is that if there's an issue, we still have time to fix it. If something feels unfair or if you feel there is a problem, please tell us now. If you feel you have produced marks in your assessments which do not match your Working Grades, please do go through the steps outlined above to have a discussion about that with us. A reminder: you will know before the summer holidays what provisional results have been sent to the SQA so there will be no surprises on your results certificate.

I'm worried about my P.E. qualification. Will the restrictions be lifted in time for me to do my performance assessments?

We do have a plan for this so please don't worry. It is likely that you will be sitting your performance assessments well past the point that assessments for your other subjects are finished. This is to make sure you have had a fair opportunity to show us your skills. Please note that these are likely to continue well into mid-June, so please do not take early holidays or stop attending.

I need a reminder about how best to organise my studying.

In addition to the ongoing advice of your class teachers, we will be sending you a factsheet before Easter which sums up the best techniques for studying.

I have a question not covered in this letter. Who should I speak with?

About a particular subject: your class teacher or the Principal Teacher of the Department.

About your overall progress, feelings, or plans: your House Team.

About SQA processes: Miss MacKinnon.

IN CLOSING

You are the pride of Grange. Your teachers have nothing but respect and admiration for your year group in terms of your approach to – and resilience towards – your learning this year. Keep positive. Ask for help. Give your courses a massive final push between now and the end of May and you will achieve the results you deserve.

Yours faithfully,

M. MacKinnon

Mary MacKinnon
Depute Head Teacher
Grange Academy