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Dear Students, Parents and Carers,

Thank you for your patience while we have deliberated our decision regarding the upcoming BTEC exams. I am very well aware that no decision we could have made would have pleased everyone, and that every decision we could have made will have valid criticisms made against it.

Nevertheless, we have made the decision to remain open as an exam centre for the foreseeable future. What this means is that any student who wants the opportunity to show the hard work they have been putting into preparing for their exams, can do just this.

However, we are aware that many students may feel that they do not want to sit this exam for a number of reasons, including anxieties about mixing with other people and potentially spreading the virus, as well as anxieties around their preparation for their exam. No student will be penalised for not attending this exam.

It is important to understand that, while the government has confirmed that A Level and GCSE exams are cancelled this year, they have not confirmed that Centre Assessed Grades will be used for BTECs. Therefore we do not yet know whether BTEC students will have to sit these exams in the summer (although this is unlikely). The process involved in Centre Assessed Grades (CAGs) has not been confirmed, even for A Level and GCSE candidates. We suspect, if these are used for BTECs, that we will have to submit a number of pieces of evidence of a student's ability and work rate. It is likely that we will be asked to provide evidence of work produced in exam conditions.

I am very aware that many students have been working very hard to prepare for their exams and may feel very disappointed and upset if they are not able to take them. On the other hand, I am also aware that many of our students have been adversely affected by many aspects of the situation this year, and will be very relieved if they do not have to sit their exam. Although exams can be stressful, it can also be stressful to feel that you have not fully proved your abilities to yourself, as well as to others. It is also important to remember, as I said in an earlier email to you, that education is about much more than a piece of paper with a grade on it – it is also about the skills and knowledge that you learn by completing coursework and preparing for exams.

To help students and their parents with the complex decision with which they are now faced, I will attempt to summarise the issues below.

#### Risks of attending the exam

Risk	Steps we are taking to mitigate this risk
Spreading or contracting the virus	All candidates for the exam will have to have tested negative for covid at school within the 24 hours before the exam.  All exams will take place in well ventilated rooms, with appropriate social distancing.  All students and staff are expected to wear masks in communal areas (though candidates are not expected to wear masks while completing their exam) and wash their hands regularly.

Not doing well in the exam	All teachers are offering extensive (often one-to-one) online revision support before the exams, in both their timetabled lessons and in some extra sessions. Some teachers are also offering this in school for those who want to come in.  Students will also be able to resit this exam in the summer – and in any case, their grade for a January exam will only form part of their Centre Assessed Grade (if this is the system for BTECs).
Impact on mental health.	We have a strong pastoral system and can also offer counselling.

### Risks of not attending the exam

Risk	Steps we are taking to mitigate this risk
Impact on results	We will put in place as many assessment opportunities in exam conditions as we are able to, in order for students to be able to prove their level of ability and work.
Change in assumed policy of CAGs (Centre Assessed Grades)	If CAGS are not allowed for BTEC students, we will offer students the opportunity to sit this exam again in the summer – though this could mean that students have to complete multiple exams in a short space of time
Impact on mental health.	We have a strong pastoral system and can also offer counselling.

I am very aware that this is a difficult decision for you all to make – and I am more than happy to answer questions, though I have limited knowledge of what the future will bring, as the government have not fully confirmed the arrangements for the assessments of any of the courses we offer. Please do not hesitate to email me if you have questions that you think can be answered by email, or if you would like to book a time for a conversation.

I would ask all of you to remember that, whatever decision you make about these exams, students at LaSWAP are expected to attend all their lessons, whether online or face-to-face; and complete all assignments, until the end of the school year in July.

Good luck with your decision making process!

In kindness,

Flora Wilson

Director of Sixth Form

William Ellis School