



The Duchess's Community High School

Public Examinations

GCSE, GNVQ, AS, A2 and AVCE

Information for Parents

Striving for success for all

Introduction

Public examinations can be a stressful time for students and parents and it is important that all those involved are as well informed as possible. Well-informed students will realise that the rules and regulations are designed to ensure fairness and minimise disturbance and it is in the interest of all that the exams run smoothly.

The school will make every effort to ensure that candidates receive the best possible preparation for their examinations, that the administrative arrangements run smoothly, and that the examinations are conducted in a way that will cause as little stress as possible and help students to achieve their best. Mock exams are run to the same standards and rules in order that students are familiar with the process beforehand.

This booklet is intended to inform you about examination procedures, to answer some of the most frequently asked questions to help to guide and support students and parents through the examination process.

It also contains the formal notices that are required by regulation to be given to each candidate.

If you have any other questions please feel free to make enquiries from **Mrs Rose** or **Mr Learmonth** the exams officers. You can contact the exam office by telephone on **01665 602166** ext. **232**.

On exams days it is best to contact the reception on **01665 602166** and leave a message, with the nature of your query, since the main priority will be the starting of exam sessions on time.

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Who is responsible for the examinations?

The schools exams officer is responsible for administering all public examination arrangements and for oversight of students during exams, under direct responsibility from the headteacher.

There is a team of external invigilators who will be present during the exams at all times and who are supervised by the exams officer.

The awarding bodies or examination boards set down strict criteria which must be followed for the conduct of exams, and the centre is required to follow them precisely.

Who is entered for public examinations?

It is the schools policy to enter every student who is being taught a subject, for the most appropriate level of exam. Only by exception, after consultation with parents, and with the written consent of the deputy head - curriculum, will students not be entered.

Can students take holidays during term time?

Dates for exams are rigidly fixed by the exam boards and are subject to change until close to the time that students start study leave. The exams officer will not give actual dates for exams to parents or students in advance, wishing to book holidays. Parents are reminded that they require the headteacher's permission to take students out of the school and they book holidays during term time at their own risk. It is strongly against good practice, careful preparation and school policy to take holidays in term time.

Coursework deadlines

Most of the subjects have an element of coursework included in them which has to be completed, be marked and assessed and the marks and work sent to the boards well before the formal exam sessions take place. The school sets deadlines that allow time for this process and to meet the board deadlines. These cannot be changed. Students who don't submit coursework on time will not be allocated a mark for this portion and their overall grade will suffer. They may also not be eligible for special consideration for the formal exams should they be ill as they will not have completed the minimum 35% of the course.

What arrangements are made for study leave?

Study leave begins for year 11, 12 and 13 students in May on dates notified by the centre. After those dates students are only required to be in school when they actually have examinations. Any year 13 re-sitting an AS will be allowed the day before the exams as study leave.

What information will students receive about their examination entries?

When the entries have been entered on the schools computer system, students will receive a student entry summary detailing the subjects and tiers for which they have been entered. This should be checked and you are asked to inform the school if you believe there are any errors or problems.

This document serves two purposes:

- I. to check that all entries have been made and are correct,
- II. to inform parents that they undertake to pay the entry fees should their son/daughter fail to take the examination without good reason.

Once the examination boards have received entries, Statements of Entry will be issued showing the subjects entered with that board, and giving the dates of the examination. These should be checked and kept safely by the candidate, as they are evidence that an entry has been made. They should be brought by the candidate to each examination as an additional check on papers entered, tiers of entry, candidate number etc. but not written on. Sometimes candidates will receive updated statements if the entries made for them change.

What does A GCE examinations mean?

Advanced level exams are known as GCE subjects and are now examined in 2 parts and in modules. Three modules are taken in Year 12 and AS certification applied for. The student can then drop the subject if he/she wishes or go on to full 'A2' certification by taking 3 more modules in Year 13. All six modules will then count towards the final 'A2' level grade. Any module at AS can be re-taken, and may be re-entered if the student goes on to full 'A' level certification. Students unhappy with the AS grades awarded may decline them before 20 September, re-sit one or more of the modules in January and apply for certification at that point. Students must be aware that this is an individual decision and should seek advice from their subject teachers and head of sixth form.

All AS students will be entered for an award in the June examination season as we have been advised by UCAS that admission tutors will expect to see results for AS on the UCAS form. The award may be declined when the results are issued. In that case no information about AS scores has to be declared to UCAS.

What are modular examinations?

Modular GCSE and AS/A2 levels involve the written examinations on sections of the syllabus being taken at intervals throughout the course rather than all at the end.

Most modular sessions are in November, January, March and June according to the Board used. Students have the opportunity to retake certain units on the advice

of their subject teachers but the school only pays the entry fee if the original examination was missed through illness and a medical certificate was produced.

Where will the examinations be held?

The main locations for written papers are the main hall, sixth form common room and the bailiffgate gym. Candidates are asked to be there 10 minutes before the advertised start time to enable seating procedures to be carried out efficiently, and to allow for any unforeseen room changes. They are asked to queue in alphabetical seat order and wait quietly outside the exam venue until invited to enter. Then find their seat number which is on their examination timetable.

How do I know when the date exams take place?

The main period for exams is from the start of May – until the end of June/early July but some oral examinations and practical examinations will take place earlier. All students will receive a centre produced timetable of all AS, A2, GCSE/GNVQ examinations. This will include start times and the location of the examinations. It is helpful if parents make sure a copy of this timetable is available to them at home with their son's/daughter's exams highlighted.

At what times do the exam sessions begin?

The exam boards dictate the permissible start times for exams. Candidates are asked to report no later than 8.45 am for morning examinations and 1.15 pm for afternoon examinations. The length of examination papers varies and they will frequently not finish until after 3.40 p.m. Students and parents should be aware of this and make appropriate arrangements for getting home. Students will not be allowed out of an exam early for any reason.

Some students may also receive an allowance of extra time for the examinations and so their finishing times will be even later. Timings for some papers may deviate from this pattern and the candidates will be made aware of this. It is the candidates' responsibility to be aware of the start time of each exam, but parents should be warned there is a tendency for students to confuse AM and PM. sessions. Please ensure your son/daughter checks his/her exam commitments for each day on the previous evening.

What happens if a student has more than one exam at the same time?

If a candidate is timetabled to sit two or more exams at the same time this is known as a clash. If these are for the same subject this is intentional on the part of the board and the exams are meant to run one after another. If not, then this should be picked up during the checking process and notified immediately to the exams officer who can grant permission for one of the papers to be taken at a different

time on the same day. The candidate will have to remain under supervision between the two papers. In rare cases it may be necessary for a paper to be done the next day and it is a requirement that the candidate is supervised overnight. This is essential to avoid compromising the integrity of the examination and needs to be organised well in advance.

If an exam is delayed from a morning to an afternoon session the candidate will be supervised over lunchtime. They should bring some revision or reading material and their lunch and a drink, as they will not be allowed to buy food. Even attempting to communicate with any other candidate will invariably result in the loss of all those exams for all of the candidates involved.

How are students supervised?

External invigilators will supervise students under the direct management of the exams officer. Once candidates enter the exam room they must remain supervised and follow the invigilators instructions at all times. The invigilators are experienced in exams procedures and subject to strict regulation, references and police checks. They usually work in teams and can contact the exams officer to resolve any issues.

The Invigilators call candidates in by candidate number or subject group and should find the desk with their candidate number card on it.

In some sessions, papers will be already open or on exam desks, these must not be opened until candidates are advised to do so.

What happens if a student cannot find his/her place in the exam room?

Occasionally problems arise because a student's seat number is not where he/she thinks it should be. There are a number of possible reasons for this and the situation has to be investigated. Your son/daughter will be asked to wait at the front for a few moments whilst the invigilator on duty in that venue checks the entry and sorts the problem out with the exams officer. Every effort is made to keep these problems to a minimum and they will not prejudice any student's chance of taking an examination for which he/she has been entered. Students who have been officially withdrawn from an examination will not be permitted to sit the papers. It is helpful if the candidate has his/her statements of entry with him/her, but these must not be written on.

What happens if a student is late?

If parents are aware that their son/daughter has got the timing of the examination wrong and has missed the starting time, they should telephone the school immediately and get a message to the exams officer. Depending on how long the exam has been in progress, it may be possible for the candidate to be admitted. However, we are bound by examination board regulations on this matter. Normally

candidates with a genuine reason and who are brought straight to school may be admitted within the first 30 minutes of the start time, after this time the board will decide whether to accept any paper sat.

Candidates who arrive more than 1 hour after the start or after the end of the exam will not be admitted.

What should students bring to the examinations?

Candidates should bring writing equipment, coloured pencils, erasers etc. in a transparent plastic bag or pencil case. Non-transparent pencil boxes or cases will not be permitted in the examination room. All candidates should have their name clearly marked on their calculators, as these have to be collected in for some mathematics papers, which are non-calculator.

Pens should be black or blue. NO gel pens are allowed. Modular papers require the use of a black biro only.

Some subject papers will require the use of calculators, dictionaries or set texts, and candidates will be advised by their subject teachers about this.

Candidates are responsible for ensuring that they bring everything they need to the examination.

What should candidates not bring with them?

Some items are strictly banned from exam rooms and should not be brought into the examination room under any circumstances. The exam boards treat mere possession of these items as an infringement.

Mobile phones

Personal CD/tape/minidisk players - unless permitted for individual language exams.

These items can be handed to an invigilator before the start of an exam, but the school cannot be responsible for the security of these while the examination is in progress

The use of tippex or correction pens is not permitted. Candidates should cross through work they do not wish to be marked

Notes, papers and text books etc are only allowed in certain exams and candidates will be informed by the subject teachers in advance

Candidates should not bring lucky mascots etc. into the examination room

No food items or chewing gum are allowed

May students bring a drink?

Candidates may bring a drink with them into the exam room. However no more than 750ml of still water or dilute squash may be brought, preferably in a sport cap bottle. No fizzy drinks, cans or pouches will be allowed due to the risk of spillage. Drinking too much may cause an issue since candidates may not be allowed to use toilet facilities during short exams due to issues of supervision.

Regulations governing the use of calculators

Calculators are allowed for some subject papers but others explicitly prohibit the use of calculators. Candidates must not have on them or attempt to use any form of calculator for these. Also calculators with any of the following facilities are prohibited:

Data banks

Dictionaries

Language translators

Retrieval of text or formulae

QWERTY keyboards

Built-in symbolic algebra manipulations

Symbolic differentiation or integration

Capability of remote communication with other machines

The use, or attempted use, of any such calculators will be regarded as malpractice.

Calculators with graphic displays and programmable calculators are permitted if information and/or programs stored in the calculator's memory are cleared before the examination. Retrieval of information and/or programs during the examination is an infringement of the regulations. Candidates are responsible for clearing any information and/or program before the examination.

What are the regulations regarding mobile phones?

The regulations state that mobile phones are not to be brought into examination rooms under any circumstances. This applies to all public and centre/mock examinations. They cause disturbance to other candidates if they ring and can present opportunities for malpractice. Any student found to have a phone in the exam room will be reported to the appropriate examination board. Should this happen they are likely to be disqualified from that paper and possibly from the whole examination in that subject.

It is a very serious offence and our advice is that the phone should not be brought to school. We can take no responsibility for the security of mobile phones brought to school.

What is meant by Malpractice?

Malpractice is the term that the exam boards use for any irregularity, or breach of the regulations of any form. The exams officer is required to, and will, report all infringements to the appropriate body and they will decide on what action to take based on the nature of the infringement. There is a tariff system of actions from which they can decide within limits and some infringements carry automatic loss of marks as a minimum penalty. The exam boards take the integrity of exams very seriously and it is important that candidates heed the exam officers instructions carefully.

What happens if a student does not turn up for an examination?

A student who absents themselves from any examination without presenting a doctor's note or a satisfactory reason for a request for special consideration will receive a grade based only on those elements of the examinations which have been marked.

Parents should be aware that the centre will seek to recover the exam fees if a child does not turn up for an examination then parents will be asked for a payment depending on the examining board in the event of non-attendance. It is in all our interests to ensure that the centre's examination budget is not wasted.

How are exams started?

The invigilator or member of subject department will usually announce the exam formally, and candidates cautioned that they are subject to the regulations. Any instructions or board notices, changes to papers etc will be read out and the candidates asked to complete their details on the answer papers.

What standards of behaviour are expected during examinations?

All candidates are given a copy of a 'notice to candidates' produced by the examining bodies, which gives general guidelines for conduct, which must be observed.

The centre and the examination boards regard breaches of examination regulations very seriously. Parents should please impress on your son/daughter the importance of good behaviour in an examination, as any activities that may disturb or upset other candidates will not be tolerated.

The head and exams officer have the power to remove disruptive candidates.

Candidates are asked to wait quietly outside the exam venue, and to enter and leave in silence. This avoids disturbance to other candidates and does help to

maintain a calm atmosphere for those students who are nervous about their exams.

Candidates who try to communicate with other candidates inside the venue, or who create a disturbance in the examination room will be asked to leave, and the circumstances will be reported to the examination board. This may result in the candidate not receiving a grade for the whole of that examination.

What should students wear for examinations?

Examinations are a school activity and students below the sixth form must wear normal uniform. We ask for the co-operation of parents in ensuring candidates are correctly dressed as we wish to avoid causing stress to candidates in the examination room by pointing out when they are not in correct uniform. All students know the uniform rules and it is their responsibility to ensure they observe them. Students not dressed properly or modestly will not be permitted to sit exams.

Jackets, jumpers or other clothing are not allowed over the backs of the chairs.

Candidates should bring as little as possible in the way of coats and baggage into the examination room.

Items of jewellery, such as rings or bracelets should not be worn as they make a noise on the desk and would be deemed a disruption to other candidates, likewise keys around necks.

What do I do if my son/daughter is unwell at the time of one of the examinations?

Even if you would not normally visit your doctor's surgery for minor illnesses it is important that you do so at examination time. Your doctor will advise as to whether your son/daughter is fit to sit the examination. If the candidate takes the paper, your doctor should give you a letter, which the school can forward to the examination board asking for special consideration on the grounds of illness. If the candidate is unable through illness to sit a paper the board may, after examining the doctor's letter and any evidence of performance on other papers, decide to award a grade. It is unlikely that an AS grade will be awarded if a unit is missed as the candidate will be expected to re-take it in January. It is essential that you see your doctor on the day of the examination or previously. Retrospective information is not accepted by the examination boards and any doctors' letters must be forwarded to the exams officer without delay, as there is a tight deadline.

Please telephone the school if your son/daughter will not be attending an examination or if he/she will be present but is unwell. It is often helpful for the invigilator to be aware that a candidate is not feeling well.

Please be aware that any medical certificate must be accompanied by a note detailing the examinations to which it refers and the date on which the papers were sat. We cannot guarantee otherwise that all relevant examinations will be covered.

What do Students do who finish early?

Students should use all of the available time on their exams and spend any time at the end checking their answers. In any event they are not permitted to leave before the duration of the exam. They must sit quietly at their desk so as not to disturb other candidates.

What do I need to do if a student has problems that may affect his/her examination performance?

Some candidates are eligible for extra time or special examination arrangements. These are normally identified by the school and appropriate applications made supported by an educational psychologist's report, the exams officer and head are empowered to grant extra time, the provision of a prompter or similar arrangements, but only given the correct evidence and at their sole discretion. The learning development department will make arrangements for providing any other special assistance and inform the candidates of any special rooming arrangements.

Any illness, or family circumstances, which may affect examination performance, arising shortly before or during the exams, should be notified as soon as possible to the exams officer so that an application for special consideration can be made to the boards. Parents should be aware that any adjustment is likely to be small and that no feedback is ever provided.

How can parents best help their son/daughter during the examination period?

Examinations are inevitably a stressful time for some candidates and support from both centre and parents can be helpful. The school will provide advice about revision programmes and examination techniques, and if this is followed it should not be necessary for any student to work abnormally long hours during the revision period. It is probably helpful to discuss with your son/daughter how he/she intends to organise revision and to talk through any anxieties about particular techniques or subject matter. Testing knowledge of factual material can benefit the student if such help is requested, but often all that is needed is a quiet place to work and lots of encouragement. Students should get plenty of sleep and some opportunities for relaxation.

What happens about the return of centre books and equipment at the end of the examination period

Students will have been informed by subject departments, of the arrangements for return of books etc. Please ensure that all textbooks and equipment are returned promptly to centre.

When and how are the results distributed?

A level GCE results arrive in school on 16th August and GCSE results on 23rd August. Results will normally be available for collection from 8.00 a.m. for GCE and 9.30 a.m for GCSE. Students wishing for a relative or friend to collect their results must send a signed letter of authorisation with the collector. Results will not be given over the telephone under any circumstances.

Any uncollected A2 level results will be posted. AS and GCSE candidates not intending to collect in person but wishing their results to be posted, should leave a stamped addressed envelope (also bearing their candidate number), with the exams officer or at the school reception.

What can I do if results are substantially different from what is anticipated?

It must be remembered that examinations can only measure performance on the day, and that candidates can do better or worse than anticipated for a variety of reasons. It is advisable to obtain a copy of the script and mark scheme before proceeding to an EAR (enquiry about result) that is very expensive. If there are serious grounds for concern about a result then the centre can initiate an enquiry with the appropriate board. Details of the procedures and the fees involved are available from the exams officer and the process should be started as soon as possible after consultation with the head of department concerned.

If the results have serious implications for the student's future plans then advice should be sought from the careers service.

How do students go about obtaining copies of marked examination scripts?

It is currently possible to have access to marked scripts for most AS/A2 units and some GCSE. You will need to see the exam officer and pay a fee for each subject/paper. You should be aware that copies of marked scripts prior to an enquiry on results must be ordered within one week of the issue of results. You will also need to purchase a copy of the mark scheme.

How do students decline an A Level grade?

The school will apply to consolidate AS/A2 units together at the end of each course, in June, as standard. This will result in an AS/A2 grade being offered by the Boards. If a student intends to re-sit and improve the level, then they can decline the offered grade and ask for a new 'certificate grade' at the time they re-sit. Decline of grade is free of charge if within the deadline 4 weeks after result publication.

How do candidates apply to re-sit?

It is possible to re-sit modules; requests to re-sit units must be made on the correct form, via subject departments and accompanied by the appropriate examination fees. Students should discuss their decision to re-sit with their subject teacher or relevant department head, who will need to sign the form to signify approval.

Fees may vary depending on the subject and must be paid by the deadlines set. Refunds are not normally given.

How should fees be paid?

Where students are requesting a chargeable service, fees should be paid to the exam officer and cheques made payable to Northumberland County Council.

When do students receive certificates?

The examining boards issue certificates well after the examinations have taken place. They are usually in school by the end of November each year. Students are required either to collect them in person or a friend or family member may collect them but only with some form of ID.

A student who has declined his/her GCE grade will not receive a certificate until the certification process is completed. This cannot be done retrospectively without a substantial financial penalty, which must be borne by the student. Certification can be applied for in the next exam season without charge.

Certificates uncollected after 1 year are destroyed; they can only be replaced by direct application to the boards by the candidate, and will require proof of identity such as an original birth certificate and a substantial fee per certificate (£25-£35 per certificate) depending on the exam board.