

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT EXAMS AT GRAVENEY SCHOOL

GENERAL QUERIES (points 1 – 5)

1. Who is responsible for the examinations?

The awarding bodies or examination boards set down strict criteria which must be followed precisely and it is the responsibility of the school's Examinations Manager to administer all public exams ensuring that Graveney School meets the criteria. She is acting under direct responsibility from the Head of Centre, the Head teacher and Deputy Head teacher.

2. 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 consent of the Assistant Head teacher KS4 (or KS5), will students not be entered.

3. When will the exams take place?

The main period for public exams is from the middle of May until the end of June but some oral and practical exams will take place earlier than that. A small number of exams are also held in November and March though these are much smaller seasons and only a few students will have exams in those periods.

A general timetable for each season will be posted on the Examinations Information section of the school website, and a copy will be given to each student in form time as soon as is practicable after the entries have been made.

Exam dates and times are rigidly fixed by the examination boards and cannot be changed by schools for any reason. The dates are often not confirmed by the boards until several weeks before the start of an exam season

It is not possible for exams office staff to give exam dates in advance to students or parents who are trying to plan holidays; it is always best not to book holidays during term-time. Parents are reminded that they require permission to take students out of school and that they book holidays during term-time at their own risk.

4. What information will students receive about their examination entries?

Students will receive an entry summary detailing the subjects and tiers (levels) for which they have been entered. This should be checked carefully and the Examinations Manager notified ***in writing (or email)*** immediately if there are any errors. Particular attention should be paid to checking the spelling of names, ensuring that the full legal name is shown, that the date of birth is correct and, of course, that all the subject information is correct.

5. What arrangements are made for study leave?

Study leave begins for students in Years 11, 12 and 13, during May on dates notified by the school. There is no study leave for examinations that take place during the rest of the year.

BEFORE THE EXAMS BEGIN (points 6 – 10)

6. Where will the examinations be held?

We are fortunate at Graveney to have several locations where exams can be held, the Sports Hall, Assembly Hall, Sixth Form Study Centre and other rooms. It is therefore critical that students keep their timetables safe and check them every day since it will show which room each exam will take place. As Graveney is on a large, hilly site, it's not ideal exam preparation if a student has to run from one end of the site to the other because s/he is in the wrong place!

7. How will students know where to sit?

Seat numbers will be shown on the students' individual timetables, and we also pin up a copy of the session's seating plan outside each venue so that students can double-check.

8. What time do exams start?

The main morning start time is 8.45 am, and the afternoon time is 1.15 pm. Students are requested to assemble outside the exam room 15 minutes before those times so that we can begin the process of getting everyone into the room and seated properly to ensure a smooth start to the exam.

Some exams have to be scheduled for other times but this is only if students have a clash (two or more exams timetabled for the same time). Students will have received separate, individual instructions from the Examinations Manager when this occurs.

Parents should note that there is a tendency for students (even the most able ones!) to misread their timetables and confuse morning with afternoon sessions, or even confuse the length of exams with the start time. Please ensure that your son or daughter checks his or her timetable for each day on the previous evening.

9. What happens if students have more than one exam timetabled for the same time?

This is known as a 'clash' and it depends on what the clash is, as to how it is resolved. As there are only two official start times in a day, the examination boards frequently timetable two AS or A2 units for the same time – the intention here is that students take the two exams back to back with no break. This is because they are exams in the same subject and are intentionally timetabled in that way by the examination boards – it's called a false clash.

A real clash is when students have two (or more) exams in different subjects timetabled for the same time. Here exams staff are able to change the start time for one of the exams so that the student has a break between subjects. However there are very strict regulations and criteria that the exam staff have to follow in order to be able to move an exam and students must follow instructions precisely or they could find themselves disqualified from one paper.

Students will always receive a separate letter from the Examinations Manager giving them the full information regarding any clash and its resolution and will be asked to sign to indicate acceptance of the letter and understanding of the instructions.

10. How are students supervised during exams?

At Graveney we are fortunate to have an excellent team of trained and experienced external adult invigilators; they are full members of staff who have undergone all the references and CRB checks like any other staff and work under the direct management of the Exams Manager. They usually organise and officially start exams and students must follow their instructions as they would any other member of staff.

DURING THE EXAM SEASON (points 11 – 19)

11. What should students bring to the exams?

Students are responsible for supplying all their own equipment – including pens, pencils, calculators, and maths equipment as the school will not lend items. All equipment must be in a transparent pencil case or plastic bag – non transparent pencil cases are not allowed and will be removed.

The national regulations state that students should only use **BLACK** ink, and **NOT USE GEL** pens.

Some exam papers require the use of a **black biro only**, so students should make sure they have the correct pens. The reason for this is that many answer scripts are now scanned and digitally recorded, gel ink and fountain pen ink sinks into the paper and can then be seen by the scanner on the back of the sheet of paper, thus making it almost impossible to read when both sides of the sheet are scanned. Students should ensure that they have a black biro in all exams.

12. Calculator memories should always be cleared before entering an exam room, and calculators with any of the **following functions 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 communication with other machines or the internet (i.e. USB ports)

13. What should students NOT bring into exams?

National regulations strictly ban some items from exam rooms and students should therefore not bring them in to exams under any circumstances. Mere possession of them can result in disqualification. This includes items such as:

- Notes, books or paper of any kind,
- Tippex or correction pens or tape,
- Calculators with USB ports,
- Calculator cases or instruction sheets,
- Coats, hats, scarves or bags,
- Mobile phones, iPods, mp3 players or any other electronic communication/storage device with text/digital facilities,
- Food (unless there is a genuine medical need, agreed with the Exams Manager before the exam season)

Please note that this list isn't necessarily complete and invigilators can, and will, remove any item that is not permissible according to the national regulations.

Although we accept no responsibility for the security of mobile phones, iPods etc., if brought into school students should place them into the small plastic bags provided by invigilators who then look after them for the duration of the exam. Mobile phones should always be switched off, and it's important to remember to cancel any alarms set since these alarms can still sound on some models even when the phone is switched off and this, technically, is in breach of the regulations.

14. Are students allowed to bring a drink?

Students should not bring any drinks as individual bottles of water will be provided. Any other drink, including cans, cartons or pouches of drinks are not allowed and will be removed.

15. What happens if a student is late on the day of an exam?

If you know a student is going to be unavoidably late please telephone the school immediately and ask for a message to be given to the Exams Manager. Depending on how long the exam has been in progress and the student's actual time of arrival in school, it *may* be possible to still take the exam with the full amount of normal time; the Examinations Manager will be able to advise you.

16. What should I do if my son/daughter is unwell at the time of the exams?

Firstly, please telephone the school and ask to leave a message for the Exams Manager – we need to know whether the student is so ill that they won't attend at all, or whether to just pass a message to the invigilators that the student is feeling unwell – we can sometimes change where a student is sitting, perhaps moving someone closer to a door or window if that would be helpful.

Even if you would not normally visit your doctor's surgery for minor illnesses, it is important that you do so during an exam season. Your doctor will advise as to whether your son/daughter is fit to take the exam. Please get a letter from the doctor which gives the date, the reason for the illness and the effect it is having on the student. You should send the letter to the Exams Manager at school within 5 days of the date of the exam.

17. What happens if my son/daughter is absent from an exam?

Provided there is a genuine reason, if a student misses an exam, it is sometimes possible to apply to the Exam Board for a GCSE or A-level grade. There are very strict rules about this; the student would have to have completed the at least 50% of the overall assessment, there must be a genuine reason for the absence, independent supporting evidence and the support of the school before we can apply. Please note that this is not usually available to AS-levels as the student is expected to take the exam in the next available exam season.

If students are absent from exams without a valid reason the school will send an invoice home for the cost of the lost exam entry fees. For GCSE exams this is usually about £35 or £50 for a double award. AS and A2 unit exams cost about £25 - £35 per unit.

18. What should students wear for the exams?

For exams taken during the school year, such as in November or March, then the normal, full school uniform should be worn. In May, after Leaver's Day year 11 students may wear their own, casual, but sensible, clothing; however, students not dressed properly or modestly will not be permitted to sit their exams.

It would be appreciated if students don't wear jewellery such as rings, bracelets, long necklaces or keys around the neck, as they make noise on the desks and this disturbs other candidates.

19. What should students do if they finish their exam early?

At Graveney no student is allowed to leave an exam early. Apart from the disturbance caused to other students still working, the time allowances for each exam have been carefully designed by the Examination Boards and we feel that students benefit from taking that full amount of time, so we encourage them to use any spare time to check and double-check their work.

Therefore, please do not schedule any appointments until at least half an hour after the expected end of the exam as your son/daughter will not be allowed to finish early. Also note that exams often run after the end of the normal school day and you may need to think about how your son or daughter will get home.

AFTER THE EXAMS (*points 20 – 21*)

20. What happens if a student has problems that may affect his/her exam performance?

Some students are entitled to special examination arrangements, which vary from having extra time to someone who writes the student's answers. Any arrangement has to be based on a student's normal way of working in class and students are identified by the school: please do not spend money on private educational psychologists' assessments or reports as these often cannot be accepted because of the extremely strict criteria and regulations regarding these arrangements.

Students who are entitled to a special examination arrangement will receive a separate letter from the Examinations Manager explaining their entitlement.

Some candidates, who aren't normally entitled to any special exam arrangements, may need help at the time of the exams because of an accident or short-term illness. In this case you should always contact the Examinations Manager as soon as possible so that we can put something in place to help you. This can only be done in genuine cases and requires a letter from the hospital or doctor explaining the accident and injury. Please note that extra time is almost never given in these situations, the most common arrangement is having a scribe to write for you.

It may be that the student him/herself is well, but is experiencing some other difficulties, perhaps the serious illness of a close member of family, bereavement or other traumatic event. Again, it is essential to notify the Examinations Manager (in writing please) as soon as possible so that she can apply to the Awarding Bodies for special consideration.

Special consideration is a very small allowance of marks that is granted but the Boards when a student has taken an exam under difficult circumstances. We have to apply within 7 days of the last exam in the subject so getting a doctor's letter as quickly as possible is vital. The maximum allowance given is just 5% of the total marks for the paper, and to get that a student would have to suffer a very close family bereavement, such as a parent or sibling.

Most cases of special consideration, for headaches, hay-fever or flu fall into the 1 or 2% category. The Boards do acknowledge that they have given special consideration but it is not possible to find out how much. As with all exam matters, there are very strict regulations covering special arrangements and special consideration and applications must always be supported by independent evidence.

Please note that it is not possible to apply for special consideration for long-standing issues, whether that is health, medical or family upset. Applications are only accepted by the Boards for short-term illnesses or conditions that happen at the time of the exams; this is because the Boards are measuring a student's attainment on a given day, (the day of the exam) and not that student's potential.

21. What happens about the return of school books and equipment?

Students will be informed by subject departments of the arrangements for the return of books, and there will be crates left at the main exam venues so that students can drop off books as they complete the exams in each subject.

RESULTS AND POST-RESULTS (*points 22 – 25*)

22. When are results available to students?

AS and A-level results will be released to students on Thursday 18th August 2016 and the GCSE results on Thursday 25th August 2016. See the page about exam results in this section for more information.

23. What happens if results are substantially different from what is anticipated?

It must be remembered that exams can only measure a student's performance or attainment on the day and that students can do better or worse than anticipated for a variety of reasons. As well as speaking to the senior staff in school on results days, you could also consider using one of the post-results services available; perhaps asking for the return of your original script. This is not available for every subject so check with the Examinations Manager to see if a particular unit is included in this service or not.

24. Can I query the marks and results?

Yes, it is possible to make an official enquiry about a result (or a re-mark) – there is usually a 3 week period after the date the results were released when you can do so. It is expensive and costs are usually borne by the parents/students; only rarely will the school fund a re-mark application. Full information about deadlines and fees will be included in the envelope with your results.

Note that there is a priority service for A-level students who have applied for a university place – the priority service is only open for one week after the date of the results being released and applications are re-marked and the outcome reported much more quickly than a normal re-mark so that university places can be confirmed. This service is more expensive and is restricted only to A-level students.

25. Can I have my exam scripts returned?

It is possible to have exam scripts returned either for individual students or frequently, staff will request a student's script so that it can be used as exemplar material in school. Costs are usually borne by the student or their parents, but occasionally the school will fund the return of scripts, and will always do so when a member of staff asks for scripts.

Again, there is a priority service for A-level candidates who would like to see their script before deciding whether to ask for a re-mark. Note though, that you can't ask for a priority re-mark if you've asked for a priority return of script – it would then be a "normal" re-mark which might take some weeks and wouldn't be completed in time for a university place to be confirmed.

Full information about all post-results services will be included in the envelope with a student's results.