

## **A Parent's Guide to...** **Year 12 students dropping one of their four courses?**

### **Overview:**

All Year 12 students this academic year (2016 to 2017) selected and began to study the equivalent of four Level 3 courses; this could be any combination of A Levels and vocational courses (single or double awards).

As detailed at the KS5 Parent Information Evening on Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> September 2016, however, there will be the opportunity for students to drop one of these four Level 3 courses throughout the course of this academic year. We advise all students to make this important decision following the second set of formal assessments in March; nevertheless, as previously advised, if you would like to apply for your son/daughter to drop one of their courses at an earlier stage, there will be the opportunity to do so following the Christmas holidays.

### **Frequently asked questions:**

*Please note that all the questions below were answered in greater detail in the KS5 Parent Information presentation, which is available to view on our [College Noticeboard website](#) under the 'Policies and Procedures' tab.*

- 1. Why did students begin to study four Level 3 qualifications?**
- 2. Why are we now confident that they only need three Level 3 qualifications?**
- 3. Why do we advise students to wait until the March assessment point to drop a course?**
- 4. What if I want my son/daughter to drop one of their subjects beforehand?**
- 5. What if my son/daughter wants to continue to study four Level 3 courses?**

#### **1. Why did students begin to study four Level 3 qualifications?**

Key Stage 5 (the stage of education for students aged 16 – 19 years) is currently undergoing significant changes on a national scale.

Historically, students in KS5 studied four Level 3 courses in Year 12, and then carried on three of these courses to Year 13. This was when the 'AS Level' qualification operated on an old 'modular' system and when universities universally required AS Level results on student's applications to higher education.

When options were selected last year, the national picture had still not been clarified. In particular, universities were not clear on whether they still required AS Level results on students' applications to their institutions. This is why Post-16 education providers almost universally across the country adopted the same model as they had done previously – no one wanted to risk putting their students at a disadvantage.

#### **2. Why are we now confident that students only need three Level 3 qualifications?**

Further guidance has since become available in the past few months and all Post-16 education providers can now be confident in offering only three Level 3 courses to study for the duration of their two years for the following reasons:

- Universities have now been clear that they do not require AS Level or equivalent results on applications to their institutions; not only has this been made clear on a national scale but at Toot Hill College we have personally rung the admissions offices of these universities to confirm this is the case.

*If on the UCAS website, you find contrary information this is because the information on there currently is still targeting the current Year 13 cohort (in the midst of applications to universities) who are all, nationally, still operating on the old KS5 model.*

- The Department for Education has also been clear that Post-16 education providers will be measured on the quality of three Level 3 qualifications, where previously an additional AS Level or equivalent was expected.

#### **3. So why do we advise students to wait until the March assessment point to drop a course?**

Having then adopted the old 'four to three' model (as per all Post-16 providers across the country), it is important to recognise that, in many respects, students of this academic cohort have been given a unique advantage - they have had the opportunity to explore all four courses in order to make a careful and informed decision about which is in their best interests to drop.

Given this opportunity, it is important this year that we capitalise on it to ensure we use it to every student's advantage; this will be achieved by ensuring any decision to drop is made carefully, with consideration and based on robust assessment evidence. **In a nutshell – once students drop a course, they cannot go back;** as such, it is imperative that we help them to make the right decision.

Our experience working with KS5 students is that the ultimate test of a student's progress is a formal assessment and the results can often be at odds with how a student believes they are progressing.

There are three formal assessment points throughout the year for Year 12 students:

1. November Formal Assessment Point
2. March Formal Assessment Point
3. June Formal Assessment Point

When considering historical data the most robust is that which comes from the second and third assessment points; there is often the greatest fluctuation in student results between the November and March assessment points.

**As such, we can be confident as a College that we are supporting the very best interests of your child if they have sat two formal assessments across their courses** so that results can be compared between assessment points and across courses. In addition, your child will have had the opportunity to study the course for 5-6 months; the November assessment point is early in the year and students will only have studied the course for 2 months.

#### **4. What if my son/daughter wants to drop a subject beforehand?**

As detailed at the KS5 Parents Information Evening, if students and parents are wholly convinced that dropping one of the courses early is the right decision for their child then there will be the opportunity to consider this option from the end of the Christmas holidays onwards.

#### **What do I do now?**

While students have sat their November Assessments and received the results, it is important to note that their 12.1 Progress Check report and the Year 12 Parents' Evenings are now coming up within the next week.

The November Internal Assessment result is of a great significant as it provides a snapshot of a student's progress; nevertheless it is most useful when also considered alongside other qualitative judgements that are included in the 12.1 Progress Check report such as attitude, homework and, most importantly, the Predicted Grade. This is important as, for some students, they may have under or over-performed in the assessment and the teacher's Predicted Grade will reflect this, allowing for greater contextualisation of the result as it might appear in isolation.

In addition, the Year 12 Parents' Evening will be an invaluable opportunity for Year 12 students and parents to discuss in further depth their child's progress to ensure they have information regarding the whole picture.

**As such, we politely request that any requests for students to drop a subject following the Christmas holidays now wait for the 12.1 Progress Check report (due on Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> December) and the Year 12 Parents' Evening (Wednesday 7<sup>th</sup> December), with time for reflection over the Christmas holidays.**

#### **5. What if my son/daughter wants to continue to study four Level 3 courses?**

All students will need to drop a fourth Level 3 course by the beginning of Year 13. If they are currently studying a 'new' A Level specification, they will receive no qualification for this continued study and so we strongly advise against it; nevertheless, if the fourth course that your son/daughter wishes to drop is an 'old' specification there will be the opportunity for further discussion as to whether they wish to secure an AS Level grade in this subject this year (this will be subject to their results in the November and March Formal Assessment Points).