

Student Briefing



Monday 11 January 2021

I am taking this opportunity to write to you, our students, with some important messages. Please take a few minutes to read this briefing which I hope you will find helpful.

This is a time of great worry and uncertainty for all of us. Every day we see and hear more reasons for concern and all of us will be anxious about what the rest of 2021 will bring.

You have already dealt with so much in 2020 and all of us hoped that this year would have started better than last year ended. Sadly, that has not been the case.

I understand your concerns. Some of you may have lost family or others who are important to you and if you have, please accept my sincere sympathies for your loss. Some of you will be concerned, especially about older family members and those who are unwell. It is a time to remember how important our families are to us and to do what we can to protect them.

That is why you are studying at home. Not that colleges are unsafe places, but we know that Covid is spread by human contact and so we have to do everything we can to reduce the risk of the virus spreading further.

I know that learning from home is sometimes difficult. There are distractions and challenges which make it a less than ideal experience for many of you. I know this as a teacher and understand that you would rather be back in College with your friends and the wide range of on-site experiences that you would normally benefit from. Those days will return.

Of course many of our students are parents too, juggling family commitments and doing your best to keep your school age children engaged with learning. The challenges seem never ending but so too has been your own resolve to learn. I thank you for your dedication.

Your teachers, too, will find it challenging. I certainly do. Teaching using Teams is often difficult for teachers who are as used to a classroom experience as you are. Be patient with them. They want the best for you.

Make sure you play your part too. Teachers will teach your normal timetable and expect you to participate. They will expect you to continue to work as hard as you can, complete the assessments and homework you are set and attend every lesson. Please make sure you do.

I want to say something about exams. You know that this summer's GCSES and A' level exams have been cancelled. You may also know that Colleges were allowed to run January BTEC exams if they chose to. We started our January BTEC exams last week but decided to stop them after Friday. Many students were worried about coming to College to take their exams and I listened to them and also to the concerns of some staff.

I wanted to give students the opportunity to take an exam that they had prepared for. As soon as we told you all that the rest of the January exams would be cancelled, some of you contacted me to ask if they could still take them. I am afraid that my decision is final.

These are difficult decisions. But my thinking changed on Friday when I had listened to all the student and staff feedback that had been expressed to me, and, also, when it became clear that the Covid situation was becoming more worrying every day.

You will be wondering, understandably, what happens next. First, it will not be the same as last summer. Instead, the Government is starting a consultation this week to ask how we should assess students this year. We do not know what the outcome of that consultation will be. So please don't ask your teacher what grade you will receive this year. They do not know yet what evidence we will need to provide and how we will work it out. What I do know is that the harder you work this year, the more evidence we will have that you deserve a high grade.

Let us hope too that the new arrangements for qualification this year will fully support our adult students and be clear about what we need to do to get you the recognition you need and deserve. You can trust us to do all we can to influence the consultation and make plans for this year's exams and qualifications as fair as possible for all our students.

Your effort matters.

I can not tell you when things will get back to normal. I wish I could. What I can tell you is that every teacher, every learning support assistant; indeed, every member of New City College staff is committed to your success.

We are still open and will remain so. If you need to come to College because of your unique needs or for your mental health, then please let us know. If you need IT equipment to help you study, ask.

The class of 2021 will be remembered as the students who studied during a pandemic. But you will be remembered too, I am sure, as the students who achieved to the best of their ability despite the challenges they faced.

I am proud of you and all that you have dealt with so far. One day I will join your teachers in welcoming you back to College. Until then, I hope you keep safe and well.

Best wishes

Gerry

Gerry McDonald

Group Principal & Chief Executive