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Dear Students, Parents and Carers

RE: GUIDANCE AND WORK TO SUPPORT YEAR 13 STUDENTS IN PREPARING FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

I hope this letter finds you all well and we continue to remember in our thoughts and prayers anyone suffering as a result of COVID-19.

As mentioned in Mr Foster's letter earlier in the week, we will now begin to provide work and guidance for Year 13 students intending to progress to higher education. Given that the government and the exams regulator OFQUAL are clear that there is no need for Year 13 students to be completing further work to influence the grades that will be eventually determined, we feel that a much more meaningful focus for students at this time is to begin to prepare for their upcoming higher education courses. This will ensure that students are able to make a purposeful and successful start to their degree courses. It will also hopefully provide students with a very positive focus over the coming weeks and enthuse them about their future studies. Furthermore, there is information later in this letter regarding support for those students who plan to follow a different pathway, rather than higher education, as well as some suggestions for all students to support their well-being. In due course, we will be happy to support students interested in a potential autumn A level exam series once further information about this is known. We will be considering this over the coming weeks of this half-term once information emerges.

The information that follows gives details about a **study programme that will take Year 13 students through various stages of preparation for university**, comprising 1 week of study skills development, then 1 week of further researching their individual degree courses, followed by subject specific work and tasks to help preparation for higher education courses. This subject specific work will include relevant knowledge and skills across all of our taught subjects, including a variety of suggested tasks, work and reading lists to support the transition to university. Our subject teams will be finalising this work over the next two weeks and, in essence, this will provide a 'bridging' course between A Level (academic and vocational) and degree level in each subject. Once these subject packs are available, students should choose the work for the subject or subjects that are most closely linked to their chosen degree course next year. Whilst we feel that the work included in the study programme below will be very beneficial for Year 13 students in preparing for higher education, the work will, of course, be optional. Therefore, students are free to choose to complete all or some or, indeed, none of the work suggested, although all students will find work that is relevant to them within the study programme and so hopefully, they will want to attempt at least some.

Study Skills Development- Week beginning Monday 27th April

During this week, students should work through the **Study Skills Booklet** that will be uploaded onto the school website by the end of Friday 24th April. This booklet will be saved in the 'Students' tab on the website, in a sub-tab named 'Study Skills Booklet'. This booklet includes a wealth of information about different study skills that are needed to support successful study at degree level and it will help continue to prepare students to become more independent learners, a key requirement of study at degree level. Students will, of course, have begun to develop these skills throughout their A Level courses, however, working through this booklet will hopefully refresh their skills and further develop them, in advance of university next year.

The booklet offers guidance on key study skills such as note-taking, time management, researching and boosting your memory. The booklet gives students key information on these skills and there are then tasks to complete, to allow students to put what they have learned into practice. It is designed to be a resource that students can work their way through now, and then use as a source of reference once their higher education courses are underway. **Therefore, students should work through this booklet at a reasonable pace, completing as many of the tasks as possible.** We expect that the vast majority of students will want to use and complete this booklet electronically, however, if any student needs a hard copy of the booklet, please email the school at admin@st-marys.newcastle.sch.uk and we will post one to you.

Researching further chosen degree course- Week beginning Monday 4th May

During this week, **students will research their chosen degree course(s) in more depth.** To support students with this, we will provide guidance and prompts for students to use. The vast majority of students have chosen 1 or 2 degree courses and will have completed some research of the courses before selecting these. However, now is a good time for students to investigate their degree courses in more depth, particularly in terms of what is involved in the first semester and first year of their potential degree courses. Students will look in greater detail at what topics and modules are covered in the first year, including how these will be assessed, what written examinations will be involved and how the course will be structured e.g. lecture sessions, independent study, seminars, work experience opportunities etc. Students will also be able to access reading lists published by universities, regarding topics covered in the first year of their specific degree courses and therefore may want to get a head start by beginning some of this reading, if they haven't already done so.

Further to their degree subject research, students will also be guided to research the university more widely, including finding out more about the support on offer at the university e.g. support from Professors/Tutors, the Subject Faculty, the Student Union and Support Services, the Library and Study bases, the Chaplaincy teams etc, as this will again help ensure that students are well prepared and supported in the early weeks and months of their degree, to allow them to make the best possible start next year. **Therefore, students**

should work through the guidance throughout this week, selecting what aspects are relevant to them, to help them fully research and understand all aspects of their chosen degree course and university.

Subject Specific Introductory Work- Week beginning Monday 11th May onwards

From this week onwards, students will have the option of completing **subject specific work** to help them prepare for their future studies. A subject specific pack of work, for all subjects taught in school, will be uploaded onto Office 365. **Students should choose the work for the subject or subjects relevant to them.** Some students will continue to study a subject at degree level that they have studied at A Level e.g. Mathematics, Fine Art, Spanish etc and therefore will select the work for that subject. Other students may have selected a different degree specialism i.e. Law, Midwifery etc and therefore should choose the subject pack(s) most closely linked to their chosen degree course (e.g. for Law, the History and English work, for Midwifery, the Health and Social Care and Biology work and so on).

I am sure that all students know how to access Office 365 as they are used to doing so regularly, however, if needed, there is guidance on the school website, in the 'Students' tab, then 'Remote Access' tab and if there are any issues, please phone or email school and we will sort this for you. Once students have logged on, they should go to the 'Year 13' folder and all of the subject folders will be there.

These subject courses will aim to give students some foundation of knowledge and skills. Of course, depending on the degree chosen, there will be a variety of topics covered by different universities but, as far as possible, we will ensure that the subject material covers topics where the skills and knowledge are pertinent, no matter what the specific requirements of individual degrees. **These subject packs will include a range of subject knowledge and suggested tasks for students. They will also include general reading lists suggested by our subject specialists, as well as, if appropriate, suggested online courses to complete in that subject area (also known as MOOCs).** Many universities also suggest online courses to complete, therefore students may identify further online courses, when completing their own research above.

Students should work through these suggested activities and tasks at their own pace and they can choose how much of the work they want to complete. They should select whatever is relevant to support their future learning and all students will find work within the study programme that is meaningful for them. However, it will be important that students keep their workload reasonable over the coming weeks and don't place too much pressure on themselves. Students should simply do their best and pace the work to suit their own circumstances. The work will remain on Office 365 throughout the summer and therefore, there will be plenty of time for students to work on any aspect of this, before higher education courses begin. Please see the guidance below for further support for student well-being.

Students planning to take alternative pathways i.e. apprenticeships, employment etc

Whilst the majority of our Year 13 students are planning to progress to higher education, some students may be planning to seek employment or an apprenticeship or to have a gap year. If you feel that any of the resources outlined above would be useful to your future plans, of course, these resources will also be available for you to access. You may also want to further research potential employers, apprenticeship providers etc via their websites to find out more specific information about pathways you are interested in, including possibly getting in touch with them directly to find out more about any meaningful preparation you could be completing. We will also save some other useful information and suggested websites in the 'Students' tab on the website, in a sub-tab named 'Alternative Pathways,' this includes suggested work to continue to develop your maths and English knowledge, given that many training courses and employers require you to have certain levels of knowledge in both subjects, as well as links to the National Apprenticeship Service and the many excellent activities they provide for young people.

Guidance to maintain students' well-being whilst studying at home

Most importantly, whether a student is preparing for university or another pathway, their well-being is paramount. Therefore, it is important that students take regular breaks from computers and don't try to do too much without such breaks. When at school, they have a break every hour, to move from room to room, and longer at morning break and lunchtime. This might be a good rule of thumb – i.e. not to do more than 50-55 minutes without then taking a 5-10 minute break away from where they are working if possible, including getting some fresh air, water etc. They should have a longer mid-morning break and a good lunchtime break.

There are various other challenges students face. Students don't have their teacher to call on, nor are they working in a social environment with classmates. Space might be limited in the home. Students may have to share a workspace with other family members. Computers might well have to be shared. Not everyone will have a computer. Students or family members may fall ill. The school recognises all of these challenges and we essentially want to reassure students simply to do their best, not to stress and not to worry about whether they are doing more or less than others. They need to look after themselves, first and foremost, support their families, stay safe and maintain phone/social media contact with friends in the light of social distancing.

Hopefully this information is helpful in outlining the planned approach for Year 13 over the coming weeks. We believe that both the more general work on study skills and further researching chosen degrees, and the subject specific work that follows, will help to prepare students for the next stage of their learning and it will hopefully provide a really enjoyable and interesting focus for students. We will also continue to keep in touch regularly regarding all aspects of school life.

Very best wishes



Miss Patterson
Deputy Headteacher