

You are not your AS results (and other perspectives)
August 15, 2021

Dear Students,

Once again, congratulations on an overall excellent round of AS results. This letter is aimed at U6 students but it wouldn't hurt L6s to read it as well - you will soon be going through AS and, soon after, getting your results. Here are some thoughts on putting these into perspective...

1. You are not your exam results! They don't define you, for good or bad. They are only a part of the many other (mostly) wonderful things that make up who each of you are. You can even say it to yourself, "I am more than my exam results."

You'll see a lot of people in life with excellent 'results' who are not great people. And you'll see a lot of people who weren't particularly good students but have great personal qualities, and often it's the latter who are better friends, and better community members.

I remember when your O-level results came out some of you were concerned that we would ask students to leave the school if they had not done well. Of course that didn't happen, regardless of what the results were. This is one of the reasons I wrote a letter last year about belonging; belonging here at our school isn't about results, it's about character. You all, Upper 6s, belonged here long before these AS results were released, and I hope deep down you realize that.

So don't walk around feeling like you're a great person because you got three 90s on your exams - I'm sure you have other things that you can work on. Meanwhile if you didn't do as well as you hoped, know that in addition to having more chances left to prove yourself, there are plenty of other ways that we your teachers see you shine.

2. Measure your results by what is possible for you. Letter #1 asked you to be the best version of yourself, and that is still all that I hope for. Your past self is the benchmark, not other people's current selves. Psychology research tells us that when we compare ourselves to others, we mostly choose others' strengths and measure them against our own weaknesses. That's an obviously foolish way of going about it, so resist that temptation! To avoid it, try reminding yourself of what you are grateful for, or do some journaling about your past self and think about the ways in which you have improved, and the ways in which you would like to continue to improve.

3. Measure your inputs, not just the outputs. These results are outputs - what comes after a long process of studying, trying, sometimes failing, and trying again. Outputs usually have a pretty strong relationship with inputs, but not always. It's possible that you prepared very carefully, and didn't do well on test day, for a variety of reasons. The reverse is also possible - maybe you avoided preparing for some sections of material that you didn't find as interesting and got lucky that those weren't tested on exam day.

So as you consider your AS scores, do so through an honest assessment of what you put in, for this will give clarity to the results and help frame your reaction to them. In general I feel very proud of the work that we as a school community put in, but of course there is always room for improvement, and especially at the level of individuals. Only you can know where these improvements are, and only with an honest look at how you prepared. You may want to work with your advisor to assess how you prepared for these exams and if there is anything you should do differently in the future.

4. Nothing is inevitable. Half of your A-level grade still remains to be determined, and that will happen between now and November. Depending on how you did, maybe that piece of information gives you

hope, or maybe it reminds you to stay humble. But either way, it should set the task, highlighting the work that is still required. I say “between now and November” because, even though the actual exams are in October and November, the work will start again tomorrow. You have finished or nearly finished the syllabi in most of your classes, so you have plenty of time to review. Use it well.

Good luck as you start classes again tomorrow. A lot still remains to be done between now and December, and I look forward to being there with you through it.

Sincerely,
James