

Recent Decisions Regarding AS Grades 2020

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 12 Mai 2020

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Research Briefing:

Petition number: P-05-958

Petition title: Recent Decisions Regarding AS Grades 2020

Text of petition: A decision was recently made by Education Minister Kirsty Williams regarding AS Level qualifications 2020. The statement released says:

In summer 2021, current AS learners will have two options for their A level award. They will choose whether to:

- only sit the A2 units, with the A level grade based on their performance in the A2 units;
 - or sit both the AS and A2 units. They will be awarded the best grade from either route.
- However, this fails to take into consideration students that have worked extremely hard to achieve good predicted grades throughout the entirety of Year 12, and who were therefore prepared for upcoming exams, the first of which were due to begin in only four weeks from when this decision was made.

Year 12 would ordinarily contribute to 40% of the overall A Level grade.

If a student chooses to sit only A2 Units, as per the first option above, students will have worked tirelessly during Year 12 for 0% of their A Level grade, which has never previously been the case. This increases the pressure enormously for students continuing into Year 13 and contradicts the Minister's hope of a "fair system" that aids a student's "wellbeing". Further, this extra pressure will not be accounted for in the future when the 2021 cohort of students compete for jobs with students credited by the much fairer system that has previously always been in place.

The second route of taking both AS and A2 units in 2021 not only means that Year 12 again contributes nothing to the A Level grade overall, but does not decrease the already immense pressures of Year 13 either. Instead, it simply places the entirety of the pressure from both years and combines them for exams in the Summer 2021 exam series. This is not fair, and we shouldn't be confused by the statements released into believing it is.

Education is a vital aspect of a student's life, especially those who have decided to continue with A Levels, all of which require great determination and hard work, in the hope of achieving grades needed for future plans.

This time is stressful enough for students. The last thing we need is a rushed decision that is ultimately detrimental to our future plans. Both pathways offered will be disadvantageous for students.

We ask for this decision to be adjusted to take every student into account.

Background

On [18 March 2020](#), [Kirsty Williams, Minister for Education announced](#) that due to the Covid 19 pandemic, the summer 2020 examination series would be cancelled. For 2020 all AS learners will receive **an estimated AS grade** and there will be no AS exams until summer 2021. The estimate will be based on a range of evidence, including teacher assessment grades, and will not contribute to A level results in 2021.

In Wales A level qualifications consist of Advanced Subsidiary (AS) and A2 units. The AS is a stand-alone qualification and also contributes 40 per cent towards the full A level qualification. AS exams can be taken at the end of the AS course or alongside A2.

The calculated grade issued to AS learners this summer will enable them to progress onto other pathways, such as other training, or employment, or to another school or college. If a learner is carrying on to the full A level in summer 2021, the calculated grade from this summer cannot be used because it will be a grade and not a mark. Usually marks from each AS unit are aggregated in the calculation of the final A level grade.

In summer 2021, AS learners will have two options for their A level award. They can either choose to only sit the A2 units, with the A level grade awarded solely on their performance in those units, or they can choose to sit AS and A2 units. If they choose to sit the AS units alongside the A2 units they will be awarded the best grade from either route – either the grade awarded from performance on the A2 units alone or the grade awarded from combining both AS and A2 units.

The Minister provided information on how this summer's exams would be graded to the [Children, Young People and Education Committee on 28 April 2020](#) (paragraphs 90–99).

Qualifications Wales

On 6 April 2020, the Minister for Education issued Qualifications Wales, the regulator of qualifications below degree level in Wales, with a [Direction](#) to have regard to Welsh Government policy regarding the cancellation of exams and the subsequent determination of grades.

The Direction requires Qualifications Wales to ensure that a fair and robust approach to issuing grades to the summer 2020 cohort of learners is adopted. This includes determining the approach centres must follow in arriving at judgements of their learners' attainment, standardising centres' judgements and ensuring an avenue of recourse is available for those learners who do not believe that the process has been followed correctly in issuing their grades.

On 28 April 2020, Qualifications Wales published a consultation on [Arrangements for summer 2020 exam series](#). This includes proposals for a set of aims to underpin the statistical standardisation model for the issuing of grades for learners taking GCSEs, AS, A levels and Skills Challenge Cymru qualifications in the summer 2020 exam series. It also consults on an appeals process. There is a [consultation for young people](#) and Qualifications Wales state that they are keen to hear from learners. The consultation ends on **Wednesday, 13 May 2020**.

England, Northern Ireland and Scotland

Summer examinations have been cancelled in [England](#), [Northern Ireland](#) and [Scotland](#) (who have a different examination system).

In **England**, AS levels differ from those in Wales and do not count towards the final A level grade. Ofqual, Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation, are developing a process that will provide a calculated grade to each student which reflects their performance as fairly as possible. They are working with exam boards with the aim of ensuring consistently for all students. Exam boards will ask teachers to submit their judgement about the grade that they believe the student would have received if exams had gone ahead. Pupils who do not feel their calculated grade reflects their ability will have the opportunity to sit an exam as soon as is reasonably possible after schools and colleges open again. Ofqual consulted on [Exceptional arrangements for exam grading and assessment in 2020](#) between 15 and 29 April 2020.

In [Northern Ireland](#), all AS students will receive an AS grade and there will be no AS exams until Summer 2021. The grade awarded will be based on previous student performance combined with centre assessed grades and centre rank orders. Similarly to Wales, the nature of the AS grade awarded in 2020 will not allow it to contribute to A level results in 2021. In Summer 2021, students will have two options for their A level award. If a student chooses to only sit the required A2 units, then their AS outcomes will be calculated using statistical predictions based on their performance in the A2 units. If they choose to sit any AS units, alongside the A2 units, they will be awarded the highest grade at A level from either route.

In [Scotland](#), the Scottish Qualifications Authority are putting in place a certification model using coursework, teacher assessment of estimated grades and prior attainment. There will also be an appeals mechanism.

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in this briefing is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.