



Ein cyf/Our ref MA/KW/2542/20  
Lynne Neagle MS  
Chair  
Children, Young People and Education Committee  
Welsh Parliament

24 August 2020

Dear Lynne,

Thank you for your correspondence dated 3 August requesting additional information on issues within my portfolio following my appearance at your Committee last month. Due to the range of issues listed, I have provided my responses under the following relevant headings for ease of reference.

### **Children's rights**

We have undertaken a number of activities to ensure the Rights of Children and Young People as set out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) continue to be at the heart of decision making within the Welsh Government and throughout this Covid-19 crisis.

We have been aware of difficulties in engaging with children and young people on decisions which have affected them throughout the pandemic. To address this we were the first government in the UK to ask children and young people about their experiences during the Covid-19 pandemic. Children and young people told us what they thought about a range of issues including:

- their mental health and wellbeing;
- their education and learning;
- the impact lockdown has had on social aspects of their lives; their play during lockdown and the benefits of lockdown.

23,700 children and young people responded to the '[Coronavirus and me](#)' survey, which was delivered on our behalf by the Children's Commissioner for Wales in a partnership project with Children in Wales and the Youth Parliament / Senedd Ieuenctid. The survey was also co-produced with children and young people themselves.

The survey has already provided rich data on what is important to children and young people and continues to be a valuable source of information for specific policy teams within

Canolfan Cyswllt Cyntaf / First Point of Contact Centre:  
0300 0604400

Bae Caerdydd • Cardiff Bay  
Caerdydd • Cardiff  
CF99 1SN

[Gohebiaeth.Kirsty.Williams@llyw.cymru](mailto:Gohebiaeth.Kirsty.Williams@llyw.cymru)  
[Correspondence.Kirsty.Williams@gov.wales](mailto:Correspondence.Kirsty.Williams@gov.wales)

Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

Welsh Government. The Welsh Government are using the survey results to ensure children's rights and opinions are reflected upon during ongoing decision making. Each survey question was related to specific Articles within the UNCRC. Initial findings were released on 8 June 2020. The Children's Commissioners office will be providing further themed briefings in September.

We have been mindful of how we communicate directly during the pandemic. I have continued my engagement with children and young people by holding question and answer sessions through #AskKirsty on social media as well as a tailored press conference on the 24 June. The First Minister has also engaged with the Youth Parliament as well as the regular messages provided by the Deputy Minister for Health and Social Services.

During the pandemic we have given the Children's Commissioner for Wales increased opportunities to speak to Ministers and officials. The Commissioner has been meeting with the Deputy Minister for Health and Social Services on a weekly basis as well as meeting regularly with senior officials across the Welsh Government.

The Children's Commissioner for Wales has also offered the assistance of her team to give advice on IIAs and CRIAs. This offer of help was shared across the organisation, and her office have been taken up on that offer for a number of IIAs and CRIAs throughout the pandemic.

### **Schools in Wales**

As part of our Operational Guidance for schools and settings from the autumn term we set out the factors that have changed since lockdown began, and the increasing need to ensure that children and young people can access education. We know that generally prevalence of Covid-19 is lower, our NHS Test, Trace, Protect system is up and running, and we are clear about the measures that need to be in place to create safer environments within schools. We also know that the risk to children themselves of becoming severely ill from COVID-19 is very low. On 9 July I announced that all learners would return to school in the autumn term; this decision was informed by the Welsh Technical Advisory Group (TAG) who recommended that schools "plan to open in September with 100% of pupils physically present on school sites, subject to a continuing, steady decline in the presence of COVID-19 in the community."

Section 8 of our Operational Guidance sets out advice on managing confirmed cases of COVID-19 among the school community. This includes a link to an Operational Public Health Advice Note prepared by Public Health Wales for Welsh Government on the investigation and management of clusters and incidents of COVID-19 in educational and childcare settings. PHW are keeping this advice under review; it was last updated on 30 July and is next due for review on 26 August. We have also made clear in our Operational Guidance that every school will need to plan for the possibility of a local lockdown and how they will ensure continuity of education within a broader framework of local restrictions.

As we go into September, we will clearly state our expectation that schools do all they can to ensure continuity of learning under future conditions of disruption. They will be expected to set out in their plans learners' entitlement to contact and support, the frequency and duration of teaching and learning sessions, and the amount of time pupils are expected to spend in independent study. Alongside this they will also be expected to set out the curriculum that will be available to learners involved in the *Recruit, Recover, Raise Standards* programme and the general curriculum available to all learners in the case of disruption to normal operation.

In May you will recall we published a Decision Framework to support the increased operations of education and childcare settings. That framework set out our tests and the matters we were taking into account. I have asked my officials to develop something similar for what happens in the event of needing to decrease operations; again this will make clear that schools and settings would need to have their own plans in place to enable them to respond in the event of an outbreak or a lockdown (be that local or national). This Framework also will make clear the importance of keeping schools and settings open and will recognise that there is not a one-size-fits-all approach to lockdowns. Reflecting on the medical and scientific advice and balancing this with the need to consider the harm to our children and young people of not being in school I am strongly of the view that any lockdown restrictions placed on education settings should be a last resort.

This work will build on and link with the Coronavirus Control Plan for Wales published on 18 August which set out the existing systems designed to prevent the spread of the virus, as well as the new systems we have put in place to respond swiftly to new cases at a local level.

## **Curriculum**

In July I published [guidance](#) on learning in schools and settings from the autumn term to give schools and supporting partners a common set of priorities for learning, regardless of the level of operations in response to COVID-19. This guidance outlined plans for a final decision to be published before the end of the summer Recess period, and as such supplementary guidance will be issued to schools and settings ahead of the start of the autumn term to provide further clarity on what considerations need to be given and what actions taken.

## **EOTAS**

EOTAS is an integrated part of the continuum of education provision offered in Wales. I remain committed to creating a truly inclusive education system in Wales and to ensuring all learners are supported to access an excellent education. I am proud we are able to offer alternative educational provision that can be tailored to best suit the needs of our learners, to nurture and encourage self-belief and to ensure that these learners are provided with every opportunity to fulfil their potential.

I recognise the significant difficulties faced by local authorities, schools and settings in delivering services and meeting their statutory duties for EOTAS learners during the lockdown period.

The nature of EOTAS provision is diverse and includes both academic and vocational education. For those EOTAS learners engaged in vocational education, continuity of learning during the lockdown period may have been limited. Consequently, some EOTAS learners are likely to have experienced a more significant interruption to their education than their peers.

In September, when settings return to full operation, I expect local authorities to work with providers to prioritise ensuring plans are put in place for all EOTAS learners to resume their education.

On 17 August, [Guidance for supporting vulnerable and disadvantaged learners](#) was published. This guidance supplements the Operational Guidance for Schools and Settings from the Autumn Term and the Guidance on Learning in Schools and Settings from the Autumn Term and

provides specific advice for vulnerable and disadvantaged learners, including EOTAS learners.

The guidance deals with a range of scenarios and sets out expectations for local authorities, schools and settings. As well as expectations around the planning for re-engaging vulnerable and disadvantaged learners in their education from September, the guidance is clear that contingency plans should be made to prepare for potential further disruption to education in the event of future waves of the virus. This will be particularly important for EOTAS learners who are engaged in vocational learning, which may not be easily adapted to distance or blended learning models.

The guidance is clear that planning and support should be based on the needs of individual learners, taking into account the impact the closure of schools and settings has had on the well-being and wider learning of learners. It also provides information on increased anxiety, mental health issues and challenging behaviour, which may be particularly relevant in the context of supporting EOTAS learners to re-integrate and re-engage with their learning.

### **Test, Trace, Protect (TTP)**

Throughout the pandemic I have had regular discussions with the Minister for Health and Social Services about a range of issues linked to the operation of schools and the measures that need to be in place to reduce the risk of transmission. This has included the need for an effective TTP system to help enable schools to return as safely as possible. We are confident that the TTP system is working at an effective level. Our officials are in regular contact to ensure it continues to play a critical role in our system of controls to help prevent transmission both in the wider community and within schools.

Data on the performance of contact tracing is published each week. The latest data shows that between 9 August and 15 August, of the 100 positive cases that were eligible for follow-up, 93 (93%) were reached and asked to provide details of their recent contacts. Of the 292 close contacts that were eligible for follow-up, 258 (88%) were successfully contacted and advised accordingly, or had their case otherwise resolved. Since 21 June of the 1,101 positive cases that were eligible for follow-up, 993 (90%) were reached and asked to provide details of their recent contacts. Of the 3,176 close contacts that were eligible for follow-up, 2,868 (90%) were successfully contacted and advised accordingly, or had their case otherwise resolved.

We will soon be providing more detailed information on the time taken to trace contacts. Data on contact tracing performance can be accessed here <https://gov.wales/test-trace-protect-contact-tracing-coronavirus-covid-19-8-august-2020>

In July Welsh Government and Public Health Wales issued guidance to Local Health Boards and Directors of Education on how positive Covid-19 cases should be dealt with in relation to schools including through the deployment as needed of rapid testing to ensure that there is a rapid and effective response to tackle any potential clusters or incidents. Copies of this guidance are attached at **Annex 1 and 2**.

### **Higher Education**

I recognise that any projections about the financial situation of universities in the next academic year have so far been subject to massive uncertainty. The additional funding announced for higher education reflects the judgement of ministers taking into account the Welsh Government's budgetary limitations and the immediate needs of the sector prior to the conclusion of the student recruitment cycle. As we have previously stated, we will consider the situation and needs again in the autumn, to continue our support for the economic and social recovery from COVID-19.

To assist with the issue of student hardship, HEFCW will be consulting the sector to determine how to allocate the additional funding across higher education institutions, taking account of the support that individual institutions already provide. This will ensure that the funding is distributed where it is needed most.

All universities in Wales have hardship funds in place for students in financial difficulty and information about student support, including for part-time students, international students, carers, estranged students, care experienced students, for example, will be provided on their websites and promoted through a range of channels. Hardship funds for full-time undergraduate and PGCE students are established using tuition fee income.

Each year all universities forecast in Fee and Access Plans how much of the tuition fee income they will invest in hardship funds. Hardship funds are only one element of student financial support, including financial information and advice, which institutions provide for students. Universities publish their total Fee and Access plan investment in student support. Fee and Access plans relate only to full-time fee income and full-time students. Regulated institutions may also administer additional student support through other means.

In terms of considering further funding support in the autumn, we will look at the needs of the higher education sector alongside the many other competing pressures on the Welsh Government's budget. We will take a flexible approach rather than setting hard criteria for consideration of further funding, and will do so following close collaboration with HEFCW and sector leaders to understand the financial position facing the sector as it develops.

To assist higher and further education institutions during the pandemic, in addition to the £27m Investment and Recovery Fund, a further £4.5m has been provided to HEFCW to support employability and skills development: £3m to support the delivery of Degree Apprenticeships in Wales and £1.5m to provide additional support for Go Wales, focussing on students who have graduated during the pandemic.

### **Further Education**

I recently announced a number of measures that Welsh Government will be taking to ensure that post-16 learners receive the best possible continuation of their learning journey following the disruption caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. This additional funding is available to ensure the immediate pressures faced by further education institutions are addressed and includes:

- Over £15 million 'catch up funding' being provided for learners beginning or continuing their A-level or vocational course at an FE college or sixth form.
- Up to £5m to support vocational learners to return to college to help them achieve their licence-to-practice qualifications, without needing to re-sit the full year.
- An extra £3.2m to provide digital equipment such as laptops for Post-16 learners. At least £2.15 million of this funding has been earmarked for FE.

- An additional £466k to support students who have been undertaking Independent Living Skills programmes, to enable them to complete their transition from college into employment and independence.
- An additional £480k to allow for an additional £40k per college, from September 2020 to March 2021, to expand the employment bureau capacity.
- An additional £3.5m for Personal Learning Account provision
- Additional funding of up to £1.7m provided to offer Free School Meal alternatives to FE learners.
- Additional £3.5m to contribute to the increased costs of cleaning.

My officials are aware of additional costs associated with the re-configuration of campuses after adopting Welsh Government guidance, the higher than normal student recruitment in September, as well as costs associated with digital and blended learning. Once the detail is known, a further bid for funding will follow. These bids will be firstly for the cost of the re-configuring of campuses and a then a later bid for other known costs.

### **BAME pupils**

The Youth Engagement and Progression Framework (YEPF) aims to reduce the number of young people aged 11 to 25 who are not engaged in education, employment or training (NEET). The YEPF provides a systematic mechanism for local authorities to identify those in need of support, establish what support may be available and track the progress of young people as they make the transition from school into continuing education, work based training or employment.

The YEPF is aimed at **all** young people at risk of disengaging from education, employment of training, it is not aimed at a specific cohort. The [Careers Wales Pupil Destinations from Schools in Wales 2019](#), which shows the destinations of school leavers for years 11, 12 and 13, shows the proportion of young people who were NEET was higher for those from white backgrounds compared to individuals from an ethnic minority background<sup>1</sup>.

Identifying young people who have barriers to engagement, allows the appropriate support to be put in place at an early stage; early identification is one of the key components of the YEPF. As part of this process, local authority engagement and progression co-ordinators (EPCs) conduct pre-16 multi-agency meetings in schools to identify those pupils most of risk of disengaging. They therefore have a good idea which young people need support before the end of year 11. EPCs are then able to identify the specific support needs of young people, to broker appropriate support.

Each year there remain some school leavers in Year 11 who have unknown status i.e. they are not known to Careers Wales so it's not known if they have plans for education, employment or training, or if they are at risk of being NEET. Careers Wales pass on the

<sup>1</sup> Pupil Destinations from Schools in Wales 2019 - Known not be in Education, Training or Employment

<b>School year</b>	<b>White background</b>	<b>Ethnic minority background</b>
<b>11</b>	1.8% or 442 individuals	1.2% or 24 individuals
<b>12</b>	0.8% or 89 individuals	0.5% or 6 individuals
<b>13</b>	2.6% or 249 individuals	2% or 17 individuals

details of the 'unknown' young people to EPCs in July. The EPCs, working with the youth service, then try to contact those people to find out their plans. This may involve carrying out home visits to speak to young people.

Once the 'unknown' young people have been contacted and their status confirmed (whether they are in Further Education, Employment or Training or NEET) they can be allocated against the Careers Wales five tier model of engagement, which identifies what individual support they need to achieve a positive destination.

For those most at risk of disengaging, lead workers are appointed to ensure young people aren't bounced between services or lost in the system, helping them to identify and overcome any barriers to progressing that they identify. Lead workers will have a direct relationship with the young person, being a consistent point of contact and support as they move forward and helping them to build and develop the long term resilience they need to succeed in education, training and employment. For young people with significant or multiple barriers requiring intensive personal support, the lead worker is generally drawn from the youth service.

The [Youth Work Strategy](#) (2019) sets out its high level ambitions to ensure that all young people across Wales are thriving and that youth work is accessible and inclusive to all young people. In doing so it also recognises that we must remove the barriers to engagement and participation particularly to those young people who may have experience of isolation, marginalisation, exploitation or discrimination including those of a protected characteristic. The Interim Youth Work Board has sought the views of young people from across Wales and from a wide variety of backgrounds, and including those with a BAME background through discussions with the [Ethnic Minorities and Youth Support Team Wales \(EYST\)](#). Moreover, EYST recently [guest edited an issue of the Youth Work Bulletin](#), which highlighted specific concerns, including issues around Black Lives Matter at the time of a global pandemic.

I recognise the pandemic has introduced new challenges into preventing young people from becoming NEET. For example, there are practical difficulties around carrying out home visits to offer support to young people who are disengaged, there are concerns about the impact of lockdown on young people's mental health and motivation and the economic impact of the pandemic, specifically on young people's employment opportunities. The Government has been liaising extensively with local authority engagement and progression co-ordinators, who co-ordinate and broker support under the YEPF, to discuss concerns and share good practice.

I am also planning to update the YEPF to bring new focus to reducing the number of young people who become NEET. The refresh of the YEPF will be informed by developments arising from the response to Covid 19. These developments are at a policy level (the [Resilience plan for the Post-16 sector: coronavirus](#), the increased operation of schools, the development of the employability and skills recovery plan, the mental health offer) and on the ground (changes to working practices arising from the response to the pandemic).

### **Young People's Mental Health**

I was pleased that the Government was able to publish our [Embedding a whole-school approach to mental health and well-being consultation](#) on 8 July, which will close 31 September 2020. This guidance seeks to support our COVID-19 response by ensuring schools recognise and take account of the importance of not just learner well-being, but also the well-being of the wider school community. To give young people the opportunity to

help shape the guidance a young person's version of the consultation document and questions was also published.

This work forms part of the whole school approach to supporting the emotional health wellbeing of children and young people and £5 million has been allocated in the Welsh Government's budget for 2020-21 to take it forward. It includes £1.25 million for local authorities to extend and improve school counselling with a focus on targeting current waiting lists, increasing capacity and developing new ways of working to meet COVID-19 demand. Also included is £1.5 million to support local authorities in developing plans to support training teachers and other school staff on their own and learner wellbeing; delivering universal and targeted interventions to learners and implementing age appropriate interventions for younger children (below Yr6) in primary schools.

It is, of course, essential that teachers' mental health is also supported during these difficult times and that is why we have allocated £450,000 in the current year to support their wellbeing, recognising that effective learning can only occur in an environment where all are engaged. More detail on this package of funding will be available shortly.

We have been working with higher education institutions to develop a range of professional learning resources for teachers to support implementation of our whole school approach guidance - £85,000 was provided in 2019-20 for this work, which includes training modules on child development, mental health and neurodiversity. They were due to be finalised earlier this year, though have been delayed as a result of COVID-19 and we are now aiming to have them available from September/October.

In the autumn term, schools and settings will play a pivotal role in supporting the well-being of our children and young people. Learners will require time, support and understanding to develop new behaviours; appropriate opportunities to play, socialise and nurture relationships can support this. In recognition of these challenges, the Welsh Government has been working closely with partners to develop a range of resources to support schools and settings in putting the well-being of both learners and staff at the heart of everything they do as they teach within the context of COVID-19's ongoing impacts. The first couple of resources in this [series](#) have now been published:

- [Teaching COVID-19-safe behaviours: Strategies for building new routines](#)
- [The role of the teaching assistant: supporting learner well-being in response to COVID-19](#)

More will be available over the coming months, each focussed on different aspects of fostering a friendly and inclusive whole-school approach to mental health and emotional well-being within the context of COVID-19.

Our CAMHS in-reach pilot projects, which provide schools with consultation, liaison, advice and training from CAMHS staff, have been extended until July 2021, recognising the longer-term impact of COVID-19 on emotional and mental health and coinciding with the final evaluation of the pilots.

In June, the updated [School and community based counselling operating toolkit](#) together with an [FAQ factsheet](#) containing the latest advice for counsellors on delivering face to face and on-line counselling services during the COVID-19 pandemic was issued. These provide a valuable resource on the best practice in delivering the service and promote consistency of provision and equity of access for young people.



Hosted on the Hwb platform, I have also recently produced [The young person's mental health toolkit](#) which links young people, aged 11 to 25, to websites, apps, helplines, and more to build resilience and support them through the Coronavirus pandemic and beyond.

## **ALN Support**

With schools and settings returning to full operations from September, I expect that the learning and wider support for ALN learners will reflect pre-lockdown arrangements. The Guidance for supporting vulnerable and disadvantaged learners provides detailed information, advice and expectations on supporting learners with SEN during the next academic year. As outlined above, the guidance deals with a range of scenarios from full operation to a further national or local lockdown.

For planning arrangements from September, the guidance covers a wide range of both operational and learning matters that will be relevant to the effective support of learners with SEN. These include, for example, engagement with parents/carers and learners, transition, social distancing, use of PPE and arrangements relating to peripatetic staff. In line with the [Guidance on Learning in Schools and Settings from the Autumn Term](#), the guidance for supporting vulnerable and disadvantaged learners is clear that well-being is a pre-requisite for learning. It goes on to include a detailed section on specific considerations for SEN learners.

As well as providing comprehensive advice and expectations on arrangements from September, the guidance for supporting vulnerable and disadvantaged learners is also very clear on the importance of contingency planning for potential further national or local lockdowns. With a view to ensuring that the disruption to the education of vulnerable and disadvantaged learners is minimised as far as possible were there to be further school and setting closures in response to the pandemic. The guidance includes a section on ensuring continuity of learning and highlights a range of literature and resources to support local authorities, schools and settings to do this.

## **Qualifications**

I made a statement on 17 August that A level, AS, GCSE, Skills Challenge Certificate and Welsh Baccalaureate grades in Wales would be awarded on the basis of Centre Assessment, as such the standardisation model was not used.

Working with Qualifications Wales and WJEC we sought an approach which provided fairness and balanced out differences in the standards applied to judgments in schools. But given decisions elsewhere, the balance of fairness changed to lay with awarding Centre Assessment grades to students, despite the strengths of the system in Wales.

All awards in Wales were made on the basis of teacher assessment. For those young people, for whom our system produced higher grades than those predicted by teachers, the higher grades will stand. The policy approach I announced regarding an AS level floor will also stand and no learner will receive an A level grade this year lower than their AS grade.

Maintaining standards is not new for 2020, it is a feature of awarding qualifications every year in Wales, and across the UK. However, it is clear that maintaining confidence in our qualifications whilst being fair to students required this difficult decision. These have been exceptional circumstances, and in due course I will be making a further statement on an independent review of events following the cancellation of this year's exams.

## **Tertiary Education and Research Bill**

The challenges the sector is facing as a result of the pandemic means that the First Minister and I had no option but to prioritise other legislation within the programme. To reflect the importance of the Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Bill, we have [published it in draft](#) allowing stakeholders and the public to consider.

The draft bill is currently subject to consultation until 4 December. This gives us further opportunities to continue our stakeholders' engagement relating to provisions within the bill, and importantly the impact and challenges ahead for the sector as a result of the pandemic.

The challenges created for our economy and education sector as a result of Covid-19 mean that it is more important than ever to take a more strategic, coherent, and efficient approach to overseeing tertiary education, under the auspices of a single Commission with a clear remit to build a system that works for the people of Wales and the Welsh economy.

### **Tuition Fees**

I am in no doubt that the higher education experience will be very different for many students during the coming academic year. Nonetheless, we have worked closely with the sector to develop guidance which we hope will enable them to provide an excellent university experience that is also healthy and safe. We cannot realistically expect universities to lower their fees when the costs of this provision will remain unchanged, and in some cases increased, and doing so would in any case only benefit higher earning graduates long after they leave university due to the nature of student loan repayments.

### **Student Numbers**

I [wrote to the Minister of State for Universities](#) on the 29 May expressing my deep concern about the UK Government's intention to introduce temporary student number controls in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. My key concerns were that the proposals would not be in the best interests of the UK as a whole; that they would place controls on Welsh institutions rather than working with the Welsh Government to achieve a solution compatible with devolution and that they would cut across HEFCW's proposals for admissions constraint being developed in partnership with the Welsh higher education sector.

On 1 June, the UK Government announced student number control arrangements for English universities and English domiciled students. This policy represents a move away from a UK-wide approach to higher education admissions constraint. I expressed my disappointment about this outcome to the Minister of State for Universities. I also discussed my concerns about the UK Government's approach with the Scottish Government and the Northern Ireland Executive.

On 17 August the Secretary of State for Education announced that the UK Government intends to remove their temporary student number controls which had been introduced for the coming academic year.

### **FE Student Support**

I am extremely satisfied that providers made every effort during this time to respond to the needs of vulnerable and hard to reach students. Some of the specific things providers have done which were identified for us by Estyn include:

- Restricting the number and duration of scheduled online delivery sessions to prevent 'digital exhaustion' for learners and staff;

- Lecturers filming and uploading demonstrations to show learners how to do specific things (e.g. preparing certain meals or shearing sheep);
- Colleges have lent out equipment, including tablets, Chromebooks and laptops, and provided other financial support to fund or provide broadband, mobile data or Wi-Fi dongles to those learners most in need of support to alleviate digital poverty;
- Staff have offered a wide range of support interventions to learners including telephone calls, text or email; and in a few cases, staff have visited learners at home where colleges have not been able to contact through other means;
- Examples of specific initiatives to support vulnerable learners include food deliveries or vouchers, period poverty payments, provision of IT equipment or support to help access Wi-Fi or mobile data.

I have announced funding of £3.2m to help with the purchase of ICT equipment and connectivity for digitally excluded learners in 2020-21.

Providers have also been very aware of the impact of this on their staff as well as their learners and have ensured that they have provided or signposted staff to appropriate support and allowed staff to work flexibly as required.

Colleges are continuing to monitoring and maintain regular contact with vulnerable learners, especially those identified on support registers as being high priority. I do not believe there has been any less support provided for vulnerable learners in post-16 than has been offered to the equivalent in schools.

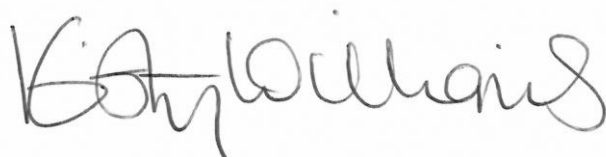
### **Post 16 Vocational Qualification**

My officials continue to work closely with Qualifications Wales regarding vocational qualifications.

OfQual has advised Awarding Organisations to follow the principle of using Centre Assessed Grades where in year assessments have not provided sufficient evidence to apply a grade. It is estimated that this impacts on less than 1% of students. Any student unsure on how their final grade has been awarded need to be advised to appeal.

I hope you find this information helpful. Should you require any further clarification, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely



**Kirsty Williams AS/MS**  
Y Gweinidog Addysg  
Minister for Education