

CYPE(5)-20-20 - Paper to note 23

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Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg

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Welsh Parliament

Children, Young People and Education Committee

Kirsty Williams MS, Minister for Education

Dyddiad | Date: 20 August 2020

Pwnc | Subject: **Scrutiny of the awarding of 2020 examination results**

Dear Kirsty,

On **18 August** you attended Committee to discuss the awarding of 2020 examination results. I would like to put on record our thanks to you, your officials, and representatives of the WJEC and Qualifications Wales for contributing to the important scrutiny we are undertaking on this matter.

It is clear that the awarding of 2020 examination results has created a very stressful and concerning situation for thousands of young people across Wales. The volume of correspondence we have received as Members and as a Committee, as well as the public outcry in relation to this issue, demonstrates the significant distress experienced by young people, their parents and carers, and education staff alike as a consequence of the arrangements adopted to award exam results in 2020. We recognise the unprecedented challenges of developing an approach to exams during a global pandemic. However, the impact the approach has had on young people's well-being and the public's confidence in the system that awards qualifications to them, is a matter of deep concern and regret to us, especially in light of the wider collateral damage caused to children and young people by this pandemic.

We welcome your direct and unreserved apology to all those affected by recent events. While striking a balance between maintaining standards and fairness is complex, the impact of the shortcomings in the process that was adopted in light of the disruption to exams caused by COVID-19 has become clear and must be avoided in future.

As a Committee, it is our view that the priority must now be to ensure those young people worst affected by this system are supported and able to move forward with the next steps in the career or learning paths they have chosen. Longer term, we need to know what the Welsh Government and relevant public bodies are doing to make sure this does not happen again, and that the risk of any unintended consequences arising from recent decisions is mitigated. As future lockdowns remain a possibility, we must learn from this year's experiences to avoid any repetition of the distress caused to some children and young people, parents and carers, and education staff and institutions.

We are reassured by your commitment as Minister to an independent review of the events following the cancellation of exams this year, and welcome your willingness to consider our views on that work. We will take an active role in monitoring its progress and findings, and we will keep



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a close eye on ensuring that lessons from this period are learned for future years. It is important to us that the interests of past and future cohorts of young people – as well as those who sat exams this year – are taken into account.

In the meantime, we will be continuing our work to represent and support children and young people in Wales through what has been one of the most challenging times of their lives. The ongoing situation in relation to university admissions is one we will monitor closely. We are particularly concerned regarding places on medical courses where we understand that there are now more applicants who have met their conditions than places and funding available for 2020/21 entry. We are also concerned about the situation with regards to higher cost and expensive subjects in general - these courses attract additional HEFCW funding and there is a real risk course quality could suffer if additional funding is not provided in proportion to an increased student intake. **We would welcome an urgent update on university medical places, and updates from you on any other significant developments in regards to the university admissions matters outlined above.**

Furthermore, since our meeting on 18 August, further disruption has occurred in relation to Pearson BTEC results which will now be re-issued, with Level 1 and 2 results consequently delayed and already-issued Level 3 results now subject to revision. We are extremely concerned that this last-minute decision by Pearson will mean further disruption and distress for learners who have university offers based on BTEC Level 3 qualifications, and has potential to disadvantage them in securing their place in higher education. We are also concerned about what this might mean for other vocational qualifications. **We would welcome an urgent update on the arrangements for the awarding of vocational qualifications across all awarding bodies who offer significant numbers of vocational qualifications in Wales; an indication of when you expect BTEC results to be issued for Level 1 and 2, and re-issued for Level 3; and an indication of whether other awarding bodies plan to re-grade their qualifications.**

Subject to your announcement next week relating to the independent review, **we would welcome an urgent update on the steps you will take to provide clarity about any remaining action relating to the awarding of qualifications in 2020 and preparations for 2021.**

We would also welcome more information on the points listed in the annex to this letter as soon as possible.

Kind regards,



Lynne Neagle MS
Chair

Cc Qualifications Wales David Jones (Chair), Philip Blaker (Chief Executive) and Jo Richards (Regulation Director) **WJEC** Ian Morgan (Chief Executive) and Elaine Carlile (Director of Qualifications, Assessment and Responsible Officer)

ANNEX – Further information requested in light of the evidence provided by the WJEC, Qualifications Wales and the Welsh Government on 18 August 2020

The Committee would welcome the following:

- A **timeline of events** since the cancellation of exams was announced, to include:
 - the meetings undertaken between the Welsh Government and the WJEC, the Welsh Government and Qualifications Wales, and the Welsh Government, the WJEC and Qualifications Wales. Please could the timeline specify if these meetings involved officials only and/or the Minister;
 - dates on which details of – and advice about – A-level results were provided to the Minister for Education;
 - dates on which there was communication between the Welsh Government (Minister and/or officials) and other devolved administrations relating to the awarding of examination results.

NB We are grateful to the Minister for her commitment in our meeting on 18 August to provide a timeline of the meetings she held personally with Qualifications Wales during this period.

- Further information about the **Qualifications Wales Sponsorship Unit within the Welsh Government**, including:
 - details of its remit;
 - details of its membership;
 - confirmation of when it became aware that the standardisation process had resulted in 42% of A-level results being downgraded or any earlier estimates;
 - confirmation of whether this information was passed on and, if so, to whom and when.
- A commitment from the Welsh Government to provide the Committee with **regular updates** on the steps taken to establish the independent review, and to ensure that updates on its progress thereafter are also provided to us.
- An assessment of the **impact on specific groups of pupils** (eFSM, BAME, ALN etc), of the proposed standardised grades and the awarded Centre Assessment Grades (CAGs) respectively. In addition, an assessment of how the differential between proposed standardised grades and the awarded CAGs has affected individual centres and particular types of centre.