

# Appeals against Centre Assessed Grades

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 29 Medi 2020  
Petitions Committee | 29 September 2020

**Reference:** RS20/13831-2

**Petition Number:** [P-05-1020](#)

**Petition title:** Introduce an Appeals process in Wales for all Centre Assessed Grades for 2020 public exam programme

**Text of petition:** We were relieved that the Welsh Government decided that CAGs should form the basis for 2020 exam results. However, what learners need now is a transparent process for appeals against CAGs which may have been lowered due to assessment criteria set by WJEC, disallowing compensatory measures ie variable learner circumstances affecting data.



## 1. Summary

- Following the cancellation of exams in 2020, grades were initially going to be issued under a standardisation process applied by WJEC to the grades submitted for learners by their school or college.
- In response to concerns that standardisation resulted in many Centre Assessment Grades (CAGs) being lowered, the Welsh Government decided that the higher of the CAG and the standardised grade would be used.
- Candidates cannot appeal against the professional judgement their centre has reached in determining their grade, only where there has been an administrative or procedure error, or malpractice.

## 2. The cancellation of exams and the process put in place for awarding grades in 2020

On the same day (18 March) as announcing the closure of schools, the Minister for Education, Kirsty Williams MS, decided, following discussions with Qualifications Wales and the WJEC, that the **2020 summer GCSE and A level exam series would not go ahead**.

The Minister said from the outset that learners due to sit their GCSE and A level exams this summer (predominantly Year 11 and Year 13 respectively) would be awarded a **'fair grade'**, **'drawing on the range of information available'**.

Welsh Government guidance issued in late March said that grades would be 'calculated using a range of available evidence including for instance, work done to date, mock exams and teacher assessed grades'. The government also stated its **'aim that no learner will be disadvantaged'**.

As the regulator of qualifications below degree level, Qualifications Wales instigated a process under which grades would be issued in 2020. Such a process would have to be mindful of the **two principal aims** which the regulator has under the Qualifications Wales Act 2015:

- a) ensuring that qualifications, and the Welsh qualification system, are effective for meeting the reasonable needs of learners in Wales;
- b) promoting public confidence in qualifications and in the Welsh qualification system.

The process put in place by Qualifications Wales consisted of schools submitting a grade for their pupils (Centre Assessed Grade) and a rank order for their pupils. Qualifications Wales agreed a mechanism under which WJEC, as the awarding body, would **'standardise' these grades using a statistical model**. This was aimed at achieving fairness and consistency between centres as well as

**maintaining grade stability and the value of qualifications** awarded. Further information about this process can be found in blog articles Senedd Research published on [7 August 2020](#) and [14 August 2020](#).

## 3. Centre Assessment Grades (CAGs)

### 3.1. The decision to use (CAGs)

Following the publication of A-Level grades on 13 August 2020, it emerged that nearly half (46%) of the Centre Assessed Grades (CAGs) were changed after the standardisation calculation. **42% of calculated (standardised) grades were lower than the CAG** and 4% were higher.

On 17 August, the [Minister for Education announced](#) that A level, AS, GCSE, Skills Challenge Certificate and Welsh Baccalaureate candidates would receive the **higher of the CAG and the grade calculated** from the standardisation model. This followed concerns at the number of candidates who faced receiving lower grades than their school had submitted for them as a result of the standardisation system. The Minister said the ‘balance of fairness’ now lay with awarding CAGs to students.

Similar decisions were taken in Scotland, Northern Ireland and England.

The Minister was scrutinised by the [Children, Young People and Education Committee on 18 August 2020](#). The Committee also held sessions with Qualifications Wales and WJEC.

### 3.2. How were CAGs determined?

Guidance issued by Qualifications Wales to centres on generating CAGs for their pupils (May 2020) stated:

Producing centre assessment grades for each learner should be a **holistic professional judgement**, balancing the different sources of evidence. Teachers, Heads of Department and senior leaders will have a good understanding of their learners’ abilities and how they compare to other learners taking the qualification this year, and in previous years. We want centres to consider each learner’s performance over the course of study and make a **realistic judgement of the grade each learner would have been most likely to get if they had taken their exam(s)** in a subject, along with any non-exam assessment this summer. [bold is Senedd Research emphasis]

Further details are available on [pages 3- 5 of the guidance](#).

## 4. Appeals

Following the decision to use CAGs, Qualifications Wales issued [revised appeals arrangements](#). Candidates **cannot appeal against their school's or college's professional judgement** of the grade that they would most likely have achieved if exams had taken place. They can only appeal where there has been some form of administrative or procedural error.

It was already the case that candidates would not be able to appeal against CAGs other than where any error was administrative or procedural rather than relating to schools and teachers' judgements. However, following the Welsh Government's decision to use CAGs where they are higher than calculated grades, the main focus of any disagreement with the grade that has been awarded is likely to be towards the school or college, rather than the awarding body and the standardisation process.

Qualifications Wales [decided](#) at the end of June, following [consultation](#), that learners would not be allowed to appeal to the WJEC against the grade that their centre has submitted for them or the ranking they have been given. It said that, **because there is no common assessment to inform the professional judgements made, there is no benchmark or standard form of evidence against which those judgements could be evaluated by a reviewer or appeal decision maker** (see page 27 of Qualifications Wales' [decision report](#)).

Qualifications Wales also said there would be **nobody better placed to make these judgements than teachers** who have engaged with their learners through the course of study, have the best understanding of their abilities and how they compare to other learners in that centre taking the qualification this year, and in previous years (see page 28 of Qualifications Wales' [decision report](#)).

The Minister confirmed in the CYPE Committee on 18 August (see paragraphs 346-347 of the [transcript](#)) that candidates would not be able to appeal against centres' professional judgements.

As the Minister's letter to the Petitions Committee regarding this petition outlines, where candidates have concerns that their school has exhibited bias or discrimination in determining their CAG, they should contact their centre and use the [school complaints procedure](#). They can also pass any evidence to the WJEC who may then decide to investigate the matter as alleged malpractice by the centre. A [learners' guide to the appeals process](#), produced by Qualifications Wales, gives more information.

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.

