

Kirsty Williams AS/MS
Y Gweinidog Addysg
Minister for Education



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Ein cyf/Our ref: KW/05200/20

Janet Finch-Saunders MS
Chair Petitions Committee
Senedd
Cardiff Bay
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Petitions@Senedd.Wales

14 September 2020

Dear Janet,

Thank you for your letter dated 4 September regarding Petition P-05-1025 - "Ensure Fairness for Students in 2021" from the National Education Union.

The Petition sets out three areas on which the Petitioners believe there should be a focus.

The first refers to reducing the curriculum content assessed across GCSE, Welsh Baccalaureate, and A level exams next summer, by making some topics optional across all Subjects. I have been clear that I believe it is in the best interests of learners to take their exams next summer but that there should be some adaptations to take into account the disruption to teaching and learning, as well as social distancing considerations.

In July, Qualifications Wales established an extraordinary regulatory framework in July that allows WJEC to make adaptations to general qualifications next summer. On 1 September, WJEC published the adaptations that will be made to general qualifications in summer 2021, these were produced following detailed considerations on a subject specific basis and engagement with practitioners. These adaptations were provided to schools and colleges over the summer to facilitate their planning for the autumn term but have now been made publically available to help provide reassurance to learners and their families. I have enclosed a link to these documents for you:

<https://www.wjec.co.uk/home/summer-2021-adaptations/>

This approach will ensure that learners are provided with the opportunity to demonstrate their ability whilst recognising the disruption there has been to their teaching and learning. It will also seek to provide teachers more time to deliver course content, making the best use of the time available when schools resume, while ensuring the qualifications remain valid and meaningful.

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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.

To support learners due to take their exams next year, they will be priority cohort support via our £29 million '[recruit, recover and raise standards plan](#)'. This will enable recruitment of the equivalent of 600 extra teachers and 300 teaching assistants throughout the next school year, to provide extra coaching support, personalised learning programmes and additional time and resources for exam year pupils

The second point in the petition, refers to working with educators and trade unions to develop a Welsh system of moderated centre assessed grades in case there is further disruption to exams next summer. As we continue to operate in an uncertain public health environment, whilst we plan to proceed with examinations as normal in 2021, as a responsible Government it is only right that we also develop contingency arrangements in case of further disruption. Therefore, in July I asked Qualifications Wales and WJEC, to develop contingency arrangements in relation to exams, drawing on our experience and learning from this year. Lessons learned and proposals for 2021 will also be a key focus of the independent review which I announced on 28 August will be chaired by Louise Casella and is due to provide interim findings next month and a final report at the end of 2020.

The third point in the petition refers to the need to develop a robust system which ensures young people are rewarded for their achievements and not held back due to their background. You may be aware that Qualifications Wales has recently published a statement on its plans for further analysis of this summer's results and I have provided a link to this below:

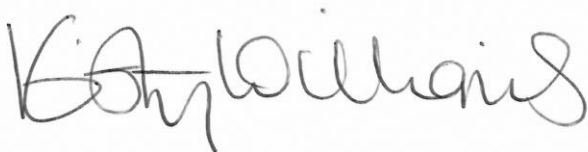
<https://qualificationswales.org/english/results-2020/qualifications-wales-statements/statement-on-plans-for-further-statistical-releases/>

Qualifications Wales has now published an update to its results overview <https://www.qualificationswales.org/english/news/revised-results-4-september/>. This provides more accurate estimates of final results this summer for A levels, AS, GCSEs and the Skills Challenge certificate as well as comparisons to results in previous years and the proposed standardised grades. Qualifications Wales will also update the information on attainment gaps and expand it to include an analysis of results for learners with a special educational needs status and further information on results by ethnicity.

With regard to longer term implications of the arrangements this year, I have also asked for the review to note areas for further consideration and exploration as we start the transition to curriculum reform. This might include practitioners' approach to assessment, the role of accountability systems and the future role and design of qualifications. Qualifications Wales will also be consulting on their next phase of Qualified for the Future, which will inform the revision and development of qualifications to reflect the Curriculum for Wales, later this year

I hope that you will find this information helpful.

Yours sincerely



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