

Ensure fairness for students in 2021

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 13 Hydref 2020
Petitions Committee | 13 October 2020

Reference: RS20/13898-4

Petition Number: [P-05-1025](#)

Petition title: Ensure fairness for students in 2021

Text of petition: As the Education Minister acknowledges, the last few weeks have been exceptionally hard for young people, who have already been disadvantaged by Covid-19. We welcome the Education Minister's apology. Now it is vital that the Welsh Government takes urgent steps to ensure students due to sit A-level, Welsh Baccalaureate and GCSE exams in 2021 are treated fairly and are not disadvantaged.

The planned independent review is very welcome, and we look forward to hearing further details.

Additional information: In Wales, with AS levels, and more focus on coursework, we have had a solid basis on which to judge students work. However, allowances must be made for the time students have missed in school or college.

It is clear to our members that Welsh Government needs to make changes to next year's exams to build confidence that the grades awarded, upon which young people's life chances are determined, properly recognise and reward their achievements.

We also believe that Welsh Government should now focus on:

- Reducing the curriculum content assessed across GCSE, Welsh Bacc and A-level exams next summer, by making some topics optional across all subjects.
- 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.



- Using this opportunity to develop a robust system which ensures young people are rewarded for their achievements and not held back due to their background.

1. Disruption to education due to COVID-19

On 20 March, schools closed for the provision of statutory education due to the national lockdown and social distancing requirements to deal with COVID-19. Schools remained open for children of key workers and vulnerable children, however the vast majority of pupils experienced substantial disruption to their education.

Schools were expected to provide for teaching and learning online, through the digital platform Hwb. However, it is widely recognised that learners due to take exams in 2021 have been significantly impacted in terms of their study towards these qualifications.

Background information on the disruption to education and to qualifications specifically can be found in Senedd Research blog articles of [16 June](#) and [7 August](#) 2020.

2. Arrangements for qualifications awarded in 2021

As the Minister for Education, Kirsty Williams MS, reiterates in her letter to the Committee regarding the petition, the Welsh Government believes it is in the best interests of all learners for the exams in 2021 to proceed in the normal way, albeit with some modifications to take into consideration the loss of learning time and classroom time that have been experienced. The Minister told the Children, Young People and Education Committee in [July 2020](#):

It is absolutely my hope and it is my belief that the examination series next summer needs to go ahead, but we need to recognise that some modifications will be necessary for that to be fair.

As the independent regulator, Qualifications Wales is responsible for determining arrangements for how qualifications are awarded. However, under the Qualifications Wales Act 2015, it must have regard to Welsh Government policy as directed by Ministers.

On [15 July](#), Qualifications Wales issued instructions to the awarding body, WJEC, on how it should make appropriate changes to GCSEs and A levels for learners taking exams in summer 2021. Qualifications Wales issued further instructions to WJEC on [6 August 2020](#).

On 1 September, [WJEC published details](#) of the adaptations it was putting in place for qualifications awarded in summer 2021.

The Welsh Government has commissioned an independent review into the events following the decision to cancel the summer 2020 exam series, due to COVID-19. The review is being chaired by Louise Casella, Director of the Open University in Wales. The Minister's [announcement of the review](#) stated:

It is essential that lessons are learned from this year's experience so that the review can provide recommendations and considerations for approaches for 2021.

The Minister has asked Louise Casella to provide her with an interim report of key findings by the end of October, with a final report and recommendations to follow by mid-December.

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.