

Kirsty Williams AS/MS
Y Gweinidog Addysg
Minister for Education



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Eich cyf/Your ref P-05-1128
Ein cyf/Our ref KW/00703/21

Janet Finch-Saunders MS
Chair
Senedd Cymru Petitions Committee
Ty Hywel
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1NA

2 February 2021

Dear Janet,

Thank you for your letter dated 19 January regarding “Petition P-05-1128 Cancel externally set ‘assessments’ in 2021 for AS and A levels and only use teacher assessed grades” that you have received.

I am sorry to hear of the concerns that Levi Phillips raises in the petition and recognise that this is an extremely stressful time for students, teachers and parents alike. I would like to assure Levi that I understand that the disrupted autumn term meant there were additional pressures for learners, families and school staff. The Welsh Government’s priorities during this pandemic continues to be the safety and welfare of students, school staff and the wider community, and the continuing education of learners.

I appreciate that many young people, particularly those in exam years are finding the current situation both difficult and challenging. Levi has noted that students have had to adapt to learning on their own, remotely. Last month, a package of remote learning design modules was launched on [Hwb](#) to offer practical advice to help practitioners develop resources that will engage learners, enable learning and continue effective provision outside of the classroom. Alongside this, additional guidance outlining [expectations for remote learning](#) specific to learners currently in exam years was launched this month.

I want all learners to be able to use the remote learning system in a fair and effective way. We have established a Blended Learning Working Group who will be addressing issues of equity of access to learning in periods of disruption, as well as making sure that the interests and requirements of learners with wide and additional learning needs are also provided for. To support this work, one of the group’s priorities will be engaging parents and learners to ensure wider views are sought.

Regarding the specific concerns about the alternative assessment arrangements for general qualifications raised in the petition. As you are aware, the public health crisis has worsened

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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.

and unless the rates of community transmission reduce significantly, schools and colleges will continue remote learning for most students until the February half term.

In light of this, on 8 January, Qualifications Wales announced the cancellation of the window for internal assessment and confirmed that revised arrangements, adapting the plans announced prior to Christmas, would be made as quickly as possible. Following receipt of advice from the Design and Delivery Advisory Group, I made an [announcement](#) on 20th January, setting out these new proposals, to reflect the impact of the continued disruption on learner wellbeing and confidence. I have summarised this announcement below:

Learners undertaking GCSE, AS and A levels approved by Qualifications Wales will have their qualifications awarded through a Centre-Determined Grade model.

Grades will be determined by a learner's school or college based on an assessment of their work. There will be no formal external assessments as per the three pillar approach that was announced before Christmas.

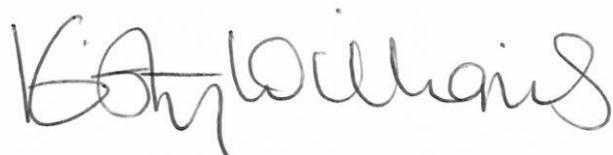
Schools and colleges will be able to use a range of evidence to determine the grades to be awarded to learners, including Non Examination Assessment elements, mock-exams, and classwork. In addition, the WJEC will offer a set of adapted past papers which can enable schools to continue to assess learning within their teaching plans, providing extra support for teachers and learners.

We have sought to make the grading approach as clear as possible in the circumstances, while remaining as simple and responsive as possible. Teaching the core content and aspects of each course remains my absolute priority for learners in exam years, so they are supported to progress with certainty into their next steps, and with confidence in the grades they've been awarded.

I note Levi has also highlighted the mental wellbeing of learners. It is vital that we support our young people in this area so as well as academic support through our [Recruit, Recover, Raise Standards Accelerated Programme](#). Welsh Government has made an additional £1.252m available in the current year to support an expansion of and improvements in the existing schools counselling scheme. There is practical help available on [our website](#) including a link to our Young Person's Mental Health Toolkit. Further resources can be found on WJEC's website, which has a very useful [student wellbeing](#) section and also on the [Student Minds](#) website.

I hope this information has provided clarity regarding the way in which grades will be determined and the steps we are taking to support remote learning for all learners.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kirsty Williams', written in a cursive style.

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