

Jeremy Miles AS/MS
Gweinidog y Gymraeg ac Addysg
Minister for Education and Welsh Language



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Ein cyf/Our ref JMEWL/11751/21

Jack Sargeant MS
Chair - Petitions committee
Senedd Cymru
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1SN

22 December 2021

Dear Jack,

Thank you for your letter of 25 November drawing my attention to Petition P-06-1237 entitled *“Look at using Teacher Assessed Grades for learners unable to sit November GCSE exams as a result of a positive COVID test. Ensure fairer arrangements are in place for May exams”*.

I would like to reassure you that I recognise learners are having to continue to adapt to the challenges caused by the pandemic and have already had a very difficult year as a result of this. I am continuing to keep a close eye on the public health situation and the experience of learners and teachers in schools. I have asked my officials to closely monitor the attendance data of learners and to continue to talk to the education sector to understand the level of disruption for learners, particularly those in examination cohorts, and how this might be mitigated.

In response to the petition, it might be helpful to firstly set out the purpose of the November exam series and then to offer an overview of the comprehensive funding package I recently announced to support learners in qualifications years during this academic year.

The November exam series provides an opportunity for learners who want to re-sit exams to improve their grades from a previous exam series. It also provides learners with an opportunity to take a small number of exams early, with another opportunity to take them in the summer. Whilst I appreciate that this may be a cause of disappointment, this is why there no specific contingency arrangements were put in place for learners like the petitioner’s son. I understand this may be disappointing or worrying for learners who unfortunately tested positive during this period and were therefore unable to sit their exams during the November series. However, expecting schools and colleges to prepare learners for and run the November series whilst also delivering contingency arrangements for those unable to sit their exams would have disproportionately affected teaching and learning time available.

Bae Caerdydd • Cardiff Bay
Caerdydd • Cardiff
CF99 1SN

Canolfan Cyswllt Cyntaf / First Point of Contact Centre:
0300 0604400

Gohebiaeth.Jeremy.Miles@llyw.cymru
Correspondence.Jeremy.Miles@gov.wales

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.

As you will be aware, Qualifications Wales has confirmed it is planning to run an exam series in summer 2022 and this is still the case. Adaptations have been made to subject specifications to reduce assessment content ([WJEC summer 2022 Adaptations](#)) to reflect disruption to teaching and learning. The summer exam timetable has also been carefully planned to build in contingency, with papers for the same subject spaced 10 days apart to maximise opportunities for learners to complete their assessments.

To complement this adapted exam series and support the learners taking their qualifications in 2022, my recent [statement](#) confirmed a comprehensive package of support to the value of £24m. This package of support will ensure every young person in qualifications years will be able to access practical support or advice to help them prepare for exams and next steps, whether that be in education, training or employment.

As I detailed within my statement, I believe exams are the fairest way to provide qualifications, particularly in the wider UK context where it is essential that our young people are on a level playing field with their counterparts in other parts of the UK in relation to university admissions. Importantly, exams are primarily scheduled at the end of the school year which increases the time for learning and preparation. I do understand that some learners may feel anxious at the prospect of sitting formal exams for the first time next summer. In addition to the wide range of [resources](#) that have been developed by WJEC to support learning and preparation for exams, including knowledge organisers, blended learning and exam walk-throughs, as part of this package of support, £7.5m will be provided to schools to enable extra support for learners in exam years, with additional teaching time and resources. The funding will help schools respond to the disruption seen since September which has been caused by self-isolation of staff and learners.

I am also aware that there are learners whose attendance has dropped during the pandemic and will be providing more than £7m to support Year 11 learners who have low attendance to help them complete their GCSEs or to help them reach the next stage in their education. Alongside this, there will also be attendance support for learners in other years and additional help for children and young people who have suffered trauma or have a mental health issue.

This support package also provides further education colleges and sixth forms with £9.5m to support young people with their transition into the next stage of their education or career and for activities such as taster sessions into vocational careers and open days, as well as a continuation of the University Ready hub in partnership with the Open University and universities in Wales. This is a resource which was developed last year to support learners' preparation for university to enable successful transition to their next steps, it brings together a wealth of materials that will help students heading to university for the first time to get '[University Ready](#)' – the first hub of its kind in the UK.

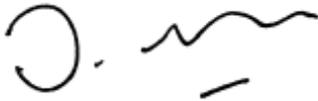
Learning from previous experience and acknowledging the continued unpredictable nature of the pandemic, we must also have contingency arrangements in place. Qualifications Wales has confirmed that centre-determined grades will be the contingency arrangements and has provided advice to schools and colleges about steps that can be taken now to prepare for the published [contingency arrangements](#) should the public health situation mean that exams cannot be held in the summer. These steps will enable schools and colleges to make use of assessments that are already planned as part of their teaching and learning programme – should they subsequently be needed to support the contingency

arrangements. This guidance has been created following careful reflection and drawing on the lessons learnt from the last academic year which will hopefully avoid the over assessment of learners and additional work faced by teachers, schools and colleges, which was a heavy burden in summer 2021.

I would like to finish by reassuring your constituent and the Petition Committee that learner well-being and progression continues to be my key priorities and I will be continuing to work closely with partners across the education sector, to consider what further support can be provided to learners in preparing for their qualifications and ensuring they have the knowledge, skills and confidence to progress.

I hope the Petitions Committee finds the above helpful in offering additional context to the November exam series and also an overview of some of the work which is being undertaken during these challenging times to support learners in qualifications years. Thank you once again for drawing this petition to my attention.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large 'J' followed by a series of wavy lines and a short horizontal stroke at the end.

Jeremy Miles AS/MS

Gweinidog y Gymraeg ac Addysg
Minister for Education and Welsh Language