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Gweinidog y Gymraeg ac Addysg
Minister for Education and Welsh Language



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Ein cyf/Our ref JMEWL/12005/21

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

5 January 2021

Dear Jack,

Thank you for your letter dated 13 December drawing my attention to Petition P-06-1239 Cancel GCSE Exams in Wales which you have received from Ms Millie Rae.

I understand the concerns that Ms Rae has raised, given the disruption to teaching and learning there has been over the last eighteen months and the challenging start there has been to the autumn term. I would like to reassure Ms Rae that supporting learner wellbeing and progression are my key priorities and will continue to be at the heart of the qualifications arrangements in 2022.

On 16 December I made a statement outlining a comprehensive £24m funding package to support learners in exam years. This package will ensure every young person in qualifications years will be able to access practical support or advice to help them so they can look forward to the next step of their life, whether that be in education, training or employment.

As I explained in 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 for university admissions. Importantly, exams are primarily scheduled at the end of the school year which increases the time for learning and preparation.

I understand that some learners may feel anxious at the prospect of sitting formal exams for the first time next summer, so I would particularly like to note that there will be £7.5m to provide extra support for learners in exam years, with additional teaching time and resources. In addition to this WJEC's website has a [wide range of resources](#) to support learning and preparation for exams, including knowledge organisers, blended learning and exam walk-throughs.

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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 ensure learners were not disadvantaged by the disruption to teaching and learning, adaptations have been made to individual subjects by the WJEC, in consultation with teachers and subject specialists. These were confirmed to schools and colleges before the end of the summer term to facilitate planning for the autumn term. The detail of these [adaptations to assessments are published](#) and include adjustments to non-examination assessments (NEA), streamlining assessment content and in some cases, the removal of a whole unit. In light of the continuing disruption, WJEC has also recently announced further adaptations to help young people prepare for exams, which provide advance information on exam topics for a number of additional subjects.

To complement this exam year focussed support, further education colleges and sixth forms will be provided 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 was developed in response to the pandemic last year to help learners moving to university prepare and it is a free, open access hub providing a wealth of materials that will help students heading to university for the first time to get '[University Ready](#)'.

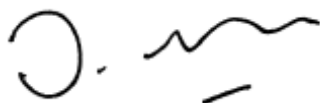
Whilst the intention is to hold the summer exam series, learning from previous experience and acknowledging the continued unpredictable nature of the pandemic, Qualifications Wales has provided advice to schools and colleges about [contingency arrangements](#) should the public health situation mean exams cannot safely be held.

I note that Ms Rae has emphasised the importance of our learners' mental health and wellbeing, an issue I take very seriously, and so I would also like to highlight the helpful resources we have available in our [Young Persons Mental Health Toolkit](#) which can be found on our Hwb pages.

Finally, I would like to reassure Ms Rae that I meet regularly with Qualifications Wales to discuss these matters and will continue to work closely with them to monitor the public health situation. Together we will ensure that learners in Wales are not disadvantaged and that those taking qualifications this year can continue to have confidence both in the qualifications arrangements but also the wider support that is being provided to support their progression.

I hope the Petitions Committee finds the above helpful and thank you once again for drawing this petition to my attention.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a stylized 'J' followed by a wavy line and a short horizontal stroke.

Jeremy Miles AS/MS

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