

CYPE(6)-17-22 - Paper to note 6

By email

Jayne Bryant MS
Chair of the Children, Young People and Education Committee



1 August 2022

Dear Jayne

Thank you for your letter of 6 July 2022 about the summer exams. Although you asked for a response by 7 September, I thought it would be useful to provide you with an interim update on the issues that you have outlined. We will provide a full response for the 7 September deadline, after all of the issues raised have been considered by WJEC in their awarding meetings, which we will observe. We note that you have also sent a similar letter to WJEC and will therefore clearly set out our respective roles regarding these issues.

To support learners and recognise the ongoing impact of the pandemic on their education, we have required WJEC to make adaptations to their qualifications and to take a different approach to grading in summer 2022. The adaptations were put in place in July 2021 to focus learner preparation for the summer 2022 assessments (exams and non-exam assessments). The expectation was that schools and colleges would endeavour to teach the full course content but were aware of where the exams and other assessments would be focussed. Due to the substantial increases in results in 2020 and 2021 when alternative assessment arrangements were in place, consideration was given to making a fair move back to the pre pandemic results. The grading approach provides a transition back to the established standards in future years, whereby this year, results at a national subject level will be broadly midway between the 2019 and 2021 results.

As you noted in your letter to us, we have spoken to you about some of the exam paper issues that have arisen this summer. WJEC as the 'owner' of the qualifications will take the lead in investigating such issues and setting out the actions to be taken in relation to ensuring that learners are not disadvantaged by the issues. They report the issue to us and outline the actions that they will be undertaking which we then monitor. WJEC also undertake root cause analysis investigations where errors are identified and provide us with an overview of the cause and what will be put in place to prevent a similar incident reoccurring. Again, we monitor these action plans.

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This year there have been complaints to WJEC, us and more widely reported in the media about some adaptations and views expressed that particular questions or part questions that appeared on exam papers had been from topics which had been removed from the assessment requirements. We have also seen from our Have Your Say questionnaire views from some learners, parents and teachers where similar concerns have been raised alongside general comments about the demands of some of the papers. We have published an interim report on the responses we have seen and actions taken to date: <https://qualificationswales.org/media/8561/have-your-say-on-summer-2022-exams-questionnaire-summary.pdf>

WJEC will consider these issues through the awarding process and as part of our monitoring programme we will be observing awarding meetings where concerns have been raised and WJEC will report to us the actions they will be taking. Where concerns have been raised in relation to difficulty of the exam papers, for example in A level Chemistry, WJEC will take account of the demand of the paper when setting the grade boundaries. In the case of A level English Language and Literature where a known error in question paper collation has occurred, WJEC will consider the impact on learners and take action to ensure that as far as possible they are not disadvantaged.

The AS Maths first exam paper (Unit 1) has come under particular scrutiny. We have already asked WJEC to review the questions where concerns have been raised and provide us with a report. Additionally, we have engaged two independent subject experts to review the paper and feedback to us on the claims that some of the questions should not have appeared as they had been removed from the assessment requirements. We have shared them with WJEC and are considering what action needs to be taken, such as the removal of these questions from the paper.

I hope this provides some reassurance to the committee that these issues are being considered and we will provide further detail to you by 7 September as requested. I have copied both WJEC and the Minister for Education and the Welsh Language into the interim response.

Yours sincerely



Philip Blaker
Chief Executive