

CYPE(6)-18-22 - Paper to note 9

Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg

Children, Young People and Education Committee

Philip Baker, Chief Executive
Qualifications Wales

28 September 2022

The “broadly midpoint policy”

Dear Philip,

Thank you for attending Committee on 21 September to talk to us about the summer 2022 exam series, particularly given that you were unwell at the time. We very much appreciate your commitment to discussing these important issues with us. I hope you are feeling better.

You and your colleagues told us during that evidence session that you felt the “broadly midpoint policy” was delivered this year. You also confirmed to us that this year’s results were closer to the results in 2021 than to the results in 2019. This is particularly evident in A level results at all grades down to grade C, and in AS levels and GCSEs at grades A and above. You explained that this was partially due to your conscious decision to “err on the side of generosity”. You also explained that a late decision in England to shift the weighting towards the higher 2021 results had an impact on your decisions for Wales because you didn’t want learners to be disadvantaged relative to their peers elsewhere.

We understand this decision. We also acknowledge the challenges you face when making decisions about exams in Wales when decisions are also being made across the border in England that have a significant impact on Welsh learners.

However, we would like your confirmation that the decisions you made about the summer 2022 exams in Wales were made in the best interests of Welsh learners. Please can you detail:

- when you first knew about the decision in England to shift the weighting towards the higher 2021 results;
- whether you had any input into that decision and when the similar decision was taken in Wales; and

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- whether you and WJEC would have approached the setting of grade boundaries for summer 2022 exams in Wales differently had that late decision to shift the weighting towards the higher 2021 results not been taken in England?

One purpose of the “broadly midpoint policy” was to avoid a stark fall in how generously grades are awarded from one year to the next – a “cliff edge” - as the process of determining grades transition from the more generous approach taken throughout the pandemic (i.e. 2022 and 2021) to how it was before the pandemic (i.e. 2019).

We are concerned that the decision to shift the weighting of the 2022 results towards the more generous 2021 results may mean that there is still a cliff edge (albeit a smaller one) in 2023, rather than being avoided altogether. Do you believe that learners receiving grades in 2023 will face a cliff edge compared to their 2022 peers if the grading returns to pre-pandemic levels in 2023? What, if anything, do you intend to do to ensure a smooth transition back to pre-pandemic grading and ensure fairness to all cohorts?

I understand that your Board is currently considering options for the November 2022 and summer 2023 exam series. I imagine that those decisions will shape your responses to my questions above. I know that you will be seeking to make those decisions quickly, but I understand that you may need to meet with stakeholders etc. to communicate those decisions before responding to us.

With that in mind, please can you reply to this letter no later than Thursday 13 October? If this deadline is difficult for you please contact the clerks (SeneddChildren@Senedd.Wales).

Yours sincerely,



Jayne Bryant MS

Chair

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg.

We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.