

14 August 2020

Dear Senedd Members,

I feel that I need to write to you on behalf of the Association of School and College Leaders Wales, regarding the recent exam results at both AS and A level.

You will already be aware, that we as a union are reasoned, measured and moderate and I would wish that you read and respond to this communication with that in mind.

Feedback from members regarding the grades awarded to students has revealed a very difficult picture of results awards in Wales. While the headline figures look healthy, this hides real volatility at individual student level. Indeed, one head teacher told me that his results were the best in their history, yet he had never been more angry in all his career.

It is not an exaggeration to say that colleagues who have contacted me have been distraught and indeed very angry at the clear injustices at pupil level that many of these results have produced. Granted, I have not spoken to all schools, but the many who have been in touch reveal that the statistical modelling applied to centre assessed grades has in many cases failed to reflect a fair outcome for learners. While we agree that results need to be standardised to maintain credibility, the learner seems to be lost in the algorithm.

Indeed, only yesterday at a WJEC briefing session, the meeting was told that outcomes, “would be difficult to unpick unless we look at pupils at individual level”. Surely any process of awarding results should at least function for the individual rather than serving a statistical outcome at national level. Our members are frustrated and upset by results which have served the machine of a statistical outturn, rather than all individual learners.

School leaders worked very hard to provide accurate grades to the WJEC exam board, carefully following all the guidance, and are dismayed that the statistical model then used to standardise these grades has had such a devastating impact. This is in terms of both the number of grades lowered, and some students’ results being pulled down by more than one grade. ASCL Cymru has always accepted that some form of standardisation was needed to provide consistency, and we recognise that this was never going to be easy.

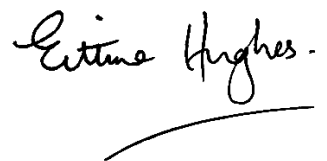
We are now calling on the Welsh government and the exam regulator Qualifications Wales to review the situation as a matter of urgency. We cannot accept that all is well with these results – they are not.

It is not sufficient to respond to these concerns by saying that schools and colleges can attempt to battle their way through the appeals process.

Our leaders are currently working extraordinarily hard on preparing schools to be ready for a September start. Having to process a large number of appeals, will place a huge strain on an already strained system and not support the well-being of young people who have already endured much.

We look forward to your response in this matter and I am more than happy for a meeting to further discuss the issues that have been raised and work together for a way forward. We, like you, want what is best for our learners in Wales.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Eithne Hughes." The signature is written in a cursive style. Below the signature is a long, horizontal, slightly curved line that serves as a separator from the typed name below.

Eithne Hughes
Director of ASCL Cymru / Cyfarwyddwr ASCL Cymru



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16 August 2020

Dear Eithne, can I first all thank you for efforts along with other ASCL officers in keeping the pressure on the Welsh Government to resolve the current crisis with regard to AS and A2 grades awarded last Thursday.

There is no doubt that the last minute decision to use AS grades if the generated A2 grade was lower has provided some protection to year 13 and their final A2 grades. Nearly all of our students have received offers to go to one of their chosen Higher Education Institutions, on to Further Education or work based employment or training. I am also heartened that due to pressure from schools and professional associations that the grounds of appeal seem to be widening. This will hopefully allow us to challenge grades that are below we would have expected.

My main concern is our students at both King Henry VIII and Croesyceiliog School that received their AS grades last week and the large number of adjustments made to the centre assessed grades. At KHS the number adjusted was 44.4% and at Croesy 65%. This is unacceptable and has had a detrimental impact on the wellbeing of a number of our students and staff. In a number of cases individual students have had their grades downgraded by up to three grades to a U grade. I also have an experienced a member of staff, who was previously a chief examiner at the WJEC, seeing her class downgraded so that 40% were given U grades. She has rarely ever had U grades.

This morning, Sunday, I have spoken to a parent governor whose son is in Year 12. On an individual level her son grades are lower than expected however she feels she has the capacity to reassure him to continue with his studies. She has reported that for those students who have grades downgraded by 2 or 3 grades they are now considering leaving education. Many are feeling why bother? Both my parent governor and I are very concerned about the impact this has had on the wellbeing of our students.

All through this on-going crisis the Welsh Government have told us as Head teachers that the wellbeing of our students is paramount. I would suggest that the wellbeing of year 12 has been sacrificed to maintain year on year comparisons of national data. My proposal is that student wellbeing should be placed centre stage and the Welsh Government should address this by accepting all centre assessed grades for these students.

From what I have read the algorithm used to calculate these grades is based on the average relationship between AS outcomes and GCSE outcomes at a national level. I also understand that allowances were made for small cohorts. As a head teacher I am concerned that this model has not worked at a school, subject and individual student level. My perception is that the following were not considered or undertaken:

- Historical value added data of individual subject, schools and colleges;
- The nature of small sixth forms and the significance variance of individual cohorts;
- Schools that have made recent changes to staffing to address performance concerns;
- Students who although average at GCSE have started to developed into independent learners at AS and have worked hard all year. Student 20 in the model below is a true example of this.
- Use of centre assessed grades – why were we asked to generate these when they do not seem to have been used except with small cohorts?
- No consideration of special circumstances adjustments.

Far greater use of centre assessed grades and discussions with schools as part of this process would have mitigated some of the issues that became apparent on results day. The lack of trust in teacher judgements and the arrogance of the WG, Qualification Wales and the WJEC to ignore these beggars belief. I would suggest that this episode may have broken this relationship and I am worried for the future.

Below are a few examples of what we consider are injustices. We have many more of these types of examples.

Maths and further maths at KHS.

Surname Forename	NC Year	Gender	Special Conditions Y12-CAG	KS5-Y12-CAG-Ma Y12-CAG	Rank Y12-CAG	Actual grade	Number of grade changes	Further maths grade	Number of grades change
1	12	M		A	1	A	0		
2	12	M		A	2	A	0	A	0
3	12	F		A	3	A	0		
4	12	M		A	4	A	0		
5	12	M		A	5	A	0		
6	12	M		A	7	A	0	A	0
7	12	F		A	8	A	0		
8	12	F		A	9	A	0		
9	12	M		A	10	A	0		
10	12	M		A	12	A	0		
11	12	M		A	13	A	0	B	0
12	12	F		A	14	B	-1	C	0
13	12	M		B	1	B	0		
14	12	F	Y	B	3	B	0	B	0
15	12	M		B	4	B	0	B	0
16	12	M		C	1	C	0		
17	12	M	Y	C	2	C	0		
18	12	F		C	3	C	0		
19	12	F	Y	C	5	E	-2		
20	12	M		C	6	U	-3	B	0
21	12	M		D	1	U	-2		

You will note the algorithm was applied to the maths class. Why have those students towards the bottom of the ranking had their grades adjusted most when compared to other students within the class? What justification has the WJEC have for awarding students a U grade even though they have not sat an examination? Why was the school not contacted to discuss their CAGs? And provide the objective evidence of the standard of work?

The Further Maths class was too small to apply the algorithm therefore final grades from what we can see were based on CAGs. Hence students 20 receives an AS 'B' grade for Further maths but has been downgraded by three whole grades in AS maths to a U grade. Student 20 is a student who cruised through GCSEs but has worked really hard this year. This is a brilliant example showing how a nationally applied algorithm does not transfer to individual students. This student is currently distraught and may not return to education.

Student 19 had special consideration and significant mental health issues. As part of the CAG process we were asked to take special considerations into account. The algorithm applied has not taken theses into account. Again this students is distraught and this whole episode has been detrimental to their already fragile mental health.

Finally there is the issue that if you were lucky enough to be in a small class then you seem more likely to have received your CAG. Surely no grade should be down to the size of your class.

AS Chemistry

At AS the school has made a significant effort to improve the standard of outcomes. These standardised grades do not reflect the academic profile and work ethic of these students. GCSE outcomes for this class are exceptional and we are at a loss as to why final AS grades were significantly downgraded. Again the school was not contacted to discuss these. This picture is replicated at AS Physics.

Surname Forename	Gender	FSM	EMA	Cm CAG	Cm	Cm Actual	GCSE Cm grade	Nos of GCSE at A*/A	10 or more A*s at GCSE
1	M	N	0	B1	-2	D1	A	4	
2	F	N	0	B1	-2	D1	A*	12	
3	M	N	0	C1	-3	U1	A	4	
4	F	N	0	B1	-1	C1	A	11	
5	M	N	0	A1	-2	C1	A*	13	
6	F	N	0	A1	-1	B1	A*	13	Y
7	F	N	0	A1	-1	B1	A*	13	Y
8	F	N	0	C1	-3	U1	A	9	
9	F	N	Y	A1	-1	B1	A*	14	Y
10	M	N	0	A1	-1	B1	A	7	
11	M	N	0	B1	-3	E1	A*	12	
12	M	N	0	B1	-3	E1	A	10	

AS music

Another example of an outstanding music student who has been downgraded by one grade and is not in line with his ability.

Surname Forename	Year	Gender	Mu CAG	Mu Change	Mu Actual	Comments
8	12	M	A1	-1	B1	Currently has grade 8 on piano. This equates to 2 grades higher than the expected standard at AS.

In all the above examples we shall appeal if we meet the criteria to do so. We trust the widening of the criteria will allow this.

So as an experienced head teacher and executive head teacher I am really worried about our current year 12 cohort across Wales and their wellbeing. What if we lose significant in school teaching due to local lockdowns in the next few terms? What if the summer examination series 2021 are unable to run due to the on-going crisis, what happens then? We do not know what the next academic year will bring. As we move through the year the importance of these AS grades may become critical. I would suggest the WG should accept all CAGs and put an end to the worry for many young people.

Following on from this debacle I am now very worried about our GCSE results and again the impact on the wellbeing of our students. I would suggest a statement to accept all CAGs before Thursday is the only way forward.

I am sure there are many head teachers working solidly through their holidays on behalf of their students. In addition we are still planning to fully open and do all the normal school activities including planning how we can further improve provision for our young students. It is a side point but the proposed pay award that is detrimental to school leaders and experienced teachers when compared to others within the profession is an insult after all we have done this year.

I am sure the examination debacle, the proposed pay ward and the ongoing COVID-19 crisis will impact on the decision of those to remain within the profession. As you stated in your press release 'enough is enough'. We need to the Welsh Government to listen and make the necessary changes. I know that your team within ASCL will continue to work on our behalf. I hope this letter and the sentiments contained within will help inform those discussions.

Yours faithfully

Elsbeth Lewis

Executive Head teacher

King Henry VII & Croesyceiliog Schools