

WLGA COMMENT

SCRUTINY OF AWARDING OF EXAM RESULTS

CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND EDUCATION COMMITTEE



CLILC • WLGA

17th August 2020

1. The Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) represents the 22 local authorities in Wales, and the three national park authorities and the three fire and rescue authorities are associate members.
2. The WLGA is a politically led cross-party organisation, with the leaders from all local authorities determining policy through the Executive Board and the wider WLGA Council. The WLGA also appoints senior members as Spokespersons and Deputy Spokespersons to provide a national lead on policy matters on behalf of local government.
3. The WLGA works closely with and is often advised by professional advisors and professional associations from local government, however, the WLGA is the representative body for local government and provides the collective, political voice of local government in Wales. Discussion with ADEW has helped inform this response.

WLGA POSITION ON THE AWARDING OF EXAM RESULTS

4. The WLGA's position on the award of examination results is as follows:
 - Local government believes that the use of teacher assessments – Centre Assessed Grades – is the only fair way of determining A level, AS and GCSE grades this year;
 - The approach adopted by the regulators to determining A' level grades is random, arbitrary and focuses on the needs of institutions rather than individual learners:
 - We need to put the learners at the heart of the process and trust in the profession – no one knows learners and their performance better than their teachers:
 - The current methodology relies on historic data at school level and ignores the performance, needs or expectations of individual learners:
 - It's disadvantaging learners from poorer communities and learners from Wales when compared with learners from the rest of the UK:
 - The learner voice has been ignored throughout the process both in developing and implementing the methodology:
 - From discussion with Qualifications Wales to date, the benefit of any appeals process is unclear and seems minimal:
 - In the absence of an exam, any appeals would simply consider the application of a flawed methodology:
 - This matter must be resolved with urgency to enable A level students from Wales to access university places as soon as possible:
 - We need to avoid the same fiasco with GCSE results later this week:
 - The risk with GCSE results is the quantum and impact is much larger. We stand the risk of losing a whole set of children who will be off our radar and likely fall into NEET:
 - An independent review is needed to assess whether Qualifications Wales is fit for purpose.

5. The WLGA cabinet members for education have met with Philip Blaker, the Chief Executive of Qualifications Wales and Ian Morgan, Chief Executive of the WJEC on three occasions (May, June and July), with Kirsty Williams, the Minister for Education, in attendance at the third meeting. The purpose of the meetings was to discuss concerns raised regarding the process for determining the A Level, AS and GCSE results 2020 and the appeals process, and also the assessment process for 2021.
6. The WLGA and Cabinet Members expressed concern about the methodology at early meetings and wrote to the WJEC and Qualifications Wales on 9th June outlining these concerns. Members' priority was to ensure that learners were to be awarded a fair grade but were particularly concerned given part of the evidence to be used would have been historical data and performance which would favour learners and schools where performance had been strong, but would depress the outcomes for individual learners whose schools had not performed well in the past.
7. During weekly bilateral meetings with Kirsty Williams and Cllr Andrew Morgan WLGA Leader, Cllr Ian Roberts WLGA Education Spokesperson, Cllr Ellen ap Gwynn WLGA Deputy Education Spokesperson and WG colleagues, concerns have been raised consistently regarding the final assessment process for A Levels, AS and GCSE results.

The following are supporting documents:

- Letter to WJEC and Qualifications Wales from the Education Spokesperson – 9th June 2020
- WLGA Press Statement – 13th August
- WLGA Press Statement – 17th August
- WLGA Press Statement – 17th August

Ein Cyf /Our Ref:

WLGA/Schools&Colleges/200609

Dyddiad /Date:

09 June 2020

Gofynnwch am/Please ask for:

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CLILC • WLGA

To:

Mr Ian Morgan
Chief Executive
Welsh Joint Education Committee (WJEC)
245 Western Avenue
Cardiff
CF5 2YX

Annwyl/Dear Ian Morgan

WJEC and Qualification Wales summer 2020 arrangements

I am writing this letter following the LA Cabinet Members for Education meeting which was held on the 29th May 2020. May I take this opportunity to thank you both for your attendance at the meeting and for your participation throughout the meeting, especially the questions and answer session.

The main purpose of the meeting was to review the status of planning around the examinations system, the arrangements for appeals process, raising local authority issues regarding, grading - GCSE & A Level result awards, and to seek clarification from both the WJEC and Qualifications Wales following the Minister's announcement in March regarding the cancellation of summer exams.

Whilst I recognise that these are indeed unprecedented times due to the COVID-19 pandemic and recognise the task of producing an alternative 'process' that has the best interest of learners, not just on their education, but on their well-being, and future pathways is not an easy one.

However, I write to continue to raise the concerns that schools and local authorities have in connection to the arrangements for the summer results.

Learners this summer will be awarded a fair grade to recognise their work, drawing on the range of information. This is stated in your FAQs page on the Qualifications Wales website.

How will WJEC and Qualification Wales guarantee this, when part of the evidence used to determine a 'fair grade' is based on historical data and performance? This would favour learners and schools where past performance has been strong, yet could depress the outcome for learners and schools that have not performed as well in the past, but had worked tirelessly during this academic year to improve outcomes and are showing an upward trajectory. The danger is that learners and schools could be penalised, especially when considering the 3% variation that has been discussed when using the statistical standardised model.

I am aware of the Qualifications Wales consultation regarding the summer arrangements which closed on the 13th May, included a proposal on the appeals process. I urge that the findings from this consultation be shared as soon as is possible. The fear of the option for learners who are dissatisfied with their grades and not being able to appeal

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the decisions with WJEC but to directly contact their school is a real concern. Clarity is needed not only to ensure consistency of approach and the role of the WJEC in the process, but also to reduce the vulnerability that schools might find themselves in regarding pressures from individual learners and their parents.

During the Q&A session of the meeting a question was asked regarding the examination fees. Ian, you answered explaining that further discussions were taking place in due course, finalising 'what a reduction fee would look like'. Again, I urge that the finalised details be shared with schools as soon as is possible to reduce further stress and speculation.

I hope that the comments above are useful and I respectfully ask that due care is applied to the response regarding the above concerns.

I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Yn gywir/Yours Sincerely



Y Cyng Cllr. Ian Roberts
Llefarydd addysg CLILC
WLGA Education Spokesperson

WLGA PRESS RELEASE
Thursday 13 August 2020

WLGA congratulates learners but urges Minister to act swiftly on individual A' level concerns and discrepancies

The WLGA has congratulated A level students in Wales on their remarkable achievements in unprecedented and challenging circumstances. The Association welcomed the Minister for Education's confirmation that Welsh learners' grades will be no lower than their previous AS results and that there will be a free appeals process. The late changes to the qualifications system across the UK have been unsettling and have caused confusion and concern for learners, parents and guardians. As a result, schools' and councils' focus today and in the coming weeks will be on the wellbeing of learners and providing advice, support and reassurance to the large number of students who will have received lower than expected grades. The WLGA will assess today's results when the full picture is clearer, in the meantime we urge the Minister to take swift action to correct any local concerns and discrepancies.

Cllr Ian Roberts (Flintshire), WLGA Education Spokesperson said:

"We are pleased for our learners who have shown commitment and worked hard for several years and who will be receiving their A level results today. They have shown remarkable resilience in recent months and through no fault of their own, have been unable to complete their course work or sit their exams this year. This has been the most challenging of times for our school children and learners and whilst many students will be celebrating, many will be disappointed that they have not received the grades that they and their teachers were expecting."

"This has been an unprecedented period for all involved in education, for learners, parents, schools and teaching staff and for councils and national governments. Whilst it is important that employers and universities have confidence in the qualifications system, it is more important that learners themselves have confidence and feel their efforts and their potential have been fairly recognised in their qualifications."

"The past week has been incredibly unsettling for learners across the UK and there will be some concern and continued confusion. We welcome yesterday's reassurance from the Minister that students will receive grades that are the same or higher than their AS levels, however, this will still mean that the results some students receive today will need to be revised upwards. Many will still be lower than they had reasonably expected, based on their mock exam performance and improvements during the past year. We therefore welcome the Minister's confirmation of a free appeals process for all students."

"The welfare and well-being of learners is always paramount for schools and councils and it is more important than ever that students are at the heart of every decision taken within the education system at this time. These were the core messages that I and the 22 education cabinet members raised with Qualifications Wales, WJEC and the Welsh Government during several meetings earlier this summer about the plans for awarding A levels and GCSEs. It is important therefore that we learn lessons from this experience, and with our partners from across the UK. We are especially concerned that Welsh students are not disadvantaged in relation to students from other parts of the UK, particularly when applying for university places, apprenticeships or jobs."

- ENDS

WLGA PRESS RELEASE
Monday 17 August 2020

Focus on the Needs of Learners and Trust Teachers

Welsh local government believes that the use of teacher assessments – Centre Assessed Grades – is the only fair way of determining A level, AS level and GCSE grades this year and is calling on the Education Minister to implement this policy change immediately even if it delays Thursday’s GCSE results. This approach should also be applied retrospectively and with urgency to all A’ level and AS grades.

Now that the full picture of A’ level and AS results across Wales is clearer, the WLGA believes that the approach adopted by Qualifications Wales- the regulator- in determining A’ level and AS grades has been arbitrary and has focused on the needs of institutions rather than individual learners. It has created confusion and concern and has been unfair, it has not given individual learners the results they expected and would probably have achieved had they sat the exams. We need to put learners at the heart of the process and trust in the teaching profession, as no one knows learners and their performance better than their teachers.

This matter must be resolved with urgency to enable A level students from Wales to access university places as soon as possible and to avoid the same situation with GCSE results later this week.

Cllr Ian Roberts, WLGA Education Spokesperson said:

“The WLGA Leader and I met with the Education Minister on Thursday morning, and we highlighted emerging local anomalies and concerns; clearly these are not just local concerns but there are systemic issues and we therefore call for an urgent review of grades, and the awarding of Thursday’s GCSE results to be based on the CAGs (Centre Assessed Grades).”

“I and Cabinet Members for Education met with WJEC and Qualifications Wales earlier this summer and we raised concerns and sought assurances about the fairness of the proposed system. We were particularly concerned given part of the evidence to be used would have been historical data and performance which would favour learners and schools where performance had been strong, but would depress the outcomes for individual learners whose schools had not performed well in the past. We will be feeding our views into the recalled Senedd’s Children, Young People and Education Committee’s discussions tomorrow.”

The WLGA is also calling for a review of Qualifications Wales and whether or not the organisation is fit for purpose.

- **ENDS**

Datganiad CLILC / WLGA Statement

Dydd Llun 17 Awst 2020 / Monday 17 August 2020

I'w ryddhau ar unwaith / To be released immediately

Please scroll for English



Mae CLILC yn croesawu cyhoeddiad y Gweinidog yn cadarnhau y bydd canlyniadau arholiadau eleni yn cael eu dyfarnu ar sail asesiadau athrawon. Diolchwn i'r Gweinidog am wrando ar ein galwadau ni a rhai eraill ac, yn anad dim, am lais y dysgwyr. Dyma'r ymagwedd decaf, mae'n rhoi barn broffesiynol athrawon ac yn sicrhau nad yw myfyrwyr Cymru dan anfantais o'u cymharu â myfyrwyr mewn rhannau eraill o'r Deyrnas Unedig. Mae'n bwysig felly bod Llywodraeth y Deyrnas Unedig yn dilyn y dull hwn o ystyried bod nifer o ysgolion a myfyrwyr Cymru yn astudio pynciau drwy system arholiadau Lloegr.

Bydd CLILC yn bwydo i mewn i sesiwn Pwyllgor y Senedd yfory ac mae'n bwysig bod y cyngor a roddir i'r Gweinidog yn ystod y cyfnod cyn cyhoeddi'r canlyniadau yn cael ei graffu, a bod Llywodraeth Cymru yn adolygu Cymwysterau Cymru ar fyrder.

WLGA Statement

The WLGA welcomes the Minister's announcement confirming that examination results this year will be awarded on the basis of teacher assessments. We thank the Minister for listening to our and others' calls and, above all, the voice of learners. This is the fairest approach, trusts the professional views of teachers and will ensure that Welsh students are not disadvantaged compared to students elsewhere in the UK. It is therefore important that the UK Government follows this approach given several Welsh schools and students study subjects through the English exam system.

The WLGA will feed into tomorrow's Senedd Committee session and it is important that the advice given to the Minister in the run up to the publication of the results is scrutinised and that the Welsh Government urgently reviews Qualifications Wales.