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Ian Morgan  
Chief Executive  
WJEC  
By email

13<sup>th</sup> March 2024

Dear Ian,

### **GCSE reform**

Thank you for meeting with us earlier this week to discuss our members' urgent concerns regarding GCSE implementation – especially, but not exclusively, relating to English GCSE. There is a strong demand for **greater consultation** and a **pause** in the implementation of certain aspects of the reforms from our members, particularly where the resources are insufficient, or the guidance is unclear.

National Education Union (NEU) Cymru has been engaged in ongoing discussions regarding GCSE Reform and its implications for teachers and learners in Wales with the WJEC, Qualifications Wales, and the Welsh Government.

The main focus of our interactions with you has been on the **changes in curriculum and assessment**, particularly in light of the challenges around **workload, resources, training, and the pace of implementation**.

However, NEU Cymru's engagement with its members over the past few weeks has revealed a growing sense of frustration and concern regarding the **pace of the GCSE qualification reform** and its implementation in Wales. This includes the **lack of exemplar materials** for new GCSEs, and the **workload impact** of the changes on teachers. They are also concerned about the implications for students, especially those from disadvantage groups, disabled students and those with additional learning needs (ALN).

We have gathered feedback through multiple channels, including emails, internal meetings, and direct interactions with members. As promised, we have attached a detailed outline of their concerns.

**Workload, resource availability, and training quality** were identified as key issues that must be addressed immediately.

Moving forward, we have assured our members the **NEU Cymru team** will continue to raise these concerns with the relevant authorities, including the **Welsh Government, Qualifications Wales**, and **WJEC**, with a particular focus on **workload** and **resource support** for teachers.

We agree with our members that mitigation of any extra workload is critical, and we ask that English GCSE **implementation be paused**, in order to ensure **teachers have time to prepare for the new course with all the resources they need** to support their students.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely



Nicola Fitzpatrick  
Ysgrifennydd Cymru Dros-dro / Interim Wales Secretary

CC: Lynne Neagle MS, Education Secretary, Welsh Government  
Philip Blaker, Chief Executive, Qualifications Wales  
Buffy Williams MS, Chair, Children, Young People and Education Committee

## GCSE Qualification Reform: Key Points and NEU Cymru Members' Concerns

### Key Takeaways:

#### \*\*1. Concerns Over Curriculum Changes:

- Teachers are frustrated with **inadequate resources** and **unclear guidance** regarding the implementation of the new qualifications.
- There is concern over the **increased workload**, particularly with the introduction of mandatory oral assessments and filming of students.
- The **lack of exemplar materials** for the new GCSE qualifications is a critical issue. Teachers are struggling without clear examples of how to implement the new assessment criteria effectively.
- There is a severe shortage of **funding for resources**. For example, changes to the English GCSE will mean schools will have to buy new texts for every student – they do not have the resources to do this.

#### \*\*2. Feedback from NEU Members:

NEU Cymru members have shared their concerns during **weekly drop-in meetings**, focusing on:

- **Workload and Stress:** There is widespread anxiety about the **mental health** and well-being of staff, with teachers feeling overburdened by the new demands.
- **Inadequate Training and Support:** Members have expressed disappointment with **WJEC training sessions**, citing poorly delivered sessions and lack of answers to pressing questions about the new specifications.
- **Financial Implications:** There are growing concerns over the **financial burden** posed by the changes, particularly regarding the cost of new materials and resources that schools must fund themselves – for example new texts, and photocopying of anthologies.
- **Digital accessibility** – teachers are concerned they are expected to share information on a screen without access to the technology. They also raised concerns about the capacity of the technology schools to capture information, and the **increased workload** in terms of modifying files.

### **\*\*3. Impact on Students:**

- Teachers raised concerns about the potential disadvantages that **Welsh students** might face in comparison to their counterparts in England, especially given the **lack of resources** and the **pacing of changes** in Wales.
- The move from **three-tier** to **two-tier** qualification systems in certain subjects (e.g., maths) could cause confusion for students and universities, affecting their **university admissions**.
- Teachers raised concerns about pupils not wanting to be filmed, because of the impact on their mental health and wellbeing. The bar appears to have been set very high for students to be exempt.
- Teachers had concerned about safeguarding in terms of filming pupils.
- Teachers are concerned that any reasonable adjustments are being seen as a requirement of the school, not the WJEC. For example, access to large print anthologies for visually impaired pupils.
- Teachers felt that there was an expectation anthologies could be read on a screen – without the understanding that schools and pupils do not have widespread access to devices.
- Teachers felt the level of texts may exclude many pupils, and does not represent the level of literacy in cohort.

### **\*\*4. Concerns about WJEC:**

- Members criticized **WJEC's response** to concerns, describing them as unhelpful and dismissive.
- **Training provided by WJEC** was seen as unprofessional and insufficient, with **no exemplar materials** and unclear mark schemes being major points of concern.

### **\*\*5. Key Issues Identified in Meetings:**

#### **Monday, March 3rd, 2025 – GCSE NEU Member Drop-in Meeting**

- The group discussed concerns related to the **new qualifications in Wales**, focusing on:
  - **Implementation difficulties**, especially regarding the lack of resources and preparation materials.
  - **Concerns about accessibility** and the **increased workload** for teachers.

- **Financial strain** on schools due to the additional resources and training needed for the new qualifications.
- **Lack of engagement** from WJEC and the **slow rollout** of exemplar materials – teachers commented they have not been told what ‘good’ looks like, and will not know before teaching the course in the autumn.

## **Tuesday, March 4th, 2025 – GCSE NEU Member Drop-in Meeting**

- The group discussed the **implementation of the new curriculum** and voiced concerns over:
  - **Poor quality training** sessions from WJEC and its impact on teachers.
  - **Lack of exemplar materials** and the challenges of **assessing the new curriculum** without proper support.
  - The issue of **AI** in assessments, particularly **AI misuse** and concerns about its policing – they felt that there is a lack of resources or support for assessing the use of AI, and yet that teachers were expected to spot the use of AI.
  - **Concerns over workload** for teachers due to the increased demands of the new specifications and a **lack of preparation** since the reforms started.
  - The **monopoly** held by WJEC in Welsh qualifications, leading to calls for more competition from other exam boards.