

## CYPE(5)-20-20 - Paper to note 24

Kirsty Williams AS/MS  
Y Gweinidog Addysg  
Minister for Education

Eich cyf/Your ref 200820-CYPE  
Ein cyf/Our ref HED/KW/0026/20

Lynne Neagle MS  
Chair  
Children, Young People and Education Committee  
Senedd Cymru



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

7 September 2020

Dear Lynne,

### **Scrutiny of the Awarding of 2020 examination results**

Thank you for your letter of 20 August following my appearance at Committee on the 18<sup>th</sup>. I trust that this reply provides the clarification that you have requested.

**We would welcome an urgent update on university medical places, and updates from you on any other significant developments in regards to the university admissions matters outlined above.**

I recently established an HE Admissions Task and Finish Group, which I chair, to identify any impact on HEIs and students from the recent awarding of A Levels and other qualifications.

The group brings together representatives from the NUS, staff unions, Vice Chancellors, UCAS, Universities Wales, HEFCW and Government health and education officials.

We have met three times in the last two weeks, with medical school admissions being an agenda item for each meeting. Working with my colleague the Minister for Health and Social Services, we have agreed to fund an increase of 25 in the undergraduate medical intake at Cardiff Medical School for the 2020-21 cohort with a further 12 deferring to 2021-22.

On the wider issue of university admissions, as of 3 September Welsh higher education institutions had 22,960 placed applicants, 2% more than in 2019, and 18,520 Welsh domiciled applicants have been placed to higher education institutions in the UK, 1% more than in 2019.

We have seen an increased number of applicants placed at their firm choice, and fewer placed at their insurance choices. There are now fewer 18 year old Welsh domiciled applicants holding a yet-to-be resolved offer than at the same time in the admissions cycle last year.

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

We will continue to work with HEFCW, Universities Wales, UCAS and others to monitor the situation and its impact on the sector and on students.

**We would welcome an urgent update on the arrangements for the awarding of vocational qualifications across all awarding bodies who offer significant numbers of vocational qualifications in Wales; an indication of when you expect BTEC results to be issued for Level 1 and 2, and re-issued for Level 3; and an indication of whether other awarding bodies plan to re-grade their qualifications.**

On 19 August Pearson announced that it had decided to re-grade BTECs to fully reflect Centre Assessment Grades. The rationale for this was that whilst BTEC qualification results had been generally consistent with teacher and learner expectations, Pearson had become concerned about potential unfairness for vocational results in relation to the higher outcomes for GCSE and A Levels.

As you will be aware, Pearson's vocational qualifications are delivered UK-wide. They are designated for delivery to learners in Wales, but Ofqual approves the design and assessment arrangements for these qualifications, reflecting the fact that the vast majority of delivery is in England.

Although Centre Assessment Grades for internal (i.e. coursework) units were accepted, the grades for the examined units had been calculated using historical performance with a view of maintaining overall outcomes over time. Pearson's review has removed these calculated grades and applied consistency across teacher assessed internal grades and examined grades that students were unable to sit.

Pearson worked with schools and colleges to reissue these grades with all qualifications being re-graded by 28 August at the latest. The regrading exercise covered Level 1/2 and Level 2 qualifications as well as Level 3.

Other awarding bodies operating in Wales that used the statistical standardisation model, instead of adapted qualifications, have also re-graded their vocational qualifications in line with the approach for A levels. This includes, for example, WJEC and AQA.

I understand awarding bodies' wish to ensure fair outcomes for BTEC students in relation to A Levels and GCSEs to ensure that no BTEC student is disadvantaged. This aligns with Welsh Government policy to ensure that learners studying vocational qualifications are not disadvantaged compared to their peers studying A levels, including in relation to progressing to higher education. Once again, I would like to apologise for the anxiety caused by recent events.

During summer 2020, we also provided guidance enabling further education institutions to reopen, so that vocational learners who needed to complete "license to practice" assessments were able to do so.

**Subject to your announcement next week relating to the independent review, we would welcome an urgent update on the steps you will take to provide clarity about any remaining action relating to the awarding of qualifications in 2020 and preparations for 2021.**

The key actions remaining in relation to 2020 are the publication of additional analysis which I have detailed later in this response, and the resolution of appeals.

In relation to appeals received by WJEC, the regulator Qualifications Wales is carefully monitoring this process to ensure they are expedited as quickly as possible. Further analysis will also be published in relation to appeals received for the summer 2020 series.

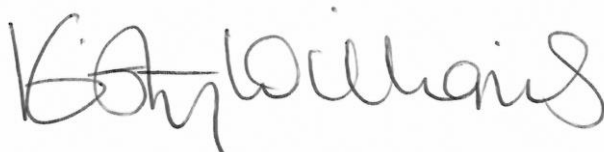
In terms of considerations for 2021, I have been clear that I believe it is in the best interests of learners to take their exams next summer but that there should be some adaptations to take into account the disruption to teaching and learning, as well as social distancing considerations. Qualifications Wales established an extraordinary regulatory framework in July that allows WJEC to make adaptations to general qualifications in summer 2021.

On 1 September, WJEC published the adaptations that will be made to general qualifications in summer 2021, following considerations on a subject specific basis and engagement with practitioners. These adaptations were provided to schools and colleges over the summer to facilitate their planning for the autumn term but have now been made publically available to help provide reassurance to learners and their families. I have enclosed a link to these documents for you: <https://www.wjec.co.uk/home/summer-2021-adaptations/>

As we continue to operate in an uncertain public health environment, whilst we plan to proceed with examinations as normal in 2021, as a responsible Government, it is only right that we also develop contingency arrangements in case of further disruption.

Therefore I have also asked Qualifications Wales and WJEC to develop contingency arrangements in relation to exams, drawing on our experience and learning from this year. Lessons learned and proposals for 2021 will also be a key focus of the independent review which I announced on 28 August, its chair, Louise Casella, will report initial findings next month.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kirsty Williams', written in a cursive style.

**Kirsty Williams AS/MS**  
Y Gweinidog Addysg  
Minister for Education

## **ANNEX – Further information requested in light of the evidence provided by the WJEC, Qualifications Wales and the Welsh Government on 18 August 2020**

The Committee would welcome the following:

- **A timeline of events since the cancellation of exams was announced, to include:** ▪ the meetings undertaken between the Welsh Government and the WJEC, the Welsh Government and Qualifications Wales, and the Welsh Government, the WJEC and Qualifications Wales. Please could the timeline specify if these meetings involved officials only and/or the Minister;
- **dates on which details of – and advice about – A-level results were provided to the Minister for Education;**
- **dates on which there was communication between the Welsh Government (Minister and/or officials) and other devolved administrations relating to the awarding of examination results.**

The requested information is provided at Annex A to this letter.

*NB We are grateful to the Minister for her commitment in our meeting on 18 August to provide a timeline of the meetings she held personally with Qualifications Wales during this period.*

- **Further information about the Qualifications Wales Sponsorship Unit within the Welsh Government, including:** ▪ details of its remit;
- details of its membership;
- confirmation of when it became aware that the standardisation process had resulted in 42% of A-level results being downgraded or any earlier estimates;
- confirmation of whether this information was passed on and, if so, to whom and when.

The Qualifications Wales Sponsorship Unit comprises of three Welsh Government officials at Grade 7, MB1 and MB3 level. The unit reports into a Grade 6 official who provides oversight of the team's work alongside responsibilities for two other teams. The Grade 6 reports to the Deputy Director for Curriculum and Assessment.

The remit of the Sponsorship Unit is to provide the administrative, monitoring and accountability functions to ensure the effective and appropriate interface between the Welsh Government and Qualifications Wales as a sponsored body. These functions are provided in line with the advice and requirements for sponsored bodies in Wales. Key responsibilities include financial management, public appointments, issuing of remit letter, accountability arrangements including attendance at Board meetings and holding sponsorship morning meetings and managing the effective interface between Welsh Government policy team and Qualifications Wales to ensure alignment of policy and delivery.

On 28 July an Information Sharing Group meeting was held between Qualifications Wales and Welsh Government officials providing an update on the awarding process and the role of standardisation. A further meeting was held on 3 August at which officials were advised by Qualifications Wales that due to inconsistencies across centres and to prevent grade inflation that the centre assessment grades after standardisation may result in:

- a small percentage of learners receiving a grade higher than their centre assessment grade;

- a majority of learners receiving a grade the same as their centre assessment grade;
- the remainder receiving a grade lower than their centre assessment grade. A small percentage of calculated grades would be two or more grades lower than the centre assessment grade.

A further meeting was held late afternoon on 11 August between Welsh Government officials and Qualifications Wales. This meeting discussed a results overview including the numbers of grades that were being standardised below the centre assessment grade and the detailed equality analysis. This information was reported to the Minister and senior Welsh Government officials during a number of meetings held on 12 August, as part of the normal pre-results briefing that is held on an embargoed basis ahead of the publication of exam results.

**• A commitment from the Welsh Government to provide the Committee with regular updates on the steps taken to establish the independent review, and to ensure that updates on its progress thereafter are also provided to us.**

On 28 August, I issued a written statement on my appointment of Louise Casella, Director of the Open University in Wales, as Chair. The review will examine the arrangements which were developed and put in place for this summer's awarding of grades, and will draw lessons from events this year specifically to provide recommendations for approaches in preparation for 2021.

Given the risk of further disruption that may be caused by Covid-19 in the 2020/21 school year, I believe that it is essential to act quickly and have early findings to inform planning and to put contingency arrangements in place for next summer. I have therefore asked that the review provides me with an interim report on key issues by the end of October. The final report and recommendations will follow by mid-December. The review will provide reassurance to stakeholders, including learners, parents, carers, teachers, and education bodies, that this year's arrangements have been scrutinised and that measures are being put in place for 2021. I would welcome the Committee's views and input as the review progresses and will ensure that you are kept updated.

**• An assessment of the impact on specific groups of pupils (eFSM, BAME, ALN etc), of the proposed standardised grades and the awarded Centre Assessment Grades (CAGs) respectively. In addition, an assessment of how the differential between proposed standardised grades and the awarded CAGs has affected individual centres and particular types of centre.**

Qualifications Wales has recently published a statement on its plans for further analysis of this summer's results and I have provided a link to this below:

<https://qualificationswales.org/english/results-2020/qualifications-wales-statements/statement-on-plans-for-further-statistical-releases/>

Qualifications Wales is currently working towards publishing an update to its results overview and this is expected to be published in the next week. This will provide more accurate estimates of final results this summer for A levels, AS, GCSEs and the Skills Challenge certificate as well as comparisons to results in previous years and the proposed standardised grades. Qualifications Wales will also update the information on attainment gaps and expand it to include an analysis of results for learners with a special educational needs status and further information on results by ethnicity.

There are additional plans to produce and publish the following analysis:

- Analysis of results, centre assessment grades and proposed standardised grades with regional and local authority breakdowns.

- An enhanced version of the [centre variation](#) statistics publication that were produced in summer 2019, with a view to including information by centre type.
- A document that draws together equalities impact analysis with some more detailed analysis.

## Summer 2020 Exam Cancellation Timeline

| Date     | Event  |
|----------|--|
| 4 March  | Call with Michelle Donelan, Minister of State for Universities   |
| 6 March  | Weekly Catch Up on Exam Contingency Arrangements – Qualifications Wales and WG Sponsorship Unit officials  |
| 12 March | Fortnightly meeting between Education officials from England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland   |
| 16 March | Meeting with Qualifications Wales to discuss Qualified for the Future  |
| 17 March | Call with Gavin Williamson, Secretary of State for Education   |
| 18 March | Meeting with WJEC & Qualifications Wales to discuss options and contingency arrangements for the summer 2020 exam series   |
|          | Formal advice on exam cancellation for summer 2020 and options for calculating grades.   |
|          | Statement cancelling exams for summer 2020 and announcing alternative arrangements to award grades   |
|          | Call with Gavin Williamson, Secretary of State for Education   |
| 19 March | Attendance at Children, Young People and Education Committee   |
| 20 March | Announcement bringing Easter holiday forward and closure of schools for most learners  |
|          | Formal advice on not using outcomes from the summer exam series to calculate performance measures, nor including them in data packs, or publishing on My Local School. |
| 24 March | Education Ministers Four Nation call   |
| 24 March | UK Government Ministerial Information Group  |
| 26 March | Meeting with WJEC & Qualifications Wales to discuss options on awarding grades to learners in Years 10 and 12  |
|          | Formal Advice on arrangements for awarding grades to learners in Years 10 and 12   |
|          | Letter to the Secretary of State for Education about maintaining normal results day and not bring results forward  |
|          | Qualifications Wales Board Meeting – WG officials attend as observer   |
| 27 March | Announcement of approach for learners in Years 10 and 12   |
|          | Letter to Higher Education Institutions Regarding Implications of COVID-19   |
|          | Quarterly Management Meeting – Sponsorship meeting with Qualifications Wales and Senior Officials  |

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| 1 April  | UK Government Ministerial Information Group  |
| 2 April  | Formal Advice on Issuing a Direction to Qualifications Wales regarding the cancellation of the summer exams and the calculation of grades  |
| 3 April  | Qualifications Wales issues guidance to exam centres on the calculation of Centre Assessment Grades<br>Four Country Meeting – regulators and Education Department officials from Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and England |
| 6 April  | Direction formally issued to Qualifications Wales regarding the Welsh Ministers' policy on cancellation of the summer 2020 exams and arrangements for awarding grades  |
| 7 April  | UK Government Ministerial Information Group  |
| 8 April  | Education Ministers Four Nation call   |
| 14 April | Meeting with Qualifications Wales to discuss arrangements for Vocational Qualifications  |
| 16 April | Formal advice on maintaining the pre-planned results days<br>Statement on the dates of results days<br>UK Government Ministerial Information Group   |
| 17 April | Call with Michelle Donelan, Minister of State for Universities   |
| 22 April | Education Ministers Four Nation call   |
| 24 April | Formal advice on issuing a Direction to Qualifications Wales regarding arrangements for vocational qualifications  |
| 28 April | Publication of Qualifications Wales consultation on arrangements for calculating grades  |
| 28 April | Attendance at Children, Young People and Education Committee   |
| 30 April | UK Government Ministerial Information Group<br>Welsh Government Director of Education and Chief Executive of Qualification Wales Bilateral   |
| 1 May    | UK Government Ministerial Information Group  |
| 5 May    | Call with Richard Lochhead, Scottish Minister for Further Education, Higher Education and Science  |
| 6 May    | Education Ministers Four Nation call   |
| 7 May    | Vocational Qualifications Meeting – Qualifications Wales and policy officials  |
| 11 May   | Call with Gavin Williamson, Secretary of State for Education   |



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| 13 May  | Qualifications Wales Board Meeting – WG Officials attend as an observer   |
| 14 May  | Qualifications Wales Board Meeting – WG Officials attend as an observer   |
| 19 May  | Education Ministers Four Nation call  |
| 28 May  | Education Ministers Four Nation call  |
| 29 May  | Qualifications Wales pre-notification of decision regarding appeals process following consultation  |
| 1 June  | Call with Michelle Donelan, Minister of State for Universities  |
| 3 June  | Education Ministers Four Nation call  |
|         | Welsh Government Director of Education and Chair of Qualifications Wales Board Bilateral  |
| 12 June | Formal advice on consulting on the relaxation of school reporting requirements  |
|         | Qualifications Wales and WG officials meeting – planning for 2020-21  |
| 16 June | Qualifications Wales Extraordinary Board Meeting – WG officials attends as observer   |
| 17 June | Education Ministers Four Nation call  |
| 18 June | Formal advice on sharing Welsh Government Key stage three teacher assessment and nation test data to support the development of standardisation models  |
| 22 June | Meeting with Qualifications Wales regarding initial considerations for exams in 2021  |
| 25 June | Quarterly Management Meeting – Sponsorship meeting with Qualifications Wales and Senior Officials   |
| 26 June | Formal advice on the continued suspension of KS4 performance measures to 2020/21, continued collection of GCSE and A Level awards data and production of a national level Official Statistics publication |
| 30 June | Call between three devolved Education Ministers   |
|         | Qualifications Wales Extraordinary Board Meeting – WG official attends as observer  |
| 1 July  | Education Ministers Four Nation call  |
| 3 July  | Letter to Qualifications Wales regarding the approach to be taken for exams in 2021   |
|         | Statement announcing changes to the publication of qualification awards data due to COVID-19  |

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|           | Weekly Results Planning and Communications Meeting Between WG, WJEC and Qualification Wales – held weekly until the end of August |
| 6 July    | Qualifications Wales and WG officials   |
| 7 July    | Attendance at Children, Young People and Education Committee  |
|           | Qualifications Wales Extraordinary Board Meeting – apologies given and no WG official attended to observe                         |
| 9 July    | Qualifications Wales and WG officials – Qualified for the Future Next steps   |
|           | Covid-19 resilience Planning – A Levels task & Finish Group – WG, QW & WJEC officials attend as part of wider key representation  |
| 10 July   | Formal advice on making the Relaxation of School Reporting Requirements (Wales) (Coronavirus) Regulations 2020                    |
| 15 July   | Children, Young People and Education Committee debate - The impact of the Covid-19 outbreak on children and young people in Wales |
| 16 July   | Education Ministers Four Nation call  |
|           | Call with Michelle Donelan, Minister of State for Universities  |
|           | Qualifications Wales Board Meeting – WG Officials attend as an observer   |
| 17 July   | Welsh Government Director of Education and Chief Executive of Qualification Wales Bilateral                                       |
| 21 July   | Qualifications Wales Extraordinary Board Meeting – WG official attends as observer  |
| 22 July   | Covid-19 resilience Planning – A Levels task & Finish Group – WG, QW & WJEC officials attend as part of wider key representation  |
| 28 July   | WLGA & Local Authority Directors of Education, Minister for Education, Qualifications Wales and WJEC                              |
|           | Information Sharing Group – QW and WG officials meeting to discuss preparing for results  |
| 3 August  | Information Sharing Group – sub-group results preparation – QW and WG officials   |
| 7 August  | The Relaxation of School Reporting Requirements (Wales) (Coronavirus) Regulations 2020 came into force                            |
| 10 August | Information Sharing Group – sub-group results preparation – QW and WG officials   |
|           | Meeting with Qualifications Wales   |
| 11 August | Meeting with officials regarding Scottish Government announcement   |
|           | Call with Gavin Williamson, Secretary of State for Education  |

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|           | Information Sharing Group – sub-group results preparation – QW and WG officials  |
| 12 August | Meeting with Qualifications Wales  |
|           | Follow up meeting with Qualifications Wales  |
|           | Results pre-briefing with Qualifications Wales   |
|           | Discussion with DFE Officials  |
|           | Formal advice on ensuring that appeals made to the WJEC are free   |
|           | Call with Gavin Williamson, Secretary of State for Education   |
| 14 August | 10am Meeting with Qualifications Wales   |
|           | 4pm Meeting with Qualifications Wales  |
|           | 5pm Meeting with Qualifications Wales  |
|           | Formal advice on revised arrangements for AS & A level including the introduction of AS floor and broadening of appeals rights |
|           | Issuing of addendum to the Direction to Qualifications Wales regarding AS & A level and broadened appeals process              |
| 15 August | Meeting with Qualifications Wales and WJEC   |
| 16 August | Meeting with Qualifications Wales and WJEC   |
|           | Formal advice about options for GCSEs, as well as the implication of moving to Centre Assessment Grades                        |
| 17 August | Statement on the Announcement of move to Centre Assessment Grades for GCSEs, AS, A level and Skills Challenge Certificate      |
| 18 August | Issuing of revised Direction to Qualifications Wales about Awarding Grades on the Basis of Centre Assessment Grades            |
| 19 August | Meeting with Qualifications Wales – Pre-briefing on GCSE Results   |

*Please note the meetings highlighted in blue are those attended by officials only. There are two meetings which have been held on a weekly basis and for brevity only the first occurrence of these has been included within the table, these are Weekly Catch Up on Exam Contingency Arrangements – the first of which was held on 6 March and Weekly Results Planning and Communications Meeting - the first of which was held on 3 July. There has also been two meetings held on a fortnightly basis and again for brevity only the first occurrence of these has been included within the table. These are fortnightly meeting between Education department officials from Northern Ireland, Scotland, England and Wales and again only the first*

*meeting has been included within the table the first of which was held on 12 March and the Four Country meetings between Regulators and Education Department officials, the first of which was held on 3 April.*