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Y Gweinidog Addysg
Minister for Education



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Ein cyf/Our ref KW/01087/20

Janet Finch-Saunders AM
Chair Petitions Committee
National Assembly for Wales
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21 April 2020

Dear Janet Finch-Saunders AM,

Thank you for your letter of 14 April regarding Petition P-05-958 concerning Recent Decisions Regarding AS Grades 2020.

As you will be aware, in March, following detailed discussions with Qualifications Wales and the WJEC, I announced that the summer exam series would not go ahead. This was not an easy decision to make but the continued uncertainty around exams was causing additional stress for learners, parents and practitioners alike at an already challenging time.

On 27 March, following detailed consideration of the options available I was able to outline the approach for learners who were due to sit their AS levels and Year 10 learners who would have taken GCSE unit assessments this summer. Learners who were due to sit their AS exams this year will not be required to take those exams at a later date. Instead they will be treated in a similar way to those taking GCSEs and A levels.

As you will be aware, in Wales, AS levels are not only stand-alone qualifications, but also contribute to A level qualifications, AS units are usually taken in Year 12 and A2 units in Year 13. This year all learners due to sit AS exams will receive an AS grade and there will be no AS exams until summer 2021. The calculated grade awarded will be based on centre assessment data and statistical modelling but it will not contribute to A level results in 2021.

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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.

In summer 2021, AS learners will have two options for their A level award. They can either choose to only sit the A2 units, with the A level grade based on their performance in those units, or they can choose to sit AS and A2 units. If they choose to sit the AS units alongside the A2 units, they will be awarded the best grade from either of these routes.

I understand that learners signing the petition think this is an inequitable approach however; I have taken detailed advice about the range of options available from Qualifications Wales and the WJEC. In doing so, I have sought to balance prioritising the health and well-being of all learners, ensuring that learners are not unfairly disadvantaged in their progression into work or further education, and maintaining the credibility of our qualifications system. In these unprecedented times, there are no easy decisions, but wherever possible I have sought to provide valid choices for learners.

For AS learners, this approach ensures that: students are provided with an AS grade to recognise their hard work over the course of the year; those who do not go on to complete a full A level course of study receive a qualification, and AS grades are available to support UCAS applications in the usual way.

The process for awarding A-level grades is complex and made up of a number of components, as such, not all of the information that is required for the complete A level award will be available as a result of the calculated AS grades this summer. Actual marks are needed from each AS unit, to provide a UMS (Uniform Mark Scale) mark which can then be combined with the A2 UMS marks, to produce the A level grade. This detail will not be available for calculated grades this summer and so cannot be used in production of the A level grade in summer 2021.

Consequently, on the detailed advice of the qualifications regulator, I have decided on the approach I outlined above, in order to maintain the credibility and robustness of our qualification system so that the efforts of learners affected by this pandemic are not undermined and are viewed credibly alongside those of learners in other years.

Under this approach, unless the learner opts to take their AS units alongside their A2 units, then for the purposes of determining the A-level award, the AS unit marks can be derived from the actual performance in A2 units. There is a clear statistical relationship between performance in these different units and this is a tested and well-established methodology, already used where students miss certain units due to illness.

Having engaged with headteachers and the teaching unions, I recognise there is a strong desire to get learning back on track in the autumn term, assuming that schools are open, and it is important that students are able to progress with their second year of A level studies, something that this approach enables us to achieve. It is also important to note that in taking such decisions, we are working closely with the FE and HE sectors to ensure learners are not disadvantaged.

I hope this explains the rationale behind the approach to AS levels that I have taken after much careful consideration.

Yours sincerely,



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