

P-05-958 Recent Decisions Regarding AS Grades 2020, Correspondence – Petitioner to Committee, 04.05.20

Petition's Committee – Response

Firstly, I would like to say that I am extremely grateful that you are discussing my petition at such a difficult time. I am immensely passionate about this issue, as most AS students are, because we feel that the Minister is refusing to listen to us about a topic that will have an extremely detrimental effect on our education.

Response to Education Minister's Letter

Again, I am grateful that the Minister has responded to this petition. However, after receiving almost identical communications from the Minister previously, I cannot help but feel that this response has simply been copied and recycled.

I am also disappointed with the response due to the number of unfair and ill-judged comments throughout:

1. **“Continued uncertainty around exams was causing additional stress for learners...at an already challenging time”**. I fully comprehend and agree with the difficult decision to close schools and cancel 2020 exams, and also with the statement that this is, indeed a difficult time for all, including learners. However, I do not agree with the suggestion that, as a result of uncertainty, AS students should be given a decision that will ultimately place us in a disadvantageous position next year.
2. **“Health and wellbeing of all learners”** – I do not understand how giving students the *immensely* stressful option of sitting exams in every unit from AS and A2 would be beneficial to our wellbeing, because surely that would only increase pressures next year? From past experience, I have seen that students find it exceptionally difficult to achieve a good grade when taking this option. Further, to only sit A2 units will place too much pressure on next year also, because an *entire* A-Level will be based on only these exams. The only fair decision would be to allow AS grades to contribute towards 2021 grades.
3. **“Ensuring that learners are not unfairly disadvantaged in their progression into work or further education”** – Both options offered by the Minister will undoubtedly mean that 2020 AS students will be “unfairly disadvantaged”, and that the results achieved by this cohort of students will be incomparable to any other year because of the unjust system that the Minister has put in place.
4. **“Maintaining the credibility of our qualifications system”** – AS students simply cannot understand why allowing a calculated grade (one that has been given by teachers as a result of work from the entire year, and that can be used in UCAS applications and for students not continuing with education) to contribute to A-Level grades is less credible than using grades that are essentially calculated using A2 units anyway (that has also never been the case previously). Both grades are essentially being calculated, but calculated grades this year will actually be based on AS work, not A2 work, which is surely more accurate?
5. **“Sought to provide valid choices for learners”** – I maintain that “valid” choices are not necessarily the fair or correct choices for learners.
6. **“Recognise their hard work”** – AS students feel that the Minister fails to understand that students do not wish for their work to be recognised but *rewarded* also. An entire year was devoted to AS grades in the knowledge that work would be rewarded with 40% of A-Level grades being banked. We do not want recognition for this work, we already know how much

work and effort we put into preparing for AS exams – we want to know that this “hard work” was not devoted only to be told what we could have achieved if AS grades contributed this year (as has been tradition in Wales for a significant time).

7. **“Not all of the information...will be available as a result of the calculated AS grades”** – Teachers have been asked to assign a grade to each student, and to then rank students within each grade. Therefore, as students will be ranked based on ability within each grade, there must be a way that a scale can be produced, similar to the UMS (Universal Mark Scale), that can be used to assign a mark to each student.
8. **“Efforts of learners not undermined”** – I do not understand how this decision does not undermine the efforts of learners – an entire year of work and time devoted to preparing for exams will not give us any benefit.
9. **“Well-established methodology”** – I understand why this has been an established method of determining grades for students who have been unable to prepare for exams due to illness in the past. However, 2020 AS students will be given a grade that is based on work throughout the entirety of year 12, and that will be compared with other learners throughout the country to ensure consistency. Therefore, it makes more sense to use the calculated grade given in 2020 than a grade that has been effectively calculated anyhow by A2 units.

I would like to propose these questions to the Minister in response:

1. Why are we unable to use the ranking of students within each grade to create a similar scale to UMS?
2. How do these options ensure that learners are not disadvantaged?
3. Have you spoken with any teachers who feel that this decision is justified and will benefit any of their AS learners? If not beneficial, at least fair to these learners?
4. If you were an AS student in this position, would you be happy with the decision of your Education Minister?

I would also like to include some quotes from the Twitter accounts of WJEC and Qualifications Wales, from articles they have posted regarding AS grades 2020 (excluding names):

1. “Year 12 assessed grades count if you’re not progressing to A-Level. Somehow, they don’t if you do go on to A-Level. You’ll then be assessed on how you would have done based on your A2 results in Year 13. Only Kirsty Williams can contrive something so wrong.”
2. “I have an incredibly upset daughter as a result of this decision. She is in Year 12. It’s been hard enough over the past week trying to keep her focused after she was told there’d be no exams, but now you’ve said her efforts this year are wasted. She is devastated”.
3. “That’s very disappointing. A year’s worth of hard graft for nothing and all eggs in one basket, in one exam year! What a terrible decision. Please rethink”.
4. “Minister, please explain the rationale for not allowing AS Level predicted grades to count towards A-Level final grades next year, when predicted grades are being provided to Years 11 and 13 that they are able to rely on?”.
5. “So, all of the work that I did this year was for nothing?”.
6. “I would urge all Year 12 pupils/parents to ask the Minister to please reconsider, and allow AS grades to be included in the 2021 A Level results as normally happens, in order to ensure equality of treatment for all members of the current Year 12 cohort”.

There are a significant number of responses like these on the @quals_wales and @wjec_cbac Twitter pages. None have been responded to.

I would like to thank you for reading my response, and once more express my gratitude to the Petitions Committee in discussing my petition.

I really hope that something can come of this, for every AS student in the country.

Thank you again,

Sian Williams 17,

Llangollen.