



By email to all schools and colleges in Wales

June 2018

Dear colleague

Summer 2018 exams

As the exam season closes, I am writing to you about GCSE, AS and A level qualifications. With more new qualifications being awarded for the first time in Wales this summer, our priority is that learners are not unfairly advantaged or disadvantaged and the relevant standard is being maintained.

Securing standards and fairness for summer 2018

Grade boundaries are set by senior examiners, who consider both statistical information and examples of learners' work to carry forward standards from the old qualifications. There is a well-established approach to maintaining stability in outcomes when new qualifications are introduced, known as 'comparable outcomes'. This approach protects students so that they are not unfairly disadvantaged from being the first to sit new qualifications. We used comparable outcomes successfully last summer when awarding the new GCSE, AS and A level qualifications and it is also used across the UK. You can find out more about it [here](#)¹.

The comparable outcomes approach applies to the whole cohort taking a qualification to ensure that variability in outcomes at the national level is limited. However, when a qualification changes, there can be more year-on-year variability than usual in the results for individual schools and colleges, as they may have taken different approaches to delivering the new qualification.

¹ <http://qualificationswales.org/media/2643/spotlight-on-comparable-outcomes-e.pdf>

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GCSE qualifications awarded for the first time

There are 15 GCSEs being awarded for the first time this summer². As with those subjects awarded for the first time in 2017, WJEC will be carrying forward standards from the old qualifications. In general, where the 2018 cohort is similar to the 2017 one, we expect broadly similar outcomes at grades A, C and F.

GCSE Science Suite

The new science suite is made up of six qualifications: the separate sciences (GCSE Biology, Chemistry and Physics), GCSE Science (Double Award), GCSE Applied Science (Double Award), and GCSE Applied Science (Single Award). The double award qualifications replace the old GCSE Science and GCSE Additional Science qualifications and have a 15-point grade scale. We have produced a postcard to explain these new qualifications, which you can find on our website [here](#)³.

Entries for the new double award qualifications are higher than the combined entries for science and additional science in previous years. Entries for the separate sciences have also increased. This increase has most likely been driven by the change to school performance measures where alternatives to GCSE qualifications no longer count.

Because the cohort of students taking science GCSEs has changed significantly from previous years, we expect that results this summer will be different. So you may see more variability in your results compared to previous years - particularly where you have seen changes to the mix of qualifications you teach, or to the numbers of students sitting them. We advise being very cautious when making any comparisons between results for legacy science qualifications and the new double award qualifications.

AS and A level qualifications awarded for the first time

There are 10 A level subjects⁴ and six AS subjects⁵ being awarded for the first time this summer. As with those subjects awarded for the first time in 2017, WJEC will be carrying forward standards from the old qualifications. In general, where the national

² Applied Science Single Award, Applied Science Double Award, Art & Design, Biology, Chemistry, Drama, Food and Nutrition, French, Geography, German, Music, Physical Education, Physics, Spanish, Science Double Award

³ <http://qualificationswales.org/media/3395/new-science-gcses-for-wales.pdf>

⁴ Drama, French, Geography, German, Mathematics, Music, Physical education, Religious Studies, Spanish, Welsh Second Language

⁵ Design and technology, Government and Politics, Law, Further Mathematics, Mathematics, Media Studies

cohort is similar in 2018 to that in 2017, we expect broadly similar outcomes at grades A and E.

New A levels are usually awarded for the first time two years after the courses start. A Level Mathematics is an exception and will be awarded just one year after first teaching. This gives students the option of taking A level Mathematics at the end of Year 12 before going on to take A level Further Mathematics in Year 13. This will mean that there is a very small entry for the new A Level Mathematics qualification this summer, made up of mainly 17-year-olds.

Entries

We published the provisional number of entries for this summer's GCSE, AS and A level exams on 24 May 2018. This data gives us an early indication of changes in entry patterns, which is useful when interpreting the summer results.

This summer there are some significant changes to the entry patterns in Wales. In particular, there has been a significant decrease in Year 10 entries for GCSE English Language, GCSE Welsh Language and both mathematics GCSEs, as well as an increase in Year 10 entries for GCSE English Literature. The decrease in entries has been driven by the change to school performance measures from summer 2019, which allows only a student's first result to count.

The awarding process focuses on the performance of Year 11 students, so these changes to Year 10 entries will not impact on the maintenance of standards. But the changes to the cohort sitting these qualifications are likely to impact on the overall summer results. It will therefore be important to take care when interpreting the summer results and comparing them with previous years.

Keeping you informed

Over the next two weeks, we will publish a series of articles explaining the new qualifications and the examination process. We offer a range of handy [postcards](#)⁶ to download from our website, covering the main features of the new GCSEs and the Welsh Baccalaureate. We also send regular updates to schools and colleges on GCSEs, A levels and the other qualifications we regulate through our 'Slate' newsletter. You can sign-up to receive this from our [website](#)⁷.

⁶ <http://qualificationswales.org/english/information-for-stakeholders/schools-and-colleges/>

⁷ <http://qualificationswales.org/english/get-involved/keep-in-touch/newsletters/>

Have your say!

As part of our monitoring of the summer examination series, we are running an on-line questionnaire to give students, teachers and lecturers an opportunity to give feedback about examinations. The [questionnaire](#)⁸ is open until 6 July.

Results release

We would like to remind schools and colleges that results are confidential until the official results days (16 August for GCE and 23 August for GCSE) and must not be shared with any person or organisation outside of your school or college.

I hope you find this information helpful. If you have any suggestions for information you would find useful in future, please get in touch.

Yours sincerely



Philip Blaker

Chief Executive

⁸ <http://qualificationswales.org/english/get-involved/consultations-and-surveys/have-your-say-survey-2018/>