

Kirsty Williams AS/MS
Y Gweinidog Addysg
Minister for Education



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

David Jones OBE, DL
Chair of Qualifications Wales
&
Philip Blaker,
Chief Executive Officer, Qualifications Wales
Q2 Building, Pencarn Lane,
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3 July 2020

Dear Philip and David,

I am writing to you regarding considerations for General Qualifications in 2021. As you will be aware, with the continuing disruption from the pandemic learners, their families and practitioners are increasingly seeking certainty about the arrangements for next year's exams.

I know you are already undertaking detailed work alongside the other regulators and WJEC to identify and assess the range of possible options available to ensure learners due to take qualifications next year are not disadvantaged by any loss of learning. I believe that to help reduce some of the current anxiety and to provide time for learners and practitioners to appropriately prepare for the autumn term, we must clearly announce the approach that will be taken and associated next steps before the end of the summer term. It will also be important to provide regular updates as this work progresses over the summer.

As we discussed, although there is continuing uncertainty about the progression of the pandemic and associated public health requirements, at this time I believe the best course of action to ensure learners are not disadvantaged and have the opportunity to demonstrate their full potential is to prepare for examinations in 2021 to go ahead as normal – albeit with some modifications to take account of any loss of learning time. I understand that this may include changes to assessment arrangements and is likely to vary on both a subject by subject but also qualification level basis. As the regulator this will be for you to determine, working with WJEC, to ensure fairness and consistency of approach, whilst maintaining the credibility of the qualification system.

Subject to your advice, I am also happy to consider wider actions that we could take across the Education sector either to create additional space for a focus on qualifications or to facilitate some of the options that you may be considering. Although, these must be consistent with my wider priorities for educational reform. I have just announced that the suspension of Key Stage 4 and legacy sixth form performance measures will be extended to the 2020/21 academic year. I am also considering an Accelerated Learning Plan that will establish a programme of support for priority cohort learners – this will include a key focus on those learners who will be in Years 11 and 13 next academic 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.

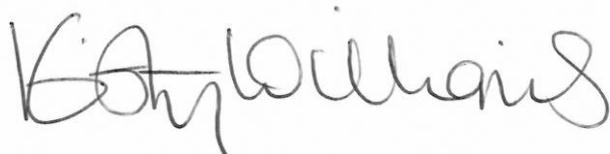
I am also conscious that despite our best plans, the public health situation remains changeable and is outside of our direct control, so I would ask that you develop contingency arrangements should we find ourselves again needing to rely on centre-assessed grades. In doing so I am keen to ensure that we draw on the lessons and experience from the arrangements implemented this year, to ensure the robustness and fairness of our qualification system.

I recognise that adopting this twin approach places additional pressure on both you and the WJEC, at a time when you are already responding to unprecedented demand. However, given the current uncertainty and continuing risks I believe this is a prudent course of action. I am committed to meeting regularly with you at key decision points between now and next year's summer examinations, to review the available evidence and to consider whether this approach remains necessary.

I believe our shared priorities in making arrangements for next year are supporting the health and well-being of learners, ensuring no learners are unfairly disadvantaged and their progression opportunities are protected, and maintaining confidence in and credibility of our qualification system. I am also mindful that similar considerations will need to be made for Vocational Qualifications. Whilst I recognise that this is in part dependent on the decisions taken across the rest of the UK, it is important to me that wherever possible we seek to provide parity of treatment for learners taking vocational and general qualifications in Wales.

Finally I would like to again thank you and your staff for the exceptional effort you have put in to both delivering the arrangements for this year and planning for next year, I do not underestimate the scale or challenge that this has been.

Yours sincerely,

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

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