

Kirsty Williams AC/AM
Y Gweinidog Addysg
Minister for Education



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Eich cyf/Your ref
Ein cyf/Our ref
David Jones OBE, DL
Chair of Qualifications Wales
&
Philip Blaker,
Chief Executive Officer, Qualifications Wales

30 September 2020

Dear Philip and David

I am writing further to my letter of 3 July regarding considerations for General Qualifications in 2021.

I am grateful for all of the work that you have done since this time, working with WJEC, to put in place adaptations for next summer's General Qualifications to take account of the disruption there has been to teaching and learning, as well as social distancing requirements. I was particularly pleased to see the greater flexibility it has been possible to introduce for GCSE subjects, in the adaptations published by WJEC in the summer.

As we discussed in June, whilst we shared the opinion that it was in the best interests for learners to sit exams in summer 2021, I also asked you to prepare possible contingency arrangements should there be further disruption - drawing on the lessons and experience from the arrangements implemented for summer 2020.

As you are aware with the continuing disruption caused by COVID-19, in particular the recent local lockdowns and the incidences of self-isolation following positive cases in schools and colleges, there is increasing anxiety amongst learners, their families and practitioners about arrangements for this summer's exams. In light of this I would like to ask you for further advice on the best options that you now consider to be available for learners due to sit their exams next summer.

In doing so, I would ask you to consider my overriding priority for any approach, which is to promote and enable learning and learner well-being, so that learners have the knowledge, skills and confidence to progress into further education, higher education or employment. I also wish to ensure that any approach meets the following objectives:

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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.

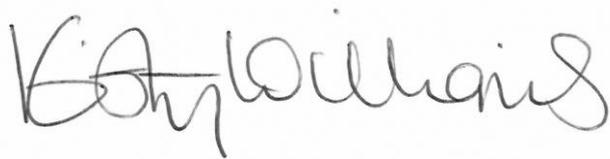
- Delivers fair and equitable arrangements that provide consistency across Wales and parity of treatment, ensuring equality for all learners - particularly those most disadvantaged;
- Presents the lowest risk to learners in terms of their future progression;
- Is deliverable within the timescales available, both in terms of the actions that you and WJEC must undertake, as well as the wider responsibilities of the education sector required to deliver a viable approach; and
- Provides a credible approach that promotes confidence in the qualifications system in Wales.

I would be grateful if you could provide this advice to me before the end of October, so that I can consider it alongside the interim findings of the Independent Review. My intention is then to make an announcement on the way forward in November. This will provide needed clarity for learners and the wider education sector, so that thorough preparations can be made and our priority focus on learning continued.

I am also mindful that arrangements 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. As such, I would also welcome an update on this work and propose that we discuss it as part of a meeting to consider your advice on general qualifications.

I am grateful for your continued advice and assistance, as well as the hard work of your staff during this challenging time.

Yours sincerely

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

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