

Kirsty Williams AS/MS
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
Q2 Building, Pencarn Lane,
Newport
NP10 8UH

17 November 2020

Dear Philip and David

I am grateful for the detailed support and advice that you and your officials have provided and continue to provide to me.

The purpose of this letter is to issue you with the enclosed Direction under Section 53 of the Qualifications Wales Act 2015 to have regard to the Welsh Ministers' policy regarding the cancellation of exams.

I recognise that the events of last summer, the continuing disruption from Covid-19 and the diversity of views on arrangements for general qualifications in 2021 make this a very complex and pressurised issue. I also appreciate the level of flexibility and responsiveness you have demonstrated in seeking to develop proposals that are reflective of these unprecedented times. I do not underestimate the challenge of this.

I fully acknowledge that the disruption to teaching and learning and the variability of learners' experiences across Wales are not something that can be solved by *any* qualification system. Whilst qualifications are a gateway to future progression, we must also ensure that our learners develop the knowledge, skills and confidence they need to be successful in their next steps. It is this ongoing uncertainty and ensuring fairness, equity and well-being for learners that are central to my thinking. In this exceptional year, I believe these interests are best served by cancelling the summer examinations to maximise teaching and learning time in the summer term.

Drawing on our experience from the summer and realising the diversity in experience that learners have faced – with instances of learners having had to self-isolate on multiple occasions, some schools having had to temporarily close, variability in blended learning and

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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.

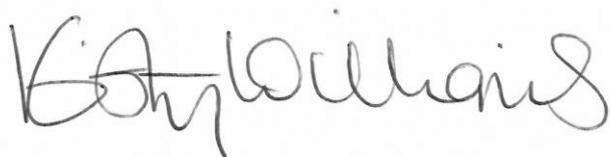
differences in learners' ability to successfully engage with blended learning – it is more vital than ever to ensure that the education profession is fully engaged in the development and delivery of any solution. In my opinion this is best achieved via the co-construction of policy proposals. Accordingly, I have established a Design and Delivery Advisory Group to do this, bringing together a range of college and school leaders. Providing expert assessment advice to this group as an official observer will be crucial and I welcome your commitment to support the Design and Delivery Advisory Group in this way.

I acknowledge that in order to ensure confidence and credibility across the education system Qualifications Wales has key statutory functions in relation to assessment arrangements for qualifications under the Qualifications Wales Act 2015. I have written setting out the rationale for my intended policy approach, as detailed in my oral statement of 10 November and to provide a policy direction to this effect. Following consideration of the detailed policy proposals developed by the Design and Delivery Advisory Group then I intend to write to you again to provide further policy direction – either as an addendum to the direction enclosed or as any new direction. However, I recognise that the final decision regarding arrangements for the summer examination and any alternative assessment arrangements will be for Qualifications Wales to make and implement.

I will reiterate my commitment to learners' wellbeing, fairness and progression for 2021, and my expectation that the best solution is one that is developed in conjunction with the education profession. As I set out in my Oral Statement, I continue to believe this is an exceptional year and our focus should remain on supporting learners through to summer 2021. I am confident by continuing to work closely together we can develop an approach that is sensitive to the exceptional challenges being faced by learners this year and that has the confidence of the wider education sector.

I welcome your commitment to working alongside me in this endeavour.

Yours sincerely

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

Kirsty Williams AS/MS
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Minister for Education

DIRECTION UNDER SECTION 53 OF QUALIFICATIONS (WALES) ACT 2015

Under section 53 of the Qualifications Wales Act 2015, Qualifications Wales must have regard to such aspects of government policy as the Welsh Ministers may direct.

The Minister for Education, one of the Welsh Ministers, directs Qualifications Wales to have regard to:

A policy statement regarding the summer 2021 examinations and the development of alternative assessment arrangements for learners in Wales who were due to take Qualifications Wales approved GCSE, AS and A-level this summer to support their future progression, dated 10 November 2020, that was published by the Welsh Ministers on the Welsh Government website and can be found by following this link;

<https://gov.wales/oral-statement-approach-qualifications-2021>

- the Welsh Government policy that the summer 2021 cohort of GCSE, AS, and A-level learners in Wales taking Qualifications Wales approved qualifications should not sit nationally co-ordinated and timetabled exams this summer.
- the Welsh Government policy that as an alternative to these summer examinations an approach to centre-based outcomes is developed linked to an agreed national approach to provide consistency across Wales. It is the Welsh Government's policy intention that there will be a common approach across Wales providing transparency and rigour.
- the Welsh Government policy that policy proposals for centre-based outcomes, are co-constructed with the education sector via the Design and Delivery Advisory Group that has been established. In relation to this policy, recognising that Qualifications Wales is the independent regulator of qualifications in Wales and has the power to make decisions relating to the regulation of qualifications the Welsh Government believes that it is desirable that Qualifications Wales should be an observer to the Design and Delivery Advisory Group in order to provide expert advice.