

By email to all schools and colleges in Wales



29 January 2021

Dear Head of Centre,

Summer 2021 assessment update

We hope you are keeping well. We will be sending regular updates to you about the assessment arrangements for approved GCSEs, AS and A levels and vocational qualifications. We want to provide you with as much information as we can as soon as we can, so you and your colleagues know what to expect.

Update on Vocational qualifications

In the last few weeks, you will have seen government announcements in Wales and England on the policy position for qualifications in 2021. Our role as regulator is to respond to the changes and to put the regulatory frameworks in place to allow awarding bodies to award qualifications in these challenging circumstances and to enable as many learners as possible to progress to the next stage of their learning or to employment.

The vocational qualifications market is complex and the different approaches required for different types of qualifications mean it can be difficult to communicate the position clearly and succinctly. We know that this can cause frustration for you.

We know that you want clarity and detail to answer the many questions that you have as you try and support your learners to complete their qualifications. I know this update will not answer many of those specific questions, but I want to assure you that we are doing all we can to provide you with the answers you need as soon as possible.

I want to assure you that vocational qualifications taken by learners in Wales are given the same priority as general qualifications by my staff at Qualifications Wales. I know that is also the case for our colleagues at Ofqual who we work with very closely

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on the approach to vocational qualifications. Issues that affect learners in Wales or Northern Ireland are discussed and considered in decisions on vocational qualifications taken in England.

Awarding bodies are also doing their best to adapt and respond to the changing landscape. We are all focused on doing all we can to support learners' progress. The UK Department for Education and Ofqual have consulted on the proposed approach to awarding vocational and other general qualifications in summer 2021. Most of the vocational qualifications taken by learners in Wales are also regulated by Ofqual and are within the scope of the consultation. We expect the consultation outcomes will be available in late February.

Qualifications used for progression alongside, or instead of, general qualifications

We will take the same regulatory approach for Wales-only Approved vocational qualifications as will be taken for Approved GCSE, AS and A levels in Wales. This will apply to the Level 2 and 3 Health and Social Care: Principles and Contexts qualifications. Scheduled written external examinations will not take place for these qualifications and learners will receive a centre determined grade. Further detail on the alternative arrangements will be provided by WJEC.

For three-country qualifications, the DfE and Ofqual consultation proposes that alternative assessment arrangements are put in place for vocational and other general qualifications that are used for progression to further study instead of, or alongside, GCSEs, AS and A levels. Scheduled written external examinations will not take place for these qualifications. These are likely to include qualifications that received calculated grades in summer 2020 such as BTECs, WJEC Vocational Awards and Applied Certificates and Diplomas, Cambridge Nationals and Technicals. The alternative arrangements propose to allow awarding bodies to award qualifications where exams and assessment cannot take place, subject to learners completing sufficient assessment on which an objective judgement on their performance can be made.

I understand that you want answers about what the alternative assessment will look like. Until that information is available from the awarding bodies please continue to teach the qualification content to learners and complete any internal assessment in accordance with any adaptations that are in place, where it is safe and possible to do so.

Qualifications that assess practical competence

Assessment for vocational qualifications that assess practical competence should continue where it is safe to do so with the adaptations that are currently in place. The

adaptations for vocational qualifications that assess competence are available from each awarding body. This includes Wales-only practice qualifications in Health and Social Care and Childcare and three-country regulated qualifications. You should continue to deliver the qualifications in accordance with the published adaptations. If you are unclear about what the adaptations are, you should check with the awarding body.

The best source of information on individual qualifications is the awarding body's website or contact them directly if you want any clarification. If your usual EQA is unavailable, please contact the awarding body directly and let us know if you have difficulty in getting answers.

Some assessments may unfortunately need to be delayed where there is no way to deliver the assessment safely, or for practical assessments where learners have not received enough learning to reach occupational competency and so are not ready to take the assessment.

There is no end date on when adaptations can remain in place and it is our intention that they remain in place as long as they are necessary.

Essential Skills Wales qualifications

We are talking to stakeholders and awarding bodies to consider the options for assessing and awarding ESW qualifications this year. We are also discussing the likely approaches that will be taken to Functional Skills qualifications in England and Essential Skills in Northern Ireland with our fellow regulators to inform our decision. The current adaptations remain in place and assessment can continue where it is safe to do so. We will provide a further update on whether any alternative arrangements will be introduced for ESW qualifications by 12 February.

Weekly updates

We plan to send you weekly updates every Friday and we will soon be sending you information about the overarching assessment framework for GCSEs, AS and A levels. This will set out high-level requirements for schools and colleges so that there is some consistency in approach across Wales this summer. The over-arching framework will give an overview of:

- The type and amount of evidence that might be used to support grade judgements. It has been designed to give you reassurance about the evidence that will be required, so that the focus can remain on teaching and learning and supporting learners in developing the skills, knowledge and understanding they need to progress.
- How holistic, best-fit grade judgements might be made.

- The need for decision making processes to be developed and documented to be able to demonstrate that evidence-based judgements have been made based on sound rationale.

A high-level timeline with key dates related to GCSEs, AS and A levels will also be sent to you shortly.

We are looking to collate learner feedback in the coming weeks. If your school or college has any information about how learners are feeling, and you would be prepared to share this with us, please get in touch by sending it to communications@qualificationswales.org.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Philip Blaker', is centered on the page.

Philip Blaker
Chief Executive