Guidance

Examination and assessment guidance: 2020 to 2021

Information on examinations and assessments, including A levels, during the coronavirus pandemic.

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Published

29 March 2020

Last updated

22 December 2020

What is happening with qualifications in 2021?

On 10 November the Minister confirmed her intention that there would be no end of year exams for learners taking GCSE, AS level and A level qualifications in Wales in the academic year 2020 to 2021 (known as AcCY in summer 2021. This decision reflected the nature of what has been a highly challenging year, with many learners, including those in exam cohorts, feeling the impact of the public health crisis in their day to day teaching and learning experiences.

Fairness has been at the centre of this decision, recognising the different teaching and learning experiences that learners have faced this year. The Minister's decision was underpinned by a unanimous view for teaching and learning the approach will enable learners to build knowledge throughout the spring and summer terms and put them in the best position possible to progress into employment, training or further education.

Instead of exams, qualifications in 2021 will be awarded through a centre-based outcomes model and the Minister for Education announced the approach to be taken in a Written Statement to the Senedd. This decision was also reflected in a joint statement by the **Design and Delivery Advisory Group** of headteachers and college principals nominated by regional consortia, Colegau Cymru and local authorities.

What will replace exams in 2021?

Instead of exams, qualifications will be awarded through a three step approach that builds on the types of assessments schools and colleges regularly undertake and are experienced in delivering:

- non-examination assessment;
- internal assessments that are planned and marked by teachers and lecturers; and
- assessments that are externally set and marked by WJEC.

Each qualification will look slightly different depending on how it is assessed. For some, it will be a mix of non-examination assessment, internally set and marked, for others, for example, coursework.

This approach ensures that every learner taking general qualifications in 2021 will have an equitable experience of assessment as part of their course, regardless of their circumstances or their school or college. However, how and when these assessments are used will be designed and planned by teachers and lecturers (within broad parameters set by the Government and WJEC) to suit teaching and learning time, as well as supporting learners' wellbeing.

Where WJEC has already made adaptations to course specifications, these will continue to apply. Details of these adjustments can be found here. Assessments will take place in the classroom and be integrated into teaching and learning plans so that learners are supported to cover all of the core aspects of their course so they can progress confidently in their next steps.

These will be the only assessments which contribute to grades in 2021.

WJEC will provide guidance on high level themes for the internal and external assessments to enable schools and colleges to prepare teaching plans. WJEC has produced a **timeline for teachers** which outlines all the key dates in the 2021 assessment calendar.

When will the internal assessments take place and what will they look like?

The window for internal assessments, where relevant, will run from 22 February to 23 April. Teachers and lecturers will have some flexibility to plan assessments to suit their learners. WJEC will also be able to decide when to run their assessments so that they are embedded within the planned teaching schedule. This allows for teachers to use the time they have with their learners to ensure that is ongoing disruption. The marking of these assessments will be undertaken by the centre, supported by guidance from WJEC.

Teachers/lecturers and learners will be familiar with WJEC assessment materials. Using them will minimise teacher workload and provide equity for learners, having been impact assessed for equalities and accessibility. They will also help ensure a consistent assessment experience for learners. WJEC will provide guidance on how to use materials, and giving teachers and lecturers advance notice of what is covered, and direction over when to introduce them, will better support learners to cover core aspects of their course to support their progression, and to be tested when ready.

When will the external assessments take place and what will they look like?

The window for external assessment will be from 17 May to 25 June. Similar to the internal assessments, teachers and lecturers will get advance notice of themes that will be covered, and decide when and how to use the time they have with their learners to ensure continuity of learning and do not create the necessity for disruption in the future.

The extended window for their delivery will help schools and colleges be flexible to any disruption resulting from the public health crisis.

We know some learners have been worried about whether these are just exams by another name – that is not the case. WJEC has made it nationally set assessments that all learners across Wales will take, but will be held under normal exam conditions, at a time which will be at the same date and time, in an exam hall and in silence. Teachers and lecturers will be able to administer the exams, but they will not be able to offer any guidance or comment, assess or mark the responses so it is more relaxed, and planned as part of their learning so they are more prepared.

When will I know what internal and external assessments will look like and when they will take place?

WJEC has prepared a **high-level timeline** which has been sent to schools and colleges and more detailed information on the assessment approach will be issued by them in January. Further information, including answers to commonly asked questions, can be found on the **WJEC website** and the **Qualifications Wales website**.

How will grades be calculated and what standards will be applied?

All assessments will be mark-based, allowing the WJEC to award a grade as in a normal year. Given the continuity disruptions to teaching and learning for learners in exam years in 2021 the grade boundaries will be set at a level that will not disadvantage the loss of learning time and overall disruptions.

Why have we moved from the Centre Assessment Grades model used for the 2020 exam series?

To ensure fairness for learners across different settings, Centre Assessment Grades would have required teachers and lecturers to make judgements about their learners' potential. This would have, of accessibility, ensure a mechanism to provide consistency across schools and colleges (and protect against over-assessment), develop and test marking schemes, and then be responsible for applying it relative to these.

This would inevitably take time away from the priority for learners in exam years in 2021 – that they develop the skills, knowledge and confidence they need to progress. It would also have led to inconsistency for learner experiences and outcomes across Wales. **The Design and Delivery Group** sought to develop an approach which offers learners a consistent assessment experience and maximises time for teaching and learning, so did not take the Centre Assessment Grade route.

Will there be an appeals process?

Yes, there will an appeals process. There will be further work between WJEC and Qualify in the New Year with the **Design and Delivery Advisory Group** to confirm what the process will be.

What is happening with Private Candidates?

We recognise that due to the arrangements that were put in place last year to calculate grades for all private candidates, including mature students who were taking qualifications and learners who are home educated, there will be concerns about how their grades might not have had enough knowledge of a candidate's to make a professional judgement on their ability. Avoiding a similar situation in 2021 has been a key consideration of the **Design and Delivery Advisory Group**.

The proposals for 2021 will be more inclusive of the needs of private candidates, including through the introduction of common and consistent assessments, and more time for teaching and for further information to support all learners, including private candidates, understanding what the assessment proposals will look like for them will be available in the New Year.

Our priority is to support learners in developing the skills and knowledge they need to confidently progress – this includes the needs of private candidates.

How were these decisions arrived at?

Since the 10 November announcement, which was informed by an **Independent Review** and the advice of **Qualifications Wales**, much work has been undertaken by the **Design and Delivery Advisory Group** chaired by Gerard Rees, was established. The group is made up of school headteachers and college principals, representatives from the Welsh Local Government Association, unions, and supported by expert assessment advice from Qualifications Wales and WJEC. Following their establishment they immediately began working on their identified tasks:

- giving consideration to lessons around GCSE, AS and A levels for Qualifications Wales approved qualifications;
- developing proposals on the scope and timescales for teacher-assessed assessments and other elements of classroom assessments; and
- developing a model for centre-based outcomes as part of a consistent approach across Wales, including the proportions of learning that may support this, and the mechanisms of the agreed approach to ensure maximum transparency and rigour to support learner progression.

The Group provided a set of proposals for consideration by the Minister for Education to inform her decision. In doing so they have reflected on the extraordinary circumstances faced by learners, teachers, lecturers, schools and colleges this year and have recognised that there are no easy solutions. Further, the Group have worked at speed to deliver a solution in their proposals that protects what they have:

1. fair to learners - who have experienced significant and variable disruption to their learning this year;
2. deliverable by schools and colleges – that continue to navigate the impacts of the pandemic and deliver teaching and learning to their pupils; and
3. needed to ensure the credibility and integrity of a qualifications system for Wales - that supports our learners to progress confidently to their next steps, whatever they may be.

At the heart of their work has been fairness, equity, rigour, consistency and transparency. In order to set out how their considerations underpinned the proposals they developed, a report was made to the Minister for Education and included a documented **equality consideration**. The Minister considered their proposals, alongside the final report of the Independent Review, and other evidence, in providing her policy direction to the Qualifications Wales Board.

What support will be available for learners in years 11, 12 and 13?

The Welsh Government is investing an additional £1.9m in education resources to support learners in years 11, 12 and 13 to prepare for life after the Covid-19 pandemic. This includes additional resources to help and the WJEC website, include 'knowledge organisers' to help with learning key facts and information, walk-throughs and exemplar guides. These resources are in addition to the funding provided for schools and colleges to deliver mentoring and revision support programmes for learners taking qualifications.

Does the Minister's 10 Nov decision to cancel exams in Wales apply to English Exam board qualifications?

No, the new summer 2021 arrangements only apply to Qualifications Wales approved qualifications designed for Wales delivered by the WJEC and not to qualifications delivered by English based awarding bodies, as these bodies are regulated by Ofqual.

What does this mean for exams in January 2021?

Following the Minister for Education's policy decision to cancel WJEC GCSE and AS/A level exams in Wales in the academic year 2020 to summer 2021 and having listened to early proposals from the **Design and Delivery Advisory Group**, Qualifications Wales has confirmed that the January 2021 exams in Wales will not go ahead. Ofqual, Ofsted, Welsh Literature and CCT have been informed.

They have decided to retain examinations for GCSE Home Economics, Child Development and GCSE Health and Social Care as this is the final opportunity to gain qualifications in these subjects as they are being withdrawn. A full list of planned assessments can be viewed on the **Qualifications Wales website**.

Non-examination assessments (NEA) will continue to be included in GCSEs, AS and A levels in 2020-2021.

With regard to Vocational Qualifications, the January 2021 WJEC examinations for the Health and Social Care are expected to go ahead as scheduled.

As a result, for the examinations that are proceeding in the January series, we would expect learners entered into these exams to be able to access their school or colleges despite any variable return, in order to sit the exam. We will also be ensuring that provision is in place for those who were entered in the November series which was held during the firebreak.

Will the cancellation of exams affect my entry into University?

We have engaged with universities who have highlighted that their priority is students who have covered core aspects of their course, and that a transparent and robust approach which provides confidence of a learner's knowledge and ability will not disadvantage learners in their next steps.

Universities across the UK assured us that this proposal will not disadvantage our learners. We will keep this under consideration and robust and transparent. The **Design and Delivery Advisory Group** have tasked to develop proposals which meet these needs.

The approach that we are proposing is intended to maximise the time available for teaching and learning so that learners have the opportunity to develop the skills and knowledge they need to confidently progress.

What is happening with Vocational Qualifications?

Most vocational qualifications taken by learners in Wales are also available in the other UK nations. To ensure consistency we have worked closely with our colleagues in the other UK nations to develop ensure a pragmatic approach that works in learners' interests and gives them clarity about the way forward.

Adaptations for vocational qualifications have been put in place and awarding bodies are considering whether any further adaptations are required to ensure learners can progress to the next stage of their learning. Awarding bodies' considerations will include whether any of the adaptations put in place for GCSEs, AS and A levels may be appropriate for their vocational qualifications.

Will learners have to sit the Numeracy (Reasoning) paper test this year?

There will be no statutory paper-based tests in Wales in 2020 to 2021. The Numeracy (Procedural and Reading) in Numeracy (Reasoning) are being trialed in 2020 to 2021 and will become a statutory requirement from the 2021 to 2022 academic year.

Will learners be required to take the online personalised assessments in Numeracy (Procedural and Reading)?

Yes. Personalised assessments in Numeracy (Procedural) are statutory from September 2020. The tests are now available and be available for schools to schedule when they consider it appropriate to do so.

Where learners have completed procedural numeracy assessments this year, schools will have access to feedback on their skills, age-standardised scores and progress reports.

Feedback reports for the reading assessments are also available. However, scores and progress reports will only be available once the majority of learners have taken the reading assessments. Given current circumstances, this will not be until the end of the summer term 2021.

It should be noted these tests are not part of the qualifications process, and are to support learners in understanding their own progression.

First published

29 March 2020

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Last updated

22 December 2020

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