

Independent review of the summer 2020 arrangements to award grades, and considerations for summer 2021

Terms of reference

Remit and objectives

- Recognising there was no alternative but to cancel the 2020 summer exam series (GCSEs, AS levels, A levels and Skills Challenge Certificate, and approved vocational qualifications designed for Wales) in light of the public health pandemic and the anxiety that the uncertainty was creating for learners, their families and practitioners, this independent review should consider the **key issues which emerged from the arrangements** which were developed and implemented.
- The review should consider the **challenges resulting from the 2020 experience and (in the context of future Covid uncertainty) the challenges for learners in the summer 2021 exam series.**
- Key lessons from the experience this year should be drawn specifically to provide **recommendations and considerations of a possible approach to prepare for 2021** which prioritises the needs of learners and their progression, and has regard to the continued need to maintain the standards and integrity of the education system and awarding of qualifications.
- This review is intended to provide recommendations and considerations for the Minister for Education, with recognition of the multiple partners involved in supporting learners in Wales.

Scope of review and questions to be addressed

Welsh Government principles and priorities

- In setting the policy for the cancellation of the exams and subsequent development of arrangements to award grades to learners, the Welsh Government prioritised the following principles:
 - a. Enabling the future progression of all learners and recognising their hard-work by awarding grades
 - b. Ensuring learners are not disadvantaged, particularly in relation to those elsewhere in the UK
 - c. Delivering a robust and fair approach, that is fair for past, present and future learners
 - d. Maintaining confidence in and credibility of the qualifications system.
- Were these priorities clearly understood and shared by all delivery partners?

- Were they given the right weighting?

Challenges of operationalisation

- What were the key issues and challenges in the operationalisation of the arrangements in 2020, recognising the constraints within which all parts of the sector were working?
- Were the approaches adopted, and those alternatives not adopted, robustly tested and evaluated against the intended policy directions?
- Were the approaches adopted, and those alternatives not adopted, robustly tested and evaluated against equality, diversity and inclusivity criteria to ensure fairness?

Organisational roles, responsibilities and relationships

- Is there clarity in the different responsibilities within the Welsh education sector for supporting the delivery of qualifications?
- Were the respective roles played this year in the awarding of grades appropriately enacted, well understood and communicated by the parties concerned?
- Was the emphasis placed on the interdependencies across the UK, and the impact for Wales of different approaches taken elsewhere in the UK in the consideration and operationalisation of arrangements for 2020, appropriate?

Transparency and learner voice

- Was there sufficient engagement, communication and transparency with stakeholders to develop and deliver the arrangements in 2020 and was the learner voice appropriately represented?

Challenges and options for 2021

- Given the challenges for the 2020/21 cohort in terms of progression and achievement, and achieving fairness and credibility both in the context of the wider UK qualifications system and for individual learners, what assessment approaches might be considered for 2021 that would help achieve the Welsh Government priorities set out above?

In considering the above, the Review is particularly invited to consider the following questions:

- What learning is there from the operationalisation of the standardisation process from 2020, and what should be considered in agreeing the criteria or principles for any standardisation process in 2021?

- How can the voice of learners and their well-being be recognised and prioritised in any future approach?
- Is there is a role for a greater teacher and centre assessment contribution, which is proportionate to the need to prioritise teaching and learning time?
- Is there a possible model of moderation across clusters/centres, supported by professional learning provision, and could practitioners, Estyn, local authorities or regional education consortia play a greater role in ensuring consistency of approach between schools?
- What role should there be for any appeals process, and how might the responsibilities from school through to regulator level be considered in any future process?
- What further analysis is needed to understand the impact of events this summer on cohorts in following years?

Further areas for consideration

- The review may also note areas for further consideration and exploration as we start the transition to curriculum reform. This can include, but is not limited to, areas relating to: practitioners' approach to assessment and professional judgement, the role of accountability systems and the behaviour the drive, and the future role and design of qualifications.
- The review may also consider learning that we can draw from approaches taken to assessment and awarding of qualifications internationally.

Operation of the review and timing

- The Chair will consider membership of the review team and will bring in partners and stakeholders to provide contributions and reflections. Welsh Government officials will provide the secretariat.
- Given the pressing need to put measures in place to ensure the deliverability of the 2021 exam series alongside the development of contingency arrangements in case of further disruption, the review should report in two phases:
 - an interim report containing key findings and factors to be addressed will be presented to the Minister by the end of October 2020;
 - a final report with full recommendations will be presented to the Minister by mid-December 2020.