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CABINET STATEMENT

Written Statement: Update on General Qualifications in 2021

Kirsty Williams, Minister for Education

First published:
16 December 2020

Last updated:
16 December 2020

On 10 November I stated my intention that exams for general qualifications in 2021 should be cancelled due to the significant disruption already experienced by learners.

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I set out this approach recognising that WJEC has already made significant adaptations to course content for 2021. We have also committed nearly £50 million to support those most affected, including personalised support through our “Recruit, Recover, Raise Standards” programme, coaching and mentoring, and development of GCSE and A levels resources.

I established the Design and Delivery Advisory Group, chaired by Geraint Rees, to develop proposals which would support wellbeing, fairness and progression for learners taking GCSE, AS and A level qualifications approved by Qualifications Wales and delivered by WJEC in summer 2021. I am grateful to the group of headteachers and college leaders, nominated by regional consortia, Colegau Cymru and local authorities, who have come together at pace to develop this thinking. I have now received and considered their proposals.

The Group has put equity for learners at the centre of their considerations, maximising time for teaching and learning to support progression, while minimising the impact on teacher workload. The Group has also been conscious that any solution must support learner wellbeing. Finally, they have made clear that the approach should maintain confidence in the integrity of qualifications in Wales.

For 2021, my intention is that general qualifications are supported by a 3 pillar approach:

- non-examination assessments where currently planned in the qualification;
- internal assessments; and
- assessments that are externally set and marked.

The window for internal assessment, where relevant, will run from 22 February to 23 April. Teachers and lecturers will be able to decide when to run their assessments within this window.

Teachers will have some flexibility in choice of materials, which will be provided by WJEC, and arrangement of assessments so that they are embedded within the planned teaching schedule. This allows for teacher professional judgement. It will also provide flexibility if there is ongoing disruption. The marking of these assessments will be undertaken by the centre, supported by guidance from WJEC.

The Group agrees that using existing WJEC assessment materials will minimise teacher workload and provide equity for learners. WJEC assessments are impact assessed for equalities and accessibility, and both teachers/lecturers and learners are familiar with them.

Alternative options, including unsupported centre assessment grades, would have required centres to design assessment materials, test them for equalities and accessibility, ensure a mechanism to provide consistency across centres (and protect against over-assessment), develop and test marking schemes, and then be responsible for appeals in relation to these.

It was felt that this would take time away from teaching and learning, as well as introduce inequity of experience for learners, and inconsistency across the country.

The extended window for external assessment will be from 17 May to 29 June. This will enable teachers and lecturers to embed the assessments into teaching time, and be flexible to any disruption. Teachers and lecturers will decide when and how to operate these assessments – for example splitting up assessments - to ensure they can be embedded within teaching and learning and do not create the pressure and anxiety of exams.

Schools and colleges are experienced in delivering assessments within the classroom – this is no different. For this year, it will provide learners with confidence that their experience of assessment is the same for learners across the country.

All assessments will be predicated on the existing adaptations that WJEC has confirmed. WJEC will provide guidance on high level themes for the internal and external assessments to enable schools and colleges to prepare teaching plans.

It is important that learners and teachers are able to have their expected break at the end of their Year 11, 12 and 13 studies. I will be expecting this to be delivered in a way whereby currently planned national results days, and term dates, will be fulfilled. In conversations with school and college leaders I know that many are already planning additional support and opportunities for those learners towards the summer and I welcome those actions.

The non-examination assessments, internal assessments and external assessments will be mark-based to allow WJEC to award grade outcomes. These will be the only assessments which contribute to 2021 grades. This approach will be clearer and more inclusive for private candidates than the arrangements in 2020.

The grade outcomes will overall align with 2020 outcomes, to recognise the loss of learning time and overall disruption. It is expected that the combination of internally managed assessment and non-examination assessment (where relevant) should, where possible, contribute a greater proportion to the individual's ultimate grade than the external assessment.

Appeals would need to be directed to where the decision on marking/awarding had taken place with a preference of minimising the role of centres in managing appeals. We recognise this is a key aspect for many learner to ensure fairness and an appeals process will be finalised and agreed in the New Year.

Some classes or groups of learners have experienced particular disruption compared to others. As a priority, the Design and Delivery Advisory Group will consider what arrangements can be put in place to reflect the challenging circumstances certain learners have faced, and may continue to face.

Finally, the Group consider that the rigour and evidence-base for the AS levels in 2021 will enable us to return to our preferred Welsh approach where the AS level in 2021 will be expected to contribute to A levels in 2022.

I have accepted these proposals and provided them as policy direction to Qualifications Wales Board, which has considered and agreed them. I expect WJEC to provide supporting operational information to schools and colleges at the beginning of the next term.

I am very grateful to the Group for their considerations and welcome their agreement to continue work in 2021 on more detailed delivery issues. Members will find the reflections of the Design and Delivery Advisory Group and the proposed timetable for sharing information with schools at the following link. I would like to recommend that all learners, teachers and lecturers take a break for the Christmas period, ready to return to teaching and learning in the spring term.

[Design and Delivery Advisory Group](#)

First published

16 December 2020

Last updated

16 December 2020

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