



20 January 2021

Dear Headteacher /FE Principal

Shortly before Christmas I wrote to you about the arrangements that we were making for general qualifications in 2021. In that letter, I raised the prospect of a challenging start to 2021 as we have seen in the rapidly changing public health situation caused by the new variant. The pace at which we have had to respond as an Education sector has been relentless and I am grateful for your continuing dedication and professionalism in supporting our learners.

The return to remote learning for most learners – as part of our contribution to the public health pressures – and significant policy developments elsewhere in the UK means we have had to revisit our plans for awarding qualifications to ensure they continue to promote learner well-being and progression.

Supported by expert advice from Qualifications Wales and WJEC, the Design and Delivery Advisory Group (DDAG) has worked at pace to adapt the proposals I agreed before Christmas and I have now considered and accepted their recommendations as my policy approach. These are summarised below.

Learners undertaking GCSE, AS and A levels approved by Qualifications Wales will have their qualifications awarded through a Centre-Determined Grade model. This means that grades will be determined by their school or college based on an assessment of the learner's work.

Schools and colleges will be able to use a range of evidence to determine the grades to be awarded to their learners, including Non Examinations Assessment elements, mock-exams, and classwork. In addition, the WJEC will offer a set of adapted past papers which can be used to help assess learning within teaching plans. These will be optional assessment materials but they are intended to provide extra support for teachers and lecturers.

Qualifications Wales will work with WJEC, supported by the DDAG, to provide an assessment framework to support schools and colleges in developing their assessment plans, which should demonstrate sufficient coverage of key concepts to allow learners to progress, and detail for how the centre has determined a learner's grade. These assessment plans will be quality assured by WJEC to support schools and colleges in arriving at their professional judgements and to assist with any future appeals.

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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.

Alongside the Assessment Framework, WJEC will publish guidance to support schools and colleges to develop internal quality assurance processes and the Design and Delivery Group will consider an approach to promote consistency across Wales.

Once quality assurance has been completed at the centre, the grade will be submitted to WJEC. There will be no intervening action on the grades. Learners will appeal to their school or college if they are unhappy with their grade, and to WJEC if they are unhappy with the process that their school or college has followed in determining their grades.

I have asked the Design and Delivery Advisory Group to support Qualifications Wales and WJEC in developing and setting out both the Assessment Framework and the quality assurance process. Alongside the framework and guidance, we will also make training available for practitioners so that processes are applied consistently, equitably, and fairly.

Recognising the challenges posed by the ongoing disruption, I can confirm that the deadlines and controls around non-exam assessment are being removed and it will not be moderated by the WJEC – I understand that this has been a source of some anxiety with a return to remote learning and hope this provides welcome clarity. Where possible I would continue to encourage schools and colleges to support learners to undertake some of their NEA to continue to build learning and skills. Building knowledge and skills, and covering core concepts to support progression, remains my priority and should continue to be a focus, supported by our guidance and approach to distance learning as appropriate.

Where learners in Year 10 are due to complete a qualification this year then this approach will apply, but it won't apply to learners due to take individual units of assessment. Learners in Year 12 will be awarded an AS grade that is Centre Determined. This will recognise the hard work and learning that they have undertaken this year, provide for progression into the A-level course of study, and support UCAS applications, but will not contribute to the final A-level award in 2022.

I know that some schools and colleges also have private candidates entered to take their qualifications with them and I have asked the Design and Delivery Group to consider arrangements for private candidates as a priority: we must ensure there is a clear option for them to support their progression too.

This Centre Determined Grade approach puts trust in teachers' and lecturers' commitment to prioritise teaching and learning in the time available, and their knowledge of the quality of their learners' work. We have sought to make the grading approach as clear as possible in the circumstances, while remaining as simple and responsive as possible.

Teaching the core content and aspects of each course remains my absolute priority for learners in exam years, so they are supported to progress with certainty into their next steps, and with confidence in the grades they've been awarded. We are working with higher education institutions to look at how they can support learners in Wales through this transition, and can provide a bridge into university courses. Initial engagement and commitment from our universities have been very positive.

Equally, we will explore with further education institutions and schools how they can support those learners currently in years 10, 11 and 12, as they move to the new academic year. It is vital that the wider education sector continues to come together to support our learners

I will be announcing these revised assessment arrangements later today via a Written Statement to Senedd Members.

I would appreciate it if you could circulate the attached letter to years 10, 11, 12 & 13 and arrange to speak to your learners about this announcement.

### **Session on assessment arrangements**

Geraint Rees, chair of the Design Delivery and Advisory Group together with heads and college leaders, with representatives from Qualifications Wales and WJEC, will be delivering three sessions to update head and college leaders on the changes to qualifications following the announcement.

Timings for Wednesday 20 January and joining details below.

16:00–16:40 – Schools Welsh language session - [Click here to join the meeting](#)

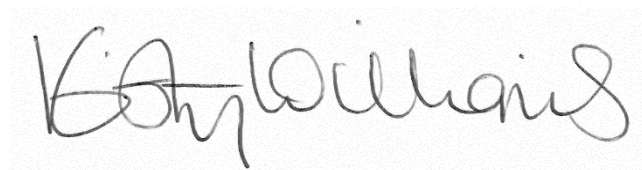
16.40–17.20 – Schools English language session - [Click here to join the meeting](#)

17:20–18:00 - Colleges (By invitation to principals and senior college leaders)

I would like to thank you and your learners for your ongoing flexibility and adaptability in responding to the situation in which we find ourselves.

Your continuing commitment in the face of adversity is admirable, as is your individual and collective contribution to the national effort against COVID-19 – diolch yn fawr.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kirsty Williams', is centered on the page. The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'K'.

**Kirsty Williams AS/MS**

Y Gweinidog Addysg  
Minister for Education