

Dear Minister

I last wrote to you to set out the Design and Delivery Advisory Group proposals of 16 December 2020. These were well-received in the seminars I chaired with head teachers and college leaders on 18 December and were supported also by teaching unions and the Children's Commissioner for Wales. They were described as the best fit with your clear ambitions for learners in 2021. However, further to your confirmation on 7 January that schools and colleges would move to remote learning until further notice, I know that you have been concerned about the possible implications for learning and teaching, and learner wellbeing, for those doing Qualifications Wales-approved GCSE, AS and A levels in 2021. This was the context in which an urgent cancellation of the spring assessment window was announced.

The Design and Delivery Advisory Group has met since then to adapt and build on the existing proposals in the light of the move to remote learning. The Group is absolutely clear that the existing priorities for learner wellbeing, progression, and maximising teaching and learning must remain. We cannot fail this generation of learners by failing to provide them with opportunities to be recognised for what they know and understand. The Group is resolute about supporting them as they find themselves in these increasingly remarkable circumstances. We are clear that any proposals we offer must be resilient to all possible future situations, given the ongoing uncertainties around Covid-19 and its variants. However, we must also be hopeful, and support our learners with confidence in their learning and progression to their next steps.

As a group of headteachers and college leaders from across Wales, reflecting rural and urban settings, Welsh language and English language, all regions, and different sizes of schools and colleges, it is clear that there remain a range of views, but we have come together around ways forward which we can support. We have also reflected on the recommendations of the independent review of qualifications in 2020, chaired by Louise Casella, in our discussions, in the context of the remit of the group.

The Design and Delivery Advisory Group has confirmed its view that all learners should receive a grade based on evidence of learning, and critically, that they should be assessed on the content covered by their school or college, including crucial work that needs to be covered between now and the summer, in very unusual circumstances. They cannot, and should not, be expected to be assessed on what they have not had the opportunity to learn. Our main priority is that schools and colleges should be able to continue to prioritise their teaching to cover the key points and concepts which will enable learners to progress through each subject area. Assessment should be organised to support what learners are learning to the best of their abilities.

The current adaptations for 2021 published by WJEC last summer will remain. Teachers will be able to use the range of work that learners will have produced between the start and end of their courses in order to support the determination of an

appropriate grade for each learner. This range of evidence should contribute to a Centre Determined Grade for each learner in each qualification.

It will be for the centre to decide and organise any internal process to provide confidence and consistency of approach. Each centre's process (for assigning the final Centre Determined Grade) will be quality-assured by WJEC; WJEC will not assure each individual grade. As the grade is awarded by the centre, if the learner is unhappy with the Centre Determined Grade, they will be able to appeal to their centre. If a learner is unhappy with the outcome of their appeal to their centre, there will be an appeal route to the WJEC on the grounds that their centre has not followed their process for assigning the grade.

The Design and Delivery Advisory Group further proposes that it works with QW and WJEC to develop an assessment framework. This guidance will help schools and colleges decide on the types of evidence (NEA, classwork, homework, WJEC-produced materials) to reach and evidence their Centre Determined Grades. To support teachers and lecturers, WJEC will develop a set of adapted assessment materials reflecting the currently-adapted units. These will be parts of past papers which would have been used for the previous proposal of 'internal' or 'external' assessment' elements in the three pillared approach. These materials will be made available to schools and colleges to support them in undertaking assessment. WJEC will also provide mark schemes and notional grade boundaries to support teachers and lecturers in their marking. There should be no constraints on how or when these are used and no oversight by WJEC or others: the materials would be purely provided to schools and colleges to support assessment and to help provide evidence. These assessments could also help to motivate ongoing learning in these challenging times and could also provide helpful evidence to support grading decisions in any appeals process. As such, they should be viewed as a helpful resource for teachers and lecturers to use. They have been tested for equalities and used for previous cohorts. These assessment materials, whilst not mandatory, should be ones that teachers and learners would be keen to use to support teaching and learning and for providing helpful evidence for teacher judgement.

The assessment framework that needs to be developed should also provide guidance and advice on the process to arrive at a final grade (including details of the WJEC assessment materials option, approaching the judgements, arriving at a final grade and rationale employed). It will be for the teacher/lecturer to decide how to use the different forms of evidence, and there may be varying amounts of evidence based on the context of the learning experience of individual school cohorts. It should also contribute to the development of the wider quality assurance processes, including the mapping out of how a centre should reach its grades for each learner, ensuring that these processes have gained support prior to submission of final grades and a sample of decision-making records to WJEC.

The notion of Centre *Determined* Grades confirms clearly that there will be no intervening statistical process: however, as part of the development of an

assessment framework the Design Group and partners will consider approaches to promote consistency across Wales.

The Group recognises the disruption to the planning of the non-examination assessment (NEA) that has been further complicated by the move to remote learning. The Group proposes that the formal assessment of NEA by WJEC does not go ahead, to remove this pressure from schools and colleges. However, the Group considers that the NEA can be used by schools and colleges as part of the evidence used for their determination of grades.

The Group also proposes that learners in Year 10 who are completing their qualifications this year will be eligible for a Centre Determined Grade, as will learners in Year 12. Similarly to 2020, as Year 12 learners will receive a grade rather than marks, it will not contribute to their qualification in Year 13: however they will have certification for the learning that they have achieved this year which will be valuable for their motivation and progression, including a significant contribution to support their applications to HEIs through the UCAS process.

The approach being designed puts trust in teachers' commitment to prioritise core teaching and learning in the time available, and their knowledge of the quality of their learners' work. We have sought to make the approach as simple yet flexible as possible, and to maximise learning in the remaining time available.

If this way forward is accepted by yourself and Qualifications Wales, the DDAG members are committed to supporting both QW and the WJEC in the next steps, and to support an approach to professional learning to help ensure that teachers and lecturers are able discharge these responsibilities during such challenging times. Working at pace, the Group will turn to the assessment framework in the coming weeks, to support the development of guidance on evidence, grading, quality assurance and appeals. The Group will also consider how private candidates can be accommodated in this approach, recognising that many were unable to achieve a qualification under the centre assessment grade approach in 2020 which we must seek to avoid in 2021. Equalities issues will be embedded throughout this consideration, as it has throughout our considerations to date. The Group will also consider the Skills Challenge Certificate. These are significant and challenging issues and I am grateful for the continued professionalism of the Design and Delivery Advisory Group members and their efforts to develop an approach to support learners. Sub groups have been chaired by three of our members – Marc Belli, Sarah Sutton and Mark Leighfield, for which I am very grateful.

The coming months are crucial for our learners and the Group is totally committed to supporting their wellbeing, securing approaches that affirm the best that we can do in terms of equalities and equity, and a commitment to ensuring that teachers and lecturers can prioritise the key areas of learning required so that our class of 2021 will not be forever disadvantaged by a lack of knowledge of the core concepts in each subject, or by being assessed for things that they cannot possibly know.

There is a considerable amount of work yet to do in these challenging times, but it is crucial that teachers and learners are able to get on with their work to ensure the best progression possible for each of our learners.

*Geraint Rees*

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