Kirsty Williams AS/MS
Y Gweinidog Addysg
Minister for Education

Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

10 November 2020

Dear colleague

I am writing to you to confirm my intention to direct Qualifications Wales that there should be no end of year exams for GCSE, AS and A level qualifications in 2021.

The primary reason for my decision is down to fairness; the time learners will spend in schools and colleges will vary hugely and, in this situation, it is impossible to guarantee a level playing field for exams to take place.

- Instead of exams, we intend to work with schools and colleges to take forward teacher-managed assessments.
- These should include assessments that will be externally set and marked, but delivered within a classroom environment under teacher supervision.
- My expectation is that these will form the basis for centre-based outcomes which will be linked to an agreed national approach to provide consistency across Wales.

I have heard first hand from many learners about how worried they are about the prospect of taking exams and the pressure they feel under to get through as much course content as possible.

I have been clear from the beginning that my over-riding priority for any approach to qualifications in 2021 is to ensure that learners in exam years develop the knowledge, skills and experience that they need to confidently progress to their next steps – whether that is employment, training or further and higher education.

Removing exams frees up the entire summer term which is normally focused on preparing for and sitting exams, for additional teaching and learning.

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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.

A Design and Delivery Advisory Group has been set up and will meet this week, chaired by Geraint Rees. The proposed approach to centre-based outcomes, an appeals process and arrangements for private candidates, will be developed by this group, involving school and college leaders, supported by Welsh Government and advised by Qualifications Wales and WJEC.

My intention is for this work to be finalised in December so that guidance and supporting materials can be in place for the start of the spring term.

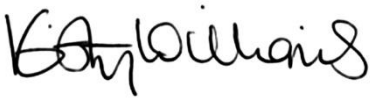
While done for the best intentions, I can give you reassurance that the first assessment activities will not need to commence until the latter half of the spring term.

We have engaged with universities across the UK and have been assured that this decision will not disadvantage Welsh learners as long as our alternative arrangements are robust and transparent and I am confident that they will be.

The situation for Vocational Qualifications is more complex and will require extra work. Welsh Government officials will continue to support Qualifications Wales as they work closely with other regulators to ensure a pragmatic approach that works in learners' interests and gives them clarity about the way forward.

I will write to you again to update you on progress.

Yours sincerely



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