



By email to all schools and colleges in Wales.

October 2016

## Overseeing the November 2016 GCSE exam series

Dear colleague

Before each exam series, we write to all schools and colleges to explain our approach to overseeing the award of GCSEs, A levels and the Welsh Baccalaureate. In this letter, I will be focusing on the GCSE qualifications that learners will be sitting this November.

### The November 2016 series

The new GCSE Mathematics – Numeracy and GCSE Mathematics qualifications will be assessed and awarded for the first time this November. As we explain below, these qualifications are significantly different to the previous Mathematics GCSE and we will be taking an especially close interest in their assessment and award.

This November is also the penultimate opportunity for candidates to re-sit legacy GCSE qualifications in Mathematics, English Language and Welsh.

### Expected early entries for the two new GCSEs in mathematics

Provisional entry data collected by WJEC gives us an early indication of entry patterns for the new GCSE Mathematics and GCSE Mathematics – Numeracy. We use this data to help plan our approach to overseeing the award and to

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interpret the results. In total we expect over 50,000 entries for the two new qualifications: approximately 29,000 entries for GCSE Mathematics – Numeracy and 23,000 for GCSE Mathematics. This equates to over 90% of the national cohort sitting the GCSE Mathematics – Numeracy qualification and around 60% of the national cohort sitting the GCSE Mathematics qualification. Nearly 21,000 candidates, 83% of the combined entries, will take both qualifications. Across the two qualifications, 60% of candidates will sit the intermediate tier, 23% will sit the higher tier, and 16% will sit the foundation tier.

### **First award of new GCSEs in November 2016**

There is a well-established approach to maintaining stability in outcomes when a new GCSE or an A level is introduced, known as 'comparable outcomes'. The principal aim of the approach is to ensure students taking the new qualifications are neither advantaged nor disadvantaged compared to those who took the legacy qualification. We know that this approach works well in situations where one specification is replaced with another. It is the approach that was used successfully this summer when awarding the new AS level qualifications.

The challenge of overseeing the first award of the new GCSEs being sat this November is that a single qualification is being replaced with two separate and distinct qualifications. In this scenario, we cannot rely solely on the comparable outcomes approach. We have therefore been working with WJEC to develop additional measures to supplement the comparable outcomes approach. These include additional statistical analysis of the performance of the cohort and arrangements for examiners to conduct more extensive and intensive reviews of candidate work at key grade boundaries during the awarding process.

We will shortly be publishing technical documents, called data exchange documents, that will set out the detail of how the comparable outcomes approach will apply to the award of these new qualifications.

## Outcomes for the new Maths GCSEs – what to expect

We will carry forward the standard of the previous GCSE Mathematics qualification to each of the new qualifications individually. This means that – all other things being equal – we expect broadly the same proportion of grades to be awarded in each of the new qualifications that would have been awarded for the legacy qualification. It follows that the overall proportion of candidates achieving a grade C or above in both GCSE Mathematics – Numeracy and GCSE Mathematics will be lower than the percentage of candidates awarded a grade C or above in each of these qualifications individually.

The new GCSE Mathematics and GCSE Mathematics – Numeracy qualifications are significantly different to the previous GCSE Mathematics qualifications – and indeed to each other – with each assessing different content and skills. This means that not every candidate will get the same grade on both of the new qualifications.

Statistical methods, including comparable outcomes, help to ensure that outcomes remain stable at the national cohort level when looking at the whole academic year. When taking new qualifications, however, schools and colleges may see more variability in their own results as they adapt differently to the demands of the new qualifications.

These new Maths GCSEs have been designed as linear qualifications, which means that all of the assessment must take place at the end of the course. So the exams being sat this November will assess learners on all of the content for the full GCSE. Learners sitting exams this November will have started their studies in September 2015, which means they will not yet have completed two years of study, which is the usual time we expect learners to need to prepare for these exams. Given the high proportion of the cohort entered for this November, it is therefore reasonable to expect that many learners will not achieve the best grade of which they are capable.

## **Predicting results**

We know that some commercial organisations are marketing assessment tools that claim to help predict the likely grades for learners who will be sitting the new GCSE Mathematics and GCSE Mathematics – Numeracy this November. Neither Qualifications Wales, nor WJEC have any involvement in the provisions of such tests and so we cannot comment on their accuracy or reliability. Any teacher using these products should apply their professional judgment and experience when interpreting the results obtained.

## **Issuing results**

The extent of the changes between the old and the new Maths GCSEs, coupled with the high proportion of early entries, present us and WJEC with some unique challenges when awarding these qualifications for the first time.

We have therefore decided to delay the issue of results, for the new GCSE Mathematics and GCSEs Mathematics – Numeracy qualifications only, by one week.

The results, for these two qualifications only, will be published on Thursday 19 January 2017, with results released to schools and colleges on Wednesday 18 January 2017. This will allow time for us and for WJEC to take all possible steps to ensure that the awarding process does not unfairly advantage or disadvantage learners taking these new qualifications.

Please note that the qualification results for all other GCSEs being sat this November will be published as planned on Thursday 12 January 2017 and released to schools and colleges on Wednesday 11 January 2017.

## **Legacy GCSEs**

For GCSE subjects in which reformed specifications have been introduced, this will be the penultimate opportunity for candidates to re-sit the outgoing

('legacy') specifications. We have published details on our website of the arrangements for [re-sits](#) in all legacy GCSE, AS and A level qualifications.

### **Further information**

I hope you find this letter helpful. We give regular updates to schools and colleges on GCSEs, A levels and the other qualifications we regulate through our '*Slate*' newsletter. You can sign-up to receive this from our [website](#).

Yours sincerely

**Philip Blaker**

Chief Executive