



June 2017

Dear colleague

Summer 2017 exams

As the exam season closes, I am writing to you about GCSE, AS and A level qualifications this summer. This letter outlines our regulatory approach to awarding, changes to qualifications and changes to the post-results enquiry service.

This summer sees the first award of new GCSEs, AS and A level qualifications, as well as the new KS4 and Advanced Welsh Baccalaureate. We will be taking a close interest in the award of these qualifications in Wales, with a focus on ensuring that the relevant standard is maintained appropriately.

Qualifications that have not yet been reformed continue to be awarded across Wales, England and Northern Ireland. We are working closely with the qualifications regulators in those countries (Ofqual in England and CCEA in Northern Ireland) as part of an existing three country regulatory approach.

Awarding in summer 2017

There is a well-established approach to maintaining stability in outcomes when new qualifications are introduced, known as 'comparable outcomes'. The principal aim of this approach is to ensure this year's students are not unfairly advantaged or disadvantaged by being the first to take the new qualifications. This approach is able to compensate in situations where a small drop in performance may occur when new



qualifications are introduced. It is the approach that was used successfully last summer when awarding the new AS level qualifications.

In addition to adopting the comparable outcomes approach WJEC will undertake additional statistical analysis and implement arrangements for senior examiners to conduct more extensive and intensive reviews of candidate work at key grade boundaries during the awarding process.

The comparable outcomes approach is undertaken at whole cohort level and will ensure that variability in outcomes at the national level is limited. However, when a qualification changes, there can be more year on year variability than usual in the results for individual schools and colleges, as they may have taken different approaches to delivering the new qualification.

We will publish technical documents on our website, called data exchange documents, that set out the detail of how the comparable outcomes approach will apply to the award of these new qualifications.

New GCSE qualifications

Students in Wales are taking for the first time reformed GCSE qualifications in English Language, Welsh Language, English Literature and Welsh Literature. Additionally, this is the second opportunity to enter students for the reformed mathematics qualifications; GCSE Mathematics and GCSE Mathematics - Numeracy. Although the reformed GCSE Science qualifications are not being awarded until next summer, some of the new units will be available for students this summer. We have recently launched a campaign to highlight the changes to qualifications in Wales. Further information can be found on our [website](#).

New AS and A level qualifications

There are 14 reformed A level subjects available for the first time this summer: Art and Design, Biology, Business, Chemistry, Computer Science, Economics, English Language, English Language and Literature, English Literature, History, Physics, Psychology, Sociology and Welsh (First Language). Additionally, there are nine reformed AS subjects available for the first time this summer: Drama, French, Geography, German, Music, Physical Education, Religious Studies, Spanish and Welsh Second Language.

Legacy GCSEs, AS and A levels

For GCSE and A level subjects in which reformed qualifications are awarded this summer, this will be the last time that the outgoing qualifications will be available for re-sit. We have published details of the arrangements for [re-sits](#) in all outgoing GCSE, AS and A level qualifications.

Entries

On 15 June 2017, Ofqual published provisional entry statistics for GCSE, AS and A level qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. This data provides us with an early indication of changes in entry patterns, which is useful when interpreting the summer results. This summer there are some significant changes to the entry patterns in Wales; in particular, there has been a significant increase in Year 10 entries for GCSE English Language and both mathematics GCSEs. Overall, Year 10 entries account for 18% of the entry this summer. This change in the cohort may have an impact on the summer results; therefore, care will be needed, both in interpreting the summer results and in comparing them with previous years. The awarding process will only consider the performance of Year 11 students, so this change in the nature of the cohort will not impact upon the maintenance of standards.

We think that it's important to provide clarity on key factors influencing this summer's qualifications. So over the next two weeks, we will be [publishing a series of articles](#) focusing on the key changes to the new qualifications and what they might mean for results in August, along with some themed articles intended to increase understanding of the awarding process.

Changes to the post-results review service

We expect the marks given to students to be accurate first time; however, if a school or college believes an error has been made in the marking of an assessment, you will be able to request that the mark is reviewed. We expect marking errors to be corrected when they are found, but we do not expect an already appropriate mark to be replaced with an alternative mark.

We made changes to the way in which reviews of marking and moderation operate for GCSEs, AS and A levels last year. Following a pilot, Ofqual will be announcing the arrangements that will be in place for appeals in England this summer. To ensure consistency and fairness for students in Wales, we intend to align with the changes to these processes. We will write to you before the end of term to provide more detail.

Predicting results

We know that some commercial organisations are marketing assessment tools that claim to help predict the likely grades for students who will be sitting the new qualifications this summer. Neither Qualifications Wales, nor WJEC have any involvement in the provision 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.

Results release

We would like to remind schools and colleges that results are confidential until the official results days (17 August for GCE and 24 August for GCSE) and must not be shared with any person or organisation outside of your school or college.

Have your say!

As part of our monitoring of the summer examination series, we have been running an on-line survey to give students, teachers and lecturers an opportunity to give feedback about examinations. We have already received over 600 responses, but welcome more, so please encourage students and staff to complete surveys if they have not already done so. The [survey](#) is open until Friday 15 July.

I hope you find this information 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 by emailing comms@qualificationswales.org.

Yours sincerely



Philip Blaker

Chief Executive