

7 September 2022

Dear Jayne

Thank you for your letter outlining concerns about this summer's exams.

We understand the challenges faced by all in returning to formal exams and assessments this summer following the policy decision to cancel such exams and assessments in 2020 and in 2021.

WJEC implemented a range of measures to ensure that students taking exams and assessments were supported during the 2021-2022 academic year.

Following Qualifications Wales' policy decision to introduce adapted qualifications for students taking their exams and assessments in the summer 2022 series, WJEC published qualification adaptations for each specification in July 2021. Following a period of consultation these adaptations were published at the end of the previous academic year to aid teachers in planning for the 2021-2022 academic year. These adaptations were aligned to Qualifications Wales' [requirements](#) and, depending on the design of the qualification and/or assessments, included;

- streamlining assessment content
- reducing NEA (Non-Exam Assessment) requirements
- having optional questions or units.

We provided advance information in September 2021 for some qualifications where it was not possible to put suitable adaptations in place. Additionally, we provided advance information in February 2022 for a range of qualifications which already had adaptations in place.

We believe that the range of measures we took provided support to students, aiding them in planning their revision and in focusing on key aspects of the specifications that were subject to assessment this summer.

In addition to providing detailed information for teachers and for students and parents on the adaptations made to specifications for the summer 2022 assessments, we also provided a range of resources to support students in preparing for their exams and assessments. These included:

- blended learning resources
- knowledge organisers
- exam and NEA walk-throughs
- bridging resources (to support the transition from Year 9 to Year 10 GCSE cohort)

We also provided generic resources to support students' revision and well-being, which included a range of revision tips and templates, mental health and nutritional advice and guidance.

This information was made freely available to all students via our dedicated [student support webpages](#). We also provided student friendly support on [Instagram](#) to ensure we reached as wide a group of students as possible.

We provided a range of resources to support teachers, including additional sample materials and additional non-examination assessment guidance for qualifications where the design of assessments was more significantly altered this summer.

In designing the summer 2022 assessments, we followed our standard process to create assessments that effectively differentiate between students' performance, whilst being of a similar level of demand to those set in previous years. However, as we assess different aspects of specification content each year to ensure appropriate coverage of content over time, it is possible

for an assessment to be more or less challenging than in previous years. If the questions we set this year were considered to be more challenging, or not as clear as anticipated, and may have been open to differing interpretations, we reviewed the mark scheme and considered how marks could be assigned to as wide a range of responses as possible to ensure students were appropriately credited for showing what they know, understand, and can do.

We also took account of the level of demand of assessments in setting grade boundaries during the awarding process. We did this to ensure outcomes were as fair as possible for all students. As announced by Qualifications Wales last autumn, qualifications this summer were graded more generously than they were in 2019, but not as generously as they were in 2021. We worked with our assessment and subject experts to ensure we set appropriate standards this summer to meet this policy objective.

As in any exam series, we implement the [JCQ special consideration process](#), which is our standard practice. Special consideration was given to students who had temporarily experienced illness, injury, or some other event outside of their control at the time of the assessment. It was applied when the issue had a material effect on a student's ability to take an assessment or demonstrate their normal level of attainment in an assessment. Special consideration was usually given by applying an allowance of additional marks to each unit affected within a specification. The size of the allowance depended on the timing, nature, and extent of the adverse effect.

We are confident that the range of measures we took this year, across the full range of qualifications, resulted in students being awarded fair outcomes for their qualifications.

GCE Mathematics

We were aware that some students found a range of our GCE Mathematics assessment materials challenging this summer. There was very specific feedback provided on the content of the Unit 1 AS Mathematics question paper.

It is worth noting that A level Mathematics and Further Mathematics were part of the last group of qualifications to be reformed, with students following a one-year programme of study being assessed in the new specification for the first time in 2018, and those following a standard two-year programme of study being assessed in 2019, the last year exams were sat prior to the pandemic.

As stated previously, we wish to assure you that we set out to design assessments that were of broadly similar demand to those set in 2018 and 2019. However, we have observed that some of the questions that we considered to be straightforward challenged many students this year, whilst in other more demanding questions students performed better than when similar questions were set in 2019. We understand that the inclusion in the Unit 1 AS Mathematics paper of the topic 'know and use the function a^x and its graph, where a is positive', under 2.1.6 of the specification content, and with links to depreciation methods, confounded many students. In marking this question, as well as other challenging questions in the paper, we ensured that mark schemes were adapted to appropriately reward students wherever possible to do so. When setting grade boundaries for the Unit 1 paper, as well as ensuring we were implementing this summer's generous grading policy, we also accounted for the level of difficulty of questions.

91.85 % of 17 year-old students entered for AS Mathematics this summer achieved an E grade or above compared to 84.56% achieving the same grade in summer 2019. 49.71 % of 17 year-old students entered for AS Mathematics this summer achieved an A grade compared to 36.46% achieving the same grade in summer 2019.

A level English Language and Literature

In printing over 1,730,000 examination papers across a range of qualifications in Wales this summer, we implemented our standard quality assurance process at each stage of the development process. Our thorough process checks identify errors as the materials are developed, which are

addressed and rectified prior to the materials being despatched to schools and colleges. Regrettably, our quality assurance processes did not identify the collation issue that impacted some optional questions on one of our A level English Language and Literature exam papers. We issued an apology to the 153 students from the 22 schools and colleges in Wales impacted by the collation error.

We implemented a range of measures to minimise the impact of the error and to ensure that students were not adversely affected. These included:

- identifying each student taking the optional questions impacted by the collation error
- considering any adjustments needed to the mark scheme as some students answered Section B before seeing the questions set for Section A
- senior WJEC staff contacting staff at each of the affected schools/colleges to discuss how the error specifically impacted their students
- considering the impact of the error during the awarding process
- applying a special consideration tariff to all impacted students
- reviewing the marks achieved by each impacted student in both Section A and in Section B
- reviewing the marks achieved by each impacted student in unit 3 compared to units 4 and 5
- following our reviews, making any additional adjustments to final unit 3 marks.

We believe these measures resulted in students being awarded fair outcomes for the impacted unit and for the A level English Language and Literature qualification as a whole.

We informed all impacted schools/colleges of the measures we took, the day before results were issued to students, and provided them with contact details if they wished to discuss the situation further.

At the end of each summer series we undertake a lessons learnt review, to learn from our experiences and to make any identified improvements for future series. We have already identified and implemented actions to improve our final quality assurance processes

Although there were some reports of students experiencing challenges with this summer's examinations, we are also aware that many did not find the period as daunting as they had feared and welcomed the return to exams. As outlined in this letter, with an acute focus on students, we took a range of measures to ensure the summer 2022 exam series went as smoothly as possible.

Where issues were reported, we took measures to ensure that students were not adversely impacted and were issued with fair qualification results so they could progress to the next steps of their education or into the world of work.

We look forward to meeting with the Committee in due course where we will be happy to further discuss these themes or any other themes you may wish to explore.

Your sincerely



Ian Morgan
Chief Executive