

Qualifications Wales
Arrangements for the summer 2020 exam series
13 May 2020

1. The NASUWT welcomes the opportunity to comment on the aims that will underpin the statistical standardisation model for the issuing of grades for learners this summer and the appeals process for the summer 2020 exam series.
2. The NASUWT is the largest teachers' union in Wales representing exclusively teachers and school leaders.

GENERAL COMMENTS

3. The NASUWT recognises that the partial closure of schools from 23 March 2020 was driven by a clear public-health imperative. A consequence of this decision has been that examinations and other assessments scheduled to take place this summer have now been withdrawn.
4. The NASUWT is also aware that the Minister for Education published a Direction under Section 53 of the Qualifications (Wales) Act 2015 to have regard to the Welsh Ministers' policy regarding the cancellation of exams and the subsequent determination of grades.¹
5. The NASUWT is clear that the qualifications associated with these examinations are of critical importance for students, given their function in accrediting learning and as a gateway to future employment, as well as higher and further education. It was, therefore, entirely appropriate to give the direction that candidates should be awarded qualifications with a grade that reflects their work on the basis of the best available evidence.

¹ Kirsty Williams, Minister for Education Letter to Qualifications Wales about the policy on the cancellation of exams and how to determine grades, 6 April 2020
<https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2020-04/gcse-as-and-a-level-cancellations-letter.pdf>

However, it is essential that the exceptional arrangements required to give effect to this direction are proportionate and manageable for centres and their staff, while reflecting the fact that the education system and its workforce are operating in extraordinary circumstances.

6. The NASUWT notes that the guidance from Qualifications Wales (QW) states that the centre assessment grades submitted to the WJEC must reflect a fair, reasonable and carefully considered judgement of the most likely grade learners would have achieved if they had sat their exams this summer and completed any non-exam assessment.²
7. The Union also notes that the two principal aims of QW are:
 - to ensure that qualifications, and the Welsh qualification system, are effective for meeting the reasonable needs of learners in Wales; and
 - to promote public confidence in qualifications and the Welsh qualification system.
8. The NASUWT believes that to ensure public confidence it is essential that there remains comparability of qualifications across the UK, particularly where the titles of GCSE and A-level are in common usage. The Union therefore insists that QW works closely with Ofqual to ensure this.
9. The NASUWT also welcomes the statement that the Welsh Government has confirmed that centres will not be held to account for their performance on the basis of these grades.
10. The Union further welcomes the assertion by QW that there is no requirement for centres to set additional mock exams or homework tasks, and that work completed after 20 March, when schools were closed, should not be considered when making judgements on centre assessment grades. The NASUWT is aware of some centres that intend to require students to attend onsite sessions in order to complete mock examinations and other assessments, or to complete assessments for use in the determination of centre-assessed grades and rank ordering at

² Qualifications Wales, *Summer 2020 grades for GCSEs, AS and A levels, and Skills Challenge Certificate (SCC) Information for Centres on the submission of Centre Assessment Grades*, 3 April 2020, <https://www.qualificationswales.org/english/publications/information-for-centres-on-the-submission-of-centre-assessment-grades/>

home, in direct contravention of this. The Union would expect QW to take action to ensure that this does not happen.

11. Additionally, the NASUWT maintains that any of the arrangements required by QW, the WJEC or the Welsh Government must take into account the exceptional circumstances in which teachers, headteachers and heads of centres are working, and that none of these requirements add to the stress or workload of staff.

SPECIFIC COMMENTS

12. The NASUWT offers the observations and comments that follow in relation to the questions posed on the consultation response form. The Union is content for this response not to remain confidential.

Q4. Learners for whom a qualification-level centre assessment grade and rank order are submitted will receive a grade.

a. To what extent do you agree with this aim?

13. The NASUWT agrees with this aim.

b. Please clearly explain the reasons for your answer in the space below.

14. As noted above, one of the principal aims of QW is to ensure that qualifications, and the Welsh qualification system, are effective for meeting the reasonable needs of learners in Wales. Therefore, the aim that all learners for whom a qualification-level centre assessment grade and rank order are submitted will receive a grade is essential to ensure confidence in the system.

Q5. The outcomes for summer 2020 will be broadly similar to those in previous years.

a. To what extent do you agree with this aim?

15. The NASUWT agrees with this aim.

b. Please clearly explain the reasons for your answer in the space below.

16. The NASUWT notes that the final grades issued to learners will be the result of a fair and robust process using the information provided to the WJEC by centres, and the statistical standardisation model developed by the WJEC and agreed with QW. The processes applied will be transparent and deliverable this summer.

NASUWT

*The largest teachers' union in Wales
Yr undeb athrawon mwyaf yng Nghymru*

17. It is essential that learners from previous years are also treated fairly in this process.
18. The Union also notes that the statistical standardisation model will need to combine a range of evidence, including:
 - expected grade distributions at national level;
 - results in previous years at individual centre level; and
 - the prior attainment profile of learners (including attainment in qualifications and units that have already been awarded).
19. The NASUWT notes that these models are still in development. It will be important for QW to communicate the outcomes of this development to the NASUWT and other relevant stakeholders. Given the exceptional circumstances within which grades are being awarded this year, the maintenance of public and professional confidence in these arrangements will require as much transparency as possible about the nature of the model being used and the reasons for its adoption.
20. The NASUWT recognises that centre-assessed grades and rank ordering are important components of the process for the awarding of grades. However, given the impracticality of implementing any form of external moderation in the context of qualifications that to a significant extent have not been designed to be dependent on teacher assessment, there is a need to consider carefully the weight that should be given to this information in relation to other indicators of likely student performance.
21. It is essential that learners from previous years are also treated fairly in this process.

Q6. A statistical standardisation model which uses historical evidence of centre performance and the prior attainment of learners, along with the centre assessment data, is likely to be the fairest approach and produce more accurate calculated grades.

a. To what extent do you agree with this aim?

22. Although the NASUWT would agree with this aim, there are nevertheless some significant concerns that the Union has in it being achieved.

- b. Please clearly explain the reasons for your answer in the space below.
23. The Union notes that the statistical standardisation model will also need to combine a range of evidence, including:
- expected grade distributions at national level;
 - results in previous years at individual centre level; and
 - the prior attainment profile of learners (including attainment in qualifications and units that have already been awarded).
24. The NASUWT notes that these models are still in development. It will be important for QW to communicate the outcomes of this development to the NASUWT and other relevant stakeholders.
25. As noted above, the weighting given to each of these elements will be crucial in ensuring that the model is robust and provides confidence in all stakeholders. In particular, the demonstration by research that teachers are able to secure a high degree of accuracy in determining rank orders of eventual candidate performance suggests that an approach that gives emphasis to aligning expected distributions of outcomes to rank orders is likely to be more accurate and to reflect the true ability of the current cohort.
26. The Union is concerned as to how the model will take into account the circumstances of small centres, centres without historical outcome data, and centres with no or limited prior attainment data. Given the exceptional circumstances within which grades are being awarded this year, the maintenance of public and professional confidence in these arrangements will require as much transparency as possible about the nature of the model being used and the reasons for its adoption.

Q7. As far as possible, we should ensure that the process for awarding grades in summer 2020 will not disadvantage groups of learners, including those with protected characteristics, relative to previous years.

a. To what extent do you agree with this aim?

27. The NASUWT agrees strongly with this proposal, as it is essential.

b. Please clearly explain the reasons for your answer in the space below

28. The NASUWT agrees strongly that the responsibility for correcting any bias that may be inherent in the grading system to be adopted this summer should rest with QW and the WJEC in the development of the statistical standardisation model and in the implementation of it. As previously stated, this must be shared with the NASUWT and other stakeholders.
29. The responsibility of centre staff should be to provide a fair and objective professional judgement of the grade that a candidate would have been likely to receive, and a rank order of all candidates entered for a subject had the examinations proceeded as scheduled. Centres should be clear that the information used to reach these judgements has been generated in the context of their duties and responsibilities under relevant equalities legislation. The fairness and objectivity of judgements may be supported by means of professional dialogue between colleagues with recent and relevant knowledge of candidates' progress and achievement.
30. As QW notes, while there is some evidence that teacher assessments may be subject to bias, there is no clear evidence of the extent or impact of this bias or the degree to which the impact and extent differs from that associated with the assessments that the system to be introduced this summer will replace.
31. It would be highly problematic for centres to attempt to modify teachers' grade assessments or rank ordering to account for any systemic bias, as they would have no clear and consistent criteria by which to do so validly and reliably. Such an approach would risk exacerbating any disadvantage, given the different approaches that centres might be likely to adopt in this respect.
32. Consequently, it is critical that all possible steps are taken to ensure that the statistical standardisation process takes account of the potential for the process adopted for awarding this summer to be subject to bias. The NASUWT agrees that the application of an approach in which outcomes for centres would be largely benchmarked against performance in previous years would reflect the existing relationship between centre results and the demographic composition of cohorts. It would, thereby,

help to prevent any additional bias arising from the application of the exceptional awarding model. However, as noted in the consultation document, such a model would rely to some extent on an assumption that centre demographics are relatively constant over time. It will be important for QW to assure itself that any such assumption is sound, as candidates should not be disadvantaged as a result of an overarching assumption that does apply in respect of their centres' circumstances. If this consideration is identified as significant, it will be critical for QW to ensure that it is remedied effectively in the final statistical standardisation model. The NASUWT notes that, to some extent, QW envisages adopting such an approach, although further details of QW's intentions in this respect would be helpful.

33. On balance, the NASUWT accepts as appropriate QW's intention not to incorporate an approach that would apply historical aggregate performance data for different groups of candidates to centre judgements, as it not would be possible to judge accurately the extent to which differences in centre assessments and rankings are the product of bias rather than a fair and objective assessment of the likely performance of each candidate. As QW notes, such a process would involve overruling the judgements of individual centres in respect of rank ordering, the accuracy of which is critical to the reliable operation of the model.

Q8. Processes for issuing grades in summer 2020 will use results from any qualifications and units already completed and awarded. As such, the evidence used may differ across qualification types.

a. To what extent do you agree with this aim?

34. The NASUWT accepts this proposal.

b. Please clearly explain the reasons for your answer in the space below

35. The NASUWT maintains that in order to achieve the most robust and fairest system, it is inevitable that evidence from existing awards should be taken into account.

Appeals Process

Q9. Learners who are dissatisfied with their results this summer will not be able to appeal against the professional judgement made by their centre, or the procedure used by their centre to arrive at this judgement.

a. To what extent do you agree with this proposal?

36. The NASUWT strongly agrees with this proposal.

b. Please clearly explain the reasons for your answer in the space below.

37. It is right that candidates are given an opportunity to appeal against the outcomes of the awarding process. The NASUWT notes that a requirement to establish an appeals mechanism was included in the remit to QW by the Wales Minister for Education, stating that: *'an avenue of recourse is available for those learners who do not believe that the process has been followed correctly in issuing their grades'*.

38. The approach adopted by QW will mean that only the statistical standardisation process used by the WJEC will be consistent in respect of the awards made this year. Due to the exceptional circumstances within which awarding is taking place, it is not possible to set out clear criteria against which centre assessments should be made and, instead, reliance has to be placed on teachers' professional judgements. It follows that there can be no basis on which a fair and objective challenge could be made to these judgements, given that there will be no criteria against which judgements could be appraised as valid or otherwise. There would also be no means of ensuring that such appeals could be assessed consistently in the absence of any criteria.

39. For these reasons, the NASUWT is clear that the appeals system should not permit scrutiny of the professional judgements on which centre-assessed grades and rank orders are based, nor allow a student to challenge their position in a centre's rank order.

40. The NASUWT maintains that a process that permits candidates to appeal against their grades on the basis that a centre's processes for assessing grades or determining rank orders is flawed would be impractical and unfair.

41. QW has not specified the precise nature of the evidence that must be used to determine rankings and grades, given the logistical public health-related challenges that would be associated with monitoring compliance with any such provisions and the need to begin the process of awarding grades at pace in extremely challenging circumstances. In the absence of criteria, it would also not be apparent how any judgement identified as flawed would be corrected consistently in all cases.

Q10. Centres will be able to appeal to WJEC on the grounds that they used the wrong data when calculating a grade, the calculated grades generated by the statistical standardisation model were incorrectly allocated or communicated and/or there was some other procedural failing on the part of WJEC.

- a. To what extent do you agree with this proposal?

42. The NASUWT partly agrees with this proposal.

- b. Please clearly explain the reasons for your answer in the space below.

43. While, for the reasons set out above, it would not be appropriate to allow candidates to appeal against centre assessments and rank ordering, the NASUWT can identify no objection in principle to allowing a centre to appeal against the application by the WJEC of the awarding process established by QW. This pertains to when the calculated grades generated by the statistical standardisation model are incorrectly allocated or communicated, or when there are reasonable grounds for suspecting that an administrative error has been made.

44. However, the Union is concerned that allowing centre appeals in this way could prompt a significant number of speculative appeals or result in centres being placed under pressure to launch appeals on the behalf of individual candidates. Where an appeal is made on behalf of an individual candidate, it should, therefore, be established that it may result in a reduction in that candidate's grade.

45. Furthermore, the NASUWT strongly maintains that no grounds for appeal should be established for centres in circumstances where no error can be identified in respect of the application by the WJEC of statistical standardisation, but where, instead, the results do not align with a centre's

expectations. Such an approach would risk significant unfairness as it would, in effect, permit the statistical model developed by QW and the WJEC to be suspended or amended in some instances, undermining the consistency that the exceptional arrangements seek to secure.

Q11. For results issued this summer, we should require WJEC to only consider appeals submitted by centres, and not those submitted by individual learners.

a. To what extent do you agree with this proposal?

46. The NASUWT strongly agrees with this proposal.

b. Please clearly explain the reasons for your answer in the space below.

47. Given the importance of rank ordering, it is difficult to envisage how any perceived error might be corrected without the disclosure of protected material in a way that would be consistent with QW's expectations in this respect, or that would not impact on the rank ordering of other candidates who may not be a party to an appeal.

Q12. If an appeals process identifies an error that would result in a lower grade for learners other than those cited in the appeal, then WJEC should not lower these grades.

a. To what extent do you agree with this proposal?

48. The NASUWT partly agrees with this proposal.

b. Please clearly explain the reasons for your answer in the space below.

49. As noted in the consultation document, the prospect exists that an appeal submitted by a centre could result in adverse impacts for the awards made for some of its candidates. Nevertheless, where a centre has genuine grounds to suspect that an error has been made in respect of the grading for a whole subject cohort, it should be allowed to seek redress in the interests of fairness to all entered candidates. It would not be appropriate for an individual candidate to be given an effective veto over any such appeal. As a corollary of this, requirements should ensure that no candidate is subjected to a reduced grade as a result of an appeal made in respect of a subject cohort.

50. However, as noted above, there remains the concern that this might prompt a number of speculative appeals.

Q13. WJEC should be required to take all reasonable steps to ensure that all appeal decisions are taken by people who were not involved in the process leading to the issue of those results.

a. To what extent do you agree with this proposal?

51. The NASUWT agrees with this proposal.

b. Please clearly explain the reasons for your answer in the space below

52. Given the likely challenges that may be associated with securing sufficient personnel to administer the appeals process for this summer's awards, the NASUWT does not object to a relaxation of existing requirements that would permit persons who have been involved in the calculation of results in a particular centre to be involved in the appeals process.

53. The WJEC should, nevertheless, take all reasonable steps to ensure that all appeal decisions are taken by people who were not involved in the process leading to the issue of those results.

54. It should be recognised that the current circumstances do not detract from the appropriateness of not allowing such involvement in normal circumstances. Provisions in this respect should make clear that such persons should only participate in arrangements for appeals where it can be demonstrated that best endeavours have first been taken to avoid the need to make use of this permission.

Q14. WJEC should be permitted to run a simplified appeals process whereby the decision-maker considers a report by the member of staff conducting the administrative review and any representations made by the centre in light of that report.

a. To what extent do you agree with this proposal?

55. The NASUWT agrees with this proposal.

b. Please clearly explain the reasons for your answer in the space below.

56. In all circumstances, the final decision-maker should not have had any prior involvement in determining the assessed grades or rankings for any centre involved in an appeal.

Q15. The only functions of the Exam Procedures Review Service (EPRS) this summer will be to review:

- 1. the extent to which WJEC was compliant with our requirements and with their own policies and procedures, or**
- 2. if any error was identified in the data used to generate the calculated grade(s) and/or in the grade(s) issued, whether that error was properly corrected.**

a. To what extent do you agree with this proposal?

57. The NASUWT agrees with this proposal.

b. Please clearly explain the reasons for your answer in the space below.

58. The NASUWT accepts that the proposals are measured and sensible in the current circumstance.

Integrated Impact Assessment

Q16. In relation to the regulatory impacts that we have identified in this section, are there any additional steps that we could take to reduce them? If so, please outline these steps in the space below.

59. The NASUWT is not aware of any further steps that are necessary.

Q17a. Are there any other positive or negative regulatory impacts (intended or unintended) that we have not already identified?

60. The NASUWT is not aware of any regulatory impacts not already identified.

Q18. In relation to the impacts that we have identified in this section, are there any additional steps that we could take to reduce them?

61. The NASUWT has not identified any additional steps that could be taken.

Q19a. Are there any other positive or negative impacts (intended or unintended) for individuals or groups who share protected characteristics that we have not identified?

62. The NASUWT is not aware of any impacts on individuals or groups who share protected characteristics not already identified.

63. The NASUWT believes that QW is correct in identifying Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils and refugees as those who will potentially suffer detriment as a result of the cancellation of examinations. It is right for QW to continue to consider any further steps that may be made to deal with these groups

fairly without having any unintended consequences on the generality of learners.

Q20a. Are there any positive or negative impacts (intended or unintended) on opportunities for people to use the Welsh language that we have not identified?

64. The NASUWT is not aware of any impacts on opportunities for people to use the Welsh language not already identified.

Q21a. Are there any positive or negative impacts (intended or unintended) in relation to treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language that we have not identified?

65. Similarly, the Union is not aware that there are any impacts in relation to treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language.



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For further information on the Union's response, contact Neil Butler, National Official for Wales.

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