

Education Minister Kirsty Williams provides further clarity on system to replace exams for general qualifications in 2021

Education Minister Kirsty Williams has today (Wednesday, December 16) provided further details of how the system put in place to replace examinations for general qualifications in 2021 will work.

In November, when confirming there would be no end of year exams for learners taking GCSEs, AS levels or A levels next year, the Minister said she would establish a Design and Delivery Advisory group that would support 'wellbeing, fairness and progression' for learners in 2021.

The group, chaired by Geraint Rees and made up of head teachers and college leaders nominated by regional consortia, ColegauCymru and local authorities, has now presented its proposals to the Minister after working closely with both Qualifications Wales and WJEC.

The group agreed that the system needed to be fair for all learners and flexible so that learners who have had more disruption than others are not unfairly affected.

The approach will ensure that teachers can design and plan teaching, learning around assessments in a flexible way to promote learners' wellbeing and support their needs.

The Minister has confirmed her intention is for general qualifications in Wales to be supported by a three pillar approach made up of:

- non-examination assessments,
- internal assessments
- assessments that are externally set and marked.

The decision has been supported by the news that the Welsh Government is investing an additional £1.9m in education resources to support learners in years 12 and 13 in preparing for their A Level assessments.

The revision tools, available on the WJEC website, include 'knowledge organisers' to help with learning key facts and information, exam walk-throughs and revision guides.

The resources are in addition to £7m being provided for schools and colleges to deliver mentoring and revision support programmes for learners in exam years.

Education Minister Kirsty Williams said: "I would like to thank Geraint Rees and the group of head teachers and college leaders for working at pace to develop these recommendations and for putting equity for learners at the centre of thinking.

"What I am providing details of today is a transparent and rigorous approach to support learners as they progress to their next steps

"It ensures that universities can be confident of the abilities of students from Wales through their qualifications, and it also promotes teaching, learning and consistent assessment across Wales as we all struggle to recover in different ways from the impact coronavirus has had on education.

“I was clear that any solution must be mindful of our learners’ well-being. I am satisfied we have an approach that is fair for all learners whilst minimising disruption to learning and maintaining confidence and trust in the integrity of qualifications in Wales.”

“Alternative options would have required centres to design assessment materials, develop and test marking schemes, and then be responsible for appeals in relation to these.

“This would take time away from teaching and learning and could also lead to inconsistency for learner experiences across Wales.

“I am also confident these plans minimise the impact on teacher workload - teachers and lecturers are already under a great deal of pressure and we do not want to add to this.”

This approach confirms that the internal assessments will not begin until after the spring half term, so schools can focus entirely on teaching until then. WJEC will provide further guidance and information in January.

The Minister also confirmed that the group has agreed to continue to work together in 2021 on more detailed issues, including support for teachers and lecturers, consider how differences in disrupted learning might be recognised drawing on existing special consideration process, the appeal process and the grade outcomes process and how to engage learners throughout the year.

The Minister continued: “The Welsh Government will now work with our stakeholders to ensure as much information is shared as soon as possible.

“It’s been a long term and I hope all learners, teachers, lecturers, school and college staff take a well-deserved break over the Christmas period.

“I have said many times that I am extremely proud of the way the education family has come together in Wales to face the challenges coronavirus has presented.

“We all need to be ready to come together once again next year to deliver for our learners who have already suffered so much.”

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More details on the three pillar approach

1. Non-examination assessments

These are currently managed within schools and colleges for many but not all subjects, and WJEC has already made adaptations to these. This will not change.

2. Internal assessments

There will be a broad window for internal assessment from February 22 to April 23.

Teachers and lecturers will be able to decide when and how to deliver assessments within this window, to embed it within their teaching plans, support the needs and well-being of learners and provide flexibility in case of disruption.

To ensure consistency of assessment experience and to reduce any additional demand on teachers and lecturers – assessment material will be provided from WJEC that schools/ colleges will be able to choose from.

The marking of these assessments will be undertaken by the schools and colleges, supported by guidance from WJEC and shared with WJEC to inform grade outcomes.

3. Externally set and marked assessments

The extended window for externally set and marked assessment will start on May 17 and end on June 29.

This will provide broad flexibility to enable teachers and lecturers to embed the assessments into teaching time, to be responsive to any disruption, and to support wellbeing.

Teachers and lecturers will decide how and when to deliver these assessments within the classroom so they do not create the pressure and anxiety of exams.

WJEC will provide information about the topics for the internal and external assessment to support teachers in preparing their learners for assessments

The flexible assessment windows are intended to allow for assessments to be embedded within teaching plans and to minimise disruption to learning so learners develop the skills and knowledge they need to confidently progress.

Hwb A Level revision resources:

<https://hwb.gov.wales/distance-learning/resources/a-level-revision-resources/>
