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PUBLICATION

# Design and Delivery Advisory Group: letter to the minister June 2021

Letter from the Chair of the Design and Delivery Advisory Group to Jeremy Miles MS, Minister for Education and Welsh Language.

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Dear Minister,

On behalf of the **Design and Delivery Advisory Group** I would like to congratulate you on your appointment as Minister for Education and Welsh Language as we look forward to working with you to ensure successful closure on the implementation of centre determined grades in Wales.

As you will be aware, the group, made up of headteachers and college leaders from across Wales, supported by expert assessment advice from Qualifications Wales and WJEC, has been working collectively, and in partnership with the wider education system, to develop policy recommendations for and to support

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the subsequent implementation of arrangements for qualifications in 2021. In their role, Design and Delivery Group members have shown dedication and commitment, going far above and beyond what was originally expected following their nomination to the group, and so I would like to begin by formally acknowledging their efforts and thanking them for their ongoing commitment. This gratitude extends to practitioners and leaders in schools and colleges up and down the country, whose collective efforts, and strong, ethical leadership, have been so crucial to the delivery of centre determined grades at pace, and at a time when so much else is also being asked of them.

I wrote to the former Minister for Education in **January** and **March** of this year providing an update on the work undertaken by the group. This included setting out where members had reached consensus on key actions to be taken forward, and highlighting some of the remaining challenges, as well as opportunities, during implementation. With the centre determined grade process now well advanced, with many centres now making provisional grades available to learners, I am writing to update you on progress made since my March letter and work planned going forward.

As set out previously, and to ensure proper and detailed consideration of key issues, a number of sub groups were established as follows:

- Assessment Framework and Quality Assurance, group chaired by Sarah Sutton, Ysgol Eirias, Conwy
- Professional learning and workforce considerations, group chaired by Marc Belli, Caldicot School, Monmouthshire & The Bishop of Llandaff High School, Cardiff
- Equalities and Learner Voice, group chaired by Mair Hughes, Ysgol Penglais, Aberystwyth
- Appeals, group chaired by Kay Martin, Cardiff and Vale College

While the work of these sub groups is now complete, resulting in fully published guidance on centre determined grades and scaffolded support in the form of

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exemplars and centre to centre discussions, these areas have continued to inform the work of the group, whose focus since March has been on operationalising and supporting the implementation of the agreed approach. This has included regular engagement with schools and colleges across Wales and a significant range of organisations associated with schools and the profession, with the aim of understanding and responding with agility to any challenges or opportunities presented. In doing so, we have worked closely with Qualifications Wales, WJEC and Welsh Government at a strategic level to help ensure the voices of learners are fully represented, equalities issues are considered, and that the final model is mindful of workload implications, being informed by those parts of the sector which will have the central role in delivering it.

I have set out below the key areas of practical policy consideration for the Design and Delivery Advisory Group over recent weeks.

## Awarding of provisional grades and appeals

The final **guidance on appeals** was published on 17 May and represented the culmination of a period of extensive stakeholder engagement in which members of the group, alongside Qualifications Wales and WJEC, reflected on feedback from key partners in the education system. The primary objective in developing this guidance was to support centres in ensuring learners had a meaningful, fair and workable route of appeals for qualifications in 2021, reflecting a key recommendation from the independent review of qualification arrangements in 2020 led by Louise Casella. The final version of the document, and the appeals process itself, was amended after a pause and reflect period to better ensure manageability, being mindful of workload implications for practitioners directly involved in the centre determined grade process, while retaining a meaningful and effective route for learners to appeal their grades.

Importantly, the group agreed that the scheduling of the appeals process should reflect the timing of the academic year, so that schools and colleges would be

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able to manage their part in the process, as far as practicably possible, within the confines of the school or college term. The group, therefore, sought a timeline where the centre review stages of the appeals process could occur during the summer term. The second stage of the appeals process where learners, if not content with the outcome of their centre review can appeal to the awarding body, would take place after results day and be undertaken by WJEC.

## External Quality Assurance

Throughout the development of the centre determined grade model, the group has prioritised the importance of appropriate levels of quality assurance as a vital part of delivering transparency, fairness, and confidence in grades awarded this year. This has included a focus and practical arrangements for supporting internal quality assurance, within and across departments at centre-level, as well as externally, seeking greater consistency across centres. With specific reference to the external elements of the process, the group has been in agreement that an element of external discussion and scrutiny, both in relation to a centre's approach to implementing the model, and the overall grade profile of centres, was essential in helping to provide public assurance and credibility. As such, the group has discussed the thinking behind, and provided practical policy advice on, the discussion of atypical grade profiles directly between WJEC and a centre over the course of recent weeks.

This has included providing reflections on the importance of the centres setting out the rationale for their overall pattern of results in order to support transparency and validity of approach, and the role this could play in the external quality assurance process. The group agreed this was an important element, both in terms of promoting confidence in the grades awarded, but also following feedback from centres who told us this was a step that they expected, but did not receive last year. In doing so the Group was clear that this was not about introducing a target or cap on grade outcomes, but to ensure that the rationale presented articulated the context behind grades awarded at a centre level.

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The Design and Delivery Advisory Group has held detailed discussions in relation to these processes, with a range of views expressed, particularly with regard to the workload burden that may be perceived to be associated with them. Within the group there have been different viewpoints put forward on the benefits and limitations of different approaches and their potential impact at a centre level. Notwithstanding this range of views, the Group understands the importance of these steps being put in place, as mentioned above, and namely to promote transparency, fairness, and confidence in grades awarded this year. With that in mind the members of the group are in consensus that these steps are essential, and have provided relevant feedback to WJEC to support them in operationalising them pragmatically.

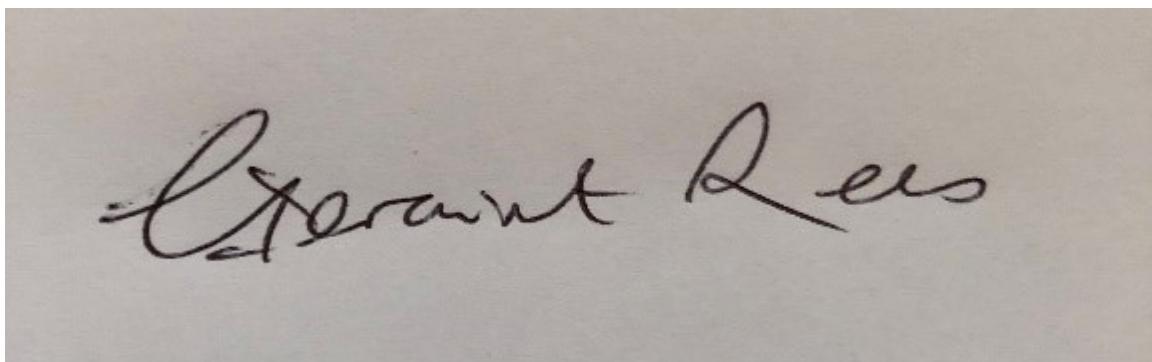
Throughout this time, and with the support and engagement of the Design and Delivery Advisory Group members, our focus has been on working across the education sector to enable all partners to come together in support of learners. I have appreciated the amount of effort and commitment that all partners have put into engagement to come to a single model, and I have seen significant compromise on all sides as we work together on this.

As a result of this collegiate and co-constructed approach taken in developing and implementing arrangements for qualifications this year, and despite the difficult circumstances presented by the pandemic, I am confident that we have developed a system for Welsh learners that is transparent, fair, equitable and credible. There is no doubt in my mind that the class of 2021 will have fully deserved the outcomes that await them, after a most challenging period in their lives. They may have missed out on a wealth of opportunities that would usually be open to young people, but through the collegiality of the education community they will not have lost the opportunity to transition to the next phases of their lives. It is our greatest hope, therefore, that learners will enjoy confidence in the grades awarded, and that this confidence will extend to the wider education system and employers, within and beyond Wales.

As I set out to the former Minister, the opportunity to sit on this group has built

some new capacity across the system as headteachers and college principals have developed deep learning on approaches to qualifications and we have all taken on this opportunity with the ethical commitment it so deserves.

We remain committed to continuing in our roles and will be on hand to provide ongoing support if required. We are clear in our commitment to ensuring the best possible outcomes for our learners, who have been through so much and worked so hard in the pursuit of their education this year. The continued commitment and collaboration of the whole education system in supporting this ambition remains essential as Wales recovers from this challenging period.



Geraint Rees  
Chair  
Design and Delivery Advisory Group for Wales, Qualifications 2021

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