

Cancel GCSE Exams in Wales

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 7 Chwefror 2022
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Petition title: Cancel GCSE Exams in Wales

There is uncertainty around the cancellation of exams. This adds extra stress to learners who haven't had a full year of education since 2019! By having Centre Assessed Grades, students will feel more secure. The mental health and well-being of students should be the first priority in this decision making process. Sign this petition now and help Year 10 and 11 reach their full potentials and get the grades they deserve.



1. Examinations in 2020

In March 2020, Kirsty Williams, then Minister for Education announced that the 2020 summer GCSE and A level exam series would not proceed. Learners were to be awarded a ‘fair grade’, ‘drawing on the range of information available’. Learners grades were to be awarded on the basis of information that schools and colleges submitted to WJEC. The initial plan was for those grades to be ‘standardised’ using WJEC standardisation models, approved by the regulator, Qualifications Wales. This approach was changed on 12 August 2020. Those who were due to sit their A levels were automatically be awarded the same grade they achieved in their AS-Level, if it was higher than that calculated by WJEC. A further change was announced on 17 August and grades were awarded on the basis of the information that schools and colleges had submitted.

2. Examinations in 2021

On 10 November 2020, Kirsty Williams announced that there would be no end of year examinations in 2021. On 20 January 2021, she announced that learners would have their GCSE, AS and A level qualifications awarded through a **Centre Determined Grade** model. This meant that grades would be determined by schools and colleges (centres) based on their assessment of learners’ work. Centres used a range of evidence, including non-exam assessments, mock exams and classwork, to judge a pupil’s “demonstrated attainment” and award them an appropriate grade.

3. November 2021 examinations

GCSE examinations in November 2021 proceeded as usual prior to the pandemic. November exams are generally taken by those who are resitting GCSEs in order to obtain a better grade. There are also ‘early entry’ candidates who may take some exams before the end of the school year. These candidates have an opportunity to sit the exam again in the summer examination series. A limited number of subjects are available in the November series compared to the summer series. In November 2021, reformed GCSEs in Mathematics, Mathematics – Numeracy, English Language and Welsh Language were taken by learners in Wales.

4. Summer examination series 2022

In March 2021, [Qualifications Wales announced](#) that there would be exams in summer 2022. They confirmed this again on [5 January 2022](#) stating that any decision to cancel would be made by the Welsh Government.

Qualifications Wales said that the assessment requirements for WJEC GCSE, AS and A levels, Skills Challenge Certificate **qualifications would be adapted to recognise the impact of lost face-to-face teaching** and learning time during the pandemic. Qualifications Wales have also said that if there are further substantial periods of disruption that results in the cancellation of future exam series, **contingency arrangements** will be put in place. – these would be similar to those for 2021 but refined following lessons learned – [guidance](#) was published in November 2021.

The Welsh Government have said repeatedly that their intention is that exams go ahead this year. At the [Committee for the Scrutiny of the First Minister](#) (16 December 2021), the First Minister explained the reasons why the Welsh Government wanted exams to go ahead:

- **Parity with the rest of the UK** – for those applying for a university place outside Wales, the qualification should have equal status with learners in other jurisdictions who also plan to hold to hold exams this summer.
- **Equity** – using the system in place for summer 2021, the performance of young men from working-class backgrounds fell back.

The First Minister said

‘truthfully, that is at least partly a reflection of the assessment method. Young people from those backgrounds do better in exams; they often exceed the expectations of their teachers, and exams give them the opportunity to do that, and, for reasons of equity, we want to go back to an element of exams, because we think it will help young people from those backgrounds to show what they can do’.

Qualifications Wales published their [Equalities Analysis of General Qualifications in Summer 2021](#) in October 2021.

In October 2021, Qualifications Wales [announced their approach to grading](#), that 2022 would be a transition year to reflect that it is a pandemic recovery period and learners’ education has been disrupted. In 2022 they will aim, for exam results

to reflect broadly a midway point between 2021 and 2019. In 2023 they will aim to return to results that are in line with those in pre-pandemic years.

5. Welsh Government Action

On 15 December the Minister for Education and Welsh Language announced funding of £24m to support learners impacted by the pandemic. Of this, £7.5m is to provide **extra support for learners in exam years**, with additional teaching time and learning resources - to help learners to develop their skills, knowledge and confidence, as well as supporting those who feel anxious about exams. The funding will be weighted towards schools with greater numbers of learners who receive free school meals. Over £7m will go towards supporting learners whose attendance has dropped during the pandemic. Dedicated support will be provided to support Year 11 pupils who have low attendance to complete their GCSEs or help them reach the next stage in their education or in starting a career, as well as support for pupils in other years. Funding will also be provided to support well-being and education for learners at Pupil Referrals Units.

In a Cabinet Statement on 25 January 2022, the Minister for Education and Welsh Language said:

I wish to reiterate to learners, schools and colleges that exams and assessments this year will go ahead, unless the public health situation makes it impossible for them to physically run – which we do not envisage. The intention to adjust grade boundaries to reflect disruption has already been set out. Adaptations to exam content have been put in place as well as prior notification of areas of examination, so that assessments are as fair as possible, and which will enable teachers to focus their time on the key areas for learning [...] I encourage all learners in exam years to talk to their schools and colleges about what additional support and flexibility might be available this year, to help them progress with confidence.

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in this briefing is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.