



**Qualifications & Assessment  
Cymwysterau ac Asesu**

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Dear Ms Finch-Saunders AS/MS

**Petition P-05-1025 Ensure fairness for students taking exams in 2021**

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to petitioners' concerns in relation to WJEC adaptations to general qualifications for summer 2021. I understand the reasons for petitioners' concerns as I and my colleagues appreciate the very difficult circumstances faced by schools and colleges across Wales.

The adaptations we have made to our GCSE, AS and A level qualifications for assessment in 2021 have been made in the context of the regulatory framework within Wales. Our aim has been to mitigate the issues faced by teachers and learners this academic year. However, it is important to note that in designing these adaptations we have had to act in such a way as to remain fully compliant with all regulatory requirements.

As you are aware, WJEC is in the unique position of offering approved GCSE and GCE qualifications in Wales and as such is subject to specific regulatory requirements of Qualifications Wales.

In the context of the summer 2021 assessments, there are two specific and additional regulatory publications from Qualifications Wales:

- *Adapting assessments for GQ Qualifications in 2021* ([here](#))
- *Requirements for Adapting assessments for GQ Qualifications (GCSE, GCE and Welsh Baccalaureate Skills Challenge Certificate) in 2021* ([here](#))

Within the first of these publications are Special Conditions of Recognition for adapting assessments for general qualifications in 2021. These require that:

- *'WJEC must consider whether or not it is necessary to Adapt assessments for GQ Qualifications which it makes available in spring and summer 2021, and make any such Adaptations required, in accordance with the principles and requirements set out in our document entitled 'Requirements for Adapting Assessments for GQ Qualifications (GCSE, GCE and Welsh Baccalaureate Skills Challenge Certificate) in 2021.'* (SPCWJEC1)
- *'Where WJEC Adapts an assessment under Condition SPCWJEC1, it must ensure that it takes all reasonable steps to – (a) comply with the principles published by Qualifications Wales and revised from time to time, and (b) only where there is a conflict between two or more of those principles, achieve a balance between those principles in line with any requirements published by Qualifications Wales and revised from time to time.'* (SPCWJEC2)

Within the second of these publications, Qualifications Wales has set out seven clear principles with which WJEC must comply in adapting assessments for general qualifications for 2021. To clarify for stakeholders the context in which the adaptations have been developed, we have quoted these principles in our GCSE and GCE adaptations booklets published on the WJEC website. The two below are those mentioned in your communication.

*3. WJEC must seek to ensure that qualification content, in general, is not reduced; however, content can be restructured so it can reasonably be streamlined, such as in relation to optional units.*

*4. WJEC must seek to ensure that the manageability of assessment is maximised, where this will allow for an increase in teaching time in order to minimise the impact on outcomes.”*

The content of our specifications remains unchanged, in compliance with Qualifications Wales’ principle 3. This principle was put in place to ensure parity with other jurisdictions, and to ensure that general qualifications awarded to learners in Wales in 2021 are not viewed less favourably than those awarded to learners in England and Northern Ireland. There has been no reduction in content for general qualifications in England, so the adaptations for general qualifications in Wales do not disadvantage Welsh learners in comparison with their peers in England.

However, as per the principle, we have restructured content by either streamlining our assessments e.g. in GCSE Mathematics, or by providing additional optionality, e.g. in GCSE Religious Studies. We have also clarified in our adaptations booklets that some subject content will not be assessed in 2021. We appreciate that teachers and learners have experienced different levels of disruption, and continue to do so. However, we would still encourage teachers, wherever possible, to deliver all aspects of content, in order to allow learners the opportunity to gain valuable skills and knowledge required for progression to the next level of study or employment.

In addition to restructuring content, we have revised our non-examination assessment (NEA) arrangements to make them more manageable for teachers and learners, as per principle 4. We are aware that centres in Wales need to follow specific social distancing guidance and that some teachers and learners are also having difficulty accessing appropriate facilities. Therefore, we have reduced the scope of assessments, relaxed the controls around assessments and allowed alternative evidence to be presented wherever possible. We trust that these changes will also help mitigate lost teaching and learning time.

We note reviewers’ comments about the variation in adaptations made across the suite of approved general qualifications. This is an inevitable consequence of the differences between qualifications, not just in terms of content but also in relation to the scheme of assessment. Some qualifications have been developed in response to approval criteria published by Qualifications Wales, some in response to subject principles published by Welsh Government, while others are closely aligned to subject-level conditions and requirements published by Ofqual, along with associated subject content specified by the Department for Education. Some general qualifications are unitised, others are linear, some are assessed solely by examinations, others include NEA. Within this context it is simply not appropriate to adopt a *one size fits all* approach and we took care to ensure adaptations are specifically tailored to each qualification.

In regard to petitioners' specific comments about why we have made adaptations to some subjects and not others, I offer the following comments. We have made adaptations to every approved general qualification apart from three:

- GCE English Language
- GCE English Literature
- GCE English Language and Literature.

This is not a decision we took lightly. We carefully considered a range of strategies for how we could adapt these qualifications. However, having tested ideas with a focus group and senior examiners, we reluctantly came to the conclusion that it was not possible to adapt these skills-based qualifications in a way that would genuinely benefit learners. In some cases, adaptations we considered would have had a detrimental effect. A full rationale for our decision regarding the three GCE English qualifications can be found in the [GCE Adaptations Booklet](#) pages 14-17. While it has not proved possible to adapt the assessment of these qualifications for 2021, we recognise that the disruption to teaching and learning is likely to impact on learners' depth of knowledge. In order to provide additional support for teachers preparing learners for these qualifications in 2021, we are hosting free monthly teacher network meetings which focus on strategies for teaching and learning.

We recognise that since we published the adaptations for the assessment of approved general qualifications in 2021, the situation in schools and colleges has remained very challenging. Teachers have told us that delivery of NEA is particularly difficult as some have limited access to specialist rooms and/or equipment, and there are limited opportunities to bring learners together to complete work under the required controlled conditions.

We continue to work with Qualifications Wales to ensure that our assessments are manageable while still retaining the rigour of previous years. As a consequence of this work, and to reflect teachers' concerns about NEA, we will be publishing further adaptations to our NEA later this month.

Taking account of these latest adaptations, we believe we have adapted our GCSE and GCE qualifications as far as we are able in the context of the regulatory framework within Wales. The well-being of learners and teachers is at the heart of all the adaptations we have made for assessment in 2021. However, we believe it is important to recognise that there are limits to how adaptations to the assessment of general qualifications can help address the very real challenges faced by schools and colleges in the 2020-21 academic year. They cannot accommodate local differences between centres, or the difficulties faced by centres located in one part of Wales in comparison with those located elsewhere in the country. Nevertheless, we will continue to do all that we can to support teachers and learners across Wales throughout this exceptional academic year.

Yours sincerely



**Ian Morgan**  
Chief Executive