

By email

Jayne Bryant MS
Chair of the Children, Young People and Education Committee

7 September 2022

Dear Jayne

In our letter of 1 August 2022 we provided interim information in response to your letter of 6 July 2022 about the summer exams. Now that the awarding process, undertaken by WJEC, is complete, we are providing a further response to inform you of how concerns have been addressed.

WJEC has now awarded all GCSEs, AS, A levels and Skills Challenge Certificates to learners and results were issued on the planned results days. As indicated in our earlier letter, we observed a sample of awarding committee meetings, including all those for any subjects where concerns or issues had been identified.

We are satisfied that WJEC were compliant with our regulations and policy requirements when making awarding decisions, and carefully considered the issues and concerns identified when exams were being taken.

As required, awarding committees considered a range of statistical evidence and looked at learner performance in the context of this summer series. They also considered the level of demand presented by the papers when identifying where grade boundaries should be set.

Difficulty of question papers this summer (including A Level Chemistry)

In general, there was no evidence from the awarding process that question papers were significantly more demanding this year than any other, though learners may have found them more challenging given the exceptional context for this year's exams.

It was never the policy intent that exam papers should be more lenient or demanding than previous years, indeed the papers used this year would have been developed pre-pandemic and modified to accommodate the adaptations made to assessment requirements for this year. This said, however well designed, there are always some small differences in question paper demand from year to year - as questions change and different parts of the specification are assessed. This is normal and accommodated through the way that grade boundaries are set by awarding committees each year - lower grade boundaries reflect a slightly harder question paper and higher grade boundaries reflect a slightly easier question paper.

Qualifications Wales

Q2 Building, Pencarn Lane
Imperial Park,
Casnewydd
NP10 8AR
☎ 01633 373 222



www.cymwysteraucymru.org

Cymwysterau Cymru

Adeilad Q2, Lôn Pencarn
Parc Imperial
Casnewydd
NP10 8AR
☎ 01633 373 222

In cases where performance was poor this summer, awarding committees recommended grade boundaries that were lower than in previous years. This was to account for the context of the series, the demand of the question papers and to align with the policy that was set for results to be broadly midway between those seen in 2019 and 2021.

In a few cases, before the results of each subject were signed off, WJEC made further amendments to the grade boundaries, to ensure that sufficient account was taken of this summer's context and the challenges experienced by learners, and to meet the policy position in relation to results.

AS Level Mathematics (Unit 1)

During our monitoring, we paid particular attention to the award of AS Mathematics, especially the Unit 1 paper (where most concerns were raised about the difficulty of the question paper and the fairness of some specific sub-questions). We raised specific concerns with WJEC over one particular part of a question (question 8c – a three-mark question).

We were concerned that while the question was within the scope of the overall requirements of the specification, the specific requirements of the question could be interpreted as having been removed by the adaptations. This presented an ambiguous position that could not be resolved until there had been consideration of information about how learners had performed in this question.

There are a variety of potential responses to this issue including two principal options a) removing the question from the award or b) setting slightly lower grade boundaries for the unit overall. After extensive consideration, WJEC decided to implement the second option. This decision was made because learners had attempted the question and some had achieved the marks available. A decision to remove the question from the award would have disadvantaged these learners. It was clear that many learners found this question paper difficult, and performance was poor in several questions. WJEC took this into account when setting the grade boundaries.

WJEC wrote to the centres affected to explain their response to the concerns raised and no further concerns have been raised with us.

A Level English Language and Literature (Unit 4)

There was a known error in the question paper collation for this unit where four missing pages in the printed question paper omitted parts of the optional Shakespeare texts. This will have affected learners differently depending on which optional Shakespeare text they were responding to and on how their exam centre dealt with the issue. We know from WJEC that where necessary, all exam centres accessed the on-line question paper, which did not have the missing pages, and their learners were able to complete the question paper, albeit with some unfortunate disruption.

WJEC took an individualised approach to this issue and checked with each exam centre how they had addressed the administration of the exam. They also looked at how learners performed in the affected questions and how this compared to how those learners had performed in other questions. In addition, their performance was considered relative to other learners not affected by the issue.

Performance in the affected question and unit paper was generally good and it was felt that in general terms the error had not significantly disadvantaged learners. WJEC followed up with each individual centre to consider the specific circumstances for each learner. Special consideration (a small uplift in marks) was applied to all learners who were impacted by the error and additional special consideration was also given to some learners who following discussion with exam centres were considered to have been impacted more negatively.

WJEC wrote to the centres affected to explain their actions and no further concerns have been raised with us.

As part of our follow up activities, we will be seeking to understand from WJEC what actions they intend to put in place to avoid any similar error in the future. We will review and monitor any proposed action plan to be assured that the actions have been completed appropriately.

We know that learners will have been very anxious about the return of exams and that this anxiety will have been heightened during the exam period and the build up to results being issued.

I hope this assures the committee that all concerns and issues were considered appropriately, and action taken where necessary. I have copied both WJEC and the Minister for Education and the Welsh Language into this response.

Yours sincerely



Philip Blaker
Chief Executive