

P-06-1237 Look at using Teacher Assessed Grades for learners unable to sit November GCSE exams as a result of a positive COVID test. Ensure fairer arrangements are in place for the May exams, Correspondence – Petitioner to Committee, 13.01.22

Response to JMEWL1175 in regards to P-06-1237

Thank you for the very thorough response, linked to relevant documentation. The response details all the adaptations that have been made to courses for GCSE as well as all the money being granted to schools to support learners. However, as I work in the secondary education sector, I can see first-hand that at present all of this funding is having very little to no impact on learners and the effects of Covid disrupted schooling. The response details that officials are talking to the education sector. There are very few staff/learners/parents who I speak to who think running examinations is fair this year. While I appreciate that in a 'normal' year, examinations are the fairest way to put our learners on an even playing field, this year has still been far from it.

Officials are said to be monitoring attendance of learners and teachers. How closely is this happening? Due to my son isolating, then one member of staff who teaches him isolating, followed by going straight into a mock exam series, there is one subject he has not had a lesson in since before October half term – another half a term with no teaching. How many other learners has this happened to? For those who have contracted Covid and had staff having to isolate, they are again at a disadvantage.

The response clearly explains the purpose of the November exam series – mainly for learners to resit if they wanted to improve grades from the previous year. However, as stated, it also allows some learners early entry. This was the case for my son's school. The fact there were no contingency plans in place shows no understanding of how schools adapt POLs (Programmes of Learning) and teaching to support and prepare learners for these exam series. It shows a complete lack of understanding as to how different schools in Wales prepare for exams across the year. Those unable to sit due to Covid have just been told they can resit in the summer. This already places them at a disadvantage as POLs have been rearranged to shift focus back to other exams that will be sat for the first time by the majority of learners. There will also be a shift in grading for summer 2022 – moving back towards pre-covid boundaries, again not allowing a level playing field for those unable to sit in November because of Covid (Qualification Wales letter 13/1/22). Learners

having to sit for the first time due to Covid will be treated differently to if they had been able to sit in November in terms of grading.

I am very aware of the course adaptations that have taken place to support learners taking GCSEs. However, in some subjects NEAs have been removed, adding extra pressure to the written exams. Unfortunately, this is now the case in four of my son's chosen subjects. In some courses, namely triple sciences, they have removed the practical NEA aspect while changing none of the course content for this year. Surely removing some of the course content and keeping the practical NEA would have been more beneficial to learners, allowing them to at least enter the exam with some marks behind them.

I appreciate the resources that have been developed by WJEC but how can you guarantee schools will be using these? Most subjects are still concerned that they will not cover course content. The money being pledged for this year group is unfortunately too late to have enough impact.

While I have seen the exam timetable for Summer 2022 and understand why exams have been spaced out to allow for any isolation periods, how can you guarantee learners won't suffer longer if they do test positive for Covid in the exam series. What contingency plans are in place for those? They will not have a chance to resit. The spacing out doesn't allow for learners to chunk their work and revision for specific exams. While it keeps them on a level playing field against peers this year, how can they be compared to learners in other years when entering the work and looking at grades on CVs?

On a personal note, since the disappointment of being unable to sit his exam, I have watched my able, laid back son turn into a shell of a boy who needed to be picked up off the bathroom floor over Christmas after suffering a severe panic attack. When speaking to the doctor the following day all he could talk about was the pressure he is feeling this year – a story that is being relayed by many, many learners. Today, (13/1) he watched as his friends opened their results and rejoiced. Tonight, we are trying to pick up the pieces again and trying to keep him motivated. These are the stories the officials need to be listening to and reporting back as this is the real impact of Covid. Money will not fix this in such a short space of time.