

**COUNCIL: 18 MARCH 2021**

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**EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT & SKILLS STATEMENT**

**AGENDA ITEM:**

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**School Return Update**

Building on the previous return of Foundation Phase pupils from 22 February 2021 and following announcements made at the end of February 2021, the Welsh Government is expected to confirm on 12 March 2021 the continued return of pupils to Primary and Secondary schools from 15 March 2021.

All Nursery and Primary schools, including Special schools, Specialist Resource Bases (SRBs) and Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) will return to in-school face-to-face learning for all learners from 15 March 2021. The Local Authority has encouraged the return of pupils as soon as possible from 15 March 2021, although we acknowledge the need for flexibility and local decisions when managing this.

In addition to the return of all Primary school pupils, learners in Years 11 and 13 in Secondary schools will return from 15 March 2021. Flexibility will be used to also bring Years 10 and 12 into school during the period from 15 March to 26 March 2021 where they can be accommodated. In addition, Years 7, 8 and 9 will have a reduced face-to-face provision for a check-in prior to Easter that will be focused on support for well-being in readiness for a return to onsite learning after Easter. The decision on what this looks like will be made at a local level.

All schools will continue to offer in-school support for identified vulnerable pupils and pupils of key critical workers from Key Stage 3 (KS3) and above. This in-school support will take place during normal school hours. The focus on supporting access to those learning remotely should continue for these learners attending school. Distance learning will need to be provided to all pupils KS3 and above when not receiving face-to-face learning in school.

Feedback from School Leaders indicates that the majority of learners have adapted well to distance learning, with the levels of engagement higher during this lockdown period than last year. It is clear that schools have made rapid progress in developing the skills needed to use online teaching platforms. Schools are carefully monitoring both engagement and the quality of provision. The Local Authority also continues to work with schools to ensure that all learners have access to appropriate devices and connectivity. It is recognised that some learners, often in some of the most disadvantaged communities, are facing challenges when expected to complete their school work at home. Schools are developing a range of strategies to engage with families and to meet the needs of all pupils requiring additional support.

## **Qualifications Assessment Arrangements 2021**

On 9 February 2021, Qualifications Wales wrote to all learners and centres in Wales to provide a further update on the arrangements for GCSEs, AS and A Levels, Skills Challenge Certificate and Essential Skills Wales qualifications for 2021. This followed the announcement made by the Welsh Government Minister for Education on 20 January 2021, which confirmed further changes to qualifications following further disruption to learning and the move to a Centre Determined Grade model.

The letters to learners and centres included the first version of guidance for centres that provides high level information about the requirements for producing Centre Determined Grades, based on pieces of work that candidates have completed over the course of study. It provides an overview of what decisions teachers need to make, how they should make those decisions and what types of evidence should be used to support those decisions. Reference is also made to decision making records, quality assurance processes and the review of appeals processes which requires centres to implement internal processes to allow learners to request a review of the centre's judgement of their grade and/or correct any factual errors. Qualifications Wales has acknowledged that this first version of the guidance does not answer all the questions that centres may have, but they wanted to get information to centres as quickly as possible and will provide periodic updates to the guidance document as it is developed.

It was confirmed that the awarding of the Skills Challenge Certificate qualifications will align with the approach for awarding Approved GCSEs, AS and A level qualifications in summer 2021. In addition, schools and colleges will be able to provide a Centre Determined Grade for learners who are unable to access the usual methods of assessments for Essential Skills Wales qualifications due to the impact of Covid-19.

The WJEC has continued to update its guidance and FAQs for learners and centres including:

- a timeline giving details of when further information will be made available.
- Initial Qualification Assessment Frameworks: summarising key requirements of each qualification, assessment materials to be provided by WJEC, how learners may provide evidence of knowledge, skills and understanding, and advice about determining grades.
- a WJEC Assessment Creation Guide: a guide for teachers to assist them in the development of assessment materials.
- Non-Examination Assessment (NEA) Guide: a guide to the adaptations made for NEA in summer 2021.
- Qualification Adaptations: a guide to the adaptations made to the assessed content in summer 2021.

It has also been confirmed that the A Level and GCSE results days will be earlier than usual in Wales on 10 & 12 August 2021. Exams and assessments will continue in vocational qualifications where they are needed for students to demonstrate the necessary professional standard in an occupation. Further details regarding grades submission dates, quality assurance and outcomes of a consultation with schools regarding the key grades descriptors will be provided in due course.

On 4 March 2021, Qualifications Wales confirmed the appeals process and routes for private candidates. There will be a three-stage process:

- Stage 1 – By June 2021, schools and colleges will share provisional centre determined grades with their learners. A learner can ask their school or college to review provisional grades and/or check for any errors before they are submitted to WJEC.
- Stage 2 – After results days in August 2021, a learner can appeal to WJEC that the grade judgement that their school or college has made is unreasonable and/or a procedural error has been made.
- Stage 3 – Following completion of the Stage 2 appeal, learners can request an Exam Procedures Review Service (EPRS) review from Qualifications Wales to check whether WJEC has followed their procedures correctly.

Final qualification grades will not be issued to learners until the results days, which are 10 August 2021 for AS and A Levels and 12 August 2021 for GCSEs.

Detailed arrangements for 'private candidates' are being finalised so that they can be awarded a grade this summer. Where a private candidate already has a relationship with a school or college, then arrangements can continue as planned. Where a private candidate does not have an established relationship with a school or college, Welsh Government is working with Local Authorities to ensure there are centres who will accommodate private candidates, and that these are available and accessible across Wales. Assessment of private candidates will be carried out in a similar way to other learners.

### **Young People Not in Employment, Education or Training**

Close work between the Youth Service, schools, EOTAS (Education Other Than At School) team, Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) and wider partners such as Cardiff and Vale College has helped keep the number of young people Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET) in Cardiff at below 2%. Our Youth Service provided a combination of targeted support with open access provision, but had to be innovative in its delivery to achieve the high level of support it was attaining pre-Covid. Emphasis has shifted to detached youth work and digital support, both approaches reaching thousands of young people and maintaining contact to provide information, support and guidance. Schools, Cardiff and Vale College and the PRU have also played an important part with extra classes being established to support the most vulnerable. Work will now focus on maintaining those places or finding places for post-16 young people who are NEET and this will be achieved by building on the base established with Children's Services, Housing and Cardiff Youth Justice Service in identifying vulnerable young people and providing a joint response.

### **Free School Meals/School Catering**

All pupils eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) will continue to receive supermarket vouchers until their individual school catering provision is restarted. In most schools, as interim and phased arrangements are ongoing, this is likely to be until at least the start of the summer term on 12 April 2021.

## **Music Service**

Staff from the Music Service continue to provide an online tuition service. As schools restart, the service will work them to agree the best practical date for the resumption of face-to-face tuition and the restart of ensemble rehearsals.

## **Additional Learning Needs (ALN) Provision**

As children return to school, the Multi-Disciplinary Forum will continue to operate, enabling Special schools to continue working closely with Health and Children's Services to coordinate support for learners with Additional Learning Needs (ALN) and their families. The forum has enabled effective risk assessments to be carried out for children with complex medical or behavioural needs.

The final ALN Code has been laid before the Senedd. The implementation plan has been modified, taking into account the additional pressures on schools in the context of Covid-19. Rollout of the new system will begin in September 2021 for new cases and for specific year groups who have needs at school action/school action plus. Cardiff schools are working together in clusters and are well-placed to begin implementation.

**Councillor Sarah Merry**  
**Cabinet Member for Education, Employment & Skills**  
**11 March 2021**