

15 September 2020

Dear

ATISN 14246

Thank you for your request of 19 August 2020, in which you asked for:

1. A detailed and comprehensive account of the Standardisation Models used to calculate 2020 results for A Levels, AS Levels, GCSE and Welsh Bacc Skills Challenge Certificate Qualifications.
2. Details of all data sets and criteria underpinning the models and explain what, if any, effort was made by the Welsh Government, Qualifications Wales and the WJEC to ensure that individual students would not have their results tied to pre-existing inequalities of outcome.
3. A detailed account of the algorithm that was used to calculate results, including mathematical calculations and formulas. This account to include comprehensive model examples using anonymised real data – showing the working in each case.

As advised in the acknowledgement letter of 22 August, I am unable to provide you with information regarding your third question as this information is not held by Welsh Government. The WJEC developed and tested the standardisation models and these were then approved by Qualifications Wales, as such you will need to ask these organisations for the additional information that you are seeking.

I can also confirm that The Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) gives individuals a right of access to recorded information held by a public authority at the time the request was received. It does not require an authority such as the Welsh Government to provide views or opinions where those views are not already recorded. This is confirmed by the Information Commissioner's guidance 'The Guide to Freedom of Information', page 7:

“The Act does not cover information that is in someone's head. If a member of the public asks for information, you only have to provide information you already have in recorded form. You do not have to create new information or find the answer to a question from staff who may happen to know it.”

To that end, the recorded information that we hold in relation to your remaining questions amounts to the following:

On 6 April the Minister for Education issued a letter of Direction to Qualifications Wales to have regard to the Welsh Government policy regarding the cancellation of the summer exams and the calculation of grades. This directed Qualifications Wales to have regard to:

“the Welsh Government policy that a fair and robust approach to issuing grades to the summer 2020 cohort of GCSE, AS, A-level and Welsh Baccalaureate Skills Challenge Certificate learners is adopted, which includes determining the approach centres must follow in arriving at judgements of their learners’ attainment standardisation of centres’ judgements and ensuring an avenue of recourse is available for those learners who do not believe that the process has been followed correctly in issuing their grades.”

Although this letter is exempt from release under section 21 of the FOIA (‘information accessible to the applicant by other means), I can confirm a copy of the letter is available here:

<https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2020-04/gcse-as-and-a-level-cancellations-letter.pdf>.

If you are dissatisfied with the Welsh Government’s handling of your request, you can ask for an internal review within 40 working days of the date of this response. Requests for an internal review should be addressed to the Welsh Government’s Freedom of Information Officer at:

Information Rights Unit,
Welsh Government,
Cathays Park,
Cardiff,
CF10 3NQ

or Email: Freedomofinformation@gov.wales

Please remember to quote the ATISN reference number above.

You also have the right to complain to the Information Commissioner. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at: Information Commissioner’s Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF.

However, please note that the Commissioner will not normally investigate a complaint until it has been through our own internal review process.

The above response notwithstanding, I can confirm that on 18 March the Minister for Education announced the cancellation of the 2020 summer exam series in light of the coronavirus pandemic and that grades would be calculated for learners in Years 11 and 13. The arrangements that would be made for learners in Years 10 and 12 were announced on 27 March.

On 6 April the Minister for Education issued a letter of Direction to Qualifications Wales (referenced above) to have regard to the Welsh Government policy regarding the cancellation of the summer exams and the calculation of grades.

Given the extremely compressed timescales within which the new arrangements to calculate grades had to be established and the pivotal role practitioners' professional judgement would play in the awarding of grades, it was recognised from the outset that some form of standardisation would be needed to provide equity and consistency.

Whilst the judgements made by exam centres across Wales should be consistent, it was unreasonable to expect that teachers in different centres across the country would make judgements that were precisely consistent with one another. Moderation across all exam centres was not feasible in light of the timescales needed to issue grades in August. Therefore, statistical models were developed to standardise the results. This was intended to ensure:

- consistency in the judgements that were made by centres, recognising that some centres may have over-predicted the likely attainment of their learners, whilst others may have under-predicted; and
- performance was broadly consistent with that in previous years in order to preserve the credibility of the qualification system and maintain fairness for past, current and future learners.

In order to help inform the standardisation process, Qualifications Wales consulted on the principles that should underpin any standardisation. The findings from this consultation are available [here](#). This consultation also included an equality impact assessment.

Qualification Wales then worked closely with WJEC to develop and test various statistical models using historical data. Given the differences in the structure of types of qualifications in Wales, with some being unitised and some linear, and differences in the range of prior attainment data available, for example AS levels contribute to the final A level award, several standardisation models were needed. Welsh Government worked closely with Qualifications Wales to provide additional data on prior educational attainment (Key Stage 3 teacher assessment and national literacy and numeracy tests) to support the development of accurate models.

As the awarding body for Wales, WJEC developed, tested and proposed the standardisation models to be used for different types of qualifications. These were then presented to Qualifications Wales who analysed them and presented them to their Board for approval. This was done via a series of Extraordinary Board meetings in June and July, a Welsh Government official is an official observer at board meetings. The models used in Wales, as well as the other models tested, are detailed in the methodology reports published by WJEC:

<https://www.wjec.co.uk/media/2vodafde/methods-report-qw-regulated-as.pdf>
<https://www.wjec.co.uk/media/p0uiqio1/methods-report-qw-regulated-a-levels-1.pdf>

Qualifications Wales published equality analysis as part of its publications on results day, a copy of which is available here:

<https://www.qualificationswales.org/english/results-2020/>

Qualifications Wales has also recently published a statement on its plans for further analysis of this summer's results and I have provided a link to this below:

<https://qualificationswales.org/english/results-2020/qualifications-wales-statements/statement-on-plans-for-further-statistical-releases/>

Qualifications Wales will provide updated information on attainment gaps and expand it to include an analysis of results for learners with a special educational needs status and further information on results by ethnicity. There are also additional plans to produce and publish the following analysis:

- Analysis of results, centre assessment grades and proposed standardised grades with regional and local authority breakdowns.
- An enhanced version of the centre variation statistics publication that were produced in summer 2019, with a view to including information by centre type.
- A document that draws together equalities impact analysis with some more detailed analysis.

Yours sincerely