

FOI 14252 – Appendix 1

Could you please provide all correspondence between the Welsh Government and the other UK administrations (namely the UK Government, Scottish Government and Northern Ireland Executive) relating to the process of deciding how the 2020 A Level and GCSE grades should be decided in the absence of exams?

This request is for correspondence before the first set of Scottish results was published on 4th August, and for correspondence since then.

Email 1 from Department for Education (DFE) to Devolved Administration (DAs – NI, SG and WG), 12 March: Options Analysis

Hi all

As promised, here is the Ofqual paper that's gone to your regulators. Comments have been requested from them for close today. There will then be a further iteration.

Best,

Ofqual to Awarding bodies and other UK Regulators 12 March:

Dear all

As discussed on the call earlier, attached is a draft paper to form part of the submission to the Secretary of State.

We have focused the paper on three options as discussed.

Option A is BAU + additional papers

Option B is to delay

Option C is to issue estimates.

There are many permutations in each and so there is a risk that we could easily get bogged down in discussing all of these. It would be helpful therefore if you could focus on the 'trigger points' for any decisions, in particular the decision to delay. For example, what is the latest point at which you could notify schools and colleges that the start of the timetable would be delayed by three weeks? And if the start of the timetable is delayed by 3 weeks, what are the implications for the issue of results? I'd also welcome any specific examples or details that might help set the scene.

If possible, it would be helpful to have a single response from each exam board, but I appreciate that might not always be possible. And could I have any additions/comments/suggestions by **close of play today**. We'll aim to circulate an amended version tomorrow for review.

Many thanks

Email 2: DfE to Welsh Government, 17 March: School Closures & Bill briefing

Great thanks – let us know outcome.

Also, assume you're aware that John Swinney, Scotland DPS and education minister, and Kirsty Williams, Wales education minister, had separate calls with our education secretary this morning and exams season was discussed, including the possibility for delay. I've received readouts on our side.

Just so you know, that's not now where our education secretary is and we are looking afresh at contingencies that do not delay the awarding of grades by the awarding bodies. Will say more tomorrow.

Our ed sec's call with Peter Weir is tomorrow, I gather.

Best,

WG to DFE

Thanks for sharing this helpful information. Just to let you know that our Minister is meeting with Qualifications Wales and WJEC tomorrow to discuss their preparations. I'll be in touch after the meeting to give you an update

Thanks

DFE to WG

Hi all

As promised, our draft bill briefing attached.
And as discussed, we're waiting for our SoS to respond today to advice and then we expect this to go to COBR and your Ministers, though we're not entirely clear about what the process is.

In terms of initial comms, we're planning for a short joint statement from DfE/Ofqual which we anticipate needs to go out at the same time as the bill is introduced, if not before.

But this is all fast moving so will keep in touch on ongoing plans.

Best

Email 3: DfE to DAs, 17 March: Bill Briefing

Certainly no announcement tomorrow – no – we need three nation agreement. And four nation solidarity of course. But we're planning for a short statement before end of week.

I've put some 10:00 to 10:30 in tomorrow as I think it's better to discuss.

In meantime, given I gather that DHSC may issue press notice on emergency bill, we've agreed the following lines with stakeholders if asked about bill.

- As you know, we're working closely with Ofqual, exam boards and other regulators to plan for a range of scenarios. Our overriding priorities are fairness to students and keeping disruption to their studies etc to a minimum, in the context of the latest scientific advice on how to delay the spread of COVID-19.
- The government will decide on the most effective contingencies in relation to the summer exams season soon, in consultation with ministers from the Wales and Scotland governments and the NI Executive.
- The powers in the bill are designed to allow us to take forward any of the options currently being considered

Email 4 DfE to DAs, 18 March: Exam announcements

Hi

SG and NI, WG are already aware but just so we're all on same page, our SoS will make an oral statement today around 5pm that includes (though wording to be finalised):

- We will not go ahead with primary assessments or GCSEs, AS levels or A levels this summer, and we will not be publishing performance tables for 2020. Students due to sit their GCSEs, AS levels and A levels this summer will be awarded a fair grade to recognise the work they have put in. We will work with Ofqual and the sector to provide more details shortly

Our Q&A for briefing purposes will be very light but we'll share.

Best,

PS.

To add that we are saying nothing later today about any autumn term exam series,

Email 5: DFE to WG and other administrations, 25 March: Next steps: Some draft principles for partnership working on calculated grades etc.

Hi all

Following our meet on Monday, see below some rough draft "principles for partnership working" which I hope reflects our discussions.

- Calculated grades methodology: How we ensure that the three regulators (Ofqual/Qualification Wales/CCEA) re GCSEs, AS and A levels and SQA re: National Quals are working closely enough so they can learn from each other re calculated grades, noting there will inevitably be differences due to varying

assessment models (modular vs linear, balance of non-exam vs. exam elements). We will follow this up with Ofqual

- Timing of guidance: Whatever the calculated grade methodologies are, consensus was that both we and our regulators aim to issue guidance on calculated grades and wider guidance on the process or awarding qualifications across the four nations at the same time – and that that can't be achieved, least across England, Wales and NI given the three nation agreement on GCSEs, AS and A levels.
- Awareness of emerging differences in policies: Close working between our regulators and between ourselves will better ensure we are fully aware of commonalities and differences across the four nations, and flagging risks where there are differences. E.g. Scotland recently committed to not charging for appeals (not called this by SQA) under the new emergency arrangements; the DfE commitment to issue GCSE, AS and A level grades before end of July.

Best,

Email 6 from DfE to DAs, 27 March: 4 Nations Education DGs meeting

Dear all,

Apologies for the delay in getting this out to you, but please find attached a brief readout of Wednesday's '4 Nations' education meeting of DGs.

- Exams
 - Broad agreement that collaboration on this is working well, with some set-piece regular meetings already taking place.
 - Concerns specifically raised around the July deadline for awarding moderated assessments, and questioned if there was any flexibility in this.
 - Potential for JRs also flagged which we should continue to work together on (especially if we are out of step, and disadvantage is a real issue).
 - AM keen to revisit once Ofqual and the awarding bodies have worked through the detail and it's easier to determine if the timelines can be met, and if not – revisiting with ministers.

With best wishes,

Email 7 DfE to DAs, 30 March: draft Direction to Ofqual

Good to talk to you again earlier, colleagues.

As I explained, we are still talking to special advisers about two key issues in the attached draft direction:

- (i) The timing of availability of results – want to press for end of July, but we don't want to commit to a specific date in this direction due to logistical issues.

- (ii) The timing and scope of an autumn exam series for those pupils who aren't happy with the calculated grade they get. We would much prefer a series in November rather than earlier, as it will be very difficult for schools to host exams straight after schools come back after 6 months of being closed.

Also as I explained, we are issuing this direction under existing powers in the ASCLA 2009 – nothing to do with the Coronavirus Act 2020. As you explained, you (WG and NI) are or will be considering with your lawyers what kind of direction might be needed, while you remain of the view that no direction will be necessary in Scotland.

I will let you know when these issues are settled and the direction goes out, which hopefully will be tomorrow or Wednesday.

Thanks all, and best wishes,

Email 8: NI To WG, 9th April: DA view on timing of results day

Below is the NI response, cleared, which I will issue shortly.

Best wishes

Our Minister is set to take decisions on the approach to adopt for awarding GCSEs, AS and A'levels by early next week – while no final decision has been taken we will be recommending that he agrees we follow closely the Welsh approach, particularly in relation to AS levels and GCSE modules (Y10 candidates, Y11 in NI). If he agrees that approach and you announce earlier dates for the issue of results we will prioritise A'level results to issue on the same day as England and Wales, but we are considering issuing GCSE results on the original date, and AS levels around that time, but not on the earlier date for A'levels.

Finally, as VQs are also used for admission to HE, can you advise what discussions have been held with awarding bodies who produce applied general or VQ results (e.g. BTEC) used in progression as there would need to be alignment otherwise students taking these qualifications could be at a disadvantage.”

Email 9: WG email to DFE, 12 August: Minister for Education guarantees that a learner's final A Level grade cannot be lower than their AS grade

Yes that's right, partly because they are externally assessed. Though, as below, there is some thinking about appeals scope too.

DFE to WG

Thanks, so this means any change based on the AS grade will be automatic, and not part of any further extension to your appeals procedures.

Email 10: DfE to DAs, 12 August: Briefing for results days

Thanks very much,

The position is that we have widened the appeals process so that a new ground for appeal is that if a student had a mock exam result higher than the calculated grade, the mock exam takes over. Including the autumn exams as a further option, this is being described as a triple lock, so that a student gets the higher of the two or three grades they have from this set. I attach our press notice on this. Ofqual will be working on guidance on this change to the appeals procedure, so that a robust decision can be made on whether a particular mock exam result was valid, given the lack of consistency in the way schools approach mock exams.

This won't affect the results being announced tomorrow, as this is being handled entirely through the appeals procedure.