

# Awarding general qualifications in summer 2020

## Overview



August 2020

**On 17 August 2020, the Minister for Education announced that following changes in other jurisdictions, learners in Wales will be awarded their centre assessment grades. In response, we have instructed WJEC to issue learners with their centre assessment grades for GCSEs, AS and A levels and the Welsh Baccalaureate Skills Challenge Certificate qualifications. (17 August 2020)**

**The information within this document has not been updated to represent any changes in policy.**

**This Overview of AS, A level and Advanced Skills Challenge Certificate results/Overview of awarding GQs in summer 2020 Wales contains information describing results that were issued to centres in readiness for results publication day on 13 August. Since writing, the Minister for Education has issued Qualifications Wales with a Direction to introduce a rule preventing A level learners receiving a grade that was lower than their AS level result in that subject. The information within this document will be updated in due course to represent accurately this change in policy.**

**(13 August 2020)**

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## Introduction

The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has had a significant impact on general qualifications (GQs), which includes GCSEs, AS and A levels, in summer 2020. It led to the closure of schools, colleges and other exam centres and the cancellation of exams across the UK.

In Wales, approved qualifications<sup>1</sup> are provided by the exam board, WJEC. These include GCSEs, AS and A levels and the Welsh Baccalaureate Skills Challenge Certificate. In 2019, 305,135 certificates were issued for GCSEs, 41,435 for AS and 32,410 for A levels in Wales. Where there is a subject with no approved qualification, maintained schools in Wales can use qualifications designed for England. The independent sector in Wales can take England or Wales designed qualifications. WJEC also deliver qualifications to learners outside of Wales through their Eduqas brand.

GQs aid progression to learning in further education (FE) or higher education (HE). Our approach sought to minimise the impact of the pandemic on learners due to complete their qualifications in summer 2020 and, wherever possible, enable learners to progress to the next stage of their learning or career.

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<sup>1</sup> Approved qualifications have met qualification-specific approval criteria that ensure they meet the needs of learners in Wales.

## Background

As the independent regulator of these qualifications in Wales, our role is to set rules for exam boards. We work with Welsh Government, who set education policy and oversee the education system in Wales.

On 18 March 2020, to help fight the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19) the Minister for Education in Wales announced the closure of schools and the cancellation of the 2020 summer exam series.

On 24 April 2020 the Minister for Education issued Qualifications Wales with a [Direction](#). This required Qualifications Wales to have regard to:

- The Welsh Government policy that, as far as possible, learners who were due to complete assessments for general qualifications between 20 March and 31 July 2020 should be issued with calculated results for these qualifications.
- The Welsh Government policy that learners studying general qualifications should be treated fairly, receiving results that reflect the work they have put in and their cumulative attainment on their qualifications.
- The Welsh Government policy that, as far as possible, learners studying general qualifications should not be disadvantaged compared to their peers studying vocational qualifications, or their peers studying qualifications in different jurisdictions in being able to progress to the next stage of learning.
- The Welsh Government policy that a fair and robust approach to issuing results to learners studying general qualifications is adopted, which includes determining the approach awarding bodies and schools and colleges must follow in arriving at judgements of learners' attainment 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 results.

We worked with Welsh Government and WJEC to put in place arrangements for summer 2020 in order that learners would be awarded grades, as explained in this [infographic](#). We also engaged with fellow regulators Ofqual (in England) and CCEA Regulation (in Northern Ireland) to make sure that the approach taken in Wales was consistent with the approach taken for general qualifications in other parts of the UK, where this was appropriate. We wanted to make sure that learners in Wales were not disadvantaged or advantaged relative to their peers elsewhere.

## Our approach

The majority of learners in Wales take Wales-only approved GQs awarded by WJEC. There are 32 GCSEs, 29 AS levels, 29 A levels, three Welsh Baccalaureate Skills Challenge Certificates and a number of legacy qualifications<sup>2</sup>. A small number of general qualifications are awarded by other awarding bodies which operate outside Wales. Whilst we regulate those qualifications, they follow the regulations set by Ofqual as they are designed principally for England.

As a regulator we have a duty to consider the burden we place on the awarding bodies we regulate. In planning for, and agreeing, arrangements for summer 2020, we have worked closely with WJEC to ensure as far as possible that our decisions were manageable and deliverable so that learners would receive grades on the usual results days.

## Information for schools and colleges on the submission of Centre Assessment Grades

In the absence of assessments in summer 2020, processes needed to be developed to enable the calculation of qualification grades. We issued [guidance](#) to schools and colleges on the 3 April 2020, outlining the data that they needed to submit to WJEC to support this process. Two pieces of data were required for each learner entered in each qualification in a school or college and Heads of Centre were required to sign a declaration when submitting the data.

The data to be submitted were:

- a Centre Assessment Grade (CAG) which was a professional, holistic judgement of the grade a learner would most likely have achieved, had they been able to sit the exams this summer, and
- a position for each learner in a single rank order for each qualification in each school or college.

Within this guidance we provided advice on the range of evidence that might be used to inform the CAG for each learner. This included: records of learner performance in ongoing assessments and classwork, including practical work, formal assessments and mock exams, performance on non-examination assessment and any results already achieved. WJEC subsequently provided more specific guidance for each qualification. Due to likely inconsistencies in sources of evidence used by schools and colleges to arrive at a CAG for each learner, we judged that it was best that the information should be considered as part of a holistic judgement about a learner. Our guidance also included advice regarding CAGs for learners with agreed access arrangements, for example learners with disabilities.

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<sup>2</sup> WJEC Level 1/Level 2 GCSE in Information and Communication Technology, WJEC Level 1/Level 2 GCSE in Information and Communication Technology (Short Course), WJEC Level 1/Level 2 GCSE in Health and Social Care, WJEC Level 1/Level 2 GCSE in Health and Social Care (Double Award), WJEC Level 1/Level 2 GCSE in Home Economics: Child Development, WJEC Level 3 Advanced GCE in Applied ICT, WJEC Level 3 Advanced GCE in ICT, WJEC Level 3 Advanced Subsidiary GCE in Applied ICT, WJEC Level 3 Advanced Subsidiary GCE in ICT, WJEC Level 3 Advanced Subsidiary GCE in Health and Social Care (Double Award), WJEC Level 3 Advanced GCE in Health and Social Care (Double Award), WJEC Level 3 Advanced Subsidiary GCE in Health and Social Care and WJEC Level 3 Advanced GCE in Health and Social Care.

Our guidance indicated that a statistical standardisation process<sup>3</sup> would be required to produce the calculated grades this summer. It also made clear that the CAGs submitted by schools and colleges would be subject to these processes, and, therefore, were likely to change.

Finally, the guidance provided early advice about appeals.

We published an [update](#) to our guidance on 18 May 2020, which included three changes:

- A reminder for Heads of Centre of the requirement already in place to ensure processes were compliant with the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) and the need to give due regard to it
- Advice that schools and colleges keep a detailed written record of the process used to produce CAGs and rank orders for each qualification, and
- As part of the Head of Centre declaration the need to provide confirmation that the accuracy of the data had been checked.

## Consultation on arrangements for summer 2020

We held a [consultation](#) on arrangements for summer 2020 for a period of two weeks between Tuesday 22 April and Wednesday 13 May 2020. We consulted on proposals relating to two key aspects of the arrangements. Firstly, the aims which would underpin the statistical standardisation model for the issuing of grades for learners this summer and secondly, the specific appeals process for this summer.

As part of the consultation, we produced an [integrated impact assessment](#) asking for views on the impact of our proposals, including the impact on those learners with protected characteristics, and on the Welsh language.

As a public body, we also have a duty under the Equality Act 2010 to have due regard, when carrying out our functions, to eliminate unlawful discrimination, particularly against those who share a protected characteristic. In accordance with this duty, we have carried out Equality Impact Assessments on our proposals this summer.

Our proposed arrangements to allow results to be issued to learners in a timely manner this summer raised a number of concerns about a potential negative impact on a range of learners, including those who share particular protected characteristics. These concerns were broadly captured under the following themes:

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<sup>3</sup> See page 10

- centre assessment data may systematically discriminate against groups of learners
- some learners (private candidates)<sup>4</sup> will not be able to receive a grade.

In response, we updated our guidance to schools and colleges to include references to the PSED, reminding them of their obligations when determining their CAGs, and rank order for each learner. WJEC also provided additional guidance about submitting data.

Consistent with our aim of approving a model that accurately predicts learner grades, we have monitored the impact of the standardisation approach on the grades of learners with protected characteristics.

We ensured that the centre assessment data was checked as soon as possible after it was provided and used Welsh Government data to see if there was evidence that attainment gaps linked to learner characteristics had substantially changed compared to previous years.

In some cases, schools or colleges were unable to provide the two pieces of data required for private candidates originally entered with them. This was because they had insufficient relevant information to make a professional judgement on the likely grade the private candidate would achieve if they had sat the exams this summer.

Following our consultation, we made a decision to allow an exception for those learners where there was significant evidence already in place with WJEC, from prior attainment in the same qualification, and this is outlined in our [Private Candidate policy statement](#). A calculated grade was produced for any private candidate who had sat a sufficient amount of the qualification in a previous exam series. This meant that most private candidates would receive a calculated grade. However, there were still a small number<sup>5</sup> of private candidates who were not eligible for this method and therefore have not received a grade calculated this summer.

## Extraordinary regulatory framework

On 29 June 2020 we put in place an [Extraordinary Regulatory Framework for General Qualifications](#) for summer 2020<sup>6</sup>. We published the final framework and [consultation decisions](#) on 29 June 2020. We held a public [webinar](#) to outline the findings and decisions of our consultation. More than 300 people attended and were able to submit written questions. A [summary](#) of those questions and responses is available on our website, along with a recording of the webinar.

The final agreed aims that underpinned the statistical standardisation model were:

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<sup>4</sup> A Learner in relation to whom there is no Relevant Centre that has purchased the GQ Qualification on behalf of the Learner, and materially contributed to the preparation of the Learner for the assessment (whether through teaching or instruction provided by Teachers employed by it or otherwise).

<sup>5</sup> 28

<sup>6</sup> Ofqual held a consultation on their proposed GQ extraordinary regulatory framework for summer 2020. The final [framework](#), and consultation decisions were published by Ofqual on 11 June 2020.

1. Learners for whom a qualification level centre assessment grade and rank order submitted would receive a grade.
2. National outcomes would be broadly similar to those in previous years to reduce the risk of unfairness for learners over time and maintain public confidence.
3. As far as possible, the process for awarding grades would not systematically advantage learners or disadvantage learners, including those with characteristics protected by equalities legislation.
4. The statistical standardisation model would use a range of evidence to calculate the likely grades that learners would have achieved, had they been able to complete their assessments.

## Appeals

We also consulted on details of an appeals process for summer 2020. The [appeals](#) process cannot work in the usual way this summer because there is no marking process to appeal against. However, schools and colleges will be able to appeal to WJEC on the grounds that wrong data was used when calculating a grade, the calculated grades generated by the statistical standardisation model were incorrectly allocated or communicated and/or there was some other procedural failing on the part of WJEC.

WJEC is not required to accept appeals submitted by individual learners or their representatives<sup>7</sup>. Appeals will not be permitted relating to the professional judgements of teachers in relation to calculated grades, so long as those judgements are arrived at in line with the procedure set out by WJEC. If a learner is concerned that there has been bias or discrimination in how the school or college has followed the process, they should submit a complaint to the school or college in the first instance. Where the learner has credible evidence that grades were not based on objective judgements, resulting in bias or discrimination, they can contact WJEC. Learners with such concerns can also raise these with the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC).

Qualifications Wales offers a final appeal stage [via](#) the Exam Procedures Review Service, for appellants who do not consider that WJEC followed the correct process in dealing with their appeal. We have published information on the [appeals](#) process that will be available this summer.

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<sup>7</sup> The only exception will be if it is the only way to secure an effective appeal where learners are not associated with a school or college, such as private candidates.

## Entries

Despite the unique circumstances around the summer 2020 exam series caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, provisional entries data were collected as normal and published as [Official Statistics](#). These figures are useful indicators of potential changes in results due to fluctuations in entry from year to year.

### GCSEs

There were 307,925 GCSE entries for summer 2020. This is up by 0.7% compared to GCSE entries for summer 2019. Year 11 entries made up most of all GCSE entries for summer 2020 with 88.9% of entries from Year 11 learners. This proportion is unchanged from last summer.

Year 9 or below, Year 10 and Year 12 had proportional increases in GCSE entries this summer compared to last year. Despite the overall increase, Year 11 entries saw a small reduction of 0.1% compared to summer 2019. There were three phases of reformed GCSEs approved for use in Wales awarded this summer. 291,995 (94.8%) of the total summer 2020 entries were for these reformed qualifications.

### AS level

There were 42,445 AS level entries for Wales for summer 2020, 1.9% more than for summer 2019 (41,645 entries). This increase breaks the consistent downward trends since summer 2015, when there were 57,030 AS level entries. Year 12 had the largest number of entries, with 32,985 entries in summer 2020. Year 12 saw an increase of 3.5% AS level entries compared to summer 2019, while all other year groups saw proportional decreases. 40,760 entries (96.0%) of the total summer 2020 entries were for reformed qualifications approved for use in Wales.

### A level

There were 31,095 A level entries for summer 2020, 4.5% fewer than in summer 2019 (32,580 entries). The number of A level entries in Wales has seen a consistent year-on-year decrease since summer 2015, when there were 38,480 entries. Year 13 entries have decreased by 4.4% in summer 2020 (26,930 entries) compared to summer 2019 (28,165 entries). All other year groups also saw a decrease compared to summer 2019. 27,735 entries (89.2%) of the total summer 2020 entries were for reformed qualifications approved for use in Wales.

## Oversight of summer 2020

We held review meetings with WJEC, at least weekly, to understand how the Extraordinary Regulatory Framework was being implemented, and to seek assurance on how risks that might impact on the delivery of this summer's results were being managed.

We asked WJEC to update us on progress in collecting and processing CAGs and sought assurance that correct results would be issued in a timely manner.

## Development of the approach to standardisation

Grades issued this summer needed to be as fair as possible. Our [analysis](#) of the CAGs showed that they were generous and there was also evidence of inconsistency between exam centres. Each school or college undertook their own process to produce the CAGs and it was unreasonable to expect that teachers in different schools or colleges across the country would make judgements that were precisely consistent with one another. In the time available, there was also not enough time to implement training. So that the final grades awarded were as fair as possible, a process of standardisation was needed. This would mean that grades could be calculated so that, there was no advantage or disadvantage to learners in different schools or colleges, or to learners in previous or future cohorts and at a national level, results would be broadly similar to those in other years. We worked with WJEC to identify the approach which would use the best combination of evidence available in these extraordinary circumstances

As outlined earlier, each school or college provided a CAG and a rank order to WJEC for all learners studying GCSEs, AS, A levels and the Skills Challenge Certificate. Following on from that process, there were two main steps to standardisation:

- **Step 1: Calculate grades for learners in each centre.** WJEC calculated a set of grades for each school or college
- **Step 2: Allocate grades to individual learners.** WJEC allocated the set of grades from step 1 to individual learners using the rank order provided by the teachers in the school or college

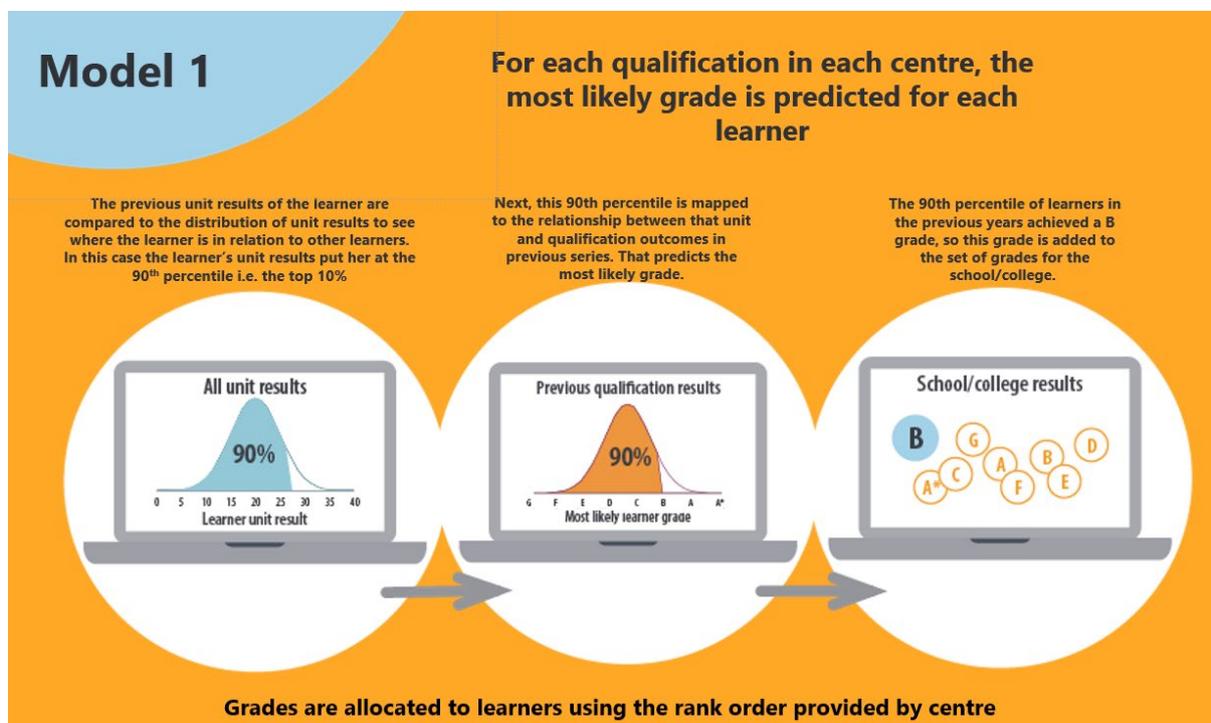
It was the combination of the evidence in these two steps which is the strength of the approach which:

- Allowed those who could not be included in step 1, for example, learners without prior attainment evidence, to receive a grade
- Removed reliance on a statistical model to accurately differentiate between individual learners

- Included information from teacher judgements which would have been based on latest/more recent performance of learners. Research also shows that teachers are good at ranking learners<sup>8</sup>.

WJEC researched various approaches, working closely with colleagues in other awarding bodies and with other regulators. A number of model approaches (and variants of those) were trialed and tested using data from recent years. Data from 2017 and 2018 were used to predict grades in 2019 and test for the accuracy of various models. The aim was to use the approach which was most accurate and valid across qualifications.

WJEC's proposed approaches for standardisation of GCSEs, AS and A level, and Welsh Baccalaureate Skills Challenge Certificate qualifications were presented to the Qualifications Wales Board over a number of extraordinary meetings. The standardisation models developed and proposed by WJEC were approved after careful consideration of their impacts and, in some cases, after additional information and clarification was provided by WJEC. The models are referred to as [Model 1](#) and [Model 2](#). In summary, Model 1 is used for unitised qualifications where most of the learners entering in summer 2020 have taken the unit and where that unit forms a substantial part of the qualification. Model 2 is used for linear qualifications or unitised qualifications with insufficient units sat by the cohort.



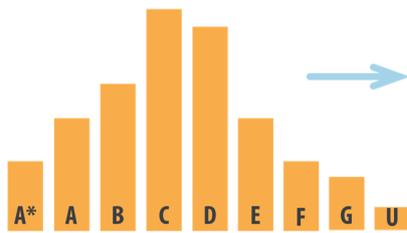
8 Tim Gill, Methods used by teachers to predict final A-level grades for their students. Research Matters: a Cambridge Assessment publication, 28 (Autumn 2019), pp.33-42

## Model 2

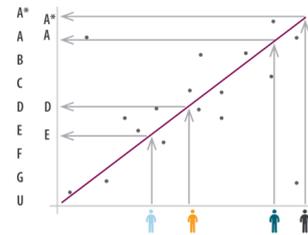
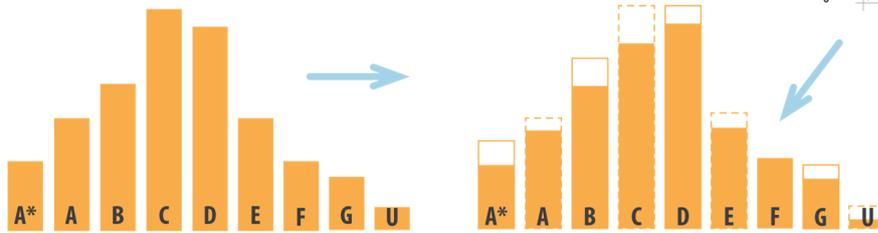
Next data from earlier tests, teacher assessments and qualifications is used to see if the schools' learners this year have higher or lower ability than in the historic data.

Historic data is used to find the typical set of grades for the school/college.

Average Centre Outcomes



2020 Centre Outcomes



The historic data is adjusted to take account of the ability of the current cohort and get a set of grades for the school/college.

**Grades are allocated to learners using the rank order provided by centre**

The final approach taken to calculating grades for each qualification type this summer is outlined below.

### A Levels – summer 2020

In Wales, the AS qualification contributes 40% of the assessment marks to the full A level. This means that there is very good evidence of prior attainment within the qualification available, which would have contributed to the grades of learners who were due to sit A levels this summer.

Model 1 was used by WJEC to calculate A level grades. WJEC calculated the most likely A level grade a learner would get based on their performance in the AS units and the known statistical relationship with A2 unit performance. This approach is similar to the approach taken when learners are absent for some exams in an exam series. This step in the process, step 1, created a set of results for each qualification in each school or college. In the final stage of the process, step 2, the set of results were allocated to learners according to the rank order of learners submitted by schools and colleges. This meant the final calculated grades took into account previous performance at AS level, and the judgment of teachers in a school or college in relation to individual learners. The approach includes a 'sense-check' to prevent any learner getting a grade lower than they had already 'banked'.

We approved this method for use in Wales because AS results are a reliable source of evidence of prior attainment. Testing on the accuracy of this method using historical data confirmed that this was an accurate method. This approach can only be used where AS qualifications contribute to the A level grade.

### AS levels – summer 2020

At AS level, Model 2, was used. Step 1 of the process used historical centre performance over two to three years to calculate a set of grades for the school or college. This was then adjusted using mean GCSE data to account for the ability of the current cohort. In step 2, the grades were then allocated to learners according to the rank order provided, as for A levels. This is a similar approach to that used for all GCSEs, AS levels and A levels in England and AS levels in Northern Ireland.

### GCSEs – summer 2020

For most GCSE qualifications, Model 2 was used. We supported the developmental work by investigating the relationship between data from key stage 2 national assessments and key stage 3 national assessments with GCSE outcomes. We found that using key stage 2 teacher assessment data did not add much predictive value. However, we found that a measure of average performance across all of the Year 9 national tests and teacher assessments from key stage 3 was strongly associated<sup>9</sup> with, and predictive of, GCSE results.

We analysed the national test and teacher assessment data to determine if there was any bias related to learner characteristics. An initial analysis which simply compared outcomes without controlling for later attainment (GCSE outcomes) found that there were some differences by learner characteristic. However, these differences were subtle, and had substantial overlaps. A statistical model was then used to quantify these differences, account for later attainment and test for statistical significance. While some of the differences were statistically significant, the effect sizes were small. We also found that there was no strong evidence of bias in this data relative to GCSE results. The release of this data, from the Welsh Government to WJEC for the purpose of standardisation was therefore approved by the Minister for Education. As a source of evidence, this allowed the predicted results of the school or college to be adjusted to account for the ability of the current cohort in step 1.

A number of GCSEs in Wales are unitised and therefore evidence from previous units of the qualification was available. For subjects where there is consistent evidence of prior attainment from earlier units of a qualification and these units make up a substantial part of the course, then Model 1 was used, in a similar way to that used at A level. Testing showed that this banked evidence only produced more accurate and valid grades in subjects where the units in question represented enough of the qualification and had been taken by enough of the learners entered for the qualification. Model 1 was used for GCSEs in Biology, Chemistry Physics, Double Award Science and English Literature, where the banked evidence would be from units completed earlier in the course. As for AS levels, the approach includes a 'sense-check' to prevent any learner getting a grade lower than they had already 'banked'.

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<sup>9</sup> correlation of 0.89

## Welsh Baccalaureate Skills Challenge Certificates

These qualifications are different to unitised A levels and GCSEs in that learners can take any combination of units in any order. This flexibility meant that there was banked evidence for each of the units but only from a subset of the cohort. A variant of Model 1 proved to be the most accurate for these qualifications.

There are some cases where the overall approach was adjusted, due to issues with availability of data.

1. Some private candidates did not have CAGs and rank order data submitted by a school or college. We explored options for these learners and made an allowance for grades to be calculated using previous attainment data where it existed. This was outlined in our [Private Candidate Policy statement](#). However, there remained a small number of private candidates for whom a grade could not be awarded this summer, and we highlighted this to FE and HE admissions officers, urging them to consider alternative forms of evidence of ability for these learners. We [wrote](#) to all HE providers, via UCAS, to explain this. A number of private candidates may have been entered for GCSEs as part of the admission requirements for Initial Teacher Education (ITE) courses. Welsh Government recognised that existing admission requirements for learners joining ITE courses may not be achievable this summer and the normal [entry requirements for ITE provision](#) in Wales have been amended to take this into account.
2. In a small number of cases, where a school or college did not have any AS data, Model 2 was used.
3. Predicting outcomes based on historic performance for schools or colleges with very small entries into a qualification, can be unreliable. Therefore, for qualifications where Model 2 was used to calculate the grades (AS levels and most GCSEs), and the school or college had a small entry, more weight was given to CAGs. For schools and colleges with a very small entry the CAGs were used directly with no input from the model. For those with large entries, the model was used with no weighting placed on the CAGs and for those with entries between these two extremes the weighting on the CAGs decreased as the entry size increased. The technical detail of this was the same as used in England and was accepted following analysis to check it was appropriate for Wales. Model 1, which was used to calculate grades for A level and some GCSEs, was based on performance in AS units or GCSE units sat earlier in the course, with no reliance upon historic centre performance, so there was no need for a similar adjustment for small entries to be used.

## Monitoring of qualification decision-making processes

WJEC developed processes to agree the outcomes for each qualification. These meetings involved a committee of key staff including senior WJEC officers and subject teams. They reviewed proposed outcomes against statistical predictions for 2020 and historical data to make decisions on the final outcomes for each qualification. Qualifications Wales observed all 28 of these meetings to be satisfied that processes were compliant with WJEC procedures and that appropriate evidence was taken into account.

Once results were calculated and proposed to us, we carried out a review of subject-level outcomes, before confirming them in Maintenance of Standards meetings. We worked closely with WJEC to understand the outcomes for all qualifications, and to be satisfied that national outcomes were broadly similar to previous years in order to protect qualification standards and support fairness for learners, past, present and future.

## Results

We published an [overview](#) of AS, A level and Advanced Skills Challenge Certificate outcomes on 13 August 2020. The report also includes:

- an initial equalities analysis focused on how overall attainment gaps relate to previous years. The overview includes some analysis by free school meal eligibility, age and sex and
- an analysis of the CAGs provided by schools and colleges across Wales this summer.

This results overview will be mirrored for GCSE and KS4 Skills Challenge Certificate qualifications on 20 August 2020.

WJEC published a technical report on the details of how they have calculated AS, A level and Advanced Skills Challenge Certificate grades on 13 August 2020 and will publish an equivalent report on GCSE and KS4 Skills Challenge Certificate qualifications on 20 August 2020.

## How we communicated

We have communicated with learners and other stakeholders through a range of channels on a regular basis, and to reassure them that they can have confidence in the process that will be used for awarding grades for GQs this year.

We created a dedicated [COVID-19](#) area on our website and kept it updated to provide current information on all developments. The published information included:

- blogs
- video content
- letters and information to schools and colleges
- Qualifications Wales statements
- Ofqual statements and
- frequently asked questions.

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in an increase in traffic to our website and in activity from learners and wider stakeholders engaging through our social media channels. The total number of impressions (opportunities to read our content) through Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn, from the time schools and colleges closed in March to the end of May, was just over 1.1 million, almost five times more than usual. Our External Relations Team has responded to over 250 direct emails and telephone calls from a range of stakeholders since the closure of schools and colleges in March.

In May, we provided a formal response to the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) on their response to our consultation on Arrangements for summer 2020 exams series. In July, we provided a formal [response](#) to the Children, Young People and Education (CYPE) Committee's scrutiny of COVID-19 and its impact on children and young people.

In addition to partnership work outlined previously, we engaged with the following key stakeholders on developments to discuss their concerns and the impact on delivery:

- our Head Teacher Reference Group (HTRG)
- Regional Education Consortia
- Association of Directors Education Wales (ADEW)
- Trade Union Representative Organisations (TURO)
- Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA)
- Careers Wales
- Youth Parliament; Children and Young People Committee members
- Minority representative and parent representative groups and
- Estyn.

In the interest of supporting learner progression, we have worked closely with FE and HE to share information with the clear message that qualifications this year will be as valued and robust as those awarded in any other year. We have created [blogs](#) and infographics to support this message and have [written](#) to all HE providers setting out our approach to awarding grades this summer, as outlined earlier.

Approaching results days, we created a dedicated [Results 2020](#) section on the website with the aim of providing supporting information for all stakeholders related to results for summer 2020.

## What next? – Approach to 2020/2021

In March we discussed the risks and issues associated with requiring WJEC to offer an autumn series with the Minister for Education and agreed that the disruption to teaching and learning in the autumn would be too significant, and that there were potential issues of equity as learners would not necessarily have access to the same opportunities to prepare. This view was shared by WJEC.

Around the same time, Ofqual indicated that they would be consulting on a requirement that awarding bodies offer qualifications in an additional series to allow those learners dissatisfied with the calculated grades awarded in summer 2020 to sit their exams. Following consultation, they confirmed that an autumn series would be held in October and November 2020. In July 2020, the Qualifications Wales Board reviewed the decision made in March and confirmed that we should not require WJEC to offer an exceptional autumn series.

### November 2020 series

We decided that the November 2020 series will operate as normal, subject to there being no further disruption caused by COVID-19, and communicated this to schools and colleges in a [letter](#). GCSEs in English Language, Mathematics, Mathematics-Numeracy and Welsh Language will be available, as usual. Given the timing of this scheduled series, we believe that this series will be most relevant for learners who wish to re-sit any of these qualifications. The assessments in this series will not be amended, so schools and colleges will need to consider carefully whether it is appropriate to enter Year 11 learners where teaching and learning has been significantly disrupted.

## Summer 2021 series

As it became clear that COVID-19 would continue to have an impact on education and assessment into the next academic year, we started to look at what adaptations to qualifications may need to be made to minimise the impact on schools and colleges and their learners.

We know that current Year 11 and 13 learners had their learning disrupted in summer 2020 and we have taken steps to minimise the ongoing impact into summer 2021. We also know that there may be further disruption to teaching and assessment in the coming year and that non examination assessment in some of the more practical qualifications may be more challenging for schools and colleges to deliver if there are further lockdowns or public health restrictions in place. We provided updates on this in a [blog](#) published on 6 May 2020. On 10 July 2020 the Education Minister for Wales issued Qualifications Wales with a [Direction](#) regarding considerations for general qualifications for 2021. Having considered this, and the policy positions that informed our arrangements for spring and summer 2020, we structured our regulatory approach for 2021 around a set of overarching principles that WJEC should apply when adapting assessments, and more detailed requirements that WJEC must comply with when making those adaptations. On 15 July 2020, we published our [Requirements for Adapting Assessments for GQ Qualifications in 2021](#) and [Special Conditions for Adapting Assessments for GQ Qualifications in 2021](#) and wrote a [letter](#) to schools and colleges on planning for summer 2021.

The adaptations made to qualifications by WJEC seek to mitigate lost teaching and learning time through reducing the pressure of assessment whilst maintaining development of knowledge, understanding and skills across a broad and suitable curriculum. The changes do not disadvantage or advantage learners against their peers taking other types of qualifications or in different jurisdictions and do not undermine the validity, reliability and credibility of the qualifications in Wales and outside Wales. WJEC consulted with teachers on their proposed adaptations, which received broad support.

With regard to the Welsh Baccaulaureate Skills Challenge Certificate, WJEC made adaptations according to our policy and communicated these to schools and colleges in August 2020. WJEC provided detailed information and guidance to schools and colleges, on an individual qualification basis, for GCSEs on 21 July 2020 and for AS and A levels on 6 August 2020.

In addition to the consideration of suitable adaptations to assessment of GCSEs, AS levels, A levels and the Welsh Baccaulaureate Skills Challenge Certificate, we have also been working with WJEC on contingencies that could be required due to COVID-19. These might include social restrictions on a local, regional or national level, which could have differing levels of impact on preparations for exams in summer 2021.