Annex: Key policymaker statements on their exam replacement systems (2021)

Table 1: Key announcements across the four UK education systems

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<th>Explaining the problem</th>
<th>Describing the system</th>
<th>Defending the system</th>
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<td><strong>Scotland</strong></td>
<td>National 5 exams were cancelled on October 7th 2020 and Higher and Advanced Higher exams on 8th December 2020, with John Swinney citing concerns over 'fairness' owing to the unequal impact of lockdowns on different students. A replacement system was sought which would allocate grades to students based on work they had completed but which avoided an 'algorithm'. The Priestley Report, which had recommended modifications to future exams, informed (somewhat) a replacement system for 2021.</td>
<td>The Alternative Certification Model was announced alongside the cancellation of National 5 exams, and expanded to cover Higher and Advanced Highers following their cancellation. The SQA, (16th February) described a system which rested upon 'demonstrated learner evidence' as judged by teachers and lecturers 'professional judgements'. It drew on a range of evidence, encompassing student coursework, mock exams, and assessment materials provided by SQA which could be drawn upon by centres in determining grades. Quality assurance would be carried out by SQA and within centres.</td>
<td>Criticism of the new system came from the spokespeople of other parties, students and parents groups, and teaching unions. Most emphasised the quantity of assessments, which were described as 'exams in all but name' by Green, Labour, and Liberal Democrat MSPs and the burden it was placing on students. Fiona Robertson on the 9th August of the SQA pointed to the 'flexibility around when and how schools and colleges assessed learners'. On the 3rd of June, the new Education Secretary Shirley Ann Somerville described the Alternative Certification Model as a “fair, credible and a consistent assessment policy”</td>
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<td><strong>Wales</strong></td>
<td>Wales was the first to cancel all exams (November 10th 2020). Education Minister Kirsty Williams took the advice of stakeholders such as Qualifications Wales, which had publicly advised the Government on the 16th October 2020 to adopt alternative arrangements given that there was no guarantee exams would be able to go ahead as planned.</td>
<td>The new system adopted was announced on November 10th and rested upon a range of evidence such as coursework and mock exams. It also incorporated assessment material which could be carried out in-class under exam-like conditions. Kirsty Williams described a system which was 'transparent and rigorous' which 'ensured that universities could be confident of the abilities of students' which was 'mindful of students wellbeing'. Qualifications Wales confirmed and finalised the arrangements the following month on December 10th.</td>
<td>Criticisms arose from the high burden placed on both students and teaching staff, but the Chief Executive of Qualifications Wales, Philip Blaker (12th August 2021), pointed to the fact that given a 'centralised approach' wasn't possible, this was the 'fairest possible approach in [...] extraordinary circumstances'. Earlier in the year (19th May), a WJEC spokesperson denied that an algorithm was being used and stated that results would be based on teacher judgement alone.</td>
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<td>England</td>
<td>The UK Government initially sought to retain then modify exams, before cancelling them on the 6th of January 2021. Williamson told the House of Commons on January 6th that a ‘form of teacher assessed grades’ would be used to allocate GCSE and A-Level grades, but that the precise details needed to be ‘fine tuned’ following consultation with ‘Ofqual, the exam boards, and teaching representatives’. The consultation results would feed into the system which was announced to the House of Commons on the 25th February.</td>
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<td>On the 25th February 2021 Williamson told the Commons that ‘Teacher Assessed Grades would draw upon a range of evidence to underpin their assessments, including coursework, in-class tests set by the school, the use of optional questions provided by exam boards and mock exams’. This followed a consultation which received ‘over 100,000 responses’. Williamson described standards ‘pegged to performance standards from previous years so teachers and students are clear what is expected at each grade … combined with a rigorous quality assurance process … this system will ensure grades are fair and consistent.’</td>
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<td>Unions, parents, and teachers criticised the Government's tardiness in announcing exam cancellation and the design of the new system. Nick Gibb, the Schools Minister, told the House of Commons Education Committee (9th March): 'I am confident, given the huge consultation that took place … that we have come to the fairest and most rigorous approach that we can […]. Introducing some mini-exam system into it […] would also create opposition from other quarters that you are bringing back the unfairness that we sought to get rid of when we cancelled exams this year.’</td>
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<td>Northern Ireland</td>
<td>Education Minister Peter Weir resisted pressure to cancel GCSE and A-Level exams. On the 6th January, he stated: 'we have reached a point where, while I still believe examinations are the most appropriate and fairest awarding methodology, with a further six weeks of remote learning having to be imposed, we cannot continue with exams in the way that was planned'. The Northern Ireland Executive’s replacement system drew upon research commissioned in the wake of the previous year’s fiasco. It emphasised the importance of teacher assessment and quality control to ensure consistency across centres.</td>
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<td>On the 5th March 2021, CCEA announced the arrangements for ‘Centre Determined Grades’. Their guidance for Heads described grades 'based on a holistic review of a student's performance as indicated by assessment evidence, gathered and retained at centre level. In the interests of fairness within and across centres, each Centre Determined Grade must be a realistic, evidence-based judgement of the standard at which a student is performing, i.e. their demonstrated knowledge, understanding and skills in the content of the specification they have covered' including mock exams, CCEA assessments, completed coursework, and past performance.</td>
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| | Secondary Students’ Union of Northern Ireland President Cormac Savage stated (15th April): ‘Students feel betrayed … We were promised a cancellation of exams and CCEA’s guidance has left students and teachers in a situation where they feel they must complete swathes of high control assessment’. Weir had told the Stormont Education Committee (23rd March): ‘The balance needs to be struck so that we do not create too much of an onerous burden, but, when we are talking about major qualifications, there has to be a robust, evidence-based quality to it as well. A similar approach is being taken in other jurisdictions. We want to make sure that none of our young people is in any way disadvantaged in comparison with their compatriots in different jurisdictions’.
Table 2: Description of alternative examination systems for Summer 2021 by country

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<th>Territory</th>
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<td>Scotland</td>
<td>The Alternative Certification Model saw ‘five steps’ carried out by SQA and centres: the issuing of subject specific guidance; the provision of samples to SQA and the receipt of feedback on samples of assessment evidence by each school and college; the assurance by SQA that local and national quality assurance is fair, consistent, and equitable; the submission of quality assured provisional results to SQA; and, the opening of a free appeals service. Heavy emphasis was placed on the gathering of ‘evidence’, which largely took the form of many in-class assessments spread over the weeks leading up to the end of term (SQA [2021a; 2021b])</td>
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<td>Wales</td>
<td>Teacher Managed Assessments replaced exams in Wales in academic year 2020-21. This the 'Centre Determined Grade Model', which saw schools drawing upon an array of evidence to determine the grades to be awarded, including NEA elements, mock-exams, and classwork. The WJEC offered a set of adapted past papers which enabled schools to continue to assess learning within their teaching plans (<a href="https://www.gov.wales">Welsh Government, 2021</a>). While there would be no external moderation of Centre Determined Grade outcomes, WJEC would implement internal and external quality assurance processes to promote consistency within and across centres (<a href="https://www.qualificationswales.org.uk">Qualifications Wales, 2021</a>).</td>
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<td>England/UK</td>
<td>The UK Government used ‘Teacher Assessed Grades’ for English GCSE and A-Level students. Grades were arrived upon by ‘teacher judgement’ and signed off by departmental heads and headteachers, before being submitted to an exam board. The range of evidence drawn upon in determining grades was large, and encompassed mock tests, tests and work already completed, non-exam assessment (both complete and incomplete), portfolios, and questions provided by exam boards if they choose to do so (the latter appears to have been used frequently) (<a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/office-for-qualifications">Ofqual, 2021</a>).</td>
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<td>Northern Ireland</td>
<td>Northern Ireland’s Alternative Awarding Arrangements rested upon Centre Determined Grades. Like Scotland, the system rested on five steps: guidance, information and readiness; evidence gathering and provision of assessment resources; centre professional judgement and moderation; review of evidence and award; and, post-award review service (<a href="https://www.ccea.org.uk">CCEA, 2021</a>). The evidence encompassed CCEA assessment resources; performance in mock exams; performance in CCEA past paper questions and mark schemes; performance in class tests and controlled assessments; records of students performance; and other work carried out in the course of their studies. The CCEA would provide guidance to schools to ensure standards and consistency, in a process overseen by the CCEA (and encompassing an element of moderation of centres).</td>
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Exemplar quotations to inform Annex Tables 1 and 2

1. Scotland

“Our objective is to run a full 2021 exam diet. "SQA have consulted on what steps they could take to reduce the burden of assessments before the exam diet - what elements could be removed. "We've also looked at the timetable of exams. Do they need to start in late April? Could they start at the end of May, giving them an extra month for learning and teaching. "We've looked at those and the SQA is currently considering the response." - John Swinney, 10/09/20

https://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/news/scottish-news/scots-pupils-sit-exams-2021-22663800

"The risk remains that there may be further disruptions for individual pupils, schools, college, or more widely across the country during the course of this academic year. "Due to the level of disruption already caused by Covid, and due to the likely disruption faced by some or all pupils and students this academic year, a full exam diet is simply too big a risk - it would not be fair." - John Swinney, 07/10/21

https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-54423265

"This isn't an easy call, but in the interests of the pupils of Scotland it is time for John Swinney to swallow his pride and cancel the higher and advanced higher exams."

"The data is clear: pupils in the most deprived areas are more likely to be missing vital class time, and the provisions that the Scottish government have put in place for remote learning cannot fully replace face to face learning. "In these circumstances the possibility of exams on a level playing field has gone."Pupils and teachers need a decision now, and Mr Swinney needs to focus completely on ensuring awards are made consistently and fairly. We cannot have another chaotic last-minute decision on schools. "Therefore we are calling on John Swinney to cancel the exams now and replace them with a fairer, alternative method of assessment, that will not penalise students based on their socioeconomic background as the Scottish government initially did this summer in the SQA fiasco."., Ian Gray MSP, 07/12/20

https://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/news/politics/call-scrap-higher-exams-fears-23124570

“In October, I said Highers and Advanced Highers would go ahead if it was safe and fair to do so. Since then, many pupils have suffered disruption because of COVID, as they were obliged to self-isolate or even saw their school closed. The level of disruption has, however, not been the same across the board – pupils in deprived areas have been hit hardest. “While we hope that public health will improve in the coming months with the roll-out of the vaccine, we cannot guarantee that there will be no further disruption to pupils’ learning. “Holding exams would run the risk of translating the unequal impact of COVID into unfair results for our poorest pupils, leading to their futures being blighted through no fault of their own. That is simply not fair. “There will be no Higher or Advanced Higher exams in 2021. Instead we will adopt a new model that is based on the one developed for National 5 qualifications and make awards on teacher judgement of evidence of learner attainment. This
approach is more flexible and takes account of the reality of the disruption so many pupils have already had to their learning." - John Swinney, 20/10/21 https://www.gov.scot/news/sqa-awards-update/

In light of this, the question is less whether we can hold the exams safely in the spring and more whether we can do so fairly. There is no getting around the fact that a significant percentage of our poorest pupils have lost significantly more teaching time than other pupils. Changing the exams for all does not – and cannot - address that. Instead, we need a model that is more flexible to the specific circumstances of the individual pupil. That model exists. It is the model we plan to use to award qualification this year for National 5s. A group led by the SQA, and involving directors of education from our councils, members of the EIS, Colleges Scotland and others has been working to develop this model. - John Swinney to Scottish Parliament 08/12/20

Having anticipated significant disruption to learning this session, actions have been taken across the Scottish education system to ensure demonstrated learner evidence can be gathered. For example, SQA has already reduced the evidence requirements for each National Course to the minimum to preserve the validity and public confidence in the qualifications. In many subjects, assessment components have been removed and content and contexts have been reduced to enable a narrower focus for this session. In addition, planned National Qualification verification activity has been reduced to support learning and teaching. SQA, 16/02/21 https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/96763.html

"Our view is if youngsters do any assessments, they should be broken up, and used between now and the end of term. "At the moment, the government guidance is that when pupils go back to school after Easter, it should be for teaching and learning. Assessments should come towards the end of the session. "That is the mistake schools are making." He added: "There are a lot of children who won't have been engaging during lockdown who will be totally disadvantaged by the systems these schools are trying to bring in. "The system put in place at the moment looks straightforward but it's actually micro-managing teachers' decisions. This is where the panic is starting to come in. Teachers are now looking for pieces of evidence to prove to the SQA their grades are correct." - Seamus Searson, General Secretary of the Scottish Secondary Teacher’s Association (SSTA), 01/05/21 https://www.holyrood.com/news/view,sqa-urged-to-act-over-pressure-cooker-tests-that-are-exams-in-all-but-name

Many of the arrangements we are putting in place are very similar to those being put in place in England and Wales, under governments of all parties. I think that reflects the fact that this is a difficult situation. - Nicola Sturgeon, 03/06/21 https://www.holyrood.com/news/view,first-minister-has-full-confidence-in-sqa-after-criticism-over-pupil-assessments

The youth-led SQA Where’s Our Say group told the Sunday -National that young people had been -contacting them to raise concerns over fairness. “Some are concerned that they are being asked to learn a whole course with only a fraction of the teaching they would have in a
‘normal’ year,” said Rachael Hatfield of the group. “Other students are asking how their individual circumstances will be considered by teachers in a way that is fair. For example, students who have had several periods of self-isolation prior to lockdown, those who have been caring for family members during Covid-19 and those with limited or poor internet activity, who want to know how their circumstances will be fed into the ACM the SQA has developed. “Some students are confused about the language used – how is an assessment different to an exam when it makes them feel the same level of anxiety?” She said the group had also heard from pupils with additional support needs who say they need greater flexibility than schools were currently offering. “We know some universities are offering online, home-based exams over a 24-hour period for all students – however that doesn’t appear to have been considered by the SQA,” she said.

“The SQA has essentially said that teachers should use the exam papers that they have provided online and should get pupils to sit these in conditions that are as close as possible to a normal exam,” said Paterson. “No amount of denial by the SQA or by ministers can get round that clear set of instructions.” She said that while, in some respects, that created a better basis for teacher judgments than was available last year when the exams were cancelled it was also clear pupils were not being given the same opportunity to prepare as they normally would, even though their learning had been “severely disrupted”. “The SQA also cancelled most of the normal assessed course work this year, a failure that has not been widely enough commented on,” said Paterson. “So teachers will have to rely to an unfortunately excessive extent on the pseudo-exams. I don’t think any system of assessment would be fair in present circumstances but blaming teachers and schools for interpreting the SQA instructions as being to run exams is hardly likely to encourage confidence in the system.”

From the National, 18th April 2021

Young people in many settings are finding themselves doing assessments which are, in effect, exams, but within school time, to an even more challenging timetable than SQA exams, with no study leave and while being driven to cram for tests rather than to learn. We had understood – as had many parents and young people – that ‘assessment’ would mean course work and that this would take account of the different experiences of young people this year, not a process which would simply mimic the very worst elements of the inequitable exam system it replaces. Many young people will have been negatively impacted by being unable to complete work through no fault of their own, because they are self-isolating, struggling to study from home, suffering from social isolation without their usual support systems and more. We also understand that these tests, with answers, are being widely shared on TikTok. How can there be any hope of this being a fair system, when indeed different schools are adopting different approaches? - Letter from Connect, 18th April (independent parents’ group)

Glasgow Youth Council launched survey of fourth, fifth and sixth year pupils last week and has been swamped with replies. Rose Martin, a sixth year pupil and the GYC’s executive communications and outreach officer, said: “The overwhelming response is we have not been consulted as much as we should have been. "Every school is doing it their own way. There have been leaks of exams and learning online has -disadvantaged a lot of people who may not have a great wi-fi signal or a quiet space.” She added: “From the responses so far, some teachers have been giving away what’s in the exam. It is all a case of luck in who your teacher is and what school you go to. “Some have been as subtle
as a brick but other pupils have not even been given any notice, they just go in and it is sitting on their desks. Others have had notice but no hint as to what is in it.” She said the unfair situation could have a direct impact on trying to secure a university place. She added: “I already have an -unconditional place to study psychology but a lot of my friends are relying this year on their exam results. They were confident of getting the grades they needed but now they have lost faith. Some are even considering dropping out of school at the end of fifth year and going to college. That was never a consideration before this.” - Glasgow Youth Council spokesperson, 31/05/21
https://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/news/scottish-news/grotesque-unfairness-scots-exams-blasted-24217251

‘Let me be clear about the assessment process itself. At the heart of the model are teachers’ and lecturers’ professional judgments, which are based on what learners have demonstrated that they have attained. Those judgments alone, based on learners’ work, will this year determine the grades that young people receive. **Those grades will be based not on historical data or on use of an algorithm, but on what each individual learner has demonstrated that they know, understand and can do, through the work on which they have been assessed in school or college. That is the key difference this year, compared with what happened last year.** My key message to reassure learners is this: your grades will be judged by your teachers, based on your work. I am enormously grateful for the efforts of our teachers, lecturers and others in schools and colleges who are implementing the model in order to ensure fairness for all learners. To provide evidence of how the model is being implemented locally, Her Majesty’s inspectors of education today published a review of local authority quality-assurance processes. The key findings from the review provide independent evidence that the model is working well in practice, with local authority officers, headteachers, teachers and SQA coordinators having collaborated to ensure that young people’s efforts are appropriately recognised, and with local authorities having supported schools to implement the model to reflect their local contexts while working within a national framework. Despite the best efforts, a very small number of learners who completed courses have over recent weeks, in particular, experienced significant disruption that has meant that they have been unable to complete their assessments. Contingency arrangements, on which the national qualifications 2021 group is publishing details today, are in place for later certification for that group. I fully appreciate that there are people who disagree with the model that has been put in place. However, to them I say that teachers, learners, and parents and carers have been listened to, and that the model is the result of that. Awarding qualifications would always be challenging under the current circumstances, but we believe that the model that we have is the fairest solution in the interests of young people. That is not just my conclusion; it is that of the national qualifications 2021 group, too.’ Shirley Ann Somerville to the Scottish Parliament, Wednesday June 2nd, https://www.parliament.scot/chamber-and-committees/official-report/what-was-said-in-parliament/meeting-of-parliament-02-06-2021?meeting=13232&iob=119874

“We are all at breaking point with how this has been handled. It feels like we have been lied to and the kids have been lied to. They have not been given any study leave, and then were thrown into what were essentially exams to do. “Now it is on us (teachers) to mark these, and it has nothing to do with our judgement as we were led to believe. We have been given papers and marking schemes by the SQA to use, and what
percentage then matches what grade, which isn't something we can use our judgement to overrule. “There’s pupils I’m marking who should be getting an A but are having to get a B because they missed class time on subjects that then came up in these papers, and they never got study leave to catch up or prepare. So many of them are stressed over how this has been handled.” - Headteacher, 15th June 2021

https://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/in-your-area/lanarkshire/staff-pupils-breaking-point-over-24317548

"I understand when a young person is sitting in front of a desk undertaking what feels like an exam, but there are key differences this year," she said. "We accepted that because of public health advice it was not possible to get young people into exam halls in the volume and in the way we have had in the past. "Young people will have had disruption to learning that affects them in different ways. "So schools and colleges have been able to assess young people when and how they see fit within a structure of understanding the courses and the assessment approach and we have provided guidance around all of that." - Fiona Robertson, 4th August 2021

https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-58089687

2. Wales

"Any delay would have a knock-on effect on other matters such as progression, results days and so on, therefore it needs careful consideration. "We need to work through the next few weeks as we move to a full return and keep this, and other issues, under review." - Kirsty Williams, 1st September 2020


When we met with you in June, we agreed that the normal assessment arrangements for qualifications provide the fairest and most accurate measure of a learner’s performance. However, the current public health crisis means that we cannot be confident that timetabled examinations will be able to take place as usual next year. We are, therefore, proposing different assessment arrangements that provide greater flexibility, without the need for significant additional contingency measures. For the most part, our proposals move away from reliance upon timetabled exams and all of them include the ‘banking’ of some assessment evidence prior to the summer that could be used to generate results if schools were closed. - Qualifications Wales letter to Kirsty Williams, 16th October 2020


There will be no GCSE, AS Level or A Level exams next year. It's a matter of fairness. The pandemic has made it impossible to guarantee a level playing field. This eases pressure and creates time in the summer term for young people to continue learning and building confidence. - Tweet from Welsh Government, November 10th 2020

https://twitter.com/WelshGovernment/status/1326133035595669504
“The Welsh government has made clear decisions,” she said. “The current position in England of a three-week delay to 2021 examinations is simply not good enough. Education is not as normal. Months of classroom learning have already been lost and many young people will continue to have to spend varying degrees of time out of school.” - Mary Bousted, General Secretary, Education Union, November 10th, 2020 https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2020/nov/10/wales-government-no-gcse-a-levels-exams-next-summer

“The wellbeing of learners and ensuring fairness across the system is central in our decision-making process. "We remain optimistic that the public health situation will improve, but the primary reason for my decision is down to fairness; the time learners will spend in schools and colleges will vary hugely and, in this situation, it is impossible to guarantee a level playing field for exams to take place." - Kirsty Williams, 10th November, 2020 https://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/54891773

‘In place of exams, the Welsh Government intended to work with schools and colleges to take forward teacher-managed assessments that this should include assessments that will be externally set and marked but delivered within a classroom environment under teacher supervision her expectation this work will form the basis for centre-based outcomes which will be linked to an agreed national approach to provide consistency across Wales. The full approach to this will be developed by school and college leaders, supported by Welsh Government and advised by Qualifications Wales and WJEC. My policy intention is that this will form the basis for centre-based outcomes which will be linked to an agreed national approach to provide consistency across Wales to assure universities and colleges of our approach. This work will be completed in the autumn term to provide time for implementation from January and we envisage that the first assessment activities will not commence until the latter half of the spring term’. - Kirsty Williams, 10th November, 2020 https://gov.wales/wales-approach-qualifications-2021-confirmed-education-minister-kirsty-williams

“We want to make sure that qualifications meet the needs of learners in Wales and there is public confidence in our qualifications system. There are no perfect solutions. Our Board, as part of their statutory duties, has confirmed the assessment approach for GCSE, AS and A levels in 2021. We welcome the work and recommendations of the Design and Delivery Advisory Group and will continue to work with them throughout the coming academic year. This is a new approach that WJEC will be delivering and there will be risks and challenges. We will need to do further work with stakeholders and the Design and Delivery Advisory Group to confirm the appeals process and how grades will be awarded. We will also be engaging widely with schools, colleges and stakeholders so everyone fully understands the approach to regulating qualifications for this coming summer.” - Qualifications Wales Chief Executive Philip Blaker, 16th December 2020 https://www.qualificationswales.org/english/news/qualifications-wales-confirms-assessment-approach-for-summer-2021/
I would like to thank Geraint Rees and the group of head teachers and college leaders for working at pace to develop these recommendations and for putting equity for learners at the centre of thinking. What I am providing details of today is a transparent and rigorous approach to support learners as they progress to their next steps. It ensures that universities can be confident of the abilities of students from Wales through their qualifications, and it also promotes teaching, learning and consistent assessment across Wales as we all struggle to recover in different ways from the impact coronavirus has had on education. I was clear that any solution must be mindful of our learners’ well-being. I am satisfied we have an approach that is fair for all learners whilst minimising disruption to learning and maintaining confidence and trust in the integrity of qualifications in Wales. Alternative options would have required centres to design assessment materials, develop and test marking schemes, and then be responsible for appeals in relation to these. This would take time away from teaching and learning and could also lead to inconsistency for learner experiences across Wales. I am also confident these plans minimise the impact on teacher workload - teachers and lecturers are already under a great deal of pressure and we do not want to add to this - Kirsty Williams, 16th December, 2020

Philip Blaker, Chief Executive of Qualifications Wales, said they have tried to assure the appeals process is “fair and workable”, while taking on board recommendations from a review into last year’s process. He said: “As with all the decisions being taken for this summer, there are no easy answers. We are committed to putting the needs of the learner at the heart of our work.” Philip Blaker, 5th March 2021

“As outlined in the Minister for Education’s policy direction, the grade profiles of schools and colleges will be reviewed, and any atypical grade profiles discussed with the schools and colleges. “The intention is that this provides confidence that there is a final step to safeguard the credibility of results through professional dialogue. This builds on other parts of the quality assurance arrangements that seek to establish consistency in the approaches taken by schools and colleges across Wales in summer 2021. “It also reflects feedback from school and college leaders who expected a similar process last year and welcomed this opportunity to explain their professional judgement.” Philip Blaker, 23rd March 2021 https://www.qualificationswales.org/english/news/adaptations-for-2022-and-final-details-for-2021-announced/

“We are doing small assessments as per the guidance. “This is an issue as many pupils and students have already used the past papers the WJEC have instructed us to use. “This system is flawed and will allow for grade inflation as we have been told that all grades must be based on valid evidence, the problem is that many pupils will prepare for these assessments really well (using the papers they already have access to. “Some pupils have already printed out the mark schemes for the last three years past papers. This will mean they will have evidence for grades that they were not capable of if the paper was unseen.” “This new guidance goes against the first advice about having evidence for each grade awarded – if we have too many or too few Cs or As (for example) we will need to ignore the evidence and revise up or down our grades.” - Headteacher Neil Foley, 11th April 2021 https://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/education/years-exam-grading-system-flawed-20358560
"Given the extraordinary circumstances faced by centres this year, we have allowed a high degree of flexibility for teachers/lecturers to select appropriate evidence to support their determination of grades for learners this summer. "Evidence can be based on a broad range of sources including past papers, centre devised tasks and course work. “Grades will be determined by centres to reflect a holistic, fair, reasonable and carefully considered judgement of each learner's performance across a range of evidence, on the curriculum content that they have been taught. “No single piece of evidence e.g. past paper will necessarily be more important than another. Teachers/lectures will be using their professional judgement in assessing learners based on a range of evidence that best gives an overall picture of their performance.” - WJEC, 11th April 2021 https://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/education/years-exam-grading-system-flawed-20358560

Since then, we have continued to work closely with Qualifications Wales and WJEC to support the necessary scaffolding that will help schools and colleges to deliver evidence-based grades for learners which are transparent and consistent. This has included advice and feedback on the development of the framework for assessment and quality assurance, centre guidance and professional learning opportunities, approaches to communications with learners and centres, and the further embedding of learner voice and equalities issues. It has also included focused discussion to promote clarity on key aspects of the approach, including the process for appeals, routes for private candidates, and efforts to promote consistency – reflecting the view of the Group that an element of external discussion, both in relation to implementation of the model and the overall grade profile of centres, would be important in helping to provide public assurance and credibility. We have continued to be mindful of the learning from 2020, as set out in the independent review, as we progress our thinking. - Letter from the DDAG, 24th April 2021 https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2021-03/design-delivery-advisory-group-letter-to-minister-march-2021_0.pdf

‘Asked by ASCL Cymru more than 87% of the 70 schools and colleges in Wales who responded said they are using a combination of exam-style papers and non-exam evidence to assess students for GCSEs, A-levels and other qualifications. More than 47% said they will attach greater weighting to exam-style papers, with 37% giving roughly equal weighting to both exam-style papers and non-exam evidence. Just under 3% intend to give greater weighting to non-exam evidence, while no school or college that responded will use non-exam evidence alone to assess students. Less than 6% intend to base grading solely on exam-style papers sat in exam-style conditions’. - Report from Wales Online by Abbie Wightwick, 12th May 2021 https://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/education/gcses-alevels-grades-2021-summer-20573901

"The assessment process for 2021 has been designed to be as flexible as possible, to allow teachers to design their own tasks and decide how to deliver them. "The number of assessments required as part of the evidence used to make the judgement this summer has not been prescribed, so it is natural that approaches vary slightly. "Whilst there is flexibility, to promote consistency, schools and colleges have sent their centre assessment policies to WJEC to be checked as part of the quality assurance process. Where necessary, WJEC has asked for more
information and clarification." WJEC statement 12th May 2021  https://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/education/gcses-alevels-grades-2021-summer-20573901

“Schools and colleges will be working very hard to ensure standards are as consistent as they can be across Wales". She added: “There will of course be both internal and external quality assurance processes to try to ensure that grades are fair and consistent, but the appeals process that backs this up is yet to be announced and schools and colleges need this detail as soon as possible to give reassurance to their students. “It is also important to recognise that this process represents an enormous amount of work and additional pressure on schools, colleges and their staff, following on from the extremely demanding period of the pandemic. It is essential that they get as much support as possible to allow them to perform this very challenging task." She said students can feel reassured they will get gradings that are fair and "It is important that everyone understands that there is no one-size-fits-all model out there, and that nobody thinks this is an ideal situation." “Schools are working night and day to facilitate a very different arrangement to that both they and students have been used to and, unlike their colleagues in England, they have no choice regarding the exam board they are required to use, with WJEC effectively occupying a monopoly position." ASCL Cymru Director Eithne Hughes, 12th May 2021  https://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/education/gcses-alevels-grades-2021-summer-20573901

The WJEC strenuously denied any algorithm was being used this year. It insisted teachers would not be told to alter grades, although they will be asked to provide more evidence if results are more than 3% to 7% different to the three years before 2020. "There is no algorithm – we would like to reassure learners that grades will be based on the professional judgement of their schools and colleges," - From Wales Online (Abbie Wightwick) 19th May, 2021 -  https://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/education/welsh-exam-bosses-deny-claim-20630898

“Clearly, the whole process of setting, invigilating, administering, marking and moderating has created a lot of extra work for our teaching and support staff in addition to their existing roles. “It has meant a lot of marking for teaching colleagues, moderating in departments and a very busy time for our two deputy heads academic, liaising with heads of department, to standardise grades before the final grades were agreed.” - Simon Dorman, headmaster at Monmouth School for Boys, Wales, June 18th 2021  https://ie-today.co.uk/news/grading-process-caused-anxiety-and-a-lot-of-extra-work-say-senior-leaders/

“Our focus this year has been on making sure learners are not disadvantaged by circumstances they have faced so it will be the same next year," the Minister said. “There are issues with pupils who have not taken exams. We have been very clear there are these issues and they need to be addressed. "So the assurance I can give is that we will also make sure students are not disadvantaged next year. “The means of assessment may be different next year but grades will be of the same value." - Jeremy Miles (Education Minister) 10th August 2021  https://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/education/a-level-results-grade-inflation-21273100
The grades GCSE learners are receiving today have relied on the professional judgement of teachers and lecturers. Schools and colleges have been at the heart of the approach,” We would like to thank them for their dedication and hard work in adapting swiftly to the flexible arrangements put in place so that grades are awarded. “Exams were cancelled due to the pandemic and schools and colleges have been in the best position to make the right decisions for their learners as they understand the local challenges faced. “Learners can be confident that the qualifications awarded in Wales this year carry the same value as qualifications awarded in any other year.” - Philip Blaker, Qualifications Wales, 12th August 2021 https://www.qualificationswales.org/english/news/gcse-learners-in-wales-receive-their-grades-following-a-difficult-year/

“This has been an academic year unlike any other,” said Chief Executive Philip Blaker. “Following the Welsh Governments' decision to cancel exams in November last year and the subsequent move in January this year to an approach where schools and colleges determine the results for their learners, our priority has been to find the fairest possible approach in these extraordinary circumstances. “The priority being for learners to make their next steps to higher education, further education, apprenticeships or employment and protect their wellbeing. “The process has relied on the professional judgement of teachers and lecturers to determine the grades that are appropriate for their learners, placing schools and colleges at the heart of the approach. We would like to thank them for their dedication and hard work in adapting swiftly to the flexible arrangements put in place to enable grades to be awarded. “Given that a centralised approach, such as exams, was not possible in the circumstances, they have been in the best position to make the right decisions for their learners as they understand the local challenges faced. In the circumstances a one size fits all approach would have presented greater risks to fairness. “While the overall pattern of results looks different, learners can be confident that the qualifications awarded in Wales this year carry the same value as qualifications awarded in any other year.” - Philip Blaker, Qualifications Wales, 12th August 2021 https://www.qualificationswales.org/english/news/learners-in-wales-receive-their-a-and-as-level-grades-today-after-a-difficult-year/

3. England

Addressing the virtual Education Select Committee, Mr Taylor said: “We think that some form of examination, or standardised test, or something that gives the student an ability to demonstrate their skills and knowledge is going to be essential for any awarding system that students regard as fair.” When asked what Ofqual's plans were if students are unable to sit exams, Mr Taylor said: “We believe there are mechanisms, such as additional papers. “There are other mechanisms including, for example, using online tests. We feel we have enough time to come up with a solution to that problem.” Julie Swan, Ofqual's executive director for general qualifications, told MPs that a decision on whether to delay exams was due “within weeks rather than over a period of months”. She added that it would be “challenging” to ensure results were published on the usual dates in August if the start of the exams, which usually begin in May, were pushed back by more than two weeks. Ms Swan said: “One of our particular concerns about delay is the willingness of teachers after an extended period of teaching – and having
perhaps lost their holidays this year – to be willing to mark throughout the summer holidays, which if the exam timetable is shifted back is what will happen. - Coverage of Ofqual Select Committee hearing, 2nd September 2020 https://www.cambridge-news.co.uk/news/uk-world-news/gcses-levels-could-held-online-18869757

"Exams are the fairest way of judging a student's performance so they will go ahead, underpinned by contingency measures developed in partnership with the sector. "Students have experienced considerable disruption and it's right we give them, and their teachers, the certainty that exams will go ahead and more time to prepare." - Gavin Williamson, 12th October, 2020 https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-54508851

“We are looking at what further steps we could take to make these exams less daunting a prospect for students, while of course making sure they remain a fair test of knowledge and understanding in each subject,” she said. “We will be intent on making sure that results are sufficiently valid and fair across subjects, but there is nevertheless in our view an opportunity to recognise, and to compensate for the baleful impact of the pandemic for all students qualifying in 2021 (and possibly beyond), by setting national performance standards more generously than in normal times.” - Dame Glenys Stacey (Ofqual Chief Regulator), 5th November, 2020 https://inews.co.uk/news/education/gcses-a-levels-2021-ofqual-exams-grade-more-generously-750774

“We are not going to let Covid damage the life chances of an entire year of students by cancelling next year’s exams. Exams are the best form of assessment we have, and we are therefore taking steps to ensure that any student preparing to sit them in 2021 has every chance possible to do their very best.” “Tens of thousands of students have been taking those GCSE and A-level exams all the way through that national lockdown, and that’s been done safely and securely and successfully. “I have every confidence if we’ve been able to run a whole set of exams for GCSEs and A-levels during a national lockdown, we have every ability to run those same set of exams in the summer of next year.” “So we do believe that exam assessment is the best form, but we do equally recognise that we’re going to have to take extraordinary measures to support children.” - Gavin Williamson, 3rd December 2020 https://www.theguardian.com/education/2020/dec/03/gavin-williamson-vows-a-levels-and-gcses-will-not-be-cancelled-in-england-covid

“move to remote provision from tomorrow except for vulnerable students and children of key workers” until at least the February half term. He added that it is therefore “not possible or fair for all exams to go ahead this summer as normal”. The Education Secretary Gavin Williamson will “work together with Ofqual to put in place alternative arrangements”. - Boris Johnson, January 4th, 2021 https://feweek.co.uk/gcse-and-a-level-2021-exams-cancelled/

"the best system possible to ensure there is consistency and fairness in how teachers submit grades for their students”. Asked whether he accepted grades would be inflated this year, he told BBC Breakfast the government had put in place “different checking mechanisms” to ensure
there was "consistency". He added ministers had devised the "best system possible" to ensure "fairly awarded grades at a time when we don't think it's fair for [students] to sit the exams in the normal way." - Nick Gibb, 25th February, 2021 [https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-56157413

This year it is teachers' judgement that will be used to assess what has been learned and determine student grades. Assessment cannot itself serve as an instrument to recover lost learning and compensate for the different experiences students will have had in different parts of the country, and the arrangements being put in place will therefore only take into account what students have been taught, not what they have missed. The aim is to make it no harder overall for this year's students to receive a particular grade than students in other years. - Simon Lebus, 25th February 2021 (includes quotes from others)[https://www.gov.uk/government/news/teacher-assessed-grades-for-students

"It is wrong that education professionals, parents and students alike have had to wait until now to know how grades will be determined this summer. They have rightly been demanding clarity, some certainty and robust contingency planning since the start of the academic year and options to facilitate these things were highlighted to Government by the NEU. - Mary Bousted of the NEU, 25th February 2021 [https://neu.org.uk/press-releases/awarding-grades-2021

‘We have decided that: 1. Any student who receives a teacher-assessed grade (TAG) this summer, or who an exam board reasonably believes would have entered for the exams in summer 2021 had they taken place, can take the corresponding GCSE, AS and A level exams in autumn 2021. In addition, any student who was aged at least 16 on 31 August 2021 can take the GCSE English language and maths exams, as is usually the case. 2. We will require the exam boards to offer exams in all GCSE and A level subjects and to offer AS exams in biology, chemistry, further maths, maths and physics. Each exam board can decide whether to offer exams in the other AS subjects if it wishes to do so. 3. An exam board will not have to offer exams in any subject for which it has received no entries by the entry deadline. 4. The exams will be in their normal format, with no adaptations being made. 15. Except for art and design qualifications, grades will be determined by students' performance in the exams only – there will be no non-exam assessments. 6. For art and design qualifications, grades will be determined by students' performance in a task set and marked by the exam board. 7. AS and A level exams will be held in October and GCSE exams in November and December. We will also allow, but not require, the exam boards to offer GCSE English language and GCSE maths exams in January 2022 for students who were eligible to enter the autumn exams in those subjects but did not do so. 8. The usual arrangements for appeals and reviews of marking2 will apply to the exam series. 9. An exam board must issue a replacement certificate to a student showing the higher of an autumn 2021 or summer 2021 grade in response to a request from that student. We will not require the exam boards to provide replacement certificates for students showing the higher of the summer 2020 and the autumn 2021 grade'. - Ofqual, May (undated) 2021
This year we have rightly asked those who know students best – their teachers – to determine young people’s grades. While I know the wait for results can be an anxious one, students and their families can look forward to receiving results next month in the knowledge that they will reflect young people’s hard work and enable them to progress to their next stage. Exams will always be the fairest way to assess students, which is why they will take place next year, but it’s right that next summer’s arrangements take into account the disruption young people have faced over the past 18 months. - Gavin Williamson, 12th July, 2021

Now that the summer holidays are firmly underway, I hope that you are enjoying some very well-deserved rest. However, as we head towards A Level, GCSE and vocational results days, I did not want to delay writing to thank you for your incredible efforts over the past academic year. During this pandemic we have asked you to go to exceptional lengths to keep children learning and time and again you have responded. You have my deepest gratitude for continuing to step up to this challenge with such dedication and determination. I do hope you can take stock of your achievements and allow yourself a moment to feel a sense of pride. In particular I would like to thank everyone who has worked on this year’s assessments. The teacher-assessed grades process has, I know, taken a significant amount of work, but you took it on and worked, as you always do, for the greatest benefit for your pupils We all know that for young people to progress to the next stage of their lives, they need qualifications that they can have confidence in and which reflect accurately what they have learnt and what they can do. Right at the start of the pandemic I said that people would now have a far greater appreciation of what teachers do and this will only have increased as the months passed. Your hard work will have earned the trust and admiration of the whole country. In fact, I think that, as a nation, we have perhaps never valued education as much as we do now. In the next few weeks students across the country will be taking up apprenticeships, preparing for university, moving on to A levels and other further qualifications or starting their first job. They can take those next steps because of everything you’ve done to support them. You have given them their passports to the future. For all these ground-breaking achievements I want to say a heartfelt thank you on behalf of the Prime Minister, my department and the ministerial team. And I would like to wish you a peaceful, healthy and relaxing summer break. - Gavin Williamson (letter to Heads), 9th August 2021

These grades are absolutely worth so much, they are the key for those youngsters to take that next step “[students] have worked incredibly hard for those grades, wherever they have been, right across the country, and I think we should be celebrating that”. “This year is a year that we can’t truly compare to any other year,” Mr Williamson told BBC Radio 4’s Today programme. “No other cohort of students have experienced
a situation where they haven’t been able to go into the classroom for a sustained period of time, not just once, but actually twice, and we have seen people having different experiences.” - Gavin Williamson, 10th August, 2021 https://www.standard.co.uk/news/uk/gavin-williamson-alevels-education-secretary-alevel-sky-news-b949965.html

“I think that is just tweaking the system to get the Government out of a difficult story, “We shouldn’t be just playing around with the grading system here, we should be thinking about the quality of teaching and learning that children are receiving. “The Government didn’t set down a clear standardised process early on last year and schools, therefore, were really awarding grades in very different ways,” “I think the lesson is that we need a collaborative approach with education professionals to design a robust, workable system which is fair to all students,” “In my view that probably needs a mix of assessments throughout the period of study, over the two years of the A-level course for example, and an examination.” - Kate Green (Shadow Education Secretary), 11th August https://www.standard.co.uk/news/uk/gavin-williamson-labour-kate-green-government-alevel-b950120.html

"I would go to school, mark papers, go home, eat, and then go to bed. There was no social life, I did nothing for myself because the marking took priority”. "A kid might not be able to do what they want to do in the future, because I've given them three marks, all because I'm too tired to read the paper properly and find five." -- "Just like preparing for court, we collected as much evidence as possible and then formed the grade."

"I was told if I marked my students too high, then results in other departments would be brought down, so I was incredibly critical. I failed students because I knew I had to be honest.” Quotes from BBC piece on strain on teachers, 13th August 2021 https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/newsbeat-58157807

“Exams will of course go ahead in 2022, they are the fairest method of assessing young people. We have already announced the details of the adaptations to those exams to make sure they are fair,” he said. “But we are also working with Ofqual on contingency plans in case it is not possible for exams to go ahead safely or fairly.” “I can assure there will be no change to the grading system for 2022, but we are looking at the longer-term issue about grading in GCSEs and A-Levels.” - September 6th, 2021 https://inews.co.uk/news/education/ministers-drawing-up-contingency-plans-covid-cancels-gcses-a-levels-in-2022-1185358

A senior source in the Department for Education told i that they would be “very surprised” if the changes in 2021 were not carried forward. With students potentially “competing” for scarce university places, they said it made sense to “fire the start gun all at the same time” by having results released at the same time as Scotland. They added that A-level results coming out a “little bit earlier” would also help the Government deliver a planned shake-up to university admissions, whereby students would only receive offers once they have their grades. Currently, students receive offers months earlier on the basis of grades predicted by their school. The source said universities were increasingly “keen” on such a change to admissions, which the Government would look to achieve through a “voluntary” deal with vice-chancellors, rather than by
pushing through legislation. -- Geoff Barton, the general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders, told i: "There will be a range of views about the idea of moving results days into a single week on a permanent basis and on when that results week might be held. "We would urge the DfE to ensure that it consults fully about any proposed move before it decides to embark on any change. "What we would emphasise is that if it is minded to do something along these lines it needs to consult very soon because schools and colleges must be able to plan accordingly. We are concerned that this could already mean a rushed timetable for any such change." - September 15th 2021
https://inews.co.uk/news/education/a-levels-gcses-government-exam-calendar-university-admissions-1199103

Appearing before the education select committee on Tuesday, Nick Gibb, the schools minister, said the bigger rise in top grades for private schools was a "consequence of the pandemic, rather than the awarding system, [which has], of course, hit children from more disadvantaged backgrounds harder than it has for children from more affluent backgrounds". But Ian Bauckham, Ofqual's interim chair, said it was "impossible" to say that the changes were "simply due to the pandemic or simply due to the approach we’ve taken in grading". - 10th September, 2021
https://schoolsweek.co.uk/ofqual-wont-be-able-to-explain-private-school-grades-boost/

4. Northern Ireland

"We will be able to process precise details of everything that happened in 2020 to see what lessons can be learned for the future," "I believe that public examinations in these key qualifications are the most valid and reliable method of assessment available," he wrote. "The requirement to sit public examinations can provide a source of focus, motivation and engagement for many of our young people." "This means that in the event of further significant disruption due to the wider public health context, students have covered broadly similar content," Mr Weir said. "I would remind schools that it will be important that they retain a portfolio of evidence of pupils’ progression throughout the year in case this is needed at some stage for contingency arrangements. "I am conscious that the public health situation is extremely fluid and that there may be further significant disruption as the year progresses." "In taking this difficult decision, I have had to balance the merits of reducing the number of exams, with a need to protect the interests of our young people going forward," Mr Weir said. - 9th October, 2020
https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-54482867

"Today, I am announcing changes to exams and assessments this academic year which I have instructed CCEA to implement. "My key priority is to ensure that all Northern Ireland students will have the opportunity to obtain portable qualifications, comparable to those of other jurisdictions that will enable them to succeed in future study and employment. "These changes are also designed to free up teaching time, reduce pressure on students and allow assessments to be undertaken within current public health restrictions." - Peter Weir, 10th October 2020
“disappointed that Wales has acted unilaterally to move away from the three-country arrangement for GCSEs, AS and A-levels. These new proposals appear radically different from England and NI and call into question whether these qualifications can be treated as comparable to GCSEs and A Levels awarded through examinations.” “Welsh proposals for teacher-managed assessments, and the lack of clarity about what these will actually entail, are likely to significantly increase anxiety levels which will further impact pupils’ mental health and wellbeing.” “My priority is that exams to award CCEA qualifications should go ahead as planned in 2021. I am conscious that the public health situation remains fluid, therefore my officials are working closely with CCEA to develop a range of further contingencies should the public health situation worsen. “However the experience of 2020 has shown us that exams remain the fairest method of assessing and awarding qualifications. In these uncertain times, the familiarity of the exam system provides greater certainty as learners know what they are working towards and how it will be awarded.” - Peter Weir 11th November 2020 https://www.derryjournal.com/education/education-minister-confirms-exams-will-go-ahead-ni-2021-3032093

“Let me first reiterate that I will not be cancelling examinations. However, I know our students are facing unprecedented disruption to their learning. That’s why our qualifications will be different next year and I will be taking exceptional steps to ensure they are as fair as possible. In recognition of the challenges of studying in such disrupted times, I am taking unprecedented steps to reduce assessment across qualifications. “Over the last few weeks, my officials have been working closely with CCEA to develop wide ranging measures, which will best support students in these unprecedented times. In doing so they have engaged with the Education and Training Inspectorate, school leaders, teachers and, importantly, young people to seek their views on the way forward. “I believe the changes I am announcing will provide young people with the clarity and confidence they need to achieve success. The changes include more generous grading across all qualifications and significant reductions in the content which will be assessed.” “I am very conscious that our young people have faced incredible challenges as a result of this pandemic. In making these adaptations to examinations, we will ensure that their lives are not defined or held back by the disruption they have experienced in 2020. “I want to publicly thank each and every teacher, school leader, Governor and all the other vital support staff that work in and around our schools, for their incredible efforts. They have dealt with a wide range of difficult and exceptional issues. Thanks to their efforts our children have been able to return to school and continue their education.” - Peter Weir 15th December 2020 https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/news/weir-outlines-plans-exams-and-assessments-2021

In conclusion, I thank the House for the opportunity to address you on these importance issues. My Department is working hard to make sure we take into account the effects of the pandemic, to make the best contingency arrangements we can, and to make sure exam results will be fair and command public confidence. Fairness to pupils is my priority, and will continue to be at the forefront of every decision we take in the lead up to exams next summer. Exams are the fairest way of judging a student’s performance so they will go ahead, underpinned by contingency measures developed in partnership with the sector. In these exceptional times, I have taken exceptional and unprecedented steps to ensure our young people are supported to progress in education, training or employment. Let me make me one further commitment to our
students. Across GCSEs, AS Levels and A Levels: candidates will be awarded a grade based on their own performance in the units of assessment they have taken. Your work will determine your final marks and grades. Again, I commend all of our school leaders and teachers for their efforts in these difficult times. In closing, to all those in our schools - staff, pupils and their families – at the end of what has been a very difficult year, I want to send my best wishes for a quiet and restful Christmas and every success in 2021. - Peter Weir 15th December 2020

https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/education/Statement%20to%20the%20Assembly%20on%20Contingency%20Arrangements%20for%20summer%202021%20Ex....pdf

"I now feel we have reached a point where, while I still believe examinations are the most appropriate and fairest awarding methodology, with a further six weeks of remote learning having to be imposed, we cannot continue with exams in the way that was planned," he said. - Peter Weir 6th January 2021

https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-55560314

"We now need to see the education minister bringing forward credible alternative arrangements which avoid the debacle of last year and recognise the hard work put in by both students and teachers," she added. - Karen Mullan (Sinn Fein), 6th January 2021

https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-55560314

As you will be aware, I pro-actively commissioned an independent review of the 2020 awarding arrangements which was recently completed by Deloitte and which I published on 8 January. The lessons set out in this report have been taken into account in finalising arrangements for 2021. These include: ∙ More weight has been given to the professional judgement of teachers; ∙ This year there will be no statistical standardisation using an algorithm; ∙ There will be a direct link between the grade awarded and the actual work completed by the learner; ∙ There remains alignment with the approaches across the other UK jurisdictions; ∙ Equity and fairness are at the core of the approach which has been developed; and ∙ There will be moderation of centre assessments both within and across centres. In refining arrangements my officials and CCEA have been working to a set of underlying assumptions including: ∙ All students, including private candidates, who are in their final year of study and due to progress to the next stage of learning or work, will receive a grade; ∙ Focus will be on the establishment and implementation of robust processes so students can receive a fair and accurate grade to allow them to make the right choices in relation to progression; ∙ Additional training and support will be provided to teachers, heads of departments and heads of centres to assist them in undertaking the assignment of grades. This will also assist with internal and external quality assurance processes with the aim of having more consistency in approaches across centres; and ∙ No student should be penalised for being unable to complete any part of a course, including a non-examination assessment, during a period of school closure or a period of self-isolation. - Peter Weir, 2nd February 2021

https://www.newsletter.co.uk/education/full-ni-education-minister-peter-weir-outlines-alternative-arrangements-2021-exams-3120917
“The knowledge, expertise and professionalism of teachers and school leaders are key to the success of this process. CCEA recognises the burden of responsibility that this task places on to teachers and is committed to providing as much support and guidance as possible so that they can work with confidence to arrive at grades that reflect their student’s knowledge this year. We are grateful for the commitment, hard work and collaboration across the education community to ensure that our students are able to progress onto the next stage of their journey.” - CCEA, 5th March 2021 https://ccea.org.uk/news/2021/march/ccea-publishes-gcse-and-level-awarding-summer-2021-alternative-arrangements-process

“We were told by Peter Weir that they [exams] would 100% go ahead in September and then in December we were told they would go ahead - but only parts of the course. “Then in January we were told they were cancelled completely. “Now they are calling them assessments - not exams - but they are basically the same with a different name.” - Anonymous student 15th April 2021 https://www.belfastlive.co.uk/news/belfast-news/level--gcse-students-betrayed-20384707

Secondary Students’ Union of NI President, Cormac Savage, says what is happening school to school differs, but that the message from students is the same. He told Belfast Live: “Students feel betrayed by what many experience now. “We were promised a cancellation of exams and CCEA’s guidance has left students and teachers in a situation where they feel they must complete swathes of high control assessments. “A high control assessment is an exam by the back door.” And Cormac says these assessments, which following just a few weeks of face-to-face teaching, have also hit students’ mental health. “The mental health impact on students has been immense,” 15th April 2021 https://www.belfastlive.co.uk/news/belfast-news/level--gcse-students-betrayed-20384707

“I wish to congratulate all of the young people who have received their GCSE results today. They have worked incredibly hard to achieve success in their studies and this has been reflected in the grades they have deservedly achieved today, “No other cohort of students have experienced a situation where they were out of the classroom for a sustained period of time, not just once, but twice. Despite two years of disrupted learning, our young people have shown immense determination, resilience and tenacity in their studies. “I also wish to pay tribute to teachers across Northern Ireland who have been at the heart of students’ education throughout this important year. Without their enthusiasm, dedication, and commitment, today’s successes would not have been possible.” - Michelle McIlveen (Education Secretary) 12th August 2021 https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/news/congratulations-gcse-students-across-northern-ireland