

CYPE(5)-24-19 - Paper to note 9

National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1NA



25 July 2019

Dear Lynne Neagle AM

I'm writing to give you a brief overview of the work being undertaken by Qualifications Wales as the independent regulator overseeing awarding bodies in relation to the summer exam series.

Our role is to protect learners by maintaining standards so that the Welsh qualification system operates on principles of fairness.

More than 50,000 learners across Wales have taken their GCSEs, AS and A level exams during the summer. Marking is now nearly complete and grade boundaries are currently being established so that grades can be awarded ahead of the release of the results next month.

This summer marks an important point in our GCSE and A level reform journey in Wales. The final phase of qualifications reformed following the Review of Qualifications have now been sat, seven new GCSEs and five new A levels.

As in previous years, we have seen changes in entries for many of the core GCSE subjects, these are most likely due to changes in school performance measures which have influenced schools' decisions.

These different entry patterns are likely to impact on the final overall results this summer and therefore care should be taken to make meaningful year-on-year comparisons. Attached to



this letter is an article we have recently published focusing on some of the core GCSEs explaining the changes to entries and the implications for results.

We have a new section on our website – [Exams 360](#) – where you can find further information about this year's exams, including blogs written by senior staff and guest contributors and a series of articles taking a closer look at different aspects of the exam system. We will also send you our analysis of this year's GCSE and A level results after they have been published in August.

In early September, you will receive an invitation to a briefing where you will be able to discuss this year's exams with me and my senior colleagues. The briefing will be held in the autumn following your return from recess and on a date to be confirmed.

In the meantime, if you have any questions about this summer's GCSEs and A levels you are welcome to contact me.

Yours sincerely,



Philip Blaker

Chief Executive



A closer look at some of this summer's **GCSEs**

This summer, students in maintained schools in Wales sat the approved Wales GCSEs graded A*-G. In some independent schools in Wales, students may have taken the England GCSEs graded 9-1. The figures below relate to the entry for approved Wales qualifications only.

Who's taking GCSE Mathematics and GCSE Mathematics-Numeracy this summer?

Total entries for both GCSE Mathematics and GCSE Mathematics-Numeracy have increased this summer by 5,005 entries to 34,570 and 1,695 entries to 24,695 respectively compared to summer 2018. These increases mainly reflect the increase in the number of students taking these qualifications at the end of Year 11, rather than in earlier sittings.

Year 11 entries for GCSE Mathematics is up 4,200 to 27,395 compared to 2018. For GCSE Mathematics-Numeracy, the Year 11 entries have increased by 1,725 to 21,285.

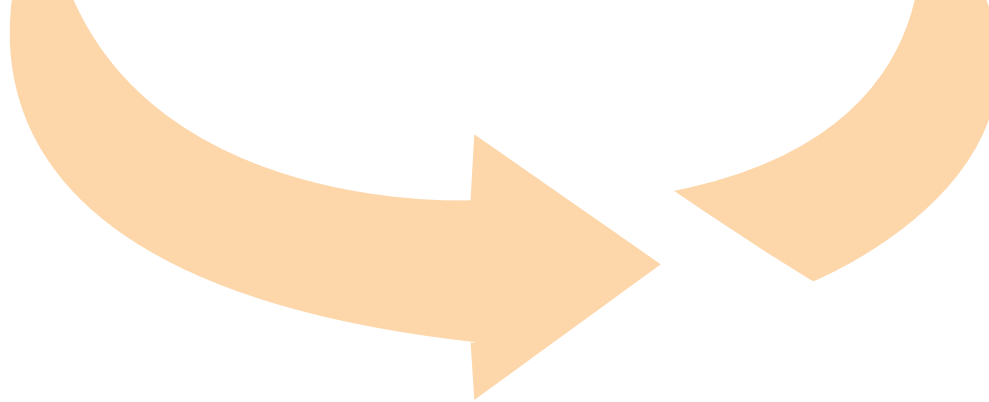
What does this mean for the GCSE Mathematics and GCSE Mathematics-Numeracy results this summer?

These different entry patterns are likely to impact on the final overall Wales mathematics results this summer and therefore care should be taken to make meaningful year on year comparisons.

It is worth remembering that some students will have achieved their grades in Summer 2018 or November 2018 and won't be taking mathematics examinations this summer. These cohort changes mean that interpreting and comparing the overall summer results will need to be done carefully.

Our comparisons will be based on the best results achieved by students who are finishing year 11 this summer. This means that if a student got a better grade earlier in the course or sat in an earlier series and didn't return this summer, that's the grade we'll use for comparison with year 11 results from previous years. This ensures the comparison is as fair and valid as possible.

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Who's taking GCSE English Language and GCSE English Literature this summer?

There is a marked change in this summer's entry pattern for these two qualifications when compared to summer 2018. Total entries for both have increased by 8,800 to 36,270 for GCSE English Language, and up 5,220 to 29,055 for GCSE English Literature. These increases are caused by Year 11 entries in GCSE English Language and Year 10 entries in GCSE English Literature. These changes are likely to have been in response to changes to school performance measures.

GCSE English Language

In the first summer award of GCSE English Language in 2017, the total entry was 55,385 due to a large Year 10 entry. Many of those Year 10 students who sat the qualification in 2017 did not go on to sit it again in summer 2018.

In summer 2018, there was also a large drop in the number of students taking the qualification in Year 10, which resulted in a much smaller total entry of 27,475.

Total entries for GCSE English Language in summer 2019 are 36,270, an increase of 8,800 (32.0%). The Year 10 entry has further decreased, and the Year 11 entry is the majority of the Year 11 national cohort.

GCSE English Literature

Total entries for GCSE English Literature this summer are 29,055 which is a 21.9% increase compared to summer 2018. All year groups except Year 13 or above saw an increase in entries in summer 2019 compared to summer 2018. The largest increase in entries was for Year 10, up by 4,165 to 9,355. These fluctuations are likely to have been in response to changes to school performance measures.

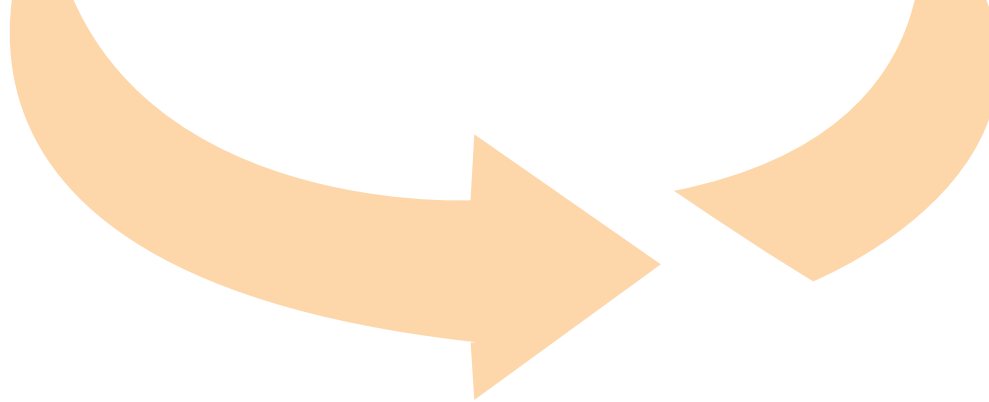
What does this mean for the GCSE English Language and GCSE English Literature results this summer?

These changes to entry patterns are likely to impact on the final overall Wales GCSE English Language and GCSE English Literature results this summer.

To help explain how this year's GCSE English Language results compare to previous years, our overview of the summer results will focus on 16-year-olds, that is, year 11 students.

With all these changes, it will be difficult to make meaningful year-on-year comparisons this summer and schools are likely to see more variation in their year-on-year results.

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In GCSE English Literature, many students will have achieved their grades in summer 2018 and haven't been entered this summer. The nature of the cohort has changed which may mean this summer's results are different compared to previous years. Again, interpreting and comparing the overall summer results will need to be done carefully.

Any comparisons we make will be based on the best results achieved by students who are finishing year 11 this summer. This means that if a student got a better grade earlier in the course, that's the grade we'll use for comparison with year 11 results from previous years. This ensures the comparison is as fair and valid as possible

Who's taking GCSE Welsh Language and GCSE Welsh Literature this summer?

There are 5,220 entries for Welsh Language this summer, up by 355 compared to summer 2018. Year 11 entries for Welsh Literature also increased by 365 to 3,695 in summer 2019.

What does this mean for the GCSE Welsh Language and GCSE Welsh Literature results this summer?

Although there has been a small increase in both GCSE Welsh Language and GCSE Welsh Literature entries, there has been little other change to entry patterns for these qualifications and we would expect to see similar results this summer compared to summer 2018.

Who's taking GCSE Welsh Second Language this summer?

The new approved GCSE Welsh Second Language qualification will be awarded for the first time this summer and replaces the previous full and short course GCSE and Applied GCSE qualifications.

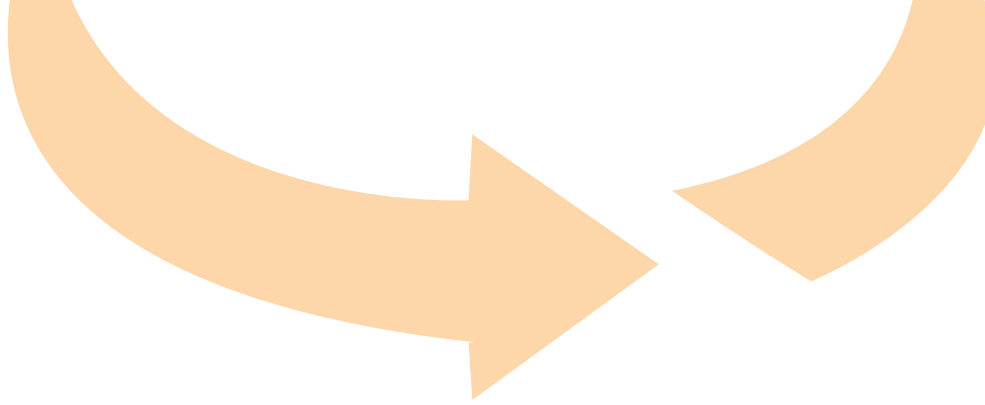
In summer 2018 there were 5,645 entries for the short course GCSE accounting for 26.8% of the total summer entries for GCSE in Welsh Second Language - including short course, full course and applied.

The new GCSE is the only qualification available to students studying Welsh Second Language in schools.

Students who may have previously been entered for the short-course or applied qualifications can now only be entered for the new, full course GCSE. As a result, there is a substantial change in the number of entries for the full GCSE this summer compared to 2018.

This summer there are 19,670 total entries for the new GCSE Welsh Second Language qualification compared to 12,115 who sat the legacy full course GCSE Welsh Second Language in Summer 2018.

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What differences are there between the old and new qualifications?

The new GCSE Welsh Second Language qualification, sat for the first time this summer, has a different design and focus compared to the legacy qualification.

The new qualification has two oracy units compared to one unit worth 25% in the old qualification. These new units have a greater focus on students' speaking and listening skills than in the old oracy unit, including their ability to respond spontaneously to conversation.

Additionally, there is no controlled assessment (coursework) in the new qualification whereas there was a controlled assessment unit worth 25% in the old qualification.

What does this mean for the GCSE Welsh Second Language results this summer?

Given the change in the size and make-up of the cohort entering the qualification, coupled with changes to the assessments within the new GCSE, we would expect to see a change in the overall results this year compared to summer 2018. Centres may see more variation in their results this summer compared to previous years.

Note: The provisional entry data for this year's exams can be found [here](#).



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