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Dear Mrs Williams, Mr Blaker, Mr Morgan

As the headteachers of the North Wales region, we felt it important to share with you our concerns and the questions we have about our current situation. It is vitally important to us that our children gain the qualifications they deserve and that no child is disadvantaged this year.

As you know, we are a moral workforce whose primary concern is the well-being of children. We are a purposeful workforce driven by a desire to support children to the next level of their learning and the future they deserve. We feel a deep responsibility to support our children in the next steps of their lives and to ensure no child is left behind or forgotten.

We ask for your trust to allow us to lead and drive the allocation of grades this year; to give us a voice in this process and not leave the future of our children to an algorithm alone. Too often our profession is degraded, sometimes even by our own, and we are perceived as gaming, as self-driven, as a profession of numbers and performance tables, and not as a moral, just and trustworthy profession we are, who have dedicated our lives to enabling our children to thrive.

We would like to thank you for your clarity to date and reiterate how much more secure and supported we feel working in Wales than our colleagues across the border. We do, however, have a number of questions which, when clarified, will allow us to plan more effectively for the education, the emotional and social support of all our children.

1. We have been informed, by our heads of subject, that Unit 7 GCSE science and other NEA qualification returned to WJEC will be marked but no mark returned to schools. Instead, this data will be used to standardise school performance. This has caused huge concern and also raised questions as to why this process is being carried out. How can data be withheld from a school and then used to “check” their rank is correct? If this is correct, it creates mistrust and undermines the joint working for the right outcome. Could we please ask for clarification as to whether this is the case?

Furthermore,

- i. Are NEAs being marked?
 - ii. Is data being withheld?
 - iii. Is this data being held by WJEC to standardise schools?
 - iv. If so why?
2. The use of comparative data generated and underpinned by national testing causes real concern; when this is done by an unknown algorithm in isolation, and without a conversation with professionals, extreme concern is created. We would ask, if this algorithm is driven on already known data and comparative data, what role do we actually play? What difference do we make? We therefore ask for clarification on how children will not be disadvantaged by the following situations
 - a. Significant cohort differences
 - i. In cognitive ability
 - ii. School improvement processes
 - iii. Cohort sizes
 - iv. Collaborative provision
 - b. The use of national data
 - i. Where children develop at different rates within the system
 - ii. Where schools translate grades at different rates
 - iii. Where schools add value at different times

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3. As I am sure you are aware, the level of anxiety in our exam cohort is extremely high. Our children and their parents are frightened of the unknown and angry that their outcomes are beyond their control. Every year we have children who surprise us and disappoint us and we have a real concern about disadvantaging those who achieve beyond our predictions. The support we need to give this year is significantly more than previous years and our knowledge and understanding of the system less so. We would therefore request that:
 - a. Results are issued to schools earlier than in normal circumstances to allow us to process them and prepare the support we will need to provide for our children.
 - b. We are kinder in our allocation of grades to ensure we capture the 1 or 2 % annually that outperform their estimate. We need to remember that this year, unlike every other year, no child has been given the opportunity to reach for a grade.

4. We would ask for clarification of fees
 - a. Will exam fees be reduced as exam board costs have been?
 - b. Will appeal fees be the same as previous years?

5. We believe a number of our colleagues are advising our government, our exam board and QW. We are not, however, aware of who these leaders are. As leaders of our profession, we do not know who to contact to share our thoughts. We believe that by identifying links in each area, the views of all headteachers can be heard and the wellbeing of all children in all areas can be represented. We therefore ask:
 - a. Who are our profession-based advisors?
 - b. How can we contact them?
 - c. Are the voices of all sectors represented?
 - d. Is the voice of each region of Wales represented?
 - e. Are all types of school represented?

6. Our year 10 and year 12 cohorts are also becoming increasingly stressed and concerned as we remain, for the right reasons, outside formal learning. We would ask, as they are unlikely to return to the full structure and rigour of learning for a significant amount of time that a decision is made about their assessment methodology and programme of study soon. This will allow schools to plan effectively and responsibly for our children. We would ask that you also consider that on a phased, socially distanced return learning will continue to be lost and the emotional ability of our children on return will be significantly diminished. On return our children will need to be nurtured and recovered before they can be taught and effectively learn, therefore our exams cohorts 2020/21 are likely to have lost almost half of their program.

Mrs Williams, as our Minister, we would like you to know how important and valuable your clarity, support and care for our children, our school and our profession, has been. You have never allowed our children to become statistics; they have never been just a number and we are genuinely grateful for this. Our government has been a kind government during these most difficult times and we are asking, with the greatest of respect, that this continues as our children are assessed and the assessment methodology of our next cohort is identified. We are asking that our children are not disadvantaged by comparative data, statistical analysis or their lack of opportunity to try and fail, we are asking that their ability to learn on return is factored into our future planning but mostly we ask that the kindness and generosity of spirit our children have been shown already continues as it is the

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moral and right thing to do. This is a year when we need to be kinder and driven by the opinion of our moral and trustworthy profession.

Many thanks

Claire Armitstead – Chair of Denbighshire Secondary Heads

Aaron Bayley – Chair of Ynys Mon Secondary Head

Elen Williams – Chair of Wrexham Secondary Head

Jane Cooper – Chair of Flintshire Secondary Head

Trefor Jones – Chair of Conwy Secondary Head