

Transcript: Is that an option? Episode 3- The nervous wait for the 'second wave' of results

Betsan Powys:

Welcome to is that an option, and let's remind ourselves that the idea behind this podcast was to offer practical advice to families with youngsters facing key academic results in a year with more uncertainty than any of us can remember. And suddenly, that uncertainty seems to have got even greater. Now when we managed to get together to discuss GCSE grades in Wales for this episode, the story around regrading in Scotland was brewing. And since then, as you well know, the headlines surrounding this year as a level and GCSE grading across the UK has grown and it's still up there in the headlines. Which can only mean more uncertainty for those awaiting their results. People like Poppy Sewell Evans, who before Coronavirus struck was up for it, and ready for this year's exams.

Poppy:

So this was my year 11. So like all Year 11 pupils I kind of I had my GCSE exams and, and I really kind of threw a lot into that. So I was revising like, every day, religiously since like March. And I really kind of wanted to do well because at my school it used to have a bit of a reputation for kind of naughty behaviour and this and that. So I really kind of wanted to do well for myself and for my school. So I really sort of pushed myself and I was very excited for you know, in August to get my results and kind of see hopefully that they were what I wanted. And it's very strange that that kind of hasn't been able to happen. And I haven't been able to sit those exams because weirdly, I was really excited too.

Betsan:

So then comes the news that you won't be sitting your GCSEs. Yes. How did you respond to that?

Poppy:

I was really surprised and quite shocked. And for a moment I was quite relieved because it did take away obviously a lot of pressure, which I was grateful for. But then I was also quite upset because I wasn't going to get the opportunity to kind of get my own grades, and, and kind of go through that process with my friends as well. Because I feel like that's quite a big coming of age kind of situation. And I was really looking forward to kind of revising with my friends and feeling relieved at the end of it all that we've done it and celebrating.

Betsan:

I can imagine. And you've just used really interesting words, 'get my own grades' Talk a bit about that and that feeling now that it's out of your hands.

Poppy:

It does feel very much out of my control. I know that obviously the grades that teachers are putting in are based off our work and almost our potential. But there is a sense of achievement when you know, you've put all that work in and then you open your results and it's the A or the A* that you've really, really worked hard for. And I don't know whether I feel that same sense of achievement because I haven't quite put the hard work into the extent that I normally would because, you know, I've been off school for the last three months.

Betsan:

And what's it been like at home? Have you been getting advice? Will be celebrating together or worrying together?

Poppy:

I'm very thankful for my family. I have a really kind of supportive family and they all listen and understand where I'm coming from. And so, especially my mom, she's been really supportive when I've been almost grieving the loss of year 11.

Emma, Poppy's mum:

So, for poppy for me, I was slightly relieved that she didn't have to sit her exams because she puts herself under a huge amount of pressure. And I think I also put myself in her position as a 16 year old and I would have been dancing on the ceiling, I would have been so happy at not sitting my GCSEs but I was relieved from that perspective. But then once the news sunk in and Poppy, she became quite anxious and very upset about it. It kind of dawned that it was it wasn't just about sitting exams you know, she had vested so much of herself and she really felt that she had so much to prove. So it was quite tricky. It's all out of our control as well. So it's just helping her, just being there to support her and, and we got to a point at Easter where we were like right now we need to take a deep breath, accept this and move on and start thinking about the future.

Betsan:

So, because we've heard from Poppy, so let's concentrate on Poppy for this bit. She was talking about how September will be different. She doesn't quite know how, obviously because none of us do really. How do you think she'll deal with all of that, and again, any concerns you might have about the challenges that are still ahead of us?

Emma, Poppy's mum:

My concerns are that if education is still challenged, because there's only so much we can do remote learning, I think you know, you do need that interaction with the teacher. You do need to be able to have that 10/15 minutes after class to sit and chat with a teacher. So, you know Poppy is doing 4 A levels plus her Welsh baccalaureate. And that's a lot of work and I really feel that she needs to be in school full time for that. So, and obviously to get those grades for Oxbridge, you know, those A*'s and those A's, the remote learning will be more challenging I feel for A levels and, and that that does concern me because it would be, it would be awful if she doesn't have that chance to, you know, to go to Oxford, or if it's impeded, or she put so much pressure on herself, to do those things herself, because, you know, we're not able to have full contact learning or whatever. And, you know, as a mom, I'm glad that she isn't in the position where she's going out into the world of work. You know, she's got many years of education left ahead of her. The virus could impact hugely on her for the rest of her life, you know that I do worry about whether her GCSE grades will be perceived as strongly as children who have sat the exams you know. They will always be that year of Coronavirus children, if that makes sense.

Betsan:

Thank you to Emma, Poppy's mum for joining in the conversation. And another mum who's been considering the effects on her daughter Marie, who wants to leave school and head to college to study health and social care is Katrin Isaac. But let's hear from Marie first, who'd hoped to find a job this summer, which would give her a bit of work experience before college, as well as some cash in her pocket.

Marie:

I've applied for a million jobs, but none of them like ever respond to you or like, I don't know, maybe because of the fact that we're in a pandemic, people have lost their jobs and stuff but you're just like on your own, that's like how you feel. If it's a job, I'll do it. Like I'm not bothered on what I have. I just wanna earn a bit of money. I turn 17 next month and I just I want to be able to start driving like I'm hoping to be starting my driving lessons and I can't because I'm not earning any money.

Betsan:

It's tough, isn't it? And you're definitely not alone. Did you originally when you realised 'Okay, I'm not actually going to be traipsing in facing those exams, it's going to be different' - was there a slight sense of relief?

Marie:

Yeah, massive. I was so excited. I did not want to do my exams. Honestly, I was so like, I was just like 'Yes!. No maths, no science nothing'.

Betsan:

As time has gone by has that changed a bit?

Marie:

Honestly, now, myself personally, I was over the moon. I couldn't have been more excited in my entire life. I was like seeing in news articles 'no GCSEs for me. I've been let off lightly'. Yeah.

Betsan:

So tell me what you want to do. When all of this, well they are telling us this is not all going to be over of course, but when September comes, what's the plan?

Marie:

I'm hoping to go to Coleg Gwent and do Health and Social Level 3. I'm hoping to go into the nursing industry.

Betsan:

Well, good luck. Good luck to you. I hope you find the motivation and get the work done and that September turns out to be okay in the end. It might throw up some good positive surprises you never know.

Marie:

I hope so. Well, I just don't want everyone to be stuck together in a massive small school where everyone's jumping on top of each other because you can't go anywhere. Like, I hate crowded places and to be in a crowded school like that. I'm nervous to actually like, I haven't been around big groups of people in so long and it's just gonna make me so nervous.

Emma, Marie's mum:

There's two concerns I have about the course that she's doing and one is nothing to do with the actual course is more because at the moment the college that she's supposed to be going to is it's

been built. And it was due to open in September. And but now they are going to have to house them in the old college site and the old college site, it isn't fit for purpose really. They did have health and social care there. However, they didn't have A levels there. And the new college they're building is a sixth form college with these additional vocational courses attached to it because it's run by Coleg Gwent. So, I think my biggest concern is really how is that going to work with them balancing the A Levels and these vocational students going there as well. There's just not going to be the space. So, there is that worry of how is this going to work? And then clearly the second thing is it's a very practical course. And currently her work placement where she was going for work experience in the local hospital, and that's been stopped because of Coronavirus So it is going to be a bit of a concern for how that's going to work. I'm hoping from speaking to people that I know within the education sector, I know other people who work in further education and in similar sort of practical courses, they are aiming at doing a lot of the written work first. So, I think that's probably going to be the way that it's going to work over the next year or so. I've got ideas of what might happen. And these are the sorts of ideas that we are relaying to Marie from our knowledge. So she is quite lucky in that sense that she's got us to help guide her to the possibilities, although she knows none of these things are set in stone. My other concern we get about her doing a course that's more practical is that she chose to do a course like this that is practical, because that's how she learns best. You know, she can write yes, she writes really well. But she enjoys being out there putting into practice what she's learned. And my concern about these type of practical courses with the uncertainty of what's coming up is that she won't have that element of it and that that she might be can become a little bit disengaged, maybe not put the full effort in because she hasn't got that: 'Right. I've got to do this bit of work now, because I'm going to put into practice in a few weeks' time so I need to know I understand it well'. So I think that's the real thing we going to have to overcome really.

Betsan:

Our final duo, and I think dad's just must be shy, are Catherine Gilmore and her daughter Imogen. And as Catherine says, her family were unlikely to forget 2020 COVID-19 or not.

Catherine Gilmore, Imogen's mum:

This summer for the Gilmore family would have been a big summer anyway because we knew they were going to be both doing external exams at the same time. So, it should have been quite stressful and significant, and it has. But for such different reasons. I think that they've both dealt with it well in their own way. In lots of ways, it's a shame, particularly Imogen has worked extremely hard and was well prepared. It's almost like they've had the rug pulled from under their seat.

Imogen:

I'm Imogen and I'm in year 11 at the moment, and I'm waiting for my GCSE results. And then if I get the ones I want, I'll be going back to the same school I was at so Caereinion Highschool in September.

Betsan:

So take me back to March and April. How did you respond and deal with all of the announcements back then?

Imogen:

Well, I was trying to finish my Welsh Bacc because that was kind of due in at the time, and I was just going around collecting past papers and that type of thing. Cos everyone was prepared that

something might happen in the next few weeks. So, it wasn't that much of a shock that school was going to be closed. I mean, everyone was kind of hoping for it. But we all had the stuff. So, it wasn't like a mad rush at the end where everyone had to go and get all the things they needed because we've been preparing for it for a few weeks beforehand.

Betsan:

And then the announcement comes that you won't be sitting the exams this year, how did you respond to that?

Imogen:

Well, we'd been out for a walk at that point. And we got home. And Scott came in, my brother, with the news that we wouldn't be sitting our exams, and at first everyone was celebrating. Yeah, I suppose it was just excitement, really, that we didn't have to sit them.

Betsan:

So, you're waiting for your results. What's your plan? or What was your plan I should ask and how close do you think you can stick to that plan come September?

Imogen:

I'm going back to sixth form at the same place to do three sciences and maths. And I'm hoping to get A*'s, but that might not happen, depending on what the teachers think. I'm hoping to just try and stick to the same, not go too far from my plan.

Betsan:

So, come September, will there be anything different for you, when you go back to school do you think?

Imogen:

Well, we've had this kind of Q & A session. And yeah, as I've said, I'm not going to be travelling to the schools to do my subjects in person. I'm going to have to be doing them online. And I think we're going to be just staying in the classes, staying together as a sixth form instead of mixing into the whole school. And we're not going to be having a common room or anything like that.

Betsan:

How do you feel about that?

Imogen:

I'm a bit disappointed. Yeah, because that's not how I imagined it to be. But hopefully, in time, it will become more relaxed and we'll be able to have a normal sixth form experience.

Betsan:

We've heard from Poppy and Emma and Imogen and Catherine and Marie and Claire in all sorts of issues, some similar, somebody different. Everyone has their own take on where they are at the moment, but to offer advice and some tips, what not to do as much as what to do we've got two who have joined me now around this, well, it's not really a table because we're all quite a long way apart from each other, but we'll think of it as a pod table for the afternoon. We've got Claire Roberts from Qualifications Wales. Welcome, Claire

Claire:

Hello

Betsan:

And Louise Evans from Careers Wales. Welcome, Louise

Louise:

Good Afternoon

Betsan:

So Louise, let me start with you and ask about your job, what you do and what you can bring as an expert to this podcast now.

Louise:

Okay, so I work as a Careers Adviser at Careers Wales and have been in the role for about 15 years in total, and as well as being based in school, so working with young people that are sitting their GCSEs, I'm actually the lead adviser in our local FE college as well. So hopefully I can kind of come at it from both angles as to maybe what to expect and what to look forward to.

Betsan:

Perfect just the person. And Claire, Qualifications Wales, what will you be bringing?

Claire:

I'm Claire Roberts and I'm head of strategic engagement at Qualifications Wales, and we are the independent regulator of qualifications in Wales. ~This is my first year doing a summer series with Qualifications Wales, and what a different summer series it is. And it's the first of its kind that we have ever experienced as well. My colleagues and the team work very closely with centres, schools and colleges across Wales offering support and information around the process that was taken this year, but also the exams process in any other normal year. And we also have lots of information on our website in order to help explain the processes that have been taken this year. And also we work very closely with WJEC in awarding general qualifications and other awarding bodies when we're awarding vocational qualifications.

Betsan:

And I'm sure there'll be a lot of interest in in that Claire, as you well know. So, welcome to both. And Louise, let me kick off with you and say, you know, we're talking to parents, those in charge of young people who are waiting now anxiously for their GCSE results. No exams, but that doesn't mean no results. So, you know, there are going to be a tough few days, things will be starting to become very real for these young people. So, what about some advice about just how to face the next few days?

Louise:

Well, I think the first thing is to kind of to keep calm I mean, it's easy to worry about 'what ifs', but that won't really help you in the long run. It's more about keeping calm. Every year regardless of the situation, GCSE results day is a stressful time for children and parents. So I suppose if you just kind of, you know, take deep breaths, think well what can happen? What's the worst that can happen? So, if it comes to GCSE results day, and you don't get the grades you want, what support is there? So,

we can look at that today. And also thinking about if you do get the grades you want, it's the logistics of how do you actually just accept your place at college? How do you know when you start? So it's kind of thinking more along the lines, I suppose of as worrying about what might happen as to maybe getting a plan in your mind about what you might need to ask in different situations.

Betsan:

A bit of thinking ahead, no bad thing.

Louise:

Yeah.

Betsan:

So, Claire, it must have been a very, very busy few months for you at qualifications Wales.

Claire:

Extraordinary times call for extraordinary measures. And so, this summer is proof of that. The good decision to close schools and colleges meant that we as a regulator, what was the most important thing to do is to establish new awarding arrangements for this summer. Because if there were no exams, then we needed some way to ensure that learners could receive a grade to progress, whether that's through further study, training or into employment. So as a regulator, we worked really closely with the Welsh Government and the qualifications regulators in England and Northern Ireland, and also WJEC, the exam board in Wales and other awarding bodies to ensure that learners get their grades this year. So each of us had different roles, but we all worked together. We then had to come up with a standardisation method to apply to GCSEs, AS, A levels and Welsh baccalaureate skills challenge qualifications. And so, schools and colleges worked hard to propose a grade and a rank order for each learner looking at previous achievements, which included coursework, mock exams, classwork, homework, and other past achievements. So that despite them not sitting an exam, that we did recognise the years of hard work, and it was taken into consideration

Betsan:

What's been the main principle Claire, because, you know parents might say, 'Okay, how are they going to make this happen' What's going to happen? Is it just down to the teachers? Teachers plus whom?'. How's it going to work at its simplest?

Claire:

There are two steps to standardisation and step one that WJEC calculates a set of grades for each subject in each school/college using one of two models. The choice of model used depends very much on the type of qualification. And step two is where WJEC allocates a set of grades from step one to individual learners using the rank order provided by the school or college. These models have been tried and tested using different information so to check which ones are the most accurate. A similar model was also used for vocational qualifications. And the idea and the aim was also to award a calculated grade for those learners as well. Working with fellow regulators in England and Northern Ireland this is how we ensure that learners studying vocational qualifications were awarded calculated grades where possible.

Betsan:

So, standardisation sounds a bit scary, though clearly as you say the aim in the end is to ensure fairness for everybody. So let's take it step by step now through the next few days and then there'll be some A and AS level results, maybe older siblings will be facing those and then maybe you'll be gulping a bit more before it's your turn and GCSE results. And so, Louise come the day, how different is it going to feel to those getting their GCSE results this year of all years?

Louise:

Well, I think it'll feel very different. Schools are taking quite a different approach. So within the local area that I live in some schools are just emailing out results all at the same time to every student. Other schools have actually invited students in clusters so that they can maintain social distancing. So, it is gonna feel very, very different. I think what what's kind of key to it is that once you get those results, it's knowing what you need to do with those next. So for instance, if you have an apprenticeship lined up and your employer wants to actually find out about your grades, it's knowing you need to contact those, what evidence do they need? If it's that you've applied for a college course it's actually then taking those results and saying to the college, yes, I've got the results. Most of those are doing online acceptance of courses now. I was relieved to hear that locally to me, and I'm sure it'll be across Wales that the college are actually going to have advisors and student services on hand on GCSE results day and the following day to support people so I know that people will be on hand as will Careers Wales. So we have a live chat facility telephone facility website available and all education based careers advisors will have been in touch at some point with young people from year 11 and hopefully we'll have kind of a good working relationship with them already. So whether it's texting your careers advisors, 'I didn't get what I need, what do we do?' It's going to be different. But I also think that actually its going to be just as exciting. I know, when I was listening to some of the videos, people were saying that actually, they felt a little bit robbed, that they've done kind of lots of work towards it, and they don't feel robbed, or they might feel the opposite. Actually, be excited, because you are kind of a pioneer in your group. So, you know, let's see what we can take from that and the positive side, maybe rather than a negative.

Betsan:

You can see why I mean, some of the young people were saying, I was really excited that I didn't have to do the exams, and I'm still really glad I didn't have to do the exams. And then you had others saying, 'Oh, actually, I was pleased at the time or when I thought about it. I just thought, gosh, you know, what was all that about? What was all that work for? When in the end, you know, it's going to be a standardisation systemic thing and it doesn't feel as if I'm Part of it' You can get that can't you?

Louise:

Oh absolutely yes.

Claire:

But actually, in awarding grade this year, all coursework, mock exams, classwork, homework and learners, other past achievements will have been considered. So, they've still achieved something huge on the results day. So, I think in terms of comparison, you know, on results day they've got their GCSEs. They should be proud of what they've achieved. I know they're getting them in a different way. However, they're still getting their results, and still is something that they should be pleased with. And then they finally progress on to the next steps as well.

Betsan:

So, on the day, we're saying, take a breath, take a look at your results, however, you'll have got them and then don't forget the mechanical things if you like of getting in touch with people letting them know that sort of thing. If you're not sure what you're supposed to do, and How'd you find out Louise about what you should be doing?

Louise:

Well, feel free to come on live chat with us at Careers Wales. We'll have lots of advisors on hand from all over Wales that'll be able to advise you but also if you know that you've applied for college for instance, I know that colleges are updating their social media regularly, updating their websites with information and sections actually have question and answer sessions with different tutors to say what to expect and what to do. But absolutely, if you don't know then feel free just to contact Careers Wales and if we don't know instantly then we will find out for you.

Claire:

So, on results days, all learners will receive their results from their school or college after 8am. If your grades aren't what's expected, then learners go and talk to your school in the first instance or college about all possible options, and then they will be able to offer you advice and guidance. There's also a WJEC helpline for results days and the number is 02921 055 441 email address is resultsday@wjec.co.uk. We also have more information on the appeals process available on our website, which is qualificationswales.org and there are a whole host of other organisations and people just waiting to offer help guidance and advice to enable learners to progress on to the next stage of their lives. And if you're a parent, those same people will be more than happy to help you with your thoughts as well.

Betsan:

Let's ask about those Claire who will get the results they'd hoped for maybe, but perhaps a little bit like some of the young people we've heard will think well, aren't there some who say 'Yeah, well, you know, it was COVID year. They didn't even have to sit exams and you know, they're not quite gonna be as impressed and well, you know, yeah, there was that year of Coronavirus children -their GCSE results don't really count'. What do you say to them?

Claire:

Well, I think Louise and I would agree that actually the further education, higher education and employers do have confidence in this year's results because of the robust process that's been applied to calculating grades. And whether that's with the centre and the awarding body working together to make sure that the grades awarded this year are fair for learners. And so we've talked to HE, FE and employers and they are still going to be recognising these grades and these results as in any other year.

Louise:

Yeah, I completely agree, Claire. I think what's the thing to take away from this really, is that even though young people might not have sat exams, it could be argued that it's actually a fairer way to get a grade because it's based on what they've achieved all year rather than an hour and a half exam at the end of the year.

Betsan:

That's interesting. Do you think that some elements of this year might be adopted in future years because of that feeling? Perhaps its fairer?

Claire:

It depends on what happens out there whether the COVID returns and we have another lock down, then this would be a model that we would certainly use again, I'm sure but at the moment, this has been created to look at results and award grades in an extraordinary time, I suppose.

Betsan:

Yes, a one off for very special times.

Claire:

But actually, you know, we're, we're also looking at changing how things are taught anyway, with regards to blended learning, and, end assessment and exams and whether there's more so there's a lot of change happening, I think, as we move forward anyway.

Betsan:

What if you're thinking, 'Okay, I was going to study these subjects. This is what I thought I might like to do, either for A level back in school or in college, or actually, I thought maybe, you know, I'd like to learn in a workplace - that would suit me better'. And now you know, you are not quite sure because of COVID-19 because either you're not sure what learning is going to be like in school. Is there going to be still more remote learning? How will you respond to that? Or will there be apprenticeships in the sort of areas that you're interested in? Or will COVID-19 mean that actually, you know, employers won't be taking on apprentices? Louise, how do you find out where you stand and what the wisest thing is for you to do?

Louise:

I mean, obviously, we've never kind of been in a situation ourselves before. But what I would say is that our Careers Advisers are trained up not just to look at what you want and give you information. It is actually to guide you through the process of thinking of what your next steps might be, what is your best option, and taking into account local market information and labour market information. So, this obviously is changeable constantly at the moment. Where I work we've got Airbus, a local employer, who, as we know, are making huge redundancies, and they have a pot of apprentices ready to go. Now their approach has actually been that even though they're making redundancies, they've just put the apprentices on hold to start over staggered times throughout 2020- 2021. Actually, we know that we're going to need a workforce. We know that they're going to continue to need to train people up. So, it might actually be that your plans might feel a little bit like, 'oh, what am I going to do?' but I would I would suggest strongly that you actually speak to somebody from Careers Wales, via our live chat our careerswales.gov.wales, or via our helpline.

Betsan:

Are there sort of areas where, you know, you think 'Well, those are going to be struggling a bit more than others because of COVID-19'. And if that had been your plan, maybe it is wise to rethink you know, in other areas that actually are still booming.

Louise:

Well, I think the care sector is absolutely booming, and it's going to improve more. I was on a meeting this morning with them with We Care Wales, and they were explaining that between now and 2030, there will actually be 20,000 more people needed to work within the care sector within Wales. I think areas that maybe might take a little bit longer maybe to recover are the Travel and Tourism areas. So obviously, businesses, small businesses in particular, I think, have really struggled with the lockdown and its whether they make it out to the other side. So I think it's something that is keep your ear to the ground really see what's coming up and what's going on. Bear in mind where you live. If you know that where you live is primarily going to be travel and tourism and that there might be issues with you getting a job or a career within that area then actually say, 'Where else could I go take a step back? How far could I travel?' You know, 'Is there similar jobs that I could do that maybe I wasn't aware of before?' And so, you know, through working with us, you'd be able to maybe establish some of those ideas.

Betsan Powys:

Can I ask something else that I picked up on when we were chatting to the parents and the people. There was a little bit of concern that because of COVID and because of restrictions on classroom teaching and that perhaps bits of remote learning would have to continue that in more practical courses, and Marie was, you know, really excited about the practical elements of the care course she was going to be getting involved in, her mother, Catherine was a bit concerned that they would front load the written work, the more academic elements of the work, and that will put her daughter off, you know, because that's not really what she's been looking forward to. And though she could see why, and she could see the logic, she thought it would be off putting, what would you say to parents who have that concern, Louise?

Louise:

Well, I mean, the kind of Welsh government's stance is actually that work placements, if they are due to go up as part of a course as long as you can get a robust risk assessment in place and can maintain social distancing there's no actual reason why you can't go ahead and do this. And indeed, the We Care Wales chat I have this morning said that more than ever, they need people to kind of do placements and look at that as an option in that particular area. But what I would say is your best bet is to speak to the college. All colleges are going to approach this differently. And all colleges have different kinds of ways of achieving placements in the first place. So, some actually just say, right, you go and find your own placement. Others actually arrange placements with you. So it's speak to your college tutor, speak to the college, speak to Student Services, about your particular college in your area to get some more advice, really, and if actually, when you look at the course and you think that's not what I signed up for, it's not what I want. And then again, it's thinking, right, okay, so you're not kind of stuck with doing the same thing. You can change your mind, you can look at other options. So at that point, it might again, be worth getting in touch with us to see what your other options are.

Betsan:

So Claire, we're telling people to think ahead and to consider all the options but to move on. And to move on, you know, no matter what. Most of those young people, and their parents will find it really tough to do that. They've got the results, they've opened the email or envelope or whatever it will be this year for them. And they just feel that things aren't right and that they want to have a look at those results. They want someone independent to take a look at the results. What's the system going to be with appeals and what sort of time frame are we talking about?

Claire:

We recognise that some learners may have concerns about their grade and both. We, Qualifications Wales as the regulator, and awarding bodies are committed to making the appeals process as straightforward as possible. If you have credible evidence that grades are not based on objective judgments resulting in bias or discrimination, please contact your awarding body. And also if learners have such concerns, or parents, then you can raise these where the equality and human rights commission so please do that too. So, there are lots of avenues and lots of people and lots of places to go if you're concerned with the grade awarded this year. The appeals process then is transparent. The initial review deadline will be Thursday the 17th of September, and that your school or college can apply to the WJEC for an initial review. And the WJEC aims to complete within 42 calendar days, and then the outcome will be sent to the college.

Betsan:

So what about people who have seen that story coming from Scotland, about results of a different system in Scotland anyway, in terms of education, but the headlines were around, pupil's being marked down and pupil's and their parents being really concerned that they had been marked down and not really understanding the system that had caused them to be marked down. There were complexities in the stories but certainly my children you know, they face GCSE and A level exams, or they would have done. They are facing the results of thinking they'd be marked down. Stories like that do have an effect. They do make people worry. So, Louise first, what would you say to people?

Louise:

Well, when I read the information myself, the headline was a student's markdown. But actually, when you drill down, the overall scoring was actually higher. The percentage of people that got the higher grade passes was higher than in a normal year. So, it might actually be the processes that they had in place, possibly similar to what we have in place, looked up the overall grades. And actually, perhaps, you know, that whole class didn't deserve the highest grade possible. That wouldn't happen any other year. And so there will be some movement around but I think, just kind of bear in mind that actually, overall the grades were higher in Scotland than what they have been the last few years. That was my understanding of the story.

Claire:

Yes, similarly, so we're looking at broadly similar to other years, we will see I'm sure that a small percentage of learners will receive a grade that's a bit higher, a small percentage will receive a grey that's a bit lower, but the majority of learners receive a grade that is the same, I would think. That's the purpose, and broadly similar is the comparison to the results that they we will have received in Wales over the over previous years.

Betsan:

So, don't panic and read on don't just read the headline, perhaps is one piece of advice. Maybe that's always good advice, not just at a time like this.

Louise:

Yeah, I think some of the queries that I've heard from young people is like, 'Oh, I'm only gonna get what my predicted grade was. And that wasn't so well, because my attendance had been impacted. I'd been in hospital.' or something. So, it was actually using the information from, from the gov.wales website to say, actually, that they're not just doing that. They're not just looking at what

your predicted grade was. They're looking about everything else that you've done throughout the year, your kind of attitude, and it wasn't just based on mock results, because that was another worry. Because obviously if they do want PPEs they actually think 'oh, well, it's not worth putting much effort in' - actually I think that going forward that is something that I will definitely stress to my own daughters in year 10. And I'm like, 'Yes, well, you never know what's gonna happen'.

Claire:

And then also, you know, as part of one of our aims are to ensure that groups of learners that are not disadvantaged relative to previous years as well. So, making sure that results across close groups of learners with unconscious bias being one of them, so its important that the analysis interpretation of these differences is also done carefully. So, we're looking at that as well.

Betsan:

There'll be a lot of analysis out there after all of this and a lot of looking back and, you know, possibly a lot of good things learned out of a difficult time.

Claire:

Definitely, yes, this is a new process for all and I think there's always lessons to be learned, but I think we're confident that, you know, the standardisation method will bring out results that are broadly similar and are fair for learners this year.

Betsan:

They've got a bit of time before GCSE results arrive. So, what's the advice for how you spend that time? You know, with volunteering? That might be a good idea anyway, regardless, or how not to panic, you know- always good to have those sorts of tips. So let me start with you, Louise.

Louise:

Yeah, I think the 'how not to panic' is kind of a key area. I think that this message is coming across from across the board. So, whether it be schools, colleges, employers, just don't panic, we don't know what's going to happen yet. I wouldn't say for the next two weeks, try and get yourself a voluntary placement because that will help you. I think its maybe looking at having a backup plan in place if you haven't got one already. I think it's something that we try and work with, with not just young people, everybody that we work with, so there's your ideal, what's your backup plan because we know not everything always works out the way that you want it to anyway. So it's maybe taking a step back and thinking okay, so worst case scenario, this happened 'What can I do?' and maybe starting to do some research into what your backup plan could be in the worst case scenario, but also not thinking too negatively actually think 'you know what I'm gonna do it. I'm confident of it and then dealing with it if it doesn't work out like that on GCSE results day'.

Claire:

Equally, I'd do a little bit of research seeing as everyone is on tech these days. Have a look at what is on our website. So we've got different videos, different blogs and graphics that really help to explain the standardisation process that no one has ever heard of before this year. We also, at WJEC have different explainers and fact sheets on their websites. So, if you've got 10 minutes, half an hour, an hour, have a look at what's happened, where your grade has been, and how they have considered all learners previous tests but also their performance over the last year /two years depending on what

qualification they are sitting. Then also, as you say, have a plan A, but also have a plan B and consider what other options you might consider when you get your results.

Betsan:

My thanks to Emma and Claire and Come the day and the hour of the GCSE results don't forget the WJEC results day helpline on 02921 055441. It will be open from the 10th to the 21st of August and the email address if you want to make a note of that is resultsday@wjec.co.uk. And the Careers Wales line is 0800 0284844 or you can go online to careerswales.gov.wales. Whatever the knock on effects of the headlines on A level grading, whatever its effects on the big word we've heard quite a lot of in this episode – standardisation, good luck to GCSE pupils here in Wales and remember when the results finally land, another episode of Is that an option? will hopefully land as well.