

FROM THE OFFICE OF THE MINISTER



Department of
Education

www.education-ni.gov.uk

Rathgael House
43 Balloo Road
Rathgill
BANGOR
BT19 7PR

Email: private.office@education-ni.gov.uk

Our Ref SUB 0498-2021
17 May 2021

Dear Parents, Guardians and Students,

CCEA QUALIFICATIONS 2021/2: A ROADMAP FOR RECOVERY

Today, I announced a package of comprehensive measures which I believe will ensure public examinations for CCEA qualifications in 2022 are adapted appropriately and fairly to mitigate the impact this pandemic has had on the education of our young people and ensure they are equipped to progress to the next stage of education or employment.

I have provided a roadmap for a return to **public examinations** for all CCEA Qualifications during the 2021/22 academic year. A planned return to public examinations is not, however, a return to business as usual. I am mindful of the need to consider our young people's mental health and well-being; the many difficulties they have faced; and the significant disruption to their learning during not one but two academic years.

In light of this, I have decided that young people will have significantly fewer examinations in 2022 and I have today announced a package of significant reductions in assessment across all CCEA qualifications. A unit of study will be omitted from the vast majority of GCSE, AS and A Level qualifications in 2022. Unit omissions will also be applied across the wide range of CCEA Entry Level, Occupational Studies and Vocationally Related qualifications.

The measures which I announced yesterday are summarised below.

A Level Candidates - Year 14 in September 2021

- CCEA A Level awards will be made on the basis of candidates' performance in their A2 examinations only.
- Within the majority of A Level qualifications, assessment of one A2 unit, worth up to a maximum of 50% of the A2 units, can be omitted. CCEA will specify the unit to be omitted.

- In ten practical subjects, where omission of a unit would take away assessment of practical skills or alternatively all external examinations, the content of internal assessment tasks will be reduced rather than a unit being omitted. CCEA will provide details to schools of the reductions in internal assessment by 1 September 2021. The ten A2 subjects are Art and Design, Digital Technology, Environmental Technology, Journalism in the Media and Communications Industry, Moving Image Arts, Nutrition and Food Science, Performing Arts, Software Systems Development, Sports Science and the Active Leisure Industry and Technology and Design.
- Any candidate who wishes to take all A2 examinations can do so.

AS Candidates – Year 13 in September 2021

- Within the majority of AS qualifications, assessment of one AS unit, worth up to a maximum of 50% of the AS qualification, can be omitted. CCEA will specify the unit to be omitted.
- In seven practical subjects, where omission of a unit would take away assessment of practical skills or alternatively all external examinations, the content of internal assessment tasks will be reduced rather than a unit being omitted. CCEA will provide details to schools of the reductions in internal assessment by 30 September 2021. The seven AS subjects are Art and Design, Environmental Technology, Journalism in the Media and Communications Industry, Moving Image Arts, Performing Arts, Software Systems Development, Sports Science and the Active Leisure Industry and Technology and Design
- Any candidate who wishes to take all AS examinations can do so.
- If public examinations go ahead as planned, the outcomes of AS assessments taken in 2022 will contribute 40% to overall A Level awarding in 2023.
- It is envisaged these candidates will take all A2 units in summer 2023.

GCSE Candidates - Year 12 in September 2021

- In the majority of GCSEs where students are in the second year of study (normally Year 12) one unit of the course will be omitted from assessment. CCEA will specify the unit to be omitted.
- In GCSE Religious Studies, Statistics and Government and Politics, candidates will be permitted the option of completing the examination for one assessment unit and a controlled assessment task for the second unit, as an alternative to the second examination.
- In GCSE Food and Nutrition and GCSE Health and Social Care, there will be a reduction in the content and word limit for the controlled assessment task which will continue to be worth 50% of the qualification.

- In GCSE English Language, candidates will have the option to omit Unit 3 the internal assessment of Study of Spoken and Written Language.
- My Department and CCEA have looked very closely at GCSE Maths. Due to the unique structure of this qualification, with many different pathways at different levels, omitting a unit can have negative consequences for learners. I am very conscious that learners have experienced significant disruption. As unit omission will not be available I have asked CCEA to provide additional examination aids for candidates taking GCSE Mathematics in autumn 2021 and summer 2022 to recognise ongoing disruption to face-to-face learning. I have also instructed my officials to explore what additional support might be provided to schools to help them in preparing Year 12 students for GCSE Maths.
- The usual January examination series for GCSE English and Mathematics will be moved forward to December 2021 due to the public health context.
- Any candidate who wishes to take all GCSE examinations can do so.

GCSE Candidates - Year 11 in September 2021

- Omission of a unit of assessment for these candidates at the outset of their GCSE studies would be premature and means they would complete some of their courses after one year.
- My Department is, however, extremely conscious that these candidates have experienced serious disruption during Key Stage 3. My Department and CCEA will, therefore, be closely monitoring the situation and will not hesitate to make changes to GCSE qualifications for these young people if required.
- In line with pre-COVID arrangements, these candidates will be able to sit GCSE modules in summer 2022.

Contribution of AS Grades to a Level Awarding in 2022

Last year, many young people and parents wanted the AS grade to contribute towards the A level grade. Talking to young people and parents this year, many felt that due to the greater level of disruption they experienced during their AS course, they would prefer their A Level grades to be based on their A2 results only.

My Department asked CCEA to consider a range of approaches in which the AS grades awarded this year could be recognised as part of the A Level awarding process. We have looked very closely at how this might work. It is simply not possible, however, to add an AS grade to A2 marks in a way that is fair or equitable for young people.

If we convert the AS grades into a mark for each grade – there would only be one mark given in each grade. Normally there is a spread of sixty marks within each grade. This means that young people who would normally be separated by only a few marks, for example those at the top of the B band and those at the bottom of the A grade will be

separated by a full sixty marks. This would potentially significantly disadvantage the candidate with the lower AS grade making it much more difficult for them to achieve a high A level outcome. This is quite simply very unfair.

In line with arrangements in both England and Wales, the Centre Determined Grades for AS qualifications in 2021 will, therefore, not form part of the A Level award next year.

Further Information

CCEA will provide detailed information to schools in relation to individual subjects over the coming weeks.

I would assure you that 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. I trust that the changes I have announced today will go some considerable way to reassure young people that we will continue to support them and help them to succeed.

I have enclosed Frequently Asked Questions providing more details. My Department will follow this with a number of leaflets and guides before the end of term. Copies are also available on the Department's website at <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/>

I would take this opportunity to send you and your family my best wishes.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Peter Weir".

Peter Weir MLA
Minister of Education