

FROM THE OFFICE OF THE MINISTER



Department of
Education

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To: All Principals of Post-Primary Schools and Special Schools with 14-19 provision

Rathgael House
43 Balloo Road
Rathgill
BANGOR
BT19 7PR

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

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Dear Principal

CCEA QUALIFICATIONS 2021/22: 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.

My first key message is to assure you that it is my priority to ensure that public examinations go ahead throughout the 2021/22 academic year, if at all possible. I cannot praise enough our school leaders and teachers, who have stepped forward to provide Centre Determined Grades with fairness and consistency. It is due to their dedication and professionalism that our students are being enabled to obtain these important qualifications during the current crisis. However, such an arrangement is not a sustainable or long-term approach. I also feel it is extremely important that young people are given the opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge and skills through the public examination process. The requirement to sit public examinations can provide a source of focus, motivation and engagement for many of our young people.

Our students have faced unprecedented disruption to their learning. Consequently, to ensure examinations are as fair as possible, I have taken exceptional steps to reduce assessment across all CCEA qualifications. The changes are designed to ensure young people are supported well and that their well-being is prioritised, including by providing them with the knowledge and skills required for progression. The approach being taken balances significant reductions to assessment, with ensuring the continued worth, validity and portability of these important qualifications.

The measures which I announced earlier today are summarised below.

A Level Candidates - Year 14 in September 2021

- CCEA A Level awards in 2022 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.
- A candidate who wishes to take all A2 examinations can do so. There is no obligation to do so. Any candidate who sits all units will be awarded the higher grade from either all units or the mandatory units only.

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 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. There is no obligation to do so. Any candidate who sits all units will be awarded the higher grade from either all units or the mandatory units only.
- 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 the assessment. CCEA will specify the unit to be omitted. There are some changes in the unit of omission from autumn 2020.

- In GCSE Religious Studies, Statistics and Government and Politics, candidates will be permitted to complete 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 Mathematics. 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 Mathematics.
- The usual January examination series for GCSE English and Mathematics will be moved forward to December 2021 due to the public health context.
- Unit omissions will also be applied across CCEA Entry Level, Occupational Studies and Vocationally Related qualifications.
- Any candidate who wishes to take all GCSE examinations can do so. There is no obligation to do so. Any candidate who sits all units will be awarded the higher grade from either all units or the mandatory units only.

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 at this time. Unlike the AS qualification, Unit omission at GCSE would mean that these candidates could not enter for GCSE modules in 2021/22 as otherwise 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 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, all units will be available for modular entries for candidates not planning to complete and cash-in qualifications until summer 2023. This will enable candidates to avail of the modular model of delivery as in pre-COVID arrangements.

- CCEA will recommend a teaching order for GCSE units for those entering Year 11 in September 2021, which will make it easier to make changes if needed.

I believe the approach I have announced will allow schools to take account of the disruption experienced by our young people to their learning and to focus on high quality planning, teaching and assessment for a smaller number of examinations. I would encourage schools to cover as much of the specification as possible to support progression.

I appreciate that these are significant and wide ranging changes and that you will be anxious for more details. CCEA will provide details of the units to be omitted from qualifications during early June 2021. Details of the reductions to internal assessment tasks for the ten practical subjects at A2 will be provided by 1 September 2021, with the reductions to internal assessment tasks for AS published by 30 September.

Over the course of the 2021/22 academic year and in the context of the wider public health situation, my Department will work with CCEA and both England and Wales to consider the logistical arrangements necessary to facilitate examinations and the necessity of such measures as a reserve examination series, as well as standards in 2022.

The public health situation can of course change quickly. Whilst we all remain hopeful, there is the potential that any decline in the public health situation could yet again lead to the cancellation of examinations. Contingency plans for alternative awarding in 2022 will build on the outworking of and learning from this year's approach based on the use of Centre Determined Grades.

I would assure you that my Department is working hard to make sure we take into account the wide-ranging 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 announced today will go some considerable way to reassure young people that we will continue to support them and help them to succeed during the next academic year.

I have enclosed correspondence to parents and students, including a factsheet and Frequently Asked Questions. I would be most grateful if you could provide copies to all relevant year groups. Copies of the Frequently Asked Questions will also be available on the Department's website. This correspondence will be followed by a series of leaflets and guides prior to the end of term.

I am determined to do everything possible to ensure that no student is prevented from fulfilling their potential by the pandemic. As you know, my Department and its support bodies have provided a range of support and interventions in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, including the Engage Programme, the provision of digital devices and the Wellbeing in Schools initiative.

I know you are all engaged in the difficult and critical task of operating our schools safely and in delivering Centre Determined Grades for qualifications in 2021. I thank you profusely for your commitment, perseverance and hard work.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Peter Weir". The signature is written in a dark ink and is positioned below the phrase "Yours faithfully".

Peter Weir MLA
Minister of Education