

FROM THE OFFICE OF THE MINISTER



Department of
Education

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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 black ink that reads "Peter Weir". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'P'.

Peter Weir MLA
Minister of Education

CCEA QUALIFICATIONS 2021/22: A ROADMAP FOR RECOVERY

- A planned return to **public examinations** for all CCEA Qualifications during the 2021/22 academic year.
- A **unit of study will be omitted** from the vast majority of GCSE, AS and A Level qualifications in 2022.
- **CCEA will select the unit to be omitted.** This will provide a consistent and equitable approach for candidates.
- Candidates' overall grade will be determined by their **performance in the unit or units they sit.**
- A **candidate who wishes to take all 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.
- In a number of practical subjects at AS and A2, the **requirements of the internal assessment tasks will be reduced** rather than a unit being omitted.
- In place of unit omission, **examination aids** will be provided for candidates taking **GCSE Mathematics** in autumn 2021 and summer 2022.
- **Unit omissions** will also be applied across CCEA Entry Level, Occupational Studies and Vocationally Related qualifications.
- **CCEA A Level awards in 2022** will be made on the basis of candidates' performance in their **A2 examinations only.**
- The usual January examination series for GCSE English and Mathematics will be moved forward to **December 2021.**
- CCEA will provide a **GCSE teaching order** recommended for those starting GCSE courses from September 2021, which will make it easier to make changes if needed.
- The public health situation can change quite quickly. CCEA will have **back-up arrangements for alternative awarding arrangements** based on centre professional judgement that can be activated if needed. These will be in place and students will be enabled to complete their qualifications.
- Details of changes will be available on the CCEA website in early June.

Frequently Asked Questions –CCEA GCSE Students (normally Year 12)

Northern Ireland

Will exams go ahead?

The plan is to return to public examinations during the 2021/22 academic year. It is important students have the opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge, understanding and skills through public examinations, which is a valid and reliable way to generate outcomes.

Everyone should prepare for timetabled examinations. We recognise that the public health situation can change quickly and there has been a lot of disruption during the past two years, so we will have back-up plans in place for alternative awarding based on teacher judgements in case they are needed.

Will exams take place at the normal time?

Due to the public health context, the GCSE English and Maths series normally held in January will be brought forward to late November/early December 2021. There will also be a series at that time for GCSE Single and Double Award Science. There will also be a February examination series for GCSE Single and Double Award Science. This will approach give candidates the opportunity to complete a number of GCSE modules prior to summer 2022.

Exams for summer 2022 will be held at the normal time during May and June. CCEA will publish the full timetable during the autumn.

Your school or college will let you know which exams you have been entered for.

Will I be issued with a result for my GCSEs?

Yes, candidates who complete CCEA GCSE examinations in summer 2022 will be issued with GCSE results in August 2022 so that they can progress to the next stage of education or employment.

Will there be parts of the course I won't be examined on?

Yes, in the majority of GCSEs where students are in the second year of study (normally Year 12), one unit of the course can 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 line with normal procedures, the controlled assessment tasks in these three subjects will be set by CCEA, internally marked by teachers according to a mark scheme provided by CCEA, and then externally moderated by CCEA.

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.

There may also be some changes, particularly to practical assessments and fieldwork to make sure the qualifications can be delivered safely in the current public health context.

Your school and the class teacher will let you know exactly what is required in each qualification and which assessments will be omitted. Details will also be available on CCEA's website from early June 2021.

These arrangements only apply to CCEA qualifications. Examination Boards in England and Wales have not yet announced changes. Your school will be able to explain the arrangements for these qualifications once announcements are made.

What about GCSE English Language and Mathematics?

In GCSE **English Language**, candidates will have the option to omit Unit 3, which is the internal assessment of Study of Spoken and Written Language. Preparation for controlled assessment takes up a lot of time. We believe the omission of this

assessment will free up additional teaching and learning time, as well as reducing the assessment burden on young people.

The 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 and change the range of grades available to them.

It would also remove assessment of nearly half of this key passport qualification, which is required for a number of Higher Education courses such as nursing and teaching. No changes have been made to the qualifications in England and Wales and we are concerned that reduction of almost half the assessment in this key qualification could affect comparability and portability.

The Department is very conscious that learners have experienced significant disruption. CCEA will, therefore, provide additional examination aids for candidates taking GCSE Mathematics in autumn 2021 and summer 2022 to provide additional support.

Will we still be taught everything?

These changes significantly reduce the content which will be assessed, however, schools will be encouraged to cover as much of the specification as possible to support your progression to Level 3 studies such as A-Levels.

What if the health situation gets worse and schools have to close again?

The Department has removed a large amount of assessment content to take account of ongoing disruption and ensure candidates feel confident in the units on which they are examined.

The public health situation can change quite quickly. CCEA will have back-up arrangements for alternative awarding arrangements based on teacher judgement that can be activated if needed. These will be in place and students will be enabled to complete their qualifications.

Can I take all the exams in my GCSE course?

Yes, I have asked CCEA to put in place arrangements so that any student who wishes to take all examinations in a GCSE 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. This will ensure no candidate is disadvantaged by taking all units of the qualification.

Are these qualifications less valuable?

Absolutely not. The level of demand for the qualifications is the same as in previous years. Higher Education providers and employers will see these as valid qualifications. Schools and learners should cover as much content as possible to facilitate progression. There is simply less assessment, to allow schools and learners the opportunity to manage in the disruption caused by the pandemic.

What about non-CCEA GCSEs or other qualifications?

Your school will let you know if you are taking qualifications with non-CCEA Examination Boards and provide you with details about these qualifications once announcements have been made in these jurisdictions.

What about CCEA entry level, vocationally related and occupational studies qualifications?

Similar changes to omit units are being made to these qualifications. Unit omissions up to a maximum of 50% will be permitted. Your school will provide you with details about these qualifications.

Schools and learners should cover as much content as possible to facilitate progression. There is simply less assessment, to allow schools and learners the opportunity to manage in the disruption caused by the pandemic.

What if I miss my exam due to illness or self-isolation?

The Department will commission CCEA to develop bespoke arrangements for summer 2022 to allow the award of grades for progression should a candidate miss an examination due to illness or self-isolation.