

FROM THE OFFICE OF THE MINISTER



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

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Dear Principal

**MEASURES TO SUPPORT AWARDING OF CCEA GCSE, AS AND A LEVEL
QUALIFICATIONS IN 2023**

I am delighted to write to you to provide details of changes to the assessment and awarding of CCEA's qualifications in the next academic year to take account of the impact of disruption on our young people's education.

During 2021/22 many schools and their pupils continued to face disruption to their learning. We cannot, therefore, simply 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 three successive academic years.

I have therefore decided that in Summer 2023 across all CCEA GCSE, AS and A Level qualifications young people will be provided with advance information that will set out the areas of focus in examinations. This information will communicate, before exams, some of the aspects of the specification that will be assessed in the examination papers. It is intended to help learners and schools prioritise revision and preparation by providing information about the broad areas of the specification that will be assessed in each examination. This will provide important support for learners preparing for exams, increasing their confidence and aiding their revision.

This approach is being adopted by both Scotland and Wales. I am, therefore, confident that it will provide support for learners without damaging the credibility or portability of the qualifications.

Unit omissions proved helpful in supporting a return to public exams this year, but I do not consider it in the best interests of our learners to continue with this approach for a further year.

Many of our young people in Year 11 have already sat a GCSE module or modules this summer so unit omission would be of limited value to these learners. It would also be out of step with arrangements in other jurisdictions thus risking the portability of CCEA qualifications. In 2023, learners will therefore be assessed across the full specification for each qualification.

Qualifications Support Programme

I do not believe it is enough to simply make adaptations to qualifications. Pupils will also need additional support with their learning.

During the last academic year, my Department provided significant additional resources and funding to support students preparing for Summer 2022 examinations. This included:

- the Engage GCSE Maths Programme to provide one-to-one and small group tuition in GCSE Maths;
- specialist GCSE Maths revision resources;
- CCEA GCSE revision eBooks for Year 12 pupils across a wide range of subjects; and
- funding for Easter Revision Schemes.

I recognise the importance of continuing to provide similar support for students and schools next year. I can therefore confirm that, in the coming year I will invest £2 million in a Qualification Support Programme across all post primary schools. Funding will be provided on per capita basis of approximately £80 for each Year 12 enrolment.

Schools will have the freedom to deploy this funding flexibly to support pupils preparing for exams in 2023. This could include revision resources, tuition, and holiday revision schemes. The funding is not limited to use with Year 12 and can also be used to support pupils in other examination year groups.

My Department will write to schools over the coming months with further details of this support programme.

Operational Issues

There are a number of other operational issues which I can confirm CCEA will have in place in the next academic year:

- the winter GCSE English and Maths series will again be brought forward to November/December;
- the lower threshold of assessment (25% rather than 40%) for accessing missed component calculations in cases where a candidate is unable to sit an examination for legitimate reasons will remain for a further year;

- CCEA will again provide a recommended teaching order for each specification; and
- internal assessment tasks carried forward from 2019/20 will again be carried forward for a further year;.

Standards

Over the coming months, my Department will also continue to liaise with colleagues in England and Wales on grading standards for 2023. CCEA will continue to work closely with the regulators in the other jurisdictions before making recommendations in relation to standards and awarding later in the autumn.

Whilst decisions on standards will be taken together across all three jurisdictions, I give you an assurance that fairness to young people will be at the centre of awarding in 2023 and we will continue to ensure they are not disadvantaged by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Occupational Studies, Entry Level and Vocational Qualifications

I can also confirm that students taking CCEA's occupational studies, entry level and vocation qualifications will be required to meet the assessment arrangements in place for these qualifications in a normal year. As these qualifications do not generally involve public examinations advance information is not appropriate.

Contingency Arrangements

While we will aim to continue to progress towards more normal arrangements, I am nonetheless conscious that the public health situation remains uncertain. CCEA will, therefore, again be in a position to respond quickly to any significant deterioration in the public health context.

Exams will only be cancelled as an absolute last resort. In this event, CCEA will again have in place arrangements so that qualifications can be awarded using the Centre Determined Grade process. The process and Head of Centre Guidance have already been refined by CCEA, taking account of lessons learned in 2021, and can be deployed as a contingency if required.

Finally, I wish to thank you and your staff for your continued commitment to the education and welfare of our young people and your sustained hard work over the past academic year in the face of ongoing challenges.

Fairness to pupils is my priority, and will continue to be at the forefront of every decision. I hope the measures I have announced today will provide not only certainty about the arrangements for qualifications in the next academic year, but will enable our young people to feel supported and look forward to next year with a degree of confidence.

Yours faithfully

Michelle McIlveen

**Michelle McIlveen MLA
Minister of Education**