

Statement to the Assembly

ARRANGEMENTS FOR CCEA QUALIFICATIONS IN 2022/23

21 June 2022

**Michelle McIlveen MLA
Minister of Education**

The following statement provides 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.

I am delighted today to bring forward a clear plan for qualifications in 2023, in advance of the start of the next academic year. I hope this timely announcement and the comprehensive package of measures I have put in place will provide school leaders, teachers, parents and, most importantly, young people with the clarity and reassurance they need.

During the last number of weeks, my officials have been working closely with CCEA and meeting with a wide a range of stakeholders to develop arrangements.

I want to thank all those who engaged with my officials, particularly the young people both in the schools they visited across Northern Ireland and representatives of the Secondary Students Union. These young people brought fresh and constructive perspectives on these issues and have influenced effectively the decisions I have taken.

Proposed mitigation measures for 2023

We hope that 2022/23 will represent a further step towards a return to more normal examination arrangements across schools and colleges in Northern Ireland. However, the pandemic has continued to have a substantial impact on teaching and learning this year, and there is, therefore, a strong argument to continue to provide a range of measures to support young people taking examinations.

There can be no simple 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 with resilience and fortitude; and the significant disruption to their learning during three successive academic years.

In light of this, I have decided that in summer 2023 across all CCEA GCSE, AS and A Level qualifications young people will be provided with advance information about their examinations. This information is intended to communicate, before exams, some of the aspects of the course that will be the focus of assessment.

In 2022, unit omissions have proved very successful in supporting a return to public exams. I do not, however, consider it in the best interests of our learners to continue with this approach for a further year.

I am conscious of the need to take account of the developments in other jurisdictions to ensure that CCEA's qualifications remain valid, credible and that our learners are not disadvantaged, particularly in relation to competing for places at university.

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.

In this context, advance information will 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, and help increase their confidence going into those exams.

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.

Qualification Support Programme

I do not believe it is enough to make adaptations to qualifications.

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 support for students and schools. School principals have indicated such support would be strongly welcomed and if provided to schools early in the school year it could be targeted at those pupils most in need of additional support.

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 for Year 12 enrolments.

Schools will have the freedom to deploy this funding flexibly to support pupils preparing for exams in 2023. This will include revision resources, tuition, and holiday revision schemes. There will also be flexibility to provide support as required to pupils in other examinations year groups.

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

Operational Issues

In addition to Advance Information and the Qualification Support Programme, my Department has also agreed a range of operational arrangements with CCEA for the delivery of qualifications in the next academic year.

Modular exams for GCSE English and Maths will again be brought forward from January 2023 to late November/early December 2022 to mitigate the risk of a spike in infections over the Christmas period impacting on exams.

Public health adaptations in place in the past two years which limited opportunities for participating in activities such as in science practicals, music and drama performances, fieldwork and speaking units for Modern Languages are no longer required. This will ensure learners will participate fully in all aspects of the qualifications they are studying and such activities will again form part of assessment across all practical subjects

In 2022, the threshold of assessment that needed to have been completed in order to be eligible for a missed component calculation in case of illness or other legitimate emergency was reduced from 40% to 25% (of the mandatory units). The 25% threshold was in line with the arrangements in the other jurisdictions. This reduced threshold will remain in place for qualifications to be awarded in 2023.

Internal assessment tasks for CCEA qualifications, issued for academic year 2019/20, will be carried over for a further year.

In 2021/22 CCEA specified a recommended order for teaching the units within a specification. This recommended teaching order will remain in place for the next academic year and will assist in the event of serious disruption.

CONTINGENCY ARRANGMENTS

While we hope that we will 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.

STANDARDS

Over the coming months, my Department will also continue to work closely with colleagues in England and Wales on grading standards. 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.

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.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I want to thank all of our teachers and school leaders who have gone above and beyond to meet the significant challenges they faced this year and ensure their pupils were supported to progress to the next stages of education, employment or training.

I am also inspired by the determination our young people have demonstrated throughout the past couple of years.

Fairness to pupils is my priority, and will continue to be at the forefront of every decision I take. Today, I have set out my roadmap for qualifications in the year ahead. It is a map which acknowledges the unprecedented disruption our education system has faced and aims in steady steps to support recovery.

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.

I will be writing directly to schools and parents of pupils to set out the arrangements I am announcing today.