

Frequently Asked Questions –CCEA A Level (A2) Students Northern Ireland

Will exams go ahead?

It is the Department of Education's priority to ensure that public exams go ahead, if at all possible. It is important that following the cancellation of exams last summer students have the opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge, understanding and skills through the exam process, which is a valid and reliable way to generate outcomes.

The public health situation can change quickly so it is also sensible to make sure we also have back-up plans in place but the focus for everyone should be on preparing for the timetabled examinations.

Will exams take place at the normal time?

Summer 2021 CCEA Exams will commence no earlier than 12 May 2021 and will end on or before Wednesday 30 June 2021. Exams are, therefore, starting slightly later than normal. This will provide some additional teaching and learning time, whilst ensuring all exams are held within the normal academic year. The full timetable will be published by CCEA in mid-November 2020.

Will I definitely be awarded a grade for each of my A Levels?

Yes, every candidate who is entered for CCEA A2 examinations in Summer 2021 will have an A Level grade awarded in August so that they can progress to the next stage of education or employment.

How will A Levels be awarded?

CCEA A Level awards will be made on the basis of candidates' performance in their A2 exams only.

There are different arrangements for qualifications offered by English and Welsh Examination Boards and your school will be able to explain the arrangements for these qualifications.

Will the AS Grades I was awarded in August 2020 count towards my A Level grade?

No, the AS award in 2020 will not form part of the A Level award in 2021.

CCEA considered a range of approaches in which the AS grades awarded this year could be recognised as part of the A Level awarding process. However, it is extremely difficult to implement this in an equitable or fair manner. It would also be a very different approach from that taken in England and Wales, which might have far reaching implications for the portability of qualifications for entry into universities in the rest of the UK.

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

The A2 content for most A Levels will remain the same but there will 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 now required in each qualification. Details are also available on CCEA's website

Why have you not removed more content?

Students in Year 14 will not have to take AS examinations, which normally make up forty per cent of the A Level qualification. We have made this change in order to reduce the assessment burden for students, whilst maintaining qualification validity, rigour and portability, particularly to support Higher Education progression.

Can I take my AS exams, which I was due to sit in summer 2020?

Yes, I have asked CCEA to put in place arrangements so that students who wish to take AS exams alongside the A2 exams can do so. There is no obligation to do so.

An A Level grade will, therefore, be based on either the performance in the A2 units sat or alternatively, the performance in both the AS and A2 exams for students who choose to sit all of the AS and A2 units in Summer 2021. Whichever option a student chooses, they will be awarded the highest grade.

Can students sitting A2 exams choose to sit some of the AS units in Summer 2021?

No. Students must choose to either sit all of the AS units of the qualification or none.

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

CCEA will provide a unit order of teaching for GCSE and A Level qualifications. This means that in the event of further significant disruption due to the wider public health context, students have covered broadly similar content and schools have been advised to retain evidence of students' progress throughout the year in case this is needed as part of contingency arrangements

The public health situation can change quite quickly. CCEA has been asked to consider back-up arrangements that can be activated if needed. These will be in place and students will be enabled to complete their qualifications.

Are these qualifications less valuable?

Absolutely not. We have been clear throughout this process that higher education and employers will see these as valid qualifications, the same as exam results in any other years.

What about non-CCEA GCSEs or A Levels?

Your school will let you know if you are taking qualifications with non-CCEA examinations and provide you with details about these qualifications. We are working with others to ensure these exams are completed in a timescale which meets the needs of Northern Ireland students

Frequently Asked Questions –CCEA A Level (AS) Students Northern Ireland

Will exams go ahead?

It is the Department of Education's priority to ensure that public exams go ahead, if at all possible. It is important that following the cancellation of exams last summer students have the opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge, understanding and skills through the exam process, which is a valid and reliable way to generate outcomes.

The public health situation can change quickly so it is also sensible to make sure we also have back-up plans in place but the focus for everyone should be on preparing for the timetabled examinations.

Will exams take place at the normal time?

Summer 2021 CCEA Exams will commence no earlier than 12 May 2021 and will end on or before Wednesday 30 June 2021. Exams are, therefore, starting slightly later than normal. This will provide some additional teaching and learning time, whilst ensuring all exams are held within the normal academic year. The full timetable will be published by CCEA in mid-November 2020.

Will my AS scores count towards my A Level?

Yes, in the current context normal arrangements will apply and AS scores will account for forty per cent of the overall A Level award.

Will I definitely be awarded a grade for my AS Levels?

Yes, every candidate who is entered for CCEA AS examinations in Summer 2021 will have an AS Level grade awarded in August.

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

The AS content for most A Levels will remain the same but there will 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 now required in each qualification. Details are also available on CCEA's website

Why have you not removed more content?

Year 13 students begin their courses in September once schools had reopened on a full-time basis. It is important to ensure that A Level qualifications have validity, rigour and portability, particularly for entrance and progression to higher education.

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

CCEA will provide a unit order of teaching for GCSE and A Level qualifications. This means that in the event of further significant disruption due to the wider public health context, students have covered broadly similar content and schools have been advised to retain evidence of students' progress throughout the year in case this is needed as part of contingency arrangements

The public health situation can change quite quickly. CCEA has been asked to consider back-up arrangements that can be activated if needed. These will be in place and students will be enabled to complete their qualifications.

Are these qualifications less valuable?

Absolutely not. We have been clear throughout this process that higher education and employers will see these as valid qualifications, the same as exam results in any other years.

What about non-CCEA A Levels?

Your school will let you know if you are taking qualifications with non-CCEA examinations and provide you with details about these qualifications. We are working with others to ensure these exams are completed in a timescale which meets the needs of Northern Ireland students

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

Will exams go ahead?

It is the Department of Education's priority to ensure that public exams go ahead, if at all possible. It is important that following the cancellation of exams last summer students have the opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge, understanding and skills through the exam process, which is a valid and reliable way to generate outcomes.

The public health situation can change quickly so it is also sensible to make sure we also have back-up plans in place but the focus for everyone should be on preparing for the timetabled examinations.

Will exams take place at the normal time?

The November 2020 examination series will be held from Monday 9 November to Friday 13 November 2020

The January 2021 examination series will be held from Monday 11 January to Friday 15 January 2021.

Summer 2021 CCEA Exams will commence no earlier than 12 May 2021 and will end on or before Wednesday 30 June 2021.

Exams are, therefore, starting slightly later than normal. This will provide some additional teaching and learning time, whilst ensuring all exams are held within the normal academic year. The full timetable will be published by CCEA in mid-November 2020.

Your school will let you know what exams you have been entered for.

Will I definitely be awarded a grade for my GCSEs?

Yes, every candidate who is entered to complete CCEA GCSE examinations in Summer 2021 will get a GCSE award in August 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 in of GCSEs where students are in the second year of study (normally Year 12) one unit of the course will be omitted from assessment. In the small number of GCSE qualifications where omission of a unit would remove more than forty percent of the total content, CCEA will be exploring alternative ways of reducing burden in assessment, including optionality. These qualifications are GCSE Religious Studies, Health and Social Care, Food and Nutrition, Government and Politics, and Statistics.

There will 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 now required in each qualification. Details are also available on CCEA's website

There are different arrangements for qualifications offered by English and Welsh Examination Boards and your school will be able to explain the arrangements for these qualifications.

What about GCSE English and Maths?

Students will be required to complete all written assessment units in both GCSE English and Maths, however there will be no speaking and listening assessment for GCSE English Language.

There are risks around the comparability and portability of these key qualifications, particularly how they would be considered for university entry in 2023, should significant elements of the qualification be omitted. England and Wales have made limited or no changes to these qualifications.

GCSE English and Mathematics are key 'passport qualifications', which are required for a number of higher level qualifications, such as nursing and teaching qualifications. The risk that students from Northern Ireland would be disadvantaged for entry to university in the future is simply too great.

Reducing examination assessment in these two key qualifications to one high stakes exam could conversely increase pressure on students. Under the current arrangements, students have the opportunity to sit some or all units in English and Maths in January 2021, and if necessary, repeat them in the summer series.

Why have you not removed more content?

We have made significant changes to GCSEs in order to reduce the assessment burden for students, whilst still ensuring the qualifications have validity, rigour and portability, particularly for entrance and progression to higher education.

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

The public health situation can change quite quickly. CCEA has been asked to consider back-up arrangements in case they should be 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.

Are these qualifications less valuable?

Absolutely not. We have been clear throughout this process that higher education and employers will see these as valid qualifications, the same as exam results in any other years.

What about non-CCEA GCSEs?

Your school will let you know if you are taking qualifications with non-CCEA examinations and provide you with details about these qualifications. We are working with others to ensure these exams are completed in a timescale which meets the needs of Northern Ireland students

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

Decisions about these qualifications will be published in the near future.