

FROM THE OFFICE OF THE MINISTER



Department of

Education

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Dear Parents, Guardians and Students

DELIVERY OF GCSE, AS AND A LEVEL QUALIFICATIONS IN 2020/21

I wrote last week to inform you of my decisions around changes to qualifications and I wanted to write to you again today, as I know many of you continue to be concerned about this issue. I have enclosed a factsheet, which I hope will provide clear information on arrangements for each year group due to sit examinations this year.

I am very conscious that these are not ordinary circumstances and that education continues to be disrupted. The public health situation is changing quickly and after a very successful and positive reopening of schools, we are now facing rising numbers of cases of COVID-19. The changes I announced last week set out the initial arrangements for exams and assessments across GCSE and A Level qualifications. I want to reassure you that I will keep the position under review. I have commissioned CCEA, the body responsible for exams in Northern Ireland, to develop back-up plans, which will be ready if they are needed.

I give you my firm commitment that every effort will be made to ensure that young people will not be disadvantaged by the COVID-19 pandemic and that outcomes for young people sitting GCSEs and A Levels in 2020/21 will be similar to other years.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Peter Weir".

**PETER WEIR MLA
MINISTER OF EDUCATION**



GCSEs

Current Year 11 Pupils

- Schools can enter current Year 11 pupils for modular GCSE exams in 2020/21.
- At present, current Year 11 pupils will be expected to take all units within the qualification at some point across their two-year course.
- The content of GCSEs has not been changed for Year 11 pupils and no units of the qualification have been omitted from examination or assessment.
- We will keep the position under review as the school year progresses and again as these pupils enter Year 12 in September 2021.

Current Year 12 Pupils

- The exams and assessments for GCSE qualifications have been reduced by up to 40% to reflect lost face-to-face teaching time.
- This means that in most GCSEs, a unit of the qualification will be omitted from examination or assessment.
- CCEA will specify the compulsory units which will be examined. If pupils take only these units, the final GCSE grade will be based on pupils' performance in these compulsory units of the qualification.
- However, if a pupil wishes to take the exams for all units of the qualification, they will be able to do so. Their final grade will then be the higher of their outcomes either across all units, or the compulsory units only.
- There is no change to GCSE Maths. Pupils will be examined in all units of the qualification.
- In GCSE English Language, the speaking and listening unit will be omitted from assessment.
- In five GCSEs, (Religious Studies, Health and Social Care, Food and Nutrition, Government and Politics, and Statistics), there are two units each worth 50% of the qualification. We have decided not to omit a unit in these qualifications, as it means pupils would be assessed on less than 60% of the total qualification. However, the Minister has asked CCEA to look at the content of the exam papers and consider ways to take account of lost face-to-face teaching time. More details will be provided as soon as possible.
- We will keep the position under review as the school year progresses.

A Levels

Current AS Pupils (normally Year 13 in schools)

- Year 13 pupils will take AS exams in Summer 2021.
- At present, current Year 13 pupils planning to complete a full A Level qualification will be expected to take all units within the A Level qualification across the two-year duration of the course.
- The content of the AS qualification has not been changed and no units of the qualification have been omitted from examination or assessment.
- The AS qualification is worth 40% of the total A Level qualification.
- We will keep this under review as the school year progresses and as these pupils enter Year 14 in September 2021.

Current A2 Pupils (normally Year 14 in schools)

- The AS grades pupils were awarded in August 2020 will not contribute to the overall A Level grade.
- Pupils do not have to take the AS exams/assessments, which were scheduled for Summer 2020. If pupils do not sit AS exams/assessments, their A Level outcomes will be based on their performance in the A2 exams/assessments in Summer 2021 only.
- However, if a pupil wishes to take both AS and A2 exams, they will be able to do so. Their final grade will be the higher of their outcomes either across all AS and A Level units, or the A2 units only.
- We will keep the position under review as the school year progresses.

All Qualifications

- There are also adaptations to qualifications (particularly to practical work and fieldwork) to ensure they can be delivered safely and meet current public health requirements.
- Examples of these types of changes are reductions in the number of practical assessments within a qualification or pupils using data already available rather than collecting their own on field trips.
- CCEA will provide schools with details of the public health adaptations for each qualification.