

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

Will exams go ahead?

It is the Department of Education's priority to ensure that public exams go ahead. It is important that following the cancellation of exams last summer students have the opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge, understanding and skills through 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, so we will continue to develop back-up plans in case they are needed.

Will exams take place at the normal time?

Summer 2021 CCEA timetabled examinations will commence on 13 May 2021 and will end on or before Friday 25 June 2021. Exams are, therefore, starting slightly later than normal. This will provide some additional teaching and learning time, whilst ensuring the exam series is held within the normal academic year.

The full timetable has been published by CCEA and is available at [Final GCE Timetable June 2021.pdf \(ccea.org.uk\)](https://www.ccea.org.uk/Final_GCE_Timetable_June_2021.pdf)

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

Yes, candidates who complete CCEA A2 examinations in summer 2021 will be issued with A Level results in August so they can progress to the next stage of education, employment or training.

Will grades be similar to 2020?

Yes, grade outcomes in 2021 will broadly align with 2020 and in line with the announcement in England, we will take a similarly generous approach for Northern Ireland candidates.

How will A Levels be awarded?

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

Candidates can choose to omit up to 60% of A2 assessment due to the significant disruption faced by candidates over their two years of study. In a significant number of subjects, this will mean taking one unit of assessment only. However, in some three-unit subjects, candidates will take **any** combination of two units in order to meet the 40% minimum level of assessment.

In two A2 subjects – History and Digital Technology – the 40% minimum threshold of the A2 qualification will not apply and candidates will have a choice of which of the two

units to be assessed in. This is to ensure candidates in these two subjects are permitted a choice of units to be assessed in, as with all other subjects.

Candidates will take a unit or units selected by their school or college. This provides significant flexibility for schools and colleges to take account of the areas where the course has been covered to date and where learning has been least disrupted.

Candidates can continue to take all A2 units if they wish to do so.

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

Yes, in every subject your school can select at least one unit to be omitted from the assessment.

In the majority of subjects, candidates will only need to take one unit of assessment, however, in some subjects with more than two A Level units, candidates will take any combination of units in order to meet the 40% minimum requirement.

This option provides significant mitigation for lost face-to-face teaching time and ongoing disruption. It also supports teachers and students in their preparation for examinations by allowing specific content to be prioritised by schools and relieves pressure to finish courses in the event of further lost face-to-face teaching time.

Your school and the class teacher will let you know exactly what will now be required in each qualification. Details will also be available on CCEA's website.

If I take all my A2 exams, can I pick my score or grade based on the unit I performed best in?

No, if you choose to take all units of assessment, your grade will be awarded based on all units completed.

Can controlled assessment contribute to my qualification?

Yes, controlled assessment can be chosen as the unit or units of assessment.

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 progression.

How will you work out my grade?

CCEA will simply scale a candidate's Uniform Mark Scale (UMS) score for the unit or units they have completed to arrive at an overall total for the qualification. This means candidates are always awarded an outcome based on their own performance in the unit or units they have taken.

Where candidates sit a single unit, they will always be awarded the grade achieved in that unit.

Where a candidate sits two or more units, they will as normal be awarded a UMS score from the weighted average of their scores in the units they sat.

Will my scores be lowered by CCEA?

No, your overall outcome will be determined by your performance in the unit or units you sit.

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 not possible to implement this equitably or fairly.

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

Whilst candidates can of course take AS examinations, the AS outcomes will **not** count towards their overall A Level grade, which will be based on A2 outcomes only.

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

The Department has removed as much assessment as possible 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 has been asked to have back-up arrangements that can be activated if needed. These will be in place so students can complete their qualifications.

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 is 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 A Levels?

Your school will let you know if you are taking qualifications with non-CCEA awarding organisations and provide you with details about these qualifications.

We are urgently seeking clarification on how Welsh (WJEC) qualifications taken by NI candidates will be awarded in 2021 and this information will be communicated to schools as soon as possible.

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

CCEA will run a reserve series in July 2021 for A2 candidates who miss timetabled examinations through illness or self-isolating. This means that if you miss all timetabled examinations for a subject through illness or self-isolation, and there is no coursework component, you will be able to complete additional timetabled examinations to receive an outcome.

Frequently Asked Questions – CCEA AS Level Candidates Northern Ireland

Will exams go ahead?

It is the Department of Education's priority to ensure that public exams go ahead. It is important that following the cancellation of exams last summer students have the opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge, understanding and skills through 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, so we will continue to develop back-up plans in case they are needed.

Will exams take place at the normal time?

Summer 2021 CCEA timetabled examinations will commence on 13 May 2021 and will end on or before Friday 25 June 2021. Exams are, therefore, starting slightly later than normal. This will provide some additional teaching and learning time, whilst ensuring the exam series is held within the normal academic year.

The full timetable has been published by CCEA and is available at [Final GCE Timetable June 2021.pdf \(ccea.org.uk\)](https://www.ccea.org.uk/~/media/Files/2021/June%202021/Final%20GCE%20Timetable%20June%202021.pdf)

Will my AS scores count towards my A Level in 2022?

Yes, it is anticipated AS outcomes from 2021 will account for 40% of the overall A Level award in 2022.

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

Yes, candidates who sit CCEA AS examinations in summer 2021 will have AS Level outcomes awarded in August 2021.

How will AS Levels be awarded?

Within AS qualifications, candidates can choose to omit up to 60% of the formal assessment. In the majority of subjects, this will mean taking one unit of assessment only. However, in some subjects candidates will take any combination of two units in order to meet the minimum level of assessment.

Candidates will take a unit or unit(s) selected by their school. This provides significant flexibility for schools to take account of the areas where the course has been covered to date and where learning has been least disrupted.

Candidates can continue to take all AS units if they wish to do so.

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.

If I take all my AS exams, can I pick my score or grade based on the unit I performed best in?

No, if you choose to take all units of AS assessment, your grade will be awarded based on all units.

Can controlled assessment contribute to my qualification?

Yes, controlled assessment can be chosen as the unit or units of assessment.

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

Yes, in every subject your school can select at least one unit to be omitted from the assessment. In the majority of subjects, candidates will only need to take one unit of assessment, however, in some three unit subjects, candidates will take any combination of two units to meet the 40% minimum required of the AS qualification.

This option provides significant mitigation for lost face-to-face teaching time and ongoing disruption. It also supports teachers and students in their preparation for exams by allowing specific content to be prioritised by schools and relieves pressure to finish the course in the event of further lost face-to face teaching time.

Your school and class teacher will let you know exactly what is now required in each qualification. Details will also be available on CCEA's website.

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 progression.

How will you work out my grade?

CCEA will simply scale a candidate's Uniform Mark Scale (UMS) score for the unit or units they have completed to arrive at a score out of the total marks available for the qualification.

This means that candidates are always awarded a grade based on their performance in the units they have taken.

Where candidates sit a single unit, they will always be awarded the grade achieved in that unit.

Where a candidate sits two or more units, they will be awarded a UMS score from the weighted average of their scores in the units they sat.

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

The Department has removed as much assessment as possible 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 has been asked to have back-up arrangements that can be activated if needed. These will be in place so students can complete their qualifications.

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 is 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 A Levels?

Your school will let you know if you are taking qualifications with non-CCEA awarding organisations and provide you with details about these qualifications.

We are urgently seeking clarification on how Welsh (WJEC) qualifications taken by NI candidates will be awarded in 2021 and this information will be communicated to schools as soon as possible.

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

AS candidates who miss an exam due to illness or self-isolation will take the examination at the next possible opportunity in summer 2022. They will continue to benefit from omission of a unit or units of assessment, up to 60% of the AS qualification.

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. It is important that following the cancellation of exams last summer students have the opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge, understanding and skills through the examination process, which is a valid and reliable way to generate outcomes.

The public health situation can change quickly so we will 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 January 2021 examination series will be held from Monday 11 January to Thursday 14 January 2021.

Summer 2021 CCEA Examinations will commence no earlier than 13 May 2021 and will end on or before Monday 28 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 has been published by CCEA and is available at [Final GCSE Timetable June 2021.pdf \(ccea.org.uk\)](https://www.ccea.org.uk/~/media/Files/2021/June/2021-Final-GCSE-Timetable-June-2021.pdf)

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 to the required performance in summer 2021 will be issued with GCSE results in August so 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 will be omitted from the assessment.

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.

The controlled assessment task within these three qualifications is considered to be equivalent to 10% of the original specification, meaning candidates will have completed assessment equivalent to 60% of the original specification. However, the

controlled assessment task will be worth one-sixth of the uniform marks of the overall revised qualification. The weighting of the revised qualification will be five sixths exam and one sixth controlled assessment.

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 frame provided by CCEA, and then externally moderated by CCEA. CCEA will provide specimen assessment tasks and training for teachers to assist in the marking and internal standardisation processes.

In GCSE Food and Nutrition and GCSE Health and Social Care, there has been a reduction in the content and word limit for the controlled assessment task which will continue to be worth 50% of the qualification.

There have also been 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 have let you know exactly what is 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 Language and Mathematics?

Students will be required to complete all written assessment units in both GCSE English Language and Mathematics, however there will be no speaking and listening assessment (Unit 2) for GCSE English Language.

GCSE English Language and Mathematics are key 'passport qualifications', which are required for a number of higher level qualifications, such as nursing and teaching qualifications. They are also key curricular skills required throughout adult life. It is important that candidates are given the opportunity to develop their skills and knowledge across these important subjects.

CCEA will provide additional examination aids for candidates taking GCSE Mathematics in January and summer 2021 to recognise ongoing disruption to face-to-face learning.

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 progression.

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

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 has been asked to have in place back-up arrangements that can be activated if needed. These will be in place so students can complete their qualifications.

Can I take all the exams in my GCSE course?

Yes, CCEA has been asked 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. 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 is 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 awarding organisations and provide you with details about these qualifications.

We are urgently seeking clarification on how Welsh (WJEC) qualifications taken by NI candidates will be awarded in 2021 and this information will be communicated to schools as soon as possible.

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

CCEA has published changes to these qualifications earlier this year. Your school will provide you with details about these qualifications.

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

Where a candidate legitimately misses GCSE exams for example due to illness or self-isolation, CCEA is working to develop a process that facilitates the award of grades for progression.