

## CCEA Equality Screening Exercise

### For the Outcomes of Consultation on Assessment Arrangements for GCSE, AS and A level Qualifications in Summer 2021

#### Table of Contents

		Page
1	Background and Introduction	2
1.1	CCEA Consultation	2
1.2	CCEA Consultation Recommendations	3
2	Screening Exercise	7
2.1	Equality Panel Screening Questionnaire	7
2.2	Panel Questionnaire returns	7
2.3	Screening Panel Meeting	8
3	Outcomes	9
4	Approvals	9
	Appendix 1 Minutes of the Screening Panel Meeting	

## 1 Background and Introduction

In March 2020 schools and colleges were shut as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, while learning continued online and general qualifications (GQs) results were issued for summer 2020 based on a combination of calculated grades and adapted assessments. Schools re-opened in September 2020, and policy direction was provided that assessment should go ahead for 2021, with consideration of adaptations to assessment. CCEA were tasked to consider how best to develop suitable adaptations. CCEA carried out a consultation exercise on possible adaptations. This Equality Screening Exercise is to assess the impact on Section 75 groups of the outcome of this consultation.

CCEA awarded 214, 000 GQs across 103 subjects/specifications in 2020

	CCEA Awards	
	Summer 2020	Subjects
A level	27,000	30
AS	37,000	30
GCSE	150,000	43

These were awarded to mostly post-primary school pupils but also through further education colleges and other providers to a lesser extent.

### 1.1 CCEA Consultation

A formal request from the Department of Education was received on 10<sup>th</sup> August 2020 asking CCEA to proceed with a consultation for Assessment Arrangements for GCSE, AS and A level Qualifications in Summer 2021 on the basis:

- that CCEA should aim to run a full examination series in 2020/21;
- that the consultation should specifically seek feedback on the proposed changes to the original decision in relation to Year 11 candidates (now entering Year 12), including extending the calculated grade option to all Year 12 candidates, CCEA specifying the modules/units that may be treated as a missed component, excluding GCSE English Language and Mathematics from this option, and ensuring that total adaptations do not exceed 40% of the total specification;
- elements of the proposal that relate to potential contingencies later in the academic year (such as cancellation of exams) should not be consulted on at this stage as this should be considered as part of a separate piece of work to develop contingencies across a range of scenarios;
- the consultation should also set out the rationale for not reducing specification content or increasing optionality in exam papers and provide the opportunity for feedback on this position (although the Minister is minded to accept your advice on these issues);
- the consultation should also seek views on the proposal that CCEA should define the order of teaching and assessment for GCSEs, AS and A levels for Years 11, 13 and 14 in order to facilitate the development of contingencies for these year

groups as required;

- schools should also be required to retain a portfolio of work for all exam students from September 2020 – this is something that may be communicated to schools directly by the Department so consultation on this matter is not required; and
- any adaptations that impact on current policy (e.g. practical assessments in science) will require separate and specific approval from the Department, but this should not preclude consultation on any such adjustments prior to seeking approval.

The consultation was subsequently launched on Monday 24th August 2020. The consultation ran for two weeks and during that period a total of 7094 responses were received. This paper sets out our recommendations to DE, based on the findings from the consultation.

## 1.2 CCEA Consultation recommendations

### Public health adaptations

Informed by the Department of Education's *Northern Ireland Re-opening School Guidance – New School Day* and wider public health requirements, we reviewed each of our GCSE and GCE qualifications against current public health requirements. Applying only to those students who will be awarded qualifications that will be awarded in Summer 2021, the consultation document set out adaptations to many qualifications to ensure compliance with these stipulations. This approach was supported by the majority of respondents with 59.9% indicating they 'agree' or 'strongly agree'. The adaptations to GCSE, AS and A level qualifications set out in the consultation will therefore be implemented.

### Specification Order

In the consultation document we suggested that guidance on the order in which units should be delivered in GCSE and GCE qualifications during 2020/21 may prove beneficial if the public health situation was to worsen and alternative interventions were required following school closures; however, we acknowledged that this may have been perceived as very prescriptive. While 70.6% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the proposal, we also received from practitioners some strong arguments against, as the new school year will already be over 4 weeks old and teaching will have already taken place. Many had also adopted measures themselves to build flexibility into qualification delivery in this academic year. Despite this, we are, on balance, of the view that advice on the order in which units should be delivered will be helpful, particularly for those just beginning their first year of study in the GCSE and GCE qualifications we offer. We propose that this advice would be set out in the addendums we will produce for each qualification. These will also include any additional changes pertaining to that qualification for the 2020-21 academic year.

### AS and A level Arrangements

The GCE qualification level grade a student attains is normally dependent on their performance at both AS and A level. As a result of the cancellation of the summer 2020 examinations, students beginning their A2 units did not have the chance to sit the associated AS units this summer. In recognition of this and the demands of A2, we proposed to allow students to be awarded a grade in their GCE qualifications in summer 2021 based on their performance in their A2 units alone. 58% of respondents

agreed or strongly agreed with this proposal and we will therefore adopt this for Summer 2021.

Because of the role that AS and A level qualifications play in the preparation and transition of students from level 3 to higher education, we remain of the view that reducing content in these qualifications may have a detrimental impact on progression. 58% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with our position. For students in Year 14 hoping to achieve a qualification level grade in Summer 2021, they have the option of attaining that grade based on their performance in their A2 units only. If they decide they wish to re-enter for the corresponding AS units, they will be awarded the higher of two options:

- the grade based on the outcome of the A2 exams; or
- the grade calculated based on the AS and A2 exams together.

It is important to emphasise, however, that they must complete **all AS units**. If students only chose to enter for some AS units, statistical calculations would be necessary to arrive at marks in the AS units they did not enter for and we have ruled out this approach.

Some respondents do not agree that the AS grade of 2020 cannot contribute mathematically to the A level grade in Summer 2021. The AS cannot contribute because of the absence of an overall uniform mark for each student, which could only have been issued on completion of an assessment. more communication may help explain the issue. Alternatively, CCEA could explore whether we can confirm that the A2 grade awarded in 2021 will not be lower than the AS grade awarded in 2020. If this was the case, conditions would have to be put in place to ensure students availing of the measure engaged in the assessment process in summer 2021 i.e. students would need to sit the exam be awarded an GCE qualification grade.

### **Changes to Assessment at GCSE**

Respondents were very much in favour of these proposals, with 78.8% either agreeing or strongly agreeing. There were strong objections however to the fact our initial proposals did not include GCSE languages (Irish, French, German and Spanish), or GCSE Gaeilge. This was as a result of concerns around the impact an omitted unit may have on progression. However, it is clear from the responses received that this proposal put languages students at a distinct disadvantage when compared to their peers in other subjects. We have therefore moved to address this by allowing schools to provide an endorsement for the Speaking element in each qualification.

Despite the overwhelming support for the proposal to allow for the omission of one unit from final grading at GCSE, providing the option to students of sitting only mandated units, or choosing to complete all assessment units, will prove challenging to implement technically now that the proposals do not include missed component calculations. Reference to calculations was taken out of the proposals after the decision to award centre assessed grades for Summer 2020. A technical challenge that would need resolved is the differences in where grade boundaries are set, between two subject pathways and that this also has implications for awarding the A\* grade. In addition, even if it were technically possible for unitised qualifications, it is not possible to apply the same approach to the small number of linear qualifications that CCEA offers.

Removing the option of allowing different pathways or routes through each GCSE qualification was supported by several respondents. For example with one commenting that *“Examinations should not be made available unless required - units that are*

*omitted from examinations should be entirely omitted so no pressure is put on students to sit these exams.” Another stated, “All GCSE pupils must be examined with equity. The 2021 exams must not favour any group of pupils - the same exams must be sat by all pupils to ensure no pupils are disadvantaged....”. Another respondent said “CCEA must specify to maintain consistency. Trying to manage this in school under the current circumstances if pupils are permitted a free choice will be very difficult and add to the stress of the situation for teachers.*

This issue has arisen because of a commitment not to use statistical instruments, such as missed component calculations in the awarding of grades in Summer 2021 to ensure awarding is understandable. Two possible solutions that should be considered are, overturning our decision on not using missed component calculations to award grades in GCSE qualifications in Summer 2021; or mandate that students cashing in, in Summer 2021 cannot choose to sit the omitted unit. Following advice from CCEA's Standards and Technical team, we recommend the latter.

If we did restrict the path through the qualification i.e., not allow students to sit the unit identified for omission, we would still permit students to use an outcome in that unit from a previous series to contribute to final grading in Summer 2021, even if this was an outcome in a unit identified for omission e.g., unit 1 Double Award Science modular outcomes from November 2019 and March 2020. We would also allow those wishing to resit the omitted unit the opportunity to do so. In addition, students in Year 11 would still be free to enter units in each GCSE qualification, as normal.

Our original proposal to limit omissions to units or components in qualifications that have a weighting of 40% or less met with a high degree of opposition. While overall 53% of respondents supported the proposal, respondents in the five subjects directly affected by this decision felt aggrieved at the perceived unfairness of capping omissions at 40% when compared to other subjects. These include GCSE Religious Studies, Health and Social Care, Food and Nutrition, Government and Politics and Statistics, all of which are comprised of two assessment units worth 50% each. We have therefore revisited our initial proposal and recommend that the option to permit one unit from final grading is also extended to these GCSE qualifications.

Optionality was presented in the consultation as a means of providing additional flexibility in assessments offered in Summer 2021 and the views of respondents sought on this point. Very early in the process CCEA considered this approach, but as was set out in the consultation document, we believe it could, amongst other things disadvantage a high proportion of learners, particularly those with special educational needs. In addition, while 36.1% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the proposal, there was no consensus as to which subject this should be applied or indeed how this would be applied. We have therefore decided not to pursue this as an option.

We are also conscious of the impact student absence may have on the successful delivery of controlled assessments in schools. These, by their very nature, have controls placed on them to ensure that every student completes the tasks under the same conditions, under the supervision of their teacher. Bearing in mind the continued threat post by Covid-19 and the need for students to self-isolate, even if they only come in contact with someone who has contracted the disease, we believe expectations around delivery of controlled assessment tasks and adherence to the controls in place must be reviewed.

### **GCSE English Language and Mathematics**

As with languages, our initial proposals to exclude GCSE English and GCSE

Mathematics from the list of subjects in which students could avail of an omitted unit was informed by concerns about progression. GCSE English Language and GCSE Mathematics play a key role in preparing students as they move on to the later stages of education and employment. They are also 'passport' qualifications, key to students accessing places on teaching and nursing programmes.

Despite this, respondents (79.3%) were overwhelmingly against our initial proposal that all elements of GCSE English Language and GCSE Mathematics should be assessed and indeed when the breakdown of each constituency is analysed, none showed majority support for the proposal, including employers. The impact of our initial proposal on students with special educational needs was also noted, as respondents identified that this group of students may find it more challenging to cover the content in both these qualifications in one year.

As such, we are therefore recommending that:

- In GCSE English Language, students are allowed to omit unit 1 (GEN1), worth 30% of the qualification, from final grading; and,
- In GCSE Mathematics, students are allowed to omit one of unit 1 – unit 4 (M1-M4), worth 45% of the qualification, from final grading.

To ensure alignment with GCSE Mathematics, we also initially proposed that all necessary assessment were completed in GCSE Further Mathematics. In light of our recommendation on GCSE Mathematics, we are also recommending that students are allowed to omit one assessment unit from final grading in this subject also.

## **Conclusion**

The lengthy nature of the consultation and developments around the issue of results has limited our options and raises technical issues. Examination decisions on Summer 2021 need to be taken quickly. We are also conscious that we must communicate outcomes swiftly with schools and learners. Base data due to be sent to schools on 15 September has already been delayed and must be sent no later than 21<sup>st</sup> September for the January series.

Changes set out in this paper are complex and we are concerned with the high risk of error in examinations, within a challenging environment. Successful delivery of assessments will prove challenging because of the range of technical issues detailed above. Technical and operational risks and issues will be mitigated to the best of the organisation's ability.

Covid-19 is having a major impact on learners and the day to day operation of schools, with a number already having to contend with students and/or teachers having to self-isolate. This situation may get worse as we move into autumn.

On balance we believe that alternative arrangements must be developed now for Summer 2021. We have already undertaken some exploratory work based on learning lessons from Summer 2020, proposals on how these might be applied in Summer 2021 will be provided to Council.

## 2 Screening exercise

A screening exercise was carried out with the following included

- Setting up an equality panel to represent a range of expertise
- Gathering panel views through an Equality Screening Questionnaire
- Screening panel meeting to review feedback and agree impacts
- Reporting

### 2.1 Equality panel screening questionnaire

The screening panel were asked to consider and comment on the likely impact, in any way, on equality of opportunity and good relations for those affected by this new and temporary process, including an indication of the level of impact on the group, i.e., minor, major, or none. Comments were invited for each question for the nine Section 75 categories.

1. What is the likely impact on equality of opportunity for those affected by this temporary process, for each of the Section 75 equality categories?  
minor/major/none
2. Are there opportunities to better promote equality of opportunity for people within the Section 75 equalities categories?
3. To what extent is the temporary process likely to impact on good relations between people of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group?  
minor/major/none
4. Are there opportunities to better promote good relations between people of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group?

Additional questions

5. are there any potential impacts of the process on people with multiple identities?
6. Are there other potential equality impacts relevant to the outcomes outlined that have not been covered?

### 2.2 Panel questionnaire returns

Twelve returns were received from panel members. In summary;

In response to question 1,

- no impacts were received on section 75 categories for Marital Status, Sexual Orientation, and Dependents
- Minor for Religious, Political, Racial Group, Age, Men and Women Generally and those with Disabilities.
- Three major impacts were recorded for the category Religious, two each for Men and Women Generally and those with Disabilities.

In response to question two, better opportunities were recorded for;

- Increased collaboration between schools for

- Provision for language issues pertaining to minority groups
- There could be a review on any feedback from centres catering for adult learners.

In response to question 3 To what extent is the temporary process likely to impact on good relations between people of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group. Minor impacts were recorded and commented upon; 'Care needs to be taken to ensure that no particular religious or political group feels disadvantaged.

In response to question 4 - Are there opportunities to better promote good relations between people of different religious belief, political opinion, or racial group. 1 yes response was received out of the nine respondents, Increased cooperation, collaboration on a cross-sectoral basis.

Four yes responses were received in response to the question on multiple identities, recording concern on:

- In the event that prescribed units are 'removed' this could include units that certain students in the section 75 category may perform better on. This could be a practical or controlled assessment unit where perhaps those from certain racial groups with English as a second language may or may not benefit.
- The impact would be on older people who also have a disability.
- Perhaps as mentioned above NI learners may experience a long term disadvantage in terms of the comparability and portability of qualifications awarded during the period affected (2020-21) by the temporary process.
- I appreciate that 'NI learners' is not a specific racial group but I feel that it is important to situate the changes in the context of all jurisdictions especially when considering comparability and portability.
- This impact could link age and national identity.

### **2.3 Screening panel meeting**

The panel was invited to attend a MST meeting to hear summary feedback to the questionnaire and allow for discussion on the responses and decide on the level of impact for each of the section 75 groups.

Where there was no impact in an equality category that it would be recorded as such and discussion was mainly based around the comments in relation to minor and major impacts. The consultation was in relation to additional bias that have been introduced into the system by the proposals or additional bias exacerbated by the current conditions could be factored into discussion.

Discussion at the meeting considered the impacts recorded through the questionnaire and concluded that no major impacts on section 75 groups would be as a result of new bias being introduced.

In summary the final recommendations of the panel: from the nine areas under review minor impacts were now concluded in three areas and none in six areas in relation to the outcomes following consultation on Assessment Arrangements for GCSE, AS and A-level Qualifications in Summer 2021.



It was advised that elements of the proposal that relate to potential contingencies later in the academic year (such as cancellation of exams) should not be consulted on at this stage as this should be considered as part of a separate piece of work to develop contingencies across a range of scenarios.

It was noted that any potential contingences as they develop may need to be screened should they become policy or recommendations.

### 3. Outcomes

Major Impact 0  
Minor impact 3  
No impact 6

The proposed adaptations for Assessment Arrangements for GCSE, AS and A level Qualifications in Summer 2021 will not have major impact on the equality for the Section 75 groups.

### 4. Approvals

	Name	Job Title	Date
Screened by	Name C	Programme Manager (Acting)	18 <sup>th</sup> December 2020
Approved by	Name A	Head of Resources	18 <sup>th</sup> December 2020

## Appendix 1

### **Minutes of the Equality Screening Exercise in Relation to the Outcomes of Consultation on Assessment Arrangements for GCSE, AS and A-level Qualifications in Summer 2021**

**In attendance:** Name C (Chair), Name A, Name D, Name E, Name F, Name G, Name H, Name I, Name J, Name B.

**Apologies:** Name K

The Chair welcomed the panel and thanked them for the timely turnaround in forwarding the completed questionnaires for the meeting and for their contribution. The Chair briefed the panel on housekeeping issues for the afternoon and then introduced the meeting; the panel would be discussing the outcomes following consultation on the 2021 exam proposals to explore whether there was any additional bias or indeed new bias introduced to the system of awarding to the normal trends experienced in previous typical examination series.

The Chair advised that there was a total of 12 questionnaire responses and where there was no impact in a equality category that it would be recorded as such and that discussion would be based around the comments in relation to minor and major impacts.

The Chair advised that this screening was as a result of a formal request from the Department of Education to proceed with consultation outcomes and to take time to review equality screening. The Chair advised that the Council has approved the outcomes in principle and that the outcomes will be also be sent to DE.

The panel noted that Question 4-other considerations was not within the scope of the consultation process and that individual panel members had already been contacted and advised to disregard this question. The Chair was content with this advice and action.

The Chair then proceeded to go through each category as itemised in the equality screening document.

#### **1 Religious Belief**

<b>Major Impact</b>	<b>Minor Impact</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>Responses</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>12</b>

The Chair invited those who had completed the impact as major or minor to put forward their opinions for their scoring. The panel member who had considered it as major impact advised that they were not a subject expert and struggled with the questionnaire overall.

In relation to religious belief it was raised that we share the same brand across the UK division but CCEA offers unitised GCSE, England linear and as such it is hard to take a consistent approach. Moreover, as this is what is done currently there would be no additional issues in relation to bias introduced.

Clarification was put forward from another member that since the document had been forwarded to Council, proposals had been updated and the issues have been addressed to a degree. They clarified that the point is relative to what is happening in Irish but this is no different to any other language.

It was recognised that within some households there is opportunity to practice a second language but this is something outside CCEA's control.

**Recommendation:** As a result of the additional work that has been undertaken since the proposal paper it was put forward by the Chair that the impact should be recorded as minor and that monitoring in relation to the delivery should be undertaken.

This was seconded and agreed by the panel.

## **2. Political Opinion**

<b>Major Impact</b>	<b>Minor Impact</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>Responses</b>
<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>12</b>

### **Recommendation**

The Chair recommended that unless anyone had anything further to add that the impact be recorded as minor.

Agreed by the panel.

## **3 Racial Group**

<b>Major Impact</b>	<b>Minor Impact</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>Responses</b>
<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>12</b>

### **Recommendation**

The Chair recommended that unless anyone had anything further to add that the impact be recorded as minor.

Agreed by the panel.

#### **4 Age**

<b>Major Impact</b>	<b>Minor Impact</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>Responses</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>12</b>

Discussion took place around the comments that had been recorded on the questionnaires, for example potential impacts are:

-that some boys mature at a later stage than girls which may be exacerbated by the arrangements being put in place for Summer 2021,

-Older adult learners are more likely to have health issues and so not be able to attend classes.'

#### **Recommendation**

A communication strategy to be developed, in part to address issues raised.

The panel were advised that the CBI had been part of the consultation and that employers also engaged and all views have been captured.

In view of this involvement by the above parties it was proposed that the major impacts be mitigated to minor and that consideration be given to effective communication in relation to the future strategy.

Agreed by the panel.

#### **5 Marital Status**

<b>Major Impact</b>	<b>Minor Impact</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>Responses</b>
<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>12</b>

#### **Recommendation:**

No impact

## **6 Sexual Orientation**

<b>Major Impact</b>	<b>Minor Impact</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>Responses</b>
<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>12</b>

### **Recommendation:**

No impact

## **7. Men and Women Generally**

<b>Major Impact</b>	<b>Minor Impact</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>Responses</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>12</b>

As some previous discussion had already taken place in relation to gender it was proposed that there was nothing additional or new as a result of the change in process.

The panel was advised that some analysis had already been done on internal and external assessment and taking that into consideration the Chair proposed that the impact should be reduced to minor.

### **Recommendation:**

Minor impact-agreed by panel.

## **8. Disability**

<b>Major Impact</b>	<b>Minor Impact</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>Responses</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>12</b>

The Chair read out some of the comments received in relation to this category.

-‘there may be issues for learners with mental or physical disabilities. Particularly in relation to A-levels being wholly assessed at the end of two years. Formally it would’ve of course have normally been assessed across two years, spreading the weight of assessment over time. This could add stress to vulnerable learners.’

-‘the risk of bias against SEN candidates could be increased due to the new arrangements if in particular the issue of assessing learners’ achievements is not addressed.’

The panel were advised that there are two areas which are particularly affected, those being food and nutrition and health and social care which are planned to be exam only. However there still remains an option to do a controlled assessment if the candidate so wishes.

Further technical solutions are being investigated to mitigate bias for learners preferably in relation to controlled assessment. It was put forward to the panel that The Executive Team are considering jurisdiction between schools and CCEA and that they are looking to give assurance on that.

The Chair made reference to the Restart Program and the discussion around considerations given by the Executive Team and recommended that the two major impacts should now be mitigated to minor.

Recommendation minor impact.

Agreed by panel.

### **9. Dependants**

<b>Major Impact</b>	<b>Minor Impact</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>Responses</b>
<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>12</b>

#### **Recommendation:**

No impact

#### **Summary**

The Chair summarised the final recommendations of the panel: from the nine areas under review minor impacts were now concluded in six areas and none in three areas in relation to the outcomes following consultation.

It was noted that any potential contingences as they develop may need to be screened should they become policy or recommendations.

The Chair closed the meeting by thanking the panel for their time and contribution.