FROM THE OFFICE OF THE MINISTER

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Dear Parents, Guardians and Students

CHANGES TO CCEA GCSE, AS AND A LEVEL QUALIFICATIONS IN 2021

Yesterday, I announced a further package of comprehensive measures which I believe will ensure fair, inclusive and flexible public examinations in 2021. I know our students are facing unprecedented disruption to their learning. Consequently, I have taken exceptional steps to ensure public examinations are as fair as possible and to reduce assessment across all CCEA GCSE, AS and A Level qualifications.

In October, I announced a range of changes to CCEA qualifications: making public health adaptations to ensure safe delivery and reducing the number of exams pupils will need to take. In the October announcement, I said that GCSE candidates would be able to omit assessment of one unit of each of their qualifications, up to a maximum of 40% of each qualification. This represents a very significant reduction in the assessment burden.

The further measures which I announced yesterday are summarised below.

- Grade outcomes in 2021 for GCSE, AS and A Level qualifications will broadly align with 2020 outcomes. In line with the announcement in England, we will take a similarly generous approach to grading and standards for Northern Ireland candidates.

- All candidates taking A2 assessments will be able to omit one or more units of assessment up to a maximum of 60% of A2 assessment.

- All candidates taking AS assessments will be able to omit one or more units of assessment up to a maximum of 60% of AS assessment.

- Candidates' grades will be based on their outcomes in the unit or units they have completed to arrive at an overall total for the qualification. <u>This means candidates are always awarded an outcome based on their own performance in the unit or units they have taken.</u>

- Work will be taken forward on a potential COVID allowance or tariff for young people who have missed a significant number of days face-to-face teaching due to self-isolating.

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

- 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.

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

- 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.

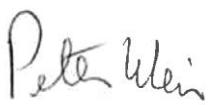
CCEA will provide detailed information to schools in relation to every AS and A2 subject, as early as possible in the New Year.

I would assure you that my Department is working hard to make sure we take into account the effects of the pandemic, to make the best contingency arrangements we can, and to make sure exam results will be fair and command public confidence. I trust that the changes I have announced today will go some considerable way to reassure young people that we will continue to support them and help them to succeed.

I have enclosed Frequently Asked Questions. Copies are also available on the Department's website at FAQs - Exams 2021 | Department of Education (education-ni.gov.uk)

I would take this opportunity to send you and your family my best wishes for Christmas and peace, health, happiness and prosperity in the coming year.

Yours faithfully



PETER WEIR MLA
MINISTER OF EDUCATION