

Response of the Association of School and College Leaders to the consultation by CCEA on proposed changes to entry level, Vocationally Related and Occupational Studies qualifications to January and summer 2021

Introduction

The Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) represents over 20,000 education system leaders, heads, principals, deputies, vice-principals, assistant heads, business managers and other senior staff of state-funded and independent schools and colleges throughout the UK. In Northern Ireland the association has approximately 200 members in more than 80 schools, across all sectors, the total enrolment of which equates to almost half of all pupils in secondary education and includes some of the largest schools in the Province. As a branch of the national association, ASCL(NI) is able to contribute independently to the debate on education in the Province on behalf of its members and the children it serves. We work to shape education policy, provide advice, and support to members and deliver high quality professional development across the sector. This places the association in a strong position to consider this issue from the viewpoint of the leaders of schools and colleges of all types.

ASCL welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this consultation by CCEA. We set out our answers below to each of the questions in the consultation document.

Question: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposals to implement public health adaptations for Entry Level subjects in 2021.

We agree.

There has been significant disruption in recent months with significant missed teaching. The proposal to reduce the assessment burden in a fair and consistent way for young people across Northern Ireland taking entry, vocationally related and occupational studies at levels 1 and 2 in 2021, is fair and should still ensure standards are met.

Question: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposals to implement public health adaptations for Vocationally Related subjects in 2021?

We agree.

As in our answer to the above question, there has been considerable disruption in recent months and there is a real need for flexibility in the way evidence of attainment is gathered, the amount of evidence required and in relation to moderation of specific units, where this is reduced.

Question: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposals to implement public health adaptations for Occupational Studies Levels 1 and 2 in 2021?

We agree

As in our answers to the above questions, it is important that assessment plans are flexible and that the burden of assessment is reduced. It is also important that all qualifications are treated consistently during this difficult time, whilst at the same time, maintaining standards.

Question: Do you have any comments on the proposed subject-specific public health amendments?

We agree that arrangements must be flexible and evolve as the academic year continues.

We also feel strongly that teachers and students must be clear as soon as possible as to what is expected of them in January and the summer 2021 so that all possible teaching and learning can take place throughout the year, whether this is face to face or online/ blended.

We ask that in the spirit of the aims set out by CCEA, that there is consistency in terms of the criteria for evidence of assessment requirements across all qualifications whilst efforts are made to retain standards.

In terms of reducing content, this varies from qualification to qualification and from unit to unit. ASCL is aware that Heads of Department have been in contact with Subject Officers in CCEA on assessment and delivery issues. It is important that due consideration is given to these submissions and that they are included as part of this consultation process. Subject specific issues will, no doubt, also be raised as part of this consultation and these should be factored into a final decision. We support the need for the qualifications to remain robust and that content must remain sufficient enough for this to be the case.

Question: To what extent do you agree or disagree that for all CCEA Entry Level qualifications in 2021 we should accept a reduction in the number of units to be moderated, up to a maximum of 50% of the qualification?

We agree.

The uncertainty around teaching and learning in 2020-21 means that there can be no certainty that all teaching and learning normally expected could be completed in time for normal assessment arrangements in 2021. Therefore the proposed public health adaptations to subjects requiring practical and observational work which cannot be completed easily by online assessment seem sensible.

Question: To what extent do you agree or disagree that for all CCEA Vocationally Related qualifications in 2021 we should accept a reduction in the number of units to be moderated, up to a maximum of 50% of the qualification?

We agree.

As stated above, it makes sense to reduce the level of assessment burden during these uncertain times. In terms of vocationally related qualifications, it is important that young people taking these qualifications are not disadvantaged because they are not able to complete all the work online or at a distance if isolation is required.

Question: To what extent do you agree or disagree that for all CCEA Occupational Studies Level 1 or 2 qualifications we should accept a reduction in the number of units to be moderated, up to a maximum of 50% of the qualification?

We agree.

As stated above in relation to entry level and vocational related qualifications, it makes sense to reduce the burden of assessment in these uncertain times. It is very important that standards are maintained in occupational studies and reducing the actual amount of assessment to possibly 50% seems a fair way to achieve the aim of reflecting experience and ensure student wellbeing.

Question: Do you have any comments on the proposed assessment arrangements for CCEA Entry Level, Vocationally Related and Occupational Studies qualifications?

We agree with the proposed arrangements as they seem fair across all the qualification types and the reduction in the assessment and moderation burden is the fairest way to ensure no student is treated differently during a time of public health restrictions.

Question: How far do you agree or disagree with our assessment? If you disagree, please outline any potential equality impacts which you feel we should consider.

We agree.

In terms of equalities, the proposals appear to be fair and consistent across all including those with protected characteristics.

Question: Do you have any other comments you would like to make regarding our proposed changes to CCEA Entry Level, Vocationally Related and Occupational Studies qualifications?

Yes. In terms of mitigation, we would like to know how all students who are impacted by public health adaptations will be treated if they are required to isolate at times of assessment and if there will be any leeway for those who have completed just under 50% of assessments.

The proposals help maintain the value and character of the qualifications and the award that pupils receive will still give a valid and reliable indication of knowledge, understanding and skills or practical competence. Importantly, they will also ensure that learners taking these qualifications are not disadvantaged compared to their peers taking AS and A level qualifications.

The proposals are primarily based around reducing the assessment burden – specifically, that CCEA will accept a reduction in the number of units to be moderated, up to a maximum of 50% of the qualification. Reducing the assessment burden will help to ensure that there is time and space available for learners to benefit from high quality practical experience. It may be appropriate to incorporate elements of optionality into the assessment arrangements to allow for the varied disruption to individual learners' experiences during this academic year.

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