

# Awarding for GCSE, AS and A Level Qualifications Summer 2020

Head of Centre Guidance



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On 19 March 2020, the Minister of Education, Peter Weir MLA, announced that the Summer 2020 examination series would be cancelled to help fight the spread of the COVID-19 virus and that grades would be based on a range of evidence and data, including prior attainment and centre estimated grades.

This unprecedented change to examinations has required us to adapt the way grades will be awarded. Following consultation by the Department of Education with representatives of the teaching profession, CCEA has received instruction from the Minister of Education about how to proceed.

### GCSE, AS and A Level Qualifications Not Provided by CCEA

Northern Ireland operates an open qualifications market. This means that students can take their GCSE, AS and A level qualifications with AQA, OCR, Pearson, Eduqas (part of WJEC) and CCEA.

Ofqual and Qualifications Wales have published guidance on how GCSEs, AS and A levels will be awarded in Summer 2020. If you have candidates entered for a GCSE, AS or A level qualification with AQA, Pearson, OCR or Eduqas (WJEC), you should refer to the awarding organisation for guidance and requirements, which may differ from this information. You will also wish to familiarise yourself with the regulatory requirements published by Ofqual and Qualifications Wales.

The links to the guidance and other communications from Ofqual and Qualifications Wales are below.

Ofqual:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/awarding-qualifications-in-summer-2020>

Qualifications Wales:

<https://www.qualificationswales.org/english/coronavirus---covid-19/information-for-centres>

### **The remainder of this document addresses GCSEs, AS and A levels provided by CCEA.**

This information is provided in the context of the most up-to-date advice for educational settings provided by the Department of Education and HSC Public Health Agency. If that advice changes, Heads of Centre should consider this information in the light of any updated guidance.

### GCSE, AS and A Level Qualifications Provided by CCEA

CCEA Regulation has been working to enable the award of grades for GCSE, AS and A level this summer, to facilitate the progression of students to college, higher education, training, apprenticeships or employment.

CCEA awarding organisation has been working on the technical process for awarding and will ask exam centres to generate, for each subject at GCSE, AS and A level, centre assessment grades for their students, and then to rank order the students within each of those grades. These two key pieces of information will enable CCEA to issue the fairest possible results.

Most GCSE, AS and A level qualifications provided by CCEA are modular and the AS qualification contributes to the overall A level outcome. This means that the vast majority of A level candidates wishing to 'cash in' A level qualification(s) this summer will have already completed AS units. There is, therefore, previous performance data available. However, we recognise that further learning and development take place in the A level year of study, and so CCEA will ask for centre assessment grades for A level students as part of the awarding process.

Exam centres will receive detailed guidance from CCEA awarding organisation on how it will collect these grades and rank orders. This process will be as clear and straightforward as possible for Heads of Centre and their staff.

CCEA will provide detailed instructions about how and when to submit the data as soon as possible. However, we recognise that Heads of Centre and teachers need some certainty so that they can plan this work with their teams, so we confirm that the deadline for submitting data to CCEA will be no earlier than **29 May 2020**.

This document provides further information for Heads of Centre, heads of department and teachers about how to generate these grades and the evidence that should be considered.

The centre assessment grades submitted to CCEA must reflect a fair, reasonable and carefully considered judgement of the most likely grade a student would have achieved if they had sat their exams this summer and completed any coursework, controlled assessment or other assessments required by the qualification. Heads of Centre should emphasise the need for judgements to be objective and fair.

In the interests of fairness to students, judgements made by teachers should be consistent. However, it is not feasible in the current circumstances for CCEA to standardise the judgements of all teachers before grades are submitted. So that the final grades awarded are as fair as possible, CCEA will standardise the judgements across and within centres once they have been submitted using a statistical methodology agreed with CCEA Regulation.

For every GCSE, AS and A level subject, CCEA will require each school, college or other exam centre to submit the following information:

- A **centre assessment grade** for each student – the judgement submitted to CCEA by the Head of Centre about the grade that each student is most likely to have achieved if they had sat their exams and internally assessed components. This professional judgement is derived from evidence that is held within the centre and which has been reviewed by subject teachers and relevant heads of department.
- The **rank order** of students within each grade – for example, for all those students with a grade C in GCSE Mathematics, a rank order where 1 is the most secure/highest attaining student, and so on.

## Approach to Awarding

We do not anticipate the need for an additional examination series. We are currently working on the assumption that CCEA awarding organisation will operate its normal examination timetable for November 2020, January 2021, March 2021 and Summer 2021.

Students dissatisfied with grades provided for Summer 2020 will have the opportunity to sit unit(s) as part of the CCEA examination timetable. If students choose to sit unit(s), the highest grade from either the calculated grade or examination grade will stand.

## A Level Awarding

For A level, we anticipate that the calculated grade, which uses statistical predictions<sup>1</sup> based on previous student performance combined with centre assessed grades and centre rank orders, will provide a reliable grade outcome. Students will not be required to take A level examinations through an additional sitting, such as an autumn series. They will have the opportunity to sit examinations as part of the Summer 2021 examination timetable.

## AS Awarding

AS qualifications are not only stand-alone qualifications but also contribute to A level qualifications – AS units are usually taken in Year 13 and A2 units in Year 14. Because of the contribution that AS outcomes make towards A level results, it has been important for us to fully consider the implications for A level qualifications in Summer 2021. Students who were due to sit their AS exams in 2020 will not be required to take those exams through an additional examinations timetable. Instead, they will be treated in a similar way to those taking A levels.

All AS students will receive an AS grade and there will be no AS exams until Summer 2021. The grade awarded will be based on a range of evidence. Awarding organisations are working towards the model on which grades will be awarded and in which centre assessed grades and centre rank orders will be used. The nature of the AS grade awarded in 2020 will not allow it to contribute to A level results in 2021.

In Summer 2021, students will have two options for their A level award. If a student chooses to only sit the required A2 units, then their AS outcomes will be calculated using statistical predictions based on their performance in the A2 units. If they choose to sit any AS units, alongside the A2 units, they will be awarded the highest grade at A level from either route.

## GCSE Awarding

Students who were due to sit GCSE exams that would have led to a whole GCSE qualification this summer will be issued a grade using a combination of average centre performance, centre assessed grades and rank ordering.

Students entered for GCSE units in Summer 2020 that will lead to a GCSE grade in 2021 should not be issued with a grade. For those students, there will be two options. In 2021 they can sit the units they planned to take next year, and not the unit(s) they entered for in Summer 2020. These 2020 units will have a mark calculated using statistical predictions based on their performance in the 2021 units. As a result, an overall GCSE grade will be awarded in 2021. Alternatively, they can choose to sit all the units in Summer 2021. Whichever option a student chooses, they will be awarded the highest grade.

<sup>1</sup> This is a statistical procedure known as the z-score method currently used where a student is unable to complete part of a module owing to illness. Under this procedure, the difference between the candidate's estimate and the performance of candidates generally on the unit in question is the same as the average difference between the candidate's performance and the performance of candidates generally on the other units.

For GCSE students, there will be no additional examinations timetable above the already agreed November 2020, January 2021, March 2021 and Summer 2021 timetable provided by CCEA. This means that students who are dissatisfied with their grade outcomes provided by calculated grades will be able to sit some GCSEs in November, January and March. The remainder of components will be offered in Summer 2021.

The timetable for November 2020 will include:

Double Award Science (DAS) units in Biology, Chemistry and Physics  
Single Award Science (SAS) units in Biology, Chemistry and Physics

The timetable for January 2021 will include:

GCSE Mathematics (All units, 1–8)  
GCSE English Language (Unit 1 and 4)

The timetable for March 2021 will include:

Double Award Science (DAS) units in Biology, Chemistry and Physics  
Single Award Science (SAS) units in Biology, Chemistry and Physics.

**Summer 2021 will include all GCSE, AS and A level units as timetabled.**

## Centre Assessment Grades

Centre assessment grades should be based on a holistic professional judgement, balancing the different sources of evidence.

Teachers and heads of department will have a good understanding of their students' performance and how they compare to other students within the subject for this and previous years. We believe this approach is in the best interests of students. Teachers, under the supervision of heads of department, must consider each student's performance. A written record should be retained of the reasons for which each centre assessment grade has been arrived at.

Considerations should include any outcomes in the qualifications issued by CCEA in a previous examination series. From these considerations, we want teachers to make an objective judgement of the grade each student would have been most likely to get if they had taken their exam(s) in a subject and completed any other assessments required for the qualification this summer. This could include U (ungraded).

In coming to this holistic judgement, centres should assume that it is no easier or harder for a student to achieve a particular grade this year compared to previous years.

Teachers should draw on all existing records and available evidence (as far as possible in the context of current public health advice). It is important that the judgements are objective, and they should only take account of the evidence about student performance. This will include the following, where it is available and does not require centres to contravene public health instructions:

- Records of each student's performance throughout their study, including, for example, progress review data, classwork, bookwork and/or participation in performances in subjects where this is assessed, e.g. music, drama and PE.

- Performance in any controlled assessments/coursework or other assessments required for the qualification, even if this has not been fully completed. You should not ask students to complete their controlled assessments/coursework and you do not need to submit marks for any completed coursework/controlled assessments. In case students decide that they want to enter in a subsequent examination series, you should retain any coursework/controlled assessment completed to date.
- For resitting students, any information about previous grades achieved or coursework, controlled assessment or other assessment (e.g. practical and oral assessment) marks that would under normal circumstances be carried forward.
- For A level students who took AS in 2019, their AS results in that subject and performance in the A2 course of teaching and learning.
- For GCSE students, prior attainment in units already completed and CCEA outcomes awarded.
- Performance on any class or homework assessments and mock exams taken throughout their study.
- Tiers – in GCSE subjects which include units that have a tier of entry, foundation or higher, the tier entered by candidates should be considered when making judgements. For example, a candidate entered for three out of four equally weighted units at Foundation Tier would not be expected to have a centre assessed grade of A.
- Previous results for your centre in this subject – these may vary according to several factors, including past performance of the students (over the last two years, where possible), but data shows that for most centres any year on year variation in results for a given subject is normally quite small.
- The performance of this year's students compared to those in the previous two years, where possible.
- Any other relevant information that provides objective evidence of educational attainment within the subject.

Where students have agreed reasonable adjustments or access arrangements (for example a reader or scribe), the judgement should take account of likely achievement with the reasonable adjustment/access arrangement in place.

Special consideration requests, if a student is unable to take an assessment or suffers a traumatic event that might affect their performance, will not apply this summer. Instead, judgements should reflect how students would have performed under ordinary circumstances. Where illness or other personal circumstances might have affected performance in mock exams, centres should bear that in mind when making their judgements.

Given the timing of the announcement, we recognise that centres will have incomplete evidence and that the range and amount of evidence will vary between different subjects. Judgements should be made on the available evidence.

There is **no requirement** to set additional mock exams or homework tasks for determining a centre assessment grade, and no student should be disadvantaged if they are unable to complete any work set after schools/colleges and other exam centres were closed. Where students have completed additional work after school closures, caution should be exercised

where that evidence suggests a change in performance. In many cases, it is likely to reflect the student's circumstances and context in which the work was done.

There will be no requirement to send any supporting evidence to CCEA, such as student work. However, centres should retain records of this work, any written reasoning and any annotated work or notes made in reaching a centre assessment grade for each student.

CCEA awarding organisation may elect to request and inspect supporting evidence at its discretion.

Please note that centre assessment grades are not the same as:

- age related grades (usually defined as the grade a student would receive if they took the GCSE, AS or A level now);
- working at grades (the grade a student is currently working at);
- target grades (often set a little higher than likely to be achieved, to motivate students); or
- predicted grades provided to UCAS or other admission services in support of university applications.

The statistical standardisation process will require a more granular scale than grades alone. For this reason, we need centres to provide a rank order of students within each grade. For example, if you have 15 students for GCSE Mathematics for whom you have given a teacher assessment grade C, you should then rank them from 1 to 15, where 1 is the most secure/highest attaining, 2 is the next most secure, and so on.

## Accurately Rank Ordering Students

CCEA awarding organisation intends to carry out a process, being developed with CCEA Regulation, to statistically standardise the grades. For this to be as fair as possible, the rank order of students must be as accurate as possible. In order to facilitate this, for each student, their teacher and head of department must consider the student's rank order.

Centres should submit to CCEA rank orders for CCEA specifications only. CCEA awarding organisation will not process rank orders for other awarding organisations.

Where there is more than one subject teacher, they will need to agree on one rank order for all students within the centre who are taking that subject. To do this, teachers within a subject department will need to discuss the rank order and come to a shared view of the standard being applied within their centre. We recognise that this will be challenging for some centres and in some subjects, and in the current circumstances. However, the rank order is important for the statistical standardisation process.

In doing this, teachers should draw on examples of student work, including any units completed in a previous series, coursework or other qualification assessments where available.

If two or more students are almost indistinguishable in terms of their subject performance, then it may be very difficult to put them into rank order. However, CCEA awarding organisation will need a single rank order for all students. Tied rank order placings will not be allowed and will mean that submission is rejected.



Where a centre has a large entry for a subject, with many different teachers, we recognise that this will be challenging. CCEA awarding organisation will advise on this as soon as possible.

## Department Approval

Each set of centre submissions for a subject must be reviewed by at least two teachers in that subject, one of whom should be the head of department (or where there is only one teacher or only one available, by the Head of Centre).

Where a staff member might have a personal interest in the performance of a candidate (for example as a relative), this must be disclosed to the Head of Centre. The Head of Centre must make appropriate arrangements to ensure any perceived or actual conflict of interest is appropriately addressed.

## Head of Centre Approval and Declaration

The Head of Centre will be required to confirm that the centre assessment grades and the rank order of students are a true representation of student performance. If the Head of Centre is unavailable to do this, the Board of Governors may delegate a deputy Head of Centre. However, the Board of Governors should notify CCEA of this change. In reviewing these centre assessment grades, the Head of Centre should consider the distribution of the centre assessment grades in comparison to grades achieved by the centre in previous two years.

The Head of Centre will be required to submit the following declaration when the data is submitted.

*I confirm that these centre assessment grades and the rank orders of students are accurate and represent the professional judgements made by my staff and that entries were appropriate for each candidate. Having reviewed the relevant processes and data, I am confident that they honestly and fairly represent the grades that these students would have been most likely to achieve if they had sat their exams and conducted their assessments as planned, and they have not been disclosed to either the candidate or their parent/guardian/carer. I understand that CCEA will conduct a statistical standardisation exercise and that, if the profile of grades submitted is substantially different from what might be expected based on my centre's results in the previous two years, where available, and the prior attainment of this year's students, the grades for my centre will be adjusted to bring them into line with overall standards.*

## Statistical Standardisation

The statistical model to standardise grades in each subject will be developed by CCEA awarding organisation and CCEA Regulation, in conjunction with other awarding organisations and examination regulators.

We will continue to work with technical and statistical experts to develop this model, which will combine a range of evidence, including:

- expected grade distributions at full CCEA cohort level;

- results in previous two years, where available, at individual centres; and
- the prior attainment profile of students at centre level.

We will apply the statistical standardisation to align the judgements across and within centres, so that, as far as possible, your students are not unfairly advantaged or disadvantaged this summer. This means that the centre assessment grades you submit and the final calculated grades that students receive could be different.

## Private Candidates

Private candidates are students who have not been taught in the centre because they might be home-schooled or be following distance-learning programmes or studying independently.

Where centres have accepted entries from private candidates, those students should be included where the Head of Centre is confident that they and their staff have seen sufficient evidence of the student's achievement to make an objective judgement.

We are urgently exploring whether there are alternative options for those students who do not have an existing relationship with a centre and who need results this summer for progression purposes.

The Head of Centre should communicate their decision to any private candidates and take advice from CCEA awarding organisation where cases are not straightforward. It will be important for centres to make sure that their entries are complete and accurate, as grades will only be issued for those students who have been entered.

## How to Submit Information

CCEA is currently working to adapt its IT systems to collect this data in a way that is as straightforward as possible for the centre. The final deadline for submission of data will be specified by CCEA. It will not be earlier than **29 May 2020**.

When the IT system is completed, CCEA awarding organisation will issue instructions on how to submit information.

Centres can commence the work to generate centre assessed grades and rank orders, but they will not be able to submit data until further instruction is provided.

If centres do not submit the required information about a student by the specified date(s), it will not be possible to provide an award for that student.

## Entries

CCEA awarding organisation will work with centres to finalise entry data as early as possible this year. It is essential to the process of calculating grades that the entry files are accurate and finalised before centres submit centre assessed grades and rank orders. CCEA awarding organisation will convey further information about entries as soon as possible.

## Sharing Data with Students, Parents and Carers

Students, parents and carers will want to know that the process of generating centre assessment grades is rigorous, objective and fair.

We will publish a message for students, parents and carers on our website shortly that Heads of Centre may wish to circulate or publicise.

During the grading process described in this guidance note, and in advance of the issue of results, centres must not share the centre assessment grades nor the rank orders submitted with students, their parents/carers, or any other individuals outside the centre.

The Head of Centre should ensure that the confidentiality of this data is protected within the centre and only shared with those staff where there is an absolute need to do so. This is to protect the integrity of the teachers' judgements and to avoid teachers, Heads of Centre or heads of department being put under pressure by, for example, students and parents, to submit a grade that is not supported by the evidence. Since the final grades for some, or all, students could be different from those submitted, it also helps to manage students' expectations.

Notwithstanding these confidentiality requirements, data subjects (students) can request a copy of their personal data under article 15 of the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR). However, in respect of personal data such as exam marks or other information processed by a data controller to determine results, an exemption from disclosure exists under paragraph 25 (2) of schedule 2 of the Data Protection Act 2018. This exemption allows Data Controllers (in this case centres) to delay disclosure of such information until after results have been published to the students.

CCEA awarding organisation will send its instructions to centres as soon as possible and once the centre assessment grades have been submitted to CCEA, the process to produce the final grades will commence. More information will be made available to teachers, students, parents and carers at the time results are issued, to facilitate any appeals.

## Arrangements for Appeals

Under the circumstances, the normal arrangements for reviews of marking and appeals will not apply.

We are considering what arrangements might be put in place to allow an effective appeal.

It is the centre's responsibility to ensure that the data submitted to CCEA as part of this process is correct.

## Additional Examination Opportunities

Students who feel that their grades from this summer do not reflect their ability will be able to sit examinations at the next available opportunity. If they choose to do this, the higher grade stands.

## Malpractice

CCEA will investigate any allegations of acts which are intended to give an unfair advantage in the awarding process or undermine the processes described. The consequences of malpractice remain the same as in previous years.

## Next Steps

Heads of Centre should now arrange to do the following:

- Check entries are complete and correct.
- Contact any private candidates to confirm whether the centre will be able to submit a centre assessment grade and include them in the rank order.
- Consider what evidence will be available to teachers and heads of department.
- Begin the work to generate a centre assessment grade and an overall rank order in each subject, but do not try to submit the data yet.
- Ensure confidentiality so that the grade and/or rank order is not shared with students, parents and carers or other individuals inside and outside the centre who are not part of this process.

CCEA Regulation will enact several changes to its regulations to enable this year's results to be delivered in the changed circumstances, including:

- the principles underpinning the technical model for the statistical standardisation process;
- arrangements for private candidates; and
- arrangements for appeals.

## Further Advice and Information

CCEA awarding organisation will provide detailed information by the end of April to Heads of Centre about how to submit the data. Please do not send information to the awarding organisation at this stage.

Further advice and information is available through <https://ccea.org.uk> – follow the links for CCEA COVID-19 Frequently Asked Questions.



