

CCEA consultation on draft timetable for 2017 GCE AS and A2 examinations

The overwhelming view of school leaders is that AS examinations should be as early as possible within the examination cycle with A2 examinations to follow. This reflects the adjustment in weighting with AS worth 40% and A2 worth 60% of the overall A Level and the desire to have Y13 pupils return to school to begin A2 courses of study. The CCEA summary recognises this as a key factor, stating that:

“the additional preparation time such a change would allow for teachers to prepare candidates for A2 examinations, particularly when the A2 units will be weighted higher than the AS units in the new specifications”

Unfortunately, the proposed scheduling of AS examinations is so spread across the months of May and June that this key consideration is undermined almost completely. The final AS examination is on Monday 12 June and this is much too late for bringing back Y13 pupils. It is essential that CCEA reschedule a number of AS examination sessions to ensure a much earlier completion of AS examinations and a realistic opportunity to have Y13 pupils return to class to begin A2 studies. It is suggested below that the final date for all AS examinations must be **no later than Friday 2 June**.

Suggested amendments to the CCEA provisional timetable

- 1 AS examinations could start during the week commencing Monday 8 May. The only AS examination scheduled for that week currently is a single Biology module on Friday 12 May. As things stand this is a wasted week. The priority must be to avoid the three sciences and French having AS examinations between 5 and 12 June.
- 2 The week commencing 15 May has a number of opportunities to use sessions better, particularly when there are sessions with small uptake subjects. For example:
 - Monday 15/5 – pm session has only one subject, Software Systems Development. French could go here and 12 June French session be avoided.
 - Tuesday 16/5 – am session has only one subject, Journalism. Any of the three science subjects could go here and AS science examination sessions from 6, 7, 8 and 9 June be avoided.
 - Thursday 18/5 – pm session has only one subject, Business Studies.
 - Friday 19/5 – pm session has 2 subjects, Spanish and History of Art. Any of the three science subjects could go here and AS science examination sessions from 6, 7, 8 and 9 June be avoided.
- 3 If the three sciences had AS examinations begin earlier, during the week of 8 May or using sessions during the week of 15 May, then AS science examinations during the week of 22 May could cater for the second modules in these subjects rather than the first modules. Likewise, there is an opportunity to schedule AS French in the afternoon of Wednesday 24 May (again opposite Software Systems Development).
- 4 The week commencing 29 May must be utilised to the full and any opportunity to move AS examinations from June to this week must be taken. Friday 2 June must be the absolute latest when AS examinations end.
- 5 There should be no AS examinations during the week commencing 5 June. French, Biology, Chemistry and Physics AS examinations can be scheduled earlier and AS examinations concluded by Friday 2 June.

It is essential that AS examinations begin and end as soon as possible within the new system. Much has been said about comparing grading systems, mainly at GCSE, but there is a more fundamental comparison to consider – the outcomes for pupils. Northern Ireland pupils will sit AS examinations at the end of Y13 when most of their competitors for university places and jobs, sitting linear A Level courses in England, do not. Pupils in England may spend 2-3 weeks in May sitting internal examinations but they will soon return to studies and those lessons, covering A2 materials, will run for at least 6-7 weeks until around 20 July. Northern Ireland A Level pupils must not begin their A2 studies on 1 September of Y14. The potential for NI pupils to fall behind is very real and results could suffer in comparison to English pupils. We must guard against any perception that NI pupils are less able at A Level. That is the ultimate test for comparability and portability.