

4th February 2021

Re: GCSE and A Level Examinations

Dear parents and pupils,

I hope you and your family are keeping safe during this second lockdown. You will be aware that the Minister of Education, Peter Weir, made a statement in the NI Assembly on 2nd February, 2021 broadly outlining the alternative awarding arrangements for examinations and qualifications for Summer 2021. Today I received a similar communication from CEA.

I am very aware of the impact the on-going pandemic is having on you and your child, especially the worry and anxiety you may have around the uncertainty about examination grades and progression to the next stage of your child's education.

I want to assure you that the teachers in Sperrin College are making every effort to help and support your child with their learning, albeit remotely. It is therefore imperative that pupils engage fully with them, both on Google Meets registration and in their Google Classroom work.

One issue that is sometimes present for pupils is the challenge to find purpose and focus when learning remotely. This is especially true in this lockdown as many of us cannot get outside or take a break due to the short days and poor weather conditions.

As we now enter this next phase, hopefully beginning to see a return to face to face teaching soon, our GCSE and A Level pupils will need to ensure that all work is completed to the best possible standard and all lessons (if delivered on Google Meets) are attended.

The Mid-term break is shortly approaching, and I urge all pupils to take well-earned rest away from screens if possible. The school will also be running a 'Catch-up day' on Monday 22nd February 2021. On this day, no new work will be posted. This should give pupils an opportunity to review all their google classrooms and ensure all work has been submitted. There will be no google registration on this day.

In addition, I have outlined below the key points parents and pupils need to know regarding how grades will be determined and have also provided you with details of a link to CEA's website which will provide any updated information.

Once again, I want to thank you all for your continued work at this time and look forward to seeing you all soon.

Yours Sincerely

B A Heron

Principal

Sperrin Integrated College
Alternative Grading System 2021
Key Points for Parents and Pupils

Context

On 2 February 2021, the Education Minister announced how the alternative awarding arrangements for Summer 2021 CCEA qualifications will operate. Therefore, there will be no examinations for A Level or GCSE pupils in Summer 2021.

GCSE, AS and A Level grades

CCEA GCSE, AS and A level grades will be arrived at using teacher professional assessment, known as **Centre Determined Grades**, following set procedures, training, and guidance that CCEA will provide. Teachers in Sperrin College will be **using evidence** from a range of different sources (pupils work) to determine grades.

Five Step Approach:

CCEA, alongside schools and colleges, will use a five-step approach to determine grades as outlined by the Minister.

Alternative Awarding Arrangements 2021:

The Five Step Process Step 1: Guidance, Information and Readiness

During Step 1 of the process, CCEA will provide support for schools and colleges on evidence gathering as well as moderation and internal standardisation of judgements based on a range of evidence to ensure the judgements made are objective and fair. This will include support from the Chartered Institute of Educational Assessors. The aim is to build on the best practice evident across schools and colleges in 2020, with the aim of providing greater consistency within and across centres. The guidance and information provided will include:

- On-line training for heads of centre on developing robust processes for managing the moderation and standardisation of centre professional judgements within their centre.
- Good practice exemplars to support centres to develop a robust centre specific approach.

- A data pack to include information about past performance at the centre at subject level to assist in the internal moderation and standardisation of grades within the centre.
- General guidance documentation and a series of webinars for schools on gathering evidence and producing grades to include principles of assessment, avoiding unconscious bias and fairness for all students; the type, quality and value of evidence; adjustments to accommodate access arrangements or special considerations including loss of learning due to the pandemic; arriving at final judgements; and, internal moderation of judgements; and training for heads of departments and teachers at a subject-specific level.

Step 2: Evidence Gathering and Provision of an Assessment Resource

In this period, schools will wish to give further opportunities for students to demonstrate what they know, understand, and can do. Schools can use evidence of students' performance against the specification from any point in the course. To promote ongoing engagement by students in teaching and learning during the coming months, schools can utilise evidence from during the current period of remote learning, as well as when students return to school or college. To support the evidence gathering process, CCEA will provide assessment resources for each subject. Students may sit the assessment resources during April and early May.

Step 3: Centre Professional Judgement and Moderation

In Step 3, schools and colleges will draw on evidence which relates to the specification, including but in no way limited to, the use of the assessment resource to reach centre professional judgements (Centre Determined Grades) for each qualification. Where there is more than one subject teacher in a department, the school will need to carry out an internal standardisation process and agree on the grades for all students within the centre who are taking that subject. To do this, teachers within a subject department will need to discuss the grading and come to an agreed view of the standard being applied within their centre. We recognise that this may be challenging, and it may be necessary to adjust individual teachers' judgements to bring them into line with those of the other teachers. CCEA will not be asking centres to produce or submit a rank order with the Teacher Professional Judgements, however, subject departments may find this exercise useful as an element of internal standardisation. Centres will be asked to retain records of supporting evidence, any written reasoning and any

annotated work or notes made in reaching a centre professional judgement for each student. While there will be no requirement to send any supporting evidence to CCEA at this stage, CCEA will request and inspect supporting evidence at its discretion in Step 4. There is no prescribed weighting for any piece of evidence rather the Centre Determined Grade is the holistic judgement of the standard at which the student is performing. Initial Centre Determined Grades will be submitted to CCEA towards the end of May. Grades for AS and A level qualifications are to be submitted by **Friday 21 May**, and grades for GCSE qualifications are to be submitted by **Friday 28 May**. These are not students' final grades and will be subject to an external quality assurance process.

Step 4: Review of Evidence and Award

Once Centres have submitted their initial grades, CCEA will carry out a review of evidence before issuing awards. Throughout June 2021, Senior Examiners and Subject Officers in CCEA will carry out an external quality assurance process looking at the grades submitted by all schools and colleges and reviewing samples of students' work to make sure the grades submitted accurately reflect the evidence provided. Work will be reviewed from every school and college across Northern Ireland. Where the evidence does not support or justify the outcomes provided, school will be expected to rerun their judgement and moderation processes. This is a completely different process to that carried out in 2020. ***There will be no algorithms or statistical models used to determine grades.*** If there is evidence when candidate work has been reviewed to suggest the judgments made in a subject or subjects are not secure, schools and colleges will be asked to re-run their processes and for grades to be resubmitted. If after this process, grades submitted are not secure, CCEA will provide support teams to work with centres where evidence and grades do not comply with the appropriate standard. Ultimately, and only in the most severe of circumstances, CCEA may withhold permission for the centre in a subject or subjects to proceed to award and may commence an investigation. This process is very important to ensure that outcomes are fair and consistent between different schools and colleges across Northern Ireland. CCEA want young people, parents, universities, and employers to have confidence that grades awarded by different schools and colleges are of the right and consistent standard. CCEA is working closely with awarding organisations in England and Wales, with the aim to agree a date for the release of results across all three jurisdictions. This will ensure students in Northern Ireland are not disadvantaged in regard to

university admissions and all students here, including those taking qualifications with English and Welsh examination boards, will receive their results at the same time.

Results will not be any later than the dates previously envisaged for exam results (24 August 2021 for AS and A Level and 27 August for GCSE) but may be earlier. As soon as a date is agreed, CCEA will advise schools, colleges, and students.

Step 5: Post-Award Review Service

Following the distribution of results there will be a post-award review service to enable anyone unhappy with their grade to ask for a review of the outcome. Students who are dissatisfied with their results may use the appeals process. This process will allow students to present evidence in challenge of the grades provided by their centre. Subsequently, appeals against centre process may be made to CCEA. CCEA will be working with other examination boards over the coming months to make sure that a similar appeals process is put in place across all examination boards and to provide more detailed guidance for schools. This will be well in advance of the issue of results.

Occupational Studies and Vocational Qualifications:

For CCEA Occupational Studies and Vocational qualifications, there will be no formal assessment in 2021. Instead, schools and colleges will use teacher professional assessment and available evidence to reach Centre Determined Grades. **Therefore ,all our pupils will be required to complete all portfolio work as requested by their teacher.**

Other Awarding Bodies (BTEC ETC)

Whilst the school has no specific information regarding other examination boards, it is likely that a similar approach to CEA will be taken when determining grades. All pupils must complete all work and coursework as instructed by their teachers.

USEFUL LINKS

DENI Statement from Minister of Education:

<https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/statement-alternative-awarding-arrangements-summer-2021>

Department of Education Publications:

<https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications>

CCEA Documentation:

Alternative Awarding Arrangements for GCSE and A Level

<https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/education/High-Level-Guidance-Schools.pdf>

Leaflet for Parents and Students:

https://www.educationni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/education/Leaflet_Parents_and_Students_Version2.pdf

Factsheet for Parents and Students:

<https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/education/DE-FACTSHEET-V2.pdf>

<https://ccea.org.uk/summer-2021>.

Helpline CEA:

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