# **CSSC response to CCEA Consultation on Summer Exams 2021**

***Question: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposals to implement public health adaptations to CCEA qualifications?***

CSSC strongly agrees with the proposal to implement adaptations to CCEA qualifications due to COVID-19 and appreciates that it is not a straightforward matter for CCEA.

CSSC believes that adaptations to the qualifications are necessary to support the safety and wellbeing of young people and teachers at this time. It is critical that CCEA is proactive and responsive if circumstances change. It is paramount that decisions are led by medical and scientific evidence. CSSC is of the view that a reasonable level of balance has been achieved, however, concerns have been expressed by controlled schools in respect of some of the detail.

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

Whilst CSSC is not in a position to comment on the detail of subject specific amendments it is noted that there appears to be considerable disparity between the subjects with some having had very little removed whilst considerable changes have been made to other subjects.

Concern has been expressed by a number of controlled schools over some areas of the qualifications not being assessed. There is a need to ensure that there is an exam in each subject to ensure objectivity. Amendments to reduce the number of assessments may subsequently result in a very high stake assessment which will intensify the pressure on young people, school leaders and teachers.

Some controlled schools are of the view that there appears to be an over emphasis on assessing skills rather than a holistic approach to the assessment process. Subject qualifications must retain a certain level of challenge and content as well as the development of skills. The validity and currency of the qualification must be considered in relation to previous years and for the future.

**2. Specification Order**

***Question: To what extent do you agree or disagree that CCEA should provide guidance on the order of unit delivery in a specification?***

CSSC broadly agrees that guidance should have been provided on the order of unit delivery, however, it is already late to be specifying the order units should be taught as teaching has started. This proposal could help the new Year 11 cohort but schools have expressed concern that it may already be too late. If there is no uniform specification taught in each subject across the province cognisance should be taken in terms of how assessment will be conducted in the event of localised lock-downs.

***Question: Could you suggest any other information that CCEA could provide that may assist delivery planning?***

Specification guidance is critical together with the accompanying assessment rubric. CSSC would urge CCEA to provide advice regarding the structure of examinations well in advance so that all candidates and teachers have the information. Clear assessment methodology in terms of online assessment will be essential in the event of a local lockdown. There is the

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potential for multiple lockdowns of schools or classes, what is CCEA’s assessment and examinations continuity plan?

**3. AS and A Level Assessment Arrangements**

***Question: To what extent do you agree or disagree with our proposal that in Summer 2021, students in the second year of their A level studies should be required to take A2 unit assessment only?***

CSSC strongly recommends that the situation caused by usage of an algorithm to determine grades from this year’s examination season is not repeated. If an AS exam is taken consideration must be given in terms of how the grade will be worked out. Some controlled schools are of the view that pupils will be disadvantaged due to the impact of COVID-19 on courses last year. The proposal provides flexibility for candidates and enables them to make informed choices with the guidance of their teachers and parents regarding the benefits of sitting AS papers alongside A2 papers or reducing the assessment burden on themselves by just sitting A2 papers.

***Question: Other than public health adaptations (outlined in Appendix D), do you think course content should remain largely unchanged at AS and A level at this time?***

CSSC agrees course content should be left with minimal change otherwise the validity of the qualification would be questionable. If reduced significantly the qualifications in 2021 cannot be compared to previous years and for qualifications in future years. Candidates could be disadvantaged in their ability to progress to higher education/further education or employment. If course content is amended and added to this would put significant pressure on learning and teaching time.

***Question: Do you have any additional comments on the proposed arrangements for CCEA AS and A level qualifications?***

For controlled schools the focus will be on re-building students’ confidence in their learning through high quality focused teaching based on clear specifications

CSSC is of the view that flexibility is key. Whilst CCEA appears to be opposed to providing flexibility in examinations, controlled schools would welcome optional questions in papers. Appropriate information regarding the structure of papers would need to be provided in a timely manner to allow schools to prepare candidates for modified examinations. Questions could be devised that assessed all assessment criteria and were equivalent in challenge and level. This would be more challenging for the writers of the papers but not an unreasonable expectation.

The proposal that pupils may not have to undertake AS modules has been welcomed. Some concerns were expressed by controlled schools that many units at A2 are synoptic in nature and touch on prior learning at AS but on the whole schools were unconcerned regarding this.

**4. Changes to Assessment at GCSE**

***Question: To what extent do you agree or disagree that all 2020/21 Year 12 students who started their course in September 2019 should, where possible, be permitted to omit***

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***assessment in one unit in each GCSE qualification to be completed by Summer 2021, if they wish to do so?***

Agree. More teaching time is required to cover content in year 11 which tends to be delivered in an intensive manner. Teaching has been impacted by prolonged absence and this needs to be considered with modifications focused on those entering year 12.

Some controlled schools expressed reservations as this proposal could also impact on the candidates’ ability to progress successfully to A/S level where the knowledge, understanding and skills developed at GCSE form the foundations of A/S. Others highlighted that if this is not made known at the outset then a significant part of the syllabus would not be assessed and this could potentially skew teaching.

Some controlled schools felt strongly that proposals outlined in the consultation paper do not do enough for the Year 11 pupils going into Year 12 from economically and / or socially challenged backgrounds who may not have received much support at home during lockdown and who have lost a lot of learning. Controlled schools have indicated that many pupils are anxious at the prospect of entering Year 12 with much Year 11 work to address, particularly so for English Language and Mathematics.

***Question: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposed approach that, where omission of a unit is possible, CCEA should specify the GCSE units to be taken, with the intention of ensuring consistency, as far as possible, for schools and colleges?***

CSSC accepts the rationale; if the specification is agreed and followed by all, assessment will be uniform and consistency of approach is assured but some controlled schools feel that ideally there should have been more freedom in choosing which units were omitted.

Some emphasised that if a school has already taught a unit that is going to be omitted their pupils may be disadvantaged and were of the opinion that optional questions would provide a level playing field for all.

***Question: Do you have any comments on CCEA specifying required examination units for GCSE specifications?***

CSSC would emphasise that schools need this information in a timely manner. Teaching has already started and time is of the essence.

***Question: To what extent do you agree or disagree that the total amount of any qualification adjustment in 2020/21 should not exceed 40% of the specification?***

CSSC would welcome a fuller explanation of the rationale for the 40% reduction and clarification regarding the potential impact if the Covid-19 pandemic worsens or there are a number of localised lockdowns i.e. could this potentially be higher?

***Question: Do you have any comments on the arrangements for limiting the amount of change to 40% of the total assessment?***

This appears to be is a reasonable starting point as it is important to maintain integrity, however disruption may occur throughout the year.

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***Question: To what extent do you agree or disagree that the 2021 exams should not include more optional questions than usual?***

Concerns have been expressed by schools which have spent much of last year teaching areas of the specification that have now been omitted. Optional questions would provide a valuable mechanism for addressing this. If CCEA provide teachers with a clear structure and time to prepare the pupils, this will greatly mitigate any disadvantage.

***Question: Do you have any comments on the use of optional exam questions in the 2021 exams?***

There needs to be much greater flexibility for individual schools in terms of components to be omitted - this would be achieved by including more options on each paper. Whilst CCEA may argue that this is logistically not possible, some controlled schools expressed the view that everything should be made possible in these exceptional circumstances.

***Question: Do you have any additional comments regarding GCSE arrangements considered in this section?***

Specifications and assessment requirements are needed urgently for school leaders, teachers and pupils together with clarity in terms of arrangements relating to localised lockdown.

**5. GCSE English Language and Mathematics**

***Question: Do you think that students should be assessed in all elements of GCSE English Language and Mathematics?***

CSSC recognises the importance of English and Mathematics for progression to further study, further education and employment but believes this cohort of students will find this more difficult than previous cohorts due to unprecedented circumstances. Optional questions would potentially be beneficial in addressing the lack of reduction of content in the English Language and Mathematics specifications.

***Question: Do you have any additional comments regarding students being fully assessed on all elements of these qualifications?***

CSSC would emphasise that optionality would be beneficial if it is the case that no adjustments can be made. In the event of anticipated disruption to the normal timetable an opportunity for earlier assessment should be considered.

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**6. Equality**

***Question: Please outline any potential equality impacts which you feel we should consider.***

There are major implications for those students who didn’t access home learning during lockdown as a consequence of disadvantage or lack of intrinsic motivation. Some young people may not have the parental support and access to resources that other young people have benefitted from.

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**7. Summary**

***Question: Do you have any other comments you would like to make regarding the consultation proposals or other potential changes to qualifications?***

CSSC is conscious that teaching has already started and ideally this consultation should have taken place much earlier. Resolution is required quickly. CSSC would again emphasise the need for urgent clarification regarding specification and assessment arrangements. In terms of contingency planning a strategy needs to be developed which will account for any eventuality and address a range of scenarios which may emerge, such as localised lockdowns.

Controlled schools welcome CCEA’s proposal to not extend the examination series beyond 30th June 2021.