



Department of Education – Review of Exam Awarding Summer  
2020

**Final Report**

December 2020

# Contents

|    |   |    |
|----|---|----|
| 1. | Introduction  | 5  |
| 2. | Background  | 8  |
| 3. | Design of Alternative Awarding Arrangements         | 13 |
| 4. | Implementation of Alternative Awarding Arrangements | 29 |
| 5. | Management of Alternative Awarding Arrangements     | 57 |
| 6. | Communication of Alternative Awarding Arrangements  | 65 |
| 7. | Implications for Future Awarding                    | 73 |
|    | Annex I: Document Index                             | 79 |
|    | Annex II: Interviewee list                          | 94 |

# Glossary of Terms

## Abbreviation

|                   |   |
|-------------------|---|
| AQA               | Assessment and Qualification Alliance   |
| ARAC              | Audit and Risk Assurance Committee  |
| CAG               | Centre Assessed Grade   |
| CCEA              | Council for the Curriculum, Examinations & Assessment   |
| CCMS              | Council for Catholic Maintained Schools   |
| Centre            | A recognised operator of examinations and assessment of behalf of an Awarding Body  |
| CQSD              | Curriculum, Qualifications and Standards  |
| DE/The Department | Department of Education   |
| DSO               | Departmental Solicitors Office  |
| EA                | Education Authority   |
| ETI               | Education Teaching Inspectorate   |
| FAQ               | Frequently asked question   |
| GBA               | Governing Bodies Association  |
| GCoR              | General Conditions of Recognition   |
| GCE               | General Certificate of Education. Includes both AS and A level qualifications   |
| GCSE              | General Certificate of Secondary Education  |
| GDPR              | General Data Protection Regulation  |
| INTO              | Irish National Teachers Organisation  |
| IUA               | Irish Universities Association  |
| JCQ               | Joint Council for Qualification   |
| MCA               | Multi- Criteria Analysis  |
| MEMRs             | Monthly Expenditure Monitoring Reports  |
| Minister          | The Minister for Education (N.I.)   |
| Moderation        | Moderation is a process by which an individual or group not involved in marking ensure that the marks/grades awarded are reasonable for an assessment. Typically it is applied for non-exam assessments |
| NAHT              | National Association of Head Teachers   |
| NASUWT            | National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers   |
| NDPB              | Non-Departmental Public Body  |
| NEET              | Not in Education, Employment or Training  |
| NEU               | National Education Union  |
| NICCY             | National Commissioner for Children and Young People   |
| NISRA             | Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency   |
| OECD              | Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development  |
| OCR               | Oxford Cambridge and RSA Awarding Organisation  |
| OfQual            | The Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation  |
| OSR               | Office for Statistics Regulation  |
| PwC               | Price waterhouse Cooper   |
| QW                | Qualification Wales   |
| SQA               | Scottish Qualification Authority  |
| STAG              | Standards and Technical Advisory Group  |
| Standardisation   | Standardisation is the application of statistical processes to ensure grades at a cohort level conform across the system and with previous years  |
| STIG              | Standards and Technical Issues Group  |
| UCAS              | The Universities and Colleges Admissions Service  |
| UK                | United Kingdom  |
| UTU               | Ulster Teachers' Union  |
| WJEC              | Welsh Joint Education Committee   |

# Forward

The review finds that establishing alternative awarding in summer 2020 was extremely challenging. CCEA, its Council and the Department of Education (DE) working together, adopted a professional approach to the unprecedented task at hand. Best endeavours were made to arrive at a solution which delivered on the Minister's policy direction and the statutory responsibility of CCEA as both a regulator and an awarding organisation.

The balance of maintaining standards and arriving at grade outcomes accepted as fair by teachers, parents and candidates was extremely difficult. The adoption of an alternative awarding approach, where the candidate had no direct agency to the outcome (in the form of examinations) was always going to be very difficult to carry through and be universally accepted. 2020 and the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic presented a set of circumstances which left CCEA and the Minister/Department with the prospect of having to adopt a '*least worst*' approach to awarding.

The risks associated with the alternative awarding approach were noted in the design of options. However, limited opportunity to mitigate such risks created much public and indeed teacher, candidate and parent discourse when results were published. Whilst in the areas of design, implementation, management and communication, more mitigation measures could perhaps have been implemented, it is still not clear that further intervention would have avoided the situation that prevailed following the 13<sup>th</sup> August. It is evident that the statistical standardisation model applied for GCSE, AS and A level was a source of discontent, notably in terms of how it applied teacher professional judgement and in the grade outcomes which it delivered. More could have been done to manage expectations in this regard, however we do accept the balance of avoiding potential conflicts of interests from centres being involved in detailed model design whilst at the same time securing their buy-in was difficult.

The review of summer 2020 alternative awarding does provide a useful context for moving into 2021 and, considering the implications of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, how awarding might be managed in the absence of exams. The ultimate awarding for the summer 2020 cohort does create a new standard against which future

grades will need to be cognisant; and the ongoing potential impact of COVID-19 on candidate learning and potentially on exam settings remains.

Standardisation and moderation of any teacher assessment will be important in future years. What is critical however, is that candidates have direct agency in a consistent and understood way to what is being moderated and standardised. Already work on 2021 contingencies highlights the challenges of arriving at an alternative to examinations should it be required, which is publicly accepted as a fair means of awarding qualification grades.

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. Introduction

Deloitte was appointed to undertake a review of the awarding arrangements used by the Council for the Curriculum Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) for GCSEs, AS and A levels in summer 2020.

The review considers a range of themes pertinent to the awarding methodology including the design, implementation, management and communication of the arrangements.

## 1.2. Background

In 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. Grades awarded by CCEA would be based on a range of evidence and data, including prior attainment and Centre Assessment Grades (CAGs). This decision was made within the challenging context of school closures and the objective of securing continuity of learning.

This was followed in mid-April, by a further announcement from the Minister setting out how GCSE, AS and A level exams would be awarded in summer 2020 as follows:

- **A level** - those candidates due to complete an A level qualification would receive a calculated grade based on a combination of teacher professional judgement (including grading and rank ordering by schools) and statistical modelling. This would also include a value-added element to take account of the impact resits would normally have on final A level outcomes.
- **AS level** - those candidates due to complete an AS level would receive a calculated grade. However, these grades would not contribute towards the awarding of A level grades in summer 2021 (as would normally be the case). The AS grade in 2020 would be calculated using a combination of teacher professional judgement (including grading and rank ordering by schools) and pupil prior performance including GCSE mean scores.

- **GCSE** - those candidates due to complete GCSE qualifications in 2020 would receive a calculated grade based on a combination of teacher professional judgement (including grading and rank ordering by centres), and average centre performance over the past three summer series.

### 1.3. Term of Reference and Scope

The aim of the review is to consider, analyse and report on the awarding methodology for CCEA GCSEs, AS and A levels in summer 2020, including the design, implementation, management and communication of the arrangements.

The review has considered evidence and commentary around these themes. Key findings were assessed against each and lessons learned from the 2020 alternative awarding arrangements have been captured to help inform potential arrangements going into 2021.

Issues that are outside the scope of the review are:

- awarding arrangements of other examination boards for GCSE, AS and A level; and
- awarding arrangements for entry level and vocational qualifications across the UK.

Also excluded from the scope of the review is:

- any verification or audit of the statistical models which were applied in the alternative awarding during summer 2020; and
- any comment on the legislative framework or basis for the alternative examination awarding in summer 2020.

### 1.4. Approach / Methodology

The approach adopted by Deloitte was as follows:

- a. a strategic assessment across all aspects of the alternative awarding arrangements, including reviewing key documentation. A full list of the documentation reviewed is provided at **Annex I**;

- b. specific analysis of the process of standardisation applied to centre information by CCEA, including a review of the process, data and modelling applied. The review did not seek to verify or audit the statistical standardisation model used;
- c. engagement with and consideration of evidence from stakeholders, including professionals within the education sector, schools, the DE Minister and officials, CCEA, other education organisations and other key stakeholders. A full list of stakeholders interviewed is provided at **Annex II**;
- d. consideration of those issues pertinent to the development of the awarding methodology in 2021 and whether there is further significant disruption to learning and teaching and/or the cancellation of exams; and
- e. production of a report incorporating analysis, findings and recommendations.

The review commenced in the week of 26th October and was completed in six weeks.

## **1.5. Structure of Report**

This report is structured as follows:

- Section 2 – Background
- Section 3 – Design of Alternative Awarding Arrangements
- Section 4 – Implementation of Alternative Awarding Arrangements
- Section 5 – Management of Alternative Awarding Arrangements
- Section 6 – Communication of Alternative Awarding Arrangements
- Section 7 – Lessons Learned and Implications for Future Awarding.



# 2. Background

## 2.1. Introduction

As set out in the introduction, a decision was taken in March 2020 that the summer 2020 examination series would be cancelled in Northern Ireland as a result of the impact of the COVID-19 virus and to help fight its spread. This section sets out further detail, by way of context and background, on the design, implementation, management and communication of alternative awarding arrangements for the summer 2020 GCSE, AS and A level examinations.

## 2.2. Statutory Remit of CCEA

The award and regulation of qualifications in Northern Ireland is conducted by CCEA, which is a Non-Departmental Public Body (NDPB) established under The Education and Libraries Order (NI) 1993, as amended by the Education (NI) Order 1998. CCEA's constitution is set out in Schedule 3 of the 1998 Order.

CCEA's key duties and functions, as defined in part viii of the Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1998, are to:

- keep under review all aspects of the curriculum, examinations and assessment for grant aided schools and colleges of further education and to undertake statutory consultation on proposals relating to legislation;
- advise DE on matters concerned with the curriculum, assessment, examinations and external qualifications and accredit and approve qualifications;
- **conduct and moderate examinations and assessments, ensuring that standards are recognised as equivalent to standards of examinations and assessments conducted by other bodies or authorities exercising similar functions in the United Kingdom;**
- **publish and disseminate information relating to the curriculum, assessment and examinations;** and
- develop and produce teaching support materials for use in schools.

In line with these statutory duties, CCEA is an awarding organisation and examination board which develops, designs, certifies and awards qualifications, in particular GCSEs and A levels. It is one of the seven main examination boards in the UK.

CCEA Regulation works independently of the awarding organisation side of CCEA and is responsible for the quality assurance of qualifications offered in Northern Ireland. As set out in the 1998 Order, CCEA Regulation has responsibility to:

- ensure that the standards of examinations and assessments conducted by bodies or authorities in Northern Ireland are recognised as equivalent to the standards of examinations and assessments conducted by bodies or authorities exercising similar functions elsewhere in the United Kingdom (UK); in carrying out this function the Council shall, as far as is relevant, have regard to the: requirements of industry, commerce and the professions, and of persons with special learning needs;
- develop and publish criteria for the accreditation of relevant external qualifications, and accredit, where such criteria are met, any qualifications submitted for accreditation; and
- keep under review all aspects of relevant external qualifications and publish and disseminate information relating to relevant external qualifications.

The CCEA Council is responsible for the statutory functions carried out by CCEA. The relationship between DE (or the Department) and CCEA is set out in the CCEA Management Statement and Financial Memorandum. The Education Minister is accountable to the Assembly for the activities and performance of CCEA.

### 2.3. Timeline of Events

Important to this review is an articulation of the sequence and nature of events as relevant within the overall timeline of the 2020 summer alternative awarding process.

#### Phase 1 – Design

| Date                        | Occurrence  |
|-----------------------------|---|
| 13 <sup>th</sup> March 2020 | Letter from Education Minister to school principals setting out arrangements for emergency planning associated with the COVID-19 outbreak, including working with CCEA on examinations issues |

| Date                        | Occurrence  |
|-----------------------------|---|
| 17 <sup>th</sup> March 2020 | CCEA provides initial advice to DE on its response to COVID-19 and high-level exam options  |
| 19 <sup>th</sup> March 2020 | Education Minister announces closure of schools and cancellation of GCSE, AS and A level exams during summer 2020   |
| 23 <sup>rd</sup> March 2020 | Education Minister makes decision on alternative examination awarding, to implement 'Option F: Centre assessment and statistical standardisation' as per advice from CCEA (17 <sup>th</sup> March)              |
| 25 <sup>th</sup> March 2020 | Communication from CCEA to Heads of Centre to provide an update on awarding – CCEA working to develop a process for providing a calculated grade and will shortly ask centres to submit information on learners |
| 31 <sup>st</sup> March 2020 | CCEA submits paper to its Council on alternative grading approaches   |
| 5 <sup>th</sup> April 2020  | CCEA provides further detailed advice and alternative grading options and evaluation to DE  |
| 7 <sup>th</sup> April 2020  | CCEA provides paper to DE on examination re-sit considerations, recommending no Autumn re-sits  |
| 10 <sup>th</sup> April 2020 | Ministerial submission made on CCEA's alternative grading proposals   |
| 14 <sup>th</sup> April 2020 | Meeting between CCEA and Minister where he agrees alternative grading proposals, albeit raising some concerns   |

## Phase 2 – Implementation

| Date                        | Occurrence  |
|-----------------------------|---|
| 16 <sup>th</sup> April 2020 | Minister makes announcement setting out how qualifications will be awarded for GCSEs, AS and A levels and provides Ministerial instruction to CCEA to implement proposals.<br><br>CCEA publishes guidance on website aimed at parents and candidates with some initial advice for centres |
| 30 <sup>th</sup> April 2020 | Further CCEA technical guidance (developed with input from School Principals) issued to centres   |
| 7 <sup>th</sup> May 2020    | CCEA publishes consultation paper on appeals' process   |
| 19 <sup>th</sup> May 2020   | Summary of annual examination results suspended for the year  |

| Date  | Occurrence   |
|---|--|
| 21 <sup>st</sup> May 2020                   | Education Minister makes statement to the Ad Hoc Committee of the NI Assembly setting out COVID-19 response efforts within the education sector              |
| 21 <sup>st</sup> May 2020                   | An Independent Review of CCEA statistical model for awarding qualifications was concluded by Alpha Plus  |
| 29 <sup>th</sup> May 2020                   | CCEA received independent feedback from an honorary fellow of the University of Oxford (statistician) on the statistical models                              |
| 1 <sup>st</sup> / 2 <sup>nd</sup> June 2020 | CCEA Regulation confirms to CCEA Awarding Organisation that the statistical models developed for A and AS levels align with the design principles            |
| 5 <sup>th</sup> June 2020                   | Assessment Centres to provide Centre Assessed Grade (CAG) and rank order data for each AS and A level student  |
| 8 <sup>th</sup> June 2020                   | CCEA Regulation confirm statistical model for GCSEs aligns with the design principles  |
| 10 <sup>th</sup> June 2020                  | Education Minister issues indemnity agreement letter to schools to provide a level of legal protection against any claim in relation to the assessments made |
| 12 <sup>th</sup> June 2020                  | Assessment Centres to provide assessed grade and rank order data for each GCSE student   |
| 17 <sup>th</sup> June 2020                  | CCEA Regulation confirms statistical model for AS and A level aligns with the design principles  |
| 23 <sup>rd</sup> June 2020                  | CCEA Awarding Organisation publishes the Appeals Procedures for 2020 following advice from CCEA Regulation, who had consulted on the approach to appeals     |
| 5 <sup>th</sup> August 2020                 | CCEA webinar on the design of the statistical standardisation models for select Heads of Centres as a presentation ‘test run’                                |
| 11 <sup>th</sup> August 2020                | CCEA webinar for Heads of Centres on the design of the statistical standardisation models (169 centres attended)   |
| 11 <sup>th</sup> August 2020                | Education Minister welcomes CCEA decision on Appeal Procedures (via website)   |
| 13 <sup>th</sup> August 2020                | AS and A level results published. Minister congratulates candidates who received results (via website)   |

| Date                            | Occurrence  |
|---------------------------------|---|
| 16 <sup>th</sup> August 2020    | CCEA submit paper to DE, expressing concern over likely number of GCSE appeals based on initial response to AS and A level results. Paper highlights capacity to deal with volumes of appeals in a timely manner  |
| 16 <sup>th</sup> August 2020    | Minister decides to award GCSE results in line with CAGs  |
| 17 <sup>th</sup> August 2020    | FAQs on GCSE and AS/A level results and revised appeals' process published on DE website  |
| 17 <sup>th</sup> August 2020    | Meeting between CCEA and DE takes place regarding GCSE, AS and A level awards. England changing to adopt AS and A level centre assessments. Minister announces changes to AS and A level awards methodology so that awards are the higher of the CAGs or the original standardised grade and this was published on DE website. Motion on change debated in Assembly |
| 19 <sup>th</sup> August 2020    | Education Minister issues letter to schools setting out in detail the rationale for GCSE, AS and A level awarding arrangements  |
| 20 <sup>th</sup> August 2020    | GCSE results published as per CAGs. Minister congratulates candidates who received results (via website)  |
| 21 <sup>st</sup> August 2020    | AS and A level revised results published  |
| 17 <sup>th</sup> September 2020 | Closing date for appeals.   |

CCEA and DE have commenced work already in preparation for examination awarding in 2021 and indeed a range of adaptations have been made regarding examinations and on contingencies for the 2021 examination series. These elements of the timeline relating to 2021 awarding are not within the scope of this review.

## 2.4. Summary

The subsequent sections of this paper present findings in relation to the timeline of the events as set out above, specifically in terms of the design of alternative awarding arrangements, the implementation of alternative awarding arrangements, the management of alternative awarding arrangements and communications surrounding this. The findings give due regard to the statutory remit of CCEA and that of the Department.

# 3. Design of Alternative Awarding Arrangements

## 3.1. Introduction

This section sets out in further detail the approach taken to **designing alternative awarding arrangements** for GCSE, AS and A level examinations in Northern Ireland in 2020. The findings presented in this section are based on a review of documentation and supplemented by interviews with relevant stakeholders.

The report sets out factually the approach taken to the design of alternative awarding arrangements and then follows with a presentation of findings on this approach. The focus and structure of this section of the review assesses design arrangements in terms of:

- the processes developed by CCEA for **identifying and evaluating options** for the award of qualifications and **recommendations made by CCEA to DE** including consideration of key assumptions around standards, validity and comparability of qualifications which underpinned decisions during the three-week timeframe;
- **dialogue with stakeholders** in the development of the design approach;
- the **rationale for the application of statistical standardisation** in order to align teacher judgements across and within centres so that, as far as possible, no candidates was unfairly advantaged or disadvantaged;
- whether the emphasis placed on the **interdependencies across the UK**, and the impact for Northern Ireland of different approaches taken elsewhere in the UK in the development of arrangements for 2020, was appropriate; and
- whether any **potential alternative approaches** to the design of grading and awarding qualifications in the context of the disruption caused by COVID-19 and the very limited timeframe available that would have maintained standards and the credibility of qualifications whilst delivering public confidence were brought forward.

### 3.2. CCEA Identification and Evaluation of Options for the Award of Qualifications and Recommendations to the Department and Minister

On the 19<sup>th</sup> March 2020 the Minister for Education in Northern Ireland announced his decision to cancel GCSEs, AS and A level examinations in the summer of 2020. This decision was made in the unprecedented circumstances of the COVID-19 crisis; never before had exams been cancelled, not even during World War 2.

In the period between the 19<sup>th</sup> March and the 16<sup>th</sup> April, the Minister commissioned and sought advice from CCEA on the nature of the arrangements to be put in place in the absence of examinations.

CCEA advanced work on identification and evaluation of options in light of the Minister's instruction. Options were assessed separately for GCSE, AS and A level examinations but against the same set of principles:

1. **Fairness:** Ensure that candidates receive fair results that enable judgements to be made about progression to further or higher education, employment or other avenues;
2. **Reduced Burden:** Balance the inherent delivery risks with the opportunities afforded by other arrangements, particularly in consideration of the burden on resources;
3. **Future Impact Limitation:** Limit the impact, as far as possible, to the summer 2020 cohorts, to avoid knock-on effects on future examinations and qualifications arrangements; and
4. **Minimise Uncertainty:** Minimise uncertainty for candidates and school leaders, maintaining their confidence in the system.

These principles were recommended by CCEA Officers and agreed by CCEA Council, following discussion with other UK qualification regulators.

Options were considered for their benefits and disadvantages against the principles, alongside an assessment of their alignment to other jurisdictions, and were graded as Good, Fair or Poor against each, as follows:

- Good: option provides a good likelihood of meeting the principle;
- Fair: option does not fully address the principle, but does have factors that go some way to meeting the principle; and

- Poor: option does not adequately address the principle.

In evaluating individual options, CCEA set out benefits, disadvantages, testing and further development work required. This assessment was qualitative in nature.

CCEA noted that in assessing the options there was:

- no perfect solution;
- a high potential for a legal challenge; and
- a high degree of contention and potential for reputational damage as public expectation was for solutions at an individual level rather than system or cohort level.

On 5 April CCEA, with the approval of the CCEA Council, provided a report to DE setting out and assessing a range of options for each of GCSEs, AS and A levels. The evaluation of options recommended the following as alternative awarding approaches:

- **A level:** Calculate outcomes based on a combination of Z Score Method<sup>1</sup> based on AS performance with a value added allowance to account for resits and teacher professional judgement as a validation component. This was deemed by CCEA to be the least worst option of the five options presented. It was noted that it would be different from the approach taken in England but would be similar to that taken in Wales (which also has modular qualifications).
- **AS level:** Award AS using a combination of GCSE mean score and teacher professional judgement. AS would be decoupled from A2 and those progressing would have the AS component retrospectively awarded using Z-score **or** can choose to take AS in summer 2021. This was deemed to be the least worst option and was in line with the approach taken in Wales.

---

<sup>1</sup> At a high level, the Z score methodology calculates a candidate's mark in a missing unit, based on their performance relative to their peers in other units.



- **GCSE Cash-in (terminal):** Predict grade based on a combination of teacher / centre judgement (rank ordering) and average centre performance models. CCEA noted that this was similar to the approach in Wales and England. This option was deemed the least worst option by CCEA.
- **GCSE Modular (primarily for year 11 candidates):** No grades issued for 2020 for unit entry candidates. Candidates are retrospectively awarded a Z-score from terminal units taken in 2021. This was presented as the least worst option and noted as aligning to the approach in Wales.

The Minister of Education wrote to CCEA on 16<sup>th</sup> April to confirm his policy decision regarding the arrangements for issuing calculated results for candidates as follows:

*“... it is my policy that this year's cohort of GCSE (full qualification), AS and A level (full qualification) learners be issued a set of results this summer in order to allow them to progress to further study or employment. Unit-level results are not required for those not due to cash-in their qualification this year. As such, it is my policy that these learners should be issued with calculated results based on the following arrangements:*

- **A level (Terminal):** Calculate grade outcomes based on a combination of: teacher professional judgement (including grading and rank ordering by centres) and statistical modelling (enhanced with value added allowance to account for improvements which would have resulted from resits).
- **AS level:** The AS should be decoupled from the A2 for one year. The calculated AS grade in 2020 will not contribute towards the awarding of A level grades in summer 2021. Award AS grades using a combination of: teacher professional judgement (including grading and rank ordering by centres) and GCSE mean score.
- **GCSE (Terminal):** Award grade based on a combination of: teacher professional judgement (including grading and rank ordering by centres), and average centre performance models; the model should also include average centre performance at

*subject level over past three summer series and controls to ensure similar proportions in current series.*

- **GCSE Modules:** *No grades should be awarded for GCSE modular entry candidates in summer 2020 – i.e. those candidates not due to cash-in their qualification in summer 2020. These learners will participate in the summer 2021 series.”*

The Minister went on to say that, *“In order to mitigate the risk to standards as far as possible, the approach should be standardised across centres. CCEA should also mandate the method of calculating final grades based on the evidence provided for each learner. CCEA should ensure, as far as is possible, that qualification standards are maintained and the distribution of grades follows a similar profile to that in previous years.”*

In setting the policy framework the Minister identified the importance of offering candidates the right of appeal and instructed CCEA to progress with the development of an appeals’ process as a matter of urgency. The Minister also acknowledged that there will be *“...other difficulties and risks with the approach outlined ... but I will expect CCEA will advise me of those risks and take steps to mitigate these as far as possible. In particular, CCEA should consider how mitigation of any potential biases in relation to gender and disadvantaged candidates can be factored into the statistical models.”*

In arriving at the above recommendation we note a submission from DE officials to the Minister on 10 April 2020 which referred to the use of *“...teacher professional judgement [which] comprises both grading at individual pupil level and rank ordering at cohort level.”* DE officials’ advice to the Minister also referred to DE consultation with the teaching unions who felt that *“appropriate weighting should be given to teacher professional judgement”*.

## Review Findings

Previous contingency planning at a CCEA or wider Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) level had not provided for the extent of disruption that COVID-19 presented in summer 2020 and had not planned for cancellation of the examinations timetable for more than ten days. Responding to the implications of the pandemic for exam awarding within the timescales available was thus hugely challenging for CCEA and indeed other awarding organisations.

## Review Findings

In discharging its responsibilities, CCEA outlined four principles against which options for alternative examination awarding were assessed. These principles were consistent with those adopted in other UK jurisdictions. The review considers that the principles could have been more specific in terms of what they meant in practice. As an example, the principle in relation to fairness was intended to ensure that candidates receive fair results that enable judgements to be made about progression to further or higher education, employment or other avenues. CCEA and other regulators discussed the need for fairness to candidates across years (past, present and future) as well as within years (hence the need to standardise against previous years). Our interviews indicated that in some cases, teachers, candidates and parents considered the principle of 'fairness' as meaning something different, for example fairness for GCSE candidates for whom there was no prior personal attainment data available.

In addition, the detail underpinning the assessment of options against each principle was not overt. For instance, what were the specific inherent delivery risks presented by each option that was being assessed under the principle of *reduced burden* or what was the impact on the 2020 cohort that was being assessed under the principle of *future impact limitation*. Further detail on this would have been helpful in the evaluation of options.

There was no specific principle on maintaining standards, but under its governing legislation, CCEA has a duty to conduct examinations and assessments and to ensure that the standards of those conducted in Northern Ireland (by CCEA) are recognised as equivalent to the standards of examinations and assessments conducted elsewhere in the UK – so rather than a principle, for CCEA this was a legislative requirement. Alongside the four principles therefore, options were also assessed in terms of comparison to England and Wales.

Options were presented separately for each qualification – GCSE, AS and A level. For each, several options were identified and evaluated. In our interviews with CCEA we note that additional options (e.g. not awarding AS level) were also considered but were not included in the analysis presented to the Department. Normal practice would suggest a long list of options should be included in the appraisal document with the rationale for discounting,

## Review Findings

before arriving at a shortlist, although it is appreciated that time was short. In assessing the options available for awarding grades to candidates, CCEA adopted a standard approach for options appraisal, identifying a number of criteria (the principles) against which to assess each option, and separately setting out the advantages/benefits and disadvantages of each option.

There was no differential weighting to principles/criteria across the different exams (GCSE, AS, A level). Overall evaluation was based on a reflection of individual evaluations for each principle (poor, fair and good). Good practice (for instance in the Northern Ireland Guide to Expenditure Appraisal and Evaluation)<sup>2</sup> would suggest the use of Multi-Criteria Analysis (MCA). For instance, scores could have been awarded to Poor, Fair and Good and totalled for each option and a weighted, scoring approach could have been adopted. This could have provided a more robust assessment. Furthermore, there was not sufficient narrative to explain scores (poor, fair, good) awarded to options to allow the reviewer to understand the rationale for scores. Although time was limited, the use of weights and/or scores could have been applied with further narrative to underpin the proposed way forward.

Whilst risks may have been included within the commentary on disadvantages or '*further development work required*' for each option, the option appraisal document provided to the Minister did not include a formal risk assessment of individual options. Risks such as: availability of prior attainment data for GCSE, ability of teachers to complete assessments, or overall ability to standardise did not seem to be appropriately included. Review of documentation indicates differing approaches to option evaluation during the short period between mid-March and 5th April. Risks associated with each option were specifically appraised in earlier draft option appraisals. Additionally, CCEA updated its corporate risk register to reflect the broad risks regarding alternative awarding, such as not being able to issue grades effectively and that its ability to communicate clearly with centres would be affected by COVID-19.

The options paper from CCEA to DE notes that in all the qualifications and for all the options there was "... *No perfect solution; - A high potential for a legal challenge; and - A high degree*

---

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.finance-ni.gov.uk/topics/finance/northern-ireland-guide-expenditure-appraisal-and-evaluation-nigeae>

## Review Findings

*of contention and potential for reputational damage, as people expect solutions at the individual level rather than system or cohort level."* CCEA recognised that the alternative awarding options carried risk of acceptability at an individual level. Although the principles were discussed at some stakeholder meetings, neither the principles nor the qualitative assessment reflected on the acceptability of each of the different options to relevant stakeholders within the options appraisal document.

During this design phase (until 16<sup>th</sup> April 2020) the standardisation model had not been developed. It was therefore not possible to form a clear view at that point on how each element of teacher professional judgement (grading at individual level and rank order) would be used.

In identifying and evaluating options, making recommendations and giving instructions there was a clear understanding and application of the separation of responsibility between CCEA and the Department, with the Department responsible for policy and CCEA for the operationalisation of such policy. Both understood that the options recommended and accepted were the 'least worst' and did carry risk of acceptability, particularly at an individual level.

### 3.3. Dialogue with Stakeholders

The advice from CCEA was considered by DE officials and the Minister along with further advice that was sought by DE from post-primary and further education specialists in the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI). DE officials also consulted with key education stakeholders including representatives of head teachers, teaching unions, and managing authorities.

The ETI was content that CCEA's proposed options for each examination series presented a viable way forward, whilst also agreeing with CCEA's over-arching assessment that, for all qualification types and options, there was no perfect solution. ETI stressed also that CCEA would need to develop detailed guidance for learners, teachers, parents and Heads of Centre.

Engagement with teaching unions, other representative bodies, the Education Authority (EA) and Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) highlighted consensus that the CCEA proposed options presented an appropriate way forward. However, stakeholders highlighted a number of issues for further and ongoing consideration as more detailed arrangements were developed e.g. the primacy of fairness to learners over implementing a successful technical process. In explaining this, they pointed to a consideration of increased weighting of teacher judgement over statistical modelling and analysis.

Stakeholders also emphasised the importance of transparency of the arrangements throughout the process and the complexity of agreeing rank ordering for candidates while teachers were working in a restricted climate. In addition, they cited concerns about the impact on Years 11 and 13 in relation to the completion of their qualifications in the next academic year given the potential impact of the significant loss of teaching time that these candidates would experience. Finally, stakeholders sought reassurance in relation to potential gender bias, the impact of social disadvantage on performance, including also the potential impact on results next year (summer 2021) for those who could not afford additional tutoring.

DE provided official advice to the Minister (10 April 2020) stating that the principles underpinning the options evaluation were “...*shared and discussed with stakeholders and they endorsed them as valid indicators on which to make the assessment.*”

DE also sought advice from the Departmental Solicitors Office (DSO) on the legality of the arrangements being proposed and the potential for challenge. DSO concluded that the Department must treat candidates fairly and in a way which was proportional to what the Department was trying to achieve. They also recognised that the Minister would be choosing what, in essence, would be the least offensive option of those available.

CCEA worked closely throughout, with other Regulators (OFQUAL, Qualification Wales and the Scottish Qualifications Authority) and awarding organisations (OCR, AQA, WJEC, Pearson), and DE officials were in regular contact with counterparts in the relevant government Departments in England, Scotland and Wales.

## Review Findings

Engagement was carried out with a number of stakeholder groups in the design of alternative awarding arrangements, with views on options sought and reflected upon. It is evident that all stakeholders recognised the very significant challenge posed by the absence of examinations in summer 2020 and the need for alternative arrangements.

The timeframe available to CCEA to engage widely on the design of options and evaluation was limited and physical disruption to the access and operation of centres also made this more challenging. Engagement with other regulatory bodies and awarding organisations across the UK and Ireland was identified as a key priority in an attempt to maintain standards, as commensurate with the regulatory duty of CCEA. Furthermore, there was also engagement with some centres and teachers to help shape the way forward.

Engagement with candidates at this point was limited and we understand did not commence through the Youth Commission or the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY) until later in April 2020 (after the point at which CCEA had made recommendations to the Minister). We do note the safeguarding challenges associated with adults from DE and/or CCEA engaging with young people remotely during a period of lockdown when usual channels for such engagement were not possible.

In the time available and ahead of the Minister making a decision, DE engaged with key stakeholders. This engagement highlighted issues which the Minister identified when accepting the CCEA recommendations e.g. need for clarity on how teacher professional judgement would be factored alongside the statistical element, adjustment for potential advantages or disadvantages on the basis of gender bias or free schools meal entitlement, data protection and GDPR issues regarding the relevance of grading information to parents, dealing with private candidates and an appeals' process.

Overall, and given the time available, there was constructive dialogue with key stakeholders by both DE and CCEA in arriving at a proposed design of alternative awarding arrangements.

### 3.4. Application of Statistical Standardisation Model

The Minister, (based on CCEA's professional advice and in line with CCEA's statutory regulatory functions), directed CCEA that in order to mitigate the risk to standards as far as possible, the approach to awarding should include standardisation of outcomes across examination centres. CCEA was asked to ensure, as far as possible, that qualification standards were maintained and the distribution of grades followed a similar profile to that in previous years. There were genuine and legitimate concerns for this cohort of young people in relation to grade inflation and the risks of undermining the value of qualifications.

Grades awarded by CCEA would be based on a range of evidence and data, including prior attainment, CAGs and the rank order of candidates.

Following the Minister's decision, in order to align teacher judgements across and within centres, maintain overall standards in line with previous years and promote public confidence in the credibility of the qualifications to be awarded, CCEA developed statistical standardisation models for GCSE, AS and A level. This was also intended to address the recognised and empirical issue of over-optimism, prevalent in teacher forecasting of grades.

Once the CAGs and rank orders were submitted by schools, CCEA carried out a statistical standardisation process to maintain standards across centres, and in comparison, with past years and with other jurisdictions that share the GCSE and GCE brands (England and Wales).

Statisticians from the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) were redeployed to support CCEA to assist with the testing of these models.

For each qualification, CCEA developed and tested a range of standardisation models using actual past years' examination outcome data. CCEA used the previous year's data to test the accuracy of the model. The model which gave the highest level of accuracy in terms of the model's grade predictions matching actual grade outcomes, was chosen.

#### Review Findings

Standardisation was not particular to the 2020 alternative awarding series. Rather and perhaps not widely acknowledged or understood, standardisation of qualification awarding is common practice in all years and for all cohorts and, in line with regulatory duties, is



## Review Findings

intended to ensure standardisation of comparable qualifications to support candidates in their move to further or higher education, employment or elsewhere. For 2020, there was broad agreement that standardisation, in order to align teacher judgement across and within centres, should be used to ensure that as far as possible no candidate would be unfairly advantaged, or disadvantaged. This was considered to be important and necessary given the recognised and empirical issue of over-optimism prevalent in teacher forecasting of grades. The challenge for summer 2020 was the inputs that were subject to standardisation did not come directly from a candidate's own performance in examinations and thus lacked direct agency. Furthermore, the underpinning nature and construct of the standardisation continued to be unknown to many teachers, parents, and candidates and thus caused some suspicion and discontentment.

### 3.5. Interdependencies across the UK

CCEA, as a regulator has a statutory responsibility under its governing legislation to ensure that the standards of examinations and assessments in Northern Ireland are recognised as equivalent to the standards of examinations and assessments conducted by bodies or authorities exercising similar functions elsewhere in the UK.

Advice received from the DSO on this matter, indicated that it was best practice to follow the lead in England and Wales given the manpower they had deployed to arrive at the decision and associated guidance.

The analysis of each option within the CCEA evaluation, therefore, includes consideration of the approaches taken in England and Wales.

DSO considered that there are legitimate arguments, however, for departing from elements of the approach taken in England. For example, as the advice from CCEA had been that prior attainment data provides a higher degree of reliability as compared to teacher-based judgement, where this is available in Northern Ireland but not in England, then there was a strong argument to support departure from the English preferred model, for example in CCEA's preferred option for A level.

## Review Findings

Alignment wherever possible to England and Wales not only made sense, but was in effect required under the statutory regulatory duty of CCEA.

Recognising interdependencies across the UK was important given the need for portability and comparability of qualifications, in particular for university admissions across the UK. The DSO advised that there was a strong argument for taking an approach that not only met the needs of Northern Ireland candidates, but aligned as closely as possible to the arrangements in England and Wales (particularly Wales as the qualifications system there more closely resembles that in Northern Ireland). DSO believed that working in conjunction with other jurisdictions would not only provide coherence to the arrangements but ensure that Northern Ireland candidates were not disadvantaged in relation to their counterparts elsewhere in the UK.

Other UK regulators have highlighted that jurisdictional differences both in exams (i.e. in Scotland) and available data for the models would inevitably mean that there could not have been exact alignment and this is understandable.

Overall, the emphasis placed by the Minister and CCEA on the interdependencies across the UK and the impact for Northern Ireland of different approaches taken elsewhere in the UK in the development of arrangements for 2020 was appropriate and in line with CCEA's regulatory responsibility and DSO advice.

### **3.6. Potential Alternative Design Approaches**

CCEA and DE have consistently indicated that during March and early April 2020, no other options were brought forward to find a solution to the alternative examination awarding arrangements, necessary in the absence of exams during summer 2020.

Engagement with stakeholders, whilst not identifying alternative design approaches, did articulate important issues to be considered in operationalising the design options identified, namely:

- clarity on how teacher professional judgement would be factored alongside a statistical element;
- identification of legitimate reasons why schools/centres may not have the full set of data available for each candidate and how this would be treated;
- adjustments to take account of potential for advantages and disadvantages on the basis of gender bias or free school meals entitlement;
- how the system would pick up on any potential leniency in teacher professional judgement or centre imbalances;
- data protection and GDPR issues regarding the release of grading or ranking information to parents;
- level of workload involved for CCEA and identification of any budgetary pressures;
- the process for appeals and the potential for sitting examinations;
- how private candidates would be treated; and
- support and guidance available from CCEA.

## Review Findings

Evidence from documents reviewed and interviews supports the view that no other viable approach was suggested to achieve the objectives of delivering, by August 2020, fair and robust outcomes that would be recognised as valid and comparable to outcomes generated in England and Wales.

Evidence shows that stakeholders acknowledged the difficulty of the situation and the opinion that the solutions identified were the *least worst* options. Whilst no alternative options were advanced, feedback received in the design phase was adopted by the Minister in his instructions to CCEA on the 16<sup>th</sup> April.

### 3.7. Conclusion and Lessons Learned

In the absence of any precedent on cancelling examinations, CCEA applied its expertise, supplemented by other experts, with determination and dedication to adopt a design approach, giving due regard to the relevant and important considerations, including fairness, reducing the burden, future impact limitation, minimising uncertainty, standardisation and alignment

across UK jurisdictions. The Minister in making a decision on alternative arrangements also sought the views and advice of key stakeholders and reflected these in his instructions to CCEA for the operationalisation of the design. No alternative approaches were identified and all involved recognised the need to move forward on the basis of the *least worst* option.

Key lessons should however be learned from the design of alternative awarding arrangements in 2020, as follows:

- it is important that design decisions are continually reviewed and challenged as their implementation progresses. In particular, given the unprecedented nature of 2020 (and as may be the case in 2021) due to COVID-19, public acceptability of the design of alternative awarding is critical;
- the principles underpinning design of alternative award should be clearly explained including specific reference to what they mean in practice. Furthermore, the application of weighting to those principles should be considered to reflect relative importance. An appraisal of policy options should ensure that all options are presented with clear reasons for discounting and their assessment should apply a MCA approach;
- a formal risk assessment should accompany the assessment of each option and the risks associated with any selected option should be managed and reviewed on an ongoing basis;
- early, structured and regular engagement with stakeholders, including young people, involving greater collaboration in the design phase may help build a coalition of support for the approach being adopted. (It should be noted that the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People has indicated her willingness to act as a conduit to obtain young people's views on issues, similar to the role that the Welsh Commissioner has agreed to);
- the awarding approach adopted in Northern Ireland should be aligned as closely as possible to arrangements across the UK. This would not only provide coherence to the arrangements but also ensure that Northern Ireland candidates are not disadvantaged in relation to their counterparts elsewhere in the UK. The value of having good working relationships with the other regulators and awarding bodies was important in 2020 and will continue to be; and

- equity and fairness issues should be considered and clarified throughout the entire design, implementation, management and communication aspects of the awarding process.

# 4. Implementation of Alternative Awarding Arrangements

## 4.1. Introduction

Following the Minister's direction, CCEA, as the Department's professional advisors and the recognised awarding organisation and regulator for GCSE, AS and A level qualifications took forward implementation of the alternative awarding arrangements, including the design of statistical standardisation models for each qualification.

This section sets out in further detail the approach taken to **implementing alternative awarding arrangements** for GCSE, AS and A level examinations in Northern Ireland in 2020. The findings presented are based on a review of documentation and supplemented by interviews with relevant stakeholders.

The report sets out factually the approach taken to implementation of alternative awarding arrangements and then follows with a presentation of findings on this approach. The focus and structure of this section of the review assesses how CCEA put the Minister's decision on examinations into effect and considers:

- **advice and support given to awarding centres** on determining and quality assuring CAGs and rank ordering of candidates';
- approaches to the **gathering and quality assurance of CAGs and centre rank orders**. This will include the level of rigour in the evidence base for making estimates and the extent to which centres followed CCEA guidance on the generation of CAGs. The review will also assess the level of consistency in approach between centres and the extent to which the profile of CAGs substantially differed from centres' past results profiles;
- the **statistical standardisation models** put in place by CCEA, including the outcomes produced. The rationale for decision making process and nature of the revised awarding arrangements announced on 17<sup>th</sup> August 2020; and

- the process and decisions within the **publication of GCSE, AS and A level results**.

## 4.2. Advice and Support to Awarding Centres

CCEA published guidance for Heads of Centres on 16<sup>th</sup> April 2020 setting out the envisaged process for awarding GCSE, AS and A level qualifications for summer 2020. The guidance asked exam centres to generate, for each subject at GCSE, AS and A level, CAGs for their candidates, and to rank order the candidates within each subject. CCEA provided guidance for teachers and Heads of Centres and CCEA subject advisors provided advice and support to all centres as required.

The process of awarding grades was advised as including:

- **A level** – statistical predictions based on previous student performance combined with CAGs and centre rank orders;
- **AS level** – awarding organisations were working towards a model in which CAGs and rank orders would be used; and
- **GCSE** – grade awarded using a combination of average centre performance, CAGs and rank ordering.

The guidance stated that CAGs should draw on all the evidence available to teachers on each student (class work, homework, tests/assessments, mocks etc.). Where candidates had agreed reasonable adjustments or access arrangements in place, this should be taken into consideration by the teachers in determining the CAG. Teachers were asked to determine the CAGs as the most likely grade a student would have achieved if they had taken the exam.

Subsequent guidance to Heads of Centres issued 20<sup>th</sup> May 2020 stated that CAG and ranking judgements should only take account of existing records and available evidence of a student's knowledge, skills and abilities and should not consider any other factors such as social background, characteristics set out in Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 or a student's behaviour.

Rank ordering was required to be applied across all candidates in the subject and this would have been assisted by the determination of the CAG. In cases where there was more than one class for the subject, teachers would have to agree a rank order across all the subject

candidates. The guidance recognised that this may be difficult if two or more candidates were almost indistinguishable in terms of subject performance, but tied rankings could not be accepted.

Each set of centre submissions for a subject had to be reviewed by at least two teachers in that subject, one of whom should be the Head of Department (or Head of Centre where there was only one teacher for the subject).

Finally, the Head of Centre (the Principal) was required to sign a declaration that all the information provided (grades and rank ordering) was complete and accurate.

Given the time and resource available and the complexity of operating arrangements within centres as a result of the pandemic, CCEA determined it could not mandate a standard approach for exactly what specific data (and volume of data) centres should use as evidence for their CAGs. Given the range of data available to centres, particularly as they had progressed in different ways through the academic year and were stopped at a point within this learning progression, it would have been impossible to prescribe beyond a range of common possible indicators. The guidance advised that it was not feasible for CCEA to standardise the judgements of all teachers before CAGs were submitted and therefore standardisation of judgements would be done across and within centres using a statistical methodology. The guidance stated that a statistical model would be developed that would combine a range of evidence including:

- expected grade distributions at full CCEA cohort level;
- results in the previous three years at individual centres, where available; and
- prior attainment profile of candidates at centre level.

The guidance advised that, as a result of this process, the **final calculated grades received by a student could be different from the submitted CAG.**

CCEA provided technical guidance to centres (30<sup>th</sup> April 2020) on how to take forward the process of producing the data required. This guidance was shared with DE in advance of publication and DE consulted with Principals and the ETI on the draft guidance and provided CCEA with their suggestions for refinements before the guidance was published. The time



and/or physical access to review whether all centres had put in place all administrative arrangements in order to comply with the guidance was not possible.

An *OECD Review on Evaluation and Assessment Frameworks for Improving School Outcomes (2014)* highlighted the solid foundation of teacher assessment practices in the majority of schools in Northern Ireland and the OECD review team found that teachers in Northern Ireland generally have strong knowledge of different assessment processes and purposes, and their advantages and pitfalls. It also stated that teachers in Northern Ireland were generally seen as trusted professionals.

## Review Findings

The speed at which CCEA moved to develop and publish the centre assessment guidance is commendable.

Interview evidence indicates that under the circumstances, centres were broadly content with the approach to assessment awarding that would combine CAGs and ranking with some form of statistical standardisation. In the main, there was acceptance that teachers had a role to play and had previous experience of assessing candidates' performance as indicators to predicted grades and were used to working with standardisation. Furthermore, the OECD review corroborated the view that teachers in Northern Ireland were well placed to undertake such assessments. Whilst specific training to support teachers in undertaking the assessments would have been helpful there was widespread recognition that timing did not allow for this.

CCEA Guidance states that in terms of what information teachers should use to arrive at the CAG and rank "*It would not be appropriate for CCEA to specify or weight the types of information available, as this may undervalue other useful information within the department and the centre.*" This led to differences in the volume of information and/or data points that centres used to arrive at the CAG. We appreciate from discussions with CCEA that to prescribe the data required would have been impossible given the circumstances of the situation and in particular, the lack of prior planning and time. The guidance does state that because of the differences "*This makes it impossible for CCEA to suggest particular*

## Review Findings

*methods*". Possible indicators were however provided to support centres (e.g. performance in any class or homework assessments and mock examinations).

Guidance stated that *"...there is no requirement to set additional mock examinations 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 examination centres were closed. Where candidates have completed additional work after school closures, this should be used with caution"*.

Overall, the situation and the extent and nature of the guidance possible within the parameters that existed, allowed for differentiation in approach by centres. Evidence from our interviews points to instances in some (not all) centres of additional activities being set to inform grading and ranking.

Feedback regarding rank ordering candidates was, that although the guidance was clear, there were practical difficulties in instances where candidates were felt to be performing at the same level (and with the same CAG) but with borderline differences.

The primary concern expressed was in the lack of clarity as to how teacher assessment would be used within the statistical model and the weightings that would be applied to the CAG and rank ordering. At this point the work to design and develop the statistical standardisation model was not sufficiently complete to allow such clarity. Whilst the guidance did not specifically call out how teacher professional judgement would be used in the statistical model, there undoubtedly was an expectation that it would be accounted for fully, both in terms of grading and rank order. Guidance was clear that the standardisation purpose was to ensure that grades awarded in 2020 were of equal value to previous years, and that the CAGs may differ from the final calculated grades awarded to individual candidates. Whilst some stakeholders suggest the latter point should have been given more emphasis in the guidance, we do acknowledge the message was clear from the outset. The lack of understanding or acceptance of this and the resultant extent of variation between teacher assessment and the standardised award was undoubtedly an issue. From our

## Review Findings

interviews, it was not the expectation of teachers that a student's CAG could have been two or more grades different to the standardised award.

### 4.3. Gathering and Quality Assurance of CAGs and Rank Orders

CAGs and rank orderings were developed by subject teachers, with at least two teachers reviewing the proposed grades.

A final review process was carried out by the Head of Centre before the information was submitted to CCEA. Heads of Centres were required to submit a declaration confirming that, having reviewed the relevant processes and data, they were confident that they honestly and fairly represent the grades that the candidates would have been most likely to achieve if they had sat their exams and conducted their assessments as planned.

This work was taken forward at a time when all centres were closed to most candidates and a full lockdown was in place across Northern Ireland. There were also significant concerns about the potential transmission of the COVID-19 virus through surfaces and significant time constraints in the preparation and submission of teacher assessment.

It was not deemed possible for CCEA to moderate candidates' work as this would have involved collection and distribution of a large number of sample materials. In addition, teachers would have had to return to school to collect materials, at a time when many teachers were shielding and only essential travel permitted. There was therefore reliance on the quality assurance taking place within the centre prior to submission of the CAGs and rank ordering, and of the statistical model providing for standardisation of grades.

CCEA was confident that as in previous years, the appeals process would be able to deal with any individuals for whom an awarded grade was contested. Consideration of the appeals procedure commenced on 20<sup>th</sup> April 2020 following clear instructions from the Minister. The development of an appeals process was done in conjunction with other regulators and the JCQ and the principles adopted aligned closely with those of Ofqual. A two-week consultation on the appeals' principles followed from the 7<sup>th</sup> May 2020. Following consideration of the consultation responses, a legal review was sought on the Appeals Decision Report. CCEA

Regulation issued the Appeals Decision Report to the CCEA Awarding Organisation and published it on its website on the 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2020. This stated that appeals could only be made to CCEA from centres and not from individual candidates and on the following grounds only:

- the use of incorrect data;
- administrative errors; and
- incorrect communication of a grade.

Appeals to CCEA in respect of the operation or outcome of the statistical model, a centre's assessment of grade or ranking order or the process or procedures used by a centre would not be permitted.

Following publication by CCEA Regulation, CCEA Awarding Organisation developed the administrative procedures associated with the appeals process through July and on the 22<sup>nd</sup> July, a version of the appeals decision was published on the CCEA website, intended to be user friendly.

Following receipt on 17<sup>th</sup> August of the Direction under Article 101 of the 1986 Education Order to implement an adjusted approach to GCSE, AS and A level awarding, CCEA published a '*Student's Guide to the Appeals Process*' on its website clarifying that CCEA would accept applications for appeals/reviews on one or more of the following grounds:

- CCEA used the wrong data to calculate the grades;
- CCEA allocated the wrong grade based on an administrative error;
- CCEA communicated the wrong grade; and/or
- CCEA did not apply procedures consistently or procedures were not followed properly or fairly.

Furthermore, CCEA would address a situation where a centre's complaints process considered that a candidate's school or college assessment of the outcome was affected by discrimination or bias, which would be considered by CCEA as potential malpractice.

An appeal would be free, could not result in the grade being lowered for any student and had to be submitted by 17<sup>th</sup> September 2020.

## Review Findings

The public health parameters that surrounded the gathering and quality assurance of teacher assessment from centres, presented considerable limitations on what was practicable. The approach adopted in Northern Ireland was broadly similar to other UK jurisdictions, reflecting the similar public health circumstances that prevailed. Furthermore, given that other UK awarding organisations operate in Northern Ireland alongside CCEA, consistency in approach within the same jurisdiction was important for candidate fairness.

In Scotland, a centre's estimates were assessed against their historical grades by subject and estimates were adjusted where a centre's estimated 2020 attainment moved beyond tolerable ranges from previous performance. Professor Priestley's report '*Rapid Review of National Qualifications Experience 2020*', published on 7<sup>th</sup> October notes that, once it was felt that there had been 'over-estimation' in centre estimates at a significant scale, qualitative checking that had been planned as part of the moderation process was abandoned and was based entirely on the quantitative application of the standardisation model. A report by the Independent Review Panel in Wales<sup>3</sup> noted that, as in Northern Ireland, internal moderation between individual teachers grading, took place within the schools prior to the submission of centre predicted grades and there was no external moderation, but centre grades were standardised using a statistical model. Whilst the approach was less than satisfactory there were very valid reasons why external or direct moderation of assessments or administrative processes was not feasible in Northern Ireland, as in other jurisdictions.

Empirical evidence from the interviews pointed to different practices across different centres in the quality assurance of CAGs and rankings. The absence of wholly explicit guidance, (for reasons acknowledged), may have allowed for variation in approach and interpretation. As an example, a Head of Centre may have looked at the grades across the subject as a whole to determine whether they appeared reasonable compared with the data they held, whilst in other centres, a Head of Centre may have scrutinised each individual candidate's grades against the statistical data held by the centre for rolling averages across a three-year period.

---

<sup>3</sup> <https://gov.wales/independent-review-summer-2020-arrangements-award-grades-and-considerations-summer-2021>

## Review Findings

There is an acknowledgement, supported by academic research, to indicate that teacher predicted grades are on average higher than the grades awarded across a cohort through examinations. The absence of external moderation in the 2020 alternative awarding arrangements is understandable but meant that the benefits of such moderation in terms of quality assurance were not realised.

The reliance on an appeals system to rectify contested grading after award had been made, did on reflection present a number of challenges, not least the capacity to deliver on the appeals process within the timeline available. Whilst in previous years the appeals process was the only mechanism for such rectification, the unique challenges in 2020 presented a different context.

The Minister in approving the recommendations for alternative awarding in 2020 (16<sup>th</sup> April) reinforced the need for an amended appeals process. Consequently, and according to a presentation from CCEA to centres on 10<sup>th</sup> August 2020: “... *appeals could be submitted if a Head of Centre considers that:*

- *the awarding body did not apply procedures consistently, or procedures were not followed properly and fairly;*
- *the awarding body used the wrong data in calculating results; and*
- *the result generated was incorrectly issued by the awarding body to one or more candidates.”*

This appears to be a narrow set of parameters on which appeals could be made from the perspective of the candidate. To protect teachers and in line with stakeholder feedback, it was agreed that there would be no appeal against the CAG or rank order provided by the school. However, it is highly plausible that it is this element that the individual pupil may have disagreed with. In addition, no appeal could be made in respect of the operation or outcome of the statistical model, a model for which all the details had only been published alongside results.

Some interviewees also highlighted the potential (at least perceived) constraint of having to make the appeal through the centre (rather than by the pupil directly) as being a potential barrier to appeals being submitted to CCEA. Although this was normal practice in prior years,

## Review Findings

the involvement of centres in the award of grades may have created a conflict of interest for teacher and centre involvement in the 2020 appeals' process. Furthermore, it could have caused a tension between candidates and teachers given the alternative awarding approach that led to the grade award.

At a subsequent meeting with the Minister and DE on 13<sup>th</sup> August 2020, it was agreed that information on CCEA's appeals process on its website would be updated to make clear that appeals based on evidence of prior performance (which is not reflected in the awarded grade) would be accepted. In a letter to the Minister on 16<sup>th</sup> August, CCEA also made appeals free. This fact, coupled with the position that any appeal would not result in the grade being lowered, is likely to have increased the motivation of candidates to seek appeals. Furthermore, these changes were made on or after the release of A level results, to take account of changes being made in England and so as not to disadvantage candidates given the operation of other awarding organisations in Northern Ireland. These decisions were taken very late and perhaps were indicative of the concern emerging as to the acceptability of the alternative awarding arrangements.

Ordinarily the appeals process is relied upon as the remedy for disputed outcomes, however the reliance on the appeals process in 2020, given the alternative awarding approach in place (and specifically the fact that candidates had no direct agency in the results) caused issues. Where CCEA awarded a grade different to that which the student expected (e.g. through knowledge of earlier predictions or data tracking) the basis of how this could be challenged and the timing of leaving this to be sorted as part of a post award appeals process was problematical.

### **4.4. Statistical Standardisation Model and Outcomes**

In order to align teacher judgements across and within centres, maintain overall standards in line with previous years and promote public confidence in the credibility of the qualifications to be awarded, CCEA developed statistical standardisation models for GCSE, AS and A level. This was in line with the CCEA proposed design for awarding and the Minister's request to CCEA to operationalise the alternative arrangements.

Standardisation was intended also to help address the issue of over-optimism in teacher forecast grades. The standardisation approach taken by CCEA was guided by the following regulatory principles:

- as far as possible, the approach used to produce grades should be similar to those adopted in England and Wales to ensure comparability of grades across all UK jurisdictions offering GCSE and GCE qualifications;
- awarded grades should reflect, as accurately as possible, the ability and attainment in each subject;
- a consistent approach and methodology should be adopted for all candidates and all subjects as far as possible; and should not create an advantage or disadvantage (in terms of outcomes) within the present, past or future cohorts, so that standards are maintained; and
- the approach used to award grades in summer 2020 should be explainable to the public.

Based on the guidelines and principles above, CCEA adopted a common standardisation approach for GCSE, AS level, and A level awards in 2020, with the expectation that arrangements for each of the three types of qualification made use of the specific information available in each case. Specifically, the arrangements for all three qualifications adopted the following framework:

### **Step 1**

Based on available performance data, CCEA produced a *predicted grade distribution* for each centre and for each subject; that is, the predicted number of candidates expected to receive each grade at a centre in each subject.

The precise formula and data used to calculate the predicted grade distribution differed for each qualification type, dependent on available information. In particular, prior attained AS-level marks (summer 2019) were used to predict A level grade distributions, while GCSE prior attainment was used for AS level grade distributions. However, as prior attainment data was not available for all GCSE candidates in the 2020 cohort, GCSE grade distributions were instead based on the centre's past GCSE performance in the previous three years.



## Step 2

To award grades, CCEA mapped the centre provided rank orders to the centre's predicted grade distribution for each subject. For example, if the CCEA predicted grade distribution estimated that three candidates at a centre would receive A or above in English, ten would receive a B grade and so forth, then the top three candidates according to the centre provided rank order would receive A or above, the next ten in the rank order would receive a B, and so on for each of the lower grades.

The specific arrangements for this calculation are outlined for each qualification type as follows:

### A-Level Specific Arrangements

For each centre, subject predicted grade distributions were calculated using:

- the prior attained AS-level marks (summer 2019) for candidates in the 2020 A-level cohort, adjusted if necessary, to account for the likely improvement that would have occurred due to resits; and
- A2 and AS unit marks obtained by the centre in 2019 for the previous A-level cohort.

The prediction method employed a *z-score* (mean and standard deviation) methodology based on standard procedures used in previous years for candidates that missed individual units due to exceptional circumstances. Under normal circumstances, this procedure works by predicting a student's mark for missed units, based on their performance relative to their peers in other units.

Since no candidates sat exams in A2 units in 2020, this approach could not be applied as-is, and so was adjusted by using aggregated A2 and AS unit marks for each candidate in the previous 2019 cohort. Specifically, each student in the 2020 cohort was first assigned a *z-score* based on their AS level results in the previous year to measure their performance relative to their peers. This was then mapped to the mark distribution generated by aggregating the A2 and AS marks for candidates in the 2019 cohort, to estimate their expected results for the missed summer 2020 units.

In addition, candidates who were due to resit specific units received an adjustment based on the average (positive) change in mark normally achieved by resits.<sup>4</sup> Finally, the centre predicted grade distribution was calculated by assigning estimated grades to candidates based on their predicted scores and standard grade boundaries. The centre grade distribution was then given by the total number of candidates assigned to each grade.

It is important to note that, although the centre predicted grade distribution was based on each individual's AS performance, an individual's AS level performance was not used to directly determine their own awarded grade. Instead, individual AS level performance was only used to determine the overall grade distribution for a centre. The centre provided rank order was then applied to the grade distribution to determine which individuals received which grade.

### **AS-Level Specific Arrangements**

The procedure for calculating centre grade distributions for AS-levels followed a similar procedure to that employed for A-levels, except that a centre's predicted performance in 2020 was its performance in the three years (2017–2019) with an adjustment for changes in the 2020 candidates' prior attainment at GCSE.

Specifically, the procedure for assigning centre grade distributions for AS levels comprised the following key steps:

- an initial centre grade distribution for each subject was calculated as the average proportion of candidates achieving each grade at the centre in the previous three years. Note that this average was calculated using the total counts across all three years, which in effect, means that the results from each year were weighted proportional to the number of candidates taking the specific subject at the centre in that year;
- where available, the mean prior GCSE attainment in each subject was calculated for the previous three cohorts (2017–2019) as a whole, and separately for the present 2020 cohort; and
- the difference between the GCSE mean performance for the 2020 cohort compared to the previous three years was used to assess the strength of the centre's 2020 cohort relative to their predecessors in 2017–2019. This was used to adjust the centre's initial grade distribution based on 2017–2019 results in proportion to this difference. The

---

<sup>4</sup> This ensured that, in line with the Minister's directives (Section 3.2), allowance was made for improvements that would have resulted from resits.

adjustment was also weighted proportional to the number of candidates for which prior GCSE attainment data was available in each subject. In the extreme case, where no prior GCSE attainment data was available for a centre in a given subject, this would mean that the centre's average AS-level distribution for the previous three years would be used as-is without adjustment.

## **GCSE Specific Arrangements**

In contrast to AS level and A level qualifications, individual past performance data was not available for all candidates completing GCSEs in 2020. As a consequence, the predicted grade distributions for each subject at each centre were predicted solely based on a centre's past performance in each subject in the preceding three years, in addition to the national average performance in 2019.

Specifically, CCEA calculated the proportion of candidates expected to receive each grade in each subject as a weighted average of the proportion of candidates achieving each grade at the centre in the three years 2017–2019, and the national average for Northern Ireland in 2019. Here, the 2019 national average was included in the formula to stabilise outcomes (particularly for small centres), and the weights applied to each of these data points were as follows: 2019 centre outcomes (weight = 3), 2018 centre outcomes (weight = 2), 2017 centre outcomes (weight = 1) and 2019 national outcomes (weight = 1).

## **Quality Assurance**

For each qualification, CCEA developed a range of statistical models, which were tested by predicting grades for 2019 and comparing the results to actual grades awarded in 2019. The final chosen models were those that achieved the highest accuracy compared to the actual awarded grades.<sup>5</sup>

External testing, review, validation and evaluation was carried out on the models by a range of external organisations as follows:

---

<sup>5</sup> Since rank orders were not available for 2019, model accuracy for predicting individual candidates' grades could not be performed on a like-for-like basis. Instead, CCEA focused on assessing the accuracy of centre grade distributions rather than individual grades.

- AlphaPlus, specialists in standards, assessment and certification were appointed by CCEA to independently review the proposed methodologies for the award of grades;
- a statistician, who was an honorary fellow of the University of Oxford, was employed by CCEA Regulation to conduct an independent assessment of the models;
- a Peer Review Group, with representatives from UCAS, Queen's University Belfast, University of Oxford, CIEA, and Cambridge Assessment, provided feedback on the clarity, validity, strengths and areas of improvement, ethics and equality of the methodology used; and
- PwC UK was commissioned by CCEA to ensure accuracy and independently check all results during the test of models. It should be noted that this commission was not to provide an assessment of the methodology but instead PwC developed an independent software implementation of the statistical models based on CCEA's specification.

In addition, CCEA developed their own independent software implementations using different programming languages. The outputs from all of these programs (including those from PwC) were then compared for consistency to ensure that results could not be affected by software error.

The reviews by AlphaPlus and the Peer Review Group made a number of observations that were responded to by the CCEA Awarding Organisation. There was a general recognition that the cancellation of exams and lack of external assessment was a limiting factor on the data available for statistical modelling. The reviewers noted that excluding CAGs as a direct input to the model may come as a surprise to certain stakeholders, and that there may be a need to manage expectations on this. Concern was also raised about the ability to handle outliers (e.g. a particularly high or low achieving student relative to a centre's cohort).

Once predicted grades had been produced by this software for 2020, post analysis was performed by CCEA subject officers to quality assure the final results. Specifically, each subject officer performed two levels of checks:

- first, the predicted grade distributions for all centres were compared against outcomes from the previous three years. If the distribution fell outside of the range of the previous three years, then the officers judged whether the change was significant given the number of candidates, any changes relative to previous years, and any other centre information available; and
- secondly, any individual grade that differed by two or more grades from the CAG was manually reviewed, based on evidence including all previous subject level results available for the student, rank orders, and centre grade variance. If the evidence suggested that a different grade was warranted, this was flagged for further review.

If any of these checks highlighted that the predicted grade distribution was unreliable (e.g. due to insufficient data or significant changes in circumstance) then all candidates at that centre were awarded CAGs for that subject. On the other hand, if checks suggested that there was an anomaly in the centre provided rank order (e.g. a student's rank appeared significantly out of line from their individual prior attainment data), then this was flagged to the centre the day prior to result publication.

As a result of these checks, awards for 75 individual candidates were highlighted to their centres due to apparent rank order anomalies, while 4,783 received a CAG instead of the modelled grade. This included all grades awarded in centres with five or less candidates, because it was deemed that the predicted grade distributions were unreliable for centres of this size.

### **Comparison to other Jurisdictions**

The standardisation approach adopted across the three UK jurisdictions was broadly aligned, with the recognition that there was a need to act in a coordinated manner to reduce any perception of disadvantage between jurisdictions. In particular, the general approach of applying centre provided rank orders to predicted grade distributions was adopted in England and Wales as well as Northern Ireland. Nevertheless, the specific differences between the design of GCSE, AS levels and A levels across these jurisdictions did inform the specific arrangements in each region.

In particular, in Wales and Northern Ireland, A level qualifications follow a similar structure:

- A level qualifications are unitised;
- AS forms part of the full A level qualification. Previous AS performance data was therefore available for the vast majority of A level candidates; and
- AS is weighted at 40% of the full A level qualification.

In contrast, the situation in England is that:

- all A level qualifications are linear; and
- AS qualifications are stand-alone and are therefore decoupled from the full A level.

This means that, while prior AS performance data was available and used in Northern Ireland and Wales for A level predictions, this information was not available nor used in England.

For GCSE predictions, externally moderated prior attainment data at Key Stage 2 and 3 is not available for the whole cohort. For this reason, in the absence of prior attainment data for the 2020 GCSE cohort, the approach adopted in Northern Ireland for GCSEs was based on centre provided rank orders and prior centre performance only. Key Stage 2 data was available and used in England, while Key Stage 3 data was available and used in Wales.

## Review Findings

There is a consistent recognition by stakeholders of the challenges faced by CCEA in designing and delivering a statistical standardisation model in the absence of public examination outcomes. Timescales were short and capacity needed to be reinforced. The approach applied to model design, build and testing involved expert input and independent third party quality assurance and challenge. Overall, the build and test of the models was robust and had appropriate involvement of independent expertise.

Based on the review of the detailed approach to standardisation, the CAGs were not applied directly to determine standardised student grades in the majority of cases.<sup>6</sup> Instead, the overall number of candidates at a centre that would receive a given grade in a subject was determined by the predicted grade distribution based on prior attainment data of that group of candidates, where available and centre performance data. The centre supplied rank order was then applied to determine which candidates in each centre would receive which grades,

<sup>6</sup> CAGs were however awarded directly in cases where the predicted grade distribution was deemed unreliable due to available data or specific circumstances. For example, recently amalgamated centres, or centres with small cohorts of five or less.

## Review Findings

while CAGs were used for comparison only to identify anomalies and in certain defined cases adjustments to the provisional grade awarded.

When past attainment data was available for individual candidates in the 2020 cohort (in the case of AS and A levels), this data was used only to predict the overall grade distributions for each subject, at each centre. An individual's prior attainment data (if available) was therefore decoupled from the grade they received. That is, an individual's prior attainment only affected their grade in so far as it determined the overall predicted grade distribution for the centre. If the centre provided rank order was aligned to the candidates' past performance data, then each student would still be expected to receive a grade in line with their prior attainment. However, if there was a marked difference between a centre's rank order and a candidates' relative prior attainment, then this meant some candidates received outcomes which were lower than their previous attainment. It is acknowledged that the statistical standardisation approach needed to allow for a candidate to have improved, relative to their peers in the cohort, during the course of the year and for this to be reflected in the rank order. Using prior attainment alone would not have allowed for this, however we also note the impact on other candidates' in a centre with a fixed grade distribution.

Whilst the need for a statistical model to standardise teacher assessed grading was accepted, there was a lack of clarity beyond CCEA, on how the model was using the input data, how it was applying the standardisation and overall, what the impact for the candidate would be. Indeed, the application of the candidate rank order over the candidate grading generated considerable concern among many interviewed.

There was also concern about the effectiveness of the statistical standardisation model to deliver robust grading outcomes where centres had a small number of candidates overall or had few candidates in certain subject areas. In general, there were concerns about the ability of the model to predict accurately and fairly at an individual candidate level rather than at an overall cohort level. In specific instances CCEA dealt with this issue by awarding CAGs for those candidates in a cohort of five or less and in three subject areas (e.g. a new subject).

Overall and despite information published by CCEA including a presentation to Heads of Centres (attended by 169 Heads of Centres) on the 11<sup>th</sup> August and information published

## Review Findings

on their website, (<https://ccea.org.uk/summer-awarding#section-12696>), there was a lack of understanding as to how the statistical standardisation model worked to deliver outcomes. The Peer Review Group did highlight the need to manage expectations in relation to this. CCEA moved to publish the underpinning detail of how the statistical model worked alongside A level grades being released. Guidance from CCEA indicated that “CCEA will share further details on the statistical models being used for standardisation, once these have been finalised with CCEA Regulation, with the issue of results.” Some of those we interviewed would have welcomed greater clarity on how the statistical standardisation model worked in advance. Whilst this may have created greater confidence in the model and its outputs it is appreciated that to have allowed individual centres to be involved in the detailed development of the model, may have created a conflict of interest. Furthermore, the design of awarding and assessment and in particular the application of statistical methods is a specialised area and did indeed need to be led and delivered by competency and industry experts.

The lack of involvement of teachers or Heads of Centres in the result awarding to such a late stage, clearly raised concern. Earlier access by centres to potential awarding anomalies in particular could have helped avoid the publication of a small number of results (75) which CCEA acknowledged to be questionable and contestable. Again the need to ensure fairness across all candidates, regardless of awarding organisation and the application of a results embargo prevented this from being possible in 2020. However, had there been an opportunity to deal with these anomalies in advance of publication this may have provided grounds for greater confidence in the overall alternative awarding system.

### 4.5. Publication of Results – AS levels, A levels and GCSE's

A level and AS results were issued to candidates on 13<sup>th</sup> August 2020. In the immediate aftermath, concerns were raised in the media and by a number of centres and candidates about the outcomes for individual learners and the methodology for award of grades.

Whilst many centres were broadly content with the results awarded, a significant number of centres initiated appeals. As detailed in Section 4.4, CCEA had carried out a series of post-



standardisation checks on the grades awarded for every centre. Where any potential anomaly was identified, CCEA wrote to the centre on the day prior to the results being issued.

For A level results, the initial CCEA calculated grade was lower than the CAG on 10,235 occasions (38.5%), higher than the CAG on 982 occasions (3.7%) and matched the CAG on 15,394 occasions (57.8%).

CCEA had set out a revised appeals process for 2020, made appeals free and diverted staff to deliver appeals within the required 42 day deadline set by JCQ. CCEA made contact with local universities to confirm admissions processes would be kept open until 7<sup>th</sup> September to allow for appeals, in line with arrangements in England. UCAS and IUA were also kept informed of changes throughout.

The Minister and DE officials met with the CCEA Chief Executive on the results publication day (13<sup>th</sup> August) to discuss the situation with regard to AS and A level awarding. They particularly discussed (i) the details of the statistical standardisation models for awarding GCSEs, AS and A level and how they were implemented; and (ii) the CCEA appeals process – how it would work in practice, estimated processing timescales and resources available to scale up if volume increased significantly. It was agreed at the meeting that:

- the information on CCEA's appeals process on its website would be updated to make clear that appeals based on evidence of prior performance would be accepted; and that
- appeals that impact on university admissions would be given priority.

DE officials used CCEA data to carry out a rapid analysis of the 2020 AS and A level outcomes at system level. At system level, the A level and AS results broadly aligned to previous years, with improvement in the overall outcomes. The following Northern Ireland system level information was noted in regard to the standardised A level and AS outcomes issued on 13<sup>th</sup> August 2020:

- a higher proportion of those taking A levels received top grades compared with 2019 - the percentage of candidates achieving grades A\*-C increased by 1.6% from 2019 and 2020;

- the proportion of candidates receiving the highest A level grades also increased, with almost two thirds of entries (64.6%) in 2020 awarded grades A\*- B. This was an increase of 2.5% from 2019;
- a higher proportion of those taking AS levels received top grades compared with 2019 – the percentage of candidates awarded Grades A\*-C increased by 2.2% from 2019. Almost 80% of candidates were awarded these top grades;
- the proportion of Northern Ireland candidates achieving the top grades outperformed England and Wales in 2020 - at 86.4%, the proportion of entries awarded Grades A\*- C in Northern Ireland at A level was notably higher than in England and Wales where the proportion of entries being awarded A\*- C was 78.0 % and 79.8% respectively;
- the scale of improvement in non-selective schools outstripped that in grammar schools in 2020. In non-selective schools the proportion of CCEA A level entries awarded Grades A\*-C was 74.8%, which was 1.8% higher than in 2019. 90.7% of entries from grammar schools were awarded A\*-C at A level, which is very similar to 2019 when 90.6% of entries were awarded these grades. This means the performance gap between the two types of centre, in terms of A\*- C reduced from 17.6 percentage points to 15.9 percentage points;
- on 16<sup>th</sup> August 2020, UCAS advised that a record 12,590 Northern Ireland applicants had been accepted onto university courses through UCAS. This was a record high and represented no less than 36% of all 18 year olds. It was also an increase of 6% from 2019;
- on 16<sup>th</sup> August, UCAS also confirmed that a higher proportion of Northern Ireland candidates from disadvantaged backgrounds had been accepted into universities than ever before - 18.3% of these young people had been accepted into university courses at that time - a new record; and
- across the UK on results days, 30.2% (210,260 candidates) of all 18 year olds were accepted to Higher Education through UCAS – a record high for results day despite there being 1.5% fewer 18 year olds in the UK population than in 2019. The equivalent figure for 2019 was 28.2%.

Following the issue of A level results in Northern Ireland and events and concerns with the process being raised in other jurisdictions of the UK, CCEA identified that there may be a

higher than anticipated number of GCSE appeals once those results were released and that there was a risk that CCEA would not be able to process the appeals in sufficient time.

On 16<sup>th</sup> August 2020, CCEA Council recommended to DE that there should be a change to the approach for awarding of GCSEs. It recommended that all candidates taking GCSEs awarded by CCEA should receive results based solely on the CAGs provided by schools and colleges.

There were three main reasons for this proposed approach:

1. CCEA had received a significant volume of appeals in relation to AS and A level awards, which was not predicted in advance of results issuing. CCEA advised that it could process these appeals within the required 42 day deadline set by the JCQ. However, if similar or increased volumes of GCSE appeals were received, CCEA advised it would not be able to process those within the required timescales. Indeed, it may have been administratively unmanageable. Even if the Department provided resources to employ additional staff, there would be insufficient people with relevant expertise to recruit at pace. The envisaged delays to the appeals process would in turn lead to significant anxiety for young people and their families.
2. In addition to concerns about the impact of a lengthy appeals process on learners, there was a concern about the burden on schools to produce the evidence necessary to support an appeal while at the same time trying to put in place necessary measures to re-open schools to candidates in line with the re-start guidance.
3. It was also recognised that continuing with the standardised grades could result in significant numbers of young people who had or were becoming disillusioned and disengaged from education over the period of lockdown, becoming further de-motivated resulting in an increase in those not in education, training or employment (NEETs). By contrast, it was believed that awarding the grades in line with their teachers' assessments may be the motivating factor that would encourage more of these young people to stay engaged in education and set them on a positive pathway to achievement.

No change in approach was proposed at this stage for AS and A level qualifications. In considering these qualifications, it was noted that these qualifications provided access to higher education for large numbers of candidates, with large numbers (in the region of 30%) seeking places at universities in England and Wales. It was considered important, therefore, that the awarding of AS and A levels were closely aligned to the approaches in England and Wales so that Northern Ireland candidates were not disadvantaged in competing for places at university. Also, as nearly one in five Northern Ireland A level candidates take qualifications offered by English and Welsh awarding bodies, there was an added need to maintain alignment with the arrangements those examination boards put in place so that there was a level playing field for all local candidates regardless of which qualification from a range of awarding bodies they were taking.

On the evening of 16<sup>th</sup> August 2020, having considered advice from CCEA Council and from DE officials, the Minister agreed the Council's recommendations that CCEA's GCSEs should be awarded according to the CAGs provided by centres. He also agreed that arrangements for A level and AS grades would remain as were.

In taking this decision, the Minister was mindful that the standardised GCSE grades did not directly derive from prior performance data and that they were, therefore, objectively more open to challenge. He also noted that the remedy of appeal would be more difficult compared to AS level and A level, as the robust data which could be used to ascertain prior performance in individual cases was not available for GCSE cohorts. A key concern for the Minister was that the risk of delay in processing GCSE appeals could have detrimental impact on the future educational direction of many young people. The Minister also noted the very high percentage of GCSEs taken through CCEA (as opposed to other awarding organisations), which limited any impact on equality of outcome.

On 19<sup>th</sup> August, the Minister wrote to all School Principals outlining the detail and rationale of his decisions. In regard to GCSEs he emphasised that system level prior performance data was not available for this group of candidates and that his particular concern was that, to be awarded qualifications standardised on the basis of their centres' past performance, may have caused some candidates, particularly those who attend schools in areas of disadvantage, to become disillusioned with education. Rather, the Minister highlighted that he wanted to encourage as many young people as possible to remain in education or training post-16 and

to know they had another opportunity to engage with education and progress to the next level of qualification.

The decision to award CAGs did not involve any delay in the awarding process and all CCEA GCSE results were issued to candidates on Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> August as planned. This meant no additional wait time for centres or candidates.

At a meeting with CCEA and DE officials on the morning of 17<sup>th</sup> August, having held discussions with Ministerial colleagues in other jurisdictions and being aware that similar announcements were anticipated in both England and Wales, the Education Minister determined that all A level and AS candidates taking qualifications through CCEA would now be awarded the higher outcome from either the CAG or the standardised grade issued on 13<sup>th</sup> August 2020.

The Minister's decision was made on the basis that changes were imminent for A level awarding in both England and Wales. His key concern was to ensure that young people in Northern Ireland were in no way disadvantaged in comparison to their peers elsewhere.

A Ministerial Direction under Article 101 of the Education and Libraries (NI) Order 1986 (regarding the manner in which existing duties should be performed) was then issued to the CCEA Chief Executive in relation to the changes to the arrangements for awarding GCSEs, AS and A levels in summer 2020.

A Press Release and Frequently Asked Questions were provided on the DE website on 17<sup>th</sup> August. On 19<sup>th</sup> August the Minister wrote to all Principals outlining the detail and rationale for his decisions.

CCEA worked closely with other awarding organisations to issue revised AS and A level results to all candidates on Friday 21<sup>st</sup> August. In the interim period, candidates were able to obtain details of their CAGs from their centre.

Following receipt on 17<sup>th</sup> August 2020 of the direction under Article 101 of the 1986 Education Order to implement an adjusted approach to GCSE, AS and A level awarding, CCEA published a '*Student's Guide to the Appeals Process*' on its website clarifying the grounds on which CCEA would accept applications for appeals/reviews.

## Review Findings

Overall, the publication of A level results with known grade anomalies (where awarded grades differed to CAGs by two or more grades) and a much larger volume of grades lower than CAGs, caused considerable public confidence concerns in the model adopted by CCEA for summer 2020 awarding. Whilst grade adjustments in 2020 were arguably less than typical grade differentials in previous years (between predicted and actual grades), public acceptability of this was challenging given the absence of examinations and in particular the lack of direct agency by the candidate in the award. This was despite CCEA advising at the outset, that awarded grades may be different to CAGs and recognition that teacher predicted grades had historically been generous to the candidate.

Whilst stakeholders had to a large degree bought into the design of alternative arrangements, the impact of their implementation and the inability to reconcile known issues in advance of publication eroded much of this buy-in. This was against a backdrop where across the UK there was intense media speculation on the credibility of alternative awarding processes. CCEA provided advice to the Minister on 16<sup>th</sup> August that GCSE grade awards should be made on the result of CAGs only. This was based on an assessment of the predicted volume of appeals for GCSE results, and an understanding that *"...other jurisdictions will invoke other changes at GCSE, some of which will reduce standardisation, most likely resulting in more discourse about standards and increased GCSE appeals through perceived unfairness of the grade awarded"*.

In his decision to move away from standardised GCSE grades, the Minister indicated that given the absence of individual pupil prior attainment data in grade awarding, they could be more objectively open to challenge and thus the remedy of appeal more difficult. The risk specifically for GCSE of applying standardisation to data which did not include prior attainment for individual candidates was significant and clearly influenced the Minister's ultimate decision. There is a question as to whether this risk was properly managed by CCEA within both the design and implementation phase of GCSE awarding.

At the time CCEA provided its advice to the Minister on 16<sup>th</sup> August, no decision had been announced in England and Wales regarding a move away from standardised grades to CAGs as a method of awarding GCSEs. However, once England and Wales took the

## Review Findings

decision to award either the CAG or the standardised grade, whichever was higher, this approach had the potential to disadvantage candidates in Northern Ireland (although, we acknowledge that GCSE grades in Northern Ireland were, across the system, higher than those in England and Wales).

The instance of anomalies arose due to issues in data from centres and as such their resolution required engagement back to that centre. Operational constraints prohibited CCEA (because of its results embargo) from engaging with centres on grade anomalies in advance and this caused serious confidence issues once results were published. The identification of such anomalies, the lack of reasonable time to address them, the pursuance of award publication and the assumption of remediation through appeal could be deemed unfair for the candidate.

The situation on A levels underpins the significance the Minister placed on comparability and portability of school leaver qualifications across the UK. Whilst in the design of arrangements for Northern Ireland, a range of criteria were taken into account, in the end, attempted fairness/equalisation within a UK system (and within Northern Ireland) took primacy. The move away from any application of statistical standardisation in the final 2020 examination awards has left a constraining legacy on such an approach being adopted in the future. This presents a challenge specifically for 2021 and the years which follow where exams are in any way impacted.

### 4.6. Conclusion and Lessons Learned

The operationalisation of the policy framework set out by the Education Minister for alternative awarding in 2020 was undoubtedly a challenging task. CCEA progressed work at pace to deliver guidance to schools, establish a standardisation approach and ultimately deliver awarding grades for GCSE, AS and A level candidates within the time available.

The design and development of a statistical standardisation model alongside the collation of CAGs and rank ordering from centres clearly presented challenges. The focus on the testing of the statistical standardised model is recognised, however the lack of transparency on the modelling approach and grade outcomes to centres in particular, proved difficult. Confidence

from teachers, parents and candidates and ultimately the public was undermined by the instance of anomalies and the divergence in grade from centre assessed grades. This was despite general acknowledgement as to the importance of standardisation to avoid grade inflation.

The reliance on an appeals process to rectify issues was felt to be unjust from the perspective of the candidate and to a lesser degree the teacher and centre. Furthermore, the lack of capacity within CCEA to deliver the appeals process for the quantum of GCSE appeals anticipated (after the A level results issued) within the timescales available further undermined the reliance on such an approach.

Overall, there should have been greater ongoing reflection on the implications of design and implementation of alternative awarding approaches throughout the summer, instead of waiting until the point of results publication. Clearly this is not specific to Northern Ireland and we acknowledge a sense of assurance in continuing to follow through on plans as in other areas of the UK and indeed on the need to maintain adherence to the results embargo.

In the event public examinations have to be cancelled in the future, there are lessons which could be learned from the implementation of alternative awarding arrangements in 2020. These are as follows:

- with more time (than was available in 2020), the guidance to centres and teachers should be specific about the processes to be followed in making assessments of grading and ranking and should specify the range of evidence that can be considered to ensure a more consistent approach within and between centres. Training for and support to teachers is very important;
- allowing for the use of limited tied rankings, if rankings are required, should be considered;
- wherever possible as much assessment evidence and data should be held electronically for ease of submission and transfer;
- whatever the approach adopted there should be earlier transparency in how the information will be used in determining the final grade;
- moderation of centre assessment to provide for consistency within and across centres is important for the implementation of any future alternative awarding (see Section 7.4);



- the grounds for appeal of alternative awards should be revisited with a focus on likely issues from a candidate's perspective. Consideration of only successful appeals being free should be undertaken and the capacity (and the associated training of individuals) to deal with the anticipated volume of appeals should be put in place. The use of an appeals' process as the only mechanism to remediate grade anomalies and perceived grade unfairness is not an optimal solution. Consideration should be given to other mechanisms to improve the consistency and quality of centre assessments to reduce the number of appeals, coupled with earlier engagement with centres so anomalies can be addressed. The subsequent implications for rank order should also be considered;
- the use of a 'quality assured' statistical model, which was not fully clear to key stakeholders, particularly on how CAGs were being used, was considered to be unfair by many, and discontent was further reinforced by the lack of agency a candidate had in the assessment. As it transpired, the overriding view was that, in the absence of exams, more weight should have been given to the professional judgement and assessment by teachers. It is therefore considered that a similar approach to that adopted in 2020 would not be publicly acceptable if exams were cancelled in 2021; and
- the move away from any application of statistical standardisation in the final 2020 examination awards has left a constraining legacy on such an approach being adopted in the future. This presents a challenge specifically for 2021 and the years that follow when exams are in any way impacted.

# 5. Management of Alternative Awarding Arrangements

## 5.1. Introduction

This section sets out in further detail how the **alternative awarding arrangements were managed** in Northern Ireland in 2020. The findings presented in this section are based on a review of documentation and supplemented by interviews with relevant stakeholders.

The report sets out factually the management of alternative awarding arrangements and then follows with a presentation of findings on this approach. The review considers whether effective control mechanisms were in place to **review and quality assure models** being developed, check that **objectives could be delivered**, and provide **assurances to the Department and the Minister**.

## 5.2. Review and Quality Assurance of Models

As detailed in Section 4.4, external testing, review, validation and evaluation was carried out on the statistical standardisation models and their outputs both internally by CCEA, and by a range of external organisations as follows:

- a statistician, who was an honorary fellow of the University of Oxford, was employed by CCEA Regulation to conduct an independent assessment of the models;
- PwC UK was commissioned by CCEA to ensure accuracy and independently check all results during the test of models;
- AlphaPlus, specialists in standards, assessment and certification were appointed by CCEA to independently review the proposed methodologies for the award of grades; and
- a Peer Review Group provided expert advice on the clarity, validity, strengths and areas of improvement, ethics and equality of the methodology used.

CCEA Council minutes record that updates were provided by a range of CCEA officers and the Chief Executive regarding the progress in the development of the statistical models and that there were processes of independent review by statisticians. Minutes for the meeting of 17<sup>th</sup> June record that the statistical model for A levels had been ratified and AS and GCSE were being worked on with final sign-off scheduled for 26<sup>th</sup> June.

The statistical models were developed by CCEA Awarding Organisation and approved by CCEA Regulation. Under the General Conditions of Recognition, CCEA Regulation sets for awarding bodies to comply with, Condition D1.2 states that “*A qualification will only be fit for purpose if that qualification, as far as possible, secures the requirements of:*

- *Validity*
- *Reliability*
- *Comparability*
- *Manageability*
- *Minimising bias.*”

Prior to issuing awards, post standardisation analysis was performed by CCEA to ensure that summer 2020 arrangements did not introduce additional differences between genders and did not accentuate unconscious bias in comparison to previous years. Alternatively their analysis indicated that for CAGs there was inflation across all centre types and genders as compared to 2019.

Demographic factors were further analysed post award by CCEA. DE also used CCEA data to analyse the 2020 AS and A level results at a system level. This showed that initial results published on 13<sup>th</sup> August were broadly aligned at system level to previous years with improvements in overall outcomes (see Section 4.5 for further detail).

## Review Findings

It is clear that CCEA has considerable expertise in standardisation and in the adoption of statistical methods to deliver such. Furthermore the commissioning of external expertise in the model build and test through NISRA, PwC, the University of Oxford and Alpha Plus provided further reinforcement and assurance on the statistical robustness of the standardisation models being applied. In the main, these reviews provided assurance in

## Review Findings

terms of clarity, validity, strengths and areas of improvement, ethics and equality of the methodology used.

What is less apparent is whether there was ongoing internal challenge of the overall design decisions on which the model was seeking to deliver e.g. the inclusion or decoupling of CAGs, and how this would ultimately be accepted by centres, parents, and candidates. The lack of clarity in the first instance around how teacher professional judgement would be applied in the standardisation model, the lack of understanding from centres specifically in relation to the weighting of factors within the statistical models and the general lack of public awareness of the application of standardisation in exam awarding in any year are all key contributors to the public confidence issues which arose when A level results were published on the 13<sup>th</sup> August. The confidence felt by CCEA in the standardisation models came from the robustness of the statistical process that was gone through to arrive at the result and the level of standardisation achieved at a system level, as compared against 2019. With this too was an assumed expectation of candidate fairness in achieving a qualification that carried the same currency as in previous years. What the review and quality assurance of the model did not identify and which ultimately proved problematic for public confidence was that the CAGs were not afforded the weighting that many stakeholders believed they should have been. Clearly the instance of anomalies allowed for concern which then created a space where the whole alternative awarding approach and specifically the statistical standardisation model were called into question when results were published.

### 5.3. A Check that Objectives could be Delivered

Following recommendations from CCEA and advice from others, the Minister of Education wrote to CCEA on 16<sup>th</sup> April to confirm his policy decision regarding the arrangements for issuing calculated results for candidates. In his instructions he outlined the approach to awarding each qualification and indicated that *“In order to mitigate the risk to standards as far as possible, the approach should be standardised across centres. CCEA should also mandate the method of calculating final grades based on the evidence provided for each learner. CCEA*

*should ensure, as far as is possible, that qualification standards are maintained and the distribution of grades follows a similar profile to that in previous years.”*

In setting the policy framework, the Minister identified the importance of offering candidates the right of appeal and instructed CCEA to progress with the development of an appeals process as a matter of urgency. The Minister also acknowledged that there will be “...*other difficulties and risks with the approach outlined ... but I will expect CCEA will advise me of those risks and take steps to mitigate these as far as possible. In particular, CCEA should consider how mitigation of any potential biases in relation to gender and disadvantaged candidates can be factored into the statistical models.*”

Under CCEA’s governing legislation it has a duty to conduct examinations and assessments and ensure that the standards of such, conducted in Northern Ireland are recognised as equivalent to the standards of examinations and assessments conducted elsewhere in the UK. The progression of alternative awarding arrangements for CGSE, AS and A levels in Northern Ireland in 2020 was managed through CCEA Emergency Response arrangements. Under these arrangements, a Gold, Silver and Bronze structure was implemented to manage CCEA’s response activities to the COVID-19 pandemic. These structures remain in place, with a focus on the 2020/21 academic year response.

| <b>Tier</b>   | <b>Responsible for</b>   | <b>Led by</b>               | <b>Frequency</b>  | <b>Reports to</b>   |
|---------------|--|-----------------------------|---|---|
| <b>Gold</b>   | Overall strategic control  | Chief Executive             | Daily   | Weekly updates to Council, Department of Education and Department for the Economy |
| <b>Silver</b> | Tactical operations based on tasks set by the Gold team. 7 Silver teams established looking at: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Safe resourcing</li> <li>• Awarding solution</li> <li>• Regulation and compliance</li> <li>• Statutory assessment</li> <li>• Curriculum</li> <li>• Communication</li> <li>• Safe closure</li> </ul> | Management                  | As required by tasks (e.g. some met 3 days per week, or daily at particular stages) | Weekly highlight reports to the Gold team   |
| <b>Bronze</b> | Operational delivery of workstreams in support of Silver team tasks  | Relevant workstream leaders | As required by tasks  | Relevant Silver team  |

Day-to-day oversight of the alternative awarding arrangements was delivered through the CCEA Gold team oversight of the Silver team. In particular the teams focused on:

- awarding solution – developing the alternative exam grading arrangement;
- regulation and compliance – informing the public about arrangements for grading and awarding qualifications while also ensuring consistency in approach;
- curriculum – supporting DE by providing a task group to support curriculum advice and guidance to candidates, parents and teachers; and
- communication – communicating with the public and education sector.

CCEA Council maintained the final oversight of activity in line with CCEA's governance structures. As part of the Emergency Response, the Council moved to weekly meetings, weekly updates were provided through project highlight reports and the Gold Team maintained oversight of activity with an overarching weekly highlight report identifying activities completed and priorities for the next week.

Verbal updates were provided by the Chief Executive to the weekly Council meeting covering:

- progress on the development and quality assurance of the statistical model;
- appeals process consultation and guidance;
- progress on submission of centre assessment grades;
- discussions with other awarding bodies across the four jurisdictions of the UK;
- communications with stakeholders;
- logistics (e.g. in running the helpdesk) and closure of the exam series; and
- consultation for the 2021 series.

Verbal updates were also provided by both the CCEA Awarding Organisation who developed the model and CCEA Regulation who was responsible for approving the model. Minutes of weekly Council meetings record debate, challenge and analysis of information by Council members on the issues presented. Meetings were conducted on a virtual basis.

In addition to CCEA's own Emergency Response structures, CCEA participated in DE's contingency arrangements through the Curriculum Qualifications and Standards Directorate (CQSD) COVID-19 Contingency Programme Board, of which the Chief Executive of CCEA was a member. In particular, this programme put in place as one of its strands, oversight arrangements for qualifications and assessment. The CCEA Chief Executive

reported to the DE CQSD Contingency Programme Board through weekly highlight reports covering updates on activities completed during the week, key priorities for the next week, assessment of current risks and issues and status update on milestones due in the next four weeks.

## Review Findings

The instructions from the Minister (16<sup>th</sup> April 2020) and the statutory duty of CCEA Regulation provides the framework for anticipated objectives from alternative awarding. In his instructions, the Minister clearly instructs CCEA to address risks in relation to standardisation and to put in place an appeals system to recognise the potential for dissatisfaction. Issues also in relation to bias on gender and free schools meal basis were identified. In line with these instructions, CCEA moved forward with the build and test of a statistical standardisation model to meet the requirements set out. The operational detail of how to deliver these arrangements (and how the statistical model would operate) was not a policy decision but was based on work undertaken by CCEA to develop the model to meet the approach and principles set. DE was continually updated on progress through established reporting arrangements.

The timescales involved in collating centre information, designing, building and testing models for each of GCSE, AS and A level were extremely short, within the window to 13<sup>th</sup> August. CCEA had in place plans and reporting through recognised emergency response management procedures and a delivery structure to ensure objectives and timescales could be met. Furthermore, resilience in staff resourcing was put in place by CCEA, recognising the importance of meeting timescales but also the risk of the prevailing public health situation on potential absence levels.

Overall, robust governance and management structures within and between CCEA and DE were in place to check that objectives as intended could be delivered. The Gold, Silver and Bronze command structure implemented within CCEA was well designed and worked effectively.

#### **5.4. Provide Assurances to the Department and the Minister**

The relationship between the DE and CCEA is set out in the CCEA Management Statement and Financial Memorandum (last updated 2014), which is the usual mechanism for sponsor government departments to monitor and oversee an NDPB's strategy, performance and delivery. The Education Minister is accountable to the Assembly for the activities and performance of CCEA.

As noted above, CCEA participated in DE's contingency arrangements through the CQSD COVID-19 Contingency Programme Board and the Chief Executive provided weekly updates to the Programme Board.

#### **Review Findings**

It appears on review of documentation and on discussion with stakeholders that the working relationship and channels of communication and assurance between CCEA and DE were effective. Furthermore, CCEA has strong links with other regulators and awarding organisations resulting in an exchange of information and knowledge which was beneficial in providing further assurance to the Department and Minister.

The management and reporting structures put in place surrounding all of COVID-19 response and specifically alternative exam awarding, allowed for regular and robust updates from CCEA to its Council, the Department and Minister and furthermore provided channels through which assurance could be sought and updates challenged.

The routine management arrangements between CCEA and DE are well established in the form of a Management Statement and Financial Memorandum. Both are due for review (which has been paused as low priority due to COVID-19 pressures) and we note DE's commitment to address this.

The review has seen and acknowledged a very comprehensive set of documentation from both CCEA and the Department. The structures and endeavours to provide update and assurance were in place and used effectively.



## 5.5. Conclusion and Lessons Learned

CCEA put in place thorough quality assurance of the statistical standardisation models developed for GCSE, AS and A levels. The logic, however, of how the models were being developed and specifically with a view on the outcome for the individual candidate could have been subject to more regular reflection and review. The process of designing, building and testing the models was completed within a tight window so as not to delay exam awarding which did limit what was possible in terms of prior engagement on grade outcomes.

In delivering against defined objectives, CCEA moved forward to develop a statistical standardisation model to address the instructions from the Minister (as of 16<sup>th</sup> April 2020). Management structures including governance, oversight, reporting and decision making were well established within and between CCEA and DE and allowed for timely updates and the provision of assurance to the Department and Minister.

Key lessons from the management of alternative awarding arrangements in 2020 are as follows:

- the governance arrangements between the Department, the Council and CCEA proved effective and should be maintained as required. Similarly the management approach and contingency governance arrangements within CCEA, incorporating Gold, Silver and Bronze structures clearly identified the different roles and responsibilities and provided clear communication channels which as required should be maintained;
- ongoing challenge of design and implementation decisions and alignment with the principles needs to evolve iteratively (alongside the development of the statistical standardisation model). Acceptability of approach and ultimately of alternative awards, by centres, parents, candidates and other key stakeholders is critical. A transparent approach needs to be adopted;
- the Department has committed to undertaking a review of the Management Statement and Financial Memorandum; and
- the lack of statistical expertise in the CCEA Council meant it could not exercise its challenge function to the extent it may have wished. Whilst this was not raised to DE during 2020, powers to co-opt such expertise may be beneficial in moving forward.

# 6. Communication of Alternative Awarding Arrangements

## 6.1. Introduction

This section sets out in further detail how **communications** in relation to the **alternative awarding arrangements** in Northern Ireland in 2020 **were planned and delivered**. The findings presented in this section are based on a review of documentation and supplemented by interviews with relevant stakeholders.

The report sets out factually detail on the communication of alternative awarding arrangements and then follows with a presentation of findings on this approach. The review analyses **communication with schools and colleges, candidates, parents and other stakeholders**, particularly in terms of how the awarding process would operate and the rationale for the chosen process, including **explanation of concepts such as maintenance of standards and standardisation**.

## 6.2. Communications

As part of its Gold, Silver, Bronze emergency response structure, a Silver team was established in CCEA to specifically deal with communications. The objectives of the Silver team were to:

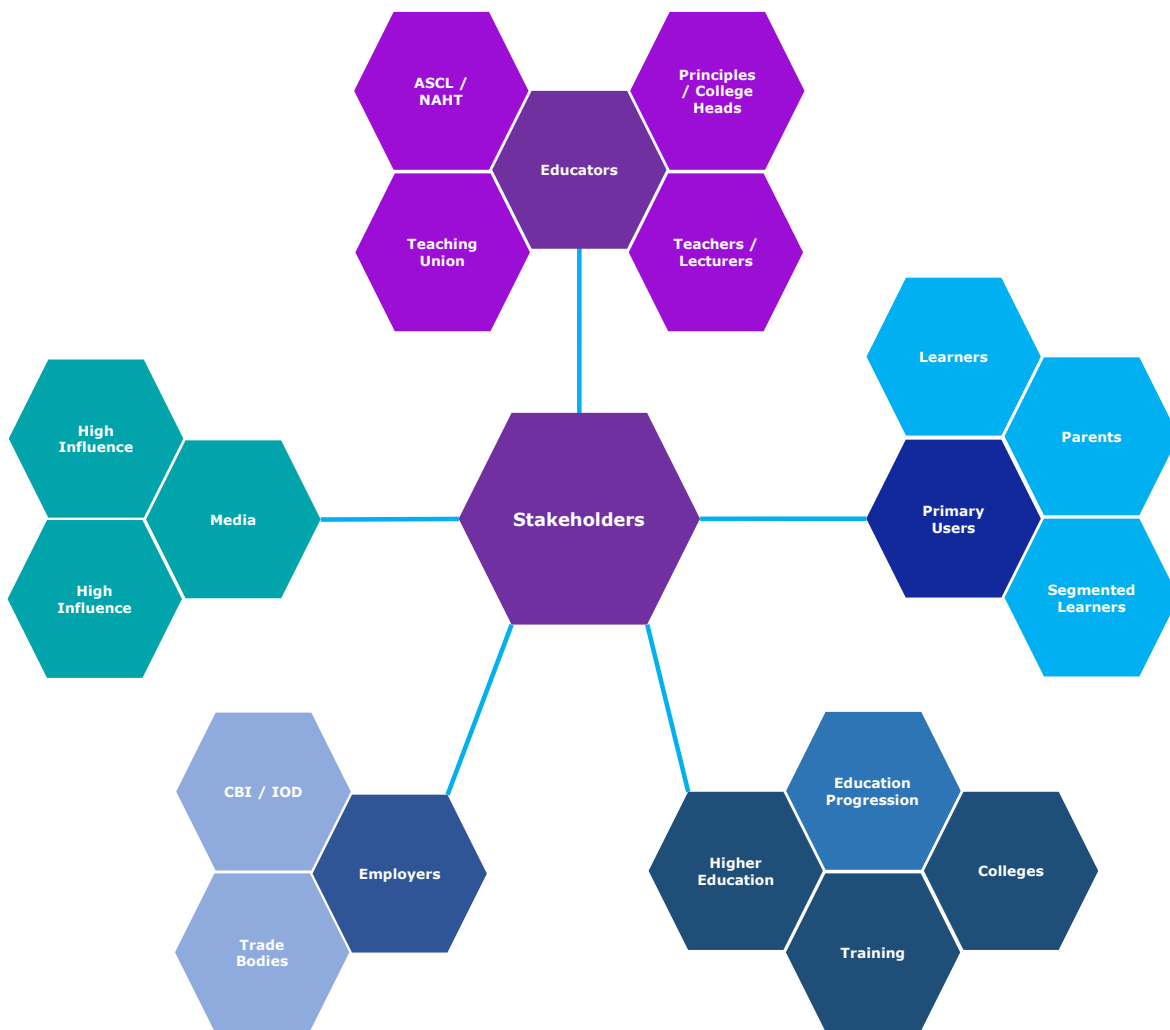
- communicate, through the CCEA website ([ccea.org.uk/summer-awarding](http://ccea.org.uk/summer-awarding)), the mainstream media and primary social media channels, **strategic and substantive updates and assurances about progress towards strategic aims**;
- to provide **clear, concise and accurate (FAQ) information** as soon as it was available to general questions posed by the public or wider education system, particularly in regard to CCEA A level and GCSE awarding arrangements;
- to **keep the Department of Education (and other government departments if required) up to date** with regards to CCEA's intended communications;
- to **keep staff and contractors up to date** with progress against strategic aims; and

- to **support the Team Leaders in preparation for public communications engagements**, particularly the Chief Executive.

CCEA developed a **Summer Awarding and Issue of Results Communications Strategy** with the strategic aim to ensure that all stakeholders had the knowledge and understanding they needed in regard to qualification arrangements for summer 2020. The communications objectives set for summer awarding 2020 were as follows:

- to ensure key **stakeholders understand the alternative awarding** this year, the background, the processes and statistical modelling;
- to ensure that key **stakeholders retain confidence** in the awarding process and the value of the grades / levels issued;
- to ensure key **stakeholders are aware and reassured** that the **process is fair, rigorous and comparable year on year**; and
- to ensure that the **learner and their needs are at the core of our thinking / process**, and that they can progress in an unprecedented year.

CCEA identified stakeholders based on previous project experience and recognising the specific task it had to undertake and understanding the context in which it was operating. The segmented stakeholder map (overleaf) highlights the many interested parties to alternate awarding arrangements.



A range of communication methods were used with the selected method(s) reflecting the likely preferences of the intended recipients. These included:

- website updates;
- FAQs;
- video animations;
- video interviews;
- social media channels;
- podcasts;
- helplines (phone and e-mails);
- press releases, editorials, media interviews and press briefings;
- webinars;
- meetings; and
- documentation.

The Communication Strategy set out that the key message regarding summer awarding was that alternative awarding arrangements were being put in place following a decision by the Education Minister to develop a new process; within this new process, centres and teachers were best placed to know the achievements and potential of each learner and would provide CAGs and rank order of candidates within each subject grade; CCEA would then standardise the outcomes using statistical modelling to ensure that no learner was advantaged or disadvantaged; and the statistical model would combine a range of evidence including expected grade distributions at full CCEA cohort level, results in the previous three years at centre level, and the prior attainment profile of candidates at centre level.

CCEA procured additional capacity and expertise to assist it in the implementation of its communications strategy.

A number of risks, with associated mitigation measures were identified and a series of performance indicators were employed to assess how successful the Communication Strategy was. These included, tracking the number of helpline queries, reach and engagement rates across social media channels and tracking website traffic and video watch rates. Measures against these indicate: 6,500 e-mails were responded to, 4,322 calls were received on the helpline, CCEA made 24 news releases and 86 social media posts and 80 emails were sent to schools.

As part of the situational analysis, consideration was given to the potential issues and challenges including additional scrutiny on the alternative awarding process, stakeholder perception that results may have less value than previous years because the process was new, uncertainty as to the need for standardisation, public concerns about the rigour and accuracy of teacher grading and public concerns that the use of statistical modelling might remove the human element.

## Review Findings

CCEA appreciated and understood the nature and scale of alternative awarding in summer 2020 and appropriately put in place a communications approach to reflect the needs of the situation. CCEA moved at pace to enable an effective communications response, developing a strategy, identifying stakeholders, defining key messages, identifying channels for delivery and articulating risks, potential issues and mitigations. Overall CCEA had a clear

## Review Findings

strategic communication aim to ensure that all stakeholders had the knowledge and understanding they needed in regard to qualification arrangements for summer 2020. Within this CCEA:

- developed a segmented stakeholder map to identify the many stakeholders interested in the alternative awarding arrangements;
- developed key messages and associated timing for their delivery;
- identified a wide range of communication methods including some quite innovative, e.g. the videos with Wendy Austin;
- identified performance measures and indicators to assist in the assessment of how well the communication strategy met its objectives;
- facilitated Council and staff level engagement with the Department;
- facilitated internal communication by the Executive teams and via meetings between senior staff and the Council along with regular and frequent discussions between the Chair and the Chief Executive and staff; and
- procured additional professional expertise to support communications.

Key messages were aligned to centres, candidates, parents and other key stakeholders. The messages delivered may not however have reached or been fully understood by all in a way that ultimately supported the approach to awarding. For instance, communicating a message that teachers were best placed to assess candidates is believed to have led to an expectation that the CAG would have been used in a more meaningful way than it was. Minutes from a Peer Review Group meeting (3<sup>rd</sup> June 2020) indicated concerns around the role and application of centre assessed grades. In particular the need for further clarity in managing expectations of centres in relation to the relative weighting of data inputs. It is not clear that the communication approach was adjusted to reflect this concern.

In the period following results publication, a primary concern coming from teachers, candidates and parents was that they had not been clear on how the CAGs would be used within the model and that, what they then were coming to understand was that the 'algorithm' and the rank order provided by centres had been the deciding factor for grades awarded. The videos on the CCEA website did communicate how the alternative arrangements would

## Review Findings

operate for each of GCSE, AS and A level and set out what data would be used to calculate the grade. For example, the video stated that grades would be calculated using teacher judgement combined with statistical standardisation models to ensure that the system was fair and that the summer grades would have equal value to those of other years. For A level awarding, the video stated that the data used in the model would be a combination of centre assessment information, the candidate's prior performance at AS and enhancements for improvements which would have resulted from resits.

The CCEA videos did indicate that for some candidates the grade awarded may be different from the CAG, and stated there was a process of quality assurance to check individual grades where the CAG varied by two or more grades from the grade predicted.

The need for standardisation in the awarding process was communicated to teachers, centres, parents and candidates through available channels. CCEA do rightly highlight the absence of normal channels e.g. due to school closures, which would have been available outside of a pandemic situation. The rationale on standardisation communicated was as follows:

- to ensure that the grade was fair and minimised any risk of difference between schools and colleges;
- to ensure the A level in Northern Ireland has equivalency to those in England and Wales (portability); and
- to ensure grades are similar to previous years (consistency across years).

The concept of how the approach to standardisation differs from any other year was not explicitly explained. Nor was the exact approach of how the data identified would be used within the model and any particular weightings given until the presentation to some Heads of Centres on 5<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> August. Overall the terms 'teacher judgement' and 'centre assessment' were understood differently, with many (specifically schools and teachers) believing this to include the CAG as a direct input to the statistical model.

CCEA acknowledged in presenting the initial options assessment to DE in April that there would be a high degree of contention as the options were operating at a cohort/system level

## Review Findings

rather than an individual level. Delivering a message setting out the risks and limitations of the design and implementation approach and managing expectations does not appear to have been clearly made to stakeholders. CCEA could have raised this with DE to assess how best to address it and determine where responsibility lay.

There is an issue, specifically with regards to parents and candidates, of how aware and engaged they were in the communication messages delivered. CCEA worked with NICCY to develop messages and identify delivery platforms that were deemed to resonate with the pupil and parent audience, but in many cases, it appears reach was still limited. Many parents in particular did not understand the standardisation process or acknowledge that it was a previously applied approach. It is not clear that CCEA could have done any more than they did on this.

Across wider stakeholders and specifically into the Executive Education Committee, there was challenge around the performance of CCEA in terms of the alternative awarding process. It is important to acknowledge that the Committee had only recently been formed and had a very new relationship with CCEA and, prior to the summer events, CCEA had very little opportunity to inform members on their role or establish a constructive, trusted relationship. This was challenging.

### 6.3. Conclusion and Lessons Learned

Communication during a pandemic is critical. In the case of CCEA and alternative awarding arrangements, it clearly understood and prioritised the importance of effective communications to all relevant stakeholders. Extensive efforts were made to identify and communicate relevant messages to schools, colleges, candidates, parents and other stakeholders. Written and video content set out the rationale for the alternative awarding approach, including explanation of concepts such as maintenance of standards and standardisation.

In regard to the standardisation approach and the use of teacher assessment there clearly was an issue of understanding but perhaps more so, acceptability, which proved extremely difficult.



Key lessons to consider from the communication of alternative awarding arrangements in 2020 are as follows:

- to address the lack of understanding and/or acceptance of standardisation, an awareness campaign targeted at stakeholders, particularly parents and candidates should be considered. This should provide factual information on the use of standardisation, the process applied and its effects and benefits. A clear articulation that standardisation may result in a candidate's grade, particularly in the event of exams being cancelled, being lower than a teacher-estimated grade is important;
- inability to disclose details of the standardisation model for determining grades earlier caused frustration and suspicion among some stakeholders particularly over how the CAGs were being used. A more transparent approach may increase confidence in the awarding process; and
- CCEA should continue to invest in building relationships with key stakeholders.

# 7. Implications for Future Awarding

## 7.1. Introduction

This section considers the implications of summer 2020 for future awarding in particular the implications for **standard setting**. Maintenance of standards has historically been the basic principle behind the awarding process for GCSEs and A levels in order to retain a similar level of performance at a grade boundary mark from year to year. To help achieve this, the examination boards across the three jurisdictions which share the A level and GCSE brand draw on both statistical (predictions based on prior attainment) and qualitative judgmental techniques (review of current and archived scripts).

The review considers what **learning there is from the operationalisation of the standardisation process in 2020**, and what should be considered in **agreeing the criteria or principles for any standardisation process in 2021**. This reflects on **possible models of moderation of teacher assessments** across centres as a contingency, should examinations not be possible.

## 7.2. Implications from 2020 on Future Years Standardisation

The approach taken to alternative awarding in 2020 undoubtedly caused considerable public confidence concerns. It highlighted an overall lack of public knowledge, understanding and acceptance of standardisation and led to suspicion and misperception in the use of statistics and how algorithms may be used within any statistical standardisation model, for any exams, in any year.

In not being able to make public the specific parameters, weightings and operation of the statistical model significantly in advance of the issuance of results, CCEA drew criticism for a lack of transparency which added to a public sense that there is some 'mystique' involved in the process of standardisation and that standardisation will inevitably disadvantage individuals.

It was clear from our interviews that, in the event exams could not proceed in 2021, it would not be in the best interests of candidates, or acceptable to the public, for alternative awarding arrangements to follow exactly those intended in 2020. However, there is recognition that standardisation for future years is important to ensuring consistency across the system for that year and compared to prior years, so that students in any one year are not advantaged or disadvantaged. There is therefore a significant communications exercise required to build public understanding of standardisation as it operates normally in years when exams can be run and to re-build confidence in the importance of and approaches taken to standardisation.

The importance of standardisation in ensuring consistency between centres and providing comparability with qualifications awarded in previous years and enabling portability of the qualification across the UK was recognised by key education stakeholders. Where the grades awarded in 2021 based on a CAG alone, there is a high risk in the ability of CCEA as an awarding body to continue with any standardisation of qualifications in a meaningful way in subsequent years. This would require significant work to develop a new specification for each subject, in effect starting afresh. In the event that exams could not be held in 2021, stakeholders interviewed emphasised the need for a clear moderation and standardisation process. Imperative, however, to any process is prior agency by the student.

In general, statistical methods provide us with a valuable set of tools for measurement, gaining insight and supporting decision making. In particular, the routine use of statistics within academic assessment fulfils an important role to calibrate and maintain comparability between results over time and at a national level. However, it is equally important that stakeholders and decision makers maintain a good understanding of what any statistical model can and cannot do and, specifically, the fundamental limitations imposed by available data (in this case, pupil assessment).

Used correctly, statistics allows us to extract information and knowledge from data. However, it cannot extract information from data that is not there. In the case of the alternative awarding in 2020, while it was possible to estimate the overall distribution of grades in sufficiently large centres with a reasonable level of confidence, statistics alone could not act as a direct replacement for examinations. Without a common instrument of assessment to determine those grades, the ability to ensure fairness and maintain standards was significantly impacted. Furthermore, when expectations from statistical methods are not managed correctly, this not

only poses a risk to decision making, it also risks degrading confidence in statistical methods as a whole. This has significant implications for important and valuable future applications. In particular, the public acceptability in the application of any statistical method in contingency planning for 2021 is questionable, no matter how valuable or appropriate that application may be.

### **7.3. Learning from the Operationalisation of the Standardisation Process**

Standardisation is not simply an important consideration, it is statutory duty for CCEA as a regulator. When alternative awarding arrangements were designed in March and April 2020, it was important for CCEA to maintain alignment with the approaches being adopted as far as possible across the UK and not act unilaterally. Indeed the decision in August to award CAGs required Ministerial direction to allow CCEA to proceed on that basis. Our review and specifically interviews with stakeholders, highlights two competing concerns: 1) the requirement to maintain standards comparable with previous years; and 2) the desire to deliver a sense of fairness to individual candidates in the results they receive.

To maintain standards, CCEA adopted a statistical standardisation approach that allowed for close alignment in overall grade distributions with previous years. Under normal circumstances, such standardisation is routinely applied at a national level and would account for differences in overall cohort ability and the relative difference in examination units between years. However, the cancellation of exams in 2020, and the lack of any alternative form of common assessment across centres, led CCEA to enforce fixed grade distributions, not only at a national level, but at a centre level. This created an unprecedented level of competition for grades within individual centres given that: if, for whatever reason, a pupil was ranked higher than their prior attainment data would suggest, then other candidates within the same centre would have to move down. Moreover, this consequence may have been unknown to many teachers and candidates at the time of assessment submission and, coupled with the candidates' lack of direct agency in being able to prove their ability through an examination, posed a significant risk to public acceptability of the approach. This was recognised by CCEA in putting forward '*least worst*' options to DE in April.

Ultimately, under the extreme circumstances imposed by COVID-19, it is difficult to see how both standards and a sense of fairness to individual candidates could have been maintained to a high degree. To have achieved fairness in the eyes of every individual would have required

awarding each what they felt was right, thus applying no standards. On the other hand, maintaining standards and comparability cannot be achieved solely by ensuring overall frequencies of candidates achieving particular grades are maintained. At its core, this requires a common and objective measurement of a candidate's ability and competence in a subject. The cancellation of exams without any alternative common instrument of assessment placed a fundamental limit on the extent to which this could be achieved, which could not be replaced by standardisation alone.

Equally, any alternative standardisation approach that accepted CAGs along with the associated risk of positive bias, may have provided candidates, teachers and parents with a greater sense of fairness, albeit not in all cases (as some candidates may have felt the teacher assessment was unfairly negative). However, the negative impact of grade inflation cannot be underestimated, as it would reduce the currency of a grade, alongside other far-reaching consequences for awarding.

#### **7.4. Possible Models for Moderation**

In the event that exams can continue as usual, moderation of non-exam assessments will continue as normal. Challenges may arise in the event that, once again, exams are cancelled and there is a need to put in place moderation and standardisation processes under an alternative awarding arrangement.

Contingency planning is already underway by CCEA and DE to identify plans in the event that exams are cancelled for one or more levels, or that centres are closed, including consideration of alignment across jurisdictions. In progressing this, CCEA has held lessons learned workshops to review the summer 2020 experience. Following a public consultation from CCEA, the Minister announced in October 2020, changes to the start of the 2021 summer exam series including a reduction in the number of GCSE units that will be assessed by examination, public health adaptations (particularly in relation to practical work and fieldwork) to ensure qualifications are delivered safely and that A levels awarded in 2021 would be based on the outcomes of A2 examinations so students are not required to take the AS assessments they received a grade for last summer.

All those we interviewed recognised that, in the event that exams could not proceed, there would need to be a robust process of external moderation for any centre professional

judgements to ensure greater consistency of approach across centres and a higher level of confidence in any centre grades submitted to CCEA.

Whilst the need for moderation is accepted by stakeholders, our interviews indicate that there is, as yet, no overall agreement as to how moderation might operate in the event of an impact on exams in 2021. Differing and complementing approaches exist and should be considered:

- putting in place a process for internal centre moderation of teacher-estimated grades has been proposed. This would be broadly in line with the process for summer 2020 whereby subject teachers agree collectively the CAGs and rank orders and these are then reviewed by the Head of Centre. However, more detailed guidance and training would be provided by CCEA to centres on what information should be used to calculate the teacher-estimated grade and what the exact approach should be that a Head of Centre would need to undertake to quality assure the grades before submitting to CCEA;
- developing a process of alignment to independently quality assure the processes within centres for determining any teacher assessment at both pre and post submission of grades to CCEA. Leveraging expertise within the ETI to review the moderation and alignment processes has been offered however ETI involvement in the moderation itself would not be appropriate. ETI quality assurance of process would be beneficial in reinforcing confidence to wider stakeholders; and
- external moderation of teacher-estimated grades. It is acknowledged by those we spoke with, that to moderate every candidate's teacher-estimated grade would not be practicable. Instead the proposal would be to moderate a sample of candidates within each centre, presumably across all subjects and levels, to ensure quality assurance, with any adjustments to grades following the sample review, being applied to the whole subject cohort in that centre. It is expected that a request for further samples would be made to allow for in-depth quality assurance before any move to adjust grades in this way. This sampling approach is currently accepted and understood as applied for non-exam assessments, however it is important to acknowledge (given the 2020 experience) that acceptability from a candidate of having their grade adjusted because of a sample review of another candidate in the centre, and not their own, may be difficult. Even with a sampling approach there would be a significant resource effort required to deliver this form of moderation - CCEA would need to contract additional

external moderators (through existing processes) to enable this to happen. Having a common instrument of assessment (as is being proposed in Wales) that can be operated in the centres will be critical for effective external moderation. The absence of consistent inputs in 2020 contributed to undermining confidence in the alternative awarding system.

Whatever the form and substance of moderation, a process of standardisation will still need to be considered. Moderation and standardisation have different objectives and should work with each other.

Based on our interviews, stakeholders were keen to be involved in the process of designing and implementing models of moderation. Stakeholders emphasised the need for early communication on contingency plans including moderation and standardisation to allow centres, teachers and candidates time to prepare and have available all inputs necessary. Any teachers or personnel involved in moderation will require detailed guidance and training.

## **7.5. Conclusion**

The need for moderation and standardisation of examination awards is well regarded as necessary for any cohort, in any year. The challenge for future examination series, which continue to be impacted by COVID-19, is how these concepts are applied under an alternative awarding model. Challenges of timing, resourcing, accessibility and acceptability all come into play. Options for 2021 have been identified and it is important these are concluded without delay so as to provide centres, teachers, candidates and parents with clarity.

There is no doubt, the ultimate awarding position arrived at in summer 2020 creates a challenging legacy for future standardisation. The uniformity of this challenge across the UK at least provides for a level playing field in seeking to standardise across jurisdictions. The greater challenge is standardisation between years.

The pursuance of a sense of fairness for individual candidates will as far as possible require the adoption of a consistent instrument of assessment which includes direct input from the candidate. Clearly the system of examination is a well-established and accepted model for delivering this.

# Annex I: Document Index

## Contents

|  |    |
|--|----|
| <u>CCEA: Assembly Engagements\Hansard Reports</u> .....                          | 80 |
| <u>CCEA: Contingencies 2021</u> .....  | 80 |
| <u>CCEA: Correspondence - N.I. Assembly Education Committee</u> .....            | 80 |
| <u>CCEA: Council Covid-19 Briefings   Meetings</u> .....                         | 81 |
| <u>CCEA: Council Documents</u> .....   | 85 |
| <u>CCEA: Head of Centre Guidance</u> .....                                       | 85 |
| <u>CCEA: Initial Information Request</u> .....                                   | 85 |
| <u>CCEA: Re Hansard</u> .....  | 86 |
| <u>CCEA: ARAC Minutes</u> .....  | 86 |
| <u>CCEA: GSB Highlight Templates</u> .....                                       | 86 |
| <u>CCEA: Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) Correspondence</u> .....        | 86 |
| <u>CCEA: Office of Statistical Regulator (OSR)</u> .....                         | 86 |
| <u>CCEA: Risk</u> .....  | 87 |
| <u>CCEA: Stakeholder Communications</u> .....                                    | 87 |
| <u>CCEA: Timeline Documents</u> .....  | 87 |
| <u>CCEA: Data Science: AlphaPlus Review</u> .....                                | 87 |
| <u>CCEA: Data Science: Research into Rank Order</u> .....                        | 87 |
| <u>CCEA: Data Science: Sample Internal Sign-off</u> .....                        | 88 |
| <u>CCEA: Additional Information Provided 26/27th November</u> .....              | 88 |
| <u>CCEA: Anomalies Communication to Centres</u> .....                            | 88 |
| <u>CCEA: Manual Checks on the Models - Training Materials for Officers</u> ..... | 88 |
| <u>CCEA: Peer Review Group</u> .....   | 88 |
| <u>CCEA: Peer Review Group Feedback</u> .....                                    | 88 |
| <u>CCEA: Regulator Sign-Off Paperwork</u> .....                                  | 88 |
| <u>CCEA: Additional Contingency Documentation 2021</u> .....                     | 89 |
| <u>CCEA – Legislation, Governance and Oversight</u> .....                        | 89 |
| <u>NICCY Documentation</u> .....   | 89 |
| <u>OfQual</u> .....  | 89 |
| <u>Qualification Wales</u> .....   | 89 |
| <u>Scottish Government</u> .....   | 90 |
| <u>Scottish Qualification Authority</u> .....                                    | 90 |
| <u>Department of Education</u> .....   | 90 |
| <u>Department of Education: Communications Documentation</u> .....               | 91 |
| <u>Additional Resources</u> .....  | 92 |



## **CCEA: Assembly Engagements\Hansard Reports**

EDU\_2020 A-level Results (CCEA) 'A review of A / AS level results for summer 2020 by CCEA, presented to DE'

EDU\_Summer2020 Exams (CCEA) 'A review of all the issues that were relevant to arrive at a council view on advice to the Minister'

EDU\_Summer2020examinations(CCEA) ' CCEA presentation on the student, teacher and parent guidance'

FW Committee For Education -14 August 2020 'Hansard information request to CCEA'

FW Committee For Education -21 August 2020 'Hansard information update from CCEA'

RE HANSARD - 3 June 2020 'Request to view Hansard report from CCEA'

## **CCEA: Contingencies 2021**

A future for qualifications in Northern Ireland\_2018.pdf 'Recommendations of the Ministerial Expert Group'

Appendix 1 – CCEA provided – 19<sup>th</sup> November 2020.pdf 'Consideration of external moderation of exams'

Contingencies Approach ' Review of contingency options incl. a view of the lessons learned from the Scotland / Wales approach'

Moderation And Guidance CAG Document DE For External Review, 'Draft guidance for moderation and centre professional judgment approach for 2020-2021 (Option 7)

Other Country Approaches To Examinations, 'Preliminary CCEA research into other market approaches'

Paper CB-9 Oct-01 Contingency Planning 2021, 'Centre Assessment Grades Based Approach For Summer 2021'

Subject Omission A level, no date provided, 'DE request on potential specific content omission from AS /A level papers'

Letter to DE, 19<sup>th</sup> November 2020 'response to DE issues with contingency planning centre professional judgement approach'.

Letter to CCEA from DE, 15<sup>th</sup> November 2020 'Proposals for professional judgement approach'

Option 7 'Centre Professional Judgement', 25<sup>th</sup> November 2020, 'This document sets out a proposed approach to the implementation of Contingencies Option 7 Centre Professional Judgement.

Plan A, B and C, 13<sup>th</sup> November 2020, 'Current status and work to be undertaken around approach to contingencies'

## **CCEA: Correspondence - N.I. Assembly Education Committee**

Comms To CCEA, 24<sup>th</sup> April 2020, 'DE acceptance of revised examination arrangements provided by CCEA'

Comms To CCEA, 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2020, 'DE acceptance of revised examination appeals arrangements'

Comms To CCEA, 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2020, 'Impact Of Covid-19 On Bioscience Education as provided by the Royal Society of Biology'

Comms To Minister, 14<sup>th</sup> August 2020, 'DE expressing grading issues and a failure to resolve anomalies in A/AS results in a timely manner and failure to explain grade awarding to key stakeholders, seeking oral briefing response from CCEA'

Comms –CCEA, 14<sup>th</sup> August 2020'Grading Issues, meeting date agreed'

Comms To CCEA, 18<sup>th</sup> September 2020, 'Standardisation And Modernisation At A level, invite for Chief Executive to attend briefing'

Comms –CCEA, 25<sup>th</sup> September 2020, 'Curriculum And Assessment 2021 Consultation, acknowledgement that models had not been determined at meeting on 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2020'

Comms –CCEA, 25<sup>th</sup> September 2020, 'Broader Contingency Planning Work, clarification letter from DE on contingency planning work timelines'

Compendium Of Approaches Taken and Formulae Used In GCE And GCSE Calculation Of Grades Summer 2020, no date provided, 'proposed grading model document'

Committee for Education correspondence, 15th July 2020, 'Impact of Covid-19 on Bioscience Education'

Committee for Education correspondence, 16th June 2020, 'CCEA provided guidance letter for appeals' Committee for Education correspondence – 16th June 2020 'CCEA provided guidance letter for appeals page 2'

Committee for Education correspondence ,24th July 2020, ' Briefing acceptance letter from CCEA'

Committee for Education correspondence ,29th April 2020, 'update to committee on candidate guidance and appeals'

Committee for Education correspondence, 14th September 2020 'Data Request FINAL, concerns from DE about data impacts and use'

Committee for Education correspondence, –18th August 2020, 'Letter attached to compendium of statistical models sent to committee for education'

Committee for Education correspondence, –, 20th August 2020 'CCEA grade predictions data set request acknowledgement'

Committee for Education correspondence, –20th August 2020, 'Provisional GCSE Results Briefing'

Committee for Education correspondence, –22nd September 2020, 'Data set attachment letter'

Committee for Education correspondence, –23rd March 2020, 'CCEA response to contingency planning response from committee for education'

Committee for Education correspondence, –24th August 2020, 'CCEA letter to announce beginning of awards consultation'

Committee for Education correspondence, –8th October 2020, 'Curriculum And Assessment 2021 Contingency Planning response from CCEA'

Committee for Education correspondence, –8th October 2020 'Pre - 17 August 2020 Grade Awarding Models'

Committee for Education correspondence, , 29<sup>th</sup> September 2020, 'Moderation and standardisation methodology and approach described'

## **CCEA: Council Covid-19 Briefings | Meetings**

Meeting 1st April 2020, 'Options assessment for alternative awarding arrangements'

Meeting 1st July 2020, 'Verbal Covid-19 situation report incl. update on other jurisdictions approach to appeals and awarding 2020'

Meeting 10th June 2020, 'Verbal Covid-19 situation report incl. appeals consultation update and options paper on payment of examiner'

Meeting 13th May 2020, 'Verbal Covid-19 situation report incl. options papers'

Meeting 15th April 2020, 'Verbal Covid-19 situation report incl. contingency updates and range of assessments'

Meeting 15th September 2020, ' Verbal Covid-19 situation report incl. consultation for 2021 and outcomes of summer 2020'

Meeting 16th August 2020, ' Verbal Covid-19 situation report incl. options for GCSE'

Meeting 16th October 2020, ' Verbal Covid-19 situation report incl. regulatory considerations and proposed change studies'

Meeting 17th June 2020, 'Verbal Covid-19 situation report incl. amendments to GCOR'

Meeting 19th March 2020, 'Verbal Covid-19 situation report incl. contingency planning and mitigation'

Meeting 21 July 2020, 'Verbal Covid-19 situation report incl. extraordinary regulatory framework and regulatory conditions'

Meeting 25th August 2020, 'Verbal Covid-19 situation report incl. exam regulatory conditions'

Meeting 27th May 2020, 'Verbal Covid-19 situation report incl. appeals consolation and options on payment of fees for summer 2020'

Meeting 3rd June 2020, 'Verbal Covid-19 situation report incl. decisions report on appeals consultation and learning parents' guide'

Meeting 5th October 2020, 'Verbal Covid-19 situation report incl. compensation payment for examiners'

Meeting 6th May 2020, 'Verbal Covid-19 situation report incl. discussion on education restart group and awarding arrangements update'

Meeting 8th April 2020, 'Verbal Covid-19 situation report incl. update on contingencies and vocational qualification impacts'

Meeting 9th October 2020, 'Verbal Covid-19 situation report incl. contingency planning and centre assessed grades'

## **CCEA: Council Covid-19 Briefings\Meeting 1 April 2020**

CCEA Advice, 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020, 'draft options assessment for alternative awarding arrangements council'

## **CCEA: Council Covid-19 Briefings\Meeting 1 July 2020**

Council Briefing Agenda

## **CCEA: Council Covid-19 Briefings\Meeting 10 June 2020**

Council Briefing Agenda

Council Briefing Minutes

Paper Cb-10june-1 Response To Departmental Letter Requesting Advice – Qualifications Restart.Doc

Paper Cb-10june-2 Options Paper On Payment Of Examiner - Summer 2020.Doc

Presentation To Council, 10<sup>th</sup> June 2020, 'CCEA Approach To Restart'

## **CCEA: Council Covid-19 Briefings\Meeting 13 May 2020**

Council Covid-19 Briefing Agenda

Council Covid-19 Briefing Minutes

Paper 1 - Options Paper On Payment Of Examiners (Markers) Summer 2020.Doc

Paper 2 - Options Paper On Payment Of Invigilators Summer 2020.Doc

## **CCEA: Council Covid-19 Briefings\Meeting 15 April 2020**

Council Minutes

## **CCEA: Council Covid-19 Briefings\Meeting 15 September 2020**

2c - CCEA Consultation On Proposed Changes To Qualifications 2021 FINAL DRAFT REPORT.Doc

C-Sp-1 Maintenance Of Standards.Doc

C-Sp-2 Consultation Outcomes Summer 2020.Doc

C-Sp-2 Appendix 1

C-Sp-2 Appendix 2 Summer 2021 Consultation Updated Proposals - Sept 2020

C-Sp-2b Consultation Research Report.Doc

C-Sp-3 Consideration Of Examination Contingencies 2021.Doc

Council Briefing Agenda

Paper Cb-21july-1 Council Advice 2020-21 GCSE And GCE Qualifications

## **CCEA: Council Covid-19 Briefings\Meeting 16 August 2020**

Council Briefing Minutes

Council Paper, Proposal For Options GCSE.Doc

## **CCEA: Council Covid-19 Briefings\Meeting 16 October 2020**

Council Briefing Agenda

Paper Cb-16 Oct 20 - 01- Regulatory Considerations CCEA AO Proposals For 2021.Doc

Paper Cb-16 Oct-02 - Consultation On Proposed Changes To CCEA EI OCC Studies For Jan And Summer 2021.Doc

Supporting Council Paper - Contingency Arrangements 2021

## **CCEA: Council Covid-19 Briefings\Meeting 17 June 2020**

Council Briefing Agenda

Council Briefing Minutes - 17 June 2020

Paper Cb-17june-1 International Monitoring.Doc

Paper Cb-17june-2 Amendments To GCOR.Doc

Restart - Structures (1)

## **CCEA: Council Covid-19 Briefings\Meeting 19 March 2020**

Council Briefing Examinations Contingency Plan Assessment And Enhanced Mitigations 18th March 2020.Doc

Council Minutes, 19th March 2020.Doc

## **CCEA: Council Covid-19 Briefings\Meeting 21 July 2020**

Council Briefing Agenda ,21st July 2020

Council Briefing Minutes, 21st July 2020

Extraordinary Regulatory Framework (GQ).Doc

Paper CB-21July-1 Council Advice 2020-21 GCSE And GCE Qualifications.Doc

Paper CB-21July-2 Regulatory Conditions For General Qualifications Under Covid-19 Arrangements

## **CCEA: Council Covid-19 Briefings\Meeting 25 August 2020**

Appendix 1 - ICO Letter To N.I. Exam Regulator CCEA 20 August 2020

Council Briefing Minutes 25 August 2020.Doc

Paper Cb-2508-01 Review Of Summer 2020.Doc

## **CCEA: Council Covid-19 Briefings\Meeting 27 May 2020**

Appeals Consultation, 27th May 2020

Council Briefing Minutes, 27th May 2020.Doc

Council Covid-19 Briefing Agenda, 27th May 2020

Paper Cb-27 May- 1 Options On Payment Of Fees Summer 2020.Doc

## **CCEA: Council Covid-19 Briefings\Meeting 3 June 2020**

Council Briefing Minutes, 3rd June 2020.Doc

Council Covid-19 Briefing Agenda,3rd June 2020

Draft Decisions Report On Appeals Consultation, 3rd June 2020.Doc

Letter To J Edwards From F Graham (De) - Commission Of Advice From CCEA For 20 21 Exam Series

Supporting\_Learning\_Parents\_Guide

## **CCEA: Council Covid-19 Briefings\Meeting 5 October 2020**

Appendix 1 Correspondence DE To L Scott - Compensation Payment For Examiners.Doc

Paper CB-05Oct-01 Payment For Examiners.Doc

## **CCEA: Council Covid-19 Briefings\Meeting 6 May 2020**

Council Minutes Covid-19 Update,6th May 2020.Doc

## **CCEA: Council Covid-19 Briefings\Meeting 8 April 2020**

Council Minutes, 8th April 2020.Doc

## **CCEA: Council Covid-19 Briefings\Meeting 9 October 2020**

Council Briefing Agenda, Fri 9th Oct 2020.Doc

Paper CB-9 Oct-01 Contingency Planning 2021- Centre Assessment Grades Based Approach For Summer 2021

## **CCEA: Council Documents**

Council Covid-19 Briefings

## **CCEA: Head of Centre Guidance**

Awarding For GCSE AS And A level Qualifications Summer 2020, no date provided, 'Version 10'

## **CCEA: Initial Information Request**

Council Paper, 16th August 2020, 'Proposal For Options GCSE'

Decisions At A Glance, 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2020, 'Key points from CCEA decisions report following our consultation on an appeals process for CCEA GCSE, AS and A level qualifications in summer 2020'

Decisions Report, 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2020, 'Consultation on an appeals process for Summer 2020 awarding of GCSE, AS and A level qualifications offered by CCEA Awarding Organisation'

EDU\_2020 A-level Results (CCEA), 14<sup>th</sup> August 2020, 'A review of A / AS level results for summer 2020 by CCEA, presented to DE'

EDU\_Summer 2020 Exams (CCEA) 'A review of all the issues that were relevant to arrive at a council view on advice to the Minister'

EDU\_Summer2020examinations(CCEA) ' CCEA presentation on the student, teacher and parent guidance'

Emergency Response - Phase 2 Update, 6<sup>th</sup> April 2020, 'the governance and operational structure to implement phase 2, COVID 19 Emergency Response'

Emergency Response - Phase 3 Complete, 6<sup>th</sup> April 2020, 'This phase requires the final implementation of alternative arrangements to maintain statutory functions or meet the Minister's requirements and consideration of New Normal.'

Emergency Response - Phase 4, 8<sup>th</sup> September 2020, 'This phase requires delivery of 2020-2021 solution until 30 March 2021'

Exemplar Information To Support Requests For Initial Review, 13<sup>th</sup> August 2020, 'This document aims to provide examples of how supporting evidence might be submitted as part of the request for an Initial Review.'

-CCEA Provided Alternative Awarding Arrangements ,6th April 2020, Draft options for assessment'

FW Committee For Education, 19<sup>th</sup> September 2020, 'Amendment request to Hansard report'

Governance Arrangements And Reporting Structure, 25<sup>th</sup> February 2020, 'Mobilisation of governance structure for management of Corona Virus and its impact'

Grounds For An Appeal\_4, updated 25<sup>th</sup> August 2020, 'Communication to centres on appeals process'

IIP Report, 13<sup>th</sup> February 2020, 'Investors in People's Insights assessment report'

Information Regarding Private Candidates And Summer 2020 Awarding Arrangements, no date given, 'A guide to help private candidates and centres to understand options.'

Initial Briefing For Review Team, 28<sup>th</sup> October 2020, 'Contextual briefing on alternative award arrangements'

JCQ provided appeals booklet 2020, no date provided, 'Process of appeals for summer 2020 issued by JCQ'

JCQ Supplementary Appeals Information - June 2020 Series, no date provided, 'additional clarity for centres on candidate consent and grade protection.'

NICCEA - 2020 Standalone Survey – Report, 17<sup>th</sup> July 2020, 'framework review and survey response'

Protect Advice, 16<sup>th</sup> August 2020, 'Council Opinion Regarding GCSE Qualifications'

## **CCEA: Re Hansard**

Student, Teacher And Parent Information, 13<sup>th</sup> August 2020, 'Awarding For GCSE, AS And A level Qualifications Summer 2020'

Student's Guide To The Appeals Process, no date provided, 'comms to Students, parents and teachers'

Updated\_ Version 2 - Head Of Centre Guidance - Awarding For GCSE, AS And A level Qualifications Summer 2020

## **CCEA: ARAC Minutes**

Minutes of meeting 17<sup>th</sup> September 2020

Minutes of meeting 18<sup>th</sup> June 2020

Minutes of meeting 19<sup>th</sup> March 2020

Minutes of meeting 29<sup>th</sup> April 2020

## **CCEA: GSB Highlight Templates**

Gold Silver Bronze Highlight reports for the period March 2020 – November 2020

## **CCEA: Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) Correspondence**

Letter from CCEA (and appendices) to the ICO, 4<sup>th</sup> September 2020, regarding the summer 2020 standardisation process

Letter from the ICO to CCEA, 9<sup>th</sup> October 2020, regarding the 2020 qualification results standardisation process

Letter from ICO to CCEA, 20<sup>th</sup> August 2020 regarding the 2020 qualification results standardisation process

Email from CCEA's legal advisors, 8<sup>th</sup> April 2020, regarding CCEA Head of Centre Advice for Alternative Awarding Arrangements and data protection matters

## **CCEA: Office of Statistical Regulator (OSR)**

Letter (including Appendices) from CCEA to OSR, 13<sup>th</sup> November 2020, regarding OSR review of developing statistical models designed for awarding summer 2020 exam results

Letter from CCEA to OSR, 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2020, regarding OSR review of developing statistical models designed for awarding summer 2020 exam results

Letter from OSR to CCEA, 1<sup>st</sup> October 2020, regarding OSR approach to review of developing statistical models designed for awarding summer 2020 exam results

Email correspondence between CCEA and the OSR, November 2020

## **CCEA: Risk**

CCEA Corporate Risk Register, March 2020

CCEA Corporate Risk Register, July 2020

CCEA Corporate Risk Register, June 2020

CCEA Corporate Risk Register, after ARAC 29<sup>th</sup> April 2020

CCEA Risk Management operational procedure (COS-OP-0029-19)

CCEA draft Corporate Risk Register, April 2020

Examinations Risk Log Summer 2020

Presentation from CCEA to Review Panel regarding Risk Management

CCEA Risk Management Policy, September 2019

## **CCEA: Stakeholder Communications**

Presentation from CCEA to Review Panel (5 November 2020) regarding Summer Awarding 2020

List of communications by CCEA from March 2020 onwards

CCEA Summer Awarding Communications Strategy V3, July 2020

Various communications with the University NI sector

Three communications between CCEA and the NI Commissioner for Children and Young People

## **CCEA: Timeline Documents**

Timeline of Events for the Review Of Alternative Awarding Arrangements

## **CCEA: Data Science: AlphaPlus Review**

Minutes of initial meeting between CCEA and AlphaPlus, 15<sup>th</sup> April 2020

Minutes of meeting between CCEA and AlphaPlus, 14<sup>th</sup> May 2020

Minutes of meeting between CCEA and AlphaPlus, 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2020

CCEA responses to AlphaPlus observations from their review

## **CCEA: Data Science: Research into Rank Order**

Issue 28, Research Matters, Autumn 2019 published by Cambridge Assessment (October 2019)



## **CCEA: Data Science: Sample Internal Sign-off**

A level Z-scores Statistical Project Sign-Off document (REF 1A/1004), May 2020

## **CCEA: Additional Information Provided 26/27th November**

Copy of example of Cags awarded decision making

Digital Technology review documents

Responses to Review Panel questions for CCEA Business Manager (November 2020)

Redacted sample – 'QTS Quirks Log summer 2020'

Example CCEA spreadsheet showing review for a centre with much higher CAG expectations

Response from CCEA (27 November) providing additional Review Panel question responses

Example CCEA spreadsheet showing identification of variances in grades (Economics) and officer review notes from check

Example CCEA spreadsheet showing example centre data checks for 3 subjects

Example 2 of CAGs

## **CCEA: Anomalies Communication to Centres**

Template letter from CCEA to a Head of Centre to communicate candidates appearing to have been placed lower in the rank order than their AS performance would suggest and requesting confirmation of rank order, 12<sup>th</sup> August 2020

Sample record of candidate level checks by CCEA where the grade difference was two or more grades

## **CCEA: Manual Checks on the Models - Training Materials for Officers**

Qualifications Technical Support document: Centre Outcomes Checks Summer 2020, May 2020

Qualifications Technical Support document: Individual Candidates Checks Summer 2020, May 2020

Qualifications Technical Support: Summer 2020 Sign-off, May 2020

## **CCEA: Peer Review Group**

Agenda for meeting of the CCEA Technical Peer Group Meeting 01 (held 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2020)

Minutes and Actions of the CCEA Technical Peer Review Group Meeting 01 held 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2020

Template for Peer Reviewers to record their feedback

## **CCEA: Peer Review Group Feedback**

David Best (UCAS) Feedback  
Alison Matthews (University of Oxford) Feedback  
Jannette Elwood (Queen's University Belfast) Feedback  
Mick Walker (CIEA) Feedback  
Simon Sharp (CIEA) Feedback  
Tom Bramley (Cambridge Assessment) Feedback

## **CCEA: Regulator Sign-Off Paperwork**

A Level Biology 2020

AS English Literature 2020

GCSE Business Studies

## CCEA: Additional Contingency Documentation 2021

A Future for Qualifications in Northern Ireland 2018: Taking forward the recommendations of the Ministerial Expert Group, CCEA 2018 presentation to Review Panel on CCEA contingencies approach for 2020/21 examination series

Letter from DE to CCEA dated 15 November 2020 regarding 'proposals for professional judgement approach'

Letter (including appendix) from CCEA to DE dated 19<sup>th</sup> November 2020 regarding 'contingency planning – centre professional judgement approach'

Information paper from CCEA to DE regarding Implementing Option 7 – Centre Professional Judgement (Draft Guidance) moderation and Guidance CAG document DE for External view Option 7 Centre Professional Judgment implementation

Summary of other country approaches to examinations

Council Briefing Paper CB-9 Oct-01 regarding Contingency Planning 2021 Centre Assessment Grades Based Approach for Summer 2021

CCEA Gold Team paper (13 November 2020) on approach to contingencies

CCEA Advice Paper to DE, no date provided, 'regarding Subject Content Omission in A level / AS qualifications'

## CCEA – Legislation, Governance and Oversight

Relevant Legislation: The Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1998, Part VIII <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisi/1998/1759/part/VIII>

CCEA Management Statement

CCEA Financial Memorandum

## NICCY Documentation

NICCY 2020 Exam Assessment advice paper: <https://www.niccy.org/publications/2020/may/21/ccea-s-appeal-process-for-summer-2020/>

Commissioners' statement re: Summer Cancellation of Exams 2021: <https://www.niccy.org/about-us/news/latest-news/2020/november/10/i-can-see-no-alternative-to-cancelling-summer-2021-exams-says-children-s-commissioner/>

## OfQual

Consultation on the assessment and awarding of Vocational, Technical and other General Qualifications in 2020 to 2021: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/consultation-on-the-assessment-and-awarding-of-vocational-technical-and-other-general-qualifications-in-2020-to-2021>

Requirements and guidance to exam boards in relation to the calculation of results to be issued for general qualifications in summer 2020 : <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/requirements-for-the-calculation-of-results-in-summer-2020>

## Qualification Wales

Resource Link: <https://qualificationswales.org/english/covid-19---results-2020/summer-2020/summer-2020-decisions/>

Arrangements for summer 2020 Exam Series: Executive Summary

Arrangements for summer 2020 Exam Series: Decisions taken following consultation

Arrangements for summer 2020 Exam Series: Findings from the consultation

Private candidate policy statement

Extraordinary Regulatory Framework: General Qualifications – COVID -19 Conditions and Requirements

Exam Procedures Review Service (COVID-19)

Appeals Process Summer 2020

Summer 2020 resource links: <https://qualificationswales.org/english/covid-19---results-2020/summer-2020/>

Results for A level, AS, GCSE and the Skills Challenge Certificate in Wales – Summer 2020 Overview – 4th September 2020 /20th August 2020 /13th August 2020

Awarding general qualifications in summer 2020 13th August 2020

Awarding vocational qualifications in summer 2020 13th August 2020

## Scottish Government

Rapid Review of National Qualifications Experience 2020. University of Stirling. Final Report September 2020

## Scottish Qualification Authority

SQA Opening Statement for Education Skills Committee – 12<sup>th</sup> August 2020 – Fiona Robertson's statement to Parliament.

SQA's 2020 Awarding Methodology Report - [https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/files\\_ccc/SQAAwardingMethodology2020Report.pdf](https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/files_ccc/SQAAwardingMethodology2020Report.pdf)

## Department of Education

Briefing Paper from CCEA to DE, 17<sup>th</sup> March 2020, regarding CCEA's response to COVID-19 – Enhancement of Arrangements

Ministerial Submission from DE regarding Advice on Contingency Arrangements for Summer Exams, 18<sup>th</sup> March 2020

The Corona Virus Act passed by Parliament: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2020/7/contents/enacted>

CCEA Advice Paper to DE, 5<sup>th</sup> April 2020 regarding Draft Options Assessment for Alternative Awarding Arrangements Submission and Ministerial Approval - Advice on Options for Alternative Awarding Arrangements – including minutes of meetings with stakeholders

Note of Meeting - CCEA and /Minister re options for alternative awarding arrangements

Paper from DE to the Minister regarding options for alternative awarding arrangements for GCSE, AS and A level General Qualifications summer 2020, 10<sup>th</sup> April 2020

Note of meeting between DE, CCEA and the Minister, 14<sup>th</sup> April 2020 regarding options for alternative awarding arrangements for summer 2020

Submission from DE to the Minister and his approval regarding determination requiring CCEA to implement decisions in relation to alternative awarding arrangements, 15<sup>th</sup> April 2020

Letter from DE to CCEA providing Direction to implement Ministerial Decisions, 16<sup>th</sup> April 2020

Letter from DE to EA, CCMS and schools with announcement of indemnity for examination centres complying with CCEA guidance, 10<sup>th</sup> June 2020

DE Equality and Human Rights Policy Screening alternative awarding arrangements for summer 2020 examinations, June/August 2020

CCEA Regulation Decisions Report on Consultation on an appeals process for summer 2020 awarding of GCSE, AS and A level qualifications offered by CCEA Awarding Organisation, 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2020

Rural Needs Impact Assessment completed by DE regarding alternative awarding arrangements for summer 2020 examinations, July 2020

Note of meeting between the Minister, DE and CCEA regarding standardisation process, 10<sup>th</sup> August 2020

CCEA presentation regarding the standardisation models given to principals on 11th August 2020

Note of meeting between the Minister, DE and CCEA regarding standardisation models, appeals process and engagement with universities, 13<sup>th</sup> August 2020

Letter from CCEA to the Minister, 16<sup>th</sup> August 2020, providing advice and options regarding the use of CAGs for awarding GCSEs

Submission from DE to the Minister regarding CCEA proposals for alternative approach to awarding GCSEs, 16<sup>th</sup> August 2020

DE document - Comparison of 2019 and 2020 A level and AS outcomes (standardised outcomes only) and comparison with England and Wales

Note of meeting between the Minister, DE and CCEA regarding Minister's decision on options for addressing concerns about AS/A level Awards, 17<sup>th</sup> August 2020

Letter from DE to CCEA with Direction regarding award of grades for GCSE, AS and A levels, 17<sup>th</sup> August 2020

Submission from DE to the Minister, 24<sup>th</sup> August 2020 regarding planning for the examinations process for the next academic year

Submission from DE to the Minister and approval regarding CCEA Consultation Report on proposed changes to GCSE, AS and A level qualifications, 15<sup>th</sup> September 2020

Submission from DE to the Minister regarding further advice from CCEA Council on exams process for 2021 following consultation on proposals, 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2020

Submission from DE to the Minister regarding analysis of further advice from CCEA Council on exams process for 2021 following consultation on proposals, 5<sup>th</sup> October 2020

Submission from DE to the Minister regarding communication with stakeholders – Delivery of GSCE, AS and A level qualifications 2020/21, 8<sup>th</sup> October 2020

## Department of Education: Communications Documentation

DE Website - Minister's Announcement setting out how qualifications will be awarded for GCSEs AS and A-level candidates, 9<sup>th</sup> October 2020: <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/news/changes-examinations-and-qualifications-announced-support-pupil-progress>

Oral Statement to the Assembly on Alternative Awarding Arrangements, updated 16<sup>th</sup> March 2020: <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/education-minister-issues-covid-19-guidance-educational-settings>

CCEA guidance published on website - communications aimed at parents and pupils as well as initial advice to schools, 2020 : <https://ccea.org.uk/students-parents>

Further CCEA technical guidance issued to schools (developed in consultation with school principals), 2020: <https://ccea.org.uk/examiner-centre-support>

DE Website - Minister's Statement to the Ad Hoc Committee of the NI Assembly, 21<sup>st</sup> May 2020: <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/news/statement-education-minister-ad-hoc-committee>

DE website - Minister welcomes CCEA decision on appeals process: 11<sup>th</sup> August 2020: <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/news/weir-welcomes-decision-summer-examinations>

DE Website - Minister congratulating student who received AS/A level results, 13<sup>th</sup> August 2020, <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/news/minister-congratulates-and-level-students-ode> Website - Minister announces CAGs will be used for GCSE awarding, 16<sup>th</sup> August 2020, <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/news/centre-assessed-grades-be-awarded-gcse-northern-ireland> Counter points to misleading A level Claims, 16th August 2020

DE Website – FAQs – GCSE, 17th August 2020, <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/frequently-asked-questions-level-and-results-northern-ireland>

DE Website - FAQs - AS / A levels, 17th August 2020, <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/frequently-asked-questions-level-and-results-northern-ireland>

DE Website - Minister announces changes to AS and levels awarding, 17<sup>th</sup> August 2020, <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/news/changes-and-level-awards-northern-ireland>

Letter from DE to schools, 19<sup>th</sup> August 2020, Minister - letter to schools – awarding arrangements 2020

DE Website - Minister congratulating GCSE Students on results day, 20<sup>th</sup> August 2020: <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/news/weir-congratulates-gcse-students-results-day>

Department of Education - Letter to schools, 26th August 2020, 'Appeals Process'

## Additional Resources

Reinstatement of exam results - 76,000 pupils received downgraded results

Link: <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2020/aug/11/over-100000-scottish-exam-grades-to-be-reinstated-after-row>

England A-level downgrades hit pupils from disadvantaged areas hardest

Link: <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2020/aug/13/england-a-level-downgrades-hit-pupils-from-disadvantaged-areas-hardest>

A-levels: Over a third of NI results lower than estimated grades

Link: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-53757767>

Generating "Centre Assessment Grades": the challenges

Link: <https://framheadteacher.com/2020/04/04/generating-centre-assessment-grades-the-challenges/>

Anger that teachers are taking the blame

Link: [https://www.mumsnet.com/Talk/am\\_i\\_being\\_unreasonable/4001459-Anger-that-teachers-are-taking-the-blame](https://www.mumsnet.com/Talk/am_i_being_unreasonable/4001459-Anger-that-teachers-are-taking-the-blame)

(Teachers) What are centre assessment grades?

Link: <https://support.ocr.org.uk/hc/en-gb/articles/360041426772--Teachers-What-are-centre-assessment-grades->

Scottish Qualifications Authority publishes 2020 Attainment Statistics

Link: <https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/94724.html>

OfQual: Summer 2020 grades for GCSE, AS and A level, Extended Project, Qualification and Advanced Extension Award in maths  
Guidance for teachers, students, parents and carers

Link:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/908368/Summer\\_2020\\_grades\\_for\\_GCSE\\_AS\\_and\\_A\\_level\\_110820.pdfv](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/908368/Summer_2020_grades_for_GCSE_AS_and_A_level_110820.pdfv)

GCSE and A-level exams in Wales cancelled for 2021

Link: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-54482867>

Cancel next summer's school exams, urges children's commissioner

Link: <https://www.irishnews.com/paywall/tsb/irishnews/irishnews//news/educationnews/2020/11/10/news/cancel-next-summer-s-school-exams-urges-children-s-commissioner-2125789/content.html>

wales independent review report by the OU

Link: <https://gov.wales/independent-review-summer-2020-arrangements-award-grades-and-considerations-summer-2021>

Education Ministers high level report on decisions for exams 2020

Link: <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/news/minister-announces-arrangements-summer-examinations>

Oral Statement from Peter Weir MLA Minister of Education on alternative awarding arrangements for summer 2020 examinations (GCSE, AS and A level - 16 April 2020)

Link: <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/oral-statement-alternative-awarding-arrangements-summer-2020-examinations-gcse-and-level-16-april>

# Annex II: Interviewee list

| Name              | Organisation            | Role   |
|-------------------|-------------------------|--|
| Justin Edwards    | CCEA                    | Chief Executive  |
| Trevor Carson     | CCEA                    | Chair  |
| Amanda Swann      | CCEA                    | Business Manager, Qualifications   |
| Esther Martin     | CCEA                    | Business Manager, Curriculum   |
| Michael McAuley   | CCEA                    | Temporary Business Manager, Qualifications   |
| Robin Megarrell   | CCEA                    | Team Leader, Qualifications Technical Support  |
| Leah Scott        | CCEA                    | Director of Finance and Corporate Services   |
| Andrew McAfee     | CCEA                    | Business Manager, Multimedia Learning Resources  |
| John Daly         | CCEA                    | Business Manager   |
| David Wilson      | CCEA                    | Business Manager Risk  |
| Kevin Henderson   | CCEA                    | Senior Standards Manager   |
| Mark Paulin       | CCEA                    | Data Scientist, QTS  |
| Pamela Larmour    | CCEA                    | Research & Statistics Manager  |
| Ruth Hobson       | CCEA                    | Portfolio Manager - MarComms   |
| Faustina Graham   | ETI                     | Chief Inspector of ETI, formerly Director of Curriculum, Qualifications and Standards, DE              |
| Raymond Caldwell  | ETI                     | Director for Curriculum, Qualifications and Standards<br>Independent Education Management Professional |
| Peter Weir        | Department of Education | Education Minister   |
| Suzanne Kingon    | Department of Education | Head of School Improvement, DE   |
| Fiona Hepper      | Department of Education | Deputy Secretary   |
| Joan Cassells     | Department of Education | Head of 14-19 Curriculum Team  |
| Philip Blaker     | Qualification Wales     | Director at QCDA - Qualifications & Curriculum Development Agency                                      |
| Jo Richards       | Qualification Wales     |  |
| Philip Wright     | JCQ                     | Director General   |
| Derek Richardson  | JCQ                     | Board Director   |
| Katherine Shirley | JCQ                     | Board Director   |
| Kevin Phillips    | AQA / JCQ               | Board Director / Responsible officer   |
| Fiona Robertson   | SQA                     | Chief Executive  |
| Maire Thompson    | Principals Group        | Hazelwood Integrated College   |
| Liam Perry        | Principals Group        | ST.Columbanus' College   |

|                    |                  |   |
|--------------------|------------------|---|
| Stephen Black      | Principals Group | Ballymena Academy   |
| Robin McLoughlin   | Principals Group | Banbridge Academy   |
| Dawn Farquhar      | Principals Group | Belfast Boys' Model   |
| Noeleen Tiffney    | Principals Group | St. Catherines's College                                      |
| Una McNulty        | Principals Group | St. Mark's High School  |
| Aiden mc Givern    | Principals Group | St. Mark's High School  |
| Joe McCann         | Principals Group | St. Patrick's Grammar School                                  |
| Nicola Connery     | Principals Group | Strathearn School   |
| Kevin Daly         | INTO             | Secondary School teacher                                      |
| Mark Langhammer    | NEU              | Representative of primary and secondary schools and lecturers |
| Graham Gault       | NAHT             | Teacher and ICT Coordinator                                   |
| Jackie Bartley     | NAHT             | Post primary chair  |
| Darren Northcott   | NOE / NASUWT     |   |
| Simon Mowbray      | NAHT             |   |
| Jacque White       | UTU              | General Secretary   |
| Stephen McCord     | UTU              | Head of Education Policy Committee                            |
| Niamh Devlin       | NICCY            | Senior Education Policy Lead                                  |
| Dame Glenys Stacey | OfQual           | Interim CEO and Chief Regulator                               |
| Trevor Robinson    | ASCL             | President   |
| Amanda McNamee     | ASCL             | Immediate Past President                                      |
| Stephen Moore      | ASCL             | Vice President  |
| Scott Naismith     | ASCL             | Executive member and former President                         |
| Robert Wilson      | ASCL             | Regional Officer  |
| Nisha Bunting      | OSR              | Statistics Regulators within the children's regulator domain  |
| Edward Humpherson  | OSR              | Head of OSR   |



This report has been prepared for the Minister for Education in Northern Ireland, in accordance with the terms of reference set for the review and the findings are based upon information made available to the review panel together with stakeholder interviews conducted within the six weeks of the review.

Deloitte MCS Limited is registered in England and Wales with registered number 03311052 and its registered office at Hill House, 1 Little New Street, London, EC4A 3TR, United Kingdom.

Deloitte MCS Limited is a subsidiary of Deloitte LLP, which is the United Kingdom affiliate of Deloitte NSE LLP, a member firm of Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu Limited, a UK private company limited by guarantee ("DTTL"). DTTL and each of its member firms are legally separate and independent entities. DTTL and Deloitte NSE LLP do not provide services to clients. Please see [www.deloitte.com/about](http://www.deloitte.com/about) to learn more about our global network of member firms.

© 2020 Deloitte MCS Limited. All rights reserved.

**Deloitte.**