

FROM THE OFFICE OF THE MINISTER



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Geoff Barton

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Dear *Geoff*

Thank you for your letter of 20 August on behalf of the Association of School and College Leaders, in which you formally request an independent review on the awarding arrangements for qualifications in 2020, seek an explanation on the decision to award CAGS for Northern Ireland GCSE pupils and also raise concerns about 2021 exam contingency planning.

I am currently receiving a high volume of correspondence and I apologise for the delay in responding to you.

With regards to your request for a review, I can confirm that my Department has commissioned an independent review of the Summer 2020 awarding arrangements, to be undertaken by external consultants. The review should be completed in six weeks.

In relation to your query about my decision to award GCSE grades based on centre assessed grades only, I can confirm that, I took my decisions following consideration of advice from CCEA and having listened to the concerns of school leaders, teachers, parents and young people.

In making my decision I was conscious that, for GCSEs, we do not have system level prior performance data for this group of young people. To be awarded qualifications standardised on the basis of their school's past performance may have caused some young people, particularly those who attend schools in areas of disadvantage, to become disillusioned with education. Rather, I wanted to encourage as many young people as possible to remain in education or training post-16 and to know they have

another opportunity to engage with education and progress to the next level of qualification

In relation to next year's exams, on 9 October, I informed CCEA of my decisions on a range of adaptations and adjustments to CCEA GCSE, AS and A level examinations that are due to be awarded in the 2020/21 academic year. CCEA will now work with centres to provide more information at centre level as quickly as possible.

The changes include a reduction in the number of exams that pupils will be required to take, as well as making a number of adaptations to qualifications to ensure they can be delivered safely and meet the public health requirements.

I am conscious that the public health situation is extremely fluid and that there may be further significant disruption as the year progresses. While it is sensible to plan on the basis of the adaptations published on 9 October, it is also critical to ensure that comprehensive contingency plans are in place. I have, therefore, commissioned CCEA to develop contingency arrangements to deal with a range of potential public health scenarios.

On the 9 October I provided all post primary schools with a letter for parents and students, which would help explain the changes I decided and the way forward. A further letter to Principals, to include an additional letter and factsheet for parents and young people, was issued last week in the hope of providing clear information on arrangements for each year group. Copies of the 9 October letters, factsheet and answers to frequently asked questions are available on the Department's website, at: <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/articles/qualifications>

I trust this provides clarification on the concerns you have raised.



PETER WEIR MLA
Minister of Education