



Parents' Guide to CCEA Examinations



CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	2
--------------	---

THE EXAMINATIONS PROCESS AT A GLANCE	3
--------------------------------------	---

THE EXAMINATIONS PROCESS	4
--------------------------	---

01 Designing and Reviewing Question Papers	4
--	---

02 On the Day of the Examination	5
----------------------------------	---

03 Marking Examinations	5
-------------------------	---

04 Awarding Grades	6
--------------------	---

Raw to Uniform Mark Conversions Explained	6
---	---

05 Results Day	7
----------------	---

Enquiries about Results	8
-------------------------	---

INTRODUCTION

This guide gives parents and guardians information about CCEA's examinations process.

For each subject, students complete a course of study. The subject specification (formerly known as a syllabus) specifies what teachers need to teach. When students are being assessed, we refer to them as candidates.

Candidates sit examinations to test their knowledge, understanding and skills. For some subjects they complete coursework, which is called controlled assessment at GCSE.



See our [subject microsites](#) for specifications, support material and information about coursework.

CCEA is one of five regulated awarding organisations that offer GCSEs and GCEs in Northern Ireland.

The other four are:

- » Assessment and Qualifications Alliance (AQA);
- » Oxford, Cambridge and RSA Examinations (OCR);
- » Edexcel; and
- » Welsh Joint Education Committee (WJEC).

In Northern Ireland, CCEA Regulation regulates qualifications. If your child is sitting examinations from different awarding organisations, CCEA Regulation will have approved the qualification.

CCEA Regulation regulates qualifications in the same way as the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual) in England and Qualifications Wales.

The Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) represents the main awarding organisations. It ensures common standards and gives guidance to schools, colleges and students on examinations.



THE EXAMINATIONS PROCESS AT A GLANCE

THE EXAMINATIONS PROCESS

01

Designing and Reviewing Question Papers

02

On the Day of the Examination

03

Marking Examinations

04

Awarding Grades

05

Results Day / Enquiries about Results



THE EXAMINATIONS PROCESS

01 Designing and Reviewing Question Papers

Examination question papers take about 18 months to write and quality assure. We quality assure question papers from an early stage in the production process to make sure that each question and the question paper as a whole are fit for purpose and will produce appropriate results for candidates.

We contract a team of senior expert examiners to design and develop the question papers and allocate marks. The examiners write the questions and the mark scheme. The mark scheme shows how many marks each question is worth and gives a guide to how many marks examiners should allocate, according to the standard of the answer. The examiners carefully consider:

- » the specification's content and assessment requirements; and
- » previous examination questions and how candidates responded to them.

A member of the team, not involved in the first stage of the process, thoroughly examines the questions and mark scheme to make sure that:

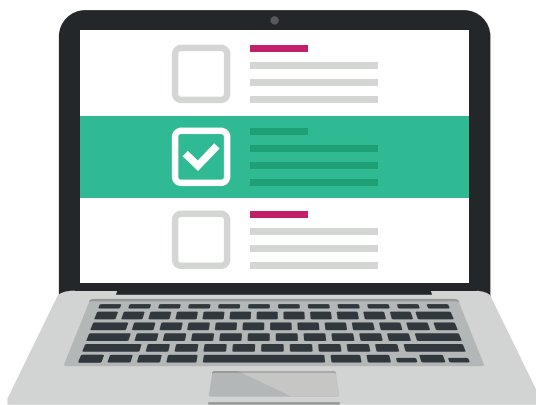
- » they are of a similar standard to previous question papers; and
- » there are no mistakes.

A question paper evaluation committee of senior team members then carefully considers each question to make sure that it is a valid assessment and can be reliably marked.

A different member of the team, not involved in the process so far, checks the question paper to make sure that:

- » candidates can complete the questions in the time allowed;
- » the questions are appropriately challenging; and
- » there are no errors, omissions or ambiguities.

Senior team members quality assure the final version, which an independent question paper setting team further reviews.



02 On the Day of the Examination

Before the examination series, centres (schools and colleges entering candidates for examinations) will have issued rules and regulations to the candidates about their conduct during examinations.

It is very important that candidates follow these rules and regulations. These include:

- » instructions on not bringing mobile phones and other unauthorised materials into the examination room; and
- » appropriate behaviour.

You can find out more about these rules, and what happens if candidates break them, in the JCQ document **Suspected Malpractice in Examinations and Assessments 2017–18**.



**No iPods, mobile phones, MP3/4 players or smart watches.
No potential technological or web-enabled sources of information.**

03 Marking Examinations

Before the marking period starts, examiners meet with senior examiners to compare the mark scheme with the question paper and discuss how they must apply the mark scheme. The senior examiners make sure that the examiners know and understand the mark scheme, and that the marking is consistent with the CCEA standard.

During the marking period, a senior examiner reviews a random sample of marking to make sure that it is appropriate and, where necessary, gives feedback to examiners to advise them on the appropriate standard.

Subject experts mark the examinations. We train these examiners each series to mark to the CCEA standard. If examiners do not mark accurately, they will be instructed to stop marking. A different examiner will then re-mark the papers they have already marked.

CCEA subject officers and the senior examining team discuss each examiner's marking accuracy at a Review of Marking meeting. If examiners have not marked accurately, a different examiner will re-mark their papers. After the Review of Marking meeting, the process of awarding grades starts.



04 Awarding Grades

Some qualifications have a pass grade and the awarding process checks if candidates have reached the required standard to achieve the qualification. Qualifications like GCSEs and GCEs have different grades that indicate how well candidates performed.

We aim to set question papers with the same level of difficulty. However, as the question papers are different each year, there is always a chance that a particular question paper might be a little more or less demanding than last year's paper. To make sure that this does not disadvantage candidates, we set separate grade boundaries for each question paper and for any coursework.

This takes place at an Awarding meeting where CCEA subject officers and senior examiners compare candidate performance from last year with this year's performance. To make a fair comparison with last year, they use statistics to see if this year's candidates are different from last year's candidates.

Awarding organisations also use a comparable outcomes approach. This ensures that, on average, a candidate who achieved a particular grade last year would achieve the same grade again this year for the same qualification. We then apply these grade boundaries and calculate the grade that each candidate has achieved.



Raw to Uniform Mark Conversions Explained

We set and mark assessments in raw marks. For unitised qualifications, we assess candidates in 'chunks' across different examination series.

As the difficulty of these assessments can vary slightly, we might need to adjust the raw mark grade boundaries to compensate for this.

We need to convert the raw mark a candidate achieves to a uniform mark. Using a Uniform Mark Scale ensures that work representing the same level of achievement, produced in different examination series, ends up with the same (uniform) mark to contribute to the final grade.



Example

The example below shows why we need to have both raw marks and uniform marks. It describes two candidates following a unit of study in different years and sitting examinations in different years. This example shows, in broad terms, why we use uniform marks and how they determine overall qualification grades. It does not cover all the technical aspects of using uniform marks.

John and Sarah both studied Government and Politics at AS level. John sits the unit 1 examination in summer 2015. Sarah sits the unit 1 examination in summer 2016. Unit 1 is marked out of 50 raw marks.

When John sits the examination in summer 2015, he scores 42 raw marks out of the possible 50. His answer was **just** within the grade boundary for an A grade answer. When Sarah sits the examination in summer 2016, she scores 40 raw marks out of the possible 50. Her answer was also **just** within the grade boundary for an A grade answer.

John and Sarah's answers are of the same standard but Sarah has scored a lower raw mark than John. This is normal. The raw mark that represents **just** within the grade boundary for an A grade answer can differ from series to series for any unit in any subject. This is because the level of difficulty in a unit of study's examination questions can differ slightly from year to year. In the example above, Sarah's examination was slightly more difficult than John's was, so it was not as easy for her to score raw marks.

Even though this situation is normal, it creates a problem. John and Sarah are taking a unitised AS Government and Politics qualification. This means that they must score as many marks as they can for each unit so their final total marks are as high as possible.

Sarah has fewer marks for unit 1 than John to add to the marks she scored in her other units, even though her answer in unit 1 was the same achievement level as John's. This would not be fair, and that is why we use the Uniform Mark Scale.

In the Uniform Mark Scale, the uniform mark that represents the standard **just** within the grade boundary for an A grade answer will always be same. In our example, John and Sarah will have received the same uniform mark even though their raw marks were different.

05 Results Day

On results day, candidates receive a Provisional Statement of Results that shows the examination and assessment units they have taken and the marks they have scored in each unit. If they have completely finished and requested a certificate, they will see the grade they achieved in each subject.



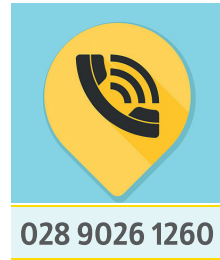
Our Results Online service is currently available for the summer series for GCE AS and A2 candidates if their centres have signed up for the service. We provide centres with the registration details every March.



Enquiries about Results

On results day, a candidate might feel that their results are lower than they expected. If this happens, centres should use our Post-Results service.

This service deals with requests for clerical checks and marking reviews. We will only accept applications from centres on behalf of candidates, so parents should contact their child's centre to arrange this.



When carrying out a clerical check, CCEA staff will go through the question paper to make sure that the examiner has:

- » included all marks and added them up correctly; and
- » awarded the candidate the correct mark as indicated on the question paper.

When carrying out a marking review, a different examiner will consider the marks the original examiner awarded to make sure that they accurately applied the mark scheme.

If the clerical check or marking review leads to a change of mark and/or grade, we will implement the changes and send the updated result to the centre. Remember that these services can result in marks going up or down.

We strive to meet and exceed our stakeholders' expectations and needs through a continuous improvement process that involves all our staff. We do this by continually reviewing our stakeholders' feedback.

For more information, please see our [website](#).



© CCEA 2018

COUNCIL FOR THE CURRICULUM, EXAMINATIONS AND ASSESSMENT

29 Clarendon Road, Clarendon Dock, Belfast BT1 3BG
Tel: +44(0)28 9026 1200 Fax: +44(0)28 9026 1234
Email: info@ccea.org.uk Web: www.ccea.org.uk

