

**DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**

**EQUALITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS POLICY SCREENING**

**FOR**

**THE FUTURE OF CCEA GCSEs, AS LEVELS AND A LEVELS**

Qualifications Reform Team

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## Equality Screening: Revision of CCEA GCSEs, AS levels and A levels

### Index

	Page No
<b>PART ONE - INTRODUCTION</b>	
Background	2
Evidence	5
Needs, experiences and priorities	8
<b>PART TWO - SCREENING QUESTIONS</b>	
Likely impact	9
Opportunities to better promote equality of opportunity	11
Likely impact on good relations	12
Multiple identities	13
<b>PART THREE - DECISION</b>	
Screening Decision	14
Mitigation	15
<b>PART FOUR- MONITORING</b>	16
<b>PART FIVE - DISABILITY DISCRIMINATION</b>	17
<b>PART SIX - HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES</b>	18
<b>PART SEVEN - RURAL NEEDS</b>	19
<b>PART EIGHT - APPROVAL AND AUTHORISATION</b>	20

## **PART ONE**

### **BACKGROUND**

*The first stage of the screening process involves scoping the policy under consideration. The purpose of policy scoping is to help prepare the background and context and set out the aims and objectives for the policy, being screened. At this stage, scoping the policy will help identify potential constraints as well as opportunities and will help the policy maker work through the screening process on a step by step basis.*

*Public authorities should remember that the Section 75 statutory duties apply to internal policies (relating to people who work for the authority), as well as external policies (relating to those who are, or could be, served by the authority).*

#### **1.1 Title of revised policy**

The Future of CCEA GCSEs, AS levels and A levels

#### **1.2 Type of policy review/revised policy/pilot/project.**

Revised policy

##### **Policy Description**

1.3 There is a pressing need for CCEA to begin a programme of work reviewing and revising their suite of GCSE, AS level and A level specifications in line with the statutory duty to keep its qualifications under review. The TransformED strategy has committed to a full review of all of CCEA's Key Stage 4 and post-16 qualifications.

A pre-requisite to progressing the work of specification review is confirmation of whether there are to be any changes to the current qualifications' policy framework (Annex A). We are therefore consulting for views on the proposed policy changes to the current qualifications policy framework for GCSE and GCE qualifications. Following consideration of consultation views, the policy framework will be finalised and will be used as the basis for the development of a detailed regulatory framework that will set the parameters for CCEA's review and revision of GCSE and GCE specifications.

## Equality Screening: Revision of CCEA GCSEs, AS levels and A levels

This change will apply to the NI education sector as a whole. **It is not anticipated that any Section 75 categories might be expected to benefit (or be impacted) from the policy.**

### 1.4 What factors could contribute to, or detract from the policy review?

The views of stakeholders, especially teachers, school leaders and pupils.

### 1.5 Main stakeholders affected

- School pupils, in particular Years 11 to 14.
- The education workforce (including teachers; college lecturers, tutors)
- Managing Authorities (including Education Authority; Council for Catholic Maintained Schools)
- Boards of Governors
- Controlled Schools Support Council
- Catholic Schools Trustee Service
- NI Council for Integrated Education
- Governing Bodies Association
- Transferor Representatives Council
- Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta
- Trade Unions or Professional Organisations
- Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI)
- Departmental Staff

### 1.6 Who is responsible for?

#### (a) Devising the revised policy

The Department (DE) will be responsible for devising the revised policy.

#### (b) Implementing it

DE, in collaboration with CCEA Awarding Organisation and CCEA Regulation will be responsible for delivering the actions and outcomes of the policy framework. There is a legal duty on CCEA to keep its

## Equality Screening: Revision of CCEA GCSEs, AS levels and A levels

qualifications under regular review. CCEA Regulation will lead on the operational delivery of the policy framework. This will require them to create a regulatory framework, based upon the policy framework, that will then be used to revise CCEA GCSEs, AS levels and A levels.

(c) Explain the relationship?

DE is responsible for setting the strategic policy direction in respect of qualifications that are offered and delivered in schools in Northern Ireland. As an Arm's Length Body (ALB), CCEA is responsible for delivering the operational aspects of the policy.

### 1.7 Other policies or objectives with a bearing on this revised policy

- *TransformED NI*: Transforming Teaching and Learning: A Strategy for Educational Excellence in Northern Ireland. This will involve a review of the qualifications landscape to ensure the availability of high-quality qualifications that are up to date, portable and fit for purpose to support progression to a higher level of learning, training, or into employment.
  
- *What Matters Most*; the *Children and Young People's Strategy 2020-2030*; '*A Fair Start*' Expert Panel Report; and *New Decade, New Approach*. The 14-19 Framework

## **EVIDENCE**

- 1.8 What evidence/information (both qualitative and quantitative) have you gathered to inform this revised policy in respect of each of the categories?

In formulating the proposed policy framework, officials have gathered and analysed various academic and other reports relevant to assessment and qualifications design. There was also extensive pre-engagement with school leaders on this issue through a series of meetings with each Area Learning Community (ALC) between February and June 2025. This enabled officials to hear first-hand the issues and concerns of school leaders and test ideas (some of which were identified through the academic and technical reports) for making changes to CCEA's qualifications. It is intended that the revised policy will apply equally and uniformly throughout the post primary education sector to schools offering CCEA GCSEs, AS levels and A levels.

### **Religious Belief**

In the 2021 Northern Ireland Census 43% of responders stated they were brought up as Protestant and 46% as Catholic. It is envisaged that the proposed policy framework will not adversely impact any specific religious groups.

### **Political Opinion**

N/A - Religious belief tends to be used as a proxy for political opinion

### **Racial Group**

A review of the 2021 Census has reported 8.1% of Northern Ireland's population belong to ethnic minority groups (reflecting a wider definition to include ethnic group, national identity and religion).

### **Age**

The 2021 Northern Ireland Census stated the following in relation to the ages of the population:

## **Equality Screening:** Revision of CCEA GCSEs, AS levels and A levels

0-14 years 19%  
15-39 years 31%  
40-64 years 32%  
65+ years 17%

### **Marital Status**

In the 2021 Census 38.7% of responders were single, 45.59% were married, 0.18% in a civil partnership, 3.78% separated but still legally married or in a civil partnership, 6.02% divorced and 6.36% widowed.

The marital status of students taking GCSEs, AS levels and A levels is not applicable.

### **Sexual Orientation**

In the 2021 Census 90.04% of responders were heterosexual, 1.17% gay or lesbian, 0.75% Bi-sexual and 0.17% classed as other sexual orientation.

### **Men And Women Generally**

The 2021 Census reported 967,043 Females and 936,132 Males which represents 50.81% female and 49.19% Male.

### **Disability**

The 2021 Census reported that 34.7% of people in Northern Ireland had one or more long-term health condition (659,800 people).

### **Dependants**

In 2021 Census, 30.67% of households in Northern Ireland contained dependent children.

## **NEEDS, EXPERIENCES AND PRIORITIES**

1.9 Taking into account the evidence gathered at 1.8 what are the needs, experiences and priorities of each category in relation to this particular policy/policy review/revised policy/pilot/project/decision?

### **Religious Belief**

None in relation to this policy.

### **Political Opinion**

None in relation to this policy.

### **Racial Group**

None in relation to this policy.

### **Age**

None in relation to this policy.

### **Marital Status**

None in relation to this policy.

### **Sexual Orientation**

None in relation to this policy.

### **Men And Women Generally**

None in relation to this policy.

### **Disability**

None in relation to this policy.

### **Dependants**

None in relation to this policy.

## **PART TWO – SCREENING QUESTIONS**

### **LIKELY IMPACT**

2.1 What is the likely impact of this revised policy on equality of opportunity for each of the Section 75 equality categories?

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Religious belief:**

What is the level of impact? None

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Political Opinion:**

What is the level of impact? None

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Racial Group:**

What is the level of impact? None

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Age:**

What is the level of impact? None

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Marital Status:**

What is the level of impact? None

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Sexual Orientation:**

What is the level of impact? None

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Men and Women:**

What is the level of impact? None

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Disability:**

**Equality Screening:** Revision of CCEA GCSEs, AS levels and A levels

What is the level of impact? None

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Dependants:**

What is the level of impact? None

**Equality Screening:** Revision of CCEA GCSEs, AS levels and A levels

## **OPPORTUNITIES TO BETTER PROMOTE EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY**

2.2 Are there opportunities to better promote equality of opportunity for people within the Section 75 equality categories?

**Religious Belief – No**

**Political Opinion - No**

**Racial Group - No**

**Age - No**

**Marital Status - No**

**Sexual Orientation - No**

**Men and Women generally - No**

**Disability - No**

**Dependants - No**

## **LIKELY IMPACT ON GOOD RELATIONS**

2.3 To what extent is the policy/policy review/revised policy/pilot/project likely to impact on good relations between people of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group?

Please provide details of the likely policy impact and determine the level of impact for each of the categories below i.e. either minor, major or none.

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Religious belief**:

What is the level of impact? None

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Political Opinion**:

What is the level of impact? None

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Racial Group**:

What is the level of impact? None

2.4 Are there opportunities to better promote good relations between people of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group?

Detail opportunities of how this policy could better promote good relations for people within each of the Section 75 Categories below:

**Religious Belief** - No

**Political Opinion** - No

**Racial Group** - No

## **MULTIPLE IDENTITIES**

2.5 Please provide details of data on the impact of the policy/policy review/revised policy/pilot/project on people with multiple identities and specify relevant Section 75 categories concerned.

*Generally speaking, people can fall into more than one Section 75 category. Taking this into consideration, are there any potential impacts of the policy/decision on people with multiple identities?*

*(For example; disabled minority ethnic people; disabled women; young Protestant men; and young lesbians, gay and bisexual people).*

There are likely to be no negative differential impacts as a result of this policy.

## **PART THREE**

### **SCREENING DECISION**

3.1 Please select as appropriate and provide details and reasons:

The decision is **not** to conduct an equality impact assessment.

**MITIGATION**

3.2 Can the policy/decision be amended or changed or an alternative policy introduced to better promote equality of opportunity and/or good relations?

No

**Equality Screening:** Revision of CCEA GCSEs, AS levels and A levels

## **PART FOUR**

### **MONITORING**

Please detail what data you will collect in the future in order to monitor the effect of the revised policy on any of Section 75 equality categories:

The Department's Qualifications Reform Team, in collaboration with ETI and managing authorities, will monitor the effectiveness of the revised policy.

**Qualifications Reform Team** shall take account of the Equality Commission's Monitoring Guidance when conducting this analysis.

## **PART FIVE**

### **DISABILITY DISCRIMINATION**

- 5.1 Will the revised policy in any way discourage persons with disabilities from participating in public life or fail to promote positive attitudes towards persons with disabilities?

No

- 5.2 Is there an opportunity to better promote positive attitudes towards persons with disabilities or encourage participation in public life by making changes to the revised policy or introducing additional measures?

No

- 5.3 Please detail what data you will collect in the future in order to monitor the effect of the policy/policy review/revised policy/pilot/project with reference to the disability duties.

No data will be collected.

## **PART SIX**

### **HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES**

6.1 Does the revised policy affect anyone's Human Rights?

Particularly consider:

- [The Human Rights Act \(1998\)](#)
- [The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child](#)
- [The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#)
- [The United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women \(CEDAW\)](#)

No

6.2 If you have identified a negative impact; what Human Right is impacted, what is the nature of the impact and who is affected and how?

N/A

At this stage you should determine whether to seek legal advice and to refer the issue to the Equality Unit to consider:

- whether there is a law which allows you to interfere with or restrict rights;
- whether this interference or restriction is necessary and proportionate; and
- what action would be required to reduce the level of interference restriction).

N/A

9.3 Outline any actions which could be taken to promote or raise awareness of human rights or to ensure compliance with the legislation in relation to the policy/policy review/revised policy/pilot/project .

N/A

**Equality Screening:** Revision of CCEA GCSEs, AS levels and A levels

## **PART SEVEN**

### **RURAL NEEDS**

The undertaking of a [Rural Needs Impact Assessment \(RNIA\)](#) is an integral part of the development, adoption, implementation or review of a policy, strategy or plan or the design or delivery of a public service.

Will a separate RNIA be completed?

No

Reason for non-completion:

The review and revision of CCEA GCSEs, AS levels and A levels should not have greater relevance nor more of a potential impact for people in Rural Areas. CCEA qualifications are offered across all Area Learning Communities (ALCs) in Northern Ireland.

Completed RNIA's are published on the Department's Internet site and shown under [Rural Needs Impact Assessments](#).

**Equality Screening:** Revision of CCEA GCSEs, AS levels and A levels

## **PART EIGHT**

### **APPROVAL AND AUTHORISATION**

#### FOR COMPLETION BY POLICY TEAM

Screened by: Jonathan Cockerill      Grade 7      Date 03/09/25

Approved by: Karen McCullough      Grade 5      Date 16/09/25

Cleared by G3: Suzanne Kingon      Grade 3      Date: 16/09/25

#### **Notes:**

The screening form must be approved and ‘signed off’ by a senior manager responsible for the policy.

The screening form must also be cleared at Grade 3 level.

The TRIM version of the completed Screening Form must be sent to the Equality Team (DE.Equality@education-ni.gov.uk) for quality assurance

#### FOR COMPLETION BY EQUALITY TEAM

Screening Decision – Agreed, EQIA and RNIA not needed.

Quality Assured by:                      B Lavery      Date **25/9/25**

Team Informed:                              Date 25/9/25

#### RECORDING AND PUBLISHING BY POLICY TEAM

You must store this completed screening form on Content Manager and finalise it. Use the record naming convention “Completed Screening form of Revision of CCEA GCSE’s, AS Levels and A Levels”

Content Manager Ref No:                      ED1/25/151267

Placed on Internet by policy team      Date: 18/09/25

**Equality Screening:** Revision of CCEA GCSEs, AS levels and A levels

As soon as possible, following quality assurance, you must publish a copy of the screening form in Microsoft Word (or other Open Document Format) on the Department's website: <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications> with a link on the "Policy Screening" page: <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/de-equality-screenings>

## **Current Policy Framework**

The current broad policy framework for GCSEs, AS levels and A levels in Northern Ireland is as follows:

1. **Curriculum Alignment:** Qualifications must support Northern Ireland's statutory curriculum and CCEA should provide a broad, balanced and economically relevant range of courses with clear progression pathways.
2. **Open Market Access:** Schools may use qualifications from awarding bodies other than CCEA (e.g. those based in England and Wales), provided they meet Northern Ireland's policy requirements.
3. **Standards and Comparability:** CCEA qualifications must be equivalent in standard to similar qualifications in England and Wales.
4. **Modular Format:** Most CCEA qualifications are modular, allowing exams taken across the course of study to count toward final grades.
5. **Resits:** Learners may re-sit each module until the qualification is awarded. Resits are usually taken at the next available opportunity.
6. **Grading:** GCSEs must use either a nine-point alphabetic scale (A\*-G) or the numeric scale (9-1, used in England).
7. **AS/A level Structure:** AS levels contribute 40% to the full A level and can also be awarded as a standalone qualification.

## **Equality Screening:** Revision of CCEA GCSEs, AS levels and A levels

### **8. Specific Assessment Requirements:**

- GCSE English Language must include a speaking and listening assessment component.
- A level sciences must include practical assessments as part of the overall grade.
- Modern languages must assess speaking and listening.
- Non-exam assessments are permitted: Typically, controlled assessments at GCSE and coursework A level.
- Practical assessments may be internally assessed, externally moderated, or examined, depending on the subject.