

## **Announcement from Economy Minister on Vocational Qualifications and Response from College Principals – 23 April 2020**

Economy Minister Diane Dodds has announced how vocational qualifications will be awarded to learners in Northern Ireland and stressed that the majority should be awarded by the end of August.

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The Minister has requested that CCEA Regulation works closely with awarding organisations to implement the new arrangements as a matter of urgency.

Minister Dodds said: **“After considering a wide range of evidence and advice, I have now notified CCEA Regulation on how I expect vocational qualifications and Essential Skills qualifications to be assessed and awarded for summer 2020.**

**“It is my intention that, where possible, the majority of vocational qualifications used for progression will be awarded by the end of August, in line with published results dates, so that learners can progress to their chosen pathway.**

**“The postponement of assessments leading to a delay to results beyond this summer must be a last resort.”**

Qualifications used for progression to further study such as BTEC Nationals, Cambridge Technicals and a range of other level 2 and 3 qualifications, will be treated in the same way as GCSEs, AS and A Levels, with learners receiving a calculated result for summer 2020.

Calculated results will be based in part on teacher, trainer or tutor judgements of their learners’ attainment, where appropriate, in combination with a range of other evidence and use of statistical methods.

This will also be adopted as the principal approach for Essential Skills qualifications in those cases where learners were due to undertake their assessments during the summer term.

A calculated result will not be suitable for all vocational qualifications, such as those used for occupational competence or licence to practice. Where calculation is not possible, consideration will be given to adapting assessments and/or delivery models where this would not undermine the validity and reliability of the result. Only in cases where this is not possible, should delay be considered.

There are a range of vocational qualifications that do not clearly align with either GCSE/AS/A Levels, or those directly signalling occupational or professional competence. The starting point for these qualifications should be the provision of calculated results for summer 2020. Where this is not possible or appropriate, the provision of adapted assessments should then be considered.

**Minister Dodds said: “I know how unsettling a time this has been for vocational learners, their families and the wide range of learning centres involved in the delivery of vocational qualifications and Essential Skills qualifications.**

**“It remains my priority to ensure that young people and adults taking vocational qualifications to progress to further or higher education or employment are treated fairly and equitably in line with the arrangements already made for GCSEs and AS/A Levels.**

**“Learners will be able to appeal their results. I have also asked CCEA Regulation to develop arrangements to allow learners to retake assessments, where possible and where appropriate, when there is a relaxation of the current social distancing measures.”**

CCEA Regulation will work with Ofqual and Qualifications Wales to ensure there is a consistent approach across England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

**Speaking on behalf of the Further Education Colleges in Northern Ireland, Michael McAlister said:**

“The Further Education Colleges are pleased that there is now an agreed way forward for students undertaking vocational and technical qualifications and essential skills in Northern Ireland.

“Understandably, there has been very real anxiety among our student population about what Covid-19 means for them and their qualifications.

“We welcome the Minister’s direction that calculated results will be used on general vocational and technical qualifications and essential skills and the assurance that all students are treated fairly and equitably in line with arrangements for GCSEs and AS/A Levels. This will allow a significant number of our students to progress to higher and further education and provides them with some certainty so they can plan ahead.

“For other courses where alternative solutions are required we must wait on further guidance from the regulator and we want to assure students that our staff will work with them in the coming weeks so they can be awarded the grades they deserve.”

Michael McAlister is Chief Executive of South West College and is the Chair of the College Principals' Group in Northern Ireland.