

Important information about the package of support for learners ahead of exams

Friday 11 March 2022

This week, there has been much discussion about the revision support we made available ahead of the National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher exams. In this context, we wanted to share with you further information about the ongoing package of support that we are providing for learners. In particular, we wanted to highlight:

- The process we have gone through to get to this point
- The work we are continuing to do.

We apologise for the late timing of this message on a Friday afternoon but felt it was important to provide this update at the earliest opportunity.

The process so far

As you know, to take account of the ongoing disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, we made significant modifications to the assessment of all courses at the beginning of the 2020-21 session. This was to help reduce the volume of assessment and ease the workload of learners, teachers and lecturers.

Depending on the subject, the assessment modifications included:

- removing or reducing elements of an exam and/or coursework
- providing more choice in an assessment
- removing a topic from the exam.

These modifications were developed following a consultation with our wider education community – with responses received from more than 22,000 teachers, lecturers, professional associations, learners, parents and carers.

We carried out a smaller scale engagement at the end of 2020-21, keeping many of the original modifications, and updating others in light of feedback from teachers and lecturers. The modification to course assessment is central to our package of support for learners.

As an additional measure, we also said that if the level of disruption exceeded that experienced last session, we would look to provide additional materials for learners where appropriate to help them with revision as they consolidated their learning in the final weeks before exams. The decision to take this step (known as ‘Scenario 2’) was taken at the start of February.

A key consideration was what additional material could be provided on top of the significant assessment modifications already in place, while maintaining the integrity and credibility of the qualifications. It is for this reason that the revision support we issued this week is tailored to, and hence different for, each course and by level.

Where possible, the additional support materials include providing advanced notice of exam topics or contexts or content that will – or will not – be assessed in this year’s exams. This was possible in 83 courses.

For other courses, where the exams had already been narrowed and we had gone as far as we could go, we have provided study guides to help learners in preparing for exams. This might include useful tips, methods of approaching questions, or common candidate errors identified by experienced markers.

In addition, in a very small number of courses, learners will be allowed to create a short study note that they can take with them into the exam hall.

Our approach to developing these materials has been informed throughout by specialist subject teachers. Learners have also been involved and provided feedback that reassured us that the support was suitable for the intended audience: 'Like the layout and format of the documents – they seem clear and easy to follow'; 'Tells you how you get the marks, which helps if you’re unsure where you get marks'; 'Very clear especially providing examples and extra top tips'.

We are grateful to all who have given their time to support the development process.

Ongoing work

The other parts of this year’s support package for learners include:

- an appeals service, after results have been published. Learners will have free direct access to this service
- an exam exceptional circumstances consideration service, available while exams are taking place. This service will be available for learners should they be unable to attend an exam owing to personal circumstances outwith their control, such as a medical issue, or if they are affected during the exam by a disruption or other exam circumstance, reported by the chief invigilator.

We have listened to feedback about the learner revision support materials since publication. To that end, we are in the process of updating the materials to make it clearer for learners, parents and carers how each course assessment has been modified to date so that there is a clearer picture of the significant support that is available through both the modifications and revision support.

We are also taking the opportunity to make clarifications and minor changes to the content in a small number of the revision support documents covering:

- Higher Biology
- Higher Business Management
- Higher Computing Science
- National 5 Computing Science
- National 5 Economics
- National 5 History (including Gaelic translation)
- Advanced Higher German
- Advanced Higher Graphic Communication

- Higher Graphic Communication
- Higher Latin
- Higher Mathematics (including Gaelic translation)

The materials are being updated on a rolling basis from today and we intend to complete these updates by early next week.

We hope this information is helpful as you support learners in preparing for their exams, and thank you for your ongoing support.