

The New GCSEs - Grades 1 to 9

What we know so far

Answers and inferences concerning some of
the key questions

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What changes have already taken place? A brief summary

- In 2013, an end to modular examinations (taking exams throughout the two year period) towards linear examinations.
- Ofqual have been given the control to instruct examining boards to alter grade boundaries.
- Multiple entries deterred – only a student's first attempt counted.
- Slow removal of coursework/ controlled assessments/ speaking and listening from a number of subjects – more examination-based.
- New, more demanding GCSEs to be rolled out starting in September 2015. GCSEs graded from 1 (lowest) to 9 (highest) rather than A* - G.

When do the new GCSEs begin?

There is a transition between the old GCSEs and the new GCSEs over the next couple of years. The table below gives the planned dates for the changes to the GCSEs.

SUBJECT	NEW GCSE AVAILABLE FOR STUDENTS BEGINNING GCSE COURSE IN:	FIRST EXAMINATIONS:
English	September 2015	July 2017
Maths	September 2015	July 2017
Sciences	September 2016	July 2018
History	September 2016	July 2018
Geography	September 2016	July 2018
Languages	September 2016	July 2018
Some other GCSEs	September 2016	July 2018
Most other GCSEs	September 2017	July 2019

How do the New Grades Equate to the Old Grades?

For the first year at least, broad comparisons can be made. There is an attached sheet containing a table and notes, depicting the broad equivalencies. It is based on this information that was released by OFQUAL and the DfE:

- “Broadly the same proportion of students will achieve a grade 4 and above as currently achieve a grade C and above
- Broadly the same proportion of students will achieve a grade 7 and above as currently achieve an A and above
- For each examination, the top 20 per cent of those who get grade 7 or above will get a grade 9 – the very highest performers
- The bottom of grade 1 will be aligned with the bottom of grade G
- Grade 5 will be positioned in the top third of the marks for a current Grade C and bottom third of the marks for a current Grade B. This will mean it will be of greater demand than the present grade C, and broadly in line with what the best available evidence tells us is the average PISA performance in countries such as Finland, Canada, the Netherlands and Switzerland
- The new maths GCSE will be tiered, with grades 4 and 5 available through both tiers”

OFQUAL/DfE - Retrieved from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/setting-standards-for-new-gcses-in-2017>

Why are the GCSEs Changing?

One reason is to be able to show more differentiation between higher-achieving students: there are now six grades (4-9) where there used to be four (A-C)

It is also an attempt to raise the standard of the benchmark grade. Ministers believe that a C is too easy to get. This is achieved by the new grade 5 becoming the benchmark grade. Only the top third of students who would have achieved a grade C will achieve a grade 5. The other students who achieve a grade 5 will be the bottom third of the students who would have received a grade B.

Ministers believe that this will bring England's exam benchmark up to the standards of the world's leading economies, e.g. China, as gauged by the PISA international survey.

What are the changes to the English GCSE?

- There is no more GCSE English – only GCSE English Language and GCSE English Literature.
- GCSE English Language is compulsory, GCSE English Literature is not.
- Controlled assessments are to be discontinued – 100% examination-based.

GCSE English Language

- Reading: (50%) 'critical reading and comprehension; summary and synthesis; evaluation of a writer's choice of vocabulary, form, and structural choices.'
- There are no longer set texts – students should read a wide-range of texts from 19th, 20th, and 21st Century,
- Writing (50%) 'Producing clear and coherent text: writing for impact.'
- 20% of writing marks are now for range of sentence structures, vocabulary, spelling and grammar.

Dfe, 2013:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/254497/GCSE_English_language.pdf

GCSE English Literature

- Stress upon studying 'classic literature' 'whole texts' and 'in detail.'
- Exam includes unseen texts.
- Exam includes comparison tasks – 25%
- Reading: 'literal and inferential comprehension; critical reading; evaluation of a writer's choice of vocabulary, grammatical and structural features; comparing texts.'
- Writing about Literature: 'writing effectively about literature for a range of purposes. 5% for vocab, sentence structures, spelling and punctuation.'

Dfe, 2013,

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/254498/GCSE_English_literature.pdf

What are the changes to the Maths GCSE?

- There is a focus upon all students mastering the fundamentals of Maths.
- There is a two-tier system. New GCSE grades 4 and 5 available in both tiers.
- The Foundation tier covers GCSE grades 1-5 and Higher tier GCSE grades 4-9.

GCSE Maths

- 5 assessment areas: 1. Number, 2. Algebra, 3. Ratio, Proportion, and Rates of Change, Geometry and Measures, Probability.
- The weighting of these assessment areas varies between the Foundation and the Higher tiers.
- Ministers have recommended increased contact time for the teaching of Mathematics. This has previously been on average 116 hours per year. One extra hour per week would put England closer to countries like China and Australia, and other world leading countries.
- There will be significantly greater coverage of areas such as ratio, proportion, and rates of change.

Dfe, 2013,

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/254441/GCSE_mathematics_subject_content_and_assessment_objectives.pdf