GCSE, AS and A level reforms in England

Updated March 2017
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What is happening, when?
Why and how are GCSEs, AS and A levels changing?

GCSEs and A levels in England are being reformed, to match the best systems in the world and keep pace with universities’ and employers’ demands.

- GCSE content will be more challenging but still suitable for a wide range of abilities
- GCSEs will be graded on a new scale of 9 to 1 rather than A* to G as before, with 9 the highest grade, to distinguish clearly between the reformed and unreformed qualifications
- A levels will allow more time for studying and better prepare students for university
- AS levels will be optional, stand alone qualifications
## When do these reforms affect GCSE students?

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GCSE</td>
<td>English literature, English language and maths only.</td>
<td>English and maths plus… Art and design, biology, chemistry, citizenship studies (and short course), combined science, computer science, dance, drama, food preparation and nutrition, French, geography, German, classical Greek, history, Latin, music, physical education, physics, religious studies (including short course), and Spanish.</td>
<td>2015 and 2016 subjects plus… Ancient history, Arabic, astronomy, Bengali, business, Chinese, classical civilisation, design and technology, economics, electronics, engineering, film studies, geology, Italian, Japanese, media studies, modern Greek, modern Hebrew, Panjabi, PE short course, Polish, psychology, Russian, sociology, statistics, and Urdu.</td>
<td>All previous subjects plus… Gujarati, biblical Hebrew, Persian, Portuguese, and Turkish.</td>
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When do these reforms affect AS and A level students?

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<tr>
<td>AS and A Level</td>
<td>Art and design, biology, business, chemistry, computer science, economics, English language and literature, English literature, history, physics, psychology, and sociology.</td>
<td>2015 subjects plus… Dance, drama and theatre, French, geography, German, classical Greek, Latin, music, physical education, religious studies and Spanish.</td>
<td>2015 and 2016 subjects plus… Accounting, ancient history, Chinese, classical civilisation, design and technology, electronics, environmental science, film studies, further maths, geology, history of art, Italian, law, maths, media studies, music technology, philosophy, politics, Russian, and statistics.</td>
<td>All previous subjects plus… Arabic, Bengali, biblical Hebrew, Gujarati, modern Greek, modern Hebrew, Japanese, Panjabi, Persian, Portuguese Polish, Turkish, and Urdu.</td>
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Reformed GCSEs
Reformed GCSEs

- Content: New and more challenging content
- Structure: All exams at the end of the course
- Assessment: Mainly by examination
  Non-exam assessment only where necessary
- Tiering: Foundation and higher tier permitted
  only in maths, science and modern foreign languages
- Grading: New numbered scale (9 to 1 plus U), 9 is the highest
New GCSE grading structure

In the first year, the same proportion of students will achieve a grade 7 and above as currently get A and above. Achieve a grade 4 and above as currently get C and above. Achieve a grade 1 and above as currently get G and above.
GCSE 9-1 grading – standard pass and strong pass

- A new GCSE grade 4 will be called a **standard pass**. For pupils, a grade 4 standard pass or above marks a similar level of achievement to a current grade C or above.

- Pupils achieving a grade 4 or above in English and maths will not be required to continue studying these subjects post-16.

- A new GCSE grade 5 or above will be called a **strong pass**. For schools, the proportion of pupils achieving a grade 5 or above strong pass in English and maths will be one of the headline performance measures.

- The Government will also publish GCSE performance measures at grade 4 and above. The Government will no longer be reporting on the “good pass” in school performance tables.
What a GCSE certificate **might** look like in 2017

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Drama</td>
<td>B (b)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Language</td>
<td>4 (four)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Spoken Language</td>
<td>Merit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geography</td>
<td>A (a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>6 (six)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physics</td>
<td>D (d)</td>
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</table>
Reformed AS and A levels
Reformed AS level

- **Content**  
  Drawn from the new A level content

- **Demand**  
  Same as current AS qualifications

- **Structure**  
  AS is now a separate qualification with the marks no longer counting towards A level  
  May not be offered in all subjects in your school or college  
  Taught over 1 or 2 years  
  Exams at end of the course

- **Assessment**  
  Mainly by examination  
  Non-exam assessment only where necessary

- **Grading**  
  Remains A to E plus U
Reformed A levels

- **Content**: Changes to better prepare students for university

- **Demand**: Same as current A levels

- **Structure**: All exams at the end of the two-year course
  Marks from the AS do not count towards the A level

- **Assessment**: Mainly by examination
  Non-exam assessment only where necessary

- **Grading**: Remains A* to E plus U
  A separate grade for science practical work
Awarding

- The standards of AS and A levels are not being changed; typically students who would have got Bs previously will get a B in reformed subjects.
- Exam boards will still use predictions (based on GCSE prior attainment) to guide their awards
- Key grade boundaries will be set, as now, using predictions and senior examiner judgement of students' work
- No UMS (uniform mark scale) – decoupling means there is no need for UMS which helped standardise results across units, qualifications and boards in a modular system
Changes to Practical Science
Practical science assessment

GCSE:
- Students do at least 8 practical activities (16 for combined science) covering specific techniques
- Written questions about practical work will make up at least 15% of the total marks for the qualification
- There will be no separate grade for practical skills
- Students studying combined science will receive one of 17 grades from 9-9 (highest) to 1-1 (lowest)

A level:
- More practicals – at least 12 in each science subject
- Written questions about practical work will make up at least 15% of the total marks for the qualification
- Students will need to record their experiments as they do them
- Students’ competence in practicals will be reported separately (‘pass’ or ‘not classified’)
- Practical ‘pass’ for A level science likely to be required by universities – check admissions information
Resits
Will there be an opportunity to resit?

- All legacy AS and A levels will have a resit the year after the last scheduled sitting - students will be able to resit any AS or A2 units (including non-exam assessment).
- A level resits are available to those that have taken the qualification before or who have had reason not to take it as planned.
- To resit legacy GCSE English, English language and maths in summer 2017, students must have been 16 or older on or before 31 August 2016.
- All legacy GCSE science and additional science qualifications (not individual sciences) will have resits no later than summer 2018.
- Exam boards may also offer resits in any other GCSE subject – including biology, chemistry and physics – in the year after the last sitting.
- GCSE resits are available to those that have taken the qualifications previously, had good reason not to take it, or who were 16 or older on 31 August in the year of the last scheduled sitting.
- For reformed GCSEs, students can resit in the following summer or in November for English language and maths.
Will there be an opportunity to resit reformed GCSEs or A levels?

- Students will be able to resit GCSE maths and English language in a November exam series, subject to students being at least 16 on 31 August the preceding year.

- For all other GCSE and all AS and A levels, as now, students will resit by taking the qualification again the following year.
Information About My School / College
Key stage 4 measures

The key stage 4 headline measures encourage a broad and balanced curriculum with a strong emphasis on an academic core:

- New focus on pupil progress – Progress 8 measures pupils’ progress in 8 qualifications. These are:
  - Attainment 8 measures pupils achievements in the same subjects
  - Percentage of pupils achieving a grade 5 or above strong pass in English and maths
  - Percentage of pupils entering the English Baccalaureate (EBacc), and EBacc achievement.
  - English
  - maths
  - Three of: science, computer science, history, geography and languages
  - Any three other approved qualifications
The English Baccalaureate measure

EBacc

- English: One of English literature and English language (where pupils have entered both)
- Maths
- Science: core and additional (unreformed); double award (unreformed); combined science (reformed); or two of biology, chemistry, physics and computer science (where pupils enter any combination of 3 of the single sciences)
- History or geography
- Language – ancient or modern
Post-16 school/college measures

- As for secondary schools, the Department for Education’s new post-16 performance measures place more emphasis on the progress of students.

- There are five headline measures:
  - **Progress** – how well are students progressing?
  - **Attainment** – are they getting good grades?
  - **Retention** – are they dropping out?
  - **English and maths** – for students who did not get a grade 4 or above standard pass in these subjects at GCSE
  - **Destinations** – are they getting university/college places, apprenticeships and jobs?
Reviews of marking and appeals
Reviews of marking and appeals

- If schools and students are dissatisfied with their results they can seek a review of the mark they have received. We expect all marking errors to be found and corrected.
- Exam boards must change a student’s marks when they find a marking or moderation error.
- Their reviewers must be specially trained to undertake reviews and exam boards must monitor their work.
- Exam boards must give reasons for the outcome of a review to schools and colleges if they want to see them.
- If a school or college remains concerned about an outcome following a review, it can appeal to the exam board.
Further Information
Responsibilities for Qualifications

- **Government:**
  - Policy, purposes and priorities
  - Curriculum and subject content
  - Use of qualifications for school/college accountability purposes

- **Ofqual:**
  - Standards
  - Validity
  - Efficiency and value
  - Oversight of the system

- **Exam Boards:**
  - Design and delivery
  - Award qualifications to students