



Changes to GCSEs January 2017

From September 2015, students began to take new reformed GCSEs.

The first new GCSEs, which were first taught in September 2015, were in English language, English literature and maths. New GCSEs in another 17 subjects, including the three sciences, modern languages, geography and history, followed in September 2016.

New GCSEs in a further 14 subjects, including business, design and technology and sociology, will be introduced from September 2017.

What are the key features of the new GCSEs?

The Department for Education (DfE) has made a number of changes to the characteristics of the new GCSEs.

Key features include:

- A new grading scale that uses the numbers 1 – 9 to replace the A* – G scale for identifying levels of performance
- ‘Untiered’ test papers in most subjects, where students will sit the same test papers at the same level regardless of ability. Some subjects, such as maths, will be tiered where untiered papers do not allow lower ability students to demonstrate their knowledge and skills or do not stretch the most able
- Students will be assessed at the end of the course and subject content will not be divided into modules
- Assessment will be made by external exam, except where non-exam assessment is the only way to assess certain skills
- Students will only sit exams in the summer. Students will only be able to resit exams in November for English language and maths if they were at least 16 on the preceding 31 August

How is the new grading scale different?

The new GCSEs will be graded using the numbers 1 – 9, with 9 being the highest and 1 the lowest.

Where performance is below the minimum required to pass a GCSE, students will receive a U.

The new grading scale will be used for the first time at the end of the new GCSE courses in English language, English literature and maths in 2017.

The chart below compares the new GCSE grading structure to the one currently used for the old ‘legacy’ GCSEs. For example, a C sits between a 4 and 5 in the new grading structure:

NEW GCSE GRADING STRUCTURE	CURRENT GCSE GRADING STRUCTURE
9	A*
8	
7	A
6	B
5	
4	C
3	
3	D
2	E
1	F
	G
U	U

Source: New GCSE grading structure, GOV.UK – Ofqual

FAQs

When do assessments for the new GCSEs take place?

- The first assessment of the new GCSE courses that started in September 2015 will be in June 2017.
- The first assessment of the new GCSE courses that started in September 2016 will be in June 2018.
- The first assessment of the new GCSE courses that will start in September 2017 will be in June 2019.

My child is in year 11. Which grading system will be used?

In English language, English literature and maths, your child will be graded using the new 1 – 9 grading structure in 2017.

In subjects other than English language, English literature and maths, your child will be graded using the A* – G grading structure in 2017.

My child is in year 10. Which grading system will be used?

Year 10 pupils will sit their GCSEs in summer 2018. This means that some subjects (including English, maths and sciences) will be graded using the new 1 – 9 scale, while others will be graded using the old A* – G system.

Please contact your child's subject teacher if you have any questions about how a particular subject will be graded.

Are the new GCSEs going to be more challenging?

Yes, the government has explained that one of the main reasons why GCSEs are being reformed is to make them more challenging.

For example, the new English language GCSE will require better reading skills and good written English.

Where to go for more information

Contact the school

If you have any questions about the changes to GCSEs and how this will affect your son/daughter, please speak to their learning coach or subject teacher.

Further information and advice

The government explains its reasons for reforming GCSEs in appendix 4 of the following policy paper:

- **2010 to 2015 government policy: school and college qualifications and curriculum**, GOV.UK – DfE
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/2010-to-2015-government-policy-school-and-college-qualifications-and-curriculum/2010-to-2015-government-policy-school-and-college-qualifications-and-curriculum#appendix-4-gcse-reform>

Ofqual regulates qualifications, examinations and assessments. It provides more information about the changes to GCSEs and the new GCSE grading structure:

- **Grading new GCSEs from 2017**, GOV.UK– Ofqual
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/537147/Postcard_-_Grading_New_GCSEs.pdf
- **Get the facts: GCSE reform**, GOV.UK – Ofqual
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/get-the-facts-gcse-and-a-level-reform/get-the-facts-gcse-reform>

The BBC and the NHS provide advice on supporting your child through exams:

- **Helping your child through exams**, BBC
http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/parents/helping_with_exams/
- **Beat school exam stress**, NHS
<http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/childhealth6-15/Pages/Examstress.aspx>

If you are worried about exam stress, you may find the following information from youth mental health charity YoungMinds helpful:

School work and exam stress, YoungMinds

http://www.youngminds.org.uk/for_parents/worried_about_your_child/schoolwork_exam_stress