



Is your child studying for GCSEs?

If so, or if they will in the future, we want you to be aware that GCSEs in England have changed – this started with English and maths in 2017. The reforms ensure that young people have the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in the 21st Century. The new GCSEs ensure that students leave school better prepared for work or further study. They cover more challenging content and are designed to match standards in high performing education systems elsewhere in the world.

Top facts about the new GCSEs

1. The new GCSEs in England have a 9 to 1 grading scale, to better differentiate between the highest performing students and distinguish clearly between the old and new qualifications.

2. Grade 9 is the highest grade and will be awarded to fewer students than the old A*.

3. The first exams in new GCSEs for English language, English literature and maths were sat in summer 2017. A further 20 new GCSEs were examined for the first time 2018, and in summer 2019 there will be 25 new GCSEs examined for the first time. For GCSEs in a small number of languages new exams will be sat for the first time in 2020, but most students will have all their GCSEs graded 9 to 1 in 2019.

4. The new GCSE grading scale is not directly equivalent to the old A* to G one. However, there are some comparable points between the old grades and the new ones, as the diagram shows:

- The bottom of grade 7 is aligned with the bottom of grade A;
- The bottom of grade 4 is aligned with the bottom of grade C; and
- The bottom of grade 1 is aligned with the bottom of grade G.

5. Although the exams will cover more challenging content, students will not be disadvantaged by being among the first to sit the new GCSEs. The approach used by Ofqual, the qualifications regulator in England, ensures that, all things being equal, broadly the same proportion of students will get grades 1, 4 and 7 and above in the reformed subjects, as would have got G, C or A and above in the old system.

GCSE Grading	
New Grading Structure	Old Grading Structure
9	A*
8	
7	A
6	B
5	
4 Standard Pass →	C
3	D
2	E
1	F
	G
U	U

6. The Department for Education recognises grade 4 and above as a ‘standard pass’ in all subjects. A grade 4 or above marks a similar achievement to the old grade C or above. It is a credible achievement for a young person that should be valued as a passport to future study and employment. A grade 4 is the minimum level that students need to reach in English and/or maths, otherwise they need to continue to study these subjects as part of their post-16 education. This requirement does not apply to other subjects.

7. Employers, universities and colleges will continue to set the GCSE grades they require for entry to employment or further study. We are saying to them that if they previously set grade C as their minimum requirement, then the nearest equivalent is grade 4. The old A* to G grades will remain valid for future employment or study.

Timetable for changes to GCSEs

Between 2017 and 2019, GCSE exam certificates may have a combination of number and letter grades, depending on the mix of subjects taken. By 2020, all exam certificates will contain only numbered grades.

First teaching in 2015, first exams 2017	First teaching in 2016, first exams 2018	First teaching in 2017, first exams 2019	First teaching in 2018, first exams 2020
English language, English literature and maths	English and maths plus... art and design, biology, chemistry, citizenship studies, combined science, computer science, dance, drama, food preparation and nutrition, French, geography, German, classical Greek, history, Latin, music, physical education (including short course), physics, religious studies (including short course) and Spanish	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, Polish, psychology, Russian, sociology, statistics and Urdu	All previous subjects plus... Biblical Hebrew, Gujarati, Persian, Portuguese and Turkish