

All You Need to Know About Changes to GCSEs

In September 2015, a new-style GCSE was introduced in schools across England. Initially, the new qualification was limited to just three subjects: English language, English literature and maths. First exams for the new GCSEs will take place in summer 2017.

Most other GCSE subjects converted to the new syllabus in September 2016, with first exams due to take place in summer 2018. Any remaining subjects will change from September 2017, with all exams taken from summer 2019 onwards following the new format. For a full timetable of changes, see [Ofqual](#).

What's changing?

So, what's different about the new qualifications?

- The updated qualifications will feature some new topics and more demanding content.
- In the past, GCSEs were divided into modules and students were assessed by module. Now, the focus will change to final exams covering the whole two-year syllabus, rather than smaller assessments throughout this period.
- Exams will be the main method of assessment and there'll be far less coursework, except where skills need to be tested in other ways, such as drama, for example.
- The chance to resit exams in November will be available only for English language and maths.
- On the whole, higher- and foundation-tier papers will disappear, with the exception of maths, sciences and modern foreign languages; in these cases, two different exam papers are considered necessary to give students the opportunity to show their knowledge and abilities.

New grading explained

The grading will change from A*-G to 9-1, with 9 being the highest. A wider spread of grades should allow for clearer differentiation between students.

A grade 5 will be considered a 'good pass' by the government but, according to Ofqual: 'the Department for Education does not expect employers, colleges or universities to raise the bar to a grade 5 if a grade 4 would meet their requirements'.

In 2017, the new grading system will be tied to the former grading system so that the same proportion of students will achieve:

- a grade 4 and above as previously achieved a grade C and above
- a grade 7 and above as previously achieved a grade A and above
- a grade 1 and above as previously achieved a grade G and above.

For each exam, the top 20% of those who get grade 7 or above will get a grade 9; a grade reserved for the very highest achievers.

In summer 2017, students will receive a mixture of old style A*-G grades, with English language, English literature and maths graded 9-1. By summer 2019, all exams will be marked 9-1.

What does this mean for the future?

This year, in the main, it looks like universities are asking for a minimum grade 4 in GCSE English language and maths to move on to university degrees. Sixth forms are showing

greater diversity in their entry requirements, with some demanding 5s in English language and maths as a basic requirement to move onto A level study, and others considering applicants with grade 4s.

Students who achieve grade 4 in GCSE English language and maths will not be expected to resit these exams post-16.

What's happening across the rest of the UK?

GCSEs in Wales are also being reformed with the first wave sitting exams from November 2017. These exams will no longer be comparable with GCSEs in England.

In Northern Ireland, change is afoot too, with new GCSEs being introduced from September 2017. The A*-G grading system will remain.

[Video clip: all you need to know about changes to GCSEs](#)

If you want to find out about how A levels have changed, see our article, [A Level Reform](#).

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