

GCSEs 2018

Frequently Asked Questions for Parents/Carers

1. What is the new grading system?

GCSEs are now graded on a new 'reformed' scale of 9 to 1, with 9 the highest grade (rather than A* to G for the 'unreformed' GCSEs), to distinguish clearly between the reformed and unreformed qualifications. The government and Department for Education (DfE) specified that the new GCSE syllabuses will include more challenging and knowledge-based content, with exams only at the end of the course. English and maths were graded 9 to 1 in 2017, and this year the following subjects will have numbered grading: art and design, biology, chemistry, combined science, drama, food preparation and nutrition, geography, history, modern foreign languages (MFL), music, PE, physics, and religious studies (RS). Most others follow in 2019. During this transition, students will receive a mixture of letter and number grades.

2. Why has this new grading system been introduced?

The introduction of the 9-1 system increases the number of higher grades than the previous A*-G system. By using 9-1, there are now six different grades from 4 to 9, rather than four in the old system (A*, A, B, C), which means individual students can be more accurately recognised in terms of their results. The revised scale will also enable employers and others to easily identify which students have taken the new, more challenging GCSEs.

3. How does the new grading system match the old one?

The new grade scale will not be directly equivalent to the existing one. However, to be fair to the students and to give meaning to the new grades, Ofqual has decided there will be some comparable points between the old grades, and the approach to awarding will ensure that, in the first year of a new qualification, broadly the same proportion of pupils will:

- Achieve a grade 7 and above, as currently achieve a grade A and above
- Will achieve a grade 4 and above, as currently achieve a grade C and above
- Will achieve a grade 1 and above, as currently achieve a grade G and above

It is important to realise the new GCSEs have more grades. While it is true to say that the same proportion of candidates will achieve a 4 and above as currently get a C and above, it is not true to say a grade 4 is directly equivalent to a grade C. This is because of the expanded number of grades above a 4. So, a grade 4 represents the bottom two thirds of a grade C, while a grade 5 is equivalent to the top third of a grade C and the bottom third of grade B.

4. I have heard there will be a 'standard' pass and a 'strong pass', what does this mean?

The government will publish schools' results, not just at the 'standard pass' (grade 4 and above), but also at the 'strong pass' (at grade 5 and above) in school performance tables only. The number of pupils achieving a 'strong pass' will be one of the measures by which schools are judged.

5. Will employers and colleges be asking for a 4 or a 5 as part of their entry criteria?

Employers, colleges and universities will continue to decide the level of GCSE grades needed to meet their individual employment or study requirements. The DfE is encouraging employers, colleges and universities to have realistic expectations of pupils who sit the new, tougher GCSEs when setting their entry requirements for work or further study. Employers and colleges will also need to recruit the same number of students as previously, so are likely to set their criteria in terms of the equivalence of C and above, and 4 and above.