

# A brief guide to GCSE changes from September 2015

From September 2015, students began to take the new version of GCSEs in some subjects.

**From September 2015**, the first new GCSEs were taught in English language, English literature and maths.

**From September 2016**, new GCSEs in another 17 subjects were taught, including sciences, modern languages, geography and history.

**From September 2017**, new GCSEs in a further 14 subjects will be taught, including business, design and technology and sociology.

## What do I need to know about the new GCSEs?

The Department for Education (DfE) has made some changes to how GCSEs are run.

Key points include:

- A new grades system, replacing the A\* – G scale with a scale from 1 – 9. This system is not changing all at once, but is being phased in over three years
- For most subjects, you will sit the same exam papers, whatever your ability. Some specific subjects, such as maths, will have separate papers for different abilities, so that the exam paper matches the level students are working at
- There are no more modules to split up a subject. You will take all of your exams in the summer, at the end of your courses
- Almost all subjects will be assessed by exam. There are a few exceptions for certain subject skills which cannot be assessed in an exam
- You can only resit exams in November of year 12 for English language and maths (if you were at least 16 on the preceding 31 August)

## How does the new grading scale work?

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

If a student does not score highly enough to pass a GCSE, they will receive a U.

The new grading scale will be used for the first time at the end of 2017, but only for the new GCSEs in English language, English literature and maths. The rest of the subject grades will still be in the A\* – G scale.

The chart below shows how the letter grades compare to the number grades. For example, a C grade is part way between a 4 and 5 in the new grade system:

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

**GOOD PASS (DfE)**  
5 and above = top of C and above

**AWARDING**  
4 and above = bottom of C and above

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

## FAQs

### ***What are Progress 8 and Attainment 8?***

**Progress 8** is a way for your school to measure the academic progress of a pupil between their results in year 6 and their results in year 11 compared to other pupils with similar results in year 6. This score is expressed as a number.

**Attainment 8** is a pupil's average grade, which is calculated from your eight best subjects. This is also expressed as a number.

Pupils do not receive their attainment 8 score like other grades.

The government uses this information to measure a school's performance overall.

### ***How do the changes affect my grades?***

You may find that some of your grades will be letters, and some will be numbers. This depends on whether the subject has changed to the new grading system yet or not.

The changes do not affect your actual results. You will still receive grades for all subjects.

### ***How do the changes affect my subject choices?***

Some subjects are grouped together for the progress 8 measuring system. For example, science and history are in a different group to art and music.

This does not mean that these subjects are more important, but it does affect how a student's progress 8 score is calculated.

Your school will have its own system for helping you choose the subjects to take.

## Where to go for more information

### **Ask your teachers**

If you have any questions about the changes to GCSEs and how they will affect you, please speak to your form tutor or subject teachers.

### **Further information and advice**

If you are worried about exam stress, you may find the following information helpful:

- **Beat exam stress**, Childline  
This guide from the Childline charity includes do's and don'ts for young people preparing for exams: <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/globalassets/documents/advice-and-info/beat-exam-stress.pdf>
- **14 ways to beat exam stress**, Mind  
Mind, a mental health charity, has a blog on the best exam tips for young people, such as how to get motivated: <http://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/your-stories/14-ways-to-beat-exam-stress/#.WCmnmS2LRhE>
- **Exam stress**, BBC Radio 1  
The BBC has put together advice for how to spot exam stress, and how to manage it: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/1HsY1X8ySjKBMVXPVCbP4qH/exam-stress>