

RSB Policy Briefing:

1. Reformed GCSEs
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3. Grading in the sciences
4. Grade boundaries and proportion of grades in the sciences

Based on

<https://newgcse.campaign.gov.uk/>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/gcse-new-grading-scale-factsheets>

<https://ofqual.blog.gov.uk/2018/03/23/grading-the-new-gcse-science-qualifications/>

<https://ofqual.blog.gov.uk/2018/08/20/gcse-results-day-what-to-expect/>

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1. Reformed GCSEs

From September 2015, GCSE students in England have been studying a mixture of reformed and legacy GCSEs, more demanding GCSEs better preparing students with the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in 21st century Britain, and to match those of their peers in high-performing education systems and elsewhere in the world.

The reformed qualifications have been introduced in phases, with students sitting exams for the new qualifications in English language, English literature and maths in summer 2017. As a result 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 GCSE exam certificates will contain only number grades. On 23rd August 2018 students will receive awards for reformed GCSEs combined science and biology, along with 18 other subjects.

Most GCSEs taken by students at schools in Wales and Northern Ireland will continue to be graded A* to G. [Guidance on key differences AS, A level and GCSE in England, Wales and Northern Ireland](#) have been summarised by Ofqual in conjunction with other regulators.

2. New 9 to 1 grading scale

The new 9 to 1 grading scale aims to better differentiate between the highest performing students and distinguishes clearly between the old and new qualification. Grade 9 is the highest grade and will be awarded to fewer students than the old A*

The old and new GCSE grading scales do not directly compare (see figure 1), however a grade 4 or above marks a similar achievement to the old Grade C or above. This is considered a “standard pass” for all subjects. Grade 5 and above will be considered a “strong pass”, and in English and maths attainment this will be used as the headline school performance measure; a benchmark comparable with higher performing education systems.

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Employers, Colleges and Universities previously setting grade C as an entry requirement should use grade 4 in the reformed qualifications, unless a deliberate decision has been made to raise the entry bar.

The Department for Education have produced a [short video](#) detailing these changes

3. Grading in the sciences

There are two science pathways for students, either a student can take single GCSEs in one or more of biology, chemistry and physics, or they can take a double GCSE in combined sciences.

If a student takes single GCSEs they will receive a single 9 to 1 grade for each subject, as detailed above for other reformed GCSEs.

Students taking combined science qualifications will receive an award worth 2 GCSEs, consisting of two equal or adjacent grades from 9 to 1. There are, therefore, 17 possible grade combinations for combined science (see figure 2).

The double grade recognises that students have covered two GCSEs worth of content and sat similar length exams to two single GCSEs.

The double grade will be based on their overall mark across the three subjects; and good performance in one area will compensate for weaker performance in another. Students will only ever receive a grades that are the same, or adjacent, and the larger number will always appear first. For example, 5-5, or 5-4 but never 5-3 or 4-7.

4. Grade boundaries and proportion of grades in the sciences

As in previous years, Ofqual will use an approach of “comparable outcomes” ensuring that, all things being equal, broadly the same proportion of students will achieve a grade 4 and above as previously achieved a grade C and above in the legacy GCSE single science qualifications. This will be applied at two other points: grade 7 or A and above, and grade 1 or G and above.

For Employers, Colleges and Universities setting entry requirements, it is therefore anticipated that the proportion of students meeting a previous requirement of a C in both science and additional science would translate to a 4-4, or for grade A in both, a 7-7. However, it should be noted that this is dependent on cohorts being similar in all other aspects.

All GCSE students are entered into either a higher or foundation tier paper, targeted at grades 9-9 to 4-4, or 5-5 to 1-1 respectively. The safety net grade 4-3 is awarded to students who fall short of the 4-4 grade in higher tier paper. This allowable grade, is designed to ensure students who were just unable to reach the 4-4 pass standard on a higher tier, are not disadvantaged by an unclassified result when they would have achieved a grade had they taken the foundation tier papers. For this year, Ofqual have also allowed exam boards to award a 3-3.

The RSB will publish a [news story](#) on GCSE results day, including information on grade boundaries.

Important dates

GCSE results day – 23rd August 2018