

New GCSE Reform - A Parent's Guide

As our year 11 students prepare for this year's external GCSEs we felt that it was a timely opportunity to remind parents and carers about the GCSE reforms and the new grading system which comes into play this year in English and Maths.

As you are probably aware the government has introduced radical new changes to the structure and assessment of GCSEs. We are moving away from the familiar system of A*-G grades to a system of grading with numbers 9-1. The new reformed GCSEs have been taught at The Charter School in English language, English literature and maths from September 2015 (current Year 11 students) with the first results using the new grading system being issued in August this year.

In addition to the changes to the structure of GCSEs, the government is also raising a 'good pass' from a C to a new grade 5, where a 5 represents the top third of a C and the bottom third of a B. This is to align the UK with the best education systems in the world.

The main features of the new GCSEs are:

- A new grading scale of 9 to 1 will be used, with 9 being the top grade. This will allow greater differentiation between students and will help distinguish the new GCSEs from previous versions. Please see the table below:
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New grading structure	Current grading structure
9	A*
8	A
7	A
6	B
5	B
4	C
3	D
2	E
1	F
1	G
U	U

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

PASS (4)
4 and above = bottom of C and above

GOOD PASS (5)
5 and above = bottom of C and above

In the first year, the same proportion of students will achieve a grade 7 and above as currently get A and above

achieve a grade 4 and above as currently get C and above

achieve a grade 1 and above as currently get G and above

- Assessment will be mainly by exam, with other types of assessment used only where they are needed to test essential skills
- There will be new, more demanding content, which has been developed by government and the exam boards
- Courses will be designed for two years of study - they will no longer be divided into different modules and students will take all their exams in one period at the end of their course

- Exams can only be split into ‘foundation tier’ and ‘higher tier’ if one exam paper does not give all students the opportunity to show their knowledge and abilities
- Resit opportunities will only be available each November in English language and Maths

	Courses Starting 2015 Exams 2017	Courses Starting 2016 Exams 2018	Courses Starting 2017 Exams 2019
GCSE	English literature, English language and maths only	English and maths plus ... art, biology, chemistry, combined science, computer science, citizenship, drama, French, geography, history, music, PE, RS, Spanish	2015 and 2016 subjects plus ... Design and Technology, Media Studies

Key points

The new 9-1 grading system will mean that it will be clear to employers and colleges or universities whether students have taken the unreformed GCSEs or the reformed, more challenging ones. The new grade scale will not be directly equivalent to the existing one, and in the first year the following points can be made:

- broadly the same proportion of students will achieve a grade 4 and above as currently achieve a grade C and above
- broadly the same proportion of students will achieve a grade 7 and above as currently achieve an A and above
- for each exam, the top 20 per cent of those who get grade 7 or above will get a grade 9 - the very highest performers
- the bottom of grade 1 will be aligned with the bottom of grade G
- Grade 5 will be positioned in the top third of the marks for a current grade C and bottom third of the marks for a current grade B. This will mean it will be of greater demand than the present grade C.
- the new maths GCSE will be tiered, with grades 4 and 5 available through both tiers

What are the changes for each subject – a brief overview

- the English language GCSE will require better reading skills and good written English
- the English literature GCSE will encourage students to read, write and think critically; it will assess students on challenging and substantial whole texts and on shorter unseen texts
- the mathematics GCSE will provide greater coverage of areas such as ratio, proportion and rates of change; it will require all students to master the basics, and will be more challenging for those aiming to achieve top grades
- science GCSEs will cover new content, including the human genome, life cycle analysis and space physics, and they will be more mathematically challenging

- the history GCSE will require students to study more historical periods; it will cover three eras - medieval, early modern and modern - and will concentrate more on British history
- the geography GCSE will require students to use maths and statistics, and will concentrate more on UK geography; it will also require students to carry out at least two pieces of fieldwork
- languages GCSEs will be more demanding and most exam questions in modern languages will be asked in the respective foreign language
- the art and design GCSE will emphasise creativity and drawing; the DfE will remove the concept of 'endorsed' and 'unendorsed' courses and replace it with a series of separate art and design titles
- the computer science GCSE will require students to understand mathematical principles and concepts such as data representation, Boolean logic and different data types; students will also have to understand the components of computer systems, and write and refine programs
- the music GCSE will require students to read and write staff notation, understand chord symbols and analyse unfamiliar music
- the physical education (PE) GCSE will emphasise the use of data to evaluate physical activity; students will be assessed in 3 different activities, including at least one team sport - a list of sports and activities that schools can offer as part of the new GCSEs is available
- the drama GCSE will require students to understand texts and performance in their social, cultural and historical context; students must study at least 1 performance text in depth and at least two extracts
- the food preparation and nutrition GCSE will teach students about the scientific and nutritional properties of ingredients - this knowledge will help them prepare and cook healthy meals
- the religious studies GCSE requires students to study two religions; it also gives them the opportunity to study the philosophy and ethics of religion, including learning about non-religious beliefs

Website links:

Further information on the GCSE reforms can be found at the following DfE websites:

PowerPoint for parents explaining new education reforms for GCSE and A-Levels

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/538640/Qualifications_reform_-_resources_for_teachers_-_slide_pack.pptx

New GCSEs – get the facts

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/get-the-facts-gcse-and-a-level-reform/get-the-facts-gcse-reform>

Grade descriptors for each GCSE subject

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/grade-descriptors-for-gcse-graded-9-to-1>

New Maths GCSE – parents information guide

<http://www.ocr.org.uk/Images/261118-gcse-9-1-maths-parent-learner-guide.pdf>