

**Your qualification**  
**Our regulation**

GCSE, AS and A level reforms in England

We regulate **GCSEs, AS and A levels** in England so that people can have confidence in these qualifications, and rely on the results.

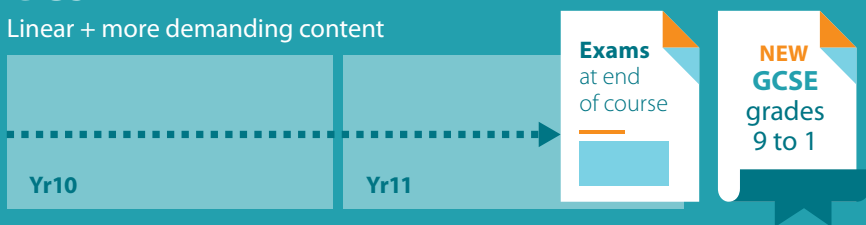
**The postcards in this set are:**

- The reforms
- New GCSE grading structure
- How grades are set
- National Reference Test
- Grade enquiries and appeals
- Improving science practicals
- Spoken language in new GCSE English language
- About Ofqual – who we are and what we do

## The reforms

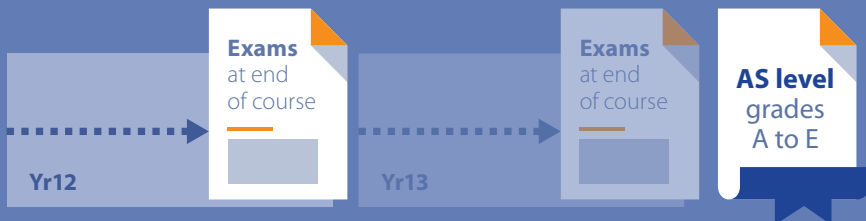
### GCSE

Linear + more demanding content



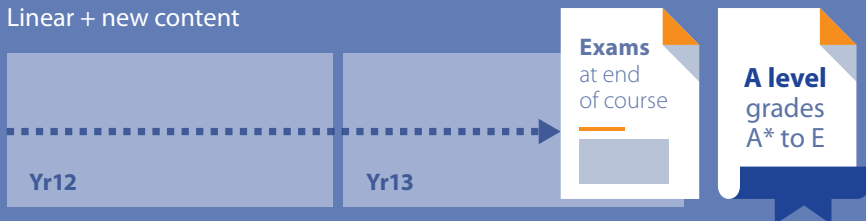
### AS level

No longer count towards an A level + new content



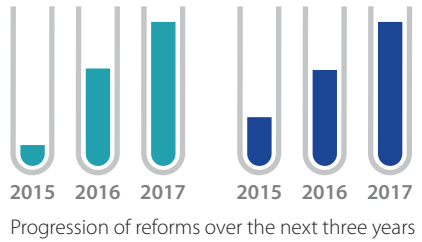
### A level

Linear + new content



## GCSE, AS and A level reforms in England

### The reforms



**GCSE, AS and A level** qualifications are being reformed. **The new subjects are being introduced gradually**, with the first wave being taught from September 2015. Subjects that have not been reformed will no longer be available for teaching from September 2018.

### Reformed GCSEs

- will be more demanding
- have been designed for a two-year period of study
- will be linear, so students will take all of their exams at the end of the course
- non-exam assessment will be removed or reduced in the majority of GCSEs
- will have a new grading scale from 9 to 1

### Reformed AS and A levels

- will have new content with greater input from universities
- will be linear, with AS assessments typically taking place after one year of study and A levels after two
- will keep the A\* to E grading scale (A to E for AS level)
- AS results will no longer count towards an A level
- degree of non-exam assessment will reflect balance and nature of new subject content
- performance standards stay the same

The phased introduction of reformed GCSEs will mean students will receive a mixture of letter and number grades in summer 2017 and summer 2018.

## New GCSE grading structure

New grading structure	Current grading structure
9 8 7	A*
6 5 4	B
3 2 1	C
U	D E F G
U	U

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

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

**Reformed GCSEs will be introduced gradually over three years from September 2015. They will be graded from 9 to 1, instead of A\* to G. Students taking GCSEs over this period will therefore receive a mixture of 9 to 1 and A\* to G grades.**

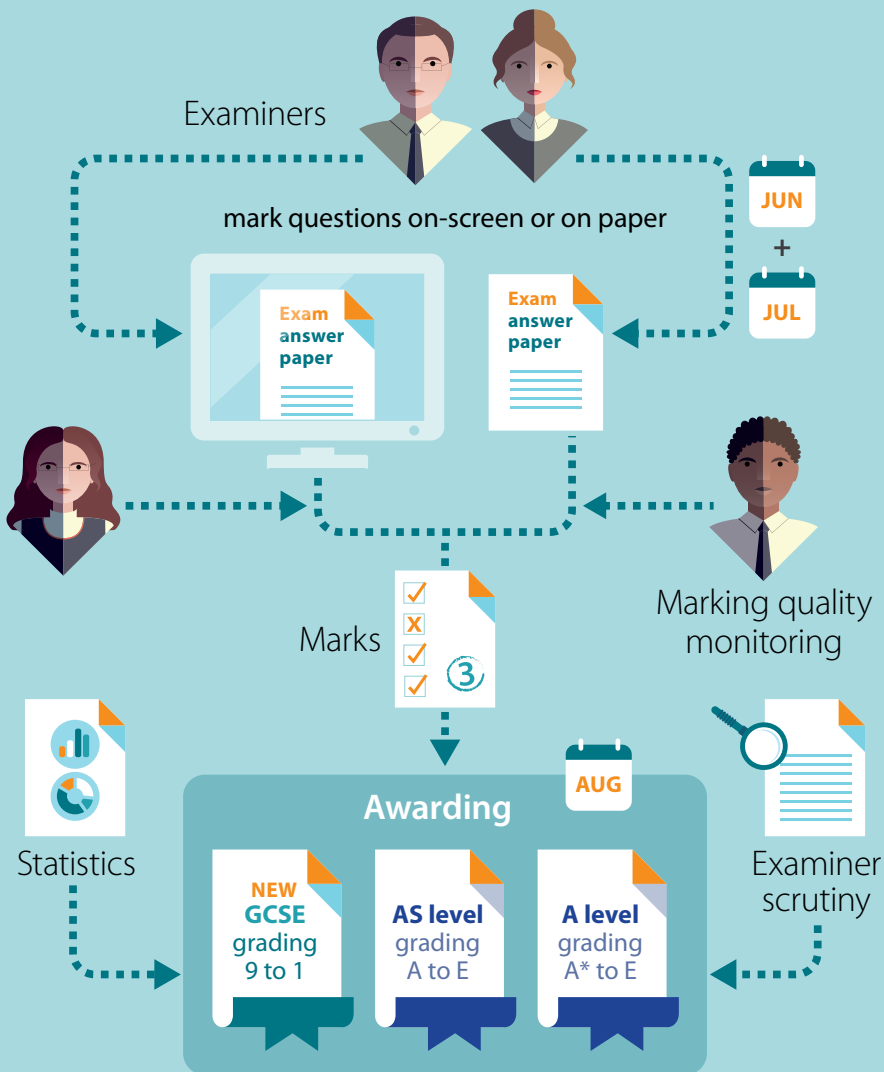


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Students will not lose out as a result of the changes. We will use a statistical method (known as comparable outcomes) in 2017 so that:

- 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 a grade A and above
- the bottom of grade 1 will be aligned with the bottom of grade G
- grade 5 will be awarded to around the top third of students gaining the equivalent of a grade C and bottom third of a grade B. This has been defined as a good pass by the Department for Education.

## How grades are set



## How grades are set

**Ofqual oversees exam boards as they award GCSEs, AS and A levels so as to ensure that standards are comparable and standards are maintained.**

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Exam boards recruit examiners who must attend **compulsory training sessions** to ensure consistency in their approach. After the exam, answer papers are either scanned for examiners to review 'on-screen' or sent directly to them for **marking**. During the marking process, the quality of marking is closely monitored. If an examiner's marking is not up to scratch their work will be given to a different person.

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Once most of the marking is complete, **awarding** committees are convened by exam boards to decide how many marks are needed for each grade on its papers. This is called awarding. **There are well-established approaches that exam boards use to set grade boundaries.**

The exam boards use mark data, statistics and examiner scrutiny to inform awarding to ensure that year-on-year outcomes are comparable at the national level. This means that it should be no easier, or more difficult, to get a particular grade with one board or another and in one year or another.

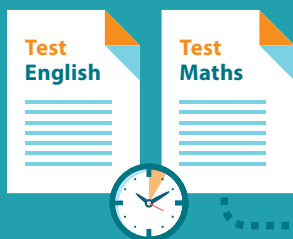


# National Reference Test

Each year from 2017  
300x schools  
in England...



around 30x Year 11s  
selected to take...



1 of 2  
one hour tests

National  
test results



taken into account for

**GCSE  
awarding**



GCSE  
marks



Key Stage 2  
results

**The National Reference Test is being introduced in 2017 to provide additional information to support the awarding of GCSEs. Trials in March 2016 will allow us to check processes ahead of the first live test in 2017.**

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**Annual tests in maths and English** will be taken by a sample of year 11 students in March each year. The test questions will remain largely the same from year to year. We will not be able to provide individual feedback to students and the results won't be used for accountability purposes.

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Each year, around **300 schools in England** will take part in the tests. At each school, around 30 students will take the English paper and around another 30 students will take the maths paper. The tests will take an hour to complete and will be administered and invigilated by the National Foundation for Educational Research.

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We will **publish national test results** towards the end of August each year. Over time, the tests have the potential to provide a valuable additional source of information that may be **taken into account when GCSEs are awarded.**



**Evidence for  
Excellence in  
Education**

## Grade enquiries and appeals



Less than **1%** of all GCSE,  
AS and A level grades are  
changed each year.

## Every year around...



**GCSE**  
scripts marked



**AS and A level**  
scripts marked

**Our research shows that GCSE, AS and A level marking is generally good – but there is always room for improvement.**

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We want to **improve confidence by increasing visibility** of the system. One approach we are considering is the publication of marking metrics to allow comparison of marking quality on a subject-by-subject and board-by-board basis.

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Where schools think that a student has been given the wrong grade they can make an enquiry about their result and appeal that decision. Either could result in a grade change, but might not. If a school is still unhappy with the outcome they can apply to us for a procedure review. We hear only a handful of these annually. **Less than 1% of all GCSE and A level grades are changed each year.**

## Improving science practicals



GCSE



practical  
activities  
(minimum)



for combined  
science



15%  
of total marks  
(written)



A level



practical  
experiments  
(minimum)



15%  
of total marks  
(written)



## We are reforming science GCSEs and A levels. One of the main changes to both qualifications is how we will assess practical work.

- Students do at least 8 practical activities (16 for combined science) covering specific apparatus and techniques
- Written questions about practical work will make up at least 15% of the total marks for the qualification
- There will be no separate grade for practical skills
- Students studying combined science will receive grades from 1-1 to 9-9



**GCSE**

- Students do at least 12 practical experiments per subject
- Students will need to record their experiments as they do them
- Written questions about practical work will make up at least 15% of the total marks for the qualification
- Practical skills will receive a pass or fail grade at the end of the course

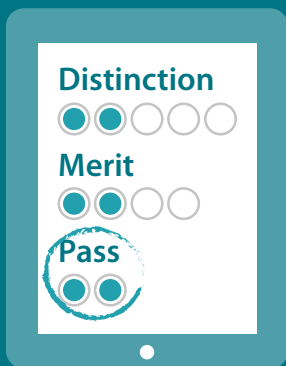


**A level**

### **For both GCSE and A level**

Schools will have to confirm they have taken reasonable steps to make sure that students complete all the defined practical activities. This reflects the critical importance of practicals within the science curriculum.

## Spoken language in new GCSE English language



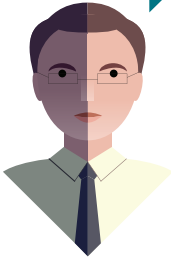
Spoken language performance will be reported as a separate endorsement.

GCSE, AS and A level reforms in England  
**Spoken language in new GCSE English language**

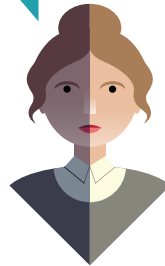
The new GCSE in English language will be first awarded in 2017.

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**Language performance will be reported as a separate endorsement, at the level of either 'pass', 'merit', 'distinction' or 'not classified'. The assessment of speaking skills will not contribute towards a student's 9 to 1 grade.**



**Teachers will assess their students against criteria which are the same across all exam boards. A student must meet all of the criteria within a specific level to be awarded that classification.**



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Schools will have to confirm they have enabled their students to undertake the spoken language assessment. A sample of students from each school will be filmed to allow exam boards to monitor assessment.



About Ofqual

Who we are and what we do

We are **independent** of government and report directly to Parliament and the Northern Ireland Assembly.



**The Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual) was founded in 2010. We regulate GCSEs, AS and A levels in England, and a broad range of other qualifications in England and Northern Ireland. Other regulators exist for the devolved nations of the UK.**



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**We are independent of government** and report directly to Parliament and the Northern Ireland Assembly, although we do work within the context of government policy. Government decides the National Curriculum used by primary and secondary schools, the qualifications that can be offered in schools, and the accountability framework by which schools are evaluated. It also determines the vocational qualifications that can be taught in schools and colleges, and the framework for qualifications used in apprenticeships.

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**GCSEs**



**AS & A levels**



**Vocational qualifications**

**We regulate around 160 awarding organisations** who between them offer more than 20,000 different qualifications. We regulate so that these qualifications are valid and trusted, and so that new GCSEs, AS and A levels and other key qualifications are of the required standard.

**“GCSEs and A levels are being reformed in England. Exam boards are producing new subject specifications which we review to make sure they are of the right standard.**

The changes being made to GCSEs will mean they are more engaging and worthwhile to teach and to study, and that they compare well with similar qualifications internationally. And the changes at A level will ensure they remain a highly respected qualification both domestically and internationally.”

**Glenys Stacey**  
Chief Regulator



Our statutory objectives are set out in the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009. More information on our goals and objectives can be found in our corporate plan.

[www.gov.uk/ofqual](http://www.gov.uk/ofqual)

You can't order further printed copies of this publication, but digital versions are available at

[www.pinterest.com/ofqual/postcards](http://www.pinterest.com/ofqual/postcards)

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