



GCSE Reforms : A summary of what's planned for GCSEs from 2015

GCSEs from 2015

In 2014 the Department for Education (DfE) and Ofqual announced proposed changes to the content and structure of GCSEs taken by students in England. The new GCSEs will be taught in schools from September 2015 and the first examinations will take place in Summer 2017. The information that follows is based on the most recent announcements from the government and Ofqual, issued on 12 September 2014.

What does this mean for you?

Plans have been confirmed for the first new GCSEs to be examined in the following subjects from September 2017:

- English Language
- English Literature
- Mathematics

What will be the key differences in these subjects?

The new exams will be linear. As such there will no longer be any controlled assessment tasks and students will take an external examination at the end of the course. Students will be expected to study more content than in the current GCSEs; they will need to learn more off by heart as they go along and they will undertake an increased number of extended writing tasks.

Mathematics

The new mathematics GCSE will be more substantial and challenging, with greater emphasis on solving problems that require “multistep solutions”. New topics being introduced include ratio and proportions. Students will be expected to learn key mathematical formulae by heart.

English

Students of the new GCSE in English language will be expected to read “a wide range of high quality, challenging texts from 19th, 20th and 21st centuries”; they will not, however, be required to study set texts for this qualification. There will be increased focus on accurate use of spelling, punctuation and grammar. English Literature will focus on high quality, challenging whole texts and there will be a requirement to respond to unseen texts in the examination.

What about other subjects?

New GCSEs in the sciences, geography, history, languages, art and design, citizenship studies, computer science, dance, design and technology, drama, music, physical education and religious studies are scheduled for first teaching in September 2016.

What will the key changes be in these subjects?

Like English and mathematics, the content for these subjects is intended to be more challenging and ambitious, with more rigorous assessment. Key changes are as follows:

- Sciences – introduction of new areas of content and increased mathematical challenge.
- History – a wider range of historical periods and a much stronger emphasis on British history.
- Geography – greater depth in the study of the geography of the UK.

- Modern languages - greater grammatical content, including the requirement for most examination questions to be asked in the target language.

How will students be assessed?

Ofqual have confirmed the following important changes to assessment of the new GCSEs:

- Introduction of a new grading scale, using the numbers 1–9, with 9 being the top grade. Where performance is below the minimum required to be awarded a GCSE level, students will be given a U.
- The use of two tiers of entry will only apply in subjects ‘where untiered papers will not allow students at the lower end of the ability range to demonstrate their knowledge and skills, or will not stretch the most able’. Mathematics will continue to be tiered, with the foundation tier covering grades 1–5 and the higher tier covering grades 4–9.
- All examinations will normally be taken in May and June of the same year.
- The first examinations for the new GCSEs in English and mathematics will be taken in summer 2017.
- The first examinations for the new GCSEs in the sciences, geography, history, languages, art and design, citizenship studies, computer science, dance, design and technology, drama, music, physical education and religious studies will be taken in summer 2018.
- Assessment will be by external exam only, except where non-exam assessment is the only way to provide valid assessment of the skills required.
- Spelling, punctuation and grammar will continue to be assessed within English literature, geography and history, as well as English language.
- For students sitting exams in 2017, the new numbering system will apply for English language, English literature and mathematics. Other GCSEs will still be graded A*-C.
- In 2018, the new 1-9 numbering system will apply to sciences, geography, history, languages, art and design, citizenship studies, computer science, dance, design and technology, drama, music, physical education and religious studies.
- In 2019, all other subjects will follow.

New GCSE English Language

Key content features:

- Greater focus on ensuring that students are able to write clearly and accurately, in good standard English.
- New requirements to use more diverse and challenging writing skills, such as narrating and arguing and to emphasise points of particular importance for different purposes and audiences.
- Requirement for students to read a wider range of high quality, challenging literature and non-fiction texts, drawn from a range of genres and types (from the 19th, 20th and 21st centuries).

Structure and assessment:

- Assessed by external exam only.
- Untiered exam papers only.
- 20% of the marks for the written exams will be allocated for accurate spelling, punctuation and grammar.
- Speaking skills will continue to be assessed but will not contribute to the overall grade. The assessment will be in the form of a formal presentation marked by teachers and reported separately, alongside the qualification grade on the certificate.

New GCSE English Literature

Key content features:

Pupils will be required to study a range of high-quality, intellectually challenging, and substantial texts including: at least one Shakespeare play, one nineteenth-century novel, a selection of poetry since 1789 including representative Romantic poetry, and fiction or drama from the British Isles from 1914 onwards.

Structure and assessment:

- Assessed by external exam only.
- Untiered exam papers only.
- 5% of the marks will be allocated for accurate spelling.

New GCSE Mathematics

Key content features:

- Greater teaching time than the current GCSE.
- Broader and deeper mathematical content, delivered through a single extended GCSE.
- Enhanced content including: number (with explicit reference to formal written methods of calculation) ratio, proportion and rates of change (with reference to simple interest in financial mathematics).
- Additional requirement to provide clear mathematical arguments.
- A greater focus on problem-solving.

Structure and assessment:

- Greater examination time than the current GCSE.
- Assessed by external exam only.
- Tiered exam papers: foundation tier covering grades 1-5; higher tier covering grades 4-9.
- More questions involving solving problems, which may require multi-step solutions.

Should you have any questions please email me

pgibson@brakenhale.co.uk