

GCSE 9 to 1 grades: a brief guide for parents

If you have children in year 11 taking GCSEs this year, many of their results will be reported on the new grade scale which runs from 9 (the highest grade) to 1 (the lowest grade). Here's a brief guide to what that means.

Why do we need a new grade scale for GCSEs?

GCSEs in England have been reformed to keep pace with universities' and employers' demands. They are based on new and more demanding subject content but are still suitable for the same wide range of abilities. The new grade scale makes it clear to everyone that students have studied the new GCSEs. It also has more higher grades compared to the old A* to G grades, to give sixth forms, colleges, universities and employers the opportunity to better distinguish between students of different abilities.

Do all GCSE subjects use the new grade scale?

Not yet. The reform has been phased over a number of years and it will take until summer 2020 for all reformed GCSE subjects to move to the new grade scale. However, most of the subjects taken in large numbers by students will be graded from 9 to 1 this summer:



GCSEs graded 9 to 1 in 2018:

English*, maths*,
biology, chemistry, physics,
combined science,
computer science,
geography, history,
art and design,
French, German, Latin, Spanish,
classical Greek,
dance, drama, music,
food preparation and nutrition,
physical education,
religious studies,
citizenship studies.

*First awarded in 2017

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How do the new grades relate to the old ones?

We have designed the grading so that there are comparable points at key grades. The bottom of a grade 7 is comparable to the bottom of the old grade A, the bottom of a new grade 4 is comparable to the bottom of the old grade C, and the bottom of the new grade 1 is comparable to the bottom of the old grade G. We have been clear to employers, universities and others that if they previously set entry requirements of at least a grade C, then the equivalent now would be to require at least grade 4.

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

Will my child be disadvantaged taking these new exams?

In short, no. We know that it takes a few years for teachers and students to get used to new qualifications. There are fewer past exam papers for students to practice on, fewer teaching resources available, and teachers are not as familiar with the new qualifications as they were with the old ones. We recognise that it would not be fair to penalise students for this, so the exam boards use statistics to help set grade boundaries, so that, for example, a student who would have previously got a grade C or above would be expected to get a grade 4 or above in the new GCSEs. So while the content and assessment have changed, don't worry, we'll make sure that grades are awarded fairly and your child will not be disadvantaged by the changes.

What is combined science?

Students taking science will take one or more separate sciences – biology, chemistry and physics – or combined science. Combined science is really two GCSEs rolled into one qualification. Students will study biology, chemistry and physics but they won't cover as much content as those students sitting separate sciences.

Combined science students will get an award consisting of two equal or adjacent grades from 9 to 1 (eg 9-9, 9-8, 8-8 through to 1-1), and it will count as two GCSEs when students apply for jobs, sixth form, or to university.