



# GCSE REFORM

**Reforming GCSEs: the changing landscape**

**A summary of what's planned for GCSEs  
from 2015**



[ocr.org.uk/gcsereform](http://ocr.org.uk/gcsereform)

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## GCSEs from 2015

Earlier this year the Department for Education (DfE) and Ofqual announced consultations on proposed changes to the content and structure of GCSEs taken by students in England. The new GCSEs would be taught in schools from September 2015 and the first exams would take place in Summer 2017.

These consultations were the result of months of discussion with awarding organisations and other stakeholders after Education Secretary Michael Gove announced his intention to reform GCSEs (but to abandon 'one exam board per subject' EBCs) in February. At about the same time, the draft National Curriculum Programmes of Study for KS4 English, Maths and the sciences were published.

### What does this mean for you?

Based on the most recent announcements from the Government and Ofqual on 1 November 2013, here is a summary of current proposals for the new GCSEs.

### Subjects

Current plans are now confirmed for new GCSEs for first teaching in September 2015 in:

- English Language
- English Literature
- Maths

New GCSEs in the sciences, History and Geography, as well as languages, are now scheduled for first teaching in September 2016.

#### GCSE changes from 2012 onwards

There have already been a number of changes for GCSEs implemented from September 2012 onwards, including a change to assessments, which are now required to take place at the end of the course – limiting re-sit opportunities, and the introduction of marks for spelling, punctuation and grammar (SPaG) in some subjects.

Ofqual also requested all awarding bodies to strengthen some GCSE subjects, including Geography, History and English Literature.

You can find out more about these changes to GCSEs for first teaching from September 2012 and September 2013 and how they affect you at [ocr.org.uk/gcse2012](http://ocr.org.uk/gcse2012)

### Changes to assessment

Key structural features of the new GCSEs confirmed by Ofqual include:

- A new grading scale that uses the numbers 1–9 to identify levels of performance (with 9 being the top level). Where performance is below the minimum required to pass a GCSE, students will get a U.
- Tiering used only for 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'. English Literature and English Language will be untiered. Maths will be tiered with an 'improved overlapping tiers model', with a foundation tier covering grades 1–5 and a higher tier covering grades 4–9.
- Linear GCSEs, with assessment to be taken at the end of the course in June. Re-sit opportunities in November for English Language and Maths only.
- Assessment by external exam only, except where non-exam assessment is the only way to provide valid assessment of the skills required. Maths, English Literature and English Language to be externally assessed. English Language to have a Speaking assessment that will be reported separately.
- The first assessment of new two-year GCSE courses that start in September 2015 will be in June 2017.
- New GCSEs in the sciences, History and Geography, as well as languages, are scheduled for first teaching in September 2016 with first assessment in 2018. The content for these subjects is due to be published in 2014.

# GCSEs going forward

We are committed to keeping you informed about the GCSEs for first teaching in 2015, and to helping you in your preparation for teaching our new GCSEs in the years ahead.

## Content of new GCSEs

The content of new GCSEs announced by the DfE features:

- A much larger, more 'challenging' GCSE in Maths with more emphasis on solving problems that require multi-step solutions. There will be new topics such as ratio and proportions. Students will be expected to learn key mathematical formulae by heart.
- Students of the new GCSE in English Language will be expected to read 'a wide range of texts' (there will be no set texts). There will be greater emphasis on accurate use of spelling, punctuation and grammar.
- English Literature, which is no longer compulsory, focuses on four areas of 'classic literature'. Unseen texts will be a new requirement.

## FAQs

### When will the reformed GCSEs first be taught?

The date for first teaching of reformed GCSEs in English Language and Literature and Mathematics is September 2015. New GCSEs in the sciences, History and Geography, as well as languages, are now scheduled for first teaching in September 2016.

### When will the first assessments take place?

Reformed GCSEs will be linear so assessment of a student's knowledge and understanding of the whole course takes place at the end of two years. The first assessment of two-year courses that start in September 2015 will be in June 2017.

### Who will the reformed exams be targeted at?

The Secretary of State for Education made it clear in a letter to Ofqual on 6 February that the reformed exams should be accessible to the whole GCSE cohort.

### What will the reformed exams be called?

There has been some speculation in the media about a possible name change to the qualification. However, the consultation documents are clear that the plan is to retain the name GCSE.

### What will the reformed assessments look like?

- Linear assessments
- Assessment by external exam only
- Tiering to be avoided, unless strong subject-specific reasons
- Expectations to match and exceed those of high-performing international jurisdictions
- Greater demand and discrimination at the top
- Current grading structure to be replaced by numbers
- Inclusion of synoptic assessment
- No re-sit opportunities (except for English Language and Maths)
- Spelling, punctuation and grammar to continue to be assessed within English Literature, Geography and History, and to also be assessed within English Language.

### What information was consulted on?

Detailed subject content criteria (detailed content and Assessment Objectives) for English, Maths, the sciences, Geography and History were included in the DfE consultation.

Assessment models and grading structure were covered in the Ofqual consultation.

You can view a summary of our response to the GCSE consultations at [ocr.org.uk/gcsereform](http://ocr.org.uk/gcsereform)





# GCSE REFORM

## What is OCR doing?

We are active participants in the ongoing discussions with all the key stakeholders about new GCSEs. We are fully committed to the task of developing new GCSEs that prepare students for university study, and engage and enthuse aspiring students and teachers alike.

While input from higher education is essential, the views of teachers – the professionals in the classroom – are vital to successful qualification and assessment reform.

Since 2010, we've been running a number of subject consultative forums, which were set up so that we could talk to teachers (and other stakeholders) directly. These forums have been invaluable in helping us to understand the strengths, issues and needs of a range of subjects as well as, critically, the needs of our stakeholders. As well as establishing very strong relationships with you, we've learned a lot. During this period of significant change, we want to clearly understand the new challenges that you face. We promise to continue to listen to you and to learn how best we can support you.

Our forums are busy and lively but we're always open to new members. If you would like to contribute to and influence the development of our reformed GCSEs and qualification support packages, please get in touch with us for more information at [partnerships@ocr.org.uk](mailto:partnerships@ocr.org.uk) (including 'Subject Forums' in the subject of your email).

## Supporting you through the changes

### What support is available for you during the changes?

Our aim is to help you at every stage and we'll continue to work in close consultation with teachers and other experts to provide a practical package of high-quality resources and support.

We will ensure that you are kept informed of upcoming changes, support you in understanding these changes, and provide you with guidance on how to plan and deliver the new GCSEs.

To stay up to date with all the relevant news about OCR's GCSEs from 2015, sign up for GCSE email updates at [ocr.org.uk/updates](http://ocr.org.uk/updates)

In the meantime if you have any queries, please contact us on **01223 553998** or email us at [general.qualifications@ocr.org.uk](mailto:general.qualifications@ocr.org.uk)



# GCSE Timeline

*When are the changes happening?*

2013		2014		2015		2016		2017		2018	
Jan	June	Sept	Jan	June	Sept	Jan	June	Sept	Jan	June	

## Changes to GCSEs



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