



Do you use GCSE grades to assess applicants to your business, college or university?

If so, we want you to be aware that **GCSEs in England have changed – this started with English and maths in 2017**. The new GCSEs have a 9 to 1 grading scale to replace A* to G, with 9 being the highest grade. The qualifications have been designed to ensure that young people have the knowledge and skills required to better prepare them for employment or further study. They cover more challenging content and are designed to match standards in high performing education systems elsewhere in the world. Changing from numbers to letters means you can see easily whether an applicant has taken an old (unreformed) or a new (reformed) GCSE.

What you need to know

- Exams in the new GCSEs graded 9 to 1 were introduced in England for GCSE English language, English literature and maths in summer 2017. A further 20 new GCSEs were examined for the first time in summer 2018, and in summer 2019 there will be 25 new GCSEs examined for the first time. So most GCSEs are now graded 9 to 1, and the very last of the new exams will be sat in 2020.

- 9 is the highest grade, and will be awarded to fewer students than the old A*.

- The new grading scale has more grades above a grade 4 than above the old grade C, to provide greater differentiation for higher achieving students.

- Between 2017 and 2019, some exam certificates will have a combination of number (9 to 1) and letter (A* to G) grades as students sit a mix of new and old GCSEs.

- By 2020, GCSE certificates will contain only number (9 to 1) grades.

- Letter grades (A* to G) awarded for old (unreformed) GCSEs will remain valid for future employment or study.

- The new GCSE grading scale is not directly equivalent to the old A* to G one. However, there are some comparable points between the old grades and the new ones, as the diagram shows:

- the bottom of grade 7 is aligned with the bottom of grade A;
- the bottom of grade 4 is aligned with the bottom of grade C; and
- the bottom of grade 1 is aligned with the bottom of grade G.

Department for Education

GCSE Grading	
New Grading Structure	Old Grading Structure
9	A*
8	
7	A
6	
5	B
4	C
3	D
2	E
1	F
	G
U	U

Standard Pass →

- Most GCSEs taken by students at schools in Wales and Northern Ireland will continue to be graded A* to G. In conjunction with the other regulators, Ofqual, the qualifications regulator in England, has produced [guidance](#) which helps explain the differences and similarities between GCSE qualifications in England, [Wales](#) and [Northern Ireland](#).
- A grade 4 or above marks a similar achievement to the old grade C or above, the standard for a level 2 qualification. If you have previously set grade C as your entry requirement, it would be reasonable to ask for a grade 4 under the new system, unless you have made a deliberate decision to raise the entry bar.
- The Department for Education recognises grade 4 and above as a 'standard pass' in all subjects. It is a credible achievement for a young person that should be valued as a passport to future study and employment. Students who do not hold a grade 4 or above in English and/or maths must continue to study these subjects as part of their post-16 education. This requirement does not apply to other subjects.
- To continue to raise standards in English and maths, the Department for Education recognises a grade 5 and above in English or maths as a 'strong pass' in its headline school performance measure for English and maths attainment; a benchmark comparable with high performing education systems.

What you need to do

- Update recruitment materials, training and practices ready for applicants having GCSE certificates and CVs with numbers as well as letters.
- Continue to set the level of GCSE grades needed to meet your entry requirements. The comparison points described above should help you to set realistic expectations for students who have taken the new, more demanding GCSEs.

Timetable for changes to GCSEs

First teaching in 2015, first exams 2017	First teaching in 2016, first exams 2018	First teaching in 2017, first exams 2019	First teaching in 2018, first exams 2020
English language, English literature and maths	English and maths plus... art and design, biology, chemistry, citizenship studies, combined science, computer science, dance, drama, food preparation and nutrition, French, geography, German, classical Greek, history, Latin, music, physical education (including short course), physics, religious studies (including short course) and Spanish	2015 and 2016 subjects plus... ancient history, Arabic, astronomy, Bengali, business, Chinese, classical civilisation, design and technology, economics, electronics, engineering, film studies, geology, Italian, Japanese, media studies, modern Greek, modern Hebrew, Panjabi, Polish, psychology, Russian, sociology, statistics and Urdu	All previous subjects plus... Biblical Hebrew, Gujarati, Persian, Portuguese and Turkish