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Department
for Education

A background image showing a row of students sitting at desks in a classroom, focused on their work. The image is partially obscured by a diagonal blue and white graphic.

GCSE, AS and A level reforms in England

Updated May 2019

Contents

- What is happening, when?
- Reformed 9 to 1 GCSEs
- Reformed AS and A levels
- Changes to practical science
- Changes to reviews of marking and appeals
- Resits
- Information about my school/college
- Further information

Responsibilities for Qualifications

- Government:
 - Policy, purposes and priorities
 - Curriculum and subject content
 - Use of qualifications for school/college accountability purposes
- Ofqual:
 - Standards
 - Validity
 - Efficiency and value
 - Oversight of the system
- Exam Boards:
 - Design and delivery
 - Award qualifications to students



What is happening, when?

Why and how are GCSEs, AS and A levels changing?

GCSEs, AS and A levels in England are being reformed to keep pace with universities' and employers' demands.

- The standards of the new GCSEs are comparable with those of high performing countries internationally. GCSE subject content is more challenging than previously but still suitable for a wide range of abilities
- GCSEs are graded on a new scale of 9 to 1 rather than A* to G, with 9 being the highest grade. This allows for better differentiation of students' achievements and distinguishes clearly between the reformed and unreformed qualifications
- A levels allow more time for studying and better prepare students for university
- AS levels are optional, stand alone qualifications

When do these reforms affect GCSE students?

Level	Started course in 2015, first exams in 2017	Started course in 2016, first exams in 2018	Started course in 2017, first exams in 2019	Start course in 2018, first exams in 2020
GCSE	English literature, English language and maths only	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... Gujarati, biblical Hebrew, Persian, Portuguese and Turkish.

When do these reforms affect AS and A level students?

Level	Started course in 2015, first A level exams in 2017, first AS level exams in 2016	Started course in 2016, first A level exams in 2018, first AS level exams in 2017	Started course in 2017, first A level exams in 2019, first AS level exams in 2018	Start course in 2018, first A level exams in 2020, <u>no AS level exams available in these subjects</u>
AS and A Level	Art and design, biology, business, chemistry, computer science, economics, English language, English language and literature, English literature, history, physics, psychology, and sociology.	2015 subjects plus... Dance, drama and theatre, French, geography, German, classical Greek, Latin, music, physical education, religious studies and Spanish.	2015 and 2016 subjects plus... Accounting, ancient history, Chinese, classical civilisation, design and technology, electronics, environmental science, film studies, further maths, geology, history of art, Italian, law, maths, media studies, music technology, philosophy, politics, Russian, and statistics.	All previous subjects plus... Arabic, Bengali, biblical Hebrew, Gujarati, modern Greek, modern Hebrew, Japanese, Panjabi, Persian, Portuguese Polish, Turkish, and Urdu.



Reformed 9 to 1 GCSEs

Reformed GCSEs

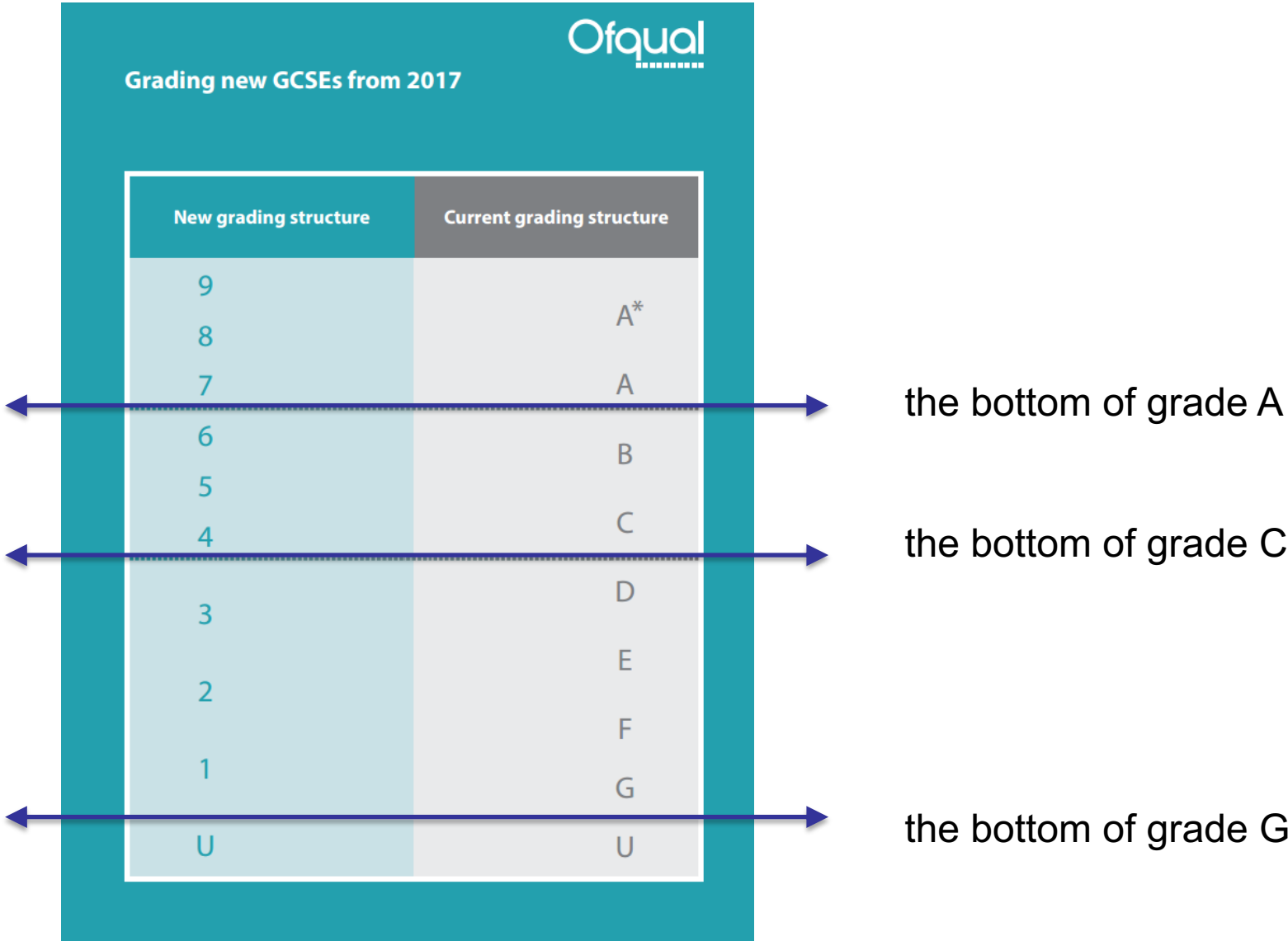
- Content New and more challenging content
- Structure All exams at the end of the course
- Assessment Mainly by examination
Non-exam assessment only where necessary
- Tiering Foundation and higher tier permitted only in maths, statistics, science and modern foreign languages
- Grading New numbered scale (9 to 1 plus U), 9 is the highest

New 9 to 1 GCSE grading structure

The bottom of grade 7 is aligned with

The bottom of grade 4 is aligned with

The bottom of grade 1 is aligned with





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**Reformed AS and
A levels**

Reformed AS level

- Content Drawn from the new A level content
- Demand Same as previous AS qualifications
- Structure AS is now a separate qualification with the marks no longer counting towards A level
It may not be offered in all subjects in your school or college
Taught over 1 or 2 years with exams at end of the course
- Assessment Mainly by examination
Non-exam assessment only where necessary
- Grading Remains A to E plus U

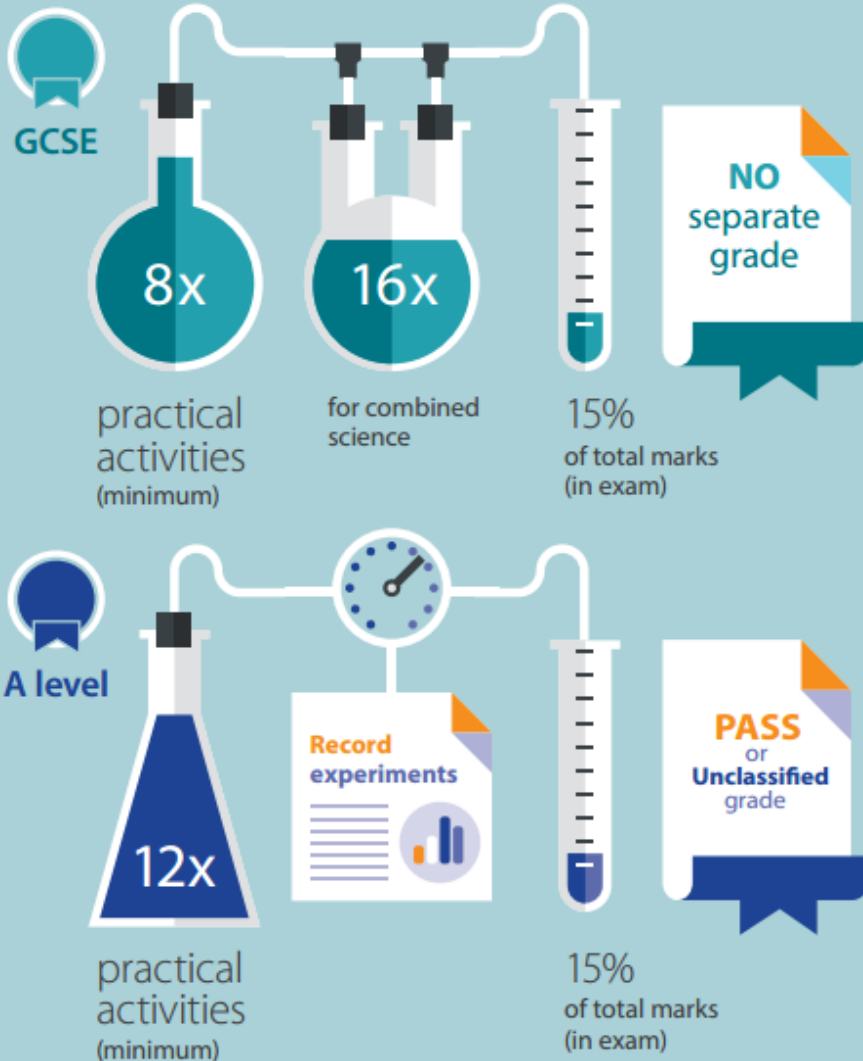
Reformed A levels

- Content Changes to better prepare students for university
- Demand Same as previous A levels
- Structure All exams at the end of the two-year course
Marks from the AS do not count towards the A level
- Assessment Mainly by examination
Non-exam assessment only where necessary
- Grading Remains A* to E plus U
A separate grade for science practical work

A black and white photograph of students in a classroom, overlaid with a diagonal blue and grey gradient. The students are seated at desks, focused on their work. The foreground shows a girl writing, with other students visible in the background.

Changes to practical science

Improving science practicals



Practical science assessment

GCSE

- Students do at least 8 practical activities (16 for combined science) covering specific techniques
- Written questions about practical work make up at least 15% of the total marks for the qualification
- There is no separate grade for practical skills

A levels

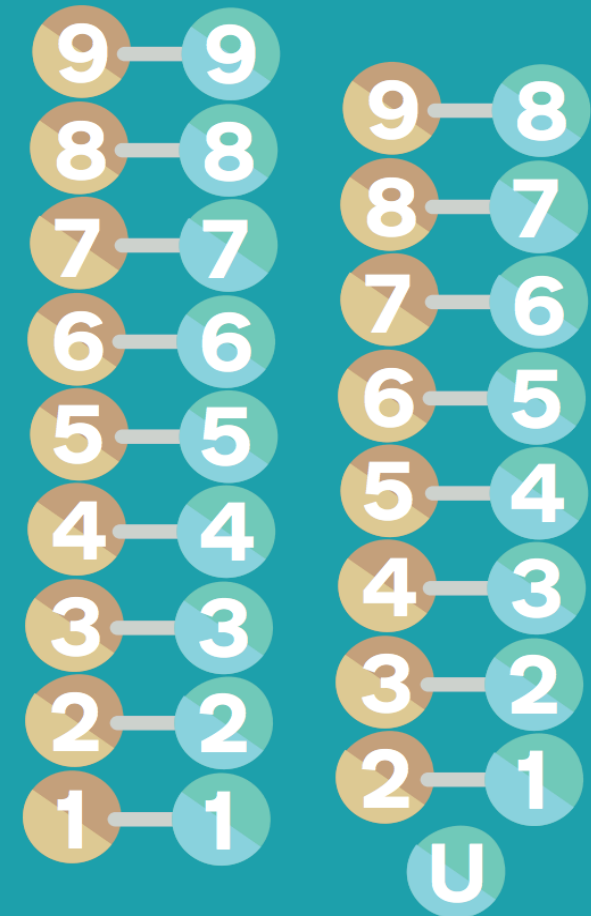
- More practicals than previously – at least 12 in each science subject
- Written questions about practical work make up at least 15% of the total marks for the qualification
- Students need to record their experiments as they do them
- Students' competence in practicals is reported separately ('pass' or 'not classified')
- Practical 'pass' for A level science likely to be required by universities – check admissions information

GCSE science grading

- Students taking separate science GCSEs will get a grade from 9 to 1 for each subject, with 9 being the highest grade.
- Students studying combined science will receive an award worth two GCSEs, consisting of two equal or adjacent grades from 9 to 1
e.g. (9-9, 9-8, 8-8, 8-7, 7-7...to 1-1).
- We considered a 9-point scale from 9-9 to 1-1 but we believed it would be unfair for students to lose (or gain) two whole grades at each grade boundary.
- If the numbers are different, the highest number will always be reported on the left.
- The new grades have been brought in to signal that GCSEs have been reformed and to better differentiate between students of different abilities.

GCSE COMBINED SCIENCE

DOUBLE AWARD GRADE COMBINATIONS



A close-up photograph of a complex mechanical gear system, likely from a watch or clock movement. The image shows several interlocking gears of different sizes, some with a polished brass finish and others with a darker, possibly steel, finish. The gears are mounted on a dark metal plate. A prominent green diagonal band runs from the top-left towards the bottom-right, partially obscuring the gears. The background is white.

Reviews of marking and appeals

Reviews of marking and appeals

- If schools and students are dissatisfied with their results they can seek a review of the mark they have received.
- Schools and colleges can also ask exam boards to give them access to marked AS and A level scripts. From 2020 this will also include GCSEs.
- We expect all marking errors to be found and corrected. This means exam boards must change a student's marks when they find a marking or moderation error.
- Exam-board reviewers are specially trained to undertake reviews and exam boards must monitor their work.
- Exam boards must give reasons for the outcome of a review to schools and colleges if they want to see them.
- If a school or college remains concerned about an outcome following a review, it can appeal to the exam board.



Resits

GCSE English and mathematics – November series

- Students will be able to resit 9 to 1 GCSE maths and GCSE English language in a November exam series provided they are at least 16 on 31 August the preceding year
- For all other GCSEs and AS and A levels, students will resit by taking the qualification again the following year



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for Education

A close-up photograph of a complex mechanical system with several interlocking gears of different sizes. The gears are made of metal and are set against a dark background. A diagonal green overlay covers the left side of the image.

**Information about
my school or
college**

Standard and strong pass

Strong pass: grade 5 or above is the headline school performance measure for English and maths attainment.

Standard pass: for all subjects, grade 4 or above marks a similar achievement to the previous grade C or above.

Department for Education

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

In all subjects, a grade 4 or above is recognised as a 'standard pass'. A grade 4 or above marks a similar achievement to the previous grade C or above.

A grade 4 is a credible achievement for a young person, that should be valued as a passport to future study and employment. Students achieving a grade 4 or above in English and maths will not be required to continue studying these subjects post-16.

A grade 5 or above in English or maths is recognised as a 'strong pass' for the purposes of school accountability only. The proportion of students achieving a strong pass in English and maths is one of the Government's headline school performance measures, reflecting the Government's commitment to raising standards in our schools.

Key stage 4 performance measures

The six headline measures encourage a broad and balanced curriculum with a strong emphasis on an academic core:

- **Progress 8** measures students' progress in 8 qualifications. These are:

English

maths

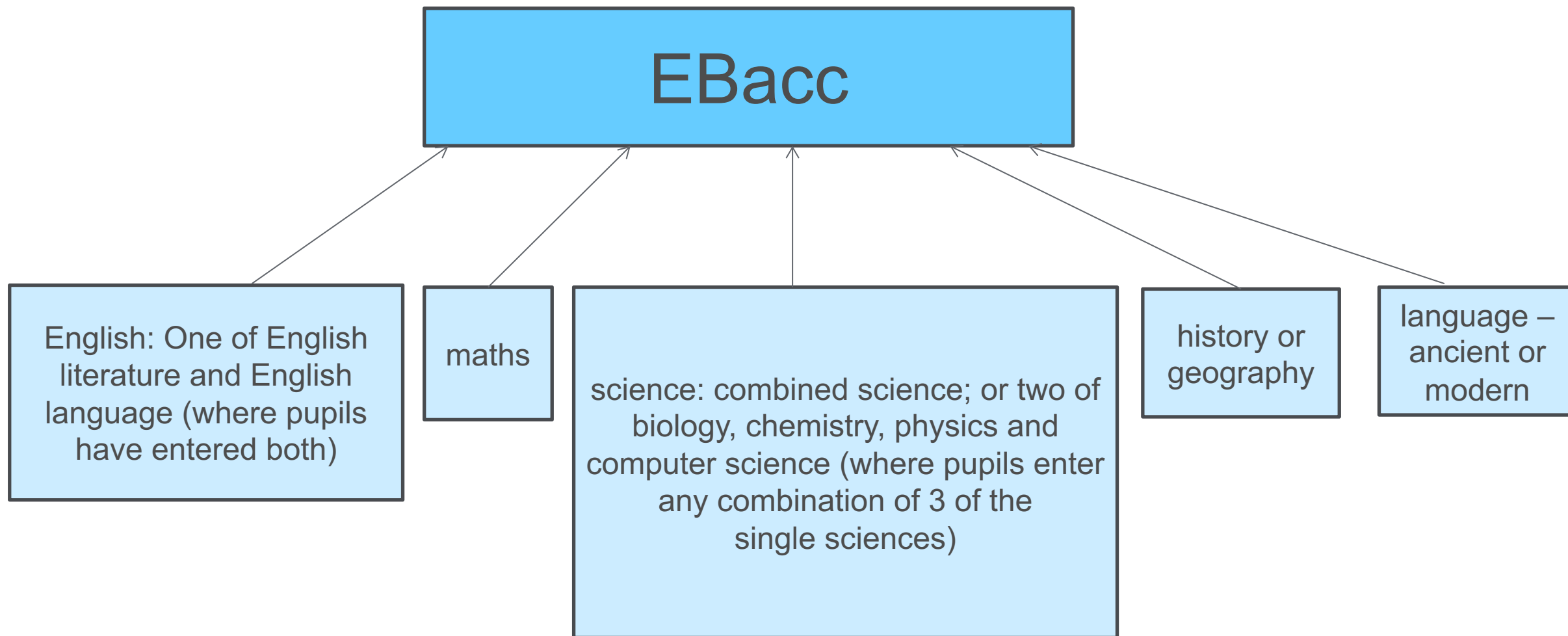
Three of: science, computer science,
history, geography and languages

Any three other
approved qualifications

- **EBacc entry** - percentage of students entering the English Baccalaureate (EBacc)
- **Pupil destinations** - percentage of students staying in education or going into employment after key stage 4
- **Attainment in English and maths** – percentage of students achieving a grade 5 or above in English and maths
- **Attainment 8** - attainment across the same 8 qualifications as Progress 8
- **EBacc average point score** – average point score across EBacc subjects



The English Baccalaureate measures



Post-16 school/college measures

- As for secondary schools, the Department for Education's new post-16 performance measures place more emphasis on the progress of students.
- There are five headline measures:
 - **Progress** – how well are students progressing?
 - **Attainment** – are they getting good grades?
 - **Retention** – are they dropping out?
 - **English and maths** – for students who did not get a grade 4 or above in these subjects at GCSE
 - **Destinations** – are they getting university/college places, apprenticeships and jobs?

A black and white photograph of students in a classroom, overlaid with a blue diagonal gradient. The students are seated at desks, focused on their work. The foreground shows a girl writing, with other students visible in the background.

**Further
information**

Department for Education resources

- A GCSE webpage (<https://newgcse.campaign.gov.uk/>) and fact sheets (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/gcse-new-grading-scale-factsheets>) which provide information on the changes to GCSEs for a wide range of audiences
- A short video to explain the changes to GCSEs which can be accessed on YouTube (<https://youtu.be/WyQdNo5zjDM>).
- Public enquiries: <https://www.gov.uk/contact-dfe>
- Call DfE: 0370 000 2288
- Tweet DfE: @educationgovuk



Ofqual resources

Visit:

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