

Completing GCSE, AS and A Level Reform



In June 2014 we published a consultation about what needs to happen to complete GCSE, AS and A level reform. This consultation considered the options for regulating reform of those subjects not being developed for first teaching in 2015 or 2016. We made these proposals to bring these subjects in line with all subjects carrying the GCSE, AS or A level title.

We have reviewed the responses to the consultation and are now in a position to announce the decisions we have made on some of our proposals. We are therefore publishing a summary of the responses alongside this document.¹ In cases where we have yet to announce what we plan to do, we will consider these views carefully as we take decisions on our proposals.

Availability of unreformed GCSEs and A levels in 2015

Once a new qualification is introduced the existing or 'legacy' version will no longer be available. We have decided that this must happen as soon as possible in subjects where legacy qualifications have a direct replacement in the reformed qualifications for first teaching in 2015. For example, the existing GCSE mathematics will be replaced directly by the reformed GCSE mathematics.

Summer 2016 will see the final award of those qualifications that are being replaced by reformed versions to be first taught from 2015; so the last teaching of a two-year course in these legacy subjects began this autumn.²

We have decided that a small number of qualifications will also be withdrawn, in addition to those being replaced directly by reformed ones. This is because the qualifications in these subjects are too similar to one or more of the subjects being reformed for first teaching in 2015. Their content overlaps with them too much, even if the emphasis may be different in places. If these legacy qualifications were to co-exist with the reformed ones, the differences between them in assessment structure,

¹ www.gov.uk/government/consultations/gcses-as-and-a-levels-new-subjects-to-be-taught-in-2015

² We are currently considering the rules about re-sits for the subjects being replaced. We will announce decisions on this in the New Year.

coupled with their equal acceptability to users, would be very likely to affect entries for the reformed qualifications. This would make it difficult for us to maintain standards and would be unfair to students.

These subjects are:

- AS and A levels in applied art and design;
- AS and A levels in applied business;
- AS and A level in human biology;
- AS and A level in economics and business (combined course);
- GCSE digital communication.

In our June consultation we indicated that these subjects would be withdrawn, but we recognise that this decision comes at a time when schools and colleges may already have planned which subjects they will offer next year. We have therefore decided to phase the implementation of this withdrawal. This is to allow those schools and colleges that are already teaching these qualifications, and may need to make changes to what they plan to teach, the opportunity to do so. Given the issues we set out above, this opportunity will only be available to this limited group of schools and colleges.

This means any school or college that has offered these qualifications previously can continue to do so for one further year, if their exam board plans to continue to make this qualification available. Schools or colleges in this position should contact their exam board to confirm whether they will continue to offer specific qualifications they want to teach. We have told exam boards not to accept any new requests from schools or colleges to offer these qualifications. This means that the final awards of these qualifications will be in summer 2017, but that this will only be available to schools and colleges that have previously offered them.

In our consultation we listed a number of subjects that could be withdrawn because they overlap with subjects in which reformed qualifications will be offered from 2015. We have decided that not all of these subjects will be withdrawn. When reviewing these subjects in the light of responses to our consultation, we found the content for these subjects has a different emphasis to that in the reformed subjects. We also decided that allowing these qualifications to be offered alongside reformed qualifications will not create any significant confusion for users, risks to standards and comparability, or impact on qualifications that have been reformed.

The subjects concerned are the AS and A levels in:

- applied science;
- environmental studies;
- humanities;
- science in society.

These subjects may continue to be offered by exam boards. However, as we set out below, all GCSEs and A levels will need to be reformed in time for first teaching from 2017 or they will be withdrawn. This means that if exam boards wish to continue to offer them, they will need to decide to develop reformed qualifications in these subjects. Our review of these subjects so far has focused on whether they overlap with subjects that have already been reformed. If reformed qualifications are to be offered in these subjects in future, they will need to be developed to meet all our expectations for new GCSEs and A levels.

The appendix to this document sets out the full list of the subjects being withdrawn this autumn.

Availability of unreformed GCSEs and A levels in 2016

Our decisions about the subjects that will no longer be available have involved comparative analysis of the extent to which different sets of content overlap. We have therefore decided to delay our decisions about those legacy subjects that correspond to subjects being reformed for first teaching in 2016 until work on the requirements for these is complete.

We will not be able to make fully-informed decisions about these until the content of the reformed subjects for 2016 is agreed. The content for these subjects is due to be finalised early in 2015, and we will announce our decisions shortly after that.

Process for reform of subjects to be taught first in 2017

In our June consultation we included a set of proposals about how subject availability should be determined and how subject content should be developed for those qualifications that have yet to be reformed. We are still considering the best approach to these areas and so are not announcing decisions on them at this stage.

Once a process for developing content is put in place, we still plan that any subject not reformed for first teaching in 2015 or 2016 must either be withdrawn from 2017 or be reformed for first teaching in 2017. This is a challenging timetable, but extending the period where unreformed and reformed qualifications are both available is not desirable. We need to protect standards and ensure fairness to students. The best way of doing this is to reach a position where all the GCSE, AS and A level qualifications are developed as reformed qualifications as quickly as possible.

Appendix – Qualifications to be withdrawn

The table below explains which qualifications will be replaced by reformed GCSEs from September 2015.

Reformed GCSEs (9 to 1) available from September 2015	Legacy GCSEs (A* to G) that will no longer be available from September 2015
GCSE English literature	GCSE English literature GCSE English
GCSE English language	GCSE English language GCSE English GCSE digital communication*
GCSE mathematics	GCSE mathematics GCSE applications of mathematics† GCSE methods in mathematics†

* Exam boards may continue to make this qualification available to schools and colleges that already offer it for an additional year. That is, to students that will start new two year courses in September 2015. Schools and colleges should contact their exam board to find out if they still plan to offer the specific qualification they want to teach.

† Since this document was first published, we have updated it to include these additional legacy qualifications which are being replaced by the reformed mathematics GCSE.

The table below explains which qualifications will be replaced by reformed AS and A level qualifications from September 2015.

Reformed AS and A level qualifications available from 2015	Legacy AS and A level qualifications to be withdrawn
Art and design	Art and design Applied art and design (single and double award)*
Biology	Biology Human biology*
Business	Business studies Applied business (single and double award)*
Computer science	Computing
Chemistry	Chemistry
Economics	Economics Economics and business (combined course)*
English language	English language
English language and literature	English language and literature
English literature	English literature
History	History
Physics	Physics
Psychology	Psychology
Sociology	Sociology

* Exam boards may continue to make this qualification available to schools and colleges that already offer it for an additional year. That is, to students that will start new two year courses in September 2015. Schools and colleges should contact their exam board to find out if they still plan to offer the specific qualification they want to teach.