



15 January 2019

For the attention of heads of science

Dear Head of Science

GCSE combined science in summer 2019

Ahead of the entry deadline for the summer 2019 exams, I would like to clarify the arrangements for higher tier grading in combined science. Specifically, **the grade 3-3 on higher tier combined science in 2018 was exceptional and will not be permitted in summer 2019**. Instead, our existing rules will apply, meaning:-

- students will get a double grade, from 9-9, 9-8, 8-8 through to 1-1
- those entered for the foundation tier will be awarded grades 5-5 to 1-1
- those entered for the higher tier will be awarded grades 9-9 to 4-4, although a small proportion of students who just miss the grade will be awarded 4-3
- students who fall below the safety net grade will receive an unclassified result (U)

We have produced [films](#), [postcards](#) and [other resources](#) to explain how the grading scale in GCSE combined science works, which you may wish to use when explaining tiering to students and their parents.

We know that decisions about tier entry can be difficult to make for some students, and the structural changes to the sciences – including the removal of untiered controlled assessment, and moving to a double award GCSE – made this more challenging in 2018. Around a third of schools had some higher tier students who were awarded a grade 3-3 last summer, but many more will have had students who benefited from the wider grade 4-3 that exam boards awarded in 2018.

As we move toward the summer 2019 entries, I am sure that you will have reflected on your approach in 2018. We know that some third-party organisations have recommended higher tier entry for students who are predicted to achieve around grade 4-4 (or grade 4 in single GCSEs). I would caution you against following that advice, as such students are at risk of missing out on two GCSE grades (for combined science). There is a narrow safety net grade 4-3 for students who just miss a grade 4-4, but below that they will receive an unclassified result (U). We recommend that students who are predicted to achieve a grade 4-4 or 5-4 should be entered for foundation tier.

Exam boards are also providing additional advice to schools on tier entry, so please do review those communications if you haven't already, and get in touch with your exam board if you need more specific advice.

You may wish to remind students and their parents that certificates for tiered subjects do not indicate which tier the student was entered for and that a 4-4

achieved through entry for the foundation tier has the same value as a 4-4 achieved through entry to the higher tier. Tiered exams contain common questions and exam boards use these to align standards between the tiers. As such, it is no easier to get a grade on one tier than the other.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "S Collier". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish underneath the name.

Sally Collier

Chief Regulator, Ofqual