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A Handy Guide to changes to GCSE grades for Employers and Training Providers

Version 1.0, 09.01.17

Introduction

This guide is designed to give a quick overview of the changes happening to GCSE grading to support Employers in understanding the grading systems which will be used from summer 2017, and what these grades say about the standards that new employees will have achieved. Additionally, Work Based Learning training providers will also need to be aware of these changes to understand previous achievement or further achievement needed at GCSE by learners undertaking learning programmes, for example Apprenticeships, and to help inform their own Employer customers of these changes.

Changes to GCSEs across England, Wales and Northern Ireland

GCSEs are no longer being developed to a common template in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. All GCSEs will be linear qualifications but there may be some differences in subject content between the three countries. Wales and Northern Ireland are retaining the familiar A*-G grading scale (Northern Ireland has added a C* grade) but England is moving to a grading scale of 9 to 1. In addition, these changes do not affect the existing system in use in Scotland; however, employers will now need to understand different grading systems, and the grades achieved by students, across the four nations of the UK.

Overview of the changes in England

The new GCSEs in England will be graded from 9 to 1, with 9 as the highest grade and 1 as the lowest grade. All current GCSE subjects will either be reformed by 2017 or will be discontinued. This reform is happening across three phases. These are outlined below, and should help employers to understand the timetable to which they will start to see school leavers attaining GCSEs with the new grading scale. Because of the phasing of the reforms, employers may find students with both alphabetic and numeric grades.

- **To be taught from 2015, first awards 2017:** mathematics, English literature, English language.
- **To be taught from 2016, first awards 2018:** physics, chemistry, biology, combined science (double award), food preparation and nutrition, history, geography, modern and classical languages, art & design, dance, drama, music, computer science, citizenship, religious studies, PE.
- **To be taught from 2017, first awards 2019:** ancient history, astronomy, business, classical civilization, design & technology, economics, electronics, engineering, film studies, geology, media studies, psychology, sociology, statistics



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The new grading scale for GCSEs in England will be 9-1 with 9 being the highest grade. The broad equivalences of grades on the old and new scales are as follows:

A*	9
A	8
B	7
C	6
D	5
E	4
F	3
G	2
U	1
U	U

The exams regulator, Ofqual, has stated the following:

- Broadly the same proportion of students will achieve a grade 4 and above as currently achieve a grade C and above
- Broadly the same proportion of students will achieve a grade 7 and above as currently achieve an A and above
- The aim is that, across all subjects, around 20% of those achieving grade 7 and above will be awarded grade 9, although the percentage will vary between subjects.
- The bottom of grade 1 will be aligned with the bottom of grade G
- Grade 5 will be positioned in the top third of the marks for a current Grade C and bottom third of the marks for a current Grade B. This will mean it will be of greater demand than the present grade C, and broadly in line with what the best available evidence tells us is the average PISA performance in countries such as Finland, Canada, the Netherlands and Switzerland



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GCSE in Combined Science

Employers will, over time, notice a new GCSE being achieved by students, the GCSE in Combined Science. It is the only GCSE which is a double award qualification and so is equivalent to two GCSEs. It will be graded on a 17-point scale from 1-1 to 9-9 as follows:

1-1, 2-1, 2-2, 3-2, 3-3, 4-3, 4-4, 5-4, 5-5, 6-5, 6-6, 7-6, 7-7, 8-7, 8-8, 9-8, 9-9

If students achieve grade 4-4 or higher, they will have achieved the equivalent of two GCSEs at grades A*-C on the old scale. If students achieve grade 4-3, they will have achieved the equivalent of one GCSE at grades A*-C on the old scale.

What is a 'good pass'?

Currently, most employers and other recruiting bodies such as universities regard grade C as the 'good pass' they require of applicants. Under the new grading structure, this standard is carried across to grade 4. However, the government has decided that for assessing school performance (rather than individual student performance) they will report the proportion of students achieving grade 5.

Considerations for Employers

Employers may wish to review their current recruitment policies, not only for school leavers, but also for higher level jobs (for example where a certain grade achievement in mathematics and/or English is required), to indicate clearly whether they will require a grade 4 or a grade 5

There are potential issues if Employers decide to require a grade 5 in GCSEs.

- In 2017 and 2018, students in schools and colleges will not be funded to resit GCSEs in mathematics and English language if they have achieved a grade 4 (they will be funded if they have achieved a grade lower than grade 4)
- If recruiting or operating outside of England, there will be no equivalent grade that may be required for students from Wales and Northern Ireland as grade 5 roughly covers the top third of grade C and the bottom third of grade B.

Achievement of mathematics and English at GCSE and continuing onto an Apprenticeship

At the time of writing, there has not been any clear guidance from the Department of Education which refers to the numeric grading system rather than alphabetic. The Department is clear that Apprentices should achieve a minimum level of Functional Skill or GCSE either before or during their Apprenticeship programme; this is stipulated within each Apprenticeship occupational standard or superseded by specific entry requirements. Employers should expect to see achievement of mathematics and English at GCSE before commencing an Apprenticeship or refer to guidance from the Department on expectations of achievement for further information.



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Summary – things to think about

- Are HR teams and recruiting managers aware of the changes in GSCSE grading in England?
- Are they aware that applicants from different home countries will have grades reported in different ways which are not directly comparable?
- Are they ready to receive applications with these new grades, do they understand what level has been achieved?
- Do employers recruitment policies reflect the changes to grades, including any entry requirements (e.g. mathematics and English)?

Further information

If you would like more detailed information about the changes to individual Pearson Edexcel GCSE subjects, please go to the following web link:

<http://qualifications.pearson.com/en/qualifications/edexcel-gcses/gcse-changes.html>

If you want to find out more about Pearson qualifications and services, sign up for our Insight newsletter at:

<http://qualifications.pearson.com/en/forms/register-your-interest-wbl.html>