

Information about Key Stage 4: The National Picture

In recent years, education has been in the throes of a period of transition driven by the previous coalition Government's desire to introduce more rigour to both GCSE and A Level exams. Since September 2015 GCSEs have been on a timetable of reform to new specifications and examination protocols. For students in current Year 9 the period of transition has ended and all their GCSE options will have converted to the new system. You may have heard about the more recent Curriculum and Assessment Review – whilst this does bring about further changes, they will not impact the current Year 9s.

The key changes that the current (from 2016) GCSEs feature are:

- A new grading system: GCSEs will be awarded on a scale of 1-9 (where 9 is the top grade). Please see the diagram below for an estimation of how the new grades compare to the legacy A*-G GCSE grading systems
- Assessment will be heavily focused on exams taken at the end of Y11. Where Controlled Assessments still feature their contribution is significantly reduced
- The content of the GCSE specifications has been much more rigorously regulated (meaning there is little variation between boards) and the level of content is much more demanding.
- In most subjects there will only be 1 tier of entry; Maths, Science & French are notable exceptions to this.
- Opportunities to re-sit exams has been withdrawn with the exception of English Language and Maths

In addition to this, the Government has been much stricter in approving BTEC and other vocational qualifications. The impact for schools is that significantly fewer of these qualifications are allowed to be used in accountability measures that judge overall student progress. The impact for students is that in time only a select number of BTEC qualifications will be considered by Colleges and Universities at time of application.

New GCSE Grading System:

The table shows an estimation of how the 'new' grades compare to the 'old' grades. As noted above, however, the new GCSEs are significantly more content heavy and pitched at a higher overall standard and as such Education ministers are keen to not try and make direct comparisons between the two awarding systems.

New 1-9 grade system	Old A*- G grade system
9	A**
8	A*/A
7	A
6	B
5	B/C
4	C
3	D/E
2	E/F
1	F/G

The former benchmark of a Grade C being deemed a 'good pass' now sits across the Grade 4/5 boundary. The DfE use both the Grade 4 and Grade 5 as benchmark measures of good attainment (and Grade 4 is often the quoted grade for accessing A Level study), although it should be noted that students achieving a Grade 1 or better indicates a 'pass'.

Key Points:

Broadly the same proportion of students will achieve a Grade 4 (and above) as currently achieve a Grade C

Broadly the same proportion of students will achieve a Grade 7 (and above) as currently achieve a Grade A

For each exam the top 20% of those who achieve a Grade 7 will be awarded a Grade 9

A Grade 1 will be aligned to a current Grade G

A Grade 5 will be positioned in the top third of the marks currently needed for a Grade C and the bottom third of marks required for a Grade B. This means it will be harder to achieve than the current Grade C.

Broad and Balanced curriculum

The Government are keen for schools to promote students following a broad and balanced curriculum. At Key Stage 3 and 4 all students have an entitlement to study a breadth of subjects, although at Key Stage 4 they have the opportunity to make the choice over some of the courses they will follow. The Government identify that all students must follow courses in English, Maths and Science and strongly promote students studying a Humanities subject (History or Geography) and a Modern Foreign Language (e.g. French). At Maiden Erlegh Chiltern Edge we whole-heartedly endorse students having the opportunity to continue to study courses in areas of talent and interest however we strongly encourage students to pursue a language qualification as part of their suite of GCSE qualifications as the importance of speaking a second language in today's world is undoubted.

Progress 8 Measure

Traditionally, student success has been judged on the number of A*-C GCSE they gain and in turn, schools have been judged on the percentage of students who meet the 5 A*-C benchmark. Whilst headline measures of % students attaining a Grade 5 or better in English/Maths does still exist there is also a Progress Measure which is in the public domain. In line with the GCSE reforms schools are now judged on individual student progress (and then on the average of this for a year group) rather than purely on end of Key Stage 4 attainment. This progress is measured for each student individually from the starting point of their results at KS2 (end of Primary School). Students do not need to worry about their personal Progress 8 score – they will not need to quote it on applications – it will not be a figure that is routinely shared with them. Students must focus on achieving the very best they can and gaining the highest grades possible in each of their subjects (which in turn will generate a good Progress 8 score).

Post-16 Pathways

After completing Y11, students have a range of options to continue their education:

A-levels: Academic qualifications typically studied over two years in a range of subjects. A-levels are often required for university entry.

Vocational qualifications (BTECs, T-levels, etc.): BTECs offer practical, career-focused study in areas such as Business, Health & Social Care, and Creative Media. They combine coursework and assessed practical tasks and can lead directly to employment, apprenticeships, or further study.

Apprenticeships: Students may also choose to enter work-based learning, combining paid employment with practical training and study. Apprenticeships are available in a wide variety of sectors and can provide a direct route into skilled employment while continuing education.

Combined pathways: Many students follow a combination of A-levels, vocational qualifications, and/or apprenticeships to align with their interests and career aspirations.

It is important for students to consider all available post-16 pathways, as each route offers valuable skills and opportunities for progression – over the course of Years 10 and 11 we will provide opportunities for students to engage with Colleges, Sixth Forms and Apprenticeship providers to help them understand the full range of options available to them.