

Changes to GCSE grading

– considerations when setting entry requirements



Have you considered how you will express GCSE entry requirements for 2017? In England, there is a phased introduction of new numeric grades. English and maths new numerically graded GCSEs will be first awarded in 2017 in England, while Wales and Northern Ireland are retaining the alphabetical grading system.

The changes will have an impact if:

- your admissions and recruitment strategies include the use of GCSEs
- you base GCSE entry requirements on the minimum requirements stated by statutory and professional bodies
- you use GCSE grades as a way of differentiating applicants
- you receive applicants from one or more UK countries

From as early as August 2017, students could apply with differently graded GCSEs in English or maths – in particular, mature students or those who may have retaken a GCSE. Consequently, your entry requirements will need to include information on GCSE requirements expressed in both:

- new numeric grades – for English and maths GCSEs
- alphabetical grades

We have received a number of queries from HEPs as to where GCSE grade requirements should be set, now that Wales and Northern Ireland have confirmed they will retain the alphabetical grading system. We have discussed the issue of GCSE grade requirements with the UK qualification regulators responsible for GCSEs.

Overleaf, we provide the [Ofqual GCSE grading postcard](#), which is also available online.

We have expanded on the information provided by Ofqual to help inform decisions on setting entry requirements.

We understand that some HEPs are concerned about ensuring fairness across the two grading systems. However, the two systems are inherently different. Teachers and advisers are noticing differences in how HEPs have interpreted the new Ofqual postcard in qualification reform statements and website entry requirements.

Whilst it is natural that different HEPs will decide to set their entry requirements at different points on the scale – at grades 4 or 5, for example – based on the competitiveness of the HE course, it may be useful to explain these decisions. It may also be worth highlighting in entry requirements and qualification reform statements that the numeric and alphabetical grades are different, therefore straightforward, direct comparisons are not possible.

Ofqual

New GCSE grading structure

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

GOOD PASS (DfE)

5 and above = top of C and above

AWARDING

4 and above = bottom of C and above

'About 20 per cent of all grades at 7 or above will be a grade 9. The grade 8 boundary will be equally spaced between grade 7 and 9 boundaries.'

Information is provided here on grade 7 and grade 9. However, it has been noted that learners presenting the new numeric grades are yet to come through the system. Therefore, highly selective HEPs that currently require GCSE grade A* attainment on the alphabetical scale may consider setting requirements at grade 8 and above under the new numeric grading scale.

'Broadly the same proportion of students will achieve a grade 4 and above as currently achieve a grade C and above' and '4 and above is the bottom of C and above.'

Based on this information, it would be reasonable for entry requirements currently set at a grade C under the new alphabetical system to be set at grade 4 under the new numeric system. The grading scales are different. Therefore, straightforward, direct comparisons are not possible. A grade 5 has been defined by the Department of Education as a good pass. Professional bodies may also set grade requirements at a 5, but this is yet to be confirmed. HEPs considering setting entry requirements at a 5 on the numeric scale should note that only the top third of C grade performers under the alphabetical system will be awarded a 5 in the numeric system in England. Therefore, setting the entry requirements on the numeric scale at 5 will reduce the number of applicants that would have previously satisfied the requirement.

'Broadly the same proportion of students will achieve a grade 7 and above as currently achieve a grade A and above.'

'Grade 5 will be awarded to around the top third of students gaining the equivalent of a grade C and bottom third of a grade B.'

Based on this information, it would be reasonable for entry requirements currently set at a grade B, to be set at a 5 and above under the new numeric system. HEPs considering setting their entry requirement at a 6 on the numeric scale and a grade B on the alphabetical scale should note that only the highest B grade performers under the alphabetical system will be awarded a 6 in the numeric scale in England. Therefore, setting the entry requirement on the numeric scale at 6 will reduce the number of English applicants that would have previously satisfied a grade B requirement.

'The bottom of grade 1 will be aligned with the bottom of grade G.'

GCSE, AS and A level reforms in England
New GCSE grading structure

Reformed GCSEs will be introduced gradually over three years from September 2015. They will be graded from 9 to 1, instead of A* to G. Students taking GCSEs over this period will therefore receive a mixture of 9 to 1 and A* to G grades.



Students will not lose out as a result of the changes. We will use a statistical method (known as comparable outcomes) in 2017 so that:

- 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 a grade A and above
- the bottom of grade 1 will be aligned with the bottom of grade G
- grade 5 will be awarded to around the top third of students gaining the equivalent of a grade C and bottom third of a grade B. This has been defined as a good pass by the Department for Education.