



2018-000POSoS

Rt Hon Damian Hinds MP
Secretary of State

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Dear Colleague,

With A Level and GCSE results days fast approaching, I wanted to provide you with an update to help you to respond to any questions which your constituents might raise over the summer.

Over the last few years, we have been reforming the curriculum and qualifications in England, to ensure that young people have the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in the 21st Century. As part of this process we have consulted extensively with schools, employers and higher and further education institutions.

Employers and universities told us that they were not satisfied with the capabilities of young people in essential areas such as literacy, use of English and basic numeracy. And while exam results were improving year after year, our results in international assessments (such as OECD's PISA and TIMSS) remained static, while some countries overtook us.

We have therefore reformed GCSEs and A Levels to better prepare young people for work and further study. The new national curriculum and reformed tests and qualifications are designed to ensure that students receive the rounded, knowledge-rich education that they need. As a result of these changes, and our wider school reforms, we are seeing signs of substantial progress. There are now 1.9 million more children now in good or outstanding schools than in 2010, representing 86% of pupils compared to 66% in 2010.

A Level Reforms

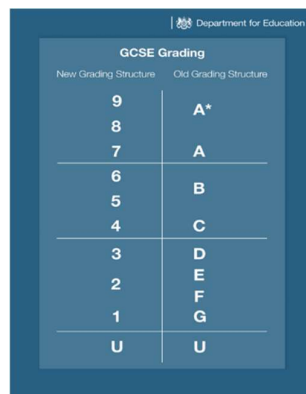
We have reformed A Levels to improve students' readiness for the demands of higher education. We have worked with universities throughout the reform process with Professor Mark E Smith, Vice-Chancellor of Lancaster University, chairing an independent review of A Level subject content for the first 13 subjects to be reformed. In addition, the Russell Group of universities established an organisation, the A Level Content Advisory Board (ALCAB) which provided advice on the subject content for a range of subjects.

AS and A Levels have been decoupled. An AS Level is now a stand-alone qualification, with results not counting towards an A Level. This means that a student who is studying for three A Levels *and no AS levels* will have no public exams at the end of year 12, allowing more time for teaching and deeper study.

GCSE Reforms

GCSEs have been reformed to be more rigorous, matching expectations in countries with the higher performing education systems, and have a new grading scale. The new grading scale runs from 9 to 1 instead of A* to G, with 9 the highest grade. The new grading scale better differentiates between the highest performing students and distinguishes clearly between the old and new GCSEs.

There isn't a direct read-across between each individual grade on the old and new scales but there are three points where they align. The bottom of a grade 7 equates to the bottom of a grade A; the bottom of a grade 4 equates to the bottom of a grade C; and the bottom of a grade 1 equates to the bottom of a grade G. This is shown in the table below.



The image shows a table titled 'GCSE Grading' from the Department for Education. It compares the 'New Grading Structure' (grades 9 to 1 and U) with the 'Old Grading Structure' (grades A* to G and U). The new grades 9, 8, and 7 are grouped under the old grade A*. The new grades 6, 5, and 4 are grouped under the old grade B. The new grades 3, 2, and 1 are grouped under the old grade C. The new grade U is grouped under the old grade U.

New Grading Structure	Old Grading Structure
9	A*
8	
7	
6	B
5	
4	
3	C
2	
1	
U	U

Last year, the new GCSE qualifications began being awarded with these number grades rather than letters – starting with English language, English literature and mathematics. This summer will see the first results in a further 20 new GCSEs, with most of the remaining subjects coming next year, and the last few in 2020. A list of the subjects is shown in the appendix to this letter.

You can find more information for students, employers and those who work in education at <https://newgcse.campaign.gov.uk/>. You might find it helpful to direct constituents towards this if they have questions about the new grading scale. We have also been running social media campaigns on Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn.

'Comparable outcomes'

Throughout the reform process we and the independent qualifications regulator, Ofqual, have sought to ensure that students are not disadvantaged by being the first to sit the new GCSEs and A Levels. Ofqual requires that the exam boards use an approach to awarding the new qualifications called 'comparable outcomes' which ensures that, at a national level, broadly the same proportion of students will achieve comparable grades as in previous years, assuming that the ability profile of the students is the same. So a student who would have achieved a C or above at GCSE under the previous system, for example, would be expected to receive a grade 4 or above this year; and broadly the same proportion who would have achieved an A or A* last year will receive a 7 or above this year.

This approach ensured last year that the overall picture of results at a national level was stable, and I anticipate that it will do so again this year. However, individual schools and colleges may see some variation in their year-on-year results, and this is normal. Variation can be due to many different factors, including differences in the mix and ability profile of the students entered for particular subjects, different teaching approaches, changes in teaching staff or teaching time, and changes to qualifications. We have been clear that schools should not be judged on the basis of 2018 figures alone, but they are an important part of the picture of a school's overall performance.

Results days

Results days in England this summer are:

- Thursday 16 August: A and AS Level results
- Thursday 23 August: GCSE results

Schools and colleges receive results on an embargoed basis the day before, and are able to release them to their students from 9.30am on results day. In addition, A Level students awaiting confirmation of their university place will be able to find out from UCAS Track from 8am on results day whether they have been accepted, though they will not have received their exam results at that point.

The data published by the exam boards on each of the results days show the total number of candidates taking each individual qualification on a national and regional basis and will not tell us anything about which combinations of subjects students have studied, or performance at school and college level. The Department publishes school performance measures, which take into account all results achieved by students which count in performance tables, in October. Provisional data at a school/college level for GCSEs are published in October, with the revised data at school and college level for both GCSEs and A Levels published in January. These data will reflect student entry and achievement in combinations of subjects, including the English Baccalaureate.

Clearing

Finally, you will be aware that students who have applied for a university place can confirm their place on A Level results day. Those who have not previously applied for higher education or have not achieved their chosen place may be able to enter through Clearing. Clearing also allows applicants who have achieved better results than they were expecting to 'trade up' their higher education place. You may wish to encourage the students in your constituency who are not able to confirm their place on results day to consult the UCAS helpline, 0371 468 0468, or the National Careers Service on 0800 100 900 for advice on their options.

Yours sincerely,



Damian Hinds

Secretary of State for Education

Appendix: Timeline of GCSE, AS and A level reforms

Level	Started course in 2015, first exams in 2017	Started course in 2016, first exams in 2018	Started course in 2017, first exams in 2019	Start course in 2018, first exams in 2020
GCSE	English literature, English language and maths only.	English and maths plus... Art and design, biology, chemistry, citizenship studies, combined science, computer science, dance, drama, food preparation and nutrition, French, geography, German, classical Greek, history, Latin, music, physical education (including short course), physics, religious studies (including short course), and Spanish.	2015 and 2016 subjects plus... Ancient history, Arabic, astronomy, Bengali, business, Chinese, classical civilisation, design and technology, economics, electronics, engineering, film studies, geology, Italian, Japanese, media studies, modern Greek, modern Hebrew, Panjabi, Polish, psychology, Russian, sociology, statistics, and...	All previous subjects plus... Gujarati, biblical Hebrew, Persian, Portuguese and Turkish.
Level	Started course in 2015, first A Level exams in 2017, first AS Level exams in 2016	Started course in 2016, first A Level exams in 2018, first AS Level exams in 2017	Started course in 2017, first A Level exams in 2019, first AS Level exams in 2018	Start course in 2018, first A Level exams in 2020, <u>no AS Level exams available in these subjects</u>
AS and A Level	Art and design, biology, business, chemistry, computer science, economics, English language, English language and literature, English literature, history, physics, psychology, and sociology.	2015 subjects plus... Dance, drama and theatre, French, geography, German, classical Greek, Latin, music, physical education, religious studies and Spanish.	2015 and 2016 subjects plus... Accounting, ancient history, Chinese, classical civilisation, design and technology, electronics, environmental science, film studies, maths*, further maths, geology, history of art#, Italian, law, maths, media studies, music technology, philosophy, politics, Russian, and statistics.	All previous subjects plus... Arabic, Bengali, biblical Hebrew, Gujarati, modern Greek, modern Hebrew, Japanese, Panjabi, Persian, Portuguese Polish, Turkish, and Urdu.

*A Level maths will be available for examination at the end of its first year of teaching. Its first award will be summer 2018.

A level only