

NEW GCSE GRADES EXPLAINED

Switching from A-G to 9-1

The 9-1 grading scheme was brought in alongside a new GCSE curriculum in England, which began rolling out in 2017.

How are GCSEs now graded?

GCSEs are now graded from 9-1, with 9 being the highest. Grade 9s are awarded to fewer students than the old A*.

When did GCSE grades change?

The reform was phased in over a number of years, starting in 2017 with just English Language, English Literature and Maths, with all subjects being graded 9 to 1 from summer 2020.

How do the new grades relate to the old ones?

The number scale is not directly equivalent to the old letter one, but the grading was designed so that it is easy to compare at key grades.

These key grades compare as follows:

- Bottom of a grade 7 is comparable to the bottom of the old grade A.
- Bottom of a grade 4 is comparable to the bottom of the old grade C.
- Bottom of a grade 1 is comparable to the bottom of the old grade G.

New grading structure	Old grading structure
9	A*
8	A
7	A
6	B
5 (strong pass)	B
4 (standard pass)	C
3	D
2	E
1	F
1	G
U	U

You could describe the grades as follows:

- 9 = high A*
- 8 = low A* or high A
- 7 = low A
- 6 = high B
- 5 = low B or high C
- 4 = low C
- 3 = D or high E
- 2 = low E or high F
- 1 = low F or G
- U = U



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What is considered a pass?

A grade 4 is considered a 'standard pass' and 5 is a 'strong pass'. School league tables are based on the percentage of pupils who achieve a 5 or above in English and maths GCSEs.

Employers, universities and others have been told that if they previously set entry requirements of at least a grade C, then the equivalent now would be to require at least a grade 4. Some sixth forms and colleges insist on a minimum number of 5s or 6s as a condition of entry for further study. Some apprenticeship vacancies, if they require English and maths, will use 4 and C when stating requirements.

Why did we need a new grade scale for GCSEs?

Current GCSEs have new and more demanding subject content (but are still suitable for the same wide range of abilities). The new grade scale makes it clear to everyone that students have studied the new GCSEs. It also has more higher grades compared to the old A* to G grades, to give sixth forms, colleges, universities and employers the opportunity to better distinguish between students of different abilities.

Would students have been disadvantaged taking these new exams?

New qualifications can take a few years to get used to for these reasons:

- There are fewer past exam papers for students to practise on.
- There are fewer teaching resources available.
- Teachers are not as familiar with the new qualifications as they were with the old ones.

It would not be fair to penalise students for this, so the exam boards use statistics to help set grade boundaries, so that, for example, a student who would have previously got a grade C or above would be expected to get a grade 4 or above in the new GCSEs.

