

GCSE reform - Frequently asked questions

When are the changes taking place?

The reformed GCSE geography is for first teaching in England from September 2016, behind several other subjects. The GA expects awarding organisations to receive approval for their specifications from Ofqual during 2015, and to make these available to teachers by autumn 2015.

Will I need to teach new content?

Some teachers may teach aspects they haven't previously covered at this level, such as extreme weather conditions and natural weather hazards, global ecosystems or urban trends in different parts of the world. Look carefully at each specification to see how the content requirements have been met. The GA provides support for each content area, through its Annual Conference, CPD programme, publications, journals and website.

What if I am teaching the new GCSE in September 2015 as part of a 3 year course?

Something like 20% of schools appear to be in this position – find out if any of your colleagues have the same challenge as you. Difficult though it is, you may be able to select some of the core content from the draft specification (i.e. content which directly meets the content requirements for ALL GCSEs) and start with this. You should also contact your preferred exam board for advice.

How do the new grades relate to the old?

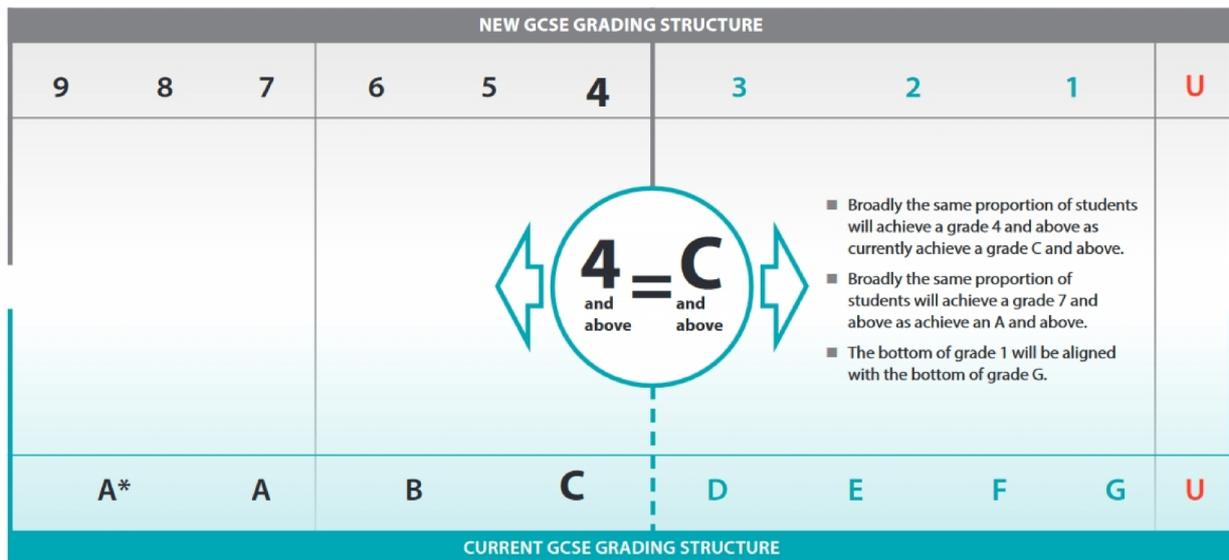
Nine is the new top grade, decreasing to one at the bottom, and there's still a U for candidates who fall below that level. Grade four is set at the level of a current grade C, so the same proportion of students who would achieve at least a grade C now will achieve at least a grade four. Grade seven is going to be set at the level of the current A, leaving grades four, five, and six to cover C and B and grades seven, eight and nine to cover A and A*. Expect the top half of the current A* students to achieve a grade nine. At the other end, grade one is expected to cover the F and G grades, leaving grade two to equal E. Note that grade descriptors will no longer be produced.

What is happening to Controlled Assessment?

Controlled Assessment is being removed, and the new GCSE will be assessed entirely through terminal examinations. There is however a requirement to undertake 'different approaches to fieldwork ... in at least two contrasting environments' and written confirmation must be provided by the centre that all candidates have been given the opportunity to meet this requirement.

How will fieldwork be assessed?

Fieldwork will be worth 15% of the overall mark, but will be assessed through examination questions. In any one cycle, candidates could be asked questions on four of the following areas: questions capable of being investigated through fieldwork and appropriate geographical enquiry; range of techniques and methods used; processing and presenting fieldwork data; analysing and explaining data collected in the field; drawing evidenced conclusions and summaries; reflecting critically on fieldwork.



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What other new skills are going to be assessed?

Many of the skills for GCSE are familiar and have simply been redrafted in the new requirements – such as the use of maps (including Ordnance Survey maps). Some of the specifications prescribe which of these skills need to be developed for specific areas of content. In others the skills will be assessed through particular examination papers. There are also requirements for mathematical and statistical skills, which will account for 10% of the total marks. These are listed in the content criteria and also appear in each specification.

What do students need to learn about the UK?

A focus on the home country or region is a very common feature of geography curricula internationally. Students will need to study the geography of the UK, both in overview and through some depth study. For teachers, this means more than just providing ‘case studies’ from within the UK, but developing knowledge of its landscapes, environmental challenges, changing economy and society. For example, students may need to study geological variations in the UK and the distinct landscapes created; urbanisation across the UK; how UK society is linked and shaped by the wider world or acquire an overview of resources in the UK.