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Changes to GCSEs and the introduction of controlled assessment for GCSEs

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Guidance

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Changes to GCSEs and the introduction of controlled assessment for GCSEs

Audience	Exams office staff at schools and colleges.
Overview	This leaflet describes the changes to GCSEs and the introduction of controlled assessment for GCSEs from September 2009, and the implications for exams offices.
Action required	None.
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Additional copies	This leaflet can be accessed from the Welsh Assembly Government website www.wales.gov.uk/educationandskills
Related documents	<i>Risk management process (editable template); Outlining staff responsibilities (editable example document); Preparing for controlled assessment for GCSEs and Principal Learning (Wales)</i> (Welsh Assembly Government, 2010)

For: Exams office staff

Changes to GCSEs and the introduction of controlled assessment for GCSEs

This leaflet describes the changes to GCSEs and the introduction of controlled assessment for GCSEs from September 2009, and the implications for exams offices.

Why are GCSEs changing?

They are changing as part of the government's reform of 14–19 learning so they:

- are consistent with the aims of the revised secondary curriculum
- incorporate key elements of 14–19 curriculum developments
- include updated content and a range of question styles
- encourage innovative teaching, learning and assessment
- represent progression from Key Stage 3.

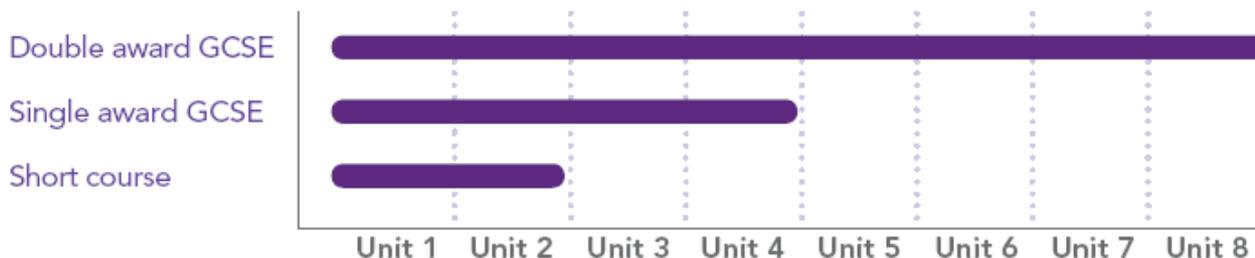
In particular, changes to assessment arrangements will challenge all students by making assessment less formulaic and predictable.

When will the revised GCSE specifications be available?

September 2009	Most subjects are available for first teaching (except English subjects, mathematics, ICT and science). Specifications are already available from awarding bodies.
September 2010	English, English language, English literature, mathematics and ICT will be available for first teaching. Specifications will be available from autumn 2009.
September 2011	Science will be available for first teaching. Specifications will be available from autumn 2010.

How are GCSEs changing?

Awarding bodies have increased the number of unitised GCSEs available. These may lead to short course, single award or double award GCSEs. The table below shows how students can build unitised awards, using a single award GCSE with four units as an example.



Please note that short courses and double awards are not available in all subjects. Also, some single award subjects will have less than four units.

How do the new specification GCSEs compare with the old ones?

Centres requiring details of how a new unitised GCSE specification compares with a previous linear specification should visit awarding body websites. However, there are several general points worth noting:

- the maximum number of units in a new GCSE specification is four
- the majority of subjects with 100 per cent external assessment have two units
- subjects with 60 per cent controlled assessment usually only have one externally assessed unit.

How will the new specification GCSEs impact on centre planning and timetabling?

Students will be able to sit individual units in the January or June examination series. However, the majority of units will only be available in the June series and at least 40 per cent of the assessment must be taken at the end of the course. There are limited assessment opportunities available in the November or March examination series.

A student may resit each unit once only. The better grade achieved will normally count. However, at least 40 per cent of assessment must be taken at the end of the course and must contribute to the student's final grade. If this includes a resit this terminal result must be used, even if this is lower.

How are the new specification GCSEs graded?

Short course or single award GCSEs will continue to be graded A*–G. Double award GCSEs are graded A*A*, A*A, AA, AB, BB, and so on.

When will first awards for new GCSEs take place?

First certification of new short course GCSE specifications will be available in June 2010. First certification of new single and double award GCSE specifications will be available in June 2011. Students who wish to complete a GCSE single award course within the next year should take the current (pre-September 2009) GCSE specifications.

What should centres do about the overlap between new and old specifications?

The overlap between new and old specifications will require careful planning and good communication between exams office staff and heads of department. For example, GCSE qualifications are intended to be taken over two years, but centres may adopt a flexible approach to delivery and teach them over three years. In this situation centres need to be aware of the implications of the accreditation end date to ensure that students are entered for the appropriate GCSE specification.

Centres should check details of assessment arrangements during the transition from the current specifications to the new specifications with the relevant awarding bodies and ensure that all assessments are completed in line with the published timelines.

Awarding bodies cannot transfer credit from current GCSE specifications to new GCSE specifications, and it will not be possible for students to combine units from current and new specifications to make a GCSE qualification.

What is controlled assessment for GCSEs?

Controlled assessment is a new form of internal assessment that replaces coursework in GCSEs. It encourages a more integrated approach to teaching, learning and assessment, and enables teachers to confirm that students carried out the work involved. As the name suggests, it applies increased control over assessment of students' work at three critical points:

- task setting – teachers can choose from a wide range of tasks set by awarding bodies, which can be contextualised to suit local circumstances. Arrangements will differ by subject, with some subjects allowing centres to set tasks
- task taking – there are several levels (and types) of supervision under which assessment can take place, depending on the skills involved; generally this will be done by subject teachers in regular lesson time
- task marking – awarding bodies provide mark schemes or criteria.

Centres must read and abide by the JCQ publication *Instructions for conducting controlled assessments 1 September to 31 August 2010*. This booklet, which provides information on the administrative arrangements for conducting controlled assessments within centres, can be downloaded from the JCQ website www.jcq.org.uk/exams_office

Why is collaboration between the exams office and heads of department key for controlled assessment?

Practice will vary from centre to centre. Exams office staff may have more of a role in some centres than in others, but in all instances they should work with heads of department to decide who does what.

For example, an exams officer will probably submit marks to the awarding body. However, in a few cases a head of department may do this electronically. The exams officer will also probably dispatch students' assessments for moderation, but in some centres this may be undertaken by a head of department.

Each centre will need to decide who will be in charge of storing work – usually this task will fall to the head of each subject. If so, they must be informed not to release students' work until after the closing date for enquiries about results or any subsequent appeal.

Will all GCSEs include controlled assessment?

No, GCSEs fall into three groups:

- 100 per cent external examination
- 75 per cent external examination (25 per cent controlled assessment)
- 40 per cent external examination (60 per cent controlled assessment).

Which group a specific GCSE falls into will depend on the range of skills being assessed and the best way of assessing them. The groupings are given in the table on the following page.

How will teachers be informed about controlled assessment tasks?

Information will come from awarding bodies, at an appropriate point, depending on the nature of the task and how often it needs to be changed. They will also stipulate to centres the period within which tasks can be used. Specific information on security levels for assessments will be found in the teachers' notes or guidance for each specification. Tasks may be provided in several forms, for example:

- files to download from an awarding body's secure website
- a password-protected CD-ROM, sent to the exams office
- hard copy, accompanying the specification.

Where will controlled assessments take place?

Controlled assessment is designed to take place within the normal teaching timetable, for example in the classroom, lab or workshop. There may be occasions, however, when it is more appropriate or convenient to have all students in a larger venue under close supervision, but this will be the exception.

GCSEs being introduced 2009–2011

Ratio of external examination to controlled assessment

100% external assessment	75% external assessment 25% controlled assessment	40% external assessment 60% controlled assessment
Classical Greek Economics Latin Law Mathematics Psychology Religious studies Sociology	Additional science Biology Business studies Chemistry Classical civilisation English literature Geography History Humanities Physics Science Statistics	Additional applied science Applied business Art and design Citizenship studies Construction and the built environment Dance Design and technology Drama Engineering English English language Expressive arts Health and social care Home economics Information and communication technology Leisure and tourism Manufacturing Media studies Modern foreign languages Music Physical education