



# National Reference Test 2017

Information provided by NFER to schools taking part

## Contents

Purpose of the National Reference Test.....	1
When testing will take place .....	1
How students will be selected.....	1
Participation by individual students.....	2
Administering the test .....	3
Access arrangements .....	3
Composition and timing of the test .....	3
Engaging with parents .....	4
Recognition.....	4
Contact information .....	4



Issued by NFER on behalf of Ofqual.

Approved by the Secretary of State as supplementary provisions in accordance with The Education (National Curriculum) (Key Stage 4 Assessment Arrangements) (England) Order 2016<sup>1</sup>

September 2016

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2016/476/contents/made>

## **Purpose of the National Reference Test**

Ofqual's National Reference Test (NRT) will provide additional information to support the awarding of GCSEs. The information from the test will be considered each year by Ofqual and the exam boards prior to GCSEs being awarded. The NRT will provide information on changes in performance standards over time and will be based on results from a nationally representative sample of students who will take the test shortly before taking their GCSEs. Currently, exam boards have limited evidence of how performance standards can change over time. The test will indicate if, over several years, there is a change in how students perform at the national level, which exam boards can then consider during awarding. More information about the NRT is [available here](#).

Ofqual has appointed NFER to develop, administer and analyse the test on its behalf.

Your school has been selected as part of a sample to participate in the statutory NRT, which will take place in the spring term of 2017. To reflect the importance of the new test and to ensure high participation rates, the Government has introduced [legislation](#) that requires the participation of state schools that are selected to take part. For maintained schools, this obligation is placed on the school directly through legislation. For the vast majority of academies and free schools, the requirement has effect through their funding agreements.

## **When testing will take place**

The NRT will take place in schools from 20 February to 3 March 2017. This testing window is in spring to avoid the main GCSE exam period, but also chosen to be at a time when students are likely to have completed most of their course of study so that the test will give a good indication of GCSE performance. You are asked not to provide any additional teaching or revision for those students who will take part in the test, because to do so has the potential to invalidate the outcome.

You are asked to indicate which dates are convenient for your school on the reply form enclosed. We will choose one of the dates you indicate and write back to you by late January to inform you of the selected date.

## **How students will be selected**

You are asked to confirm on the enclosed reply form the number of students in year 11 who will be aged 16 by 31 August 2017 and who will be entered for either or both GCSE English language and GCSE maths. We will then ask you to provide a list of all these students. From this list, we will randomly sample up to 30 of your students to sit the English test and a separate group of up to 30 students to sit the maths test. Students will only be selected to take the test if they are entered for the GCSE in that subject.

No student will be asked to take both tests. If your school has no students taking GCSE English language or GCSE maths, it will not take part in the test. Please note that students may not take part if they are taking only the International GCSE, sometimes referred to as a level1/level 2 certificate, in that subject.

We will need to collect some basic data about the eligible students and we will ask your school to provide this electronically via our secure school portal. (We will send you details of how to access this portal.) The data will include name, date of birth and gender and whether any students will be provided with any access arrangements when they sit the GCSE. Information regarding access arrangements is collected so that we can provide appropriate arrangements for the NRT.

The data collected by NFER will be shared with Ofqual for the purposes of analysis. All data relating to this project will be kept confidential by NFER and Ofqual, and no individual school or student will be identified in any way in any ensuing reports about the analysis. Starting in 2018, Ofqual will publish national measures of performance each year when GCSE results are announced. Data from the test will not be provided to the Department for Education, Ofsted or local authorities, and will not be used in any measures of school performance. The results of individual students will not be used in awarding their GCSEs. All data collected on access arrangements for individual students will be securely destroyed after the testing has been completed.

### **Participation by individual students**

We expect all the selected students to take the test in order to avoid bias in the sample. However, the legislation passed by the Government gives headteachers the right to withdraw students in exceptional circumstances.

Headteachers may withdraw students from the test **only** in the following circumstances:

- a student requires an access arrangement when taking their GCSE in maths or English language that is not available to the student for the NRT either because it is not permitted by NFER for use in this test, or it is not included in JCQ's Access Arrangements and Reasonable Adjustments<sup>2</sup>
- a student has exceptional, temporary circumstances which, had they occurred during the student's GCSE exams, would have resulted in the student not taking their GCSE exam or being eligible for special consideration, for example:
  - bereavement of a close family member or friend shortly before or at the time of the assessment
  - serious domestic crisis shortly before or at the time of the assessment which results in the student being emotionally affected at the time of the assessment

---

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.jcq.org.uk/exams-office/access-arrangements-and-special-consideration/regulations-and-guidance/access-arrangements-and-reasonable-adjustments-2016-2017>

- participation in sporting events or other competitions at an international level at the time of the assessment
- other circumstances which the headteacher assesses could cause significant distress for the student were they to take the test, such as exacerbation of an existing medical condition.

If you are unsure whether a student's particular circumstances warrant withdrawal, please contact NFER for guidance.

Unfortunately, we are unable to provide schools with results for individual students due to the confidential nature of the test and because each student will only take a part of the complete test.

### **Administering the test**

One or two of NFER's test administrators will visit your school to administer the test to the selected students. We will agree the date with you within the testing period of 20 February to 3 March. All of the test administrators are trained teachers and have enhanced DBS checks. We will inform your school of their name(s) prior to testing and they will make direct contact with your school by late January to confirm the arrangements.

### **Access arrangements**

NFER will apply access arrangements similar to those used at GCSE so if students are going to be supported in their GCSEs by a scribe or reader or given any other support, the school may use this approach in this test. Braille or modified enlarged print versions of the test will be available for those students who require this. NFER will also be able to provide enlarged tests if this is required. Further guidance on access arrangements and supporting students with access needs will be provided to your school contact nearer the time.

### **Composition and timing of the test**

The test is based on the new maths and English language GCSEs. The English test will comprise a reading part and a writing part. Both the maths and English tests will last one hour. The test has been carefully designed to be accessible to all students who are due to sit their GCSEs in summer 2017. Students will be asked to make their best attempt at the whole test.

The questions in the test will be aimed mostly at grades 3 to 7 but will also include some questions aimed at grades 1 and 2 to help make them accessible to all students. Unlike the GCSE maths exams, the maths test is not a tiered assessment. In the maths test most of the questions are based on the GCSE content that all students taking the qualification have to study and will include some more straightforward questions at the start to help encourage students. A few questions drawing on higher tier content will be at the end of the test booklet.

### **Engaging with parents**

We will provide a letter via our school portal that your school can use to provide parents with information about the NRT. We recognise that a small number of parents may not wish their child to take part, but we ask the school to support the test and ensure participation, if necessary by explaining to parents that the school is legally required to enter selected students into the test, as well as reassuring them that individual students' results in the NRT will not affect their GCSE results.

### **Recognition**

We aim to make participation in this test as easy as possible for your school. We will make every effort to select the date and timing of the test to suit you, our test administrators will administer the test and NFER will mark it. We will however require a member of staff from the school also to be present during the test to ensure arrangements run smoothly and to help finalise arrangements before the day of the test. We will provide each participating school with a cheque for £190 in recognition of this staffing requirement. We also want to recognise the contribution made by participating students. As such, all participating students across the country will be entered into a prize draw with the chance to win an iPad mini.

### **Contact information**

If you have any questions or queries about the test, please contact NFER by telephone on 01753 637 383 or by email to [NRTkeystage4@nfer.ac.uk](mailto:NRTkeystage4@nfer.ac.uk)

We wish to make our publications widely accessible. Please contact us at [enquiries@nfer.ac.uk](mailto:enquiries@nfer.ac.uk) if you have any specific accessibility requirements.



© Crown copyright 2016

This publication is licensed under the terms of the Open Government Licence v3.0 except where otherwise stated. To view this licence, visit <http://nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3> or write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU.

Where we have identified any third party copyright information you will need to obtain permission from the copyright holders concerned.

This publication is available at [www.gov.uk/ofqual](http://www.gov.uk/ofqual) and at [www.nfer.ac.uk/portal](http://www.nfer.ac.uk/portal)

Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to:

NFER,  
The Mere,  
Upton Park,  
Slough,  
Berkshire, SL1 2DQ

Telephone: 01753 574 123  
Email: [enquiries@nfer.ac.uk](mailto:enquiries@nfer.ac.uk)