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Consultation outcome

# Decisions on changes to the assessment of mathematics, physics and combined science GCSEs in 2025, 2026 and 2027

Updated 13 November 2024

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## Introduction

On 3 October 2024, the [Department for Education \(DfE\) decided](#) that it is not necessary for students taking exams in 2025, 2026 and 2027 to memorise the formulae for GCSE mathematics and most equations for GCSE physics and combined science. The longer-term expectations will be confirmed after [DfE's Curriculum and Assessment Review](#).

This reflects DfE's responsibility for GCSE subject content and was a change that

was also made for exams that took place in 2022, 2023 and 2024.

In order to implement DfE's policy decision in 2022, 2023 and 2024, Ofqual amended the Conditions and Requirements for GCSE qualifications. The amendments required exam boards to provide a formulae sheet in the exams for GCSE mathematics and a revised equations sheet in the exams for GCSE physics and combined science. Exam boards provided copies of the formulae and equations sheets for use in teaching and to ensure that students were familiar with them prior to the exams. Exam boards provided clean copies of the formulae and equations sheets in the exams.

DfE has asked Ofqual to consider continuing arrangements that provide support to students taking GCSE mathematics, physics and combined science exams in 2025, 2026 and 2027.

Given DfE's responsibility for the subject content and Ofqual's responsibility for how that content must be assessed, Ofqual [consulted on proposals](#) to change the assessment arrangements. In line with DfE's request, Ofqual proposed that students should be given support materials that set out the formulae and equations they would usually have to memorise when taking exams in 2025, 2026 and 2027. (For GCSE mathematics, the proposals will also apply to the November 2025, 2026 and 2027 exams.)

The consultation was open from Thursday 3 October to Thursday 17 October 2024 and received 15,796 responses. [A full summary and analysis of the responses](#) has been published at the same time as this decision document.

## Summary of decisions

Ofqual has decided to implement the proposals set out in the consultation document. The majority of respondents were in favour of students being given formulae sheets for GCSE mathematics (94% agreement) and equations sheets for physics and combined science (95% agreement). No issues were raised by those responding to the consultation that make it necessary to revise the proposals.

Ofqual will change its rules to require exam boards to provide students with support materials in the form of formulae and equations sheets for GCSE mathematics, physics and combined science exams in 2025, 2026 and 2027. The support materials will set out the formulae and equations that students must memorise in a

normal year, as set out in DfE's subject content and as included on the sheets provided for 2022, 2023 and 2024. Ofqual's updated conditions will require exam boards to:

- publish the formulae and equations sheets for the exams in 2025 in December 2024 so that students may become familiar with them before the exams
- publish the formulae and equations sheets for the exams in 2026 and 2027 by 1 September 2025 and 1 September 2026 respectively so that students may become familiar with them before the exams
- provide clean copies with their 2025, 2026 and 2027 exam papers

This means the formulae and equation sheets to be used in the 2025 exams will be the same as those used for exams in 2024. As such, before the exam boards republish the sheets in December 2024, students and teachers may access exam boards' 2024 sheets for practice purposes, if they wish.

The decision relates to GCSE mathematics, physics and combined science exams being taken in summer 2025, 2026 and 2027. For GCSE mathematics this will also apply to exams taken in November 2025, 2026 and 2027. The longer-term expectations will be confirmed after [DfE's Curriculum and Assessment Review](#).

## Details

[Ofqual proposed](#) that students should be provided with formulae sheets and equations sheets in the GCSE mathematics, physics and combined science exams for 2025, 2026 and 2027. There were 15,796 responses to the consultation overall.

There were 15,687 responses to the proposal that a formulae sheet should be provided in the exams for GCSE mathematics in 2025, 2026 and 2027. The majority of respondents, 94%, supported the proposal, while 3% did not. The remaining 2% neither agreed nor disagreed or did not respond to this proposal.

There were 15,715 responses to the proposal that an equations sheet should be provided in the exams for GCSE physics and combined science in 2025, 2026 and 2027. The majority of respondents, 95%, supported the proposal while just under 4% did not. Under 2% neither agreed nor disagreed or did not respond to this proposal.

Respondents provided similar reasons for supporting the proposals for GCSE

mathematics and GCSE physics and combined science. They said that the support was appropriate considering the disruption to education experienced by this cohort of students. Respondents thought that providing this support would be fair when comparing these students with previous cohorts and that it would make the experience of taking exams less stressful for students and increase their confidence. They also said it was more important that students could understand, apply and rearrange formulae and equations rather than memorise them. Some of these respondents suggested that the proposals should be extended further, and that formulae and equations sheets should be provided permanently or that similar support should be provided for other subjects.

Several respondents, including those who agreed and disagreed with the proposals, said that students had already learned the formulae and equations. Others suggested presenting the formulae or equations differently to reflect how these are used during teaching and learning.

Respondents who disagreed with the proposals said that these students had been less affected by disruption from the COVID-19 pandemic or commented on the importance of knowing formulae and equations to support progression.

Some respondents requested that equations also be added to the sheets to support students in GCSE chemistry and biology. As explained in the consultation, DfE's subject content for GCSEs in mathematics, physics and combined science explicitly sets out specific formulae and equations that students are required to recall and use in the exams. This is not the case for other GCSE subjects, including GCSEs in biology and chemistry, where DfE's subject content does not require students to recall specific formulae or equations.

The content and presentation of the formulae and equations used in 2022, 2023 and 2024 also reflects DfE's subject content. Exam boards worked together to produce support materials that would be consistent with DfE's requirements and the same for all students, whichever exam board's specification they were studying. Ofqual considers that these support materials should continue to be consistent between the exam boards and also, as far as possible, between exam series to support students' familiarity and confidence in using them.

Ofqual notes there was overwhelming support for the proposals. The proposals align with what government, which is responsible for subject content in GCSEs, expects students to cover in these qualifications being taken in 2025, 2026 and 2027. No issues were raised by respondents, including in the equalities and regulatory impact assessments as set out below, that Ofqual judged would make it necessary to reconsider the proposals.

Ofqual has therefore decided to implement the proposals set out in the consultation document. Ofqual will change its Conditions to require exam boards to:

- publish the formulae and equations sheets for the exams in 2025 in December 2024 so that students may become familiar with them before the exams
- publish the formulae and equations sheets for the exams in 2026 and 2027 by 1 September 2025 and 1 September 2026 respectively so that students may become familiar with them before the exams
- provide clean copies with their 2025, 2026 and 2027 exam papers

The support materials will set out the formulae and equations that students must memorise in a normal year, as set out in DfE's subject content, and as included on the sheets provided for 2022, 2023 and 2024.

The formulae and equation sheets to be used in the summer and November 2025 exams will be the same as those used for exams in 2024. As such, before the exam boards republish the sheets in December 2024, students and teachers may access exam boards' 2024 sheets for practice purposes, if they wish.

Ofqual expects the formulae and equation sheets used in the 2026 and 2027 exams to remain consistent with those in previous years and between specifications. Exam boards may, however, consider whether it is possible to make any minimal presentational-only changes, in response to feedback, that could be consistent for all specifications. Exam boards will ensure that these formulae and equation sheets for use in 2026 and 2027 are made available publicly no later than 1 September 2026 and 2027 respectively.

## **Equality impact assessment**

Ofqual considered the potential impact of the proposals on students with particular protected characteristics. The consultation explained that Ofqual did not consider the proposals would have a negative impact on students who share particular protected characteristics. Ofqual did not identify any such issues that made it necessary to change the proposals.

Respondents who raised issues tended to focus on students with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and those who have been disadvantaged in some way due to disruptions to their education. These comments most frequently reflected the ways in which students had already been impacted, rather than

identifying issues resulting from the consultation proposals.

A few respondents suggested that the formulae and equations sheets should be edited or printed in different formats to be accessible to SEND students or those with English as an additional language. While GCSE assessment materials cannot be reproduced in different languages, exam boards can and do provide modified papers as part of their [access arrangements and reasonable adjustments](#).

## Regulatory impact assessment

In the consultation, Ofqual identified that schools and colleges would likely have limited or no burden from these proposals. It noted that the changes are intended to reduce burden to enable more time for teaching. The consultation acknowledged that exam boards would incur costs, while noting they are familiar with the arrangements having produced formulae and revised equation sheets for exams in 2022, 2023 and 2024.

The consultation sought views on the initial regulatory impact assessment. It asked about any other potential costs or burdens that had not been identified, and what steps could be taken to reduce them.

Many respondents referred to the cost for schools of printing the formulae and equations sheets, although these frequently suggested the costs would be minimal. Exam boards that offer the GCSE qualifications also set out the cost and burden implications in updating their assessment materials, however, all 4 supported the proposals.

Respondents commented on the time needed for teachers to familiarise students with the formulae and equations sheets prior to the exams, and the importance of arrangements being confirmed as soon as possible.

While acknowledging the feedback and concerns raised by respondents to the consultation, Ofqual believes these are outweighed by the strong support for the proposals, the need for assessments to reflect the revised subject content expectations, and the benefits for students identified by respondents. As such, Ofqual has not identified any such issues that made it necessary to change the proposals.

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