

Information for teachers

Changes to GCSEs

Including controlled assessment

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Qualifications and
Curriculum Authority

Information for teachers

GCSEs are the qualifications taken by the largest number of students in England, Northern Ireland and Wales. Almost six million GCSEs were awarded in 2008, across a range of more than 40 subjects. While most are taken at key stage 4, some are taken post-16, and many also have a place within the new Diplomas as additional and specialist learning (ASL).

From September 2009, GCSEs are changing. New criteria have been produced to ensure that all GCSEs (short courses, single and double awards) are revised and improved. This leaflet explains these changes, with particular reference to the introduction of controlled assessment, including some examples of how it will work in practice.

GCSEs in core subjects are consistent with the national curricula for England, Northern Ireland and Wales at key stage 4. These subjects include citizenship, English, information and communication technology (ICT), mathematics, physical education and science. GCSEs in religious

studies must be consistent with the non-statutory national framework in England and equivalent requirements in Northern Ireland and Wales.

Why are the changes happening?

Development of GCSEs is part of the government's reform of 14–19 learning. New GCSEs will be consistent with the aims of the revised secondary curriculum and will support functional skills. They include updated content and a range of question styles. They also emphasise personal, learning and thinking skills (PLTS) and represent progression from key stage 3.

QCA has developed the revised qualification and subject criteria in collaboration with teachers, awarding bodies, subject associations, higher education organisations and other interested parties.

The revised criteria:

- update the content of GCSEs
- encourage innovative teaching, learning and assessment

- incorporate key elements of 14–19 curriculum developments
- ensure that the revised GCSEs complement the new Diplomas.

The assessment arrangements will provide stretch and challenge for all students and make assessment less formulaic and predictable.

When will the new GCSEs be available?

September 2009	New GCSEs in most subjects will be available for first teaching. Specifications are available from awarding bodies.
September 2010	New GCSEs in English, English language, English literature, mathematics and ICT will be available for first teaching. Specifications will be available to centres from autumn 2009.

Science GCSEs introduced in 2006 will be reviewed by 2011, when the accreditation of the current GCSEs expires.

A list of accredited qualifications can be found on the National Database of Accredited Qualifications (www.accreditedqualifications.org.uk). GCSE specifications can be found on awarding body websites.

Changes to GCSEs

What are the main changes to GCSEs?

In addition to the introduction of controlled assessment, discussed in detail in this leaflet, the main changes include the following.

Identification of learning outcomes

Learning outcomes set out what subject specifications require students to do, for example in terms of:

- active engagement in the learning processes
- skills development and application
- knowledge and understanding
- appreciation of a wider context for the subject and of significant issues related to it
- individual response to the subject material.

Updating of content

New developments and themes have emerged since GCSEs were last revised in 2000. Updating may result from cultural, economic, environmental, social and/or technological developments, and/or contemporary themes such as globalisation, sustainability or social cohesion. New research, findings, publications, and the availability of new processes, techniques and materials may also influence content.

Creating more unitised specifications

Awarding bodies have taken the opportunity to increase the number of unitised GCSEs. These may lead to short course, full course or double award GCSEs (see chart below). This shows how typical unitised awards of different sizes can be built from units.

Double award GCSE							
Single award GCSE							
Short course							
Unit 1	Unit 2	Unit 3	Unit 4	Unit 5	Unit 6	Unit 7	Unit 8

Assessment opportunities may be available during the course as well as at the end. Units can be retaken once, with the best result counting towards the overall grade.

However, at least 40 per cent of the assessment must be at the end of the course, whatever the style of the assessment.

Changes to assessment

This may include a change to the weightings of external and internal assessment, for example in languages and English where the weighting of internal assessment has increased.

Other changes involve:

- a variety of question types and tasks, including opportunities for extended writing
- the assessment of quality of written communication where a written response is required.

Are there any changes to grading?

Short or single award GCSEs will continue to be graded A*–G.

Double award GCSEs are graded A*A*, A*A, AA, AB, BB, BC, etc.

When will the first assessments and awards for the GCSEs introduced in 2009 take place?

For unitised assessment schemes, there will be assessment opportunities from January 2010. First awards of short courses will be summer 2010. First awards of single/double award GCSEs will be summer 2011.

What about one-year courses starting in 2009?

Students starting a one-year GCSE course in September 2009 should take the current GCSE specifications, which will be examined in summer 2010. Resit opportunities will be available; awarding bodies will provide further information.

Controlled assessment

What is controlled assessment?

Controlled assessment is a new form of internal assessment of the work of the course. Replacing coursework, controlled assessment:

- encourages a more integrated approach to teaching, learning and assessment
- enables teachers to confirm that students carry out the work involved.

Controlled assessment differs from both coursework and external examinations. It may, for example, allow supervised access to sources, such as the internet, for research purposes.

What are the advantages of controlled assessment?

Controlled assessment retains the advantages of coursework, such as the opportunity to follow up interests through independent or group work and demonstrate a range of skills. A key feature will be students' active engagement in the learning process.

In many cases there will be an opportunity for students or their teachers to choose from a range

of tasks set by the awarding body and/or to contextualise a task to the local situation.

Teachers will be able to plan their schemes of work to incorporate activities leading to controlled assessment, often at a time of their choosing. They will also have the security of systems that enable them to ensure that work submitted for assessment is the student's own.

What will controlled assessment look like?

Increased control over students' work is applied at three points:

1 Task setting

Tasks may be set by the centre or the awarding body – it varies from subject to subject. The specification stipulates the number and nature of the tasks required. When the awarding body sets the task, the centre may be able to select from a number of comparable examples or contextualise a task to its own circumstances, for example basing a task on a local industry or business.

2 Task taking

This sets out the extent of supervision in carrying out tasks and the conditions under which assessment takes place.

3 Task marking

This is usually teacher marking of the assessment according to mark schemes or criteria provided by the awarding body or, exceptionally, marking by the awarding body itself. Task marking includes provision for internal standardisation and awarding body moderation.

Teachers need to look carefully at their chosen specification to ensure that they are fully aware of each aspect of the control described.

Will all GCSEs have controlled assessment?

No, though most will. Each GCSE subject is placed in one of three groups with a specified percentage of controlled assessment. The percentage depends on the range of skills to be assessed and the most effective way of assessing them.

The groupings are:

- subjects with only external assessment and no controlled assessment, for example economics, mathematics and religious studies
- subjects with 25 per cent controlled assessment, for example business studies, geography and history
- subjects with 60 per cent controlled assessment, for example citizenship studies, design and technology, and modern foreign languages.

What will be assessed by controlled assessment?

Controlled assessment will be used for assessment of subject-related skills and their application when external assessment is not the best way of assessing them.

Examples from different subjects of skills to be assessed through controlled assessment include:

- undertaking research and gathering, selecting and organising materials and information
- planning investigations and/or tasks

- carrying out investigations and/or tasks
- performance and production skills
- working with others and devising creative approaches
- extracting and interpreting information from a range of different sources
- selecting and applying tactics, strategies and compositional ideas
- taking informed and responsible action
- analysis and evaluation of processes and products
- presenting ideas and arguments supported by evidence.

Can students work in a group to complete a controlled assessment?

Yes, but they must each produce an individual response that can be assessed. For example, they may carry out a group activity and write it up individually, drawing out their own contribution to the group activity and commenting on how they developed and demonstrated their own skills.

How will controlled assessment influence teaching and learning?

Teachers will have the opportunity to plan learning that leads up to and culminates in a substantial controlled assessment task, providing a coherent learning experience. They need to ensure that students have the range of experience to enable them to succeed in the controlled assessment, for example in developing practical or linguistic skills or carrying out research or fieldwork.

Students will know when the assessment will take place, what its objectives are, and how long it will take. They will be able to prepare for it in a systematic way and complete it within a set timeframe, with no need or opportunity to continue to work on it in an attempt to improve their marks.

Teachers should view controlled assessment as part of the work of the course, rather than a separate, time-consuming activity.

Teachers can choose a unitised approach or a linear one to suit local circumstances and students. The regulations requiring 40 per cent terminal assessment will have an influence on when topics are taught and assessed.

How will manageability be achieved?

Controlled assessment will be an integral part of teaching and learning.

Awarding bodies will specify a word and/or time limit for the controlled assessment so that students and teachers know exactly what the demands are. Teachers will find the marking criteria and other supporting documentation and processes convenient and time saving.

How will reliability be strengthened?

The levels of control applied to each assessment are designed to maximise reliability. Centres and teachers will monitor tasks to authenticate confidently that the work is the student's.

Tasks will be changed frequently where some students might be advantaged by access to previous years' work.

There will be clear guidance to teachers on drafting and providing interim feedback and advice during the task.

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. Awarding bodies will also inform centres about the period within which tasks can be used.

Tasks will typically be provided in the form of:

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

How will controlled assessment affect the exam timetable?

Any change in the balance between external and internal assessment may require changes to the timing of assessments.

A lot of controlled assessment will take place within the normal timetable in the classroom, workshop or laboratory. When a report or other written outcome is part of the controlled assessment, it will have to be completed under some level of supervision, which could be by the class teacher. However, there may be occasions when it is convenient to have all candidates in a larger venue for a

specified period of time, under close supervision similar to exam conditions.

As with teaching and learning, the requirement for 40 per cent terminal assessment may impact the exam timetable.

What about access arrangements?

These apply equally to controlled and external assessment, for example use of practical assistants, readers or additional time. Further details are available on the Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) website (www.jcq.org.uk).

Examples of controlled assessment tasks

These examples illustrate how controlled assessment regulations are reflected in specifications of different GCSE subjects. They show how a level of control is applied to each stage within the assessment.

Example 1: GCSE geography

Local investigation including fieldwork –15 per cent of the single award

■ Task setting

Centres select a task from a choice of four provided by the awarding body two years prior to submission. This enables teachers to select a fieldwork context accessible to their students, and to use the same one in succeeding years, perhaps with a different task.

■ Task taking

Students are required to plan, carry out, evaluate and report on their fieldwork activity. They work under direct supervision of a teacher at all times, with the exception of research involving primary and/or secondary data collection. Up to four hours are allowed for writing approximately 1,200 words on their activity and findings.

■ Task marking

Centres will mark the students' work, which will be moderated by the awarding body.

Example 2: GCSE modern foreign languages

Writing in the target language – 30 per cent of the single award

■ Task setting

Assessment tasks are set by the centre. The awarding body provides stimuli for the tasks, which centres can adapt, or they can create their own. Centres must ensure the task covers all the assessment objectives and allows for the full range of outcomes. All tasks must be refreshed every two years.

■ Task taking

Students have up to six hours' teaching time (within a maximum of two weeks) to prepare for their writing assessment. The work should be completed in two sessions of up to one hour each. Students must independently complete all the work submitted for assessment. The assessed work and related preparation are carried out under direct teacher supervision. The teacher monitors the progress of the work and checks that it is consistent with expectations of the student's performance. Any guidance teachers give to the student must comply with the awarding body's guidelines.

■ Task marking

Centres send the awarding body details of the stimuli used for the task, along with the completed controlled assessments. These are marked by the awarding body.

Example 3: GCSE design and technology

Designing and making – 30 per cent of the single award

■ Task setting

This unit involves researching, designing and modelling a functional prototype. Students must select a theme set by the awarding body, though it may be contextualised to suit local circumstances.

■ Task taking

Each stage of the controlled assessment task is conducted under informal teacher supervision within guidelines specified by the awarding body. The 20-hour task requires students to use appropriate ICT and to produce:

- worksheets showing design development and modelling
- a prototype product that can be evaluated
- digital images/photographs of the final product showing the product in use
- digital images/photographs of any models or mock-ups used when designing, modelling or testing
- a completed awarding body cover sheet explaining what they have done and why, and including their own evaluation of their process and product.

■ Task marking

The controlled assessment is marked by the centre using awarding body marking criteria and guidance. External moderation involves uploading the digital evidence to the awarding body's secure website.

Further information and guidance

If you would like to know more about controlled assessment, please visit the QCA website at www.qca.org.uk.

On the web

- Information and guidance on changes to GCSEs
www.qca.org.uk/qca_15976.aspx
- Examples of controlled assessments
www.qca.org.uk/qca_15718.aspx
- National Database of Accredited Qualifications
www.accreditedqualifications.org.uk
- Guidance for exams officers
www.qca.org.uk/14-19eo
- GCSE and subject criteria and reports on controlled assessment
www.ofqual.gov.uk/743.aspx
- 14–19 reforms
www.dcsf.gov.uk/14-19

GCSE awarding bodies

- www.aqa.org.uk/qual/newgcse
- www.edexcel.com/quals/gcse/gcse09
- www.ocr.org.uk/qualifications/1419changes/gcse
- www.wjec.co.uk
- www.ccea.org.uk/spec-changes
- www.icaa.com/exams (currently no accredited GCSE specifications)

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