

Changes to GCSEs



Improving the assessment system

GCSEs were developed over 20 years ago and are still going strong. Over half a million young people sit GCSE examinations every year.

As part of the reform of 14–19 education, the regulators in England, Wales and Northern Ireland are currently reviewing GCSE qualifications. This is to ensure that content supports the aims of the revised secondary curriculum and assessment continues to stimulate good teaching and learning.

The changes are designed to make sure GCSEs:

- are relevant, stimulating and engaging for students
- prove to employers that students have the skills they want
- engage more students with science and language learning
- enable teachers to confirm that work submitted for assessment is the student's own.

The main changes

Replacing coursework with controlled assessment where it is the best way of assessing subject-specific skills.

Examination papers with a broad range of question styles to enable all students to demonstrate what they know, understand and can do.

Applied and general pathways within the same qualification where possible and appropriate.

Incorporating functional skills into GCSEs in English, ICT and mathematics to ensure that students have skills employers regard as essential.

Incorporating recommendations of the Dearing Review of Languages into GCSEs in modern foreign languages to increase

engagement and participation in language learning.

Timelines

Most subjects are being reviewed in 2008 for first teaching from September 2009.

English, English literature, ICT and mathematics will be reviewed in 2009 for first teaching from September 2010.

Science GCSEs based on new programmes of study for science have already been reviewed. However, other

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Further information

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

science GCSEs that are not based on the science programmes of study, for example human physiology and health, will be reviewed in 2008 for first teaching from September 2009.

Consultation on English, English literature, ICT and mathematics subject criteria

The regulators are working with subject associations, awarding bodies and other key stakeholders to develop criteria for GCSE specifications in these subjects. The consultation on the draft criteria will start in May 2008 and will be available from the QCA website. Awarding bodies will use the finalised criteria to develop new specifications for accreditation by the regulators in 2009.

Controlled assessment

The biggest change to GCSEs is the introduction of controlled assessment in place of coursework. Controlled assessment retains the advantages of coursework while ensuring that work submitted is the student's own. A key feature will be students' active engagement in the learning process.

Controlled assessment is determined by the level of control for three different elements of assessment: setting the task, task taking and task marking. Assessment requirements will be consistent for all specifications across a subject as levels of control will be the same.

Setting the task

For the majority of subjects, tasks will be set by the awarding body and may be contextualised by the centre depending on local circumstances and availability of resources. For some subjects, tasks will be set by the awarding body and will change each year. This should ensure that assessments do not become formulaic and are manageable for students and centres.

Task taking

At least some aspects of the task will be supervised to ensure that the work is the student's own. However, skills such as research may take place under limited levels of supervision to encourage out-of-classroom learning. Students will be encouraged to use the internet and,

where appropriate, to work in groups. Teachers will be able to confidently authenticate students' work.

Task marking

In some subjects, work will be marked by the awarding body. For most subjects, work will be marked by the teacher and moderated by the awarding body. In both cases, regulations will ensure that assessment judgements are of the highest quality.

Awarding bodies will provide guidance for centres on controlled assessment and will include exemplars in their specifications. QCA is producing case studies to show what controlled assessment will look like in a number of subjects. These will be available from the QCA website.

Controlled assessment in different subjects

| Examination only | 25% controlled assessment | 60% controlled assessment | |
|-------------------|---------------------------|--|--------------------------|
| Classical Greek | Business studies | Applied business | Health and social care |
| Economics | Classical civilisation | Art and design | Home economics |
| Latin | Geography | Citizenship studies | Hospitality and catering |
| Law | History | Construction and the built environment | Leisure and tourism |
| Religious studies | Humanities | Design and technology | Manufacturing |
| Psychology | Statistics | Drama | Media studies |
| Sociology | | Engineering | Modern foreign languages |
| | | Expressive arts | Physical education |