14-19 qualification reform 2010-2019 – a handy guide

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Introduction

This guide is designed to give a quick overview of the qualification reform in England from 2010. It is written to help you understand the different changes that are currently being implemented or that that are due to be introduced by 2019. The guide has been split by qualification, as listed below. Links to more information can be found on page 8 of this guide.

Contents

What is happening to GCSEs?

Subjects

It is proposed that all current GCSE subjects will be reformed by 2017, or will be discontinued. This reform is happening across three phases:

- **To be taught from 2015:** Mathematics, English literature, English language.

- **To be taught from 2016:** Physics, chemistry, biology, combined science (double award), food preparation and nutrition, history, geography, modern and classical languages, art & design, dance, drama, music, computer science, citizenship, religious studies, PE.

- **To be taught from 2017:** Ancient history, astronomy, business, classical civilization, design & technology, economics, electronics, engineering, film studies, geology, media studies, psychology, sociology, statistics

- **Subjects to be discontinued:** Subjects confirmed for withdrawal, last teaching from September 2015: additional applied science, catering, design and technology (food technology route only), digital communication*, expressive arts, home economics (food and nutrition route only), human health and physiology, humanities, performing arts.

  Subjects confirmed for withdrawal, last teaching from September 2016: additional and further additional science, applications of mathematics, applied business, applied ICT, applied science, business and communication systems, business communications, business studies and economics, environmental and land-based science, environmental science, general studies, health and social care, home economics – child development, home economics – textiles, hospitality, ICT, law, leisure and tourism, manufacturing.

  *Only available in 2015 for centres already delivering these qualifications

Key features

Structure: All new GCSEs will be fully linear, and most will be untiered. Of the 2015 subjects, only mathematics will be tiered.

Assessment model: Assessment will normally be by examination only, except in subjects where some non-examined assessment is the best approach, such as art & design.

Availability: Assessment will be available only in the summer, with the exception of mathematics and English language, which will have an additional assessment opportunity for students aged 16 and over in November.

Grading: The new GCSEs will be graded from 1 to 9, with 1 as the lowest grade and 9 as the highest.

Standards: Ofqual proposes to carry the standard across from the current GCSEs to the reformed qualifications by pegging the current grade C to the new grade 4, at least initially.

What is happening to IGCSEs?

'IGCSE' is a term that is used, loosely and confusingly, to refer to suites of qualifications offered as alternatives to GCSE by a number of awarding bodies. Strictly speaking, **'IGCSE'** or **'International GCSE'** refers only to a qualification that was developed initially for international

use, and is not accredited by England's regulator, Ofqual. These are not approved for use in maintained schools. Following Michael Gove's announcement in 2010 that IGCSEs would be recognised in performance tables, awarding bodies moved to introduce accredited versions that would be available for use in the maintained sector. These accredited **Level 1/2 Certificates** have gradually been introduced since then and have replaced IGCSEs in performance tables – Cambridge IGCSEs counted for the last time in summer 2012, and Edexcel International GCSEs counted for the last time in summer 2013.

DfE has announced that these L1/2 Certificates will not be eligible for use in maintained schools or recognised in performance tables as the reformed 9-1 GCSEs are introduced.

What is happening to AS and A levels?

Subjects

All current AS and A level subjects will be reformed by 2017, or will be discontinued. This reform is happening across three phases:

- **To be taught from 2015:** Art and design, biology, business, chemistry, computer science, economics, English language, English literature, English language and literature, history, physics, psychology, sociology

- **To be taught from 2016:** Modern and classical languages, geography, dance, drama, music, religious studies, PE

- **To be taught from 2017:** Accounting, ancient history, archaeology, classical civilisation, design & technology, electronics, environmental science, film studies, further mathematics, Geology, history of art, law, mathematics, media studies, music technology, philosophy, politics, statistics

- **Subjects to be discontinued:** Subjects confirmed for withdrawal, last teaching from September 2015: applied art and design*, applied business*, economics and business*, human biology*, performance studies, performing arts.

    Subjects confirmed for withdrawal, last teaching from September 2016: anthropology, applied ICT, applied science, citizenship studies, communication and culture, creative writing, critical thinking, engineering, general studies, health and social care, home economics (food, nutrition and health), humanities, ICT, leisure studies, media: communication and production, moving image arts, pure mathematics, quantitative methods (AS), Science (AS), science in society, travel and tourism, use of mathematics (AS), world development.

        *Only available in 2015 for centres already delivering these qualifications

Key features

Structure: AS and A level will be separate linear qualifications; however the content of AS can be a subset of the full A level in order to facilitate co-teachability.

The separate structure means that if a student takes an AS examination on the way to completing an A level the AS outcome will not contribute to the A level grade. The concept of 'A2' disappears.

Assessment model: Assessment will normally be by examination only, except in subjects where some non-examined assessment is the best approach, such as history or computing.

Availability: Assessment will be available only in the summer.

Grading: The new A and AS levels will continue to be graded from A to E, with an additional A* grade available at A level only.

Standards: The standard of AS will remain in line with current end of first year standard; the A level standard will remain in line with current A level standard.

What is happening with vocational qualifications, including BTECs?

The government has created a number of categories of vocational qualification for students aged 14-16 (key stage 4), and for those aged 16-19. They have defined key 'characteristics' for qualifications in each category.

Key stage 4

Technical Awards: Since 2012 DfE has issued an annual list of level 1 and level 2 non-GCSE qualifications which will be recognised in performance tables. The 2017 list, published in December 2014 and updated in February 2015, introduced the term 'Technical Awards' to describe these qualifications.

Characteristics: All qualifications approved for KS4 performance tables must demonstrate a range of characteristics around size, purpose and assessment, including:

- **Size:** a minimum of 120 guided learning hours (glh).

- **Declared purpose:** a statement about the purpose of the qualification to help students make informed decisions about which qualifications to take.

- **Appropriate content:** must match the purpose, and focus on an applied study of an industry sector or cover the acquisition of practical and technical skills.

- **External assessment:** a minimum of 25% of the content externally assessed. New qualifications that will be first reported in 2018 tables will need to have 40%.

- **Synoptic assessment:** to help a student develop appreciation of the connections across a subject.

After 2016 results no vocational qualifications in EBacc subjects will be recognised for performance tables. This chiefly affects vocational science qualifications; vocational ICT qualifications will still be eligible for consideration even if there is some content that is common with Computing. From 2019, vocational qualifications that are considered to be 'direct alternatives' to any reformed GCSE will also cease to be recognised in performance tables.

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Level 3 qualifications

From September 2014, vocational qualifications at level 3 have been classified as either Tech Levels or Applied General qualifications if they are approved for performance tables.

- **Tech Levels** are for students wishing to specialise in a specific industry, occupation or occupational group, enabling entry to an apprenticeship or other employment, or progression to a related higher education course.

- **Applied General** qualifications are for students wanting to continue their education through applied learning, and which fulfil entry requirements for a range of higher education courses.

Level 2 qualifications

From September 2015, a new category of vocational qualification was introduced:

- **Technical Certificates** (previously known as Substantial Vocational Qualifications at level 2) are for students wishing to specialise in a specific industry, occupation or occupational group. The purpose will be to prepare students either for entry to employment in occupations where employers recognise entry at level 2, or where a level 2 qualification is required before students can progress to a Tech Level.

Characteristics: All qualifications approved for 16-19 performance tables must demonstrate a range of characteristics around size, purpose and assessment, including:

- **Size:** a minimum of 150 glh (AG and TC) or 300 glh (TL).

- **Declared purpose:** a statement about the purpose of the qualification to help students make informed decisions about which qualifications to take.

- **Recognition:** the value of the qualification to end users must be proved with letters of support from Higher Education institutions or employers as appropriate.

- **Appropriate content:** content must match the purpose. AG qualifications must have a minimum of 60% mandatory content, while TL and TC must have a minimum of 40% mandatory content. The rest of the qualification can be chosen from a range of optional content.

- **External assessment:** a minimum of 25% of the content externally assessed for TC qualifications, 30% for TL and 40% for AG.

- **Synoptic assessment:** to help a student develop appreciation of the connections across a subject.

- **Employer involvement:** For TL and TC only. Employers must be involved in the delivery and / or assessment of these qualifications.

In the short term, only the first three characteristics needed to be met. However TL and AG qualifications must be fully compliant to count in 2018 tables, and TC for 2019 tables.

Work-based routes for 16-24

Traineeships: Introduced in summer 2013, they are a programme lasting up to 6 months for learners who need to improve their English, mathematics and employability skills before embarking on an apprenticeship or taking up employment. The focus is on work experience and

English and mathematics, but the learner may take some sector-specific qualifications too. Delivery is currently restricted to providers with the highest Ofsted ratings.

Apprenticeships: The subject of another major reform programme. Employers are leading the formation of 'trailblazer' development consortia, initially across 37 different occupations, expanding to all by 2017. Reformed apprenticeships will be of a minimum 12 months duration with a greater focus on English and mathematics achievement, and more emphasis on synoptic assessment towards the end of the programme, with grading. Awarding organisations, professional bodies and sector skills councils are being invited to be part of the consortia.

As at mid-August 2016, there were:

- 195 standards "ready for delivery" from 103 Trailblazer groups
- 58 Trailblazer groups developing a further 127 standards
- 1000+employers now involved.

For more information there is separate Handy Guide to Apprenticeship Reform.

The Sainsbury Review and Skills Plan

On 8 July 2016 the Government published the report of a small group led by Lord Sainsbury which reviewed the route into employment for those aged 16 and above. It recommended that two 'pathways' should be established, an 'academic' pathway leading to higher study, and a 'technical' pathway leading to employment. Within the technical pathway there would be 15 routes, each encompassing a number of related occupations. Within each route there would be just one qualification for each of the occupations or cluster of occupations – typically 10-15 per route. At the same time, the Government published its Skills Plan, which accepted all the recommendations. If the whole plan goes ahead and meets its targets, the first of these new qualifications will be ready for teaching in September 2019. For more information there is a separate Handy Guide to the Sainsbury Review.

What is happening with performance tables?

Key stage 4

Headline measures: Up until 2015 the headline measure was the proportion of students achieving 5 GCSEs (with up to 2 vocational qualifications) at A*-C, including English and maths. From 2016 results, reporting changed to Progress 8.

Progress 8: This measure reports the progress made by students from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 4. Each student's GCSE and vocational results is compared to their KS2 performance, and the outcomes are aggregated at school level to report whether students in that school make more or less progress than average. This is presented in terms of GCSE grades – 'students make half a grade more progress than average,' or '… make a third of a grade less progress than average,' for example.

The eight qualifications reported in this measure must conform to a formula made up of three groups:

Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
Mathematics (points double weighted) and **English language** or **English literature** (points for the better grade double weighted if both have been taken. If both taken, the second result can contribute to group 3 if it is good enough).	**Any three EBacc qualifications** (Sciences, languages, history, geography).	**Any three GCSEs** or **eligible vocational qualifications**.

Transition arrangements: As the reformed GCSEs are introduced, alternative qualifications (Level1/Level2 Certificates) will cease to be recognised in performance tables; results from the current GCSEs will also not be recognised in performance tables when the reformed GCSEs in those subjects become available.

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Qualification categories: From 2016 results, schools and colleges will have their performance reported against up to four separate categories – academic, Applied General, Tech Level and Technical Certificates. The intention is to make reporting sharper, and a college could be rated very highly on one category yet be failing on another – under the current system good performance in one area would be offset by poorer performance in another and the college might simply be reported as doing well enough across its whole provision.

Headline measures: For each of the four qualification categories, there are five headline measures:
- Progress (academic and AG qualifications) or combined completion and attainment (Tech Level and Technical Certificates)
- Attainment
- English and mathematics GCSE (for those without at least a grade C from Key Stage 4)
- Retention
- Destinations.

Other measures: A range of other measures will be reported, the most publicised of which is probably the Tech Bacc measure. Like the EBacc, this is a measure for accountability purposes only. To meet the measure, students must achieve a Tech Level qualification, a level 3 mathematics qualification and the Extended Project. A small number of schools and colleges are piloting it in 2014-15, but it becomes fully available in 2015-6, and will be first reported in summer 2016.

What are the other key developments?

Study programmes: From September 2013 all 16-19 students in state-funded provision must be on a personalised 'study programme'. Study programmes must be built around a 'substantial' qualification, and include English and/or mathematics if either has not yet been achieved at grade C, work experience and non-qualification activity such as careers advice and tutorial time.

Where can I find out more?

Find out more in these key documents from DfE and Ofqual, and Policy Watch updates that explain and comment in more detail.

GCSE reform

Summary of reforms to GCSEs from 2015, gov.uk

Further decisions for completing GCSE, AS and A level reform in 2017, gov.uk

A level reform

A Level reform summary, gov.uk

Further decisions for completing GCSE, AS and A level reform in 2017, gov.uk

Vocational qualification reform

Vocational qualifications for 14 to 19 year olds (2016), gov.uk
Vocational qualifications for 14 to 19 year olds (2017), gov.uk
2018 performance tables: technical and vocational qualifications, gov.uk

16 to 19 vocational qualifications – technical guidance, gov.uk
14 to 16 qualifications – technical guidance, gov.uk

The Sainsbury Review and Skills Plan

Key stage 4 performance measures

Progress 8 school performance measure, gov.uk

16-19 performance measures

Government response to the consultation on 16-19 accountability, gov.uk

16-19 accountability headline measures – technical guide, gov.uk

General Policy Watch summaries

Pocket Watch: Completing the GCSE A Level reform programme, June 2014

Pocket Watch: Catching up on the latest GCSE and A Level developments, April 2014

Pocket Watch: Setting the grade for GCSEs, April 2014

Policy Watch: Holding school performance to account, April 2014

What is the timeline for change?

Year	GCSE	AS/A level	Vocational
2011			**March:** Wolf Report published.
2012	**September:** English Baccalaureate Certificate proposals announced.	**March:** Secretary of State for Education first writes to Ofqual about reform. **November:** Ofqual consultation on reform.	**March:** First KS4 performance table list published, for 2014 tables – mostly existing qualifications meeting subset of characteristics. **November:** KS4 list for 2015 tables published – all qualifications have to meet full set of characteristics.
2013	**February:** EBC proposals withdrawn in favour of GCSE reform. **June:** DfE and Ofqual consultations on content and technical issues.	**January:** Last January exam series. **January-March:** Further correspondence between Secretary of State for Education and Ofqual to confirm reforms. **Summer:** Smith review of current criteria. **Summer:** ALCAB established.	**September:** First teaching of fully reformed KS4 qualifications. **December:** First Tech Level and Applied General lists published – existing qualifications meeting subset of characteristics.
2014	**Summer:** Ofqual consult on final titles for reform. **Autumn:** Reformed English and maths specifications published. **September:** Last teaching of current English and maths qualifications.	**Summer:** Ofqual consult on final titles for reform. **Autumn:** First phase specifications published. **September:** Last teaching of AS/A2 model for phase 1 subjects.	**Summer:** DfE publishes technical guidance for reformed Tech Level and Applied General qualifications. Substantial Level 2 qualifications (Technical Certificates) and Technical Awards announced. **November:** First Substantial Level 2 and Technical Award lists published – for 2017 tables.
2015	**Autumn:** Phase 2 reformed GCSE specifications published. **September:** First teaching of reformed English and maths qualifications.	**Autumn:** Phase 2 specifications published. **September:** First teaching of phase 1 subjects.	**January:** 5A*-C performance tables published – all vocational qualifications count as '1' for the first time, and a maximum of two included.

2015 *cont*			**Autumn:** New Tech Level and Applied General qualifications published, meeting full set of characteristics. **September:** Last teaching of current specs recognised as Tech Level or Applied General.
2016	**January:** Last 5A*-C tables published (for summer 2015 results). **Autumn:** Phase 3 reformed GCSE specifications published. **September:** First teaching of phase 2 reformed qualifications. **September:** Last teaching of any current GCSE titles.	**Summer:** First results of phase 1 AS levels. **Autumn:** Phase 3 specifications published. **September:** First teaching of phase 2 subjects. **September:** Last teaching of any A levels with AS/A2 structure.	**September:** First teaching of new specs designed as Tech Level or Applied General.
2017	**January:** First Progress 8 tables published (for summer 2016 results). **Summer:** First results of reformed GCSEs in English and maths. **September:** First teaching of phase 3 reformed qualifications – all GCSE subjects now reformed or withdrawn.	**January:** First 'Academic' performance tables published (for summer 2016 results). **Summer:** First results of phase 1 A levels. **September:** First teaching of phase 3 subjects – all subjects with AS/A2 structure now reformed or withdrawn.	**January:** First Tech Level and Applied General performance tables published (for summer 2016 results). **September:** First teaching of new specs designed as Technical Certificates.
2018	**Summer:** First results of phase 2 reformed GCSEs.	**Summer:** First results of phase 2 subjects.	**January:** First performance tables to include Technical Certificates published (for summer 2017 results). **Summer:** First results of new Tech Level and Applied General qualifications.
2019	**Summer:** First results of phase 3 reformed GCSEs – first time all results are reported on new 1-9 grade scale.	**Summer:** First results of phase 3 subjects – first time all A level results are of fully linear courses.	**Summer:** First results of new Technical Certificate qualifications. **Autumn:** New technical qualifications available for first Sainsbury routes

Glossary

A level	A levels - sometimes called General Certificates of Education (GCE) or Advanced level - are normally studied after GCSEs.
	They are usually studied full-time at school or college. Students currently start with the AS level, which is the first half of an A level and a qualification in its own right. If they enjoy the subject and want to learn more, they will continue studying at the full A level.
	A full A level usually takes two years of study. Students typically need five GCSEs (or equivalent) currently at grade C or above to start on a course, although mature students may be accepted without the normal entry requirements.
AG (Applied General)	A vocational qualification. From September 2014, vocational qualifications at level 3 have been classified as either Tech Levels or Applied General qualifications if they are approved for performance tables.
ALCAB	The A Level Content Advisory Board was set up in summer 2013. It represented the UK's leading research universities and advised on the content of new A levels in major subjects.
AS level	A level students usually begin with the AS (Advanced Subsidiary) level, which is the first half of an A level and a qualification in its own right.
	Students usually take 1 year to complete the AS.
Co-teachability	The ability to deliver more than one qualification simultaneously to a single group of learners. The new AS and A levels are aimed to be co-teachable, so that schools and colleges do not need to have different teaching groups for AS and A level students taking the same subject.
DfE	Department for Education.
EBacc subjects	The EBacc is made up of: English, mathematics, history or geography, two sciences, and a language.
	It is a measure reported in performance tables – it is not a qualification awarded to individual students.
End user	The end user for a qualification is the person or institution who will make a decision about whether to recruit the student holding that qualification – for example an employer or a university.
First teaching	'To be taught from...'
GCSE	Qualifications that students in England normally take in Year 11, normally aged 15-16. The exam may be taken earlier or later in life depending on the individual.
Glh (Guided learning hours)	A measure of the size of a qualification. It reflects the typical amount of time needed to deliver the qualification.

Linear	All assessment is at the end of the course, whether in the form of an exam or a mix of exam and coursework.
Ofqual	Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation. This is the regulator for England's qualifications system.
Synoptic assessment	Asks students to show their accumulated knowledge and understanding of a subject by combining different aspects of what they have learnt and being assessed on it as a whole.
Technical awards	Broad, high-quality level 1 and level 2 qualifications for 14-16 year olds that equip students with applied knowledge and associated practical skills not usually acquired through general education.
Tech Bacc	The Technical Baccalaureate is a performance measure, marking achievement by young people aged 16 to 19 in three areas. It was introduced for courses beginning in September 2014, for reporting in the 16-19 performance tables from 2016.
Technical certificate	Vocational qualifications for post-16 students wishing to specialise in a specific industry, occupation or occupational group. The purpose will be to prepare students either for entry to employment in occupations where employers recognise entry at level 2, or where a level 2 qualification is required before students can progress to a Tech Level.
TL (Tech Levels)	A vocational qualification. From September 2014, vocational qualifications at level 3 have been classified as either Tech Levels or Applied General qualifications if they are approved for performance tables.
Vocational qualifications	Work-related qualifications suitable for a wide range of learners, built to accommodate the needs of employers and allow progression to university. They provide a more practical, real-world approach to learning alongside a key theoretical background. These include BTECs.
Tiered/untiered	In many subjects, there are two different 'tiers' of examination offered and students will sit a different exam based on which tier they have been placed into by their teacher. The grades available to them are determined by the tier they are in. For example (in relation to the current GCSEs):

- Higher, where students can achieve grades A*–D(E), or a U.

- Foundation, where they can achieve grades C–G, or a U.

- Untiered means that all students can achieve any grade by taking the same exam.

For reformed GCSEs the tiering structure changes to:

- Higher, where students can achieve grades 9-4, or a U

- Foundation, where they can achieve grades 5-1, or a U