

Report to :	EDUCATION ATTAINMENT IMPROVEMENT BOARD
Date :	27 June 2017
Reporting Officer:	Bob Berry, Assistant Executive Director, Education
Subject :	CHANGES TO GCSES IN 2017
Report Summary :	This report explains the introduction of the reformed GCSEs in English and Maths and outlines the changes and impact they will have to school performance.
Recommendations :	That members be kept fully informed of changes to educational performance and the subsequent implications on Tameside's schools and pupils.
Links to Sustainable Community Strategy :	The report supports three elements of the Community Strategy - Prosperous, Learning and Supportive Tameside.
Policy Implications :	There are no policy implications from this report.
Financial Implications :	There are no financial implications from this report.
(Authorised by the Section 151 Officer)	
Legal Implications : (Authorised by the Borough Solicitor)	It is important that Members understand the national framework and its changes together with the performance of Tameside schools so that there is appropriate resource and challenge.
Risk Management :	There are significant reputational risks to the Council if it does not monitor and challenge schools' performance and standards effectively, and intervene where appropriate.
Access to Information :	The background papers relating to this report can be inspected by contacting Dean McDonagh, School Performance Analyst, Education.



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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 In 2013 the Department for Education (DfE) announced that they were going to reform GCSEs. The DfE had several reasons for reforming GCSEs, with the main one being that *“Employers, universities and colleges are often dissatisfied with school leavers’ literacy and numeracy even though the proportion of young people achieving good grades has gone up in recent years.....We believe making GCSEs and A levels more rigorous will prepare students properly for life after school”*. In addition, the government intends these reformed GCSEs to be comparable to the highest performing education systems around the world.
- 1.2 Since September 2015 reformed GCSEs in English language, English literature and maths have been taught in schools in England, with the first exams being sat in May 2017. Further subjects will see reformed GCSEs introduced over the following two years.
- 1.3 The new GCSEs, developed by the DfE and exam boards, will contain new content which is more challenging and demanding. The DfE have stated that:
- *the English language GCSE will require better reading skills and good written English,*
 - *the English literature GCSE will encourage students to read, write and think critically; it will assess students on challenging and substantial whole texts and on shorter unseen texts, and*
 - *the mathematics GCSE will provide greater coverage of areas such as ratio, proportion and rates of change; it will require all students to master the basics, and will be more challenging for those aiming to achieve top grades.*
- 1.4 The reformed GCSE courses have been designed for two years of study – they will no longer be divided into different modules and students will take all their exams in one period at the end of their course.
- 1.5 Assessment of the new GCSEs will be mainly by exam, with other types of assessment used only where they are needed to test essential skills. This means that things such as Coursework and controlled assessment will disappear from most subjects, apart from practical ones such as art, dance and drama. Exams will feature more essay-style questions rather than ‘bite-sized’ questions.
- 1.6 Exams will be split into ‘foundation tier’ and ‘higher tier’ only if one exam paper does not give all students the opportunity to show their knowledge and abilities.
- 1.7 These reformed GCSEs will also be subject to a new grading system – 1 to 9.

2. NEW GRADING SCALE OF 1 TO 9

- 2.1 For reformed GCSEs, a new grading scale of 9 to 1 will be used, with 9 being the top grade. The Department for Education’s justification for this is that it will *“allow greater differentiation between students and will help distinguish the new GCSEs from previous versions”*.
- 2.2 The reformed GCSE exams in English language, English literature and maths being taken by the current Year 11 pupils will be the first exams to be graded this way.
- 2.3 Grades 9, 8 and 7 are broadly equivalent to an A* and A. Grades 6, 5 and 4 are in line with B and C grades. A 3 would be broadly similar to a D grade, with 2 and 2 taking in grades E, F and G. There is still a U (ungraded) mark. A four is broadly being compared to a C grade, although Ofqual warns against *“direct comparisons and overly simplistic descriptions”*. See the table below:

Ofqual

Grading new GCSEs from 2017

New grading structure	Current grading structure
9	A*
8	A
7	B
6	C
5	D
4	E
3	F
2	G
1	U
U	U

In the first year, the same proportion of students will achieve a grade 7 and above

as currently get A and above

achieve a grade 4 and above

as currently get C and above

achieve a grade 1 and above

as currently get G and above

- 2.4 A grade four will be seen as a "standard pass" and a grade five as a "strong pass".
- 2.5 For school performance tables, the government will publish "standard passes" (grade four and above) but also the "strong passes" (at grade five and above) i.e. the percentage of pupils who achieve a "standard pass" in English and maths and the percentage of pupils who achieve a "strong pass".
- 2.6 Ofqual have said that, broadly, the same proportion of teenagers will get a grade four and above as currently get a grade C or above. It also says a formula will be used which will mean that about 20% of all grades at seven or above will be awarded a grade nine. Pupils who get a nine will have "*performed exceptionally*". There will be fewer grade 9s than there are currently A*s.
- 2.7 In 2018 most other subjects will be graded this way. These subjects are: Art and design, biology, chemistry, citizenship studies (and short course), combined science, computer science, dance, drama, food preparation and nutrition, French, geography, German, classical Greek, history, Latin, music, physical education, physics, religious studies (including short course), and Spanish.
- 2.8 A third wave of 9-1 graded GCSEs will be taught from September 2017 with the first exams in 2019. These include: Ancient history, Arabic, astronomy, Bengali, business, Chinese, design and technology, economics, electronics, engineering, film studies, geology, Italian, Japanese, media studies, modern Greek, modern Hebrew & Panjabi. A few less-taught languages are the final subjects that are being reformed and will the exams will be in 2020.

3. WHAT WILL RESULTS LOOK LIKE IN 2017 FOR PUPILS?

- 3.1 The current Year 11s will get English and maths results under the new 1 – 9 grading scheme and the rest of their GCSEs (unreformed GCSEs – also known as legacy GCSEs) will be graded A*-G i.e. a child may have achieved a 5 in English Language, a 6 in maths and a C in science.
- 3.2 The current Year 10 students will next year sit most of their GCSEs under the new system (as they will be taking reformed GCSEs in English, maths and several other subjects), but they might have some under the old system, for example if they are taking ancient history or ICT. Pupils currently in Year 9 will have the vast majority, if not all, their exams under the 1 to 9 grading system.

- 3.3 All this means that exam certificates awarded to pupils in 2017 and 2018 will have mixture of numbers and letters on them.
- 3.4 For the purposes of calculating Progress 8 and Attainment 8 (the main accountability measures for secondary schools), unreformed GCSEs and all other qualifications will be mapped onto the 1-9 scale from 2017 (with 8.5 being the maximum points available for unreformed GCSEs). See the table below:

GCSE Grade	2016 Points	2017 and 2018 Points
G	1	1
F	2	1.5
E	3	2
D	4	3
C	5	4
B	6	5.5
A	7	7
A*	8	8.5

4. LIKELY IMPLICATIONS TO RESULTS IN 2017

- 4.1 Given the rigour of the reformed GCSEs and the new mode of grading, there were concerns that students sitting the exams in English and maths were at a disadvantage to previous cohorts. Ofqual however has insisted that these students will not be disadvantaged and in 2016, in English and in maths, about 70% of 16-year-old students achieved a grade C or above and so it expects a similar percentage to achieve a four and above in this summer's exams. Only a very small number of pupils are expected to get a grade 9.
- 4.2 A consequence of attaching new points to unreformed GCSEs for Attainment 8 purposes is that overall Attainment 8 is likely to fall. This is because the points attached to grades F, D, C and B in 2017 are less than the points attached. Attainment 8 will be unstable nationally for over 4 years due to the gradual re-scaling of GCSEs to grades 1 to 9.
- 4.3 As a result, schools are unable to provide a predicted progress grade this year. Ofsted stated in its March 2017 newsletter that it *“does not expect any prediction by schools of a progress score, as they are aware that this information will not be possible to produce due to the way progress measures at both KS2 and KS4 are calculated”*.

5. SUMMARY

- 5.1 GCSEs have been reformed with English language, English literature and maths being the first to both be reformed and be assessed. Reformed GCSEs are awarded a grade of 1-9 instead of A*-G. As a result they are not comparable with previous years.
- 5.2 Overall Attainment 8 is likely to fall as a consequence of attaching new points to unreformed GCSEs for Attainment 8 purposes.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 6.1 That members be kept fully informed of changes to educational performance and the subsequent implications on Tameside's schools and pupils.