

Consultation on Setting the Grade Standards of new GCSEs in England



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Responding to the consultation

Your details:

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Would you like us to treat your response as confidential?* If you answer yes, we will not include your details in any list of people or organisations that responded to the consultation.

Yes No

Are the views you express on this consultation an official response from the organisation you represent or your personal views?*

Personal views

Official response from an organisation/group (please complete the type of responding organisation tick list)

If you ticked "Personal views", which of the following are you?

Student

Parent/carer

Teacher (but not responding on behalf of a school or college)

Other (including general public) (please state capacity) _____

If you ticked “Official response from an organisation/group”, please respond accordingly:

Type of responding organisation*

- Awarding organisation
- Local authority
- School/college (please complete the next question)
- Academy chain
- Private training provider
- University or other higher education institution
- Employer
- Other representative group/interest group
- Other representative group/interest group (please skip to type of representative group/interest group)

School/college type

- Comprehensive/non-selective academy
- State selective/selective academy
- Independent
- Special school
- Further education college
- Sixth form college
- None of the above (please state what) _____

Type of representative group/interest group

- Group of awarding organisations
- Union
- Employer/business representative group
- Subject association/learned society

- Equality organisation/group
- School/college or teacher representative group
- None of the above (please specify) _____

Nation*

- England
- Wales
- Scotland
- Northern Ireland
- Other EU country (please state which) _____
- Non-EU country (please state which) _____

How did you find out about this consultation?

- Our newsletter or another of our communications
- Via internet search
- From our website
- From another organisation (please state below)
- Other (please state) _____

May we contact you for more information?

- Yes
- No

*Denotes mandatory fields

Questions

1. We have considered three possible ways by which the standard for new GCSEs could be set in the first year:
 - (a) an approach that uses statistical information to link the award of the new grades to current grades
 - (b) an approach in which awarders judge students' work against descriptions of expected performance – criterion-referencing
 - (c) a norm referenced approach in which the proportion of each grade available to the cohort is pre-determined.

Please rank these possible approaches, using 1 for your preferred approach and 3 for your least preferred approach:

Option (a) **1**

Option (b) **3**

Option (c) **2**

Please give reasons for your answer

The Mathematical Association believes that using criterion-referencing from the offset is imprecise, too subjective and overall undesirable. Norm-referencing would appear to make sense in a subject such as maths: with large cohorts, the differences year-on-year in student 'ability' are likely to be less than the error involved in assigning grades based on other measures.

The MA would emphasise that if used in the first year only it is likely that there will be an increase in higher grades in future years as the new curriculum feeds through and teachers get used to the new expectations. The grade profiles therefore need to allow for this improvement over time without ending up with distributions that are too clumped and skewed to be useful.

It is therefore useful to have norm referencing for a period of time. However standards achieved on papers are likely to improve over time and this will need to be reflected in the grades which students achieve. Hence a move eventually to criterion referencing, although not a precise science, would be fair.

We consider it vital that the transition to the new grading system is as equitable as possible, and understood as well as possible. Therefore linking the new grades to the current grades is essential.

2. We have proposed that in the first year the standard for a grade 4 should be set so that the proportion of students who would previously have been expected to

be awarded at least a grade C in a subject will be awarded at least a grade 4 in the subject. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this proposition?

Strongly agree

Agree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

Don't know/no opinion

Please give reasons for your answer

As mentioned above, the system needs to be fair and transparent, to students and to other stakeholders on 'both sides' of the change. A fixed point of comparison is therefore important.

3. Would you find it helpful if other points of reference between current and new grades were set and communicated before the first awards are made?

Yes

No

Please give reasons for your answers

As already mentioned the system needs to be fair and transparent. All stakeholders must have an understanding of how comparisons can be made between the 'old' and 'new' systems. This is particularly important given the large amount of change: a grading scale from letters to numbers, a move from current to new expectations and new styles of examination. For ease of transition between establishments, between places of work and in order to have fair competition in the workplace, all involved must know how the two systems compare before the first examinations take place.

4. We have proposed that the standard of performance for a grade 5 should align to the expected standard for similar qualifications or exams taken in high performing countries. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this proposition?

Strongly agree

Agree

Disagree

() Strongly disagree

() Don't know/no opinion

Please give reasons for your answer

Whilst we admire this aspiration, it must be recognised as too ambitious from our current performance. Particularly given, at this time, current teacher experience and student background.

It therefore would be sensible and right to replace this with norm-referencing in the first instance, and setting this as a medium term goal, once teachers and pupils are accustomed to the new expectations.

When the comparisons are made, an important factor to consider will be the choice of 'similar qualifications'. Will direct comparisons be possible? What skills will be comparable?

5. We are considering whether and, if so, at which points we should make a link between the new and the current grades. We would welcome your views on the appropriateness and the usefulness of the following possibilities:

(a) setting the grade boundary for grade 7 so that, all things being equal, the same proportion of students who would previously have been awarded a grade A or above are awarded a grade 7 or above in the first year?

Would you consider this link to be:

Appropriate **No**

Useful **No**

(b) setting the grade boundary for a grade 9 so that half of the proportion of students who would previously have been awarded an A* are awarded a grade 9 in the first year?

Would you consider this link to be:

Appropriate **Yes**

Useful **Yes**

(c) setting the grade boundary so that the same proportion of students who would have achieved grades G and F are awarded a grade 1 in the first year?

Would you consider this link to be:

Appropriate **Yes**

Useful **Yes**

Please give reasons for your answers

The Mathematical Association believes that setting a grade boundary for a grade 9 to include half of the current A* would seem sensible and differentiate clearly at the very top end. It would help to identify those students who can not only complete challenging problems but also do so with a depth of understanding and knowledge.

However we do feel that aligning grade 7 with a grade A would result in a great variety in quality of those being awarded a grade 7. We would argue that the current grade A should align with the grade 7 and top third of grade 6 or the entirety of grade 7 and the lower third of grade 8. This would allow further differentiation between these pupils.

The Mathematical Association would support the collapse of grades F and G into grade 1 if, and only if, there is sufficient accessible material in the exams for the least able pupils. Although not yet approved, we would like to point out the lack of grade 1 material in the current 'specimen' materials. We would not support an exam where a grade 1 was achievable by scoring single figure percentages. Sufficient lower ability questions need to be included to ensure these pupils have enough opportunity to demonstrate the range of what they can do.

6. Would you find it helpful to have any additional or alternative points of reference between the current and the new grades?

Yes. If yes what are they?

To allow for a successful transition between the two systems, it is essential that as many points of reference are given as possible. We would suggest;

Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8	Grade 9
Grade F/G	Grade E	Grade D	Grade C		Grade B	Grade A		Grade A*

Grade 1 G and F

Grade 2 E

Grade 3 D

Grade 4 C (lower two thirds of current grade C)

Grade 5 C and B (top third of current grade C lower third of current grade B)

Grade 6 B (top two thirds)

Grade 7 A (lower three quarters)

Grade 8 A and A* (top quarter of current grade A and half of current A*)

Grade 9 A* (top half)

The Mathematical Association recognises that if this alignment is adopted then, with norm referencing initially, there would be a reasonable distribution of grades in the 1

7. Is the current boundary between a grade G and an Unclassified outcome meaningful?

Yes

Please give reasons for your answers

There is an identifiable group within the education system for whom a grade G is an achievement that is recognised and plays a part of their future studies. It is a stepping stone to furthering their mathematical understanding and a measure by which colleges and schools can base future studies. Without the U and G grades the jump from Entry level to GCSE would be too great.

8. In your view, should the grade 1 boundary be set to align with the current grade F or grade G?

As mentioned before, we believe that the grade 1 could be a combination of both the F and G grades so long as there is sufficient material examined such that these pupils have to get a sensible, non-single digit, percentage.

9. Do you have any other views on the distribution of the new grades? **No**

10. We have proposed that the national reference test should be designed so that exam boards can use its outcomes to identify changes in the performance of the national cohort that could be reflected in the grades of new GCSEs awarded. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this proposition?

Strongly agree

Agree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

Don't know/no opinion

Please give reasons for your answer

Cohorts are sufficiently large enough to assume little cohort effect. A benchmark of current grade C being aligned to a grade 4 and allowing changes in grade proportions after some time would seem sensible.

Any additional tests would add to an already large examination burden for pupils, teachers and schools. The MA also has concerns about motivation towards such additional tests, for which pupils would receive no additional qualification or recognition.

The Mathematical Association recognises that grade inflation has occurred. It also believes that trust must now be rebuilt through the work of Ofqual with awarding bodies in designing appropriate examinations, not adding extra assessments.

11. We have not identified any ways by which our proposed approach to setting grade standards for new GCSEs may impact (positively or negatively) on persons who share protected characteristics. Are you aware of any potential impacts we have not identified?

Yes

No

If yes, what are they and what steps could be taken to mitigate them?