

IMPORTANT EXAMS INFORMATION

Rules for new GCSE Specifications - terminal requirements, re-sits and cashing-in

Notes for Teachers and Examinations Officers

Summary

- Virtually all new GCSE qualifications are unitised and students can take assessments during the course.
- The new qualifications are designed as 2-year courses and students still may take all assessments at the end of the course, as with the current (legacy) GCSE specifications.
- **Students** must take at least 40%, and may take up to 100%, of the assessment in the final examination series when they certificate.
- **This 40% terminal requirement** means that there is limited flexibility in the way that students can progress through the course. *Students must be entered for all units even if they don't arrive, this is to be awarded the full award. **40% rule applies to short and full courses.***
- **Students** may only re-sit a unit assessment once. *Students must be entered for all units even if they don't arrive, this is to be awarded the full award. Unless completed at the end of the course were the last result will count even if it lower.*
- **The better result for the two attempts at a unit counts, as long as the 40% terminal requirement is satisfied. Unless completed at the end of the course.**
- The first Full GCSE awards will be made in 2011. There are special arrangements if students complete the Full course before 2011.

These notes explain the rules for:

- new GCSEs for first teaching from 2009
- GCSE English, Mathematics and ICT for first teaching from 2010

They do not apply to current GCSE specifications or to other qualifications (GCE AS, A-Level, GCSE, etc)

For new GCSE qualifications that are unitised:

- the specifications are made up of individual units
- each unit is assessed by either a written paper or a controlled assessment
- the units contribute to an overall subject cash-in¹
- students must sit all the units which contribute to the cash-in
- students must be entered for each individual unit
- students must also be entered for the subject cash-in in the terminal examination series
- the cash-in leads to certification with a grade

The rules for the new GCSEs vary significantly from the rules for GCE AS and A-level, and from the rules for the current linear and modular GCSEs. These notes should help you to ensure that your students are entered correctly: resolving eligibility problems is time-consuming, difficult and stressful for all – teachers, examinations officers, students, and even awarding bodies.

Uniform Mark Scales (UMS) will be used to aggregate marks from individual assessment units. If you teach AS or A-levels, or any of the current modular qualifications, you will be familiar with UMS. After the grade boundaries for a question paper or a controlled assessment are decided, the marks (also referred to as 'raw' marks) are converted to a UMS mark. The same standard of performance on the papers taken at different time always gets the same number of UMS marks, so that we can use and compare results from one examination series to the next. The number of uniform marks for each unit depends on its weighting and on the maximum uniform mark for the qualification as a whole.

What are the rules?

These complex, detailed rules are to ensure a 'level playing-field'. They include details on:

- terminal assessments
- re-sitting
- cashing-in Short/Full and Single/Double award GCSEs.

Terminal Requirement

- At least 40% of the assessment must be taken in the examination series in which the qualification is certificated.
- The final grade will include the assessment results which satisfy this terminal requirement.

This means that students must complete their course by taking units that make up at least 40% of the weighting for the whole qualification. The results for the units that satisfy this terminal requirement will count (i.e. they will be used to calculate the grade), even if there is a better score for an earlier attempt at one or more of these units.

Re-sit Rules

- Students may re-sit each unit once.
- Options within an assessment unit and optional units are treated as separate units with regard to resits.
- A tiered unit or tiered option may be re-sat once at either tier (it is not permissible to make two attempts at each tier of a tiered unit). *In total there can only have 2 goes but tiers can be mixed.*
- The better result counts towards the final grade; however, if a unit forms part of the terminal requirement then the most recent result must be used (see above). *Final results can be mixed tiers.*

How do Foundation and Higher Tiers work?

In a Foundation tier unit targeted at Grades C – G, the maximum uniform mark available will be equivalent to a top Grade C. In tiered subjects with unit results from different tiers, the awarding body will generate the best grade for the student using the optimum combination. So, students may:

- take different units at different tiers
- re-sit a unit at a different tier (once only) and the awarding body will calculate the best grade (subject to the terminal requirement and re-sit rules).

Re-taking a qualification

- A qualification may be taken more than once – either by re-sitting all the units, or by re-sitting some units and re-using previous results for others, subject to the terminal requirement being satisfied. *40% rule applies.*
- When a qualification is re-taken, a student may have up to two further attempts at each unit. However, only the better of the last two results will count towards the final grade, or the last result if it is needed to satisfy the terminal requirement.

Can we decline GCSE grades?

Students cannot decline certification of GCSE awards after the results are published.

Eligibility

Students will be eligible for a qualification only when they have entered for a valid combination of units and for the cash-in.

What if the student is absent?

It is the result of, not the entry for, an assessment unit that counts. A student who enters for a unit but is absent from the examination has not used up one of his/her two possible attempts. However, for award purposes, absence from an assessment unit will be treated as a result of zero marks for that unit.

How do Short/Full Courses and Single/Double Awards work?

There are:

- Short courses – worth half a GCSE
- Full courses – worth a Single Award GCSE
- Double Award GCSEs – with a double grade

In some subjects (e.g. Modern Foreign Languages) there are Short and Full courses, with common units. Similarly in some of the applied subjects (Applied Business, Health and Social Care, Leisure and Tourism) there are Single and Double awards with common units.

Students might:

- complete the smaller subject after one year, then 'top up' to complete the larger one, or
- wait and enter simultaneously for a Double Award, Full Course award and a Short Course award in the same subject (where they exist) upon completion of all the necessary units.

Then these rules apply:

- The results of units used for a Short Course award remain available for use towards a Full Course award and/or a Double Award (and vice-versa).
- A result from any unit can be counted towards only one GCSE title (for example, if a unit can contribute to both Business Studies and Economics, a result from that unit cannot be used to count towards certification in both titles).
- Following certification, each unit may be re-taken once or twice. For example, a unit which had been taken twice prior to the certification of a Short Course award could then be re-taken on one or two further occasions prior to certification of a Full Course award and/or a Double Award (but only the better of the last two results will count towards the final grade, or the last if it is needed to satisfy the terminal requirement).
- A student must satisfy the terminal requirement for a Short Course when that Short Course is cashed-in, irrespective of any cash-in for a Full Course award and/or a Double Award, in that series or later.

Compensatory awards

- An awarding body will not make an automatic compensatory award to a student who is, for example, Unclassified for a Full Course and/or a Double Award, but has unit results which would gain a grade for a Short Course award. However, the student will be allowed to claim a late subject award for the smaller qualification within a specified period after the publication of results.

Will my students get the best results?

Yes, the awarding body will generate the best grade for each student from the available results:

- if they have re-taken a unit
- if they have taken more units than they need to (where there are optional units)
- if there is more than one valid combination of unit results (again, where there are optional units)
- if there are results from different tiers

Of course, the terminal requirement still applies.

How long will the individual unit results be valid?

The unit results remain valid during the shelf life of the specification.

**My students would rather wait and cash-in when they have their best results.
Can they do this?**

There will be an opportunity (within a specified period) to cash-in after results are published, but a student must meet the terminal requirement in that examination series.

Enquiries about results and re-marks

Enquiries about results and requests for re-marks must be made immediately following the examination series in which the relevant unit/component was taken. It will not be possible to re-mark a unit later when it is cashed-in. It must be re-marked immediately after the result for it is issued.

Are there any special rules for 2010 and 2011?

Short courses can be cashed-in from the June 2010 series onwards but the Full and Double Award GCSEs cannot be cashed-in until the June 2011 series. For some subjects all the units are available before June 2011 and students could take all the assessments to complete their qualifications before then. There is a special rule to cover this situation. It is designed to ensure that students are not disadvantaged, rather than to encourage completing these courses early.

If a student completes all of the assessments required for a Full GCSE award prior to the June 2011 examination series, he/she may, in June 2011 only, certificate the GCSE, provided that the terminal requirement was satisfied in an earlier series. For example, where certification is deferred from June 2010 to June 2011, the determination of the grade will require that the terminal requirement was satisfied in June 2010, the examination series in which certification of the Full award would have been requested, had it been available. In this example, no assessment results that post-date the June 2010 examination series would be included in the determination of the grade.