

A guide to the

CURRICULUM  
R E F O R M

AND

WHAT YOU  
NEED TO KNOW!



Curriculum reform is a term which has been discussed, announced and the cause of great debate for many years now. But what exactly is curriculum reform, and how is it and will it affect young people and their studies?

This E-Book is dedicated to provide a brief overview of the facts and the changes that you need to know about the curriculum reform.

## What is Curriculum Reform?

The reform has been introduced as a response to the criticism that the current 14-18 qualification suite was 'too easy', or didn't equip young people with the skills they require before they enter the workplace – resulting in employment based skills shortages.

Our data from the **Careers Report 2016** has also highlighted the skills that young people believe they need to improve in order to access the careers they are interested in. The results showed that young people recognise the value and importance of strong maths skills and know they need to continue to develop skills in this area, which is an area many employers cite.

Pervading our data is information relating to the lack of interest, skills and career direction in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM).

In exploring and shortlisting careers, STEM careers remain amongst the lowest. Only 4 of the most popular careers in terms of exploration are associated with STEM and these are either related to Biological Sciences or Information Technology. Looking at shortlisted careers again only 4 STEM careers feature in this year's top 50 careers.



Addressing the weaknesses in this area has been a focus for UK government for a number of years not just because of labour market shortfalls but also because STEM skills are important to all young people in developing life skills regardless of the career they choose.

'Grades have also been an issue. I'm sure we all read the repeated news features every August reporting the rise once again in GCSE and A level grades, followed by the predictable cry of, 'they're too easy!' Curriculum reform was born out of the desire to challenge these perceived issues. Below are the changes that have been made, followed by the timescales'

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The reforms can be divided into three areas of the curriculum; these are:

**GCSEs  
(14-16)**

**A Levels  
(16-18)**

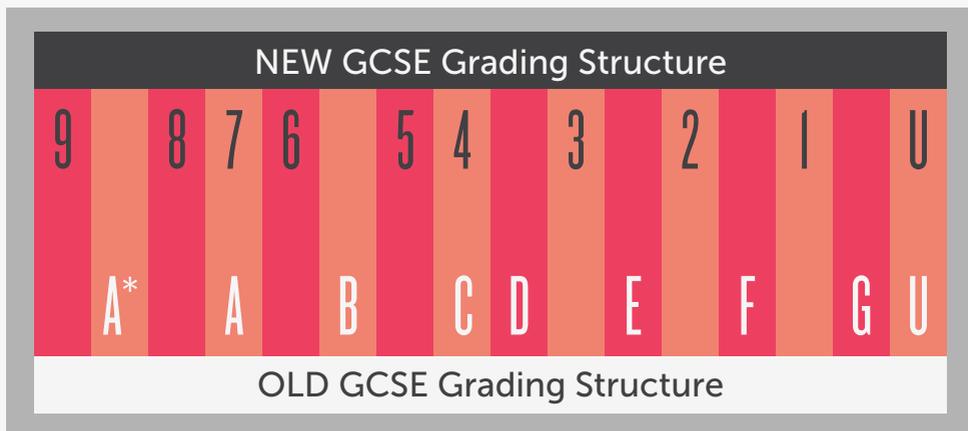
**BTECs  
(vocational)**

## GCSE Grading

The most visual, immediately noticeable, and possibly the most problematic reform, is the change to the GCSE grading system. No longer will GCSEs be graded A\*-G. In order to reduce the number of students receiving A\* grades, the new GCSEs will now be graded 9-1, with 9 being the highest and 1 the lowest. U will still represent ungraded.

The most obvious issue here concerns comparisons with the old/current grading system (8 different grade levels are now becoming 9). What, for example, is the new equivalent to a grade C? This could cause problems for employers and universities when they are comparing applications.

In brief, the current thinking regarding equivalency is as follows; A\* = 8/9, C = 4/5, D-G = 3-1. Broken down into more detail the full structure is looking as follows:



So, where universities or employers were asking for a GCSE Grades A\*-C, the new equivalent will appear to be 9-4. But only time will tell the success of these changes.

There will be no tiering in the new curriculum (except in Maths and Languages). Everyone will be taught the same curriculum, at the same level.

As well as a change in the grading system, GCSEs are also becoming more linear, with an exam at the end of the two-year study period. This is a return to the more traditional early GCSE/O'Level format, last seen in the 1980's. This final exam will be the only assessment.



## A Levels

The biggest immediate change to the new A levels is the fact that A levels and AS levels have now been 'de-coupled'. AS levels now constitute a standalone, separate qualification, and do not count towards an A level grade. Once a student has completed an AS level, they can then go on and study that subject at A level, but this is different to the previous relationship.

Previously, AS levels constituted 50% of an A level UCAS tariff; but the new UCAS tariff counts for only 40%. So the continued value of AS levels is a question which is bound to be raised.

Like the new GCSEs, these new A levels will be linear, with an exam at the end. This exam will be the only assessment (some coursework assessment will be allowed in certain subjects, but a 20% maximum content bar has been set).

However, the level of 'challenge' will be broadly similar– it is not anticipated that A levels will become more difficult, or pitched at a higher educational level.

## BTECs

BTECs are also undergoing reform. The changes are as follows:

- There will be more external assessment - at least 33%
- There will be more core mandatory units – at least 50%
- You will now only be allowed one resit
- The Maths and English requirement will be strengthened
- Level 3 BTECs will be split into Applied, General, and Technical.



# Timescales

Curriculum reform is being phased in over a number of years, with certain subjects being introduced each September. The first GCSE and A level cohort are currently in their second year of study, with the first exams being sat this summer (2017).

The implementation timescale is as follows:

## GCSE Reform Timescale

### First Teaching began in September 2015:

- English Language
- English Literature
- Mathematics

### First Teaching began in September 2016:

- Biology
- Chemistry
- Physics
- Combined (Double) Science
- Computer Science
- Art & Design
- Citizenship
- Dance
- Drama
- Food Preparation/Nutrition
- Geography
- History
- Languages (most)
- Music
- PE
- Religious Studies

### First Teaching from September 2017:

- Astronomy
- Classical Civilisation
- Design and Technology
- Electronic
- Statistics
- All the other remaining subjects not included here.



# A Level Reform Timescale

## First Teaching began in September 2015:

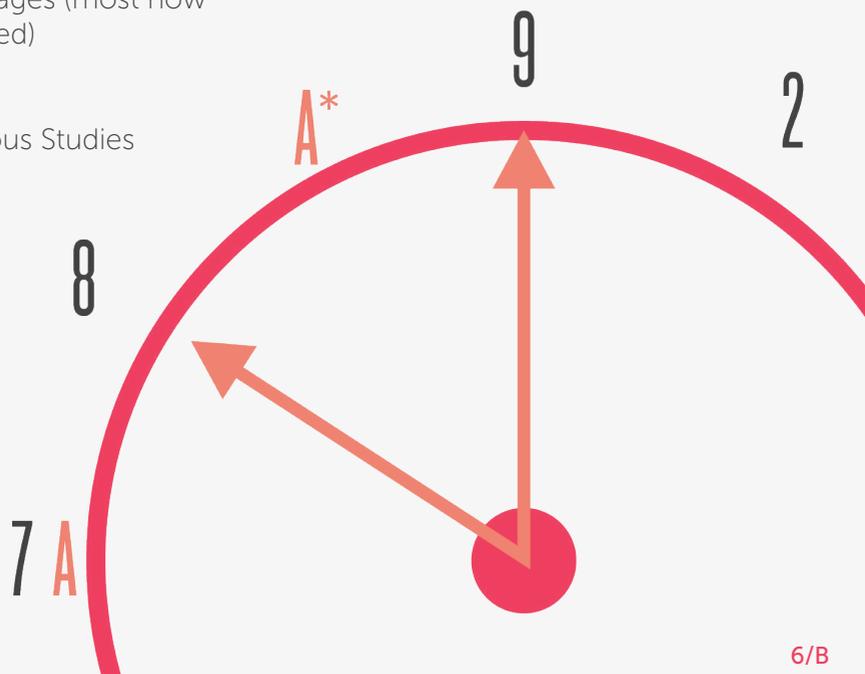
- Art
- Biology
- Business Studies
- Chemistry
- Computer Science
- Economics
- English Language
- English Literature
- History
- Physics
- Psychology
- Sociology

## First Teaching from September 2017:

- Accounting
- Design and Technology
- Law
- Maths
- Further Maths
- Media Studies
- Philosophy
- Politics
- All the remaining subjects not included here

## First Teaching began in September 2016:

- Dance
- Drama
- Geography
- Languages (most now included)
- Music
- PE
- Religious Studies





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