

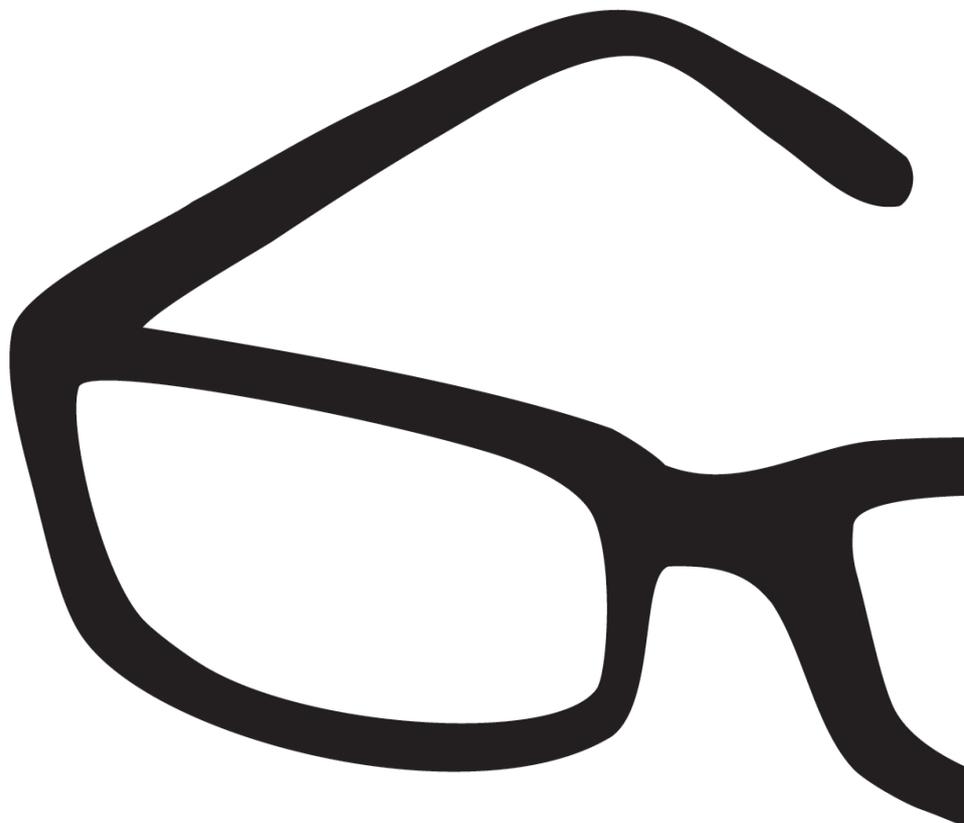


New GCSEs and school accountability

Feedback from secondary teachers, April 2014

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Introduction

Schoolzone monitors updates to education reforms by consulting directly with teachers as soon as changes or consultations are announced. We use a range of research tools, including focus groups, surveys, research forums and telephone interviews.

We asked a group of 18 senior leaders and subject leaders (via online focus group) for their response to the combined effect of the new GCSE grades and Performance 8 accountability measures. We also asked them to consider the strategies their schools might use in order to maximise their position in new, progress-based league tables.

- [Summary of GCSE grades proposal](#)
- [Summary of secondary accountability proposals](#)

In this report we have:

- summarised responses briefly
- allowed teachers to speak for themselves by reporting responses verbatim,
- **emphasised** key terms in teachers' responses.

Other reports in this series:

- *Teachers' response to curriculum reforms: Primary* (April 2014)
16 primary teachers told us, via linked research forums, what they thought about the forthcoming reforms, to curriculum, assessment and accountability.
- *Teachers' response to curriculum reforms: Secondary* (March 2014)
37 secondary teachers told us, via linked research forums, what they thought about the forthcoming reforms to curriculum and assessment and the likely impact on resource and CPD needs.
- *Primary assessment and accountability* (July 2013)
30 primary teachers told us, via a series of online focus groups, what they thought would be the impact of the suggested changes to the primary assessment and accountability measures.
- *Secondary curriculum reform* (Sept 2013)
30 secondary teachers told us, via a series of online focus groups, what they thought the changes at KS3 to the curriculum and assessment would mean in schools.

Reports:

A full index of reports currently available to download free of charge is maintained at http://www.schoolzone.co.uk/schools/research_papers.asp

Articles:

Our series of articles, keeping teachers up to date and sharing responses to curriculum reforms is at: <http://www.schoolzone.co.uk/schools/NewCurriculum.asp>

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GCSEs - a numbers game

Setting performance standards

Ofqual has proposed to develop and adapt the current approach to setting GCSE performance standards, based on the current statistical approach (a form of norm-referencing) combined with a new national reference test and grade descriptors (criterion-referencing).

Teachers feel strongly that GCSE grades should be awarded on the basis of what children can do (criterion referencing), not on how well, compared to others. However, real criterion-referencing is impractical in a system which requires grades, because there can't be a hierarchy of attainment.

Teachers' real concerns, which we hear frequently in our research consultations, are that whatever form of assessment is used, that it is fair on the candidates - and this usually comes down to awarding bodies setting exams, moderating and standardising reliably both year on year and between awarding bodies. Whatever method is used to derive the actual grades just needs to be fair and to be describable in way which teachers and students can understand.

Schools do a great deal of work in helping students to understand grade boundaries and to be able to evaluate their own performance when they are preparing for exams, so it is important that the new /revised system facilitates this process.

The new national reference test will go some way to alleviating the cynicism associated with grade inflation, if it works properly, but this is fairly low on teachers' agenda when it comes to exams.

Criterion referencing:

- *Students should be rewarded for their hard work and ability and not receive predetermined results*
- *It looks at **skills acquired**, developed and used by individual students. This would be a better method to look at attainment and progress in English*

Norm-referencing:

- ***Restrictive** and why should students be limited?*
 - *Limits students - possibly penalised based on the cohort they are in*
 - *Because it is predetermined it doesn't allow for progress that could be made by a particular cohort*
 - *Students should be awarded a grade based on **merit not norms***
 - ***Does not award grades fairly** if only a set percentage can gain a particular grade*
 - *What about natural **fluctuations** - or even **improvements** in teaching!*
 - *Doesn't allow schools with **low ability intakes** to be able to look any better as results predetermined*
 - *Is the norm **re-set** every year? The nature of questions need to be **consistent** in that case: the level of difficulty at the moment varies*
 - *If students' grades were norm referenced, along with a difficulty factor for each cohort's exams, it would **take away the subjectivity***
-

The new GCSE scale allows for nine levels of performance, rather than the current eight.

An additional upper grade, with A* for the top half of students is a welcome innovation. It allows greater differentiation of the most able, though it may reduce student numbers in more difficult subjects as the highest grade becomes more difficult to achieve.

The combination of the new grade and removal of tiers will cause some difficulties too, as students who are aiming for lower and middle grades will face exam questions which are very much beyond them, which could make them dispirited and less likely to go back and review their answers during exams, so performing less well.

- *Certainly better in terms of spotting A-level potential*
- *Schools with sixth forms do an awful lot of internal moderation and assess a student's ability to do A-levels with a range of information*
- *More accurate grades may help students choose subjects more honestly*
- *It does then allow for us to see the very 'best' students and this can only be seen as a positive factor, especially for colleges*
- *It allows students to be stretched and challenged at the top end. It may be that the entry requirements for A-levels change to a 5 not a 4*
- *Having a grade 9 will allow a student to show EXTREME talent and flair*
- *The range of marks for an A* currently is too big*
- *I think it would motivate the top end more if they knew fewer top grades were going to be awarded*
- *New, higher A* qualification would improve Britain's international standing when comparing with other countries*
- *The idea of students 'settling' for a grade will be reduced*
- *It just needs to be sold in the right way to students eg: 8 is an A*, 9 is an A**!*

However:

- *Positive only IF the marking is fair, accurate, across the board good enough to make judgements*
- *I'm not sure about pupils in my school where the majority are of average/low ability; an extra upper grades is not necessarily helpful*
- *Some students might be motivated to go for the grade 9, others might "only" achieve 8 and feel frustrated*
- *Students may be wary of selecting subjects for A-level if they have not achieved top grade. This could lead to students avoiding subjects perceived as difficult such as STEM subjects*
- *The examiners will need to make sure the questions are carefully put together. Without tiering it is hard to word questions which challenge yet suit all candidates*
- *Teachers need to be able to clearly see the differences between the criteria*
- *Not sure what a 9 would show in English. Marking is so often subjective and A* seems often to depend not on ability but on how well a student can 'express' ideas rather than the ideas themselves*
- *I would also like to see more recognition for grades below 4/C. We are in danger of less able students leaving with no worthwhile qualification/grade*
- *There will be some (or a lot of) confusion for students at grades 6 and 5*

The new GCSE scale is described in numbers 1 (low) to 9 (high).

The move to a numbered system of grades will cause confusion, at least in the short term as parents and employers have to realign their understanding. Employers will presumably find it difficult to differentiate between applicants who have letter grades and those who have numbers - at first.

The main issue with the move to numbers is that NC levels were numbered: many schools anticipate keeping NC levels, or already use a different numbered assessment system at KS3 in order to avoid confusion with the current GCSE grade letters. This means that they will have to adapt their KS3 assessment grading to reflect this change.

However, compared to other reforms, the move to numbers seems fairly inconsequential.

- *I think some **parents might get confused** with numbers 1-9 initially*
- *I think numbers are fine. We have had to deal with **levels at KS2 to 3 changing***
- *As long as there is a **robust and clear method** it should be fine*
- *We still have students **confused by KS3 levels ... I think every change adds to difficulties for everyone***
- *I think there are **huge issues** here. Having mastered levels we now to rethink completely*
- *KS2 levels will have to be changed for clarity*
- *It would help by giving clarity during the **transition between GCSEs and 1-9.***

Cross key stage assessment

The change to grading structures, coupled with removal of NC levels offers an opportunity to link assessment between KS3 and KS4 more closely.

- *We're going to start Year 7 on a **'5 year journey'** so that they will be working towards GCSE grades from the start of secondary school*
- *The **KS3-KS4 transition could be confusing** as there has been a 'loose' link to NC levels and GCSE grades. Emphasis will be much more on progress over time.*

In the first year, the new grades will be aligned to the current grades so that grade 4 is approximately equivalent to grade C.

The equivalence of the new grade 4 to the old grade C is a well received by teachers. There is broad agreement that the positioning of the new grade 4 should be accessible to similar proportions of students who would have been expected to achieve a grade C.

Teachers are generally in favour of effectively making the pass grade higher, but some find it difficult to comment on comparisons between grade boundaries because they expect them to be defined by level descriptors.

- *Have to be **links established** in the first year; definitely*
 - *I think that **continuity is the important factor**, especially for us to map progress in an effective way; in reality, there should not really be any issues*
 - *The thresholds that constitute a C would be **disproportionately large** compared to other grades*
-

Grade 5 will be internationally benchmarked.

The idea that grade 5 is to be internationally benchmarked seems to generate more questions than responses either in favour or against. Teachers don't really understand what this means in practice.

They can see some benefits to international benchmarking because students are increasingly competing in global markets for employment, but they are concerned that the whole 1 - 9 scale could move up and down every three years if it is pegged to the PISA performance data.

In favour:

- *UK should be ranked against other countries*
- *As we move into a more **cosmopolitan culture** and move between nations then a **transferable, understandable grade** to is everyone's benefit*

Against:

- *As many of us have just discovered that IGCSEs are somewhat easier than our GCSEs, this idea is meaningless.*

Questions raised:

- *Does that not make **all grades PISA related** then?*
- *Do they assess the **same things** as us or do their exams place more emphasis on knowledge and recall rather than skills? ... Surely it would also depend on every other country's degrees of **rigour**?... Who will monitor the standards of PISA/TIMMS tests?*
- *Would that mean that there would be a greater emphasis on '**norm referencing**'?*
- *Isn't it possible that this could lead to the very **grade inflation** they are trying to avoid?*
- *Against **whose criteria** is the Level 5 to be graded/compared?*
- *If it meets other standards/countries, will they sit the **same exam**?*
- *Does a link to PISA mean that the whole scale potentially shifts up or down every three years?*
- *I think that the information on other countries' performance and examination systems **needs to be shared and more accessible** to teaching professionals. Otherwise, it means nothing to us...*
- *Lots to consider before we jump in*

In the current proposals some, but not all, grades are defined in relation to the existing grades, for the first year.

Teachers very definitely want correlation tables between current grades and new grades. Any help in understanding what is needed to achieve each grade will be welcome; indeed essential. They have a very clear picture of what they will need: for arts subjects in particular, schools will need lots of exemplar materials to help them understand the requirements for each grade. This is more important than ever because of the new accountability measures and the increased requirement to monitor progress at all levels, rather than focusing so much on the C/D borderline.

- ***Exemplar** marked responses showing **previous grades/standards** and new levels and standards recorded on the same piece of work/exam responses*
- *Detailed **grade descriptors** would be helpful.*
- *There would need to be a **benchmarking** exercise so that the correct level is seen as the norm*
- ***More training- in school**, with genuine examples that achieve a grade, and well-structured guidance at **timely intervals** so we know we are helping students attain a level appropriate and our feedback is useful & accurate*

- *Greater standardisation amongst exam boards is also needed*
- **Clear specification links** - assessment objectives and criteria to be able to work backwards to agreed standards after each academic year. Which progress can be clearly mapped/tracked. Examples, examples and a few more examples.

There is a question mark over where the new 1 should correspond to the current lower grades: aligning 1 to F would effectively lift the whole scale up a grade, meaning that there would be no equivalent to the G grade.

Grade G clearly serves a useful purpose - especially for students with SEN, though some teachers fail to see point of the lowest grades. As more students are encouraged to take GCSE instead of vocational qualifications in order to boost school performance, the lower grades may be more in demand.

There is approval for additional grades at the upper end but there is a strong opinion that more grades are needed at the lower end, too: maybe a 1 - 10 scale would be more appropriate. Aligning new grade 1 to current grade G:

- *Very concerned that students who would currently leave with a GCSE grade G (and work hard for that) will now leave with nothing.*
- *I feel a G should not equal a U; a grade G was awarded for my EAL cohort; they would have been devastated to gain a U*
- *We do have some students who get a G and for those students it is sometimes a **big achievement***
- *A G suggests that at least some effort and/or ability is evident*
- *If we get rid of the G equivalent, then there are **only 3 levels below a C: 1, 2 and 3***
- *I think the prospect of having a U is useful way of helping to focus students on **more appropriate pathways***
- *We definitely require more differentiation between the lower grades then*
- *More suitable **qualifications** needed at the lower end so that students can **progress***
- *The only outcome from getting rid of a G would be to **demoralise** those with few life chances anyway*
- *G grades are rare for us at the moment as less able students follow BTEC course. However **changes to BTEC make it less accessible** to these students so I anticipate these students entering GCSE in future.*
- *Balance between accessibility to new grades is important - 4 becoming a '**catch all**' (or 'catch most') grade defeats the purpose*

Lowest grades of little value:

- *G is **not seen as a meaningful grade** by employers or sixth forms or colleges*
 - *In reality, although we talk about progression at all levels and the points system, **grades that low are not celebrated**, even if the pupil is SEN or clearly lower ability*
 - *More emphasis should be put on vocational qualifications were students will feel a sense of achievement*
 - *Many students **don't value getting a G grade** and are too embarrassed to tell you they have one*
 - *Perhaps those whose target reflected by ability and progress is below a 4 should be directed towards an **alternative qualification** (like basic skills)*
-

Participants were asked to itemise pros and cons of the reforms to GCSEs and accountability.

The main advantages mentioned were:

- Increased ability to differentiate between higher performing students
- More challenge and potentially raised expectations for higher performing students
- Provides a chance to monitor progress more effectively across KS3 and KS4
- Benchmarking should allow a better comparison between UK and other countries

Comments:

Range of grades:

- *Better gradation of achievement*
- *Grade 9 to **differentiate** between top-end students*
- *I like the grade 9 so they can demonstrate the highest achievers.*
- *Distinctions between the higher grades - **promotes outstanding success***
- *More challenge provided for students with introduction of new grades. Excellent opportunities for the more able*
- ***Raising aspirations** by increasing the top end scale so that the really talented students can be identified.*

Provides an opportunity to review current assessment systems, including at KS3:

- *The opportunity to re-visit and refine level criteria*
- *Hopefully a link between KS3 and KS4; possibility of routes of progressions through KS3-4*
- *Good progress can be tracked and **intervention strategies** introduced from Year 7.*

International benchmarking:

- *Achievement measured consistently in international terms*
- *International standard could be very **useful to 'fix' standards***
- *Aiming to **raise standards** so that we can compete internationally*
- *Maps Britain against the rest of the world - might actually realise that **education in this country should be celebrated***

Lowest grade:

- *Getting rid of grade G a positive; G is not seen as of any value to employers and colleges*

The main disadvantages mentioned were:

- Too few grades at lower levels, disadvantaging weaker students
 - Elevating the lowest grades makes GCSE inaccessible for some students
 - Difficult for parents and employers to accommodate the changes to grades
 - International comparisons can be dangerous
-

Range of grades:

- *Too few low levels being offered*
- *Fewer levels below 4*
- *Reduced choices for weaker students*
- *Poor focus on lowest levels*
- *Less opportunity for weaker students to demonstrate achievement, due to fewer grades at lower end and a possible move away from vocational subjects*
- *Difficult for parents to grasp*
- *Need more levels - **why not award a % point system** on each and every subject then we all know what everyone gets*
- ***Lack of clarity, lack of exemplars, not yet thought through before implementation***
- ***KS1 into KS2 into KS3 into KS4 into KS5 - need to ensure consistency***

International benchmarking:

- *The **dangerous comparisons** to international schools*
- *Linking Grade 5 with PISA tests*
- ***Comparisons with other nations** (eg Taiwan) seen as important, how about Finland?*

Lowest grade:

- *SEN students will lose out with no G equivalent*
 - *The possibility of 'removing' grade G*
-

Accountability - also a numbers game?

Schoolzone recently conducted research into teachers' responses to the new accountability measures (see http://www.schoolzone.co.uk/schools/research_papers.asp), where we asked about the general issues thrown up by the initiative.

The combined impact of new GCSE grades and the P8 accountability measure

Teachers are generally positive about the idea of a greater emphasis on progress, but they are still (April 2014), not in the progress mind-set. However when they consider the effect of the new GCSE grades on accountability measures, teachers could anticipate further problems.

- *I'm glad the levels of progress is the main measure and not the A*-C grades obtained*

Lower performing students could still reasonably be expected to make a significant contribution to progress measures, where they may not have in the current attainment-based system since, in theory, they should be able to show as much progress as higher performing students.

However, the potential removal of an equivalent of grade G could result in a move towards more of these students taking vocational qualifications instead of GCSE (even if less vocational options are offered - see below), which have a limited contribution to accountability measures.

- *Grade Cs will technically no longer be as meaningful as they are currently as Progress 8 will be the new measure, however, I think it will take time for a cultural shift in terms of expectations*
- *For me, it also depends on how they actually plan to measure progress from KS2 to 4*
- *They need to first make clear and distinct decisions about KS2 and KS3; otherwise, how will we even start to map progress?*
- *I feel that the C/D focus was too limiting- that we focused all efforts on a KEY cohort of students that made the vital difference of hitting 5 A-C grades with Eng Math. Meeting a certain number was crazy & stopped us being able to help every student reach their target. My Yr 11 set 4 achieved 3 & 4 levels of progress - AMAZING! But not a Grade C among them, so it seemed less pleasing to those around us...*
- *These concerns are clearly not being listened to. Surely schools should complete their own baseline assessment at KS3 and if there are huge gaps between that and the supplied KS2 data, then the progress measures somehow need changing?*

Although the existing requirement to demonstrate three to four levels of progress has encouraged schools to make efforts to get the most from students of all ability levels, the new measures could also have a beneficial impact on uptake of foundation subjects. Similarly, they give a boost to non-EBacc subjects, which had previously feared moving to a second-class status. However, concerns remain for subjects which are forced out of the eight, such as additional vocational subjects. There is a strong indication (below) that schools will steer students towards GCSE option choices that will aid school performance.

- *It has made some of our subjects realise that they will be **just as accountable** as English and Maths... which is no bad thing!*
- *I don't think that schools will disregard non EBacc students as the new focus is on progress across KS3 and 4 - regardless of EBacc status*
- *Subjects that are not included in the 8 will go off the radar*

Reliability of KS2 data for use in baselining

Schools are anxious that KS2 grades tend to be over-inflated, which would obviously mean that it would be difficult for secondary schools to achieve the expected levels of progress. This seems to be the biggest factor undermining teachers' confidence in the benefits of the new accountability measures: they are very vociferous about it as the (selected) comments below show. There is wide spread agreement that KS2 data needs to be based on externally marked assessments - in all subjects

Uncertainty about the ongoing (after the first year) correlation between current and new GCSE grades exaggerates this anxiety - especially if international benchmarking means that the whole range of grades isn't fixed.

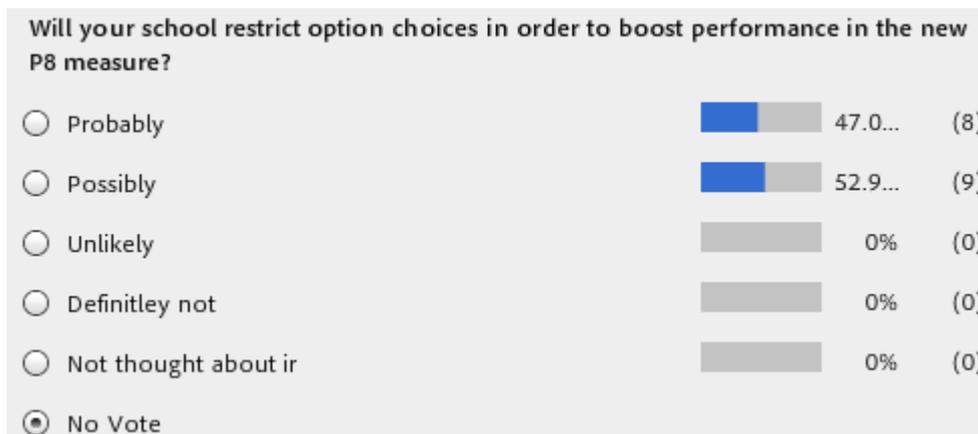
- *What about the **inflated KS2 scores** that secondary schools have to deal with every single year?*
- *These KS2 scores concern me as we all know how **primaries 'exaggerate' their levels** with exam assistance*
- *It's a real problem for core subjects - **pupils are heavily taught towards KS2 tests** which they cannot sustain. So at KS3 / 4 secondary schools often look bad. KS2 tests need to be externally tested!*
- *It's not fair to judge a secondary school against primary results - they can be inflated!*
- *It is a huge concern and potentially undermines the whole system*
- *Three to four levels of progress is limited by KS2 and primaries giving the initial level. **National testing at Y6 EXTERNALLY is required***
- *What is the point in focusing everything on progression, when **KS2 data is fundamentally flawed?***
- ***Address KS2 data issue.** We 're-baseline' them, but that data is irrelevant to Ofsted etc. They go by KS2 data*
- ***KS2 should be norm referenced** - we have some inflation of writing levels and the KS2 SATs Reading papers are not always reliable*
- ***Internal baseline doesn't really work.** The parents don't like it! If their child has achieved a certain level at primary they cling on to it for dear life!*
- *Have some National Testing based alongside socio-economic environment - **Fisher family Trust data** is collated from this and is a fairer indicator*

School strategies for maximising performance

Students who have already made their GCSE choices for next year will be the first to contribute GCSE performance data to the new P8 measure - that's how close the new accountability measures are. What will schools do to boost their performance? Here are some options and schools' responses to them.

Restricting option choices

Schools have previously directed students to certain subjects in order to boost EBacc scores, so it's little surprise that teachers expect a similar strategy to be used in the all-important P8 measures:

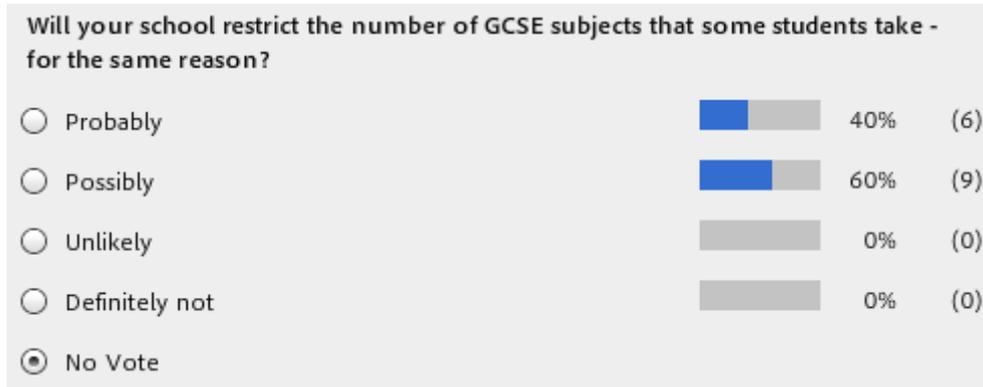


However, there are several concerns relating to the restriction of option choices in order to boost performance.

- *Schools are always going to play the system. That is the consequence of competition. They will find ways of doing things whatever happens!*
- *We have a **pathways system**, and lots of less academic students opt for History as an EBacc subject they enjoy*
- *We have already moved towards restricting GCSE options for weaker pupils*
- *But restricting subjects & scope of learning **isn't fair***
- *It's not fair on students who **lack basic ability** and grounding in a subject to be forced into doing, say Geography or History*
- *Pupils study a **narrower curriculum** and do more core subjects than they want to just to try and increase our value added*
- *So **high achieving schools** will yet again '**invent their own system**' and because they get good grades then they will sail thru Ofsted*
- *I think it's **unfair to restrict students' choice** to boost school results*
- *Lots of **resistance from parents** in limiting the subjects. They will want more GCSEs to give more choice at KS5*
- *I think it is a harsh reality that schools will **end up restricting choice** for some students, given the system we have to work with*
- *The **shadow of accountability** will predicate everything we do. So yes we will do what needs to be done to avoid the hammer.*

Restricting the number of GCSEs which students can take

Some GCSE subjects are easier than others for students to achieve higher grades. Schools could direct some students to take fewer (easier) GCSEs in order to gain more points, eg five grade 4s = 20 points, whereas eight grade 2s = 16 points. Unsurprising then, that teachers expect their schools to restrict numbers of GCSEs taken in this way:



Teachers showed a great deal of support for this strategy - it wasn't just that they were cynical about the motives of their senior leadership teams. Apart from then having more time to devote to the less able, teachers like the emphasis on quality and can see the benefits of having more time for the higher performing students, if there are fewer lower performing ones taking their subject.

- *Quality over quantity is attractive*
- *Quality needs to be at the forefront. Students being crammed into a subject they care less for is a recipe for disaster. **Quality outcomes for the individual***
- *I think what you are discussing is inevitable... wherever you have a school which has students with ability that is lower than National average, a school is bound to find a way to ensure that the most students get the essential five*
- *Focus on five subjects sounds good but some students might become disaffected and want to do other subjects they enjoy*
- *I'd rather, as both parent and a teacher, have students that gained a few great grades in subjects that they loved and felt confidence in*
- *At the moment I'm having to neglect my potential A* students in favour of devoting an inordinate amount of time to the C/D borderline students*
- *I'm doing the same, to ensure ALL pass, even if it means two or three don't get an A* that they might achieve with guidance*
- *Doesn't seem fair does it? Perhaps the new system would see that change at least?*
- *It makes sense to restrict students to fewer subjects and then hope they hit higher grades due to hot housing*
- *My personal view is that students are taking too many GCSEs and a reduction would be a good idea. In my view 8 is about right.*

There are also indications that schools may restrict the numbers of GCSEs offered in order to make more room for additional maths and English teaching because these subjects are double weighted in P8.

- *We have added more time into the timetable for English and maths from next year but don't know where the time will come from: we are **considering lower numbers of GCSE entries for less able pupils***
- *Whilst I agree that some softer subjects have been used to simply bulk up qualification numbers, some schools are becoming **almost entirely maths and English orientated - it's not healthy for anyone***
- *Given that the proposals say that Maths is set to be 'harder' and English and English Lit seem to have more 'content' than before, it is hard to see **how we will find time to teach all this unless we reduce the number of GCSEs students take.***

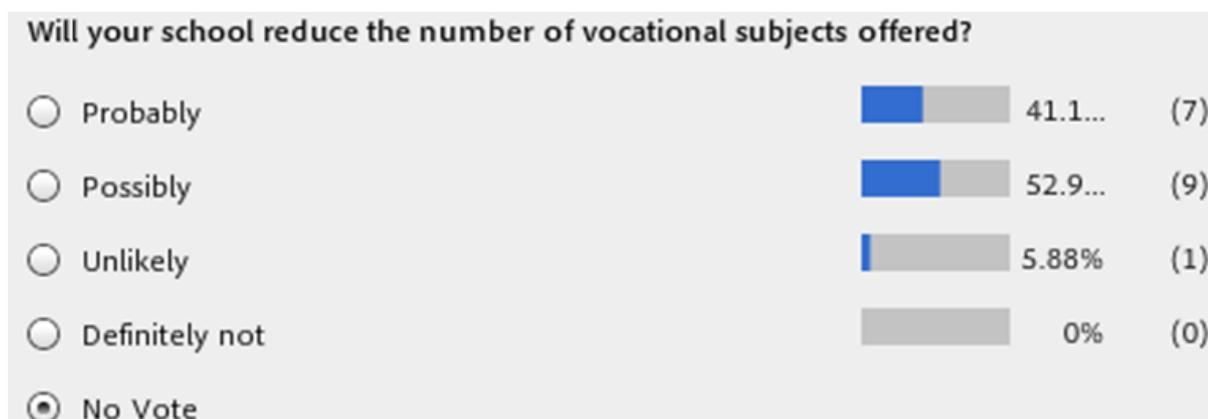
It may not be easy to accommodate in all schools, however, owing to timetabling restrictions and students may get bored if they spend more time on fewer subjects.

- *How? **Pupils tend to get bored doing lots of extra core subject lessons. But if it could be linked to realistic outcomes it might work***
- *Care would need to be taken to ensure these students followed an **interesting and stimulating curriculum***
- *The main disadvantages are **lack of breadth across learning and understanding***
- *Schools will have to be smart about making the new curriculum changes **not hamper the life chances of the less academic***

An alternative approach may be to set departments targets for each subject, rather than across the whole school - as the proposals hinted, a subject-based performance measure might be introduced, which could counteract the reduction in options and range of GCSEs available to students.

Reduction in the number of vocational subjects taken

Vocational qualifications tend to be offered to the lowest performing students, but they have been devalued in recent years and their applicability to the new P8 measure is limited. So schools have to achieve a balance between offering courses which students will be more likely to achieve some certification in (but contribute nothing to P8) and courses which will, if students achieve a grade, contribute some (few) points to P8, but which will not be valued by employers. If they are inclined to shift towards the latter position, the number of vocational subjects offered will decline:



This is a cause for concern for many teachers, including those who do not actually teach vocational subjects.

- *We have great teachers teaching vocational qualifications who manage to motivate very disaffected students. I can see **these new proposals will make schools think twice** about offering these qualifications - again to protect themselves in league tables etc*
- *Schools will not really have a choice, with the removal of vocational courses and national importance of EBacc, it is **unavoidable** really*
- *We have already lost 30 hours of vocational teaching in our faculty due to curriculum changes. **Worrying for jobs***
- *It is a huge struggle for vocational subjects as they are simply **not valued** in the same way*
- *Vocational subjects are seen as **devalued** under curriculum changes*
- *- but vocational courses with real value in the community would be superb*
- *Vocational subjects get **far less time** in my school since changes*
- *Vocational subjects **need to be promoted more and celebrated** as an integral part of the curriculum*
- *Vocational subjects are **essential**. Not all pupils can achieve Cs / level 4s! And why should weaker pupils feel they have to achieve what is impossible for them?*

Pros and cons of the reforms - generally

Teachers were asked to list aspects of the new GCSEs and accountability measures which they considered to be advantages, and which disadvantages, having discussed the reforms as described above.

The main advantages mentioned were:

- Increased ability to differentiate between higher performing students
- More challenge and potentially raised expectations for higher performing students
- Provides a chance to monitor progress more effectively across KS3 and KS4
- Benchmarking should allow a better comparison between UK and other countries

Teacher comments:

- *Removing modular exams and coursework creates a **level playing field**. It may be harder, but it is fairer*
- *Progress 8 might mean schools **value all learners**, not just C/D pupils*
- *Opportunity to teach **more English Literature**. A new focus on grammar*
- *Looking forward to **revised texts***
- *Some more exciting **GCSE texts...** to finally replace *Of Mice and Men**
- *The new frameworks at KS3 are offering many schools the chance to rethink their school / subject curriculum in **innovative ways***
- *Everyone **DOES THE SAME EXAM** - no tiered*
- *A clearer system, with no disparity between different exam boards ... in theory*
- *A chance to rework KS3 as well as KS4*
- *KS3 curriculum has possibilities for **creative ideas and teaching** - offers flexibility that possibly was not there before*

The main disadvantages mentioned were:

- *Holding teachers accountable to ridiculous targets*
- *Change has happened **too quickly** and potentially the first couple of cohorts may suffer due to the lack of preparation time for staff*
- *Lack of time to prepare*
- *Difficult for schools on the lower end of the ability mark to make inroads*
- ***No clarity** on what we should be doing at **KS3***
- *Time to prepare*
- *KS2 still needs to undergo change - progress cannot be mapped against flawed data*
- *More vocational subjects and teachers will be drafted out of schools.*
- *KS2 data issue HAS to be sorted out.*
- *Getting rid of foundation tier means **careful wording of exam questions***
- *The **uncertainty** of the new system is **making life unnecessarily difficult** and the '**drip feed**' approach to information at the moment is positively destructive*
- *It will ultimately **restrict choice for some pupils** - curriculum should not be so limiting*
- ***No joined up thinking-should** be KS3/4 linking re assessment. Lack of forethought about this on government's part. KS2 assessment should be externally assessed due to its importance*
- ***Restrictive choices for students** as students will be forced to do the p8 subjects*
- *The **cost of new resources** to help support the teaching of the new curriculum*
- *Removing KS3 level requirement will cause a huge amount of inconsistencies. **Guidance and advice urgently needed!***
- *Very **draconian** - should we not have other subjects in the new P8 that reflect the digital world?*

Profile of participants

Name	Job Position	Subject	Region	School Type	AB	Student ability
Andrew	Deputy head	History	South East	LA	OCR	Average
Brenda	Head of year	English	South East	LA	EdExcel	Above average
Charlotte	Subject leader	English	West Midlands	Academy	WJEC	Average
Gareth	Subject leader	Mathematics	North West	LA	EdExcel	Average
Jan	Subject leader	Science	Yorkshire	LA	AQA	Average
Jonathan	Subject leader	History	West Midlands	LA	OCR	Average
Julie	Subject leader	ICT	South West	Academy	OCR	Above average
Linda	Deputy head	English	North East	LA	WJEC	Average
Lorraine	Subject leader	Science	London	Independent	OCR	Above average
Lynne	Subject leader	Mathematics	East Midlands	LA	EdExcel	Below average
Mandy	Subject leader	English	North East	LA	AQA	Average
Matthew	Deputy head	English	North West	LA	AQA	Below average
Michael	Subject leader	Business Studies	North West	LA	AQA	Below average
Natalie	Subject leader	English	East Midlands	LA	WJEC	Below average
Nick	Subject leader	Science	Yorkshire	Academy	AQA	Below average
Pete	Subject leader	Mathematics	South West	LA	EdExcel	Above average
Rachel		English	North West	Academy	AQA	Below average
Robin	Deputy head	Geography	North West	LA	AQA	Below average

Feedback from teachers on their experiences of taking part in the online focus groups

- *Satisfied that I understand the proposals better...consultations with teachers/leaders should be more often and more like this*
- *Thanks for including me - I enjoyed the experience*
- *I really enjoyed the discussion and giving my input - we could have carried on for longer :)*
- *Thank you for the opportunity to participate, I really enjoyed the forum*
- *It was really useful to hear the views of other colleagues, especially on something that is likely to have such an impact on education. I look forward to working with you again*
- *It was thoroughly interesting and really useful to learn more about the new GCSE procedures*
- *I found the session really useful. It's great to hear the viewpoints of other teachers and have the time and opportunity to reflect on these vital issues. Thanks!*
- *I loved the forum! So informative and the other people made comments that both reflected my views and helped me consider further issues. Thanks for the opportunity to take part*
- *Excellent conducted- It was good to hear views from other schools and have a wider picture to anticipate areas of difficulty and prepare effectively- This can be incorporated into the development of the school plan*
- *Many thanks for a very interesting project*
- *An excellent opportunity to voice your views and listen to other like-minded teachers who care about the education of the students in their care. I strongly advise anyone to at least attempt one of these seminars*
- *I actually found the whole process very useful and thought provoking. The session was very organised and well led*
- *I found it very useful - and informative*
- *Enjoyed it - thanks!*
- *My first focus group and I actually really enjoyed it and learned from it, thanks!*
- *I am glad to hear that my frustrations are not isolated*
- *Please do more of these*
- *Loved the chat tonight- good to hear views on a par to mine and to hear a range*
- *I really enjoy this. I learn a lot from you and my teaching colleagues*
- *Enjoyed forum, especially hearing the views of other colleagues*
- *This was really interesting - we don't have time to talk about this sort of thing at work!!*
- *Very interesting and informative. Pleased to have the opportunity to contribute*
- *Thanks useful session*
- *Very useful - but a bit 'busy' at times. A lot going on simultaneously!*
- *Very useful and interesting*
- *Useful to see / hear an overview of the changes and to hear how other schools are responding to them. Good luck with it everyone*
- *A great experience - it's good to know that colleagues in other schools are experiencing the same issues as mine*
- *Great to share ideas*
- *Very illuminating - could have done with more typing time*
- *Relieved to hear frustrations are similar*



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