



Department
for Education

Ofqual



GCSE, AS and A level reforms in England

Contents

- What is happening, when?
- Reformed GCSEs
- Reformed AS and A levels
- Changes to practical science
- Resits
- Information about my school/college
- Changes to marking, reviews and appeals
- Further information



**What is happening,
when?**

Why and how are GCSEs, AS and A levels changing?

GCSEs and A levels in England are being reformed, to match the best systems in the world and keep pace with universities' and employers' demands.

- GCSE content will be more challenging but still suitable for all abilities
- GCSEs will be graded on a new scale of 9 to 1 rather than A* to G as now, with 9 the highest grade, to distinguish clearly between the reformed and unreformed qualifications
- A levels will allow more time for studying and better prepare students for university
- AS levels will be stand alone qualifications to reduce exam burden on students and teachers.



When do these reforms affect GCSE students?

Level	Start course in 2015, exams 2017	Start course in 2016, exams 2018	Start course in 2017, exams 2019	Start course in 2018, exams 2020
GCSE	English literature, English language and maths only.	English and maths plus... 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.	2015 and 2016 subjects plus... Ancient history, Arabic, astronomy, Bengali, business, Chinese, classical civilisation, design and technology, economics, electronics, engineering, film studies, geology, Italian, Japanese, media studies, modern Greek, modern Hebrew, Panjabi, PE short course, Polish, psychology, Russian, sociology, statistics, and Urdu.	All previous subjects plus... Gujarati, biblical Hebrew, Persian, Portuguese, and Turkish.



When do these reforms affect AS and A level students?

Level	Start course in 2015, A level exams 2017, AS level exams 2016	Start course in 2016, A level exams 2018, AS level exams 2017	Start course in 2017, A level exams 2019, AS level exams in 2018	Start course in 2018, A level exams 2020; no AS level exams available in these subjects
AS and A Level	Art and design, biology, business, chemistry, computer science, economics, English language, English language and literature, English literature, history, physics, psychology, and sociology.	2015 subjects plus... Dance, drama and theatre, French, geography, German, classical Greek, Latin, music, physical education, religious studies and Spanish.	2015 and 2016 subjects plus... Accounting, ancient history, archaeology, Chinese, classical civilisation, design and technology, electronics, environmental science, film studies, further maths, geology, history of art, Italian, law, maths, media studies, music technology, philosophy, politics, Russian, and statistics.	All previous subjects plus... Arabic, Bengali, biblical Hebrew, Gujarati, modern Greek, modern Hebrew, Japanese, Panjabi, Persian, Portuguese Polish, Turkish, and Urdu.



Reformed GCSEs

- **Content** New and more challenging content
- **Structure** All exams at the end of the course
- **Assessment** Mainly by examination
Non-exam assessment only where necessary
- **Tiering** Foundation and higher tier permitted
only in maths, science and modern foreign languages
- **Grading** New numbered scale (9 to 1 plus U), 9 is the highest
New Government 'good pass' set at grade 5



Reformed GCSEs

New GCSE grading structure

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

achieve a grade 4 and above

achieve a grade 1 and above

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Grading new GCSEs from 2017

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

GOOD PASS (DfE)
5 and above = top of C and above

AWARDING
4 and above = bottom of C and above

as currently get A and above

as currently get C and above

as currently get G and above

What does the GCSE 'good pass' mean?

- In the future, for the reformed GCSEs, the Government's definition of 'good pass' will be set at grade 5.
- Grade 5 will be awarded to around the top third of pupils gaining the equivalent of a grade C and bottom third of a grade B. This means that there will be fewer pupils achieving a 'good pass' than in previous years.
- Grade 4 will continue to be a level 2 achievement (equivalent to a low grade C now). We would not expect employers, colleges and universities to raise the bar to a grade 5 if, for example, a grade 4 would meet their requirements.
- Important to remember that the GCSE 'good pass' allows parents and students to hold schools and the Government to account – it is currently set at a GCSE grade C.



What a GCSE certificate might look like in 2017


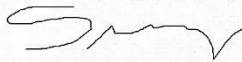

General Certificate of Secondary Education

This is to certify that the candidate named below was awarded the following grade(s) in the subject(s) shown:

A. CANDIDATE

Date of Birth: 1 January 2001

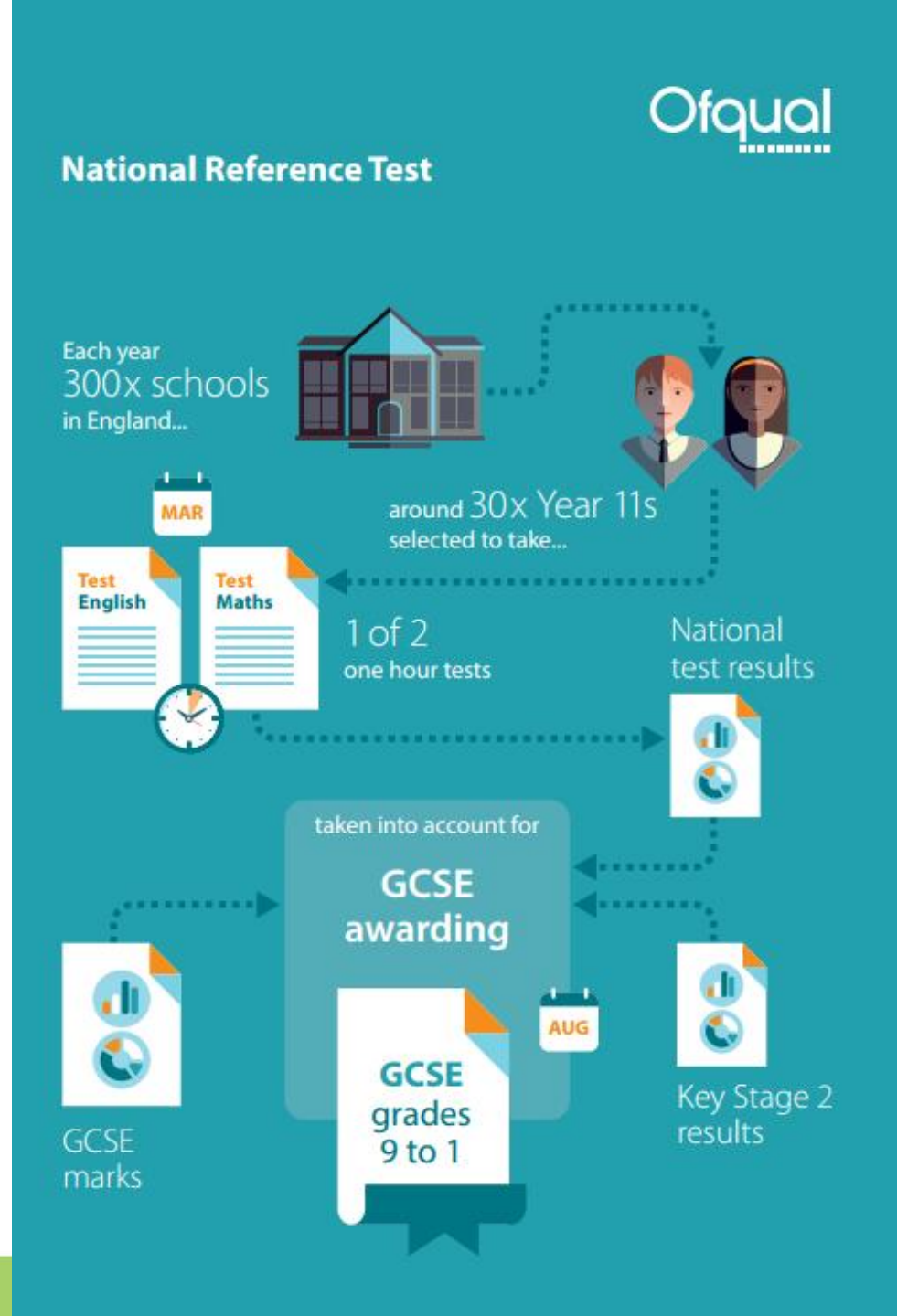
Drama	B (b)
English Language	4 (four)
English Spoken Language	Merit
Geography	A (a)
Mathematics	6 (six)
Physics	D (d)

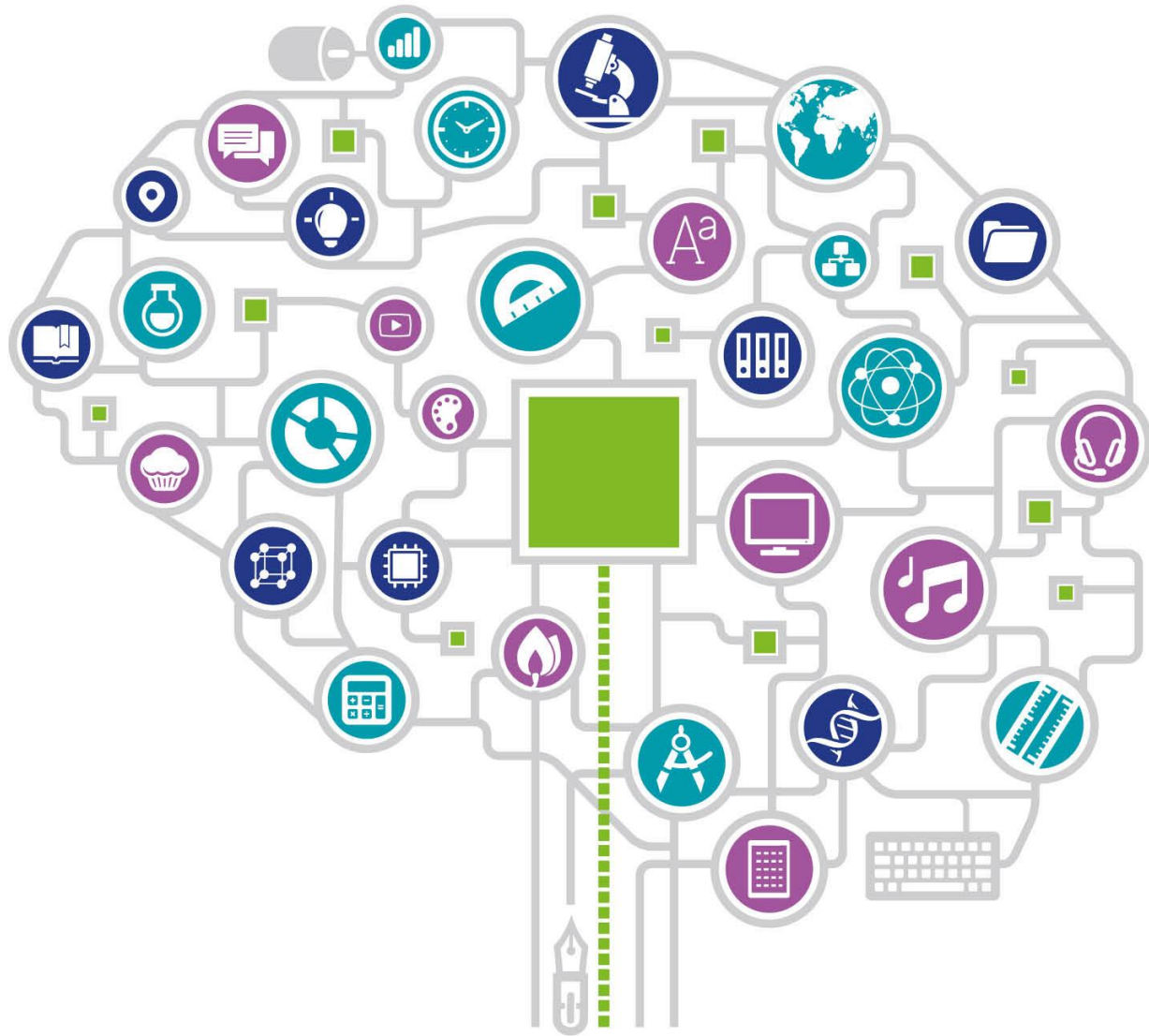
  

Signature A Signature B

The National Reference Test

- Designed to inform GCSE awarding
- Preliminary test held in March 2016
- First live test planned for 2017
- Could be used to inform awarding in 2018 and beyond
- Students and schools do not get results
- Different schools selected each year:
 - 300 schools
 - 30 students take the maths test and another 30 take the English test





Reformed AS and A levels

Reformed AS level

- **Content** Drawn from the new A level content
- **Demand** Same as current AS qualifications
- **Structure** AS is now a separate qualification with the marks no longer counting towards A level
May not be offered in all subjects in your school or college
Taught over 1 or 2 years
Exams at end of the course
- **Assessment** Most subjects have no non-exam assessment
- **Grading** Remains A to E plus U



Reformed A levels

- **Content** Changes to better prepare students for university
- **Demand** Same as current A levels
- **Structure** All exams at the end of the two-year course
Marks from the AS do not count towards the A level
- **Assessment** Mainly by examination
Non-exam assessment only where necessary
- **Grading** Remains A* to E plus U
A separate grade for science practical work



Awarding

- The standards of AS and A levels are not being changed; on average students who would have got Bs previously will get a B in reformed subjects.
- Exam boards will still use predictions (based on GCSE prior attainment) to guide their awards
- Key grade boundaries will be set, as now, using predictions and senior examiner judgement of students' work
- No UMS (uniform mark scale) – decoupling means there is no need for UMS which helped standardise results across units, qualifications and boards in a modular system
- The effect of decoupling AS on entry cohort



Changes to Practical Science

Practical Science Assessment

GCSE:

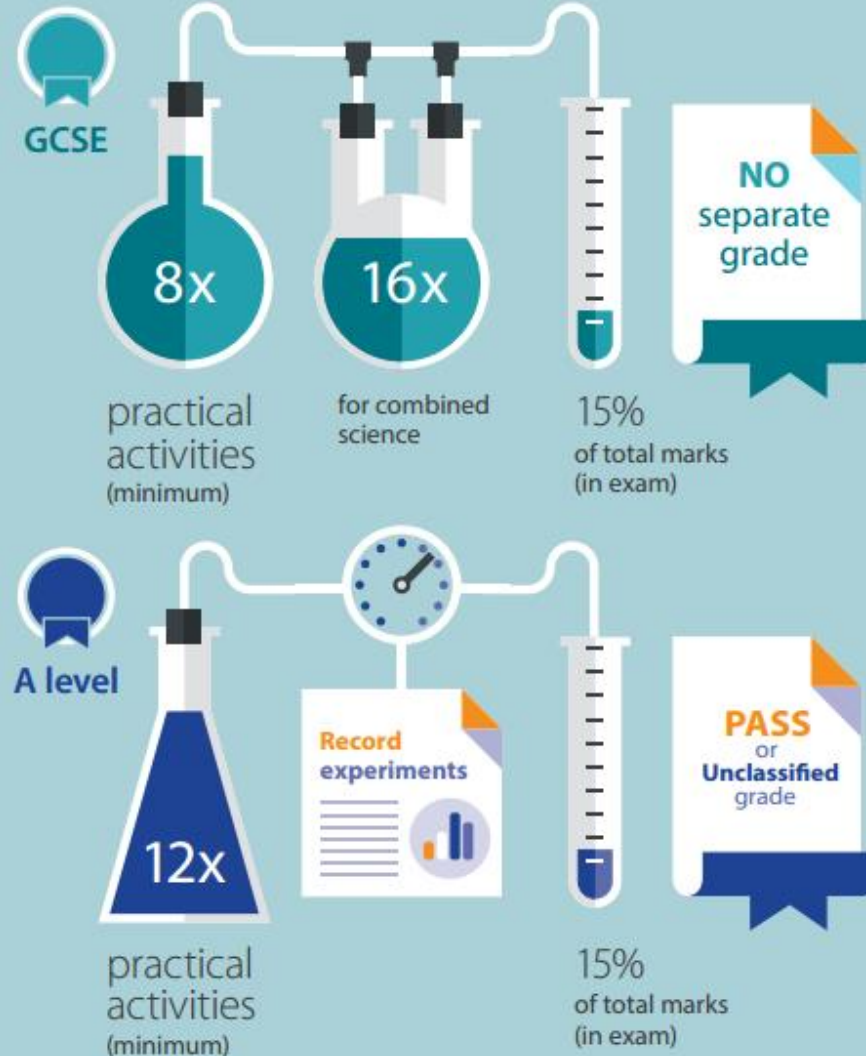
- Students do at least 8 practical activities (16 for combined science) covering specific techniques
- Written questions about practical work will make up at least 15% of the total marks for the qualification
- There will be no separate grade for practical skills
- Students studying combined science will receive one of 17 grades from 9-9 (highest) to 1-1 (lowest)

A level:

- More practicals – at least 12 in each science subject
- Written questions about practical work will make up at least 15% of the total marks for the qualification
- Students will need to record their experiments as they do them
- Students' competence in practicals will be reported separately ('pass' or 'not classified')
- Practical 'pass' for A level science likely to be required by universities – **check admissions information**

Improving science practicals

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Resits

Will there be an opportunity to resit?

Unreformed qualifications

- GCSE resits available for:
 - English, English language and maths in November 2016 AND summer 2017
 - All science and additional science qualifications (not individual sciences) no later than summer 2018
 - Exam boards may also offer resits in any other subject – including biology, chemistry and physics – in the year after the last sitting.

- AS and A levels resits available for all subjects in May or June of the year following the last legacy exam

- There are restrictions on who can take these resits

Will there be an opportunity to resit?

Reformed qualifications

- Students will be able to resit GCSE maths and English language in a November exam series.
- For all other GCSE and all AS and A levels, as now, students will resit by taking the qualification again the following year

Key stage 4 measures

A set of secondary school/key stage 4 measures encourage a broad and balanced curriculum with a strong emphasis on an academic core:

- New focus on pupil progress – Progress 8 measures pupils' progress in 8 qualifications. These are:

English

maths

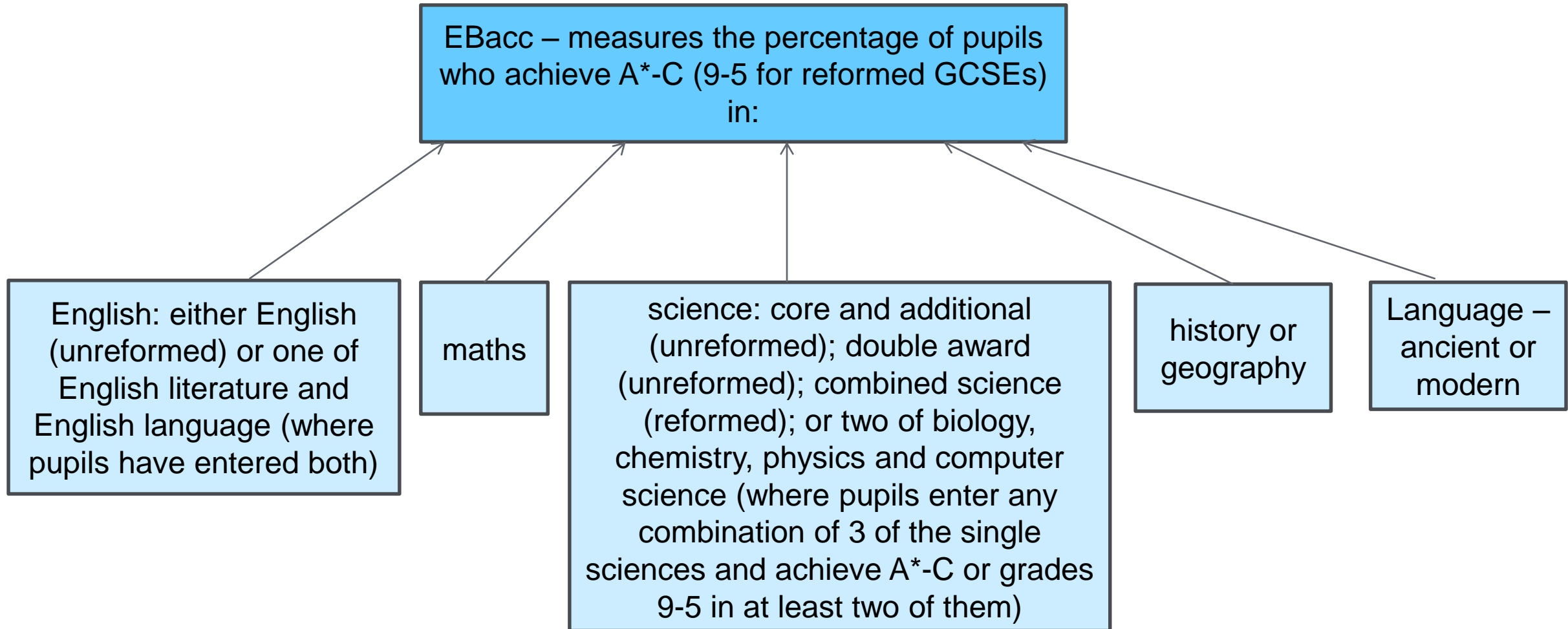
Three of: science, computer science, history, geography and languages

Any three other approved qualifications

- Attainment 8 measures pupils achievements in the same subjects
- Percentage of pupils achieving a 'good pass' in English and maths
- Percentage of pupils achieving the EBacc.



The English Baccalaureate measure



Post-16 school/college measures

- As for secondary schools, the Department for Education's new post-16 performance measures place more emphasis on the progress of students.
- There will be five headline measures:
 - **Progress** – how well are students progressing?
 - **Attainment** – are they getting good grades?
 - **Retention** – are they dropping out?
 - **English and maths** – for students who did not get a good pass in these subjects at GCSE
 - **Destinations** – are they getting university/college places, apprenticeships and jobs?





Changes to marking, reviews and appeals

The Quality of Marking

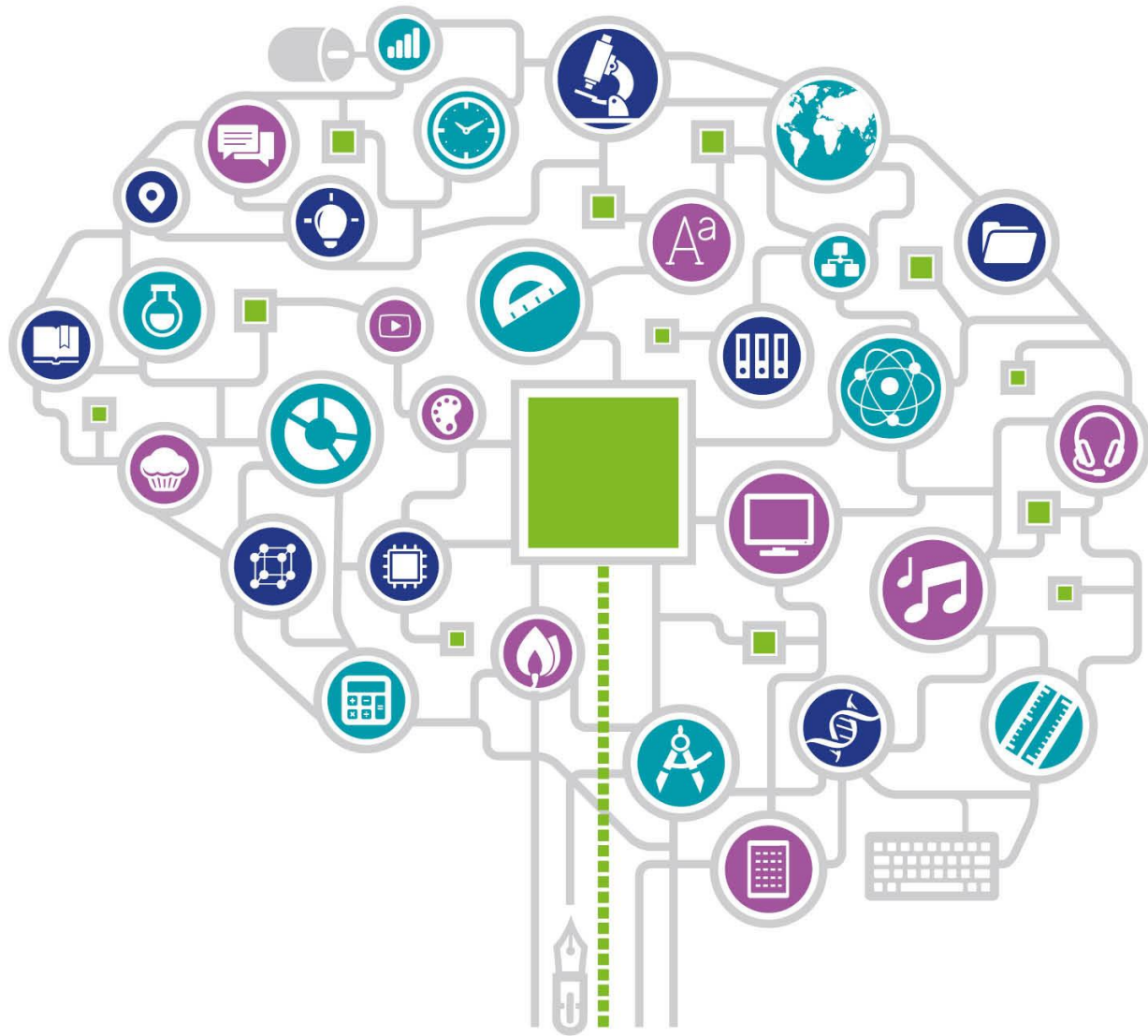
- The exams system is very large; around 8 million GCSEs, AS qualifications and A levels are awarded each year
- Exam outcomes are increasingly high stakes – for students, teachers and schools/colleges
- Growing number of reviews of marking being requested – typically where the mark is just below the grade boundary

Ofqual's aims:

- Marking errors are found and corrected
- Review and appeal arrangements are more transparent and consistent
- The system is as **fair** as it can be for all

Ofqual's decisions:

- Trained reviewers will check the original marking
- If they find an error they must correct it – however large or small
- Otherwise they must leave the mark unchanged



Further Information

Responsibilities for Qualifications

- **Government:**

- Policy, purposes and priorities
- Curriculum and subject content
- Use of qualifications for school/college accountability purposes

- **Ofqual:**

- Standards
- Validity
- Efficiency and value
- Oversight of the system

- **Exam Boards:**

- Design and delivery
- Award qualifications to students

