

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

Notes for Teachers and Examinations Officers

Summary

- All Edexcel's new GCSE subjects are unitised.
- Students can either take assessments during the course or may take all the assessments at the end of the course, as with the current or legacy linear specifications.
- Students must take at least 40% (and up to 100%) of the assessment in the final examination series when they certificate, and the results of these assessments will contribute to the final grade.
- This 40% terminal requirement means that there is limited flexibility in the way that students can take the assessments as they progress through the course.
- Students can re-sit a unit assessment once.
- The better result for the unit counts as long as the 40% terminal requirement is satisfied.
- The first full GCSE awards will be 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
- English, Mathematics and ICT from 2010

They do not apply to current (legacy) GCSE subjects, including 360 Science and Mathematics B, or to other qualifications (GCE AS, A Level, iGCSE, etc)

All Edexcel's new GCSE subjects 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-in
- students must sit all the units which contribute to the cash in
- they must be entered for each individual unit
- they must also be entered for the subject cash-in
- the cash-in leads to certification with a grade

The rules for the new GCSEs, agreed by JCQ (The Joint Council for Qualifications) and Ofqual, vary significantly from the rules for GCE AS and A level, and from the current (legacy) linear and modular GCSEs. These notes should help you to ensure that your students are entered correctly: resolving errors is time-consuming, difficult and stressful for all - teachers, examinations officers, students, and even for awarding bodies. The rules mean that although the qualifications have a number of contributing units, there is limited flexibility in the way that students can take assessments as they progress through the course.

How do we carry marks forward from one examination series to another?

A Uniform Mark Scale (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. When the grade boundaries are decided, the marks from the assessment (also referred to as 'raw' marks) are converted to a UMS mark. The same standard of performance on assessments taken at different times 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 UMS for each unit depends on its weighting and the maximum UMS for the whole subject.

What are the rules?

These complex, detailed rules are to ensure a 'level playing-field'. There are rules 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, and the results for the units that satisfy this terminal requirement will count - they will be used to calculate the grade - even if there is a better result from an earlier attempt.

Re-sit Rules

- students may resit each unit once.
- options within an assessment unit and optional units are treated as separate units with regard to re-sits.
- a tiered unit or tiered option may be re-sat once at the same or at a different tier.
- 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
- in practice, if a student has more than two results for a unit, only the better of the last two results will count towards the final grade, or the last if it is used for the terminal requirement. (This situation could only arise if some of the results had already been cashed in)

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, Edexcel will generate the best grade for the student using the optimum combination. So, students may

- take different units at different tiers
- resit a unit at a different tier (once only)

and Edexcel will calculate the best grade (subject to the terminal requirement and resit rules)

Can we decline GCSE Grades?

Students cannot decline certification after the results are published, for any qualifications.

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 happens 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, a result of zero marks will be used in any calculations.

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. in 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.

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 of a given size.
- A student may retake a unit once or twice after certification. For example, a unit which had been taken twice before the certification of a Short Course award could then be re-taken on one or two further occasions before certification of a Full Course award and/or a Double Award (but remember, only the better of the last two results will count towards the final grade, or the last if it is used for 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

Edexcel 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 make a late entry for the smaller award after the publication of results (within a specified period).

If students re-take the whole GCSE, must they re-take every unit?

Students may cash-in a second (or more) time and re-use unit results, as long as they resit sufficient units to satisfy the terminal requirement when they cash-in.

Will my students get the best results?

Yes, Edexcel will generate the best grade for the student from the available results:

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

Of course, all the terminal requirement and the resit rules still apply.

How long will the individual unit results be valid?

Where a student has more than two results for a unit, only the two most recent attempts will be used in the aggregation to a qualification award. The better of these two results will be used, subject to the application of the terminal requirement.

Can my students wait, and cash in when they have their best results?

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 remark a unit later when it is cashed in: it must be remarked immediately after the result is issued.

Are there any special rules for 2010 and 2011?

Short courses can be certificated from the June 2010 series 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. There is a special rule to cover this situation, designed to ensure that students are not disadvantaged, rather than to encourage completing these courses early.

In this situation, a student may, in June 2011 only, certificate the GCSE, provided that the terminal requirement was satisfied in an earlier series. For example, if 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), the student may certificate in June 2011. When the grade is calculated, no assessment results that post-date the June 2010 examination series will be used.