



A closer look at tiered assessment

GCSEs are assessed in different ways. In GCSEs that are not tiered, there is just one exam paper for all students, regardless of which grade they are aiming for.

In the case of tiered GCSEs, however, students sit different exam papers depending on the grades they hope to achieve.

Our view on GCSEs in Wales is that they should not include tiered assessment unless it's necessary to ensure that exams are accessible and manageable for the students sitting them.

Which subjects have tiered qualifications and why?

In many subjects, such as Welsh language, English language or Geography, it's possible to assess the content using mainly open-ended questions that are accessible to the whole cohort of students. The marks that a student gets depends on the quality of their answer and so the exam papers for these subjects are not tiered.

Tiering is used for subjects where the content is assessed through a series of questions that are of a different level of difficulty, for example, maths and science.

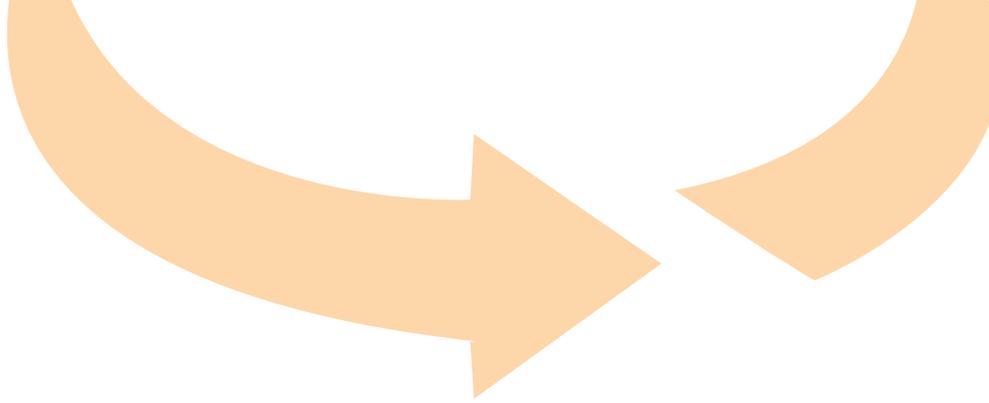
While it would be possible to set a paper that includes enough questions of various difficulty to assess the full GCSE ability range, this would lead to much longer exam papers and less positive experiences for students.

In practice, tiering means that only a subset of grades are targeted by each exam paper. The tier a student enters for depends on the grade they hope to achieve.

Most tiered qualifications have two tiers: foundation and higher. The table below shows the grades available at each tier. Grades C and D are available on both the higher and lower tiers.

Higher	A*	A	B	C	D			
Intermediate				C	D	E	F	G

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The GCSE Mathematics and GCSE Mathematics-Numeracy have three tiers of entry: *Foundation, Intermediate and Higher*. The grades available on each tier are as follows.

Higher	A*	A	B	C				
Intermediate			B	C	D	E		
Foundation					D	E	F	G

Because tiered exam papers only target a subset of the grades, it is important to take care when looking at and comparing grade boundaries.

In higher tier GCSE Mathematics and GCSE Mathematics-Numeracy for example, roughly a quarter of the questions will be targeted at each grade A*, A, B and C. This is why grade boundaries for grade C on higher tier papers are lower than they are for intermediate or foundation tier papers.

For more information see our article on setting grade boundaries.



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