

## Understanding GCSEs



A short guide for parents

Congratulations. Having just moved into Year 10, your son/daughter has recently started their work towards GCSE qualifications.

Sometimes we teachers speak a lot of jargon. This pamphlet is designed to help you understand both the pupils and teachers when we talk in GCSE speak.

GCSE stands for General Certificate of Secondary Education. Although there are other qualifications out there, like National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) and Diplomas, GCSEs are the most commonly taken subjects by 15-16 year olds. GCSEs provide information for school, college or employers about your child's skills and learning so far, and give an indication of their suitability to study further or work in specific jobs. School, college or employers will have specific expectations for further courses but many will expect at least 5 A\* to C's with emphasis being placed on English, Maths and Sciences. Schools, however, under the direction of the Welsh Government, are moving towards using an Average Point Score (APS) where each C grade is the equivalent of 40 points, (other grades are allocated other scores)

## What subjects do pupils follow ?

In Years 10 and 11(also known as Key Stage 4) all pupils will follow GCSEs in the following subjects

Maths and Maths Numeracy (2 GCSE)

English Language and possibly English Literature (1 or possibly 2 GCSEs)

Double award Science (2 GCSEs. with 40% completed in Yr 10 The Practical exam and the remaining 60% are taken in Yr 11)

Welsh

Skills Challenge Certificate

Most pupils will also follow the 3 option subjects they chose in Yr 9 eg History, French or IT, Some maybe following a day's vocational course in college while others, who may need a little extra support, will be on a bespoke course eg Option 1.

All pupils in KS4 must also have 1 core RS lesson and 2 core PE lessons a week on their Timetable.

## How are GCSEs assessed

GCSEs take the last two years of secondary education to complete and are assessed by a mixture of coursework (now called Non Examined Assessments or NEAs) and exams. There will be NEAs throughout Year 10 and 11 and some GCSE exams during Year 10 as well as Year 11

On the centre pages of this booklet you will find an outline calendar of NEAs and exams for your son or daughter whilst in Year 10

## More about NEAs

Throughout the GCSE course, pupils will be expected to complete NEAs. Mostly it is up to the teachers when these assessments are undertaken, choosing a time that suits the class and fits in with the course you are studying. In some subjects eg Welsh, Languages and Science the exam board state when the NEAs have to be completed.

NEA marks count towards the final grade, so it is important to take them seriously, meet all the deadlines and for pupils to do it as well as they can. There is no second chance to complete the NEA, and for some subjects teachers are not allowed to write or comment on what has been written. It is unusual to be allowed to take the NEA home as it has to be stored in a secure place and when completed the pupil will have to sign a declaration to say it is all their own work. It goes without saying that it is really important that pupils attend regularly throughout both Years 10 and 11.

## And the exams Modules

Many subjects are made up of several papers eg In French or German there will be a written paper, a reading and listening paper and the oral. Each of these components is called a module. Some subjects e.g science will be examined as three modules in Year10. (one Biology, one Chemistry and one Physics) with the remaining modules (again one Biology, one Chemistry and one Physics) plus the practical paper in Year 11. NEAs, if required, are a component module that is completed in class rather than as an exam.

## The exams

### Tiers

Different subjects are organised in slightly different ways. In some subjects, such as history, Music, and Art and Design, everybody studying the subject sits exactly the same exam paper. In some subjects, like English, Science, most modern foreign languages and Maths, there is a choice of tiers. Each of the tiers (usually called Higher or Foundation) has a different range of grades that can be achieved. If you take the higher tier, you will be able to get an A\*,A, B, C or D grade. If you take the foundation tier, you will be able to get a C, D, E, F or G grade.

The exams are structured like this to make sure that everyone has the opportunity to show what they are capable of, without being put off by questions that are too hard or too easy. If you have any questions or worries about which tier your son/daughter should be entered for, you should speak to your son/daughters subject teachers. They will be able to give you help and guidance.

## Exams

Exam day! - it is time for pupils to put their knowledge, understanding and skills to the test. The exam timetable will be issued in advance of the exam period. The dates of the exams are set by a Government body—the Joint Council for Qualifications, not the school. The date and time of the exams CANNOT be changed by the school, although a minor adjustment can be made to the timing if there is a clash of subjects. If your child cannot attend on the day of the exam you MUST let school know as soon as possible. You may be asked to provide some further evidence as to why they cannot attend.

## Year 10 NEA and EXAM timetable: CORE SUBJECTS

Core subjects are taken by ALL pupils and are as shown below. The faculty is provided so you can contact the correct person if you need further information (e.g. the Head of English, etc.)

FACULTY (click links to email)	SUBJECT	NEA INFORMATION		% of GCSE mark	EXAM INFORMATION	% of GCSE mark
		NEA START DATE	NEA END DATE			
<a href="#">CYMRAEG</a>	*Cymraeg	N/A	N/A	N/A	(In Yr11)	N/A
	Cymraeg (Accelerated Class only)	N/A	N/A	N/A	21 <sup>st</sup> -23 <sup>rd</sup> Apr 2020 Unit 1 27 <sup>th</sup> -29 <sup>th</sup> Apr 2020 Unit 2 6 <sup>th</sup> May 2020 Unit 3 14 <sup>th</sup> May 2020 Unit 4	25% 25% 25% 25%
<a href="#">ENGLISH</a>	*English Language	(IN YR11)	(IN YR11)	N/A	(IN YR11)	N/A
	English Literature	Oct 2019 (Poetry) Mar 2020 (Shakespeare)	Dec 2019 (Poetry) Easter2020 (Shakespeare)	25%	8 <sup>th</sup> Jan 2020 (Unit 1)	35%
<a href="#">HUMANITIES</a>	*RS Core	N/A	N/A	N/A	(IN YR11)	N/A
<a href="#">MATHS</a>	*Maths	N/A	N/A	N/A	(In Yr11)	N/A
<a href="#">SCIENCE</a>	*Double Award Science	(In Yr11)	(In Yr11)	10%	1 <sup>st</sup> June 2020 Biology 10 <sup>th</sup> June 2020 Chemistry 12 <sup>th</sup> June 2020 Physics	45%
<a href="#">SKILLS CHALLENGE</a>	Community Challenge (completed in PE)	Sep 2019	April 2020	15%	N/A	N/A
	Enterprise & Employability Challenge	Sep 2019	June 2020	20%		

N/A: Not applicable for this course or at this time  
(IN YR11): Will be completed in year 11 (2020-21)  
\*: Subject will have exams in year 11

## Year 10 NEA and EXAM timetable: OPTION SUBJECTS

Option subjects vary, so will not apply to all pupils. Most pupils will have three option subjects. The faculty is provided so you can contact the correct person if you need further information (e.g. the Head of English, etc.)

FACULTY (click links to email)	SUBJECT	NEA INFORMATION		% of GCSE mark	EXAM INFORMATION	% of GCSE mark
		NEA START DATE	NEA END DATE			
<a href="#">BUSINESS COMMUNICATION</a>	Business Studies	N/A	N/A	N/A	(IN YR11)	N/A
	Computer Science	7 <sup>th</sup> Oct 2019	20 <sup>th</sup> Mar 2020	20%	(IN YR11)	N/A
	ICT	2 <sup>nd</sup> Sep 2019	17 <sup>th</sup> Jul 2020	30%	10 <sup>th</sup> Jun 2020	20%
	Tourism	2 <sup>nd</sup> Sep 2019	30 <sup>th</sup> Mar 2020	25%	11 <sup>th</sup> Jun 2020	25%
<a href="#">ENGLISH</a>	Drama	(IN YR11)	(IN YR11)	N/A	(IN YR11)	N/A
	Music	(IN YR11)	(IN YR11)	N/A	(IN YR11)	N/A
<a href="#">HUMANITIES</a>	History	6 <sup>th</sup> Jan 2020	3 <sup>rd</sup> Mar 2020	20%	4 <sup>th</sup> Jun 2020 Unit 2	25%
	Philosophy & Ethics	N/A	N/A	N/A	11 <sup>th</sup> May 2020 (Unit 1)	50%
	Geography	(IN YR11)	(IN YR11)	N/A	(IN YR11)	N/A
<a href="#">MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES</a>	French	N/A	N/A	N/A	(IN YR11)	N/A
	German	N/A	N/A	N/A	(IN YR11)	N/A
<a href="#">PE</a>	Physical Education (not PE core)	Sep 2019	** Feb 2021	50%	N/A	N/A
<a href="#">TECHNOLOGY</a>	Art	Feb 2020	** Dec 2020	60%	(IN YR11)	N/A
	Fashion & Textiles	Feb 2020	** Dec 2020	60%	(IN YR11)	N/A
	Food & Nutrition	May 2020	Jul 2020	20%	(IN YR11)	N/A
	Graphic Communications	Feb 2020	** Dec 2020	60%	(IN YR11)	N/A
	Engineering	Jun 2020	** Oct 2020	25%	(IN YR11)	N/A
	Product Design	Jun 2020	** Feb 2021	50%	(IN YR11)	N/A
	Health and Social	Apr 2020	Jul 2020	30%	(IN YR11)	N/A

N/A: Not applicable for this course  
(IN YR11): Will be completed in Year 11 (2020-21)  
\*\*NEA tasks continue into year 11.

## Results and Grades

GCSE grades are considered to be pass grades between A\* to G. If your son/daughter doesn't achieve the minimum pass mark to get a grade G, then a U grade is awarded, which means 'unclassified'.

## Resit exams

If your child misses an exam, or needs to improve one of their modules it may be possible to resit the module exam, but that may not be until the following year (remember the dates are set by the JCQ, not school) However, parents may be required to pay for a resit exams.

**It is important you do your best the first time round.**

## A little bit about Homework .....

The most certain way to achieve success at GCSEs is to keep on top of the work. Pupils should not leave things until the last minute.

About two hours worth of homework will be set each night. Pupils should be encouraged to do it on the night it is set, or as near to that night as possible—many pupils have other interests to fit into the evenings too!. We do understand the concept of all work and no play, but it is important to get the balance between work and play right.

Pupils should find a quiet place away from distractions e.g. the TV or phone to complete homework. BOOST is available for an hour each night in school (in E12) if this is difficult at home. Pupils should be encouraged to “get their head down” and get it over and done with. If by any chance they finish their homework in under two hours they should spend any of the remaining time going over their notes, making some revision notes etc to help them understand what they are studying. If they are unsure about anything, they should make a note and ask their teacher about it when they next see them

## Attendance and GCSEs

Excellent attendance is critical to a learner's chances of success. Holidays in term time have a significant impact on what the young person might achieve . The table below shows the impact of being absent from school.

<b>Percentage attendance</b>	<b>Number of days off in a year</b>	<b>Number of lessons missed in a year</b>	<b>Chance of success at GCSE</b>
95%	9.5	48	74.3%
93%	13	65	60.4%
90% (one day every fortnight)	19	95	44.5%
87%	25	125	26.7%
85%	28.5	143	
80% (one day every week)	38	190	

However, young people are sometimes ill and will need to be off school. If your child is likely to be off school for a few days, do ask for some work to be sent home for your son/daughter to do when they are feeling a bit better. When they return to school they should ask their teacher to go over anything they feel need clarification.

## Advice to pupils— Coping with the pressure

There is no denying that exams are stressful. They are important – but they're not the only way to a successful future. Stress can be triggered by certain events (like exams) in your life. It is normal to get upset and worried about things. Keep things in perspective; tests can be retaken, career paths can change.

Exam stress can start when you feel you can't cope with revision, or feel pressure from your school or family to do well. You might worry you're going to fail or you won't get the grades you need for the course or job you want. This worry can cause you to feel unwell, both physically and emotionally. All you can do is your best

### ***Practical tips to reduce stress***

**Get lots of rest** – you need plenty of sleep.

**Listening to music** – has been proved to change your mood – use it to energise or relax, to cheer you up or calm you down.

**Healthy food** Avoid sugary snacks if you are stressed – the sugar makes things worse as it triggers a high in the body – followed by a low. Caffeine, including energy drinks have the same impact.

**Pets** – If you have a pet then stroke it regularly If you haven't, then a cuddly toy, furry cushion or blanket is a good substitute.

**Computer games** – Playing some computer games IS GOOD FOR YOU – it can be relaxing BUT avoid violent games that trigger negative emotions and limit the time they are played.

**Exercise** – find something you enjoy and do it as often as possible. A Healthy Body and a Healthy Mind.

**Go outside** – natural light is less stressful than man-made light.

**Keep warm** – when you are cold you tense your body and this creates stress – being warm and cosy is relaxing.

**Be creative** – Colouring in can be very calming. There are loads of mindfulness colouring books available. Or you could draw, write, build – find an activity away from a screen.

**Write it down** – keep a diary of life's events. Noting your thoughts and emotions related to these has been proven to reduce stress. It helps you to understand what is bothering you. It takes the worry 'out of your head' which reduces the feelings of anxiety.

**Be grateful** – List five positive things that have happened every day and two things that were challenging. This helps you focus more on the positive whilst accepting that life is not perfect.

**Breathe** – yes it sounds obvious! Take a deep, cleansing breath, expanding your stomach and keeping your shoulders relaxed, and hold it in for the count of six. Exhale, and repeat twice more.

**Laugh out Loud** – laughter releases tension and brings positive physiological changes. Even if you are feeling low try a fake 'laugh'; the body can't tell the difference so the benefits are the same. You'll still achieve positive effects, and it may lead to real smiles and laughter.

**Work** - Many young people have part time jobs but do watch how many hours they work. As the exams get closer it may be necessary to reduce the number of hours your son/daughter works.

## Where to get help

For any general concern please contact your son/daughter's head of Learning Mrs G Hughes.

For subject specific help please identify the subject in the table below and the relevant faculty Head. (Please remember when contacting teaching staff that they do teach and often have meetings after the pupils have gone home. They may not be able to return your call until the next day.

Faculty	Subject areas	Head of Faculty
Maths	Maths	Mr A Davies
English	English Language English Literature Drama Music	Mrs J Caton
Science	Science	Miss S Taylor
Welsh	Welsh	Mr D Williams
Modern Foreign Languages	French German	Mrs B Gordon
Humanities	Geography History Philosophy and Ethics Core RS	Mrs J Abas
Business Communication	Business Studies Computer Studies ICT Tourism	Mr D Jones
PE	GCSE PE Core PE	Mr N Wilkinson
Welsh Baccalaureate	Skills Challenge	Mrs T Parkes
Technology	Graphic Communication Product Design Food and Nutrition Health and Social Care Art Fashion and Textiles Engineering	Mr M Sherry