

The background of the page is a complex geometric pattern of overlapping triangles in various shades of teal and green, creating a mosaic-like effect. The triangles are of different sizes and orientations, some pointing up and some down, creating a dynamic and modern aesthetic.

2018 GCSE results and performance measures

A guide for school governors and trustees

About this guide

SSAT has produced this guide to help make sense of the changes to the GCSEs in 2018 – what this means for students, but also how these play into school performance measures, and how to interpret both.

This guide is written with governors and trustees/directors in mind; though it may also be useful for school and MAT leaders, teachers and parents. It is intended to provide a comprehensive guide for governing boards without being over-technical. More technical information is available either on the DfE website or through your school's SSAT relationship manager.

2018 was a particularly important year in GCSE reforms as many of your school's students may have sat only the new-style GCSEs. Even though the new GCSEs for English language, literature and maths came in in 2017, this change makes 2018 unique; and makes comparison to previous years very difficult.

This guide refers to the GCSE results for the summer of 2018; the performance data for which will be confirmed in January 2019. However – withstanding any major government changes to GCSEs or performance measures – the information and advice here should make sense in 2019 and beyond.

About SSAT

We are SSAT, the Schools, Students and Teachers network.

We exist to help improve outcomes for all young people. As a membership organisation of schools and academies across the UK and internationally, we work with leaders, teachers and students to drive school improvement and innovation, and celebrate their successes. We believe in a truly school-led system, with schools working in partnership across and beyond the education sector.

At SSAT's heart are our membership networks, bringing together school leaders, teachers and students. We have been working with schools for over 30 years, and continue to offer insight and understanding into teaching, learning and system leadership. Our professional development and school improvement programmes help leaders and teachers to further outcomes for all young people, and develop leadership at all levels across the system.

We are SSAT and we provide fresh ideas for ambitious schools.

Your school is a member of SSAT, meaning it is committed to a principled approach to education, collaboration between schools, and innovation. SSAT is a network of hundreds of schools – both maintained and academies – across England and internationally.

Whatever your role in the school, make sure you are making the most of your school's membership by emailing your SSAT relationship manager on **RMTeam@ssatuk.co.uk**. If you are a governor or trustee, you are entitled to join our collaborative email forum, receive e-copies of all SSAT publications including the termly journal, as well as access the full range of membership benefits. Governors or trustees working in MATs may also want to subscribe to the specific MAT governance update.

Find out more about us at **ssatuk.co.uk**.

GCSEs and performance measures

It is easy to assume that GCSEs and a school’s performance measures are the same thing. Indeed, secondary schools’ performance is based on how students do in their GCSEs. However, it’s important to remember that GCSEs are qualifications recognising individual students’ efforts and achievement; whereas any school performance measure is an aggregated or averaged score across the cohort. As governors and

trustees you have a moral and statutory obligation to analyse the school’s performance overall, but we hope you take the time to celebrate the individual successes of a range of students in your school.

Although individual students are assigned an Attainment 8 and Progress 8 score to get the school’s headline performance measures, these should not be reported back to students.

The new GCSEs

Changes to the old GCSEs were announced in 2013, along with changes to the national curriculum, A-levels and primary school SATs.

The main three changes to the new GCSEs are:

- ‘harder’ and more rigorous content, in line with the best education systems globally
- a change of grading scale from A*-G to 9-1 (with 9 the highest)
- less coursework, controlled assessment and modular (mid-course) exams, with more focus on end-of-course exams. In most subjects there is no coursework or controlled assessment at all, with all assessment being terminal exams.

In summer 2018, students received a number grade from 9-1 in reformed subjects (including all of the most-taught GCSE subjects) and a letter grade (A*-G) in any old-style GCSEs they sat. Ungraded GCSEs remain a ‘U’. This change is the same across all exam boards. The new GCSEs cannot be easily compared to the old ones – while we’re able to draw some broad comparisons between the old and new grading systems, the new GCSEs are fundamentally different qualifications. The government are working with schools, colleges, universities and businesses to help explain the changes – so don’t worry that this will affect your students’ future chances. All students nationally are in the same position.

Although it may seem unfair that last year’s cohort sat ‘harder’ exams, the GCSE scoring is based on ‘comparable outcomes’, meaning that roughly the same proportion of students will achieve a new grade 4 or higher as used to achieve a C or higher; and the same proportion of students will achieve a new grade 7 or higher as used to achieve an A or higher.

However, because it is now a nine-point grading system only half of students who used to achieve an A* will achieve the top grade 9. Very few students nationally are likely to get straight 9s in all eight subjects.

NEW GRADING STRUCTURE	OLD GRADING STRUCTURE
9	A*
8	
7	A
6	
5	B
4	C
3	D
2	E
1	F
	G
U	U

Source: Ofqual

Timeline for change

The timeline below shows you when each subject changed/changes to the new GCSEs. As you can see, although there are more reforms in 2019 and 2020, the summer of 2018 marked a turning point, with all of the highest-entered subjects changing to the new style GCSEs.

In addition, 2018's results give us three years' worth of the new headline measures, meaning we can just focus on these and forget the old measures at last.

New GCSE to be taught from:	First results will be issued in:	Subjects	
September 2015	Summer 2017	English language English literature	Mathematics
September 2016	Summer 2018	Ancient languages (classical Greek, Latin) Art and design Biology Chemistry Citizenship studies Combined science (double award) Computer science Dance	Drama Food preparation and nutrition Geography History Modern foreign languages (French, German, Spanish) Music Physics Physical education Religious studies
September 2017	Summer 2019	Ancient history Astronomy Business Classical civilisation Design and technology Economics Electronics Engineering Film studies	Geology Media studies Modern foreign languages (Arabic, Bengali, Chinese, Italian, Japanese, modern Greek, modern Hebrew, Panjabi, Polish, Russian, Urdu) Psychology Sociology Statistics
September 2018	Summer 2020	Ancient languages (biblical Hebrew)	Modern foreign languages (Gujarati, Persian, Portuguese, Turkish)

What represents a pass in the new GCSEs? A 5 or a 4?

There is some confusion over whether a 5 or a 4 in the new GCSEs represents success. A 4 has been called a 'standard pass' and a 5 a 'strong pass' by the DfE.

For individual students, a 4 represents standard knowledge and understanding in the subject; and should be seen by students, parents and post-16 providers in the same way as an old C grade. For example, if you have a sixth form which previously required students to have a C in a subject to study it to A-level; a 4 would be appropriate. Getting a 4

in English and maths also means that students will not have to resit their GCSEs in the sixth form as a condition of funding.

However, at a school level, the headline performance of a strong pass is based on a 5; in order to reflect higher aspirations. Therefore, when setting attainment targets against national averages, trusts and governing boards should remember that their school will be judged against the percentage of students who achieve a 5 or higher, not a 4.

KS4 headline measures 2018

Headline measures are the main figures about your school or academy which you as governors, teachers, parents, students, the government and Ofsted can use to see your school's performance. Alongside your own school's headline measures, you will see a national average and your local authority average. You can view all schools' performance at gov.uk/school-performance-tables.

The KS4 headline measures for 2018 are broadly the same as for 2017 and 2016. They are:

- **Progress 8** – the average progress made between KS2 and KS4 in eight subjects. This is the main headline measure. The national average is '0'.
- **Attainment 8** – the average point score achieved in the same eight subjects
- **Ebacc Entry** – the percentage of the cohort

entered for the full complement of Ebacc subjects

- **Ebacc Average Point Score** – the average grade achieved in the full complement of Ebacc subjects
- **Attainment in English and Maths** – the percentage of the cohort achieving a 5+ in both English and maths
- **Destinations** – the percentage of the cohort going on to further education, training or employment after KS4.

As far as we know, these will remain the secondary performance measures for the foreseeable future.

More information on each of these measures is given later in this guidance, including how to interpret your school's results.

Changes in 2018

In 2016 and 2017, the Ebacc measures were a) the percentage of students entered for the Ebacc; and b) the percentage of students achieving the Ebacc at grade 5+. This year, the second measure changes to an APS (average point) score, worked out in a similar way to Attainment 8; but only for Ebacc subjects.

There has also been a change to the way in which Progress 8 is calculated, with an adjustment for any 'outliers' (students with extremely negative progress scores who severely affect the overall average). The DfE have not released their Progress 8 calculation for this year's data yet, making it even harder to predict than in previous years.

What to analyse, when

Because the main headline measure, Progress 8, is a comparative judgement, this figure is not available on results day. The DfE gives a provisional figure in November, which is confirmed in late January. Some data software packages try to estimate your school's Progress 8 figure, however, with the larger changes to the GCSEs this year, and the new way of calculating Progress 8 not yet confirmed, SSAT cautions against giving too much weight to these estimates.

Instead, in the first half term, focus on the more certain figures: your provisional Attainment 8 score and attainment and internal progress figures for individual subjects, including English and maths; and for particular groups within the cohort, including pupil premium students.

When provisional data does come out, it's important to remember that last summer's results represent a moment in time. In many ways, the long-term trends of your school are more important (are your results consistently rising or falling?), as is the progress and attainment of the students currently in your school. It's also important that, as governors and trustees, you understand and either endorse or challenge the narrative/story/explanation behind the data.

When the confirmed data is released in January, governors and trustees should compare their data to national and local averages. The SSAT Educational Outcomes tool is released each spring, bringing together three different Ofsted and DfE data sets, and contains performance and contextual data for all schools in the country so can be used to make simple or more sophisticated comparisons with other schools.

Attainment 8

Although Progress 8 is the main headline measure, it is calculated from Attainment 8 (A8), and A8 scores estimated in the summer are often more reliable than Progress 8 estimates.

Attainment 8 expresses the average point score achieved by all students in the cohort, across three 'buckets'.

1. English and maths bucket

- English (the better of either language or literature)
- Maths

Both the English and maths element are double-weighted in the final score; although students must be entered for both English language and English literature to have their grade double weighted for English.

2. Ebacc bucket

Any three subjects from the full range of Ebacc subjects:

- Biology
- Chemistry
- Physics

- Combined sciences (worth two GCSEs and fills two slots)
- Computer science
- History or ancient history
- Geography
- Modern foreign languages
- Ancient languages

Remember, students can take any three subjects from the list to count in A8 and Progress 8: they do not have to take the full Ebacc (see below).

3. Open bucket

Any other three qualifying subjects, including more Ebacc subjects, the lower grade in English language or literature, arts, technology and vocational subjects.

With each new GCSE graded between 9-1, each student is given a score out of a maximum of 90 (eight subjects, but English and maths are both double weighted). If a student does not fill their buckets (i.e. only does two Ebacc subjects), they are given a 0 for that slot. For old GCSEs graded A*-G, each grade is given an equivalent point score of between 1 and 9. By 2020, all subjects will be examined by the new GCSEs.

All of the students' average attainment scores in 8 subjects are averaged across the cohort to give the school's final Attainment 8 score.

Worked example

Kitty has achieved the following grades:

- English language – 5
- English literature – 6
- Maths – 5
- Combined science (worth two GCSEs) – 5,5
- History – 6
- German – 4
- Drama – 7

The table shows which grades are allocated to each bucket.

A8 Bucket	Subject taken	Grade Achieved
English and maths (double weighted)	English literature (because this is a better grade than language)	6 x 2 because language was taken = 12
	Maths	5 x 2 = 10
Ebacc	Combined science	5
	Combined science	5
	History	6
Open	English language	5
	German	4
	Drama	7

This gives Kitty a total APS of 54. Kitty's score is not reported or fed back to her. All of the APS scores from the rest of the year group are added together and divided by the number in the cohort, giving the school's Attainment 8 figure.

Progress 8

Progress 8 (P8) is the main headline measure for secondary schools and is worked out by comparing students' Attainment 8 score to A8 scores of similar students nationally.

P8 measures the average progress made by your school's students, compared to students with the same starting point nationally.

Each student's individual Attainment 8 score is compared to students who received the same KS2 score as them, and expressed as a positive or negative progress figure. For example, if a student has an A8 score of 54, but the national average for students with the same KS2 data is 52, he would have a progress score of +2. This is then divided by 10 (because A8 is across eight subjects but English and maths are worth double). All of the cohort's score are then averaged together to give the school's Progress 8 figure.

Worked example

In the example above, Kitty has an individual APS score of 54. If students nationally who got the same KS2 results as her have an average APS of 52, this would give Kitty +2 more progress points. This is then divided by 10, giving Kitty an individual progress score of 0.2. Like with A8, Kitty's individual score is not reported. Instead, all of the progress scores from the whole year group are added together and divided by the number

in the cohort, giving the school's Progress 8 figure.

A **Progress 8 score of '0'** means that students at your school, on average, make **similar progress** as students with similar starting points nationally.

A **positive Progress 8** score means that students at your school, on average, make **more progress** than students with similar starting points nationally.

A **negative Progress 8** score means that students at your school, on average, make **less progress** than students with similar starting points nationally.

A Progress 8 score of 1.0 or higher is exceptional and means that, on average, students in your school perform a whole grade higher in each subject than similar students nationally.

Most secondary schools will have a Progress 8 score of between -0.5 and 0.5.

From 2019, there will be no defined floor target (the minimum standard schools must reach), or definition of a coasting school. (NB, in 2016-2017 these were -0.5 and -0.25 respectively). From September 2018, Ofsted will not reference either definition in inspection reports.

The Ebacc

The Ebacc, or English Baccalaureate, is not a qualification in its own right, or even something that students receive themselves from the exam boards,

Instead, it is a school-level performance measure, and refers to the entry levels and attainment of students in core academic subjects.

The full complement of Ebacc subjects are:

- English language and English literature
- Maths
- Sciences (either combined sciences or three single sciences including computer science)
- A modern or ancient language
- History, ancient history, or geography

Whereas in Progress 8 and Attainment 8, students can use any 3 Ebacc subjects to fill the Ebacc bucket (so could, in theory, do three languages or three single sciences), to qualify for the Ebacc, students must enter each of the five elements above.

Ebacc entry

This is the percentage of the cohort who were entered for all five elements of the Ebacc. There is no school-level target for entry levels, though the government have set themselves a national target of 90% by 2025. It may be useful to compare your school's Ebacc entry percentage to national and local averages. Ofsted will not automatically look down on a low Ebacc entry rate but will want to know the school's reasons for not following an Ebacc-centred curriculum.

Ebacc average point score (APS)

New for 2018, this headline measure replaces the 2016 and 2017 figure of Ebacc pass rate. Instead, it gives an average grade across the six Ebacc subjects (because sciences count for two GCSEs).

While both English language and literature must be studied, only the better grade of the two counts in the measure. Neither the English or maths grade is double weighted, unlike in Attainment 8 and Progress 8.

Two science grades count in the Ebacc APS measure. If a student is studying combined sciences, worth two GCSEs, their two grades in this count. If a student is doing single sciences, they must do three of the four single sciences but only their top two grades count.

If a student does not enter one of the slots, they receive a '0'.

The APS is worked out as a totalled score out of 54, and then divided by 6 to give an average grade between 9-0. This is then averaged across the cohort to give the school's Ebacc average point score (APS).

The APS measure is more inclusive than the old overall Ebacc pass rate as a student's grades still count even if they haven't taken all five elements of the Ebacc; previously, failure to take, say, a language would have taken them out of the calculation altogether, to the school's detriment.

Attainment in English and maths

This measure is the percentage of the cohort who achieved a strong pass of a 5 or higher in both English and maths.

Students can achieve a 5 or higher in either English language or literature for it to count towards the school pass rate.

Some schools and academies have decided to look at the percentage of students who achieve a standard pass of a 4 as well; while this is reported, the headline measure you are held accountable on is based on achieving a 5.

It is likely that your English and maths attainment

percentage severely dropped between 2016 and 2017 (and that 2018 should be similar to 2017). This is because in 2016, the measure was based on the percentage of students achieving a C+ in both, but switched to a 5+ in 2017 when the new GCSEs first came in for English and maths. Roughly 20% fewer students nationally achieved a 5+ in 2017 than achieved a C+ in 2016, so a dip of this scale in this measure would be expected.

English and maths attainment is sometimes referred to as the 'basics measure'. The word 'basics' is deeply unpleasant; there is nothing basic about the study of Shakespeare and trigonometry – and should be avoided by all polite governing boards.

Destinations

This measure shows the percentage of previous cohorts who continued into education, training or employment after KS4. It is based on cohorts two years' ago, so 2018's figure will refer to students who finished year 11 in 2016.

How to make sense of the data

Remember that data only tells you half of the story and should suggest areas for conversation, scrutiny and investigation; rather than being taken in isolation.

For each of the performance measures, you should look at comparisons to all schools nationally and to schools in your local area or MAT or chain. You should also look at trends over time: are results rising or falling?

It's important to look at the detail for each performance measure, using the guidance in this guide. For example, you should expect to see a drop in your attainment in English and maths measure between 2016 and 2017; this reflects national trends.

Remember that the cornerstones of good governance are support and challenge. Don't be afraid to question the data, or ask to find out more. Are you, as governors, assured of the steps being taken to improve the school further?

Again, while performance measures are important for school accountability, they are ultimately backward looking. What actions are your school taking now, this year? How are students still in the school performing and progressing? These are always the more valuable conversations for governors and trustees to have.

It is important that while schools and academies respond to the change in the GCSEs and performance measures, they do not base their entire curriculum and assessment on this. The best schools in the country do what is right for the young people they serve, while meeting the challenges of the accountability and assessment regimes. Recently, Ofsted have criticised schools that place too much emphasis on examination results, describing inspection as the 'counterbalance' to DfE performance measures.

Setting targets and strategic planning

As governors or trustees, it is up to you to ask for the data and information you require to hold the headteacher, principal or CEO accountable. The best governance arrangements will ask for a number of key performance indicators and updates, in line with the strategic direction of the school. However, governors and trustees must be aware of your school's performance against national accountability measures.

Your school's strategic plan should be informed by last year's data, but take into account much broader key performance indicators, based on the vision for your school.

As governors or trustees, you will be asked to set or approve targets for your schools or academies. All good targets should be based on estimates of what can be expected, informed by the knowledge of your executive leaders and teachers, and should include an appropriate amount of challenge and aspiration.

SSAT strongly advised against setting a target for Progress 8 scores. As it is a comparative measure, this cannot be accurately predicted. Instead, whole school targets may look at attainment in certain curriculum areas.

The best whole school targets should support good formative assessment in the classroom; so that teachers are supported and motivated to help all of their students progress in their learning.

If you are part of a local governing body in a multi-academy trust, you may have targets set for you by the board of trustees. Equally, if you are a trustee, you may be asked to set targets for a number of academies. The best governance arrangements use local knowledge of the governing body to inform, support and challenge the strategic direction set by the board.

Key questions for governors to ask about the new GCSEs

- How have teachers been supported to teach the new content of the GCSEs?
- How has this impacted on teachers' workload? What steps have been taken to tackle workload and support teachers' wellbeing?
- Has the changed nature of the GCSEs assessment changed how teachers are expected to teach? If so, is this reflected in the staff training available, and in your teaching and learning policy?
- Does your KS4 curriculum support high aspirations and progress for all students, and offer appropriate and broad choices?
- Does your KS3 curriculum support progression into KS4, while allowing students a broad, balanced, deep and knowledge-rich education?
- How have the changes to the GCSEs been explained to students, parents, carers and other community stakeholders?
- How, if at all, have terminal exams affected students' wellbeing? What have been the positive and negatives of end-of-course assessment? How is students' wellbeing supported?

Key questions for governors to ask about the performance data

- Above all, what is the narrative behind the figures? Data can only tell you so much, and there may be legitimate and satisfactory reasons for a dip in results in a particular curriculum area. What is the explanation for this and, more importantly, what is being done to secure improvements?
- What are the trends over time; at a school level and at individual subject level? Analysing this will become easier by 2020 when most subjects will have three years' worth of new GCSE results.
- Where are your school's areas of strength? How are leaders in these areas sharing their knowledge with other colleagues?
- Where are your school's weaknesses? What is being done in the short and long term to support improvement?
- Are there certain demographics of students who underperform compared to the rest of the cohort? Is there a reason for this, and what is being done about it? Remember that some demographic data may represent a very small number of students, and may be an area for investigation but may not be an ongoing cause for concern.
- What does the KS2 data of your current students tell you about different cohorts in the school? How are senior leaders and teachers using KS2 data to inform the curriculum, teaching and interventions?
- How do your disadvantaged students compare to non-disadvantaged students in your school, and nationally? The official 'gap' is measured as the performance of your pupil premium students with non-pupil premium students nationally.
- How does this year's performance data inform the strategic direction of the school, the school development plan, and the targets you set the headteacher or principal?
- What key data do you need at different points in the year from the headteacher, principal or CEO in order to make informed governance decisions?

SSAT support

As a governor or trustee of an SSAT school, academy or MAT, you can access the full range of SSAT benefits. This includes the collaborative governors and trustees **email forum**; which sends emails directly to your inbox to keep you updated with key information and engage in discussions with the forum. There is a separate forum for clerks. You can also access the **SSAT Exchange**, which includes a library of resources, the in-depth **Educational Outcomes** database of KS2, KS4 and KS5 performance of all schools in the country, and other benefits.

There is also additional **dedicated support** for governors and trustees including the SSAT Governance Toolkit which includes training materials for governors on data and on how to ask the right questions. SSAT also offers **in-school consultancy** and **briefing sessions** for school leadership teams and governing bodies on data, assessment, the curriculum and education policy; including more detail on the topics in this paper.

To access these or ask any questions, please ask your headteacher or principal for the contact details of your dedicated SSAT relationship manager, or email RMTeam@ssatuk.co.uk directly.

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