

Why have we published grade indicators for the new GCSE Maths qualification?

Over the last few months, each of the examination boards has stated that we can no longer directly map topics from the old specification across to exact grades in the new specification.

On the 30 September, AQA further clarified this point in a blog post on their website. Ben Stafford, the Maths Qualification Manager at AQA, stated that “exam boards are required to take some of the standard content, and ask it in a way that will stretch even the brightest of pupils”.

Inevitably, this has caused significant problems for departments across the country. Not only do they have to adapt to the new specification which contains far more content than the previous specification, but they also now have to prepare for life without grades.

In order to support our member schools, we have designed 5 schemes of work with detailed learning objectives for each topic. Despite being unable to directly map whole topics to a particular level, teachers and senior leaders will still need to consider how they are going to monitor and report on their pupils as they advance through the course.

To facilitate this, we have designed topics tests that are aligned to each learning objective in our scheme of work. In our topic progress trackers, where we indicate a grade or a level, we are indicating the approximate difficulty of that particular question in the topic test. This will allow teachers to be able to report with a reasonable degree of accuracy on the level that the pupil is currently working at.

As you will notice in our grade indicators, topics regularly appear across a number of grades. For example, solving problems involving decimal numbers, appears from Grade 1 all the way up to Grade 5. This is our attempt to map the difficulty at which that topic could be assessed in their final examination and the level of difficulty that we have attempted to prepare exam-style questions for.

Having spoken to a number of our member schools over the last 2 weeks, it is obvious that schools are approaching life without grades very differently. Some are choosing not to report any grades to students, parents or senior leaders but instead, are simply using the topic tests as a diagnostic tool. They are only using the tests to identify the strengths and weaknesses of each of their pupils and form a profile for each student which can then be used for intervention / therapy.

On the other hand, some departments have said that they are going to use the grade indicators in some form. A few departments have reported that requirements from senior leaders means that they need to report approximate grades of students and some have

reported that they are communicating these approximate grades to the pupils as an indication of the difficulty of work they are looking at.

English and Maths are in the unfortunate position where they are the only subjects who are struggling with this issue. At the moment, parents fully expect to be given information on their child's current grade as this is what they have received ever since their child started school.

Over the course of the next few years this is likely to change. Other subjects will catch up as they move into their new specification and parents will become more informed on the new designs of the national curriculum. Even if some of our member schools chose to report approximate grades to their students this year, they may not do this next year.

At this point in time, we do not think subject leaders should automatically refuse to report approximate grades. Some will choose to use the grade indicators with a clear caveat stating that the grades are only approximate, and some will decide to strictly follow the recommendations of the exam boards.

I hope this document clears up our reasoning for providing approximate topic grades despite the recommendations of exam boards being to the contrary.