

How important are your GCSE grades?

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Your GCSE results are in – what now? It depends on what you want to do in the future, but those GCSE grades will help shape your next steps. Find out why...



Hopefully putting the hard work in throughout Year 11 has paid off and your GCSE results are what you were hoping for. But whatever your grades, now is a good time to start thinking ahead.

GCSE results just in? Read these [essential things you need to know about your A-level choices](#) and [find out what A-levels you need to study different degrees](#).

1. GCSEs can determine the sixth form you go to

Entry requirements for school and college sixth forms vary – ranging from four to five Cs, with perhaps Bs in the subjects you want to study, through to at least six As for the most selective colleges.

Your GCSE performance is usually a good indicator of how well you'll do in A-level or other advanced studies – in fact, it's the only real hard-and-fast evidence of

your academic abilities a college has to go on. Many sixth forms use a scoring system, based on GCSE grades, to predict how well you're likely to do (and from that, decide whether or not to accept you).

For instance, five Bs and five Cs at GCSEs could roughly translate to a predicted CCD at A-level, while straight As and A*s would suggest AAA is possible. The lower your GCSE grades, the lower you'll be scored – which could limit the number of colleges and sixth forms open to you.

If you're worried your grades might not cut it with the sixth form or college you want to go to, see if they're prepared to be flexible – otherwise you may need to approach some alternatives.

2. GCSEs determine the qualifications you take next

Some sixth forms may say you can't do a particular subject unless you've got an A grade in that subject at GCSE.

If your grades are mostly Cs, studying A-levels or Advanced Highers could be off limits altogether; a sixth form may offer you a vocational (ie a more practical and hands-on) course such as a [BTEC Level 3 qualification](#) instead.

3. They could be used to assess if you're suitable for a uni course

The majority of university courses look for at least Cs in GCSE English, maths and perhaps science. Some university courses go further and ask for specific subjects at GCSE, with certain grades.

A management degree at the University of Leeds, for example, specifies that you must have at least Bs in English language and maths under your belt, while a psychology degree at the University of Bristol asks for 'maths, English and science at grade B, but grade A preferred'.

Don't let a disappointing GCSE performance put you off applying to the university course you really want, though – a [good AS-level performance](#), for instance, could outweigh a set of weaker GCSE results.

***Update:** Students starting sixth form in September 2015 in England should note that the current government is changing the ways A-levels are marked with AS levels no longer affecting students' final A-level grade.*

4. GCSEs may limit the universities you can apply to

Some of the top academic universities (often belonging to the [Russell group](#) of universities) will be asking for very high A-level grades – AAB or higher - for most courses.

Because of the assumed connection between your GCSE and A-level results, it'll be down to you to prove you're able to achieve top grades. Bs and Cs at GCSE are suggestive of Cs and Ds at A-level – which won't be enough to get into some universities.

The more competitive the university and course, the higher the number of high-achieving students with top GCSE marks applying. Some courses actively state this in the prospectus – the Department of Law at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) says: 'Most have already achieved excellent GCSE grades including the majority at A* and A'.

5. They could affect the career you end up doing

A career-related degree may also have subject-specific entry requirements:

- Engineering courses such as [chemical engineering](#): you'll usually need A-levels or equivalent in chemistry and maths, and physics for other engineering courses, which in turn means you'll need to have good GCSE grades – in this case, at least BB in science and a B (if not an A) in maths

- **Medicine:** competitive courses like medicine may ask for a whole suite of good GCSEs. The University of Birmingham's medical school, for example, specifies 'normally, applicants must offer A* grades in each of English (either English Language or English Literature), Mathematics and all science subjects. Integrated Science (double certificate) is acceptable as an alternative to single sciences. Overall GCSE performance will be considered.'
- **Social work** and **secondary school teaching:** these professions won't consider you without at least a C in maths and English language at GCSE
- **Nursing** and **primary school teaching:** Cs in GCSE English, maths and science.

Worried about your results?

If you're concerned that one or more of your results might hold you back, don't panic – speak to teachers or a careers adviser about your options.

Resits

English literature, language and maths GCSE resits take place in November. If you're willing to work hard it could be feasible to study for these (perhaps in the evening, perhaps through a different college) alongside the rest of your timetable. If you need to resit more subjects, you may need to wait until next summer.

Bear in mind that for very competitive degree courses such as medicine, universities might not accept GCSE retakes, so if you have an idea of what you want to study at university, spend time researching the entry requirements of a range of courses to see what's open to you.

Remarks

If you're not happy with an exam result and you think it may be incorrect, it's important to first talk to your school or college. Students can't make enquiries directly with their examining board, so it will be up to them to decide if you've got a strong case or not.