



Jo Richards, Regulation Director with Qualifications Wales, looks ahead to what we can expect when the results from this year's GCSE and A level exams are released.

As students continue their summer holidays, exam boards and their examiners are hard at work – marking and setting grade boundaries in time for the results days in August. With quite a few new qualifications being taken for the first time in Wales this year, you may well be asking, what can we expect?

Well there are significant changes to the GCSE English, Welsh and Maths exams. These reformed qualifications were introduced in September 2015, and the first opportunity for pupils to sit them after completing the full two-year course was this summer.

For Maths, one of the most noticeable changes is that where there was once one exam, now there are two – GCSE Maths and GCSE Maths Numeracy. Previously students also had the option of sitting either foundation or higher tier exams, but now have a choice of three tiers of entry - foundation, intermediate and higher.

Another big change has been to GCSE English Language, which is significantly different. Written coursework previously accounted for 20 per cent of the final grade. That has now been removed, with 80 per cent of the qualification now based on two exam papers that focus on reading and writing. The speaking and listening assessment remains part of the qualification and contributes the remaining 20 per cent towards the final grade.

There have also been similar changes to GCSE Welsh Language. It now includes two speaking and listening assessments, a group and individual task that counts for 30 per cent towards the overall grade. The remaining 70 per cent is based on two exam papers that focus on reading and writing.

Both the GCSE English Literature and GCSE Welsh Literature are similar to the old qualifications. They remain unitised which means students can take units and resit them during the course.

Aside from all the changes to the qualifications the nature of the cohort taking the exams is also markedly different to previous years, particularly in GCSE English Language.

Data shows that a substantial number of students who have taken GCSE English Language are still in Year 10. Approximately 21,000 Year 10 pupils in Wales sat the exam in June, representing around 65 per cent of all Year 10 students in Wales.



Due to these different entry patterns, we expect the overall results for GCSE English Language this summer will be lower than previous years. So, to help explain how this year's results compare with previous years, our overview once the results are published will focus on 16-year-olds in Year 11. Even so, with all these changes, it will still be difficult to make meaningful year-on-year comparisons this August.

It's a similar story for GCSE Welsh Language. While less than five Year 10 students sat the exam in 2016, just over a thousand did so in June which accounts for the 21 per cent overall increase.

When it comes to GCSE English Literature, less than 50 per cent of Year 11 pupils took the exam this year, although some sat it while they were in Year 10 in 2016. In total, around 70 per cent of all Year 11 pupils in Wales will have been entered for the exam either this year or early last year – but this is down from 77 per cent in 2016.

GCSE Welsh Literature is showing an 11 per cent decrease in the number of students taking the exam, partly due to the reduction in Year 10 entries this year – down from 130 in 2016 to less than five this summer.

As well as the changes to GCSEs mentioned here, reformed AS qualifications have also been taken in nine subjects this summer – Drama, French, Geography, German, Music, Spanish, Physical Education, Religious Studies and Welsh Second Language. These join 14 other reformed A level subjects that are being awarded for the first time this year in Art and Design, Biology, Business, Chemistry, Computer Science, Economics, English Language, English Literature, English Language and Literature, History, Psychology, Physics, Sociology and Welsh.