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**Education**  
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# Proposed Changes to GCSEs

## Consultation

### Young People's Version



ENGLISH  
MATHS  
SCIENCE  
HISTORY  
SPANISH  
IT  
GEOGRAPHY  
BUSINESS STUDIES  
ART  
IRISH  
PHYSICAL EDUCATION  
MUSIC  
CHEMISTRY  
BIOLOGY  
RELIGIOUS STUDIES  
FRENCH  
COMPUTERS

Department of Education  
Assessment and Qualifications Team  
Rathgael House  
Balloo Road  
Rathgill  
Bangor  
BT19 7PR



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**Lear**

Tel: 02891 279543  
Email: [aqt@deni.gov.uk](mailto:aqt@deni.gov.uk)



**Participation Network**  
Supporting the Public Sector to engage  
children & young people

Participation Network  
Children in Northern Ireland  
Unit 9  
40 Montgomery Road  
Belfast  
BT6 9HL

Tel: 028 9040 1290  
Email: [participation@ci-ni.org.uk](mailto:participation@ci-ni.org.uk)

# What's it all about?

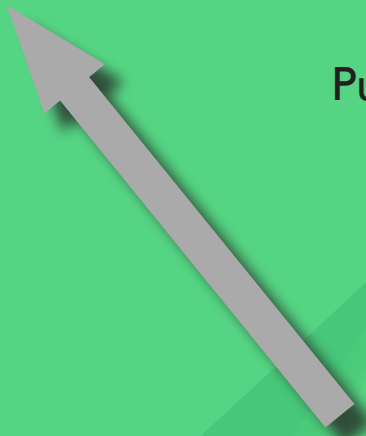
The government in England is making changes to GCSEs. We are thinking about doing the same thing here but first of all, we want to know what you think.

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At the moment GCSEs can work in two ways:

Either...

**LINEAR**



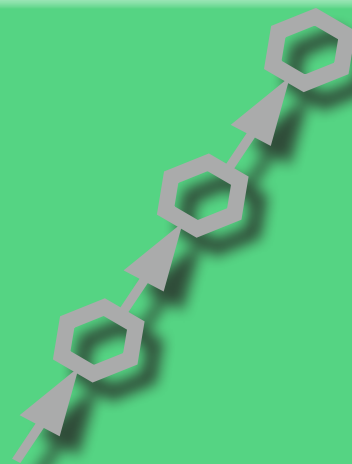
Pupils take all their exams at the end of a two year course.

(This is called a LINEAR route).

Or...

Pupils are assessed throughout the two year course ... at the end of each unit.

(This is called a UNITISED route).



**UNITISED**

# Changes in England

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In England the Government is planning to go back to Linear GCSEs – they think that Unitised GCSEs are not working well because:

- Some teachers are focusing too much of their time on assessment rather than on teaching the course;
- Taking assessment in parts doesn't allow you to get a feel for the wholeness of the subject;
- There are too many opportunities to re-sit examinations - which makes some people think that the grades don't mean much (because pupils can take the exam lots of times until they get the best mark possible);
- Some people think that GCSEs are too small to be broken down into units, in other words there is not enough breadth to the units in some GCSEs;
- Younger students, 14/15 year olds, are going in for exams that they may not be fully ready for.



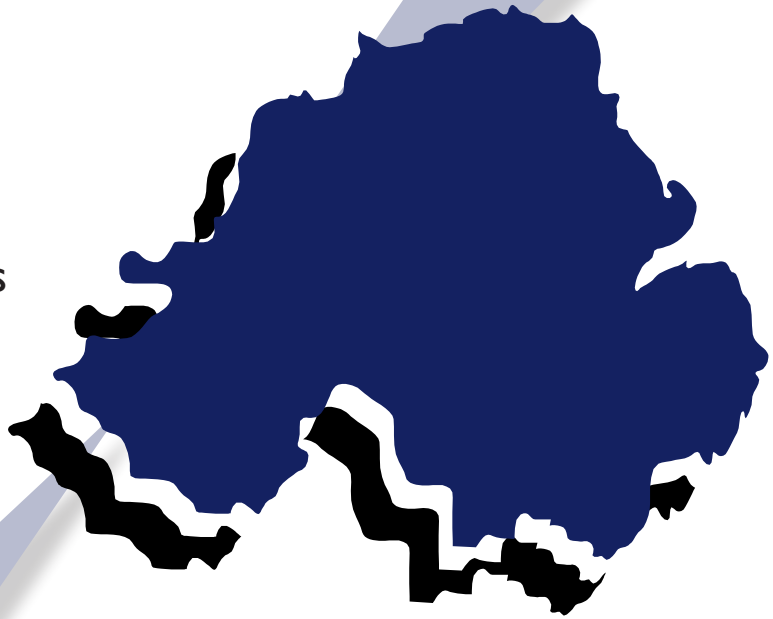
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# Issues here

Our main concern is the interests of young people. We want to make sure that you can do as well as you can in your GCSEs and your schools can give you all the help you need. We also have to think about what happens after your exams.

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At the moment, pupils taking exams here can have their qualifications easily recognised and understood by universities and employers if you wish to go to study or work across these islands. If we decided to continue with unitised GCSEs here whilst England and Wales did not, that could cause problems for you if universities or employers still think unitised GCSEs are “easier” than linear GCSEs.



# Over to YOU .....

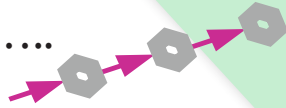
6

Linear .....



Pupils take all their exams at the end of a two year course.

Unitised.....



Pupils are assessed throughout the two year course ... at the end of each unit.

**Which do you think is best and .....why?**

We are also thinking of giving extra marks for accurate spelling, punctuation and grammar in particular subjects – English Literature, Geography, History and Religious studies.

**Do you think this is a good idea .....why?  
or why not?**

We also want to know if you think the changes might affect certain groups.

If we decide that all pupils have to take exams at the end of two years might this have a particular affect on:

- a. boys compared with girls? or
- b. people with a disability compared with those without a disability? or
- c. those from a different racial group?

**What do you think?**

If we give extra marks for accurate spelling, punctuation and grammar in particular subjects (English Literature, Geography, History and Religious studies) might this affect:

- a. people with a disability compared with those without a disability? or
- b. people whose first language isn't English?

**What do you think?**

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## How to Respond

Please complete the response booklet which can be viewed and downloaded at: [www.deni.gov.uk](http://www.deni.gov.uk)

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If you wish to complete a hard copy return, please download and complete the response booklet and send your response to:

Department of Education  
Assessment and Qualifications Team  
Rathgael House  
Balloo Road  
Rathgill  
Bangor  
BT19 7PR

Or send by email to: [aqt@deni.gov.uk](mailto:aqt@deni.gov.uk)

The closing date for responses is 30 December 2011.

### **Alternative versions of this report**

If this document is not in a format that meets your needs, please contact the Assessment and Qualifications Team. We will be pleased to consider any requests for copies of this document in alternative formats such as large print, braille, audio or in other languages.

Tel: 02891 279543

Email: [aqt@deni.gov.uk](mailto:aqt@deni.gov.uk)