



Advice on tier entry decisions



- On a Higher Tier paper, a candidate will encounter content targeted at grades 9 to 4.
- On a Foundation Tier paper, a candidate will encounter content targeted at grades 5 to 1.
- A candidate predicted to achieve a grade 5 is likely to feel much more at ease with the overall demand of the Foundation Tier papers.
- The same candidate will encounter content targeted way beyond grade 5 in the Higher Tier papers and may well find this very challenging and demotivating.
- Grade 3 is not a default grade at Higher Tier.

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The choice of tier of entry must be determined by teachers at the school where candidates are entered and it is acknowledged that such decisions can be difficult to make – particularly in languages where some candidates may perform better in some skills compared to others. Care must be taken if, for example, a candidate is quite good at speaking and writing, but is weaker in the receptive skills of listening and reading (which together account for 50% of the qualification).

Although there is some overlap of content at each tier* and some safety-netting it is important to remember that borderline students will encounter content targeted at levels 9, 8, 7 and 6 in a Higher Tier paper and are likely to find this very challenging – well beyond grade 5. If entered at Foundation Tier they should be more at ease with the overall demand of the assessments and could potentially access a grade 5, which may teachers equate with a B-/C+ type grade.

Students entered for a GCSE at Foundation Tier can access grades up to 5 and those entered at Higher Tier may access grades 4-9. It is possible that a grade 3 can be issued to a Higher Tier candidate if the marks are extremely close to those required for a grade 4, but a grade 3 cannot be regarded as a default grade at

Higher Tier. This is in line with the regulatory requirements.

In 2018, however, as this was the first awarding of the new 9-1 GCSEs in French, German and Spanish, it seemed that a significant number of candidates had been inappropriately entered at Higher Tier so a grade 3 was issued to an extended number of candidates to prevent them from being ungraded. This action will not be repeated next summer as it is expected that teachers will now be more familiar with the demands of the new qualifications at each tier and will make entries that are better aligned to their students' ability.

*Crossover questions for each skill are as follows:

Paper 1 Listening

Foundation Tier		Higher Tier
Question 9 (MCQ in English)	is also	Question 3
Question 11 (MCQ in English)	is also	Question 4
Question 13 (word cloud question in target language)	is also	Question 1
Question 14 (MCQ in target language)	is also	Question 2

Paper 3 Reading

Foundation Tier		Higher Tier
Question 5 (open response question in English)	is also	Question 1
Question 6 (open response question in English)	is also	Question 2
Question 8 (MCQ in target language)	is also	Question 7
Question 9 (MCQ in target language)	is also	Question 8

Paper 4 Writing

Foundation Tier		Higher Tier
Question 3 (informal task requiring students to convey information, narrate and express opinions and, to a lesser extent, interest and convince)	is also	Question 1