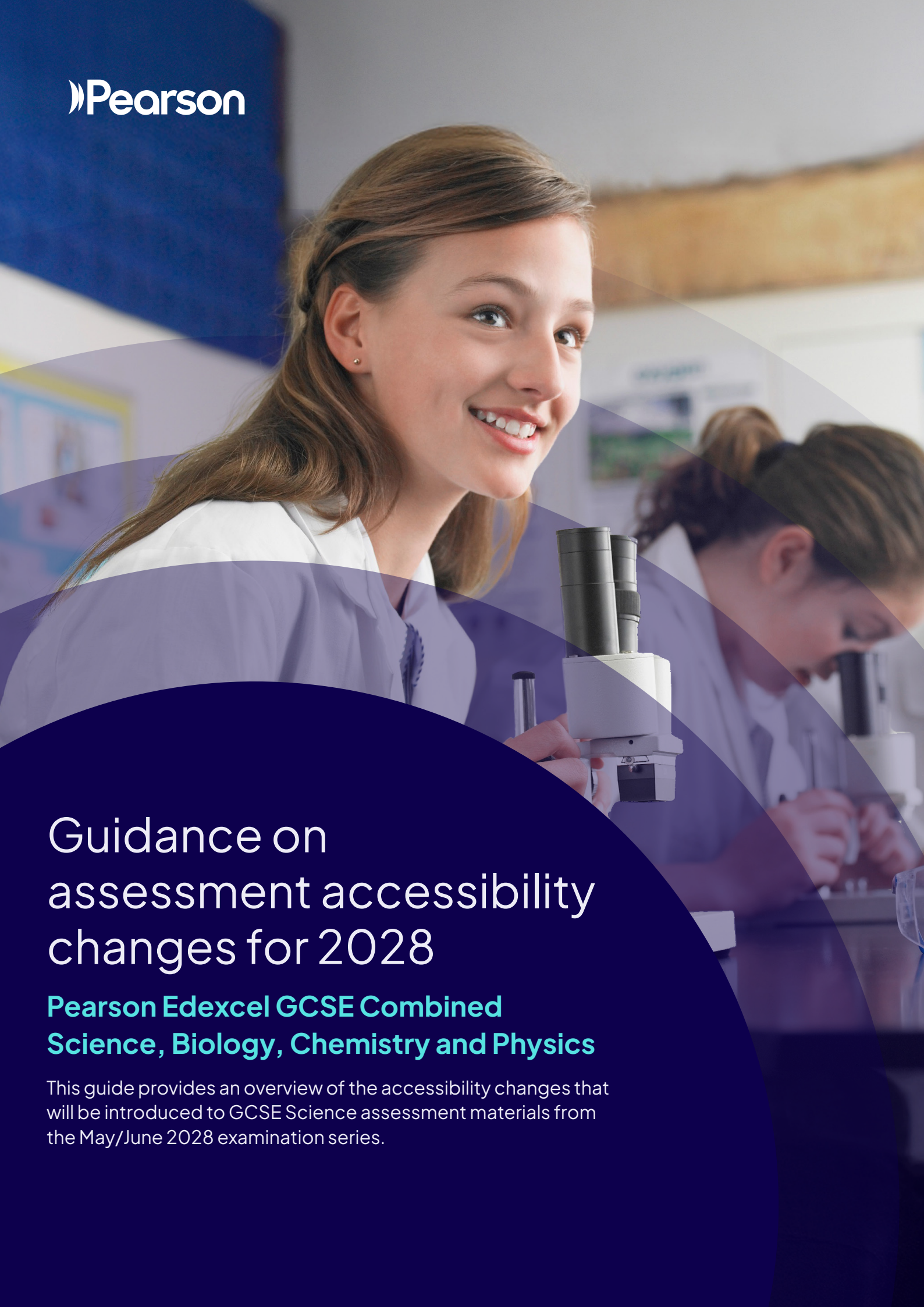


Guidance on assessment accessibility changes for 2028

Pearson Edexcel GCSE Combined Science, Biology, Chemistry and Physics

This guide provides an overview of the accessibility changes that will be introduced to GCSE Science assessment materials from the May/June 2028 examination series.

You told us, *we listened*

The changes have been informed by ongoing work with students, teachers, examiners and accessibility specialists. They are designed to make questions clearer to navigate and help students demonstrate their science knowledge and skills, without any unintended barriers.

What is improving

Clearer language:

- Simpler, more direct questions
- Questions will include everyday wording where meaning is unchanged. For example, using 'write a plan' instead of 'devise'
- Only one clear task/ command word per question

Accessible question formats:

- A clearer entry point at the start of papers
- No 'describe' or 'explain' question on Q1 of Foundation tier
- Every question starts off low demand and ramps gradually
- More multiple choice questions at Foundation tier

Clearer visual presentation:

- Image use, placement and size chosen for what is most useful and what supports student understanding
- Clearer labels, contrast and line drawings
- Larger diagrams placed close to the question

What you told us

Students told us

"I think if the paper starts with multiple choice and then short answers ... it builds up your confidence."

"There's too much reading? I'd like to just get to the question."

We have improved the wording, instructions, spacing and diagrams in our assessments to make key information easier to identify.

Teachers told us

"We have to spend a considerable amount of time helping pupils understand command words so that they put the right things in the exams, this time would be better spent recapping science."

We have simplified how we use different command words to reduce reading load.

What this means for centres



01

Teachers can focus on teaching content rather than the language and layout of assessment papers, as barriers to understanding are removed.

02

There is no change to standards, content or demand so teachers can continue with their current plans and methods.

Preparing for future reform

These accessibility changes for first assessment in 2028 pave the way for future qualification reform.

Major changes to specification content or assessment would take place through qualification reform.



This is a preview of how we'll design our reformed qualifications.

We will continue to work with teachers, students and the science community to develop qualifications that are student centered, accessible and relevant.

To express interest in future research and engagement, sign up here.



Further support

Contact our Subject Advisor - teachingscience@pearson.com.

Sign up for subject advisor newsletter.

Pearson will provide additional practice papers ahead of 2028 assessment.

Questions and Answers

Are the specifications and assessment objectives changing?

No. The specification content remains unchanged and the same assessment objectives will continue to apply.

Do teachers need to teach differently?

No. Centres can continue to teach the current specification and use their existing curriculum plans and schemes of work. These changes do not replace the normal access arrangements, so SENCos should carry on as normal with access arrangement.

Are scientific standards being lowered?

No. These improvements are about accessibility, not reducing demand. Students will continue to be assessed on the same scientific knowledge, understanding, and skills.

Are command words changing?

No. The command word list is not changing. Each question part will have one clear task, and a small number of terms (e.g. 'devise') will be replaced by everyday wording.

Why not wait until the next major GCSE Science reform?

Our research with students, teachers, examiners and accessibility specialists identified improvements that can be made now to question wording, layout, navigation and visual presentation. We do not believe students should have to wait for major reform to benefit from clearer assessments.

Will centres see examples before first assessment?

Yes. Pearson will provide additional support papers before the first live assessment in May/June 2028.

Sign up for our reform support to be updated on everything reform

218450_4555690443 • UKS • Version 1
October 2026 • DCL1: Public