

A Level Reform

A major change to A levels is one result of the current shake-up of qualification systems in England. Newly developed A level and AS level subjects were launched in September 2015 and further subjects have been phased in in the following years. These have a new structure and new content.

These reforms are led by the Department for Education and Ofqual and are being implemented by exam boards. The devolved governments in Wales and Northern Ireland do not propose to adopt these changes and Scotland already has a different system of qualifications at this level.

Timeline

September 2015

New A levels and AS levels in:

- English Language
- English Literature
- English Language and Literature
- Biology
- Chemistry
- Physics
- Psychology
- Computer Science
- Business
- History
- Art and Design
- Economics
- Sociology

September 2016

New A levels and AS levels in:

- Classical Greek
- Dance
- Drama and Theatre
- French
- Geography
- German
- Latin
- Music
- Physical Education
- Religious Studies
- Spanish

September 2017

New A levels and AS levels in:

- Accounting
- Ancient History
- Archaeology
- Chinese
- Classical Civilisation

- Design and technology
- Electronics
- Environmental Science
- Film Studies
- Geology
- History of Art
- Italian
- Law
- Mathematics
- Further Mathematics
- Media Studies
- Music Technology
- Philosophy
- Politics
- Russian
- Statistics

September 2018

New A levels and AS levels in:

- Biblical Hebrew
- Modern Foreign Languages

Some subjects will be discontinued, in some cases because their content is too similar to other more mainstream subjects. These include:

- Human Biology
- Performance Studies
- Health and Social Care
- Information and Communication Technology
- General Studies

Further information about this can be found at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/gcse-as-and-a-level-subjects-that-are-not-being-reformed/gcse-as-and-a-level-subjects-that-are-not-being-reformed>

Changes

1. Structure

The main change is that all exams are now taken at the end of the course. So for example, exams after one year for AS levels and after 2 years for A levels. AS levels have been decoupled from A levels and they no longer count towards the final A level grade.

2. Assessment

Exams are used rather than coursework. Other forms of assessment, e.g. practical assessment, will only be used where necessary to assess essential skills. So in a number of subjects the amount of

non-exam assessment has been reduced. Music Technology will now be 40% non-exam assessment, reduced from 70% at AS and 65% at A level

3. Content

Details of confirmed changes to subject content can be found here

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/gce-as-and-a-level-subject-content>

4. Grading

No change

5. Level

There is no change in level of difficulty

Exam boards can design AS levels with a similar content to the first year of A level, so that they can be taught side by side (but they are not the same and A level exam questions will be harder).

What does this mean for my son or daughter?

- They may not be able to use AS as a taster before committing to a full A level. This has been useful in the past for demanding subjects such as Maths and Physics. However, some schools are getting round this problem by entering students for both A levels and AS levels in the same subject in Year 12. This enables the student to use AS results to assist them in making a decision about which subjects to drop in Year 13. Conversely some schools may ultimately decide not to offer AS levels at all. **You should check what their school/college has decided to do.**
- They may not have such a wide range of A level subjects to choose from; in particular some less traditional subjects are being dropped.
- They should check the content of A level subjects they are interested in match their abilities, interests and preferred ways to study
- There will be a few years where old style A levels and AS levels will be running alongside new reformed subjects. **Ensure you understand how this will work in their school/college**
- Universities use AS results for admissions to higher education courses. Where AS level results are not offered universities may put more emphasis on using GCSE results, predicted grades or their own admissions tests.
- A new UCAS tariff was introduced for courses starting from September 2017. The new AS levels will attract fewer UCAS points than the former AS levels.
- Schools may still decide to test students at the end of Year 12 using internal examinations

Finally

Although your son or daughter should be aware of the impact these changes may have on their choice of subject, their primary reason for choosing a subject at A level should be, as before, because they enjoy it and do well in it rather than how it is assessed

Further Information

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/reform-of-as-and-a-level-qualifications-by-ofqual>

You may also find the following articles on this site useful reading:

[Options at 16](#)

[Choosing your A Level Subjects](#)

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