



OSSETTSIXTH



**A LEVEL  
REFORM  
ACROSS  
THE UK:**

**WHAT DOES IT MEAN  
FOR YOU?**

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# WHAT IS A LEVEL REFORM?

As you may be aware, A Levels are changing. This reform has been brought in by the Government and aims to better equip students for university and employment.

The changes aim to ensure the value of A Levels in the future. There's already been some changes to A Levels, with more due in 2016 and 2017.

## WHAT IS CHANGING?

**AS qualifications will become standalone and not count towards the full A Level.**

AS qualifications will be separated from A Levels, making them completely freestanding. At the moment, AS assessments contribute to students' final A Level grades.

**AS qualifications and A Levels will be assessed at the end of the course.**

From September 2015, reformed AS and A Level qualifications will be linear qualifications officially assessed at the end of the course only. Students will not have to take exam board assessments halfway through an A Level course like they do at the moment. Students will sit all their exams together at the end of a two year course for A Levels.

### **Current Students?**

Currently those students who are in Year 12 at Ossett Sixth Form College will continue to do AS exams after one year (Summer 2015). This process will help students and their tutors to assess progress in line with the new specifications. However, these grades will not count towards their final result if the subject is one which has already been reformed.

### **New Students?**

Students joining Ossett Sixth Form College to study reformed subjects from September 2016 will not be entered for AS examinations at the end of Year 12 (Summer 2017).

### **Greater emphasis on exams as the most effective form of assessment.**

Many A Levels are already assessed solely by exams but those that are currently a mix of exams and coursework may be changed. There will be no more than 20% coursework and only in areas where there is recognition that certain skills cannot be assessed in an exam e.g. creative writing in English. Otherwise, assessment will be by exam only. In Sciences, practical assessment will be reported separately as a pass or fail, rather than as part of the A Level grade.

## **WHAT IS STAYING THE SAME?**

### **A Levels will continue to be a two year course, as they always have been.**

- The grading system (A\* - E) will stay the same.
- The value of A Levels are unchanged.
- The qualifications still allow universities to accurately identify the level of achievement of students, providing a benchmark of academic ability for employers. They remain an internationally comparable post-16 academic course of study.

## HOW WILL SUBJECTS BE AFFECTED?

- 1 Course content is being changed in waves in September 2015, 2016 and 2017.
- 2 Subjects which are already reformed are: Art and Design, Biology, Business Studies, Chemistry Economics, English (*Language, Literature and Combined*), History, Physics, Psychology and Sociology.
- 3 At the time of print, subjects which will be reformed for 2016 on offer at our Academy are: Dance, Drama and Theatre Studies, Geography, MFL, Music and PE.
- 4 Subjects scheduled for 2017 reform are Mathematics, Further Mathematics, Law and Media Studies. Other subjects are under review and will be available unreformed until at least 2017.

## WHY IS IT CHANGING?

The Government's research on A Levels showed that the current system is generally working well but an update of the A Level system to keep them current was due – the qualifications have been around since 1951 and were last updated in 2008.

THE MAIN ISSUES IDENTIFIED WERE:

### **The modular system isn't giving students a broad range of knowledge.**

Universities felt that students had not been given sufficient time to develop the breadth of understanding during the A Level course which was broken into four or six units. By removing the modular approach it is hoped that more time can be devoted to key topics, allowing students to develop a deeper understanding.

### **Too many assessments disrupt teaching.**

The January exam series for AS/A Levels was removed from January 2014. Exams at the end of each term effectively became an assessment of exam performance, rather than assessing students' knowledge and understanding of that particular subject.

## There were too many resits.

Previously, students could take an exam, or non-exam assessment several times over. This created a 'resit culture' with some students not taking assessments as seriously as they should.

## HOW WILL IT AFFECT ME?

I'M IN YEAR 12

You will have started your A Levels in September 2015 and will fit into 1 of 3 categories:

- A.** All your A Level subjects will have reformed already for September 2015.
- B.** Some of your A Level subjects will have reformed for September 2015. But others won't have.
- C.** None of your A Level subjects will have reformed for September 2015 and they will all still follow the old AS/A Level pattern of assessment.

You will be studying 3 or 4 subjects in Year 12 and will be externally assessed by sitting an AS examination in Summer 2016. If you have been entered for an AS exam in a subject which reformed in 2015, this grade will not count towards your final mark at the end of Year 13.

I'M IN YEAR 11

You will start your A Levels in September 2016 and most subjects will have reformed. You will enrol on a 3 or 4 course programme of study. During the year you will be internally assessed on your progress, but you will not sit an external AS examination at the end of Year 12 (unless the subject hasn't reformed). You will sit an external final A2 assessment at the end of Year 13.

I'M IN YEAR 10

When you start your A Levels in September 2017 the reform will be complete and all subjects will have been updated. You will enrol to a three or four course programme. During the year we will internally assess your progress and you will sit your final A2 exam at the end of Year 13.

## **BTEC REFORM**

Alongside the reform of A Level subjects the vocational element of Post 16 qualifications has also been rationalised. All students starting their study of one of the BTEC qualifications on offer at Ossett in September 2016 will be assessed under the new specifications. The government's rationale behind the new BTEC qualifications has been to increase the rigour of the qualification and make it more openly acceptable by universities as a valued Level 3 qualification which gives a student entry to Higher Education.

### **Key Changes to BTEC from September 2016.**

Each reformed BTEC qualification will include:

- At least one externally assessed exam
- At least one piece of externally assessed controlled assessment
- Internally assessed coursework

## **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

### ***Can I just do AS qualifications and not full A Levels?***

This wouldn't be advisable as progression to the next level (university) would require you to have full level 3 qualifications which means full A Levels. The AS qualification should really only be used in addition to A Levels to show evidence of broader study.

### ***Why are you keeping exams at the end of year one for students currently in Year 12 but not for those enrolling in September 2016?***

We know that our students make significant progress from GCSE and this is often reflected in their AS grades. In this first year of reform we feel that if a student does not have AS grades, universities will initially have to use GCSE results as the most recent indicator of academic ability as they also have to adapt their systems in light of reform (as students will not yet have received their final A Level grades when applying for university). We feel, like many Post-16 providers, that given current changes to specifications and an introduction to a new unfamiliar system, an external process of assessment and benchmarking is necessary in the first year of reform. As we move through into 2016/17 with a greater clarity on the new assessment process, and as

universities adapt their application procedures accordingly we believe that the removal of the AS qualifications at the end of Year 12 will give additional and valuable time to teaching. Students will still be rigorously assessed through internal examination and the results from internal mock examinations will be used on a student's university reference to clearly outline a student's ability to study at university.

### ***What will happen if I start in September 2016 and am doing a new style subject (e.g. English) and an old subject (e.g. Maths) at the same time?***

This is likely to be the case for many students. Put simply, some subjects will have examinations at the end of the first year which contribute to the overall A Level grade and others will not. The outcome at the end of two years should be the same.

### ***Will we still study distinct units or will we study everything together?***

There will still be a number of units or study topics throughout the course. The main change is the removal of modular assessments.

### ***Why has the January assessment been removed?***

When the Government first proposed this change responses showed there was widespread support for the removal of January assessment. This change was proposed because of concerns expressed by teachers, employers and universities over what they term a 'resit culture', reinforced by the multiple opportunities to sit assessment within a two-year programme. Given these concerns it was decided that the appropriate course of action was to remove the January assessment window. This came into force from September 2013.

### ***What will happen to A Levels that are withdrawn?***

All 'legacy' AS qualifications and A Levels will be withdrawn or reformed. If they are withdrawn, this will be from 2017 (meaning the last award will be 2018). If they're reformed, they'll be for first teaching in 2017 (meaning the first award will be in 2019). This limits how long the old and new qualifications will run in parallel.

### ***Has the amount of resits a student can do been reduced?***

The rules around A Level entries and resits have not been changed. However, as the January assessment has been removed, students will only be able to resit units the following June (the year after their course has finished) or indeed the one after that (two years after their course has finished).

### ***What about exams I have already taken?***

These changes do not have any effect on the units you have already taken.

**IF YOU HAVE ANY OTHER QUESTIONS ABOUT THE REFORM  
OR STUDYING AT OSSETT SIXTH FORM COLLEGE, PLEASE  
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