



University of Sussex

Policy statement on A level and GCSE reform in England¹

The University of Sussex realises that potential applicants, and their schools and colleges, are facing a challenging time as the post-16 curriculum in England undergoes significant change. We appreciate that there are questions resulting from this around how university admissions will respond to the qualification changes and this statement sets out the current policy at Sussex.

The University is proud of our long tradition of admitting students from a broad range of backgrounds taking a wide array of qualifications from across the UK, the rest of Europe and the wider world. We are therefore used to admitting students with different combinations of qualifications and have many applicants already presenting with linear qualifications, where there is no equivalent to the AS level. We take an holistic approach to selection (looking at the potential of the applicant as a whole, taking into account their wider strengths as well as their academic history).

In assessing applications, we will always take into account the educational context in which an applicant is applying and we would not want the local policy decisions of an individual school or college to disadvantage an applicant or restrict their access to study at the University of Sussex.

With all applications, we find the academic reference extremely useful and would welcome information being included in the reference on the school or college policy towards A level reform. This will help ensure we have a full picture when assessing the applicant.

How we use AS results

Obviously one of the questions we are being most frequently asked is whether we will still expect to see AS results once the AS level is 'decoupled' from the full A level and whether those without AS results will be disadvantaged.

The short answer is 'no'.

Currently the University makes only minimal use of AS results in selecting applicants for the offer of a place at Sussex. Where we can see AS results (and it's important to remember that there are many applicants where we will *not* actually have AS results because their school/academy does not certificate results), we only take this into account as a check to ensure we are setting realistic and achievable conditions. Instead, we rely on the A level predictions provided by the school or college (as the people best placed to know the student and their potential for achieving strong results).

The only area where we *do* currently make use of AS results is as part of the additional selection for the Sussex Unconditional Offer Scheme (www.sussex.ac.uk/admissions/suos). This scheme, aimed at identifying our strongest applicants (around 10% of the total) selects on the strength of qualifications achieved to date and will, therefore, use AS results (where these are known). However, even here, it is important to understand that we have a large number of applicants who do not present with AS results (including those with qualifications other than A level) and these applicants can still be selected for the Sussex Unconditional Offer Scheme, but their selection will look at other aspects of the application and also take into account earlier qualifications (such as GCSEs).

Whilst the University regrets the decision to 'decouple' the AS and A level qualifications, those presenting without AS results in future will not be disadvantaged.

¹ This is a statement in relation to the University of Sussex and does not cover the joint Brighton and Sussex Medical School (BSMS).

A level combinations

As an institution we have always recognised the value of *all* A level subjects (including General Studies) and we will continue to view each application on the individual strengths and merits of the student. In the transition period between A level curriculums, the University will not favour either new or old style A levels.

We appreciate that funding changes for schools and colleges may result in some students only being able to take 3 A levels in future and we appreciate the ‘decoupling’ of AS and A levels may result in students moving away from a model where they take four or more AS levels before focusing on a reduced number to full A level. Whilst we regret changes which might result in the loss of breadth offered by students (especially given Sussex’s interdisciplinary traditions), we would certainly not wish to disadvantage any applicant who was only able to take three full A level qualifications.

The conditional offers that Sussex makes have always been based on a student’s three best A level grades and we would expect this to continue in future. Taking more than three A levels can be beneficial for an individual student (in terms of their knowledge and experience), but the University has never required a 4th AS or A level. We recognise that some students will (as now) wish to concentrate on achieving the best grades possible in ‘just’ three subjects in order to meet our demanding 1st year entry requirements.

Furthermore, for those applicants whose A level results may not meet these requirements for entry direct into the 1st year, the University offers a range of four year degrees including a foundation year. These degrees, which are offered across science, engineering, the humanities and social sciences, are taught on the Sussex campus and allow progression onto almost all bachelor degree courses following successful completion of the additional foundation year (see www.sussex.ac.uk/study/ug/foundation).

Science A levels

We would anticipate requiring a pass in the practical element of the reformed science A levels where the student is seeking to progress to a science or engineering degree (with the exception of our Psychology degrees). It is likely that this will form an explicit condition within the offer for those applying for science or engineering degrees.

Where applicants are progressing to non-science degree courses (but are taking reformed science A levels as part of their A level array) we would simply ask for the overall A level grade (without separate reference to the practical element).

GCSE reform

The University expects applicants to have broad educational background and this will normally mean a wide range of good GCSE results. We do not, however, have a rigid, mechanistic approach to GCSEs. We do not require a specific number nor a particular grade combination. For many subjects, we do not have specific GCSE requirements. Instead we use GCSE results as one part of our broad, holistic approach to selection.

We do, however, set out clearly in our prospectus those discipline areas where a specific GCSE (or equivalent) is needed – for example, GCSE (or equivalent) in Mathematics, with at least grade B, for our Psychology degrees.

Whilst, at present, we are not able to confirm what our grade requirements will be under the new grading structure, we will still expect GCSEs in those disciplines explicitly mentioned in the subject entries of our prospectus and we hope to publish our grade requirements shortly.

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