



## **Qualification Reform in England, Northern Ireland and Wales**

Due to the ongoing qualification reform occurring across the UK, Heriot-Watt University expects that school students from England, Northern Ireland and Wales, applying to study at undergraduate level within the coming years will present with a wide ranging portfolio of qualifications and educational experiences. The reform of qualifications will present several challenges for both applicants and higher education institutions. Factors such as funding and school size may result in limitations in the type of reformed qualifications and subject choices that can be offered to students, thus limiting students to the type of degrees and institutions that they can progress on to following secondary education. The wide range in qualifications and educational experiences will mean that the selection process for admitting students to University will become more challenging, especially within programme areas that are highly competitive. The purpose of this statement is to outline how Heriot-Watt University will ensure that applicants will not be disadvantaged during the selection process irrespective of their access to reformed qualifications and their differing educational experiences.

### **GCSE Reform**

For entry to all undergraduate programmes at Heriot-Watt University applicants currently must achieve a minimum of Grade C in GCSE English, with an additional requirement for Grade C in GCSE Mathematics for some specified programmes. In England, those applicants sitting the reformed GCSEs with a grading scale of 9-1, will now be expected to achieve a minimum grade of 4 in order to be considered for a place at HWU.

### **AS Level Reform**

Heriot-Watt University currently does not require applicants to sit AS Levels, nor does the University normally make offers including AS Level grades, and moving forward throughout the reform of qualifications it is expected that the general requirements of 3 A Levels will remain. The University recognises that the decoupling of AS Levels in England will mean that some applicants will have the opportunity to sit AS Levels and then progress onto A Levels, whereas others may not, depending on the provision within their school. With this in mind Admissions Tutors assessing UCAS applications will continue to use the predicted grades for A Levels, personal statements, and references to holistically assess the applicant's suitability to the programme applied for. Past AS Level performance would only be used in assessing border line cases, and where the applicant has not previously attained AS Levels, performance in other previous qualifications such as GCSEs would be taken into account instead.

### **A Level Reform**

In England the reformed A Level will become decoupled from the AS Level, whereas the AS Level will still be part of the A Level qualification in both Northern Ireland and Wales with the weighting of the

AS Level now equating to 40% of the A Level. Furthermore with the phased introduction of reformed A Level subjects throughout the UK some applicants will present with a mixture of reformed and non-reformed A Level subjects upon entry to higher education. Heriot-Watt University would not differentiate between these variances in qualification landscapes and will continue to treat all A Level results on the same basis.

Another change in the A Level qualification taught in England, is the introduction of the Science Practical. This is an element of the qualification for subjects such as Biology, Chemistry and Physics that will now be graded as Pass or Fail, in addition to the final grading of the A Level (A\*-E). At present Heriot-Watt University does not require a Pass in this element of the assessment and would still ask for the relevant grade in the whole A Level. However Admissions Tutors may choose to look at performance in the Science Practical when assessing borderline cases. This could be at the initial offer making stage for those applicants who have previously sat A Levels or during the confirmation period following the release of A Level exam results, depending on the competition for places available.

### **BTEC Qualifications and other Vocational Qualifications**

With an increasing range of vocational qualifications being offered within schools and colleges across the UK, there are now greater numbers of applicants applying to study at undergraduate level who are currently undertaking a mixture of 'non-traditional' qualifications such as BTEC Diplomas, Cambridge Technicals etc. and traditional school qualifications such as A Levels. Heriot-Watt University welcomes applications from applicants studying both traditional and non-traditional qualifications. However some degree programmes may require the content of the non-traditional qualifications to be relevant to the subject area applied for, this may be especially true for science and engineering programmes such as Chemical Engineering, Physics etc.

### **The New UCAS Tariff system - 2017 entry onwards**

The new UCAS tariff system from 2017 entry onwards will be based on a calculation of qualification size and grading to generate a total number of points. The aim of the new tariff is to allow fairer comparison across different types of qualifications. Whilst Heriot-Watt University does not make tariff offers (instead specifying grades in the conditions of offers), the University may use the new tariff internally when comparing qualifications for entry and reviewing the current minimum entry requirements per programme.

### **Advice to Schools**

Where possible the University would encourage referees to specify in the referee statement the provision of reformed qualifications within their school. This will provide a clearer picture as to why the applicant has followed that particular educational pathway and as to why they may have chosen particular subject areas at a given level. This information would be extremely useful for Admissions Tutors to have at hand when assessing the application form.