

# A level reform: the essentials



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# A level reform – key changes

Equipping students to progress to success at university and in their careers.

1. Greater involvement from higher education in the development of the content of A levels
2. Linear structure with all external assessment at the end of the course.
3. AS will be decoupled from the A level, so that the marks do not count towards the A level grade.
4. Assessment by examination, with other methods only where necessary to assess subject skills.



# Timeline

## **September 2015** (first exams 2017)

- A levels - English language, English literature, English language and literature, history, biology, chemistry, physics, psychology, art and design, economics, sociology, business, computer science.

## **September 2016** (first exams 2018)

- A levels – modern foreign languages (French, German and Spanish), ancient languages, geography, dance, drama, music, physical education and religious studies.

## **September 2017** (first exams 2019)

- A levels - mathematics, further mathematics, other modern foreign languages, design and technology, and remaining subjects.



# Timeline

**2014/15**

- Specifications for 2015 A levels available to schools and colleges
- Confirmation of content and regulatory requirements for remaining A levels to be taught from September 2016

**2015/16**

- First teaching of reformed 2015 A levels
- Specifications for 2016 A levels available to schools and colleges
- Confirmation of content and regulatory requirements for remaining A levels.

**2016/17**

- First teaching of 2016 A levels
- Specifications for remaining A levels available to schools and colleges
- First examinations for 2015 A levels (summer 2017)

**2017/18**

- First teaching of 2017 A levels
- First exams for 2016 A levels (summer 2018)



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# English 18 year old university entry cohort

Year of entry into HE	GCSEs	A levels
2016	Old GCSEs	All Old
2017	Old GCSEs	Mix of Old and new
2018	Old GCSEs	Mix of Old and new
2019	Mix of Old and new	Mix of Old and new
2020	Mix of Old and new	All new
2021	All new	All new



# 2015 A levels – key changes to content

Specifications for these subjects are now available on awarding organisations' websites.

- Strengthened mathematical and quantitative content in science, computing, economics and business.
- Increased emphasis on practical skills in science - students must carry out a minimum of 12 practical activities and a pass/fail grade will be separately reported.
- An 'unseen text' in English literature, and changes to number of texts.
- Non-literary texts in English language and literature.



# 2015 A levels – key changes to content

- Increased breadth of study in history – students will need to study topics from a chronological range of 200 years.
- Significant overhaul of computer science content - a greater focus on programming, and developing knowledge and understanding of algorithms.
- New emphasis on drawing in art and design.
- Economics - new content on real world and financial economics.



# 2016 A levels – key features

Content for 2016 subjects is finalised and available on [gov.uk](http://gov.uk)

- Modern Foreign Languages: students to engage critically with literary works and films, use spoken and written language spontaneously, and independent research.
- Ancient languages: clearer requirement to read and understand literary texts in the original language.
- Geography: a better balance between physical and human geography, with relevant contemporary themes.



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# 2016 A levels – key features

- Dance: emphasis on critical evaluation and reflective analysis, and a requirement to understand a range of styles and contexts.
- Music: builds on GCSE allows students to specialise in either performing or composing.
- PE: greater emphasis on theoretical understanding.



# 2016 A levels – key features

- Drama and theatre: includes study of two influential theatre practitioners, and more detail on the skills students must apply practically.
- RS: study of at least one religion in depth through three of the following: the systematic study of religion; textual studies; philosophical studies of religion; and religion and ethics.



# 2017 subjects – key features

- Maths: mechanics and statistics required, increased emphasis on problem solving, interpretation and mathematical modelling.
- Further maths: builds on the maths content, with 50% of content prescribed.
- Ofqual will confirm in due course the remaining A level subjects that will be reformed for 2017.



# Decoupled AS

- AS will be stand-alone qualifications, so that the AS marks do not count towards the final A level grade.
- This will end the routine, automatic external assessment of students at the end of year 12, allowing more time for teaching.
- AS qualifications designed to be co-taught with A levels (in the same lessons).



# Decoupled AS

- DfE does not advise on the number of qualifications each student should take, and different approaches are possible. Students can, for example:
  - alongside their A levels, take an AS in an additional subject for breadth of study;
  - use AS results to help decide which subjects to continue to A level; or
  - take three or four linear A levels only.
- To inform decisions by schools, universities are publishing admissions statements to explain how they will view students with and without AS results. These statements are also available via the UCAS website.



# More information

- More detail on the reforms:  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/timeline-of-changes-to-gcses-as-and-a-levels>
- Detailed information and links to reformed A level subject content:  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/reforming-qualifications-and-the-curriculum-to-better-prepare-pupils-for-life-after-school/supporting-pages/a-and-as-level-reform>
- Guidance for schools and colleges:  
<http://www.aoc.co.uk/teaching-and-learning/study-programmes-central/qualifications/and-levels>

