

UCAS response to Ofqual A level Reform consultation

Introduction

1. UCAS welcomes the opportunity to respond to the consultation on the reform of A levels.
2. A levels are the predominant qualification used by UK learners for progression to higher education (HE). Although higher education institutions (HEIs) are responsible for setting their own admissions policies, UCAS' role as the UK's shared admissions service gives us a unique insight into the use of A levels, and other qualifications and information, to facilitate admission to HE.
3. UCAS' mission is to help learners make informed HE choices that best suit their aspirations and abilities and maximise their opportunity for success, and to benefit our members through the provision of shared services. UCAS provides information and advice; course information; entry requirements; and application services to around 500,000 UK applicants to over 320 UK higher education providers each year. These applicants make over 2 million applications to HE courses. Our services support applications for full-time HNCs, HNDs and foundation degrees as well as undergraduate and some postgraduate degrees.
4. As this consultation relates to A level reform in England our response focuses on the potential impacts on English HE providers and English students, although any reforms to the A level will also affect HEIs and students in the rest of the UK.

Summary of key messages

The main issues that we wish to raise in relation to the proposed A level reforms are:

5. **Qualification currency:** The A level is regarded as the main currency used within HE admissions and therefore maintaining consistency in standards across A level subjects is essential. If achievement of an A grade is seen as more difficult in one subject than another then this makes it more difficult for HEIs to use A levels as indicators of general ability and as indicators of subject knowledge for admissions purposes.
6. **Qualification structure:** Some HEIs value AS results in conjunction with predicted grades as a basis for selection. AS levels were also introduced to provide breadth in the A level curriculum and encourage greater retention post-16. Their removal could both reduce the effectiveness of the admissions process and narrow post-16 learning opportunities.
7. UCAS welcomes the proposed removal of the January resit window as this will help create a more even playing field for HE applicants. We also support the view that A levels must remain equal in size, as consistency across A level subjects is important in maintaining the A level as a valued currency within HE admissions.
8. **Qualification support:** UCAS recognises the value of increased involvement of HE with A level development and encourages Ofqual to consider a model where a single group of representatives from across the HE sector could help develop agreed core content for each A level subject. As well as securing a common platform for subject development,

this approach would help to address concerns from the HE sector about the level of resources required to support A level reform.

9. **Implementation:** UCAS is concerned that the phased introduction of reforms will complicate HE admissions (as admissions tutors would need to consider how to adapt entry requirements and offers to deal with new subjects) and may disadvantage some learners.
10. If new A levels are introduced in a piecemeal fashion and changes to the standard are considerable, then the arguments for a change in grading are strong. This would make it clear to users which A level grades relate to the 'new' standards.
11. If significant changes to subject specifications, structure, assessment and grading are to be introduced, we believe that the new qualifications should be piloted.
12. Across all these areas we emphasise the importance of consistency across the A level suite of qualifications. Students need to be able to select A levels with confidence that where they represent a relevant progression route to HE, they will be valued equally. When assessing applicants, institutions need stability, predictability and consistency in A levels as indicators of both subject and general ability.

The role of A levels in admissions to HE

13. The consultation document emphasises the importance of A levels in admissions to HE and we note that one of the intended achievements of the reforms that A levels should continue to support access to, and selection for, HE (paragraph 34). To ensure that this outcome can be realised it is necessary to understand how A levels are used in admissions to HE today, both to inform debate about current issues and to evaluate the potential impacts of any reforms.
14. A levels are the most common unit of measurement used to set minimum entry requirements, advise learners, teachers and advisers, make offers of an HE place (usually on a conditional basis reflecting predicted A level grades), and to inform the decision on whether or not ultimately to accept an applicant. They are commonly used as a benchmark against which other qualifications are compared for admissions purposes and are now fundamental, in England, to the management of student numbers. As such HE providers need to have confidence that A levels will provide a consistent currency for admissions purposes. This consistency needs to be present in two distinct, but equally important, ways:
 - As a **consistent indicator of specific subject knowledge** (where particular knowledge is a prerequisite for a course).
 - As a **consistent general indicator of ability** (where HEIs are looking for a certain level of attainment rather than subject specific knowledge).
15. Whilst it is acknowledged that prior educational attainment remains the best single indicator of success at undergraduate level, it is also important to recognise that a more holistic assessment of applicants is at the heart of fair admissions.
16. The Schwartz review says that 'a fair admissions system should enable institutions to select students who are able to complete the course as judged by their achievements

and their potential' and that in assessing merit and potential 'institutions may legitimately consider other factors in addition to examination results, including: the educational context of an applicant's formal achievement; other indicators of potential and capability (such as the results of additional testing or assessment, including interviews, or non-academic experiences and relevant skills); and how an individual applicant's experiences, skills and perspectives could contribute to the learning environment.'

17. Therefore, whilst central to admissions, it is important to remember that previous academic achievement and predicted A levels grades alone are not the sole determinant of whether an applicant is made an offer, or accepted by an institution.

Approach used in our response

18. Given the need to understand how A levels are used in admissions to HE, our response presents some initial analytical work exploring what we believe are some of the key issues which need to be considered in developing A level reforms, namely:
- Establishing the importance of A levels within the set of qualifications offered by young English applicants to HE between 2008 and 2012.
 - Whether there are any indications from the admissions decisions made by institutions that there is variation in how A level grades and subjects are valued for HE admissions.
 - Within the subset of A level candidates who apply to HE, what the patterns of prior GCSE attainment across different A level grades and subjects suggest about how the current A levels offer a consistent measure of general ability for HE admission.
 - What evidence is there from people taking different numbers of A levels about how institutions appear to balance higher grades ('depth of attainment') against number of subjects ('breadth of attainment'), including mixtures of AS and A level qualifications.
19. Our analytical work is presented at Annex A. Whilst these analyses are exploratory in scope, we think that the issues they raise need to be understood in order to proceed successfully with A level reforms that are intended to support access and selection to HE.
20. The key points from this analytical work show that:
- A levels are the predominant qualifications used to support applications to all types of HE and are often presented as pending qualifications¹. Their nature and predictability are therefore central to admissions across all institutions.
 - In recent years A levels have been increasingly presented in combination with other qualifications (this applied to 29 per cent of applicants with A levels in 2012).
 - Over a quarter of those applicants holding A levels in combination with other qualifications have BTECs whilst a similar proportion have Extended Project Qualifications (EPQs).

¹ As applications are submitted prior to achievement of qualifications, the analysis carried out was on 'pending' qualifications.

- This could suggest that BTEC qualifications are meeting a need not currently met by A levels and that a concurrent review of the level 3 BTECs might be needed to understand the impacts of A level reforms on those wanting to mix qualification types.
- This highlights the complex and interdependent environment in which this A level reform takes place and the potential impacts of any reforms need to be considered in these terms.
- The acceptance rate of applicants with A levels varies by both grade and subject (see Annex A, figures 1 and 2). This is especially the case when looking at admissions to institutions who select students with higher grades of qualifications on entry.
- The GCSE attainment background of HE applicants achieving particular A level grades varies by subject (see Annex A, figure 3). Although there could be several explanations for this, it may indicate an issue of consistency between A level subjects that could be of importance to HE admissions.

Currency

21. UCAS believes that a well-understood currency for national qualifications is essential for public confidence². The enduring popularity of A levels is in part due to widespread understanding of what they represent in terms of educational achievement. This is important for learners, their parents and advisers, for employers, and for HEIs. We believe this reform consultation is timely because public confidence is eroded when standards and comparability are not wholly trusted.
22. UCAS has been working with the HE and secondary sectors to review the UCAS Tariff – both its fitness for purpose and the broader requirements for qualifications information to support progression to HE and HE admissions decisions. A consultation on the UCAS Qualifications Information Review was conducted in early 2012. Although this review did not specifically address A levels, the consultation feedback identified a number of relevant issues³. These included HE sector concerns about the comparability of standards across A level subjects; a lack of clarity regarding how A levels compare in terms of demand with other qualification types; and concerns relating to the accuracy and variability of guided learning hours (glh) attributed across level 3 qualifications. We believe it is important for the reform of A levels to address these issues.
23. The model used in the UK to admit young people to university, is one of primarily a pre-examination, conditional offer model, which relies heavily on predicted grades and the long term stability and comparability of qualifications⁴. Amongst young English applicants in 2012, 93 per cent had a pending qualification at the time of application, and 78 per cent of those applicants had pending A levels.

² UCAS has a UK wide membership. As such we recognise the importance and currency of the Higher and Advanced Highers in Scotland.

³ Please see www.ucas.com/qireview

⁴ Older applicants tend to apply post-qualification.

24. HE providers need to have confidence that A levels will provide a consistent currency for the setting of entry requirements and offer-making. This consistency needs to be present in two distinct, but equally important, ways:
- As a **consistent indicator of specific subject knowledge** (required when universities are making subject-specific offers, with particular knowledge a prerequisite for a course)
 - As a **consistent general indicator of ability** (required when universities are making grade-based offers to indicate a required level of attainment) rather than subject specific knowledge
25. It is therefore essential for admissions purposes that not only is there equivalency in terms of content and standard where a single subject is offered by different awarding organisations, but also broad consistency in terms of standards across all A level subjects such that A levels can continue to be used as a general indicator of ability.
26. UCAS does not believe that the development process proposed in this consultation allows for the required coherence and equivalency across the A level suite.
27. Giving confidence in this consistency is made more important by the fact that statistics relating to the grade profile of achieved A levels, and their apparent utility for HE admissions, do not, in simple reading, obviously indicate consistency.
28. One example of this is outlined below in Figure 1 which shows the varying distribution of achievement across three popular subjects. While there are no doubt a variety of factors behind the differences of attainment distributions between these subjects, it is important to understand what these factors are and to attempt to explain them. Our analysis of HE applicants investigates one important factor, the GCSE achievement profile of A level candidates in different subjects (Annex A, figure 3) and suggests that there may be differences in grade achievement between subjects that are not fully understood.

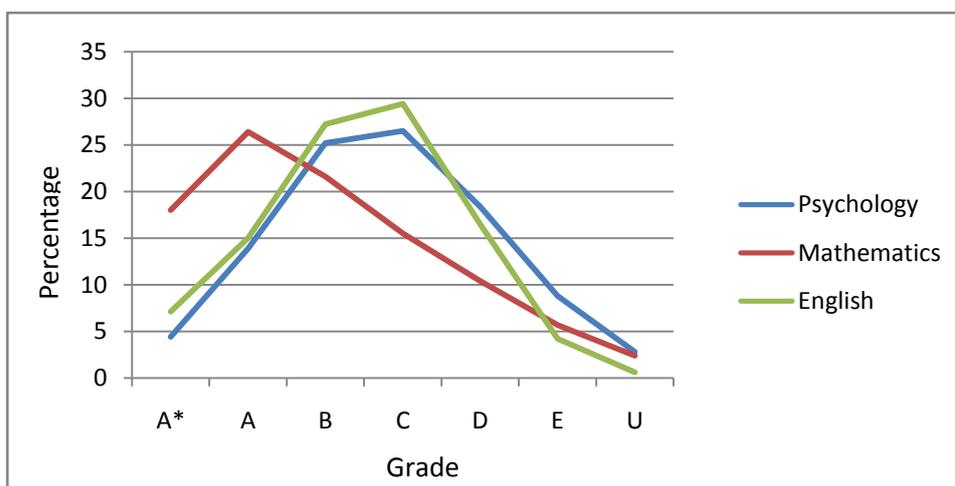


Figure 1: Grade distributions across psychology, mathematics and English A levels.
Source: JCQ 2011

29. UCAS would encourage Ofqual to ensure that its reform of the A level delivers a coherent content and standard within A level subjects and broadly comparable standards of achievement across A levels in order to support the continuing use of the A level as

the main currency of HE admissions. The implications of progression routes from GCSEs to A levels also need to be considered.

Qualification structure (paragraph 48 – 52)

30. Feedback from HEIs to the UCAS Qualifications Information Review suggests that many HEIs value AS results as providing an external benchmark of achievement part way through the level 3 curriculum and use these results in conjunction with predicted grades as a basis for selection.
31. Feedback also indicates that the HE sector would welcome formal recognition that the AS and A level qualification are not the same level. This reflects their experiences and treatment of these qualifications for admissions purposes.
32. We would be keen to understand more about how this difference in level might be presented and how the AS will be recognised in terms of equivalence with other level 3 qualifications.
33. We believe that in order to retain some coherence at level 3 that supports progression to HE, the level 3 definition needs to be revisited and indeed the A level position re-considered. It is widely accepted that the level of achievement associated with AS might overlap highest grades at GCSE and lower A2 grades. The higher grades within the A2 are often regarded as more difficult to attain than many other level 3 qualifications.
34. The AS was introduced to promote the study of a broader curriculum – encouraging students to include an additional subject beyond the standard three A level or equivalent programme. It also aimed to raise levels of participation and retention post-16. We believe that both these curriculum intentions need to be considered when considering whether or not to retain the AS.
35. In considering the structure of the AS within the A level, we would urge Ofqual to look carefully at achievement relationships between GCSE, AS and A2, and attrition rates for different subjects, for males and females. We believe that this may be relevant to making decisions about the retention or otherwise of the AS in relation to its role in keeping younger students motivated throughout Years 12 and 13.
36. Experiences of previous changes to qualifications and curriculum models have shown that there can be strategic responses to changes that are different to those that are intended. A revised model that for example allowed, or encouraged, qualifications to be taken in a linear way (with all assessment for AS and A2 at the end of the course) or the option that the AS be bypassed entirely, could lead to a greater divergence in assessment patterns and routes through A levels which may have a significant impact on fair admissions.
37. Figure 2 shows the acceptance rates of UK-domiciled 17-19 year olds with three A levels split by those who hold an additional AS⁵.

⁵ Please note AS results often information HEI offers, but rarely form part of these.

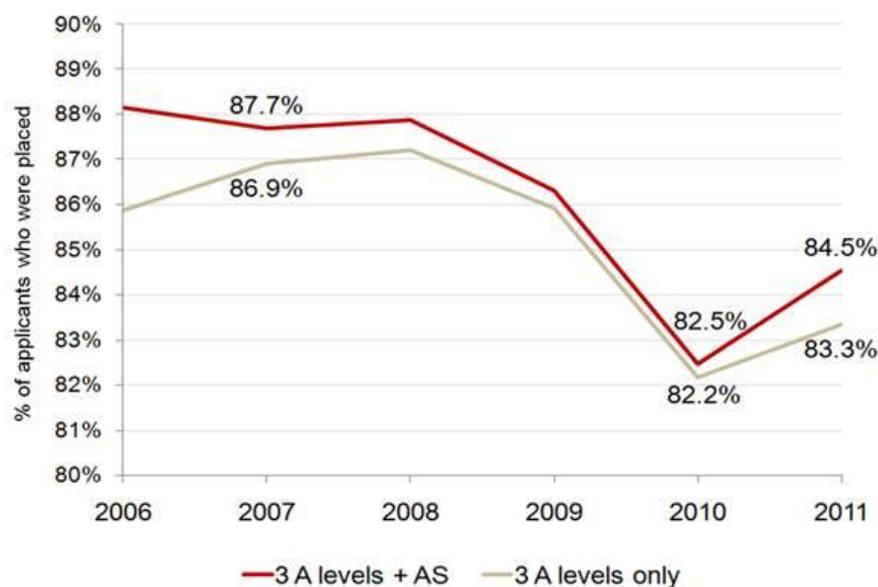


Figure 2: Acceptance rate of UK-domiciled 17 – 19 year olds with three A levels, split by those with and without AS: 2006 - 2011 Source: UCAS

38. It shows that there are higher acceptance rates for those holding three A levels with an extra AS. This could be due to the opportunity to choose the three strongest subjects from four at the end of Year 12 which might be expected to drive higher achievement in the remaining A2 subjects. However, many other factors, including differences in the makeup of applicants presenting with and without AS, could account for these differences, and they need to be better understood.
39. Our analysis of how institutions appear to value high grades from three A levels against more A levels but at lower grades suggests that some institutions value concentrated attainment more highly than breadth (Annex A, figures 4 and 5). Again, this needs to be better understood so that potential applicants can balance taking additional A levels (or AS) against possible reductions in attainment in their 'core' three A levels.
40. Given its importance for some institutions in selecting applicants for admission to higher education, UCAS urges close consultation with HE admissions practitioners before any decision is taken to remove the AS.

Curriculum

41. Paragraph 15 of the consultation highlights another aspect of the curriculum model: 'One feature of academic education for 16-19 year olds is that the curriculum is defined by the qualification. The reason for having A levels is not the assessment and the certificate but rather the learning that leads to them.'
42. Given this assertion, the consultation says surprisingly little about the way in which single subject qualifications such as A levels and AS contribute to the delivery of a broad and balanced (or narrow and specialised) curriculum as opposed to composite qualifications such as the International Baccalaureate.
43. Some HEIs consider that students progressing to HE from secondary education lack some of the higher level skills, such as critical thinking, research and writing skills, which

would support success at university. The consultation is not clear to what extent such skills might be delivered through A levels, or indeed how they might be delivered to any minimum standard.

44. Referring back to the need to consider A level reforms within the wider post-16 curriculum context, Ofqual may wish to explore whether higher order skills might be more reliably developed and assessed through something like the Extended Project Qualification. Take up of the EPQ has grown rapidly over recent years⁶ and anecdotal evidence suggests that it is highly valued by HE.

Resits

45. With regard to the removal of January resits, feedback suggests that some HEIs will welcome this as an opportunity to base more admissions decisions on qualifications taken in one sitting, which some regard as a better indicator of general ability than results that have been achieved through modular structures or after resitting.
46. UCAS would also observe that removing the January resit opportunities provides a low risk means of reducing the overall emphasis on assessment and increasing the focus on learning delivery within the A level programme.

Qualification size (paragraph 45 and condition 2)

47. We support the proposal that A levels should remain equal in size. This relates to the points we make earlier about the importance of currency and consistency across all A level subjects.
48. The UCAS Qualifications Information Review has shown that there is considerable concern in the HE sector regarding the use of guided learning hours (glh) as an indicator of qualification size particularly in relation to A level, and across qualifications more generally. The lack of a single standard descriptor of size across the range of qualifications is unhelpful, and the lack of reliability in the use of size descriptors is of concern for those who are trying to understand the volume of student learning programmes.
49. UCAS would encourage Ofqual to clarify how it proposes to address these issues to ensure a more reliable measure of qualification size which is comparable to other size measures (such as the Scottish measure of notional learning time). A reliable and comparable measure or one which could be aligned across the UK countries would be highly valued by our members.
50. In keeping with the findings of the Qualifications Information Review, UCAS would encourage Ofqual to take the opportunity of A level reform to develop a more detailed means of describing the level of demand associated with the achievement of A levels at different grades, with a view to developing more consistent approaches to describing demand with other qualifications and enabling improved comparisons of demand across qualification types.

⁶ EPQ has grown very rapidly from a few hundred in 2008 to nearly 15,000 in 2012.

51. The importance of our points about size and demand measures is emphasised by the evidence in the Annex about the increasing frequency of applicants who mix qualification types, such as A levels with BTECs.

Qualification support (paragraphs 65-74) – Condition 8

52. We recognise that there would be value from the greater involvement of the HE sector in the development of A levels. However, we have concerns about the process outlined in the consultation document.
53. With respect to subject criteria and the suggestion that there would be no core content requirements, we would be concerned if this resulted in a number of specifications for a subject, which could differ substantially depending on the HEIs that had been involved in the development of the individual specifications. We would highlight there, again, the critical importance for UCAS' members that Ofqual must secure confidence in standards and ensure consistency of standards across different specifications within a subject.
54. Whilst the proposals place a greater emphasis on HE engagement, there is little focus on providing structures and guidance to encourage coherence within subjects, or standards between them. It remains unclear how this model would ensure that HEIs are able to select students according to ability and knowledge, when the suggested model could result in very different specifications for the same subject. We would need more information about how Ofqual would assure these standards in order to support this condition.
55. Lack of co-ordination within the development process might lead to significant inconsistencies in outcomes, lack of coherence and the potential lack of wider support post- accreditation. Although paragraph 70 suggests that universities may wish to specify and agree common core content to secure consistency of core knowledge and to make it easier to secure consistency of demand, the document subsequently says that the regulator would not *require* these core content requirements to be met.
56. In addition to providing new complexity for admissions officers in HEIs, we believe that learners would be disadvantaged. It is frequently difficult for applicants, particularly those from more disadvantaged backgrounds, to secure appropriate advice and guidance about level 3 study for progression to HE. If, in addition to choice between subjects and qualification types, learners needed to navigate 'preferred' awarding bodies in selecting their A levels, we believe that participation would be narrowed and distorted.
57. We are concerned about the potentially damaging impact this model of qualification development might have on equality of access if different HEIs were to attribute different values to the same qualification from different awarding bodies for admissions purposes.
58. This does not align with the clearly stated purpose of 'equality of access for all students to the full range of universities'. We know that student choices at level 3 are heavily influenced and restricted (especially in terms of awarding organisation specification) by the options that are available to them at their local post-16 providers. To penalise a learner on the basis of the options available to them would not support equality of access.

59. It is important also to note that historically HEIs do not specify qualifications for admissions where a national entitlement across secondary education is not in place.
60. Many HEIs have expressed concern about the level of resources which could be required to engage effectively with the proposals for A level reform. Whilst there is value in increased HE involvement in the development of A levels, the consultation document does not make clear what this might mean in practice. Without core subject content or a central facilitating role for the development process, there could be the situation where the five awarding bodies each develop specifications for a subject independently; this could require involvement from five different sets of academics and agreement from 20 HEIs for each specification – 12 of which would need to be drawn from the list of ‘respected’ universities.
61. In order to maintain standards and emerge with a new common currency for A levels, we believe that the process needs to be centrally co-ordinated. Without a central co-ordinating function, the possibility exists for A levels to diverge in design, content and standards.
62. We also believe that it is essential that the full range of HE providers is represented to reflect the differing requirements of these HE providers.
63. UCAS would encourage Ofqual to consider a model where there is a central facilitating function (similar in some ways to the role previously carried out in this respect by QCA) where a single group of representatives from across the HE sector with an independent chair could help develop an agreed core content specification for each A level subject. As well as securing a common platform for the development of new A levels, this approach would help to manage the level of input required from HE.
64. We would also like to note that, although we feel that the involvement of HEIs in determining the content of A levels is important, it is also essential to ensure appropriate and smooth progression from level 2 qualifications.
65. A level reform must take place hand-in-hand with the reform of GCSEs. Progression from GCSE to A level is one of the most well established progression pathways in secondary education in England today. The risks associated with undertaking reform of A levels without alignment of reform at GCSE level could be significant.

Marking, assessment and grading

66. The consultation document asks for views on about whether the current grading of A level should apply to new specifications. UCAS would observe that it is difficult at this stage to predict the scale of recalibration that will result from the A level reforms. The current grading model has been in place since the mid-1960s⁷ (with the A* grade being introduced in 2010), and is widely understood both within the UK and internationally. This model has weathered a number of changes to assessment within A levels (most notably Curriculum 2000 and the introduction of AS qualifications).

⁷ The GCE A level was first introduced in 1951 as a pass /fail qualification. In 1953 a distinction grade was introduced. The A- E grading scale was introduced in 1963.

67. Feedback to Qualifications Information Review suggests that most HE providers find the differentiation offered by current A level grading adequate for admissions purposes. However, some more selective institutions and departments regularly point to the need for information on students' UMS points, indicating a requirement for a more granular grading scale.
68. If new A levels are introduced in a piecemeal fashion and changes to the standard are considerable, then the arguments for a change in grading are strong. This would make it clear to users which A level grades relate to the 'new' standards. We therefore believe that a switch to a numbered grading system could be explored. Using a scale of, for example, 1 -10, where 10 is the highest grade, provides differentiation between 'old' and 'new' A level achievements, a finer differentiation of performance (ten grade points vs. six at present) and future-proofs the grading scale against increases in demand. Using the higher number at the top of the scale allows for future higher grades to be added without compromising the standard.
69. UCAS is aware that any recalibration of the A level standard could lead to additional complexity in the monitoring of standards over time.
70. Whilst the focus of regulation in recent years has been on syllabus (content) and structure, we believe that there would be some benefit from a focus on assessment methodology and mark schemes. The reforms should allow for greater scrutiny of the fitness for purpose of assessment items and seek to identify mark schemes which are likely to cause distortion of outcomes over time. We welcome the identification of low mark questions as areas of risk. We would also consider that scrutiny of the marks awarded within a mark scheme could identify types of questions where the full range of marks is less well used. Use of the full range of marks across individual questionmark schemes is more likely to produce a standard distribution of achievement and prevent grade inflation caused by a smaller number of raw marks being available to translate to UMS.
71. The UCAS HE admissions service is heavily reliant on the supply of A level (and other) results through the Awarding Body Linkage (ABL). These are currently made available to UCAS one week before the publication of results in the middle of August. During this one week, UCAS transmits the results to HEIs who then match them against conditional offers made such that confirmation (or otherwise) of conditional offers can be made available to approximately 300,000 applicants on A level results day. In reality only about two thirds of confirmations are available on that day. This means that around 100,000 applicants have to wait for several days or even weeks beyond A level results day to receive confirmation of their status. This can disadvantage those wanting to apply for a place through Clearing.
72. Our recent Admissions Process Review (APR) consultation recommended that fairness to applicants making applications through Clearing would be considerably enhanced if the majority of offers conditional on A level grades could be processed by results day. This would clear the way for fairer access to clearing for all unplaced applicants.
73. In view of this, we would urge Ofqual to consider reforms to A levels which might facilitate more efficient marking of scripts. In particular, we believe there is considerable scope for the use of technology to improve the process.

74. Many candidates would welcome the opportunity to complete their exams using computers (which are commonly used for much of their preparatory work) and this would open the possibility of speeding up (and de-risking) the transmission of scripts to markers.
75. There is a risk that moving to a linear structure for A levels, with all assessments being undertaken at the end of two years of study, might increase the time required to complete the marking of scripts.
76. UCAS and HEIs would be able to facilitate a fairer Confirmation and Clearing service if they were able to receive the results several days earlier than at present.

Implementation (section 6 paragraphs 82-92)

77. With reference to the underlying requirement for a common currency within A levels, as outlined above, we are concerned about the proposed waves of development of new A levels. Section 6 of the consultation document suggests that there could be continuing incremental changes to A levels year on year from 2013 to 2018. Although the consultation document makes it clear that there will never be old and new versions of A levels available at the same time within subjects, there could be different versions of A levels for different subjects. This would raise a number of issues in relation to fair and transparent admissions.
78. Firstly, this raises challenges in relation to information, advice and guidance – guidance will be complex for students and parents to understand, particularly for those students considering subjects across both the revised and unrevised subjects. This adds complexity to an already elaborate system. It will be essential to ensure that all stakeholders are fully aware of which qualifications have been reformed, are in the process of reform, or are due to be reformed.
79. Secondly, and returning to our key theme of currency, there is a risk that early phase subjects may be ‘preferred’ by HEIs for progression – creating a two tier situation where some subjects lose value, and students may be discriminated against because of subject choice. Were this to be the case, or thought to be so, there may be lasting damage to the popularity of some subjects in these later phases and a potential for negative impact on social mobility.
80. There is also a risk that if new specifications were perceived to be more ‘difficult’, students would shift subject preferences away from key subjects and demand would fall in important subject areas, as was the case following the changes to Mathematics A level as part of Curriculum 2000.
81. We are interested too in the subjects that have been identified for the first tranche of reform. We note that they mirror the Russell Group’s list of ‘facilitating subjects’. We would like to understand more about the rationale behind this list which excludes a number of significantly more popular A level subjects taken by UK candidates.
82. The issue of phasing of qualifications reform, and the possibility of a multiplicity of different A levels being available at the same time, raises the question of how they may be easily distinguished by stakeholders - including learners, parents schools, colleges higher education and employers.

83. In addition to the revised and current A levels available to English students, it is possible that the current A levels will continue to be available to students in other parts of the UK – should, for example, Wales or Northern Ireland decide not to move to the revised model. This is likely to produce considerable challenges in relation to HE admissions – for both applicants and HEIs. If there is divergence of A levels between England, Wales and Northern Ireland we believe that a new nomenclature and branding would be required to distinguish between the different types of A levels and avoid further confusion for learners, admissions staff, and employers.
84. We believe there are considerable risks associated with overly-rapid development of high stakes qualifications. There are well documented lessons and unintended consequences associated with rushed qualification reform – the 14-19 Diploma, Curriculum 2000, various mathematics qualifications and GCSE science being well-known examples.
85. If significant changes to subject specifications, structure, assessment and grading are to be introduced, we believe that the new qualifications should be piloted. This would allow for the opportunity to identify any problems, issues or unintended consequences without threat to the full cohort and also allow time to develop appropriate support materials and information, advice and guidance for stakeholders.

Annex A: Analysis

We are supporting our response to the consultation by providing this initial analysis of a number of the key analytical issues around the current use of qualifications with special attention to their role as consistent indicators of subject-specific and general academic ability. This analysis note indicates that there are issues to explore around the relationship between A level attainment and entry into HE. There are four areas that we have investigated:

- Establishing the importance of A levels within the set of qualifications offered by young English applicants to higher education between 2008 and 2012.
- Whether there are any indications from the admissions decisions made by institutions that there is variation in how A level grades and subjects are valued for HE admissions.
- Within the subset of A level candidates who apply to HE, what the patterns of prior GCSE attainment across different A level grades and subjects might suggest about how the current A levels offer a consistent measure of general ability in terms of HE admission.
- What evidence is there from people taking a number of A levels about how institutions appear to balance higher grades ('depth of attainment') against number of subjects ('breadth of attainment'), including mixtures of A level and AS qualifications?

This is a broad summary analysis and does not attempt to control for the interaction between choice of A level subjects and choice of course within institutions. Qualifications pending are based on self-declared information made by applicants at the time of application and have not been independently verified. The qualifications have been grouped into types which may include some that are rising in popularity and others that are declining. Analysis of the link between prior attainment at GCSE and achievement at A level are based on the link between the National Pupil Database (NPD) and the UCAS application system. In the main this only covers 18 year old English applicants at state schools.

Trends in pending qualifications amongst applicants through UCAS

Data for 17-19 year old English domiciled applicants was extracted from the pending qualifications listed at the time of application for UCAS cycles 2008 - 2012. For the 2012 cycle this analysis includes the applicants at 22 August, whereas for earlier cycles the analysis covers the applicant cohort at the end of the cycle.

- Since 2008 there has been an annual increase in the proportion of these applicants with at least one pending qualification (of any type). This suggests that the results of qualifications awarded during the application cycle are increasingly important to HE admissions. Note that this is a steady increase despite a changing pattern in deferred applications amongst this age group (large drop in deferred applications in the 2011 cycle followed by an increase to lower than 2010 levels in 2012).

English domiciled applicants, age 17 - 19

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Applicants	285,049	302,574	321,869	325,498	296,927
Applicants with a pending qualification	244,148	264,543	286,036	293,980	276,257
Percentage of applicants with a pending qualification	85.7	87.4	88.9	90.3	93.0

- The majority of these applicants had a GCE (see Data tables annex: Table 1 for details of qualifications in this group) pending qualification (82.5% in 2008, 78.2% in 2012).
- The percentage of young English applicants with a pending GCE qualification has declined slightly since 2008. However, it remains the most popular qualification type in each cycle, and has remained at the same level for the most recent three cycles.
- BTECs (see Data Tables Annex: Table 1 for details of qualifications in this group) are the next most frequent pending qualifications (14.0% in 2008, 22.2% in 2012), increasing in each cycle since 2008.

Percentage of applicants with a pending qualification by type of pending qualification

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
BTEC	14.0	16.9	19.8	20.4	22.2
GCE	82.5	80.1	78.5	78.0	78.2

- Most applicants with a pending qualification had just one pending qualification type (71.7% in 2012) but this proportion has decreased each cycle.

Percentage applicants with a pending qualification by number of pending qualification types

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
1	83.0	81.9	77.9	74.6	71.7
2	16.1	16.9	19.6	21.7	24.0
3+	0.9	1.3	2.5	3.7	4.4

- Of the applicants with only one qualification type the main qualifications are GCEs and BTECs. Once again the rising popularity of BTECs is evident, however over three quarters of this group have GCE qualifications pending.
- As a percentage of all applicants with a qualification pending, 55% have only GCE qualifications pending in 2012. This has declined from 70% in 2008, reflecting an increased trend of taking multiple qualification types.

Percentage of applicants with a single type of qualification

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
BTEC	9.4	11.3	13.3	14.4	15.1
GCE	84.2	81.6	79.7	77.7	77.4

- In 2012, 29 percent of A level applicants also took another qualification (see tables 2 and 6).
- Popular combinations of qualification types include GCEs with BTECs, and GCEs with Extended Projects.
- The increase in the GCE and Extended Project combination has increased over the cycles to match the percentage of applicants with the GCE and BTEC combination (for GCE applicants with two qualification types). (See tables 12 and 13)
- However, it is not common (fewer than five in a random sample of 1,000 offers) for attainment of an Extended Project to form part of the offer.

Percentage of GCE applicants with combination of GCEs and BTECs or Extended Projects expressed as percentage of GCE applicants presenting with another qualification.

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
GCE and BTEC	17.3	22.9	25.3	23.6	26.5
GCE and Extended Project	1.2	6.4	17.4	23.7	26.9

What evidence is there that different grades and subjects are valued differently for HE admissions?

UCAS Awarding Body Linkage (ABL) results of the 2011 summer sitting for A levels have been used in combination with the application data in the 2011 cycle to evaluate the acceptance rates to HE for different subject and grade combinations. The subjects shown in the following figures are a very small subset of all A level subjects, but are very popular subjects that cover a range of academic interests. The acceptance rate is calculated as the number of accepted applicants with the grade in the subject divided by the number of applicants with that grade and subject. There is no investigation of the interaction between A level subject and course applied for. The acceptance rate for high Tariff group institutions was calculated as the number of applicants accepted to high Tariff group institutions divided by the number of applicants, regardless of the choices that they had made (ie even if they hadn't applied to high Tariff group institutions).

- From Figure 1 it can be seen that at A* the acceptance rate to any institution for all of these subjects was over 87%, with the highest acceptance rate being for psychology at 94.7%.
- For all of the displayed subjects the acceptance rate increases as the awarded grade increases.

The increase in the acceptance rate varies by subject. Chemistry and mathematics have the lowest difference in acceptance rate between A* and E (23 and 25 percentage points respectively) with media studies having the largest difference in acceptance rate of 41 percentage points.

Figure 1 Acceptance rate to any institution by grade and selected subject, 2011 UCAS cycle

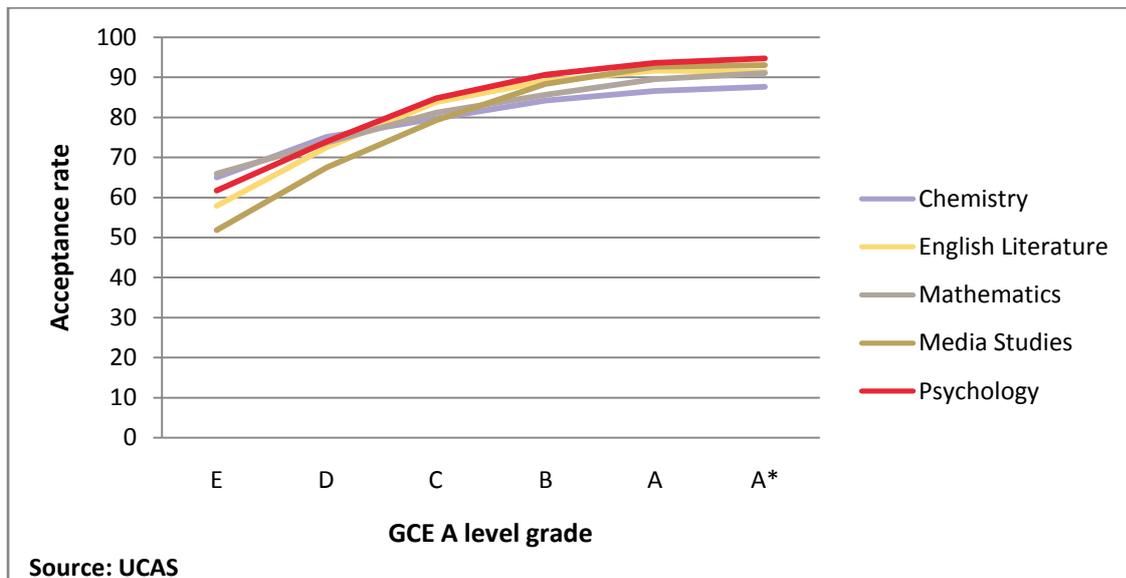
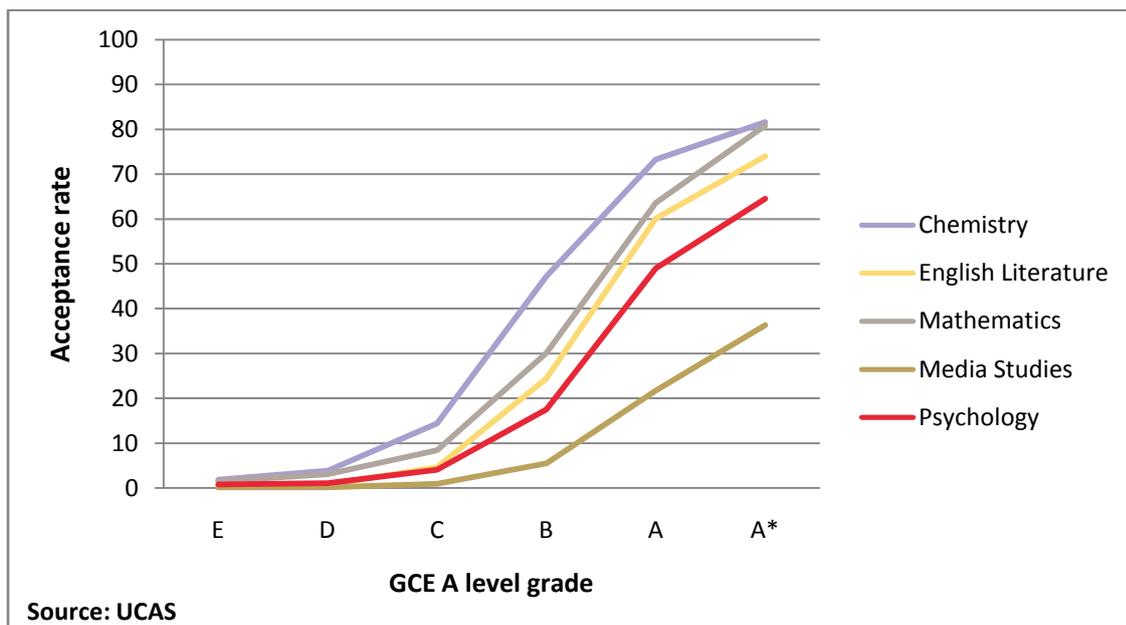


Figure 2 Acceptance rate to high Tariff institutions by grade and selected subject, 2011 UCAS cycle



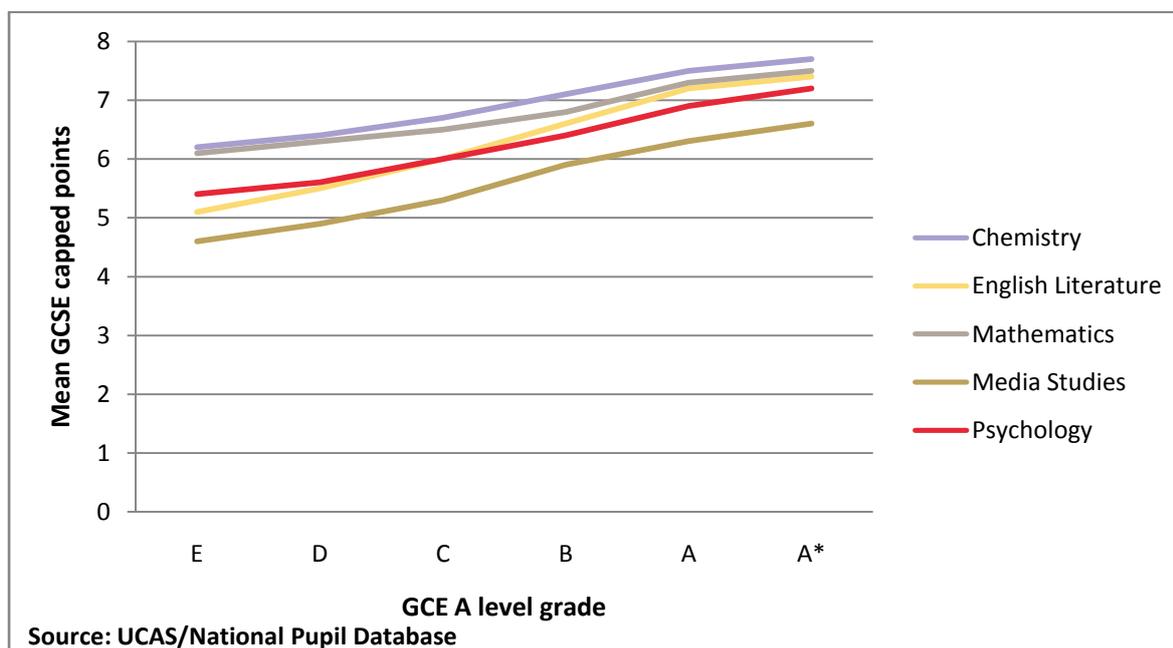
- From Figure 2 it can be seen that high grade achievement is essential in order to be accepted at a high Tariff institution, with the acceptance rate showing a steep increase from grade C up to A* across all the selected subjects. Grades of D or E at any of these subjects have virtually a zero acceptance rate compared to 50%-65% acceptance rates for these grades for applications to all institutions.

- The difference in acceptance rate between subjects at the higher GCE A level grades is more pronounced for high Tariff institutions. Those with an A* in media studies had a lower acceptance rate (by around 45 percentage points) than those with an A* in chemistry or mathematics.
- Although good grades for psychology have very high acceptance rates overall this is less evident at high Tariff institutions. The difference between subjects is particularly pronounced at B grade. The acceptance rate for applicants with a B in chemistry is 47% compared with 17% for applicants with a B in psychology and 5% for applicants with a B in media studies.

What evidence is there amongst HE applicants that different grades and subjects at Alevel represent different levels of prior GCSE attainment?

Using the ABL A level results from the summer sitting of the 2011 application cycle and matching UCAS data to the National Pupil Database (England only) we have generated an overall mean capped points score per applicant based on the best eight full GCSE qualifications. The score was generated using eight points for an A* down to one point for a G. Then the mean points score over all applicants attaining each A level subject and grade was calculated.

Figure 3 Mean GCSE capped points score by GCE A level grade achievement for selected subjects, 2011 UCAS cycle



- Figure 3 shows that across the selected subjects the higher the mean capped points score at GCSE the higher the grade achieved at GCE A level. However, there are some differences between subjects.
- Those achieving an A* in GCE A level media studies had a similar points score at GCSE (6.6) as those achieving a GCE A level grade C in chemistry (6.7) or mathematics (6.5).

- At E grade in GCE A level the difference between the mean points score at GCSE for chemistry (6.2) and media studies (4.6) is over a grade and a half (1.6).
- Therefore the prior attainment at GCSE of applicants awarded top grades for some subjects is less than the prior attainment at GCSE of applicants awarded top grades at other subjects. We have not investigated whether this is due in part to the breadth of attainment at GCSE, ie do those that take media studies at A level do well in a subset of GCSEs whereas those that take chemistry at A level do well across the board.

What evidence is there that depth of attainment is valued differently from breadth?

Figures 4 and 5 show the acceptance rates of 17-19 year old UK-domiciled applicants in the 2011 cycle by the total A level points (where A* is 6 points and E is 1 point) and number of A levels (3, 4 and 5 A levels). Figure 4 is the acceptance rate to all institutions and Figure 5 the acceptance rate to high Tariff institutions.

- Figure 4 shows that acceptance rates are generally high for all applicants that are awarded A levels. All applicants with 3 or 4 A levels with 9 points (equivalent to CCC) have an acceptance rate of over 80%. This could be due in part to the importance of A levels in admissions to HE and in part to the ability of applicants to make the right choices.
- Figure 5 shows that in high Tariff institutions depth of attainment is valued more highly than the breadth.

Figure 4 UK-domiciled applicants aged 17-19 acceptance rate to any institution– 2011 cycle

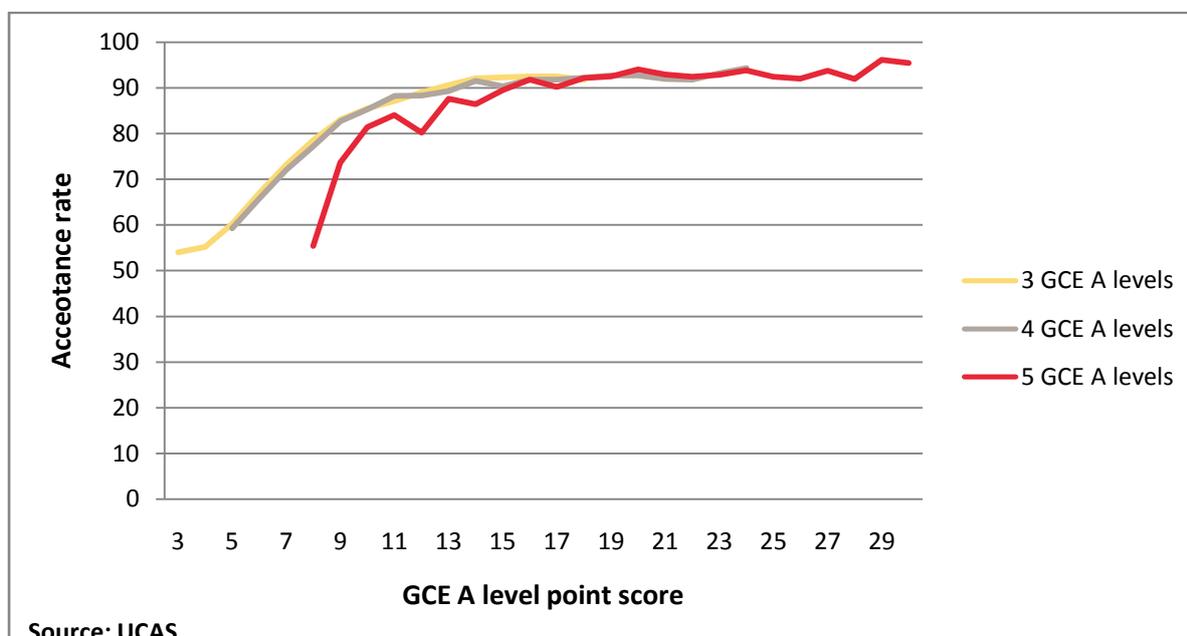
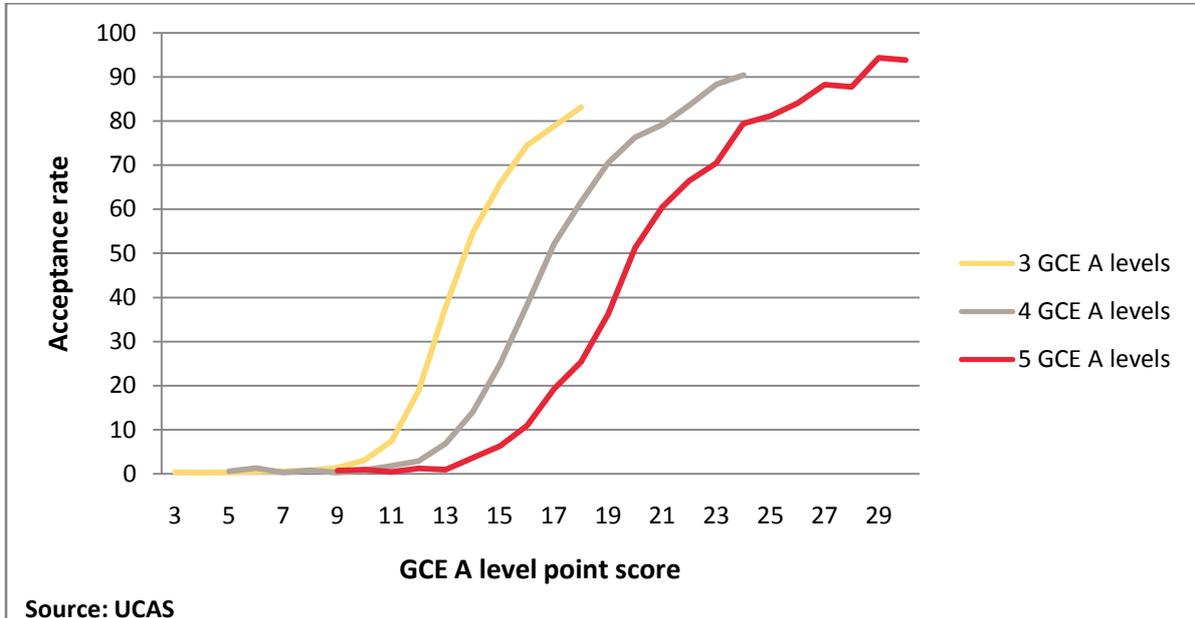


Figure 5 UK-domiciled applicants aged 17-19 acceptance rate to high Tariff institutions - 2011 cycle



UCAS analysis and research, September 2012

Data tables

The qualifications type data is taken from the Apply qualifications which applicants have stated are pending. This data is not verified and the qualifications may not have been completed or passed. The Apply qualifications have been identified using a matching process. It is possible that not all qualifications have been identified.

An applicant is identified as being in a qualification group if there is at least one qualification recorded as pending from the group.

The “Other” group contains all other qualifications. This may include qualifications at other levels such as GCSEs and degrees.

Not all qualifications listed in the groups in the Qualification Groups table may have records in the data.

The applicant cohort is English domiciled applicants with a country specific age of 17-19. The cohort is identified using end of cycle files for cycles 2008 – 2011 and 22 August 2012 files for the 2012 cycle.

Table1 Qualifications contained in each group

Group	Qualifications included in group
Cambridge Pre-U	Cambridge Pre-U Certificate (Principal Subject) Cambridge Pre-U Diploma Cambridge Pre-U Certificate (Global Perspectives & Independent Research) Cambridge Pre-U Certificate (Short Course)
BTEC	BTEC First Diploma BTEC Introductory Certificate BTEC Introductory Diploma BTEC National Award (6 Units) BTEC National Certificate (last award 2004) BTEC National Diploma (last award 2004) BTEC Award BTEC Certificate BTEC Diploma BTEC Extended Certificate BTEC First Certificate BTEC Higher National Certificate BTEC Higher National Diploma BTEC National Certificate (12 Units) (2003 onwards) BTEC National Certificate in Early Years BTEC National Certificate in Children's Care, Learning and Development BTEC National Diploma (18 Units) (2003 onwards) BTEC National Diploma in Early Years BTEC National Diploma in Children's Care, Learning and

Group	Qualifications included in group
	Development BTEC 90 Credit Diploma (QCF) BTEC Award (QCF) BTEC Certificate (QCF) BTEC Diploma (QCF) BTEC Extended Award (QCF) BTEC Extended Certificate (QCF) BTEC Extended Diploma (QCF) BTEC Subsidiary Certificate (QCF) BTEC Subsidiary Diploma (QCF)
OCR	OCR Certificate for iMedia Users OCR Diploma for iMedia Users OCR National Certificate (6 Units) OCR National Award OCR National First Award OCR National First Certificate OCR National Extended Diploma (18 Units) OCR National Diploma (12 Units) OCR Level 3 Certificate for Young Enterprise
GCE	GCE Advanced Level with Advanced Subsidiary (9 units) GCE Advanced Level GCE Advanced Subsidiary (first award 2001) GCE Advanced Subsidiary: Double Award GCE Advanced Level: Double Award GCE Advanced Supplementary (last award 2001) Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education (Vocational A Level) (6 Units) Vocational Certificate of Education Advanced Subsidiary (3 Units) Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education Double Award (12 Units)
SQA	Advanced Highers Highers
Irish	Irish Leaving Certificate
Diploma14-19	Advanced Diploma (14-19 Level 3) Progression Diploma (14-19 Level 3) Principal Learning (Level 3)
Access	Access to HE Diploma (ungraded - last award 2011) Access to HE Diploma (2009 onwards)
Extended Project	Extended Project (Level 3)
Foundation Art	Diploma in Foundation Studies (Art & Design) Foundation Diploma (Art & Design) (QCF)
CACHE	CACHE Diploma in Child Care and Education (old) CACHE Diploma in Nursery Nursing (NNEB)

Group	Qualifications included in group
	CACHE Other Level 3 qualifications CACHE Certificate in Child Care and Education CACHE Diploma in Child Care and Education (2007 onwards) CACHE Award in Child Care and Education
Music	Music Qualification - Graded Practical (ABRSM and equivalent) Music Qual.- Graded Theory (ABRSM and equiv.)
Int Bacc	International Baccalaureate Certificate International Baccalaureate Diploma International Baccalaureate Careers Certificate International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme
AQA Bacc	AQA Baccalaureate
Euro Bacc	European Baccalaureate
Welsh Bacc	Welsh Baccalaureate Advanced Diploma Welsh Baccalaureate Intermediate Diploma Welsh Baccalaureate Foundation Diploma
Other	Any qualification not grouped above

Table 2 Number of 17-19 year old English applicants by pending qualification group and application cycle

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Access	0	475	340	253	276
Baccalaureate - AQA	0	0	1,806	2,617	2,556
Baccalaureate - European	35	50	44	49	48
Baccalaureate - International	1,938	2,680	3,010	3,538	3,222
Baccalaureate - Welsh	9	11	27	28	33
BTEC	34,189	44,666	56,517	60,107	61,357
CACHE	1,068	1	1,320	1,411	1,253
Cambridge Pre U	0	0	847	943	1,448
Diploma 14-19	0	0	832	1,404	1,199
Extended Project	453	2,955	10,486	17,958	21,333
Foundation Art and Design	6,047	7,061	8,109	8,662	6,725
GCE	201,530	211,986	224,438	229,393	215,999
Irish Leaving Certificate	18	19	17	23	18
Music	1,678	1,685	2,513	3,096	3,026
OCR	1,319	1,877	3,313	4,475	5,005
SQA Higher, Advanced Higher	16	17	12	13	17
Other	39,711	42,534	43,160	46,592	44,212
Total pending qualification types	288,011	316,017	356,791	380,562	367,727

Table 3 Percentage of 17-19 year olds English applicants by pending qualification group and application cycle

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Access	0.0	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.1
Baccalaureate - AQA	0.0	0.0	0.6	0.9	0.9
Baccalaureate - European	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Baccalaureate - International	0.8	1.0	1.1	1.2	1.2
Baccalaureate - Welsh	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
BTEC	14.0	16.9	19.8	20.4	22.2
CACHE	0.4	0.0	0.5	0.5	0.5
Cambridge Pre U	0.0	0.0	0.3	0.3	0.5
Diploma 14-19	0.0	0.0	0.3	0.5	0.4
Extended Project	0.2	1.1	3.7	6.1	7.7
Foundation Art and Design	2.5	2.7	2.8	2.9	2.4
GCE	82.5	80.1	78.5	78.0	78.2
Irish Leaving Certificate	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Music	0.7	0.6	0.9	1.1	1.1
OCR	0.5	0.7	1.2	1.5	1.8
SQA Higher, Advanced Higher	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Other	16.3	16.1	15.1	15.8	16.0
Total pending qualification types	118.0	119.5	124.7	129.5	133.1

Table 4 17-19 year old English applicants by number of pending qualification groups and application cycle

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
1	202,615	216,529	222,915	219,417	198,029
2	39,227	44,601	56,062	63,665	66,203
3+	2,306	3,413	7,059	10,898	12,025

Table 5 Percentage of 17-19 year old English applicants by number of pending qualification groups and application cycle

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
1	83.0	81.9	77.9	74.6	71.7
2	16.1	16.9	19.6	21.7	24.0
3+	0.9	1.3	2.5	3.7	4.4

Table 6 17-19 year old English applicants with a single pending qualification group by application cycle

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Access	0	404	284	227	239
Baccalaureate – AQA	0	0	1	0	1
Baccalaureate – European	33	49	43	45	43
Baccalaureate – International	1,757	2,425	2,685	3,066	2,725
Baccalaureate – Welsh	0	0	0	0	2
BTEC	19,114	24,441	29,718	31,521	29,897
CACHE	685	0	873	938	889
Cambridge Pre U	0	0	42	68	96
Diploma 14-19	0	0	244	287	184
Extended Project	1	11	19	25	20
Foundation Art and Design	4,310	5,424	6,213	7,095	5,371
GCE	170,652	176,711	177,597	170,594	153,253
Irish Leaving Certificate	18	19	16	23	18
Music	39	22	45	56	25
OCR	369	471	561	610	477
SQA Higher, Advanced Higher	8	12	5	7	10
Other	5,629	6,540	4,569	4,855	4,779
Total	202,615	216,529	222,915	219,417	198,029

Table 7 Percentage of 17-19 year old English applicants with a single pending qualification group by application cycle

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Access	0.0	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.1
Baccalaureate - AQA	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Baccalaureate - European	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Baccalaureate - International	0.9	1.1	1.2	1.4	1.4
Baccalaureate - Welsh	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
BTEC	9.4	11.3	13.3	14.4	15.1
CACHE	0.3	0.0	0.4	0.4	0.4
Cambridge Pre U	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Diploma 14-19	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.1	0.1
Extended Project	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Foundation Art and Design	2.1	2.5	2.8	3.2	2.7
GCE	84.2	81.6	79.7	77.7	77.4
Irish Leaving Certificate	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Music	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
OCR	0.2	0.2	0.3	0.3	0.2
SQA Higher, Advanced Higher	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Other	2.8	3.0	2.0	2.2	2.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 8 17-19 year old English applicants with two pending qualification groups by application cycle

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Access	0	69	55	23	32
Baccalaureate – AQA	0	0	656	644	607
Baccalaureate - European	2	1	1	4	5
Baccalaureate - International	174	242	312	416	450
Baccalaureate - Welsh	6	7	12	10	8
BTEC	13,557	18,067	23,289	23,945	26,157
CACHE	380	1	427	449	334
Cambridge Pre U	0	0	724	713	1,118
Diploma 14-19	0	0	299	442	345
Extended Project	333	2,138	7,276	11,977	14,556
Foundation Art and Design	1,593	1,595	1,862	1,532	1,310
GCE	28,652	32,023	40,244	48,697	51,584
Irish Leaving Certificate	0	0	1	0	0
Music	1,160	1,159	1,736	1,814	1,626
OCR	749	1,126	2,046	2,741	3,025
SQA Higher, Advanced Higher	6	5	5	6	7
Other	31,842	32,769	33,179	33,917	31,242
Total	78,454	89,202	112,124	127,330	132,406

Table 9 Percentage of 17-19 year old English applicants with two pending qualification groups by application cycle

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Access	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0
Baccalaureate - AQA	0.0	0.0	0.6	0.5	0.5
Baccalaureate - European	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Baccalaureate - International	0.2	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.3
Baccalaureate - Welsh	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
BTEC	17.3	20.3	20.8	18.8	19.8
CACHE	0.5	0.0	0.4	0.4	0.3
Cambridge Pre U	0.0	0.0	0.6	0.6	0.8
Diploma 14-19	0.0	0.0	0.3	0.3	0.3
Extended Project	0.4	2.4	6.5	9.4	11.0
Foundation Art and Design	2.0	1.8	1.7	1.2	1.0
GCE	36.5	35.9	35.9	38.2	39.0
Irish Leaving Certificate	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Music	1.5	1.3	1.5	1.4	1.2
OCR	1.0	1.3	1.8	2.2	2.3
SQA Higher, Advanced Higher	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Other	40.6	36.7	29.6	26.6	23.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Combinations for applicants with two qualification groups

Table 10 17-19 year old English applicants with BTEC pending qualification and one other pending qualification group by application cycle

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
BTEC and Diploma 14-19	0	0	59	51	45
BTEC and Extended Project	3	90	173	310	623
BTEC and Foundation Art and Design	7	64	126	31	76
BTEC and GCE	4,966	7,322	10,195	11,472	13,645
BTEC and Music	56	44	69	54	61
BTEC and OCR	13	40	114	293	422
BTEC and Other	8,506	10,503	12,542	11,715	11,263
BTEC total (two qualification types)	13,557	18,067	23,289	23,945	26,157

Table 11 Percentage of 17-19 year old English applicants with BTEC pending qualification and one other pending qualification group by application cycle

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
BTEC and Diploma 14-19	0.0	0.0	0.3	0.2	0.2
BTEC and Extended Project	0.0	0.5	0.7	1.3	2.4
BTEC and Foundation Art and Design	0.1	0.4	0.5	0.1	0.3
BTEC and GCE	36.6	40.5	43.8	47.9	52.2
BTEC and Music	0.4	0.2	0.3	0.2	0.2
BTEC and OCR	0.1	0.2	0.5	1.2	1.6
BTEC and Other	62.7	58.1	53.9	48.9	43.1
BTEC total (two qualification types)	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 12 17-19 year old English applicants with GCE pending qualification and one other pending qualification group by application cycle

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
GCE and AQA Baccalaureate	0	0	653	644	607
GCE and International Baccalaureate	60	115	94	145	123
GCE and BTEC	4,966	7,322	10,195	11,472	13,645
GCE and Cambridge Pre U	0	0	709	709	1,104
GCE and Diploma 14 - 19	0	0	136	232	202
GCE and Extended Project	330	2,039	7,000	11,551	13,864
GCE and Foundation Art and Design	294	214	279	296	206
GCE and Music	1,075	1,089	1,618	1,693	1,508
GCE and OCR	535	780	1,534	2,075	2,317
GCE and Other	21,369	20,451	17,996	19,829	17,973
GCE total (two qualification types)	28,652	32,023	40,244	48,697	51,584

Table 13 Percentage of 17-19 year old English applicants with GCE pending qualification and one other pending qualification group by application cycle

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
GCE and AQA Baccalaureate	0.0	0.0	1.6	1.3	1.2
GCE and International Baccalaureate	0.2	0.4	0.2	0.3	0.2
GCE and BTEC	17.3	22.9	25.3	23.6	26.5
GCE and Cambridge Pre U	0.0	0.0	1.8	1.5	2.1
GCE and Diploma 14 – 19	0.0	0.0	0.3	0.5	0.4
GCE and Extended Project	1.2	6.4	17.4	23.7	26.9
GCE and Foundation Art and Design	1.0	0.7	0.7	0.6	0.4
GCE and Music	3.8	3.4	4.0	3.5	2.9
GCE and OCR	1.9	2.4	3.8	4.3	4.5
GCE and Other	74.6	63.9	44.7	40.7	34.8
GCE total (two qualification types)	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Selected GCE A level subjects and grades, overall acceptance rate and acceptance rate to high Tariff group institutions

The acceptance rate for high Tariff group institutions was calculated as the number of applicants accepted to high Tariff group institutions divided by the number of applicants, regardless of the choices that they had made (ie even if they hadn't applied to high Tariff group institutions). Institutions were identified as being high Tariff group if between the 2004 to 2011 cycles the mean Tariff score of their UK-domiciled 18 year old accepted applicants was in the top third.

Table 14 Count, overall acceptance rate and acceptance rate to high Tariff institutions for applicants with A levels in selected subjects as reported through the Awarding Body Linkage, UCAS cycles 2010 and 2011

Subject description	Grade	2010			2011		
		N	Acc rate	High TG acc rate	N	Acc Rate	High TG acc rate
Biology	A*	4,794	87.7	79.4	5,756	87.8	77.9
	A	11,830	84.8	67.5	12,202	85.8	65.4
	B	12,459	84.4	43.1	13,896	85.9	36.1
	C	10,537	80.1	15.2	11,852	82.9	10.5
	D	7,224	74.0	4.8	7,945	74.8	3.2
	E	3,978	66.7	2.4	4,220	66.9	1.6
Chemistry	A*	4,220	87.3	81.4	4,624	87.6	81.6
	A	10,399	84.7	73.0	11,234	86.6	73.3
	B	9,354	83.6	54.1	10,845	84.2	47.2
	C	6,529	78.3	21.8	7,540	79.7	14.4

Subject description	Grade	2010			2011		
		N	Acc rate	High TG acc rate	N	Acc Rate	High TG acc rate
	D	4,173	73.7	6.9	4,815	75.1	3.9
	E	2,347	66.6	2.5	2,506	65.0	1.9
English Literature	A*	5,176	87.4	73.1	5,212	91.4	74.0
	A	8,596	87.8	61	8,563	91.7	60.1
	B	11,305	84.1	26.8	11,872	89.1	24.5
	C	9,831	80.2	6.3	10,560	83.8	4.7
	D	5,534	71.5	1.2	5,514	72.5	0.8
	E	1,342	60.1	0.4	1,279	57.9	0.7
	A*	1,955	91.0	75.9	1,562	94.0	75.5
General Studies	A	3,759	92.0	71.2	3,461	93.9	68.2
	B	7,669	89.3	48.6	6,967	92.2	45.7
	C	9,421	87.1	30.1	8,742	90.8	26.8
	D	8,746	84.7	18.1	7,642	87.2	15.5
	E	5,253	80.4	12.2	4,635	82.9	11.2
	A*	3,417	88.0	77.3	3,672	92.2	81.3
History	A	9,714	89.5	68.6	9,954	92.8	68
	B	12,743	86.3	35.1	13,424	89.7	30.3
	C	9,891	81.9	8.5	10,834	85.2	6.0
	D	5,082	74.0	1.8	4,942	74.4	0.9
	E	1,404	57.3	1.0	1,257	59.4	0.5
	A*	13,602	89.7	80.2	14,998	91.0	80.8
Mathematics	A	21,601	88.2	66.5	22,530	89.5	63.6
	B	15,954	83.4	36.7	17,300	85.6	30.1
	C	10,627	78.4	12.9	11,637	81.1	8.4
	D	6,377	72.6	4.2	7,061	73.6	3.1
	E	3,480	67.1	1.9	3,604	65.9	1.5
	A*	385	92.2	32.7	372	93.0	36.3
Media Studies	A	2,419	88.7	23.5	2,401	92.6	21.7
	B	6,446	84.5	6.5	6,717	88.3	5.5
	C	6,441	77.8	1.2	6,740	79.2	1.0
	D	2,708	66.7	0.4	2,618	67.4	0.2
	E	523	53.5	0.2	456	51.8	0.2
	A*	2,761	92.0	63.2	2,414	94.7	64.5
Psychology	A	7,204	89.7	49.8	7,596	93.6	49.0
	B	12,31	87.6	20.2	13,01	90.6	17.5

Subject description	Grade	2010			2011		
		N	Acc rate	High TG acc rate	N	Acc Rate	High TG acc rate
		0			2		
	C	12,050	81.2	5.0	12,696	84.7	4.1
	D	7,696	72.1	1.3	7,930	73.9	1.1
	E	3,112	59.0	0.7	3,339	61.7	0.8

UCAS has been granted access to the National Pupil Database and has matched this to our applicant data. The GCSE grades achieved for those key stage 4 pupils that were aged 15 at the beginning of September were matched to those applicants that were aged 18 at the beginning of September towards the end of application cycle in which they applied (ie key stage 4 pupils in the 2010 NPD were matched to 2012 UCAS applicants). A mean capped points score was generated using the best eight full GCSE qualifications (GCSE equivalencies include full GCSEs, double award GCSEs such as double award science, iGCSEs and their legacy/subsequent qualifications, but exclude vocational and short course GCSEs). A scoring system was applied to the grades using A* = 8, A = 7 etc. The denominator of the mean was 8 in every case even if the applicant had achieved fewer than eight GCSEs. A mean was then taken for all matched applicants holding that subject and grade. As in the 2010 NPD for the first time accredited iGCSEs have been included to better capture the attainment of pupils in the independent sector and are counted as full GCSE equivalents, pupils identified as attending independent centres in the NPD were excluded from the match across all of the years to give a consistent view.

Table 15 Selected GCE A level subjects and grades and matched (18 year old, English applicants) mean GCSE achievement, UCAS cycles 2010 and 2011 (source of A level results: ABL, source of GCSE results: NPD)

Subject description	Grade	2010		2011		% Diff 2010-2011
		N	Mean	N	Mean	
Biology	A*	2,277	7.7	2,817	7.7	-0.2
	A	6,008	7.4	6,142	7.4	0.1
	B	7,107	7.0	7,622	7.0	0.3
	C	6,367	6.6	6,789	6.6	0.6
	D	4,366	6.3	4,508	6.3	0.2
	E	2,389	6.0	2,386	6.0	0.0
Chemistry	A*	1,666	7.8	1,925	7.7	-0.1
	A	4,562	7.5	5,088	7.5	-0.2
	B	4,863	7.1	5,464	7.1	0.3
	C	3,570	6.7	3,944	6.7	0.0
	D	2,282	6.4	2,458	6.4	0.3
	E	1,233	6.2	1,262	6.2	0.2
English Literature	A*	2,653	7.5	2,759	7.4	-0.1
	A	4,837	7.2	4,780	7.2	0.2

Subject description	Grade	2010		2011		% Diff 2010-2011
		N	Mean	N	Mean	
	B	6,887	6.6	7,242	6.6	0.3
	C	6,347	6.0	6,699	6.0	-0.3
	D	3,598	5.5	3,415	5.5	-0.5
	E	817	5.1	723	5.1	0.1
General Studies	A*	1,409	7.4	1,224	7.5	0.5
	A	2,874	7.4	2,694	7.4	0.3
	B	6,138	7.0	5,566	7.0	0.2
	C	7,557	6.6	7,017	6.6	0.5
	D	7,107	6.3	6,119	6.3	0.6
	E	4,175	5.9	3,577	6.0	1.2
History	A*	1,609	7.5	1,753	7.5	-0.1
	A	5,036	7.2	5,258	7.2	-0.3
	B	7,703	6.7	8,018	6.7	-0.2
	C	6,463	6.2	6,860	6.1	-0.4
	D	3,439	5.8	3,203	5.7	-0.9
	E	920	5.4	798	5.4	-0.6
Mathematics	A*	5,914	7.5	6,850	7.5	-0.5
	A	10,829	7.3	11,398	7.3	-0.1
	B	8,542	6.9	9,361	6.8	-0.3
	C	5,839	6.5	6,587	6.5	-0.1
	D	3,533	6.3	3,946	6.3	0.6
	E	1,977	6.1	1,961	6.1	-1.0
Media Studies	A*	285	6.7	280	6.6	-1.1
	A	1,715	6.4	1,705	6.3	-0.8
	B	4,511	5.9	4,646	5.9	-0.3
	C	4,295	5.4	4,385	5.3	-1.0
	D	1,647	5.0	1,596	4.9	-1.3
	E	297	4.7	244	4.6	-3.2
Psychology	A*	1,918	7.1	1,697	7.2	0.5
	A	5,093	6.9	5,266	6.9	0.4
	B	8,699	6.4	8,861	6.4	0.4
	C	8,389	6.0	8,416	6.0	0.1
	D	5,204	5.6	5,032	5.6	0.3
	E	1,951	5.4	2,051	5.4	-0.6