

November 2014

Dear Colleague,

### **Cambridge's position on the new AS Levels**

We have for some years been strongly of the view that for A Level students AS Levels taken at the end of Year 12 are of significant educational benefit. They allow students to assess their academic progress, review their A Level choices, and make appropriate higher education applications with confidence. Our own research, supported by a recent study by the University of Bristol, confirms that AS is a better predictor of success at university than GCSE.

For this reason, wherever possible, we will continue to use UMS scores, achieved in public examinations at the end of Year 12, in our admissions decisions as long as we have access to such scores in some subjects.

We remain in favour of the retention of the current link between AS and A2 and the associated generation of UMS results. In the event that A Level reforms proceed as planned, we continue to urge the Government to enable students in all English state schools and colleges to take end of Year 12 examinations, properly moderated by Awarding Bodies, in all of the subjects they are taking in the sixth form.

For the 2015-17 cohort of students starting their sixth form studies in an environment where there is likely to be a mixture of reformed and unreformed A Levels, we will continue to use UMS in those subjects that retain it. **We strongly encourage potential applicants to take AS Level examinations in at least three, and preferably four, subjects, whether reformed or not, at the end of Year 12.** This will provide us with a strong measure of applicants' recent academic progress, will assist us and the students in judging whether an application to Cambridge is likely to be competitive, and will provide reassurance that grade predictions are not relied upon too heavily in a new system.

AS levels taken in four subjects can provide an extremely useful, externally assessed exam that will avoid schools and colleges having to resource and run their own internal mocks. It will be both a robust indicator of student progress and of real practical utility, in that a) it can act as a terminal exam for students not continuing with four subjects; b) it can help students choose three subjects for Year 13, if they are dropping one, in an informed way; c) it will provide unarguable validation and encouragement in advance of university application for the bright but under-confident, or for those on a sharply upward academic trajectory; and d) it will provide candidates for university with recent public exam results to boost their applications.

We recognise some schools and colleges may not offer this as an option. Where a student presents without externally moderated Year 12 AS results as a result of school policy or limited availability of subjects that may have restricted a student's choices we would ask schools and colleges to address the policy issues in their UCAS reference. Our admission goal remains to select the best students, regardless of their educational regime. We are committed to ensuring that no student is disadvantaged within our processes by the model of provision offered by their educational institution.

Further information will be available at [www.cam.ac.uk/qualificationreform](http://www.cam.ac.uk/qualificationreform) in due course. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sewell', with a large, stylized initial 'S' and a horizontal line extending from the end.

Dr Mike Sewell  
Director of Admissions for the Cambridge Colleges