

Policy statement on qualification reforms to A Levels and GCSEs in England

The University of Reading recognises that reforms to the UK curriculum for A Levels and GCSEs will change the post-16 educational landscape in the forthcoming years. We remain committed to a fair and inclusive undergraduate admissions policy, admitting students from a broad range of backgrounds and qualifications. We recognise that A Levels remain one of the most popular entry qualifications for our students and the aim of this statement is to set out the University of Reading's position on qualification reform to A Levels and GCSEs in England over the next two years. We hope that this will provide reassurance and guidance to schools and students making decisions about AS and A Levels in their preparation for higher education.

A Levels

Between September 2015 and 2017 AS Levels and A Levels will become linear qualifications. This will involve the decoupling of the AS Level from the A Level making it a standalone qualification. Funding changes for schools and colleges mean that some schools and colleges may decide not to enter students for AS Levels. In addition to this, due to the scale and complexity of the reform, Ofqual will be implementing these changes through a phased approach. Some subjects (notably modern foreign languages and mathematics) will be introduced in later phases.

The University of Reading recognises that this will result in applicants presenting a range of reformed and unreformed qualifications for entry to our undergraduate degree programmes whilst these qualifications are undergoing change. We therefore wish to provide assurance that we will continue to take into account the educational context of each and every application so that we can ensure that both the phased approach taken by Ofqual and any local policy decisions undertaken by schools or colleges do not disadvantage an applicant in their preparation for study at the University of Reading. We have a long tradition of assessing applications holistically when making a final decision on whether to admit an individual. We will continue to review every application on its individual merit and strength and will not favour either the reformed or unreformed A Levels whilst the transition to reformed A Levels is taking place.

AS Levels

The University of Reading has already begun to move away from including AS Level results in issuing offer conditions. We expect that in some instances, where schools retain the provision of teaching AS Levels, applicants may still wish to take AS exams and include them on their University application. Where AS results are included they will be taken in to consideration in addition to the other qualifications presented to us. However, applicants studying subjects to A Level without a corresponding AS exam will not be disadvantaged in their application to the University of Reading. We will continue to use predicted A Level grades and GCSE or equivalent attainment, together with references and personal statements, and where necessary portfolios or interview performance, to consider applicants for entry.

We understand that the process of predicting final A Level grades for school teachers and advisors may become more challenging during this period of reform, often in the absence of achieved AS grades, and with a mixed portfolio of reformed and unreformed qualifications. We remain committed to ensuring that each and every applicant is given fair assessment on the basis of their entire application and we will ensure that all factors are taken in to consideration when reviewing every application. Our Admissions team are accustomed to working with complexity in admissions and will be able to respond positively to the changing nature of academic information provided on application forms.

Core Maths

In England, a new 'Core Maths' qualification was introduced in September 2014 with the intention of increasing the number of people who study mathematics beyond GCSE level. This qualification focuses on the use of mathematics skills in contextualised, complex scenarios. The University of Reading supports and values the ethos behind this qualification and recognises that it may be beneficial to a range of degree subjects that do not generally ask for AS or A Level Mathematics but where enhanced numerical or statistical skills may be helpful. Core Maths is not a compulsory element of post-16 study and we are not currently able to accept Core Maths in lieu of AS or A Level Mathematics where this is a specified requirement for entry. However, whilst we do not, at this time, include it as a formal condition of an offer to our applicants, we do welcome the evidence of breadth of study and skills development that studying mathematics at post-16 level can provide.

Practical Science Endorsement

In England the reformed A Levels in Biology, Chemistry and Physics will assess practical skills separately to the grading of the written examination on a pass/fail basis.

The University of Reading understands that the practical skills assessed in this way are an important indication of the candidate's knowledge and developed skill set in these subjects. We also acknowledge that this approach will not be applied to A Levels in Northern Ireland and Wales where the practical assessment will remain an integral part of the overall A Level grade. We will therefore require applicants who are offering one or more of these reformed A level science subjects in England to pass the practical skills assessment in addition to achieving the required grade(s) in the written examination(s).

GCSEs

GCSEs in England are also undergoing a period of reform through a phased approach. In August 2017 the first phase of reformed GCSEs in England (English Language, English Literature and Mathematics) will be graded numerically (Northern Ireland and Wales will retain their alpha grading structure). In August 2018 numerical grading will be adopted for the second phase of reformed GCSEs (in Sciences, History, Geography and Languages). The new grades will be from 1 (the lowest grade) to 9 (the highest grade). Ofqual has stated that a grade of 4 will equate with the existing C grade as it intends to give further differentiation at the upper end of the ability range. Where we currently have specific GCSE level requirements (for degrees in Modern Languages and Business) we will require the appropriate numerical grade from the reformed GCSEs taken in England (and will continue to require the appropriate grade from those applicants who took their GCSEs in Northern Ireland or Wales).

All applicants are advised to consult our webpages for details on entry criteria at course level:

<http://www.reading.ac.uk/Ready-to-Study.aspx> If you have any further queries regarding the upcoming A level changes, please call our Admissions Team on 0118 378 8372 or email ugadmissions@reading.ac.uk