



Department
for Education

Further additional GCSE and A level subject content consultation

Government consultation

Launch date 03 November 2015

Respond by 15 December 2015

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Introduction

This consultation asks for views on reformed subject content for a number of GCSE, AS and A level subjects which will be first taught in schools from 2017. This consultation seeks views on subjects additional to those covered in the consultation papers launched in July and September 2015 and should be treated as a separate consultation exercise.

Who this is for

- schools, including academies, colleges and further education institutions
- teachers, and organisations representing school teachers and lecturers
- subject associations
- parents and young people
- higher education
- employers/business sector
- local authorities
- awarding organisations

Issue date

The consultation was issued on 03 November 2015

Enquiries

If your enquiry is related to the policy content of the consultation you can contact the team on:

Rebecca Viney on 0207 783 8053

or at 2017GCSEsandAlevels.CONULTATION@education.gsi.gov.uk

If your enquiry is related to the DfE e-consultation website or the consultation process in general, you can contact the DfE Ministerial and Public Communications Division by email: consultation.unit@education.gsi.gov.uk or by telephone: 0370 000 2288 or via the [DfE Contact us page](#).

Additional copies

Additional copies are available electronically and can be downloaded from [GOV.UK DfE consultations](#).

The response

The results of the consultation and the department's response will be [published on GOV.UK](#) early in the new year.

About this consultation

The government is reforming GCSEs so that they are more academically demanding and knowledge based, and so that they set expectations which match those of the highest performing countries. The new A levels will be linear qualifications and ensure that students are better prepared to progress to undergraduate study and the world of work.

Reforms to GCSE and A level qualifications are already underway. New GCSEs, AS and A levels started to be taught from September 2015 in some subjects, and further subjects will be taught from September 2016¹. Revised content for these subjects has been published by the department.

This consultation seeks views on the remaining subjects to be first taught from September 2017: GCSE short course in physical education; and AS and A levels in geology and politics.

The proposed subject content requirements are designed to become regulatory documents, which set out the minimum knowledge, understanding and skills needed for GCSE and, AS and A level qualifications. They provide the framework for awarding organisations to create the detail of qualification specifications.

Whilst responsibility for specifying the subject content of GCSEs and, AS and A levels lies with the department, the determination of the assessment arrangements is the sole responsibility of Ofqual, the independent regulator. Ofqual is therefore consulting in parallel on GCSE and, AS and A level assessment arrangements for these subjects, including the assessment objectives. In order to understand how students will be expected to engage with these subjects it is important to consider both the content and the assessment objectives.

We would like to hear your views on our proposals.

Respond online

To help us analyse the responses please use the online system wherever possible. Visit www.education.gov.uk/consultations to submit your response.

¹ See “Background and context of the consultation” below for further information about the reforms to date.

Other ways to respond

If for exceptional reasons, you are unable to use the online system, for example because you use specialist accessibility software that is not compatible with the system, you may download a word document version of the form and email it or post it.

By email

2017GCSEsandAlevels.CONSULTATION@education.gsi.gov.uk

By post

Rebecca Viney
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Great Smith St
Westminster
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UK

Deadline

The consultation closes at 17.00 on 15 December 2015

Background and context of the consultation

GCSE reform

The primary purpose of GCSEs is to show the progress and achievement of students of all abilities against demanding and fulfilling subject content. GCSEs must also enable progression to further vocational and academic study, and make sure young people gain the skills they need to get a good job; an apprenticeship; or a university place and success in life.

We have reformed GCSEs, making them more rigorous and ensuring that they teach the core knowledge demanded by employers and by further and high educational institutions.

New GCSEs will remain universal qualifications which are accessible, with good teaching, to the same proportion of students currently sitting GCSEs at the end of key stage 4. Reformed GCSEs will be graded on a new 9 – 1 scale. Under the new grading scale a ‘good pass’ (currently a C grade) will become a grade 5. The new ‘good pass’ is comparable to a high C or low B under the current system, making it broadly in line with the average performance of pupils in top-performing countries such as Finland, Canada, the Netherlands and Switzerland. The new “good pass” measure will be used to hold the Government and schools to account through the performance tables.

The GCSE reform process to date

The department consulted widely with subject experts, schools and teachers to develop the content for reformed GCSEs in English Baccalaureate (EBacc) subjects. We published GCSE subject content in [English language](#), [English literature](#) and [mathematics](#) in November 2013, for first teaching from September 2015. We then published GCSE [subject content](#) in ancient languages, history, geography, science, and modern foreign languages in April 2014, for first teaching from September 2016.

The Secretary of State announced the second stage of GCSE reform in April 2014. GCSEs in art and design, citizenship studies, computer science, dance, design and technology, drama, music, physical education, and religious studies will be reformed for first teaching in schools from September 2016. We published [subject content](#) for art and design, computer science, dance, music, and physical education in January 2015, and religious studies, citizenship studies and drama in February 2015.

A level reform

The primary purpose of A levels is to prepare students for undergraduate study or employment. The purpose of AS qualifications is to enable students to broaden the

range of subjects they study post-16, and to support progression to further study or employment. Reforms to AS and A levels are intended to ensure that they continue to meet this purpose, and in particular, to respond to concerns from higher education institutions that students lack some of the skills necessary for undergraduate study². The new A levels will be linear, and as the first new A levels become linear from 2015, the AS will be entirely decoupled from the A level, so that the marks do not count towards the final A level grade. This change will allow more time for teaching and for students to develop a deep understanding of their subject without constant testing and examination. The process of reform gives universities a greater role in the design and development of the new qualifications, ensuring our exams command the respect of universities and employers.

The A level reform process to date

A review of A level subject content was conducted between April and July 2013 by the four awarding organisations for A levels in England. The review was independently chaired by Professor Mark E. Smith, Vice Chancellor of Lancaster University. As a result of this review, [subject content](#) in art and design, biology, business, chemistry, computer science, economics, English language, English literature, English language and literature, history, physics, psychology, and sociology was published in April 2014. These new AS and A levels are being taught from September 2015.

Responsibility for reviewing subject content for the remaining facilitating subjects - modern foreign languages, ancient languages, mathematics, further mathematics - and geography was remitted to a new independent body, the A level Content Advisory Board (ALCAB). ALCAB provided recommendations on these subjects and we consulted on them from July to September 2014. Content in these subjects was published in December 2014. These subjects, excluding mathematics and further mathematics are being first taught in schools from September 2016. The reformed maths and further maths AS and A level will be taught in schools from September 2017: this decision was taken on the advice of ALCAB who recommended that the first cohort to study the reformed A level should have studied the reformed GCSE.

In April 2014, the Secretary of State announced that a further set of A levels would be reformed for teaching from September 2016. Reformed AS and A level [subject content](#)

² 2012 Ipsos MORI Social Research Institute, Fit for Purpose? The view of the higher education sector, teachers and employers on the suitability of A levels, <http://www.ofqual.gov.uk/files/2012-04-03-fit-for-purpose-a-levels.pdf>;
Cambridge Assessment, What are the impacts of qualifications for 16 to 19 year olds on higher education? A survey of 633 university lecturers, <http://www.cambridgeassessment.org.uk/images/116010-cambridge-assessment-he-research-survey-of-lecturers-executive-summary.pdf>.

for dance, music, and physical education was published in January 2015, and for drama and theatre, and religious studies in February 2015.

The reform process for subjects to be taught in schools from 2017

Content is being developed for a further set of GCSEs, AS and A levels to be taught from 2017. This follows work already conducted by Ofqual, including a consultation on the final phase of reform, the results of which were published in [December 2014](#). Ofqual has already announced that any subject not reformed for first teaching in 2015 or 2016 must either be withdrawn from 2017 or be reformed for teaching from 2017. The exception to this is certain languages, which we have already announced will be developed for first teaching in September 2018.

Following this consultation Ofqual confirmed a set of principles, which they would apply to existing and new subjects, to determine whether it would be appropriate to develop core content in any particular subject. Ofqual then invited awarding organisations to submit proposals for subjects they wanted to reform for 2017. In May 2015 Ofqual completed [their review of the subjects](#) for which awarding organisations submitted proposals, and decided that the following subjects would go forward to the next stage of content development:

GCSE subjects	AS and A level subjects
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ancient history • Astronomy • Business • Classical civilisation • Economics • Electronics • Engineering • Film studies • Geology • Information and communications technology • Media studies • Psychology • Sociology • Statistics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accounting • Ancient history • Archaeology • Classical civilisation • Creative writing • Electronics • Environmental science • Film studies • General studies • Geology • Government and politics • Health and social care • History of art • Information and communications technology • Law • Media studies • Music technology • Philosophy • Statistics

Awarding organisations have worked with subject associations, subject experts and, for A levels in particular, representatives from higher education institutions, to develop the

subject content for the subjects included in this consultation. As part of the development process awarding organisations were required to:

- at A level, actively involve subject experts, including university academics, in the development of content to ensure that the proposed content facilitates progression to higher education and builds upon the revised GCSE content
- at GCSE, ensure that the proposed content for GCSEs increases the level of demand, and is sufficiently academically demanding
- develop content that will result in rigorous academic qualifications appropriate for GCSE or A level study
- develop content that will meet Ofqual's confirmed set of principles
- work with Ofqual to ensure that the content can be regulated.

Earlier this year we confirmed that AS and A levels in general studies, creative writing and, health and social care would not be developed further. This was because, as explained in the July and September consultation documents, it was not possible to draft subject content in accordance with the department's guidance and Ofqual's principles for reformed AS and A levels.

The department consulted on [revised content](#) for astronomy, business, economics, engineering, geology, psychology and sociology GCSEs between July and September 2015, and design and technology GCSE from July to August 2015, for first teaching from 2017. We will publish the outcomes of this consultation later this year.

The department consulted on [revised content](#) for design and technology, environmental science, history of art, music technology and philosophy AS and A levels for first teaching from 2017, between July and September 2015. We will publish the outcomes of this consultation later this year.

The department is currently consulting on [revised content](#) for ancient history, classical civilisation, electronics, film studies, media studies and statistics GCSEs for first teaching from 2017. This consultation will end on 5 November. We will publish the outcomes from this consultation early in the new year.

The department is currently consulting on [revised content](#) for accounting, ancient history, archaeology, classical civilisation, electronics, film studies, law, media studies and statistics AS and A levels for first teaching from 2017. This consultation will end on 5 November. We will publish the outcomes from this consultation early in the new year.

The reformed computer science GCSE and A levels provide a strong foundation for further academic and vocational study and for employment. Students will develop the computational thinking skills needed for today's economy – including coding and important information technology topics such as cyber security, networking and data storage. In the last year alone, the numbers studying computer science GCSE have more than doubled.

It is right that schools continue to focus on the digital knowledge that will best prepare young people for further study and employment. Ministers have therefore taken the decision not to approve two GCSEs and A levels in a similar qualification space. The IT GCSE and IT A level will not be redeveloped.

The reforms of academic qualifications that are underway are the most significant changes since the introduction of GCSEs. These are just one part of our ambitious reform programme to give young people the skills they need to get on in life. The priority for now is to give schools time and space to provide excellent and inspiring teaching of the new qualifications. We therefore do not intend to reform any further qualifications in 2018 beyond the lesser taught languages that we have already committed to.

This consultation

This consultation seeks views on proposed reformed content in the following subjects:

- GCSE short course in physical education
- AS and A levels in geology and politics

The organisations consulted for these subjects are listed at annex 1.

Proposed new subject content for GCSEs

Consultation questions

1. Is the revised GCSE short course content in physical education (PE) subjects appropriate? Please consider:
 - whether there is a suitable level of challenge
 - whether the content reflects what students need to know in order to progress to further academic and vocational education
 - whether the amount of content in the qualification is appropriate and, if not, whether you have any suggestions for removing or adding content

Please provide evidence to support your response:

Proposal and rationale for GCSE subjects

This section outlines the key proposed changes to current GCSE subject content. The full subject content can be downloaded from the consultation page on GOV.UK.

PE short course GCSE

The PE GCSE short course represents half the content of the revised PE GCSE, and is drawn from the new GCSE content which was consulted on and later published by the Department in January 2015. The new subject content reflects increased rigour by clarifying what is expected of students and increasing the theoretical knowledge needed to underpin physical activity and practical performance. Students will need to understand how anatomy and physiology and the principles of movement affect performance, the benefits of physical activity and sport to health, fitness and well-being and will need to use data analysis to evaluate aspects of physical activity and sport. Students will need to be assessed in the role of player/performer in one team and one individual sport/ activity.

Proposed new subject content for AS and A levels

Consultation questions

2. Is the revised AS and A level content in each of these subjects appropriate?
Please consider whether the content reflects what students need to know in order to progress to undergraduate study

Please provide evidence to support your response.

(a) geology

(b) politics

3. Is the amount of content for politics AS and A level appropriate and, if not, do you have any suggestions for removing or adding content

4.

(a) Is the size and demand of the two options in politics A level (comparative: USA, and global politics) comparable and, if not, do you have any suggestions for removing or adding content

(b) Is the size and demand of the optional areas within global politics (conflict; poverty; environment and human rights) comparable and, if not, do you have any suggestions for removing or adding content

Proposal and rationale for AS and A level subjects

This section outlines the proposed changes to current AS and A level subject content. The full subject content can be downloaded from the consultation page on GOV.UK.

Geology AS and A Level

Current content for AS and A level geology is set out in an annex of the science criteria. The reformed content ensures a greater level of detail and sets clear minimum requirements that all specifications must follow.

The reformed content is now set out with 80% of the content prescribed as 'core' for all students, with the remaining 20% of content including options which AOs will set out in detail within their specifications. This is a change from current content where only 60% of content is prescribed.

The reformed content has been reviewed with higher education representatives to provide parity with other natural science AS and A levels. New core content includes

requirements for students to have knowledge and understanding of geochemistry, the role of fluids in geology, engineering geology and geohazard risk analysis. New non-core content includes planetary geology, Quaternary geology, basin analysis and critical resources. The reformed content also requires students to take a more quantitative and mathematical approach to the study of geology, with the mathematical requirements set out in detail in line with other science AS and A levels.

The reformed content also addresses higher education concerns that students should develop a range of practical skills and techniques relevant to the expectations of a first year undergraduate entering a physical sciences course. All students must carry out two days of fieldwork at AS and four days of fieldwork for A level, and students will be assessed across a full range of practical competencies. The required skills and techniques have been developed with higher education stakeholders and set out clearly, as in other science AS and A levels, to ensure students cover laboratory techniques common to all natural sciences and field techniques specific to geology.

Politics AS and A level

The revised subject content for politics contains significantly greater detail than the previous criteria. This will ensure students, teachers, higher education representatives and others have a clear idea of the content all students will be required to study during the course. The revised content aims to enable students to develop a critical awareness of the changing nature of politics and of key contemporary political issues. The title of the course has been changed from politics and government to politics to ensure consistency with the titles of degrees in higher education.

The reformed content will provide students with a balance of historical and contemporary content, and enable them to know and understand contemporary politics through the study of key events and movements in the development of the United Kingdom's political system. All students will also gain a global perspective through the study of the European Union, which was thought important by higher education representatives to support progression to university.

For the first time, at A Level, all students will now know and understand the core political theories of conservatism, liberalism and socialism and the ideas of their key thinkers such as Edmund Burke, John Stuart Mill, John Locke and Mary Wollstonecraft. This will ensure students understand the foundational concepts that will prepare them for undergraduate study.

A level students will have the opportunity to study either: the government and politics of the USA or global politics. The former has been made more rigorous through new comparative requirements. While the latter has rigorous and up-to-date new content following feedback from higher education representatives for example by requiring students to know and understand the interaction between international organisations

and non-governmental organisations and two of the following global issues: conflict; poverty; environment and human rights. These changes have been made to ensure that the qualification is suitable for the study of politics in a contemporary, global world and provides the necessary skills and competencies to progress to university study.

Equalities Impact

In accordance with the Equality Act 2010, public bodies must have due regard, when making decisions, to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation; advance equality of opportunity; and foster good relations, in relation to relevant protected characteristics. It would therefore be very helpful to understand if, in your view, there is any potential for the subject content to have a disproportionate impact upon any student with relevant protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010. It would be particularly helpful to understand if any respondents have evidence to support concerns they may have about such impacts.

Consultation questions

5. Do you think that any of the proposals have the potential to have a disproportionate impact, positive or negative, on specific students, in particular those with 'relevant protected characteristics'? (The relevant protected characteristics are disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.) Please provide evidence to support your response.
6. How could any adverse impact be reduced and how could the subject content of the short course GCSE and/or AS and A levels be altered to better advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a protected characteristic and those who do not share it? Please provide evidence to support your response.

Annex 1 - Subject experts consulted by awarding organisations in the development of proposed subject content

Subject experts were consulted as part of the subject content development process including representatives from the following organisations:

Physical education Short Course GCSE: The PE short course represents half the content of the revised PE GCSE that was developed with input from Association of PE, Sport England, Youth Sport Trust, and teachers and individuals with expertise in the PE and school sport sector, the latter of which have advised and provided input into the development of the short course.

Geology AS and A level: Atkins Limited; British Geological Survey; Cowbridge Comprehensive; Earth Science Education Unit, Keele University; Earth Science Teachers Association; Geologists' Association; Highfields School; Jurassic Coast Partnership; King Edward VI College, Stourbridge; King George V College; Maersk Oil Ltd; Mineral Products Association; Natural History Museum; Royal Microscopical Society; Royal School of Mines, Imperial College; The College of Richard Colley; The Geological Society; Truro College; University Geoscience UK (CHUGD); Youth Hostel Association

Politics AS and A level: Bancroft's School; Bedford Modern School; Birkenhead Sixth Form College; Brighton College, British International Studies Association; Buckswood School, Canford School; Caterham School; Cheadle Hulme School; Cheltenham Ladies' College; Clitheroe Royal Grammar School Sixth Form; Croydon High School; Croydon College; Durham School; Esher College; Eton College; Fettes College; Forest School; Haberdashers' Aske's Boys' School; Harrogate Ladies' College; Highgate School; JFS School; King Edward VI College; King Edward VI Handsworth School; Kingston Grammar School; Latymer Upper School; Loughborough Grammar School; Manchester Grammar School; Merchiston Castle School; North Shropshire College; Parmiter's School; Political Studies Association; Saltash.net Community School; St Paul's School; Stowe School; The Bedford Sixth Form; The Malling School; Tiffin School; Tonbridge School; Trinity School; Welbeck College; William Hulme's Grammar School; Yateley School

Higher education institutions were also consulted during the AS and A level development process for each of these subjects.

Awarding organisations were unable to consult with all subject groups and we welcome the input of organisations, teachers and students in this public consultation.



Department
for Education

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