

New A levels: subject content consultation

**Following on from the recommendations of
Professor Mark E. Smith's report on the review of
current GCE 'specification content' within subject
criteria (July 2013)**

October 2013

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To: schools; colleges; organisations representing school teachers and lecturers; subject associations; parents; young people; higher education; further education; academies; employers/business sector; local authorities; teachers; awarding organisations.

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Foreword by Professor Mark E. Smith

When asked to chair a review of A level content in key subjects, I was delighted to accept the challenge. As Vice-Chancellor of Lancaster University, I welcome a new cohort of students every autumn. A levels are the most important qualifications for higher education. It is the responsibility of higher education, alongside other stakeholders, to ensure that the next generation of undergraduates is as well prepared as possible. The Government has made clear that higher education should have a greater role in reforming A levels. I fully support an approach where universities play a key role, as we see first hand what A level students have learned and the skills they have acquired.

The review that I chaired drew together the views of a large range of academics, learned societies, schools, industry and other interested practitioners that had been collected over an extended period prior to the short review period itself. I am confident that the process followed in carrying out that review was robust. The report setting out the recommendations from that process can be accessed using the link below¹. This consultation invites views on the subject content that has been developed subsequently by Awarding Organisations. I believe the proposals set out here update, modernise and improve A level content.

The proposed changes are confined to the following subjects: art and design; biology; business studies; chemistry; computing; economics; English language; English literature; English language and literature; geography; history; physics; psychology; and sociology. The many individuals who took the time to review the content of current A levels and suggest improvements must be thanked.

Some of the proposed changes are more significant than others. I hope you will find time to read the report and respond to this consultation. You may also want to see Ofqual's parallel consultation on assessment arrangements for the new A levels and some necessary associated regulatory changes. I look forward to hearing your views.



Professor Mark E. Smith

¹ Professor Mark E. Smith (July 2013), Independent Chair's report on the review of current GCE 'specification content' within subject criteria. A report to Ofqual. <http://ofqual.gov.uk/files/2013-09-06-smith-review-of-specification-content-july-2013.pdf>

1. Summary

1.1. In March 2012, the Secretary of State for Education set out a programme of reform for A levels. In line with the Government's commitment in the 2010 Schools White Paper, *The Importance of Teaching*², he set out that universities should be more involved in the design of A levels to help ensure that the qualifications equip students for higher education. He also confirmed the Government's ambition for all A levels to be linear, with all examinations at the end of the two year course.

Subsequently, in an exchange of letters with the Ofqual Chief Regulator, he confirmed that the AS should become a separate, stand-alone qualification, also taught and assessed on a linear basis³.

1.2. Following the Secretary of State's announcement that he wished universities to influence the content of A levels, Awarding Organisations began consulting with university representatives. The Awarding Organisations used a wide range of consultative mechanisms including their specialist subject panels, focus groups, telephone interviews and analysis of literature from interested parties.

1.3. In March 2013, the Secretary of State confirmed his intention that new linear A levels should be available for first teaching from 2015. In order to address the concerns raised about the A level qualification and assessment structure to this timescale, it was necessary to establish a process prior to the establishment of the A level Content Advisory Board (ALCAB) being formed by the Russell Group of universities, which will be in place from 2014⁴.

1.4. As a result, a review of A level subject content was conducted between April and July 2013 by the four Awarding Organisations for A levels in England⁵, working with representatives from a range of higher education institutions. The review considered A levels in: art and design; biology; business studies; chemistry; computing; economics; English language, English literature; English language and literature; geography; history; mathematics; physics; psychology; and sociology. The review was independently chaired by Professor Mark E. Smith, Vice-Chancellor of Lancaster University.

1.5. The review was tasked with considering whether the existing A level content was fit for purpose, and if not, whether it would require minor or major changes to

² See <http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/toolsandinitiatives/schoolswhitepaper/b0068570/the-importance-of-teaching>

³ For the exchange of letters where this was announced see <http://www.ofqual.gov.uk/qualifications-and-assessments/qualification-reform/a-level-reform/>

⁴ <http://www.russellgroup.ac.uk>

⁵ OCR, AQA, Pearson, and WJEC

make it so. As part of their wider consultation feeding into the formal review period, Awarding Organisations consulted with university representatives as well as other key stakeholders, including professional bodies, learned societies, schools, industry, and others. A summary of the preparatory work and subsequent engagement with higher education representatives and others can be found at Annex A to this consultation.

1.6. In some subjects, the review recommended specific amendments to A level content. It also recommended that further work be undertaken to develop new A level content in areas where the review panels identified changes that were needed in order to:

- engage A level students in deeper learning and improve their opportunities to demonstrate their accumulated knowledge and understanding across the breadth of their subject;
- ensure that A level students are prepared for higher education and that the qualifications meet the needs of universities, reflecting the involvement of higher education institutions in A level design; and
- adapt A level subject content to reflect the fact that examinations will take place at the end of two years of study for those starting courses from September 2015 onwards⁶.

1.7. The review concluded that, of the 15 A levels originally considered, 14 could be revised by the Awarding Organisations and delivered for first teaching in 2015. Mathematics was the only subject that could not be delivered to that timescale.

1.8. Following the review, Awarding Organisations were asked to suggest changes to the A level subject content to implement the specific recommendations made in the report. Where the report identified that further work was needed to develop A level content Awarding Organisations were tasked with developing this content.

1.9. Awarding Organisations were also asked to consider the content for AS qualifications where it was specified in the current subject criteria, to confirm it was appropriate for a stand-alone AS qualification and consider what changes were needed to reflect the revised A level content.

1.10. This consultation seeks views on the proposals made by Awarding Organisations to translate the issues raised during Professor Smith's review on changes to A level subject content and to highlight the content for AS qualifications. It summarises the key content changes proposed for each individual subject⁷. It asks

⁶ For discussion of these issues, see page 3 of Professor Mark E. Smith's report.

⁷ www.education.gov.uk/consultations

whether the revised A level subject content gives students the foundation to progress to undergraduate study.

2. About this consultation

Coverage of the consultation

2.1. The AS and A level subject content that is covered by this consultation are: art and design; biology; business studies; chemistry; computing; economics; English language; English literature; English language and literature; geography; history; physics; psychology; and sociology. The aim is for revised A levels in these subjects to be taught in schools in England from September 2015. Mathematics, further mathematics and languages A levels are due to be taught in schools from September 2016 and consulted upon at a later date.

2.2. Ofqual, the qualifications regulator, will be consulting in parallel on proposed changes to the assessment objectives (the principle abilities that candidates taking that qualification should be required to demonstrate) and assessment arrangements (how assessment will be conducted) for each of the subjects covered in this consultation and on a range of other regulatory issues.

2.3. This consultation is available at <https://www.education.gov.uk/consultations/> and Ofqual's parallel consultation is available at <http://comment.ofqual.gov.uk/a-level-regulatory-requirements-october-2013/>. **We would ask respondents to reply separately to each consultation.**

2.4. This consultation, beginning on 25 October, will be live for 8 weeks until 20 December 2013. Early in January 2014, Professor Smith will reconvene the review panels that made the recommendations which led to the development of the proposals being consulted upon in this consultation. The review panels will consider the responses to this consultation and make recommendations to the Secretary of State on any further changes that should be made to the AS and A level subject content. The Secretary of State will take decisions on the final A and AS subject content and provide the final subject content to Ofqual.

2.5. Details of how this content will be used by Ofqual to regulate the revised qualifications and the Awarding Organisations that award them can be found in Ofqual's consultation.

How to use the consultation documents

2.6. In responding to this consultation, respondents should refer to the revised AS and A level subject content for each of the subjects. These can be found via links on the consultation website (<https://www.education.gov.uk/consultations/>).

3. Context of the consultation

3.1. The primary purpose of A levels is to prepare students for degree-level study: over 80% of students with two or more A levels go on to higher education⁸.

3.2. Research commissioned by Ofqual found that while higher education representatives and teachers agree that A levels prepare most students well for higher education, some higher education staff in specific subjects believed that new undergraduates lacked some of the general skills essential for undergraduate learning. These included both specific academic skills such as researching, essay-writing and referencing, and the wider skills of problem solving, analysis and critical thinking. In addition, interviewees noted that some of their students lacked the requisite levels of literacy skills and mathematics⁹. Research from Cambridge Assessment found that over 50% of lecturers think that new undergraduates are underprepared for degree-level study, and 72% of lecturers have had to adapt their teaching approaches to teach underprepared first year undergraduates¹⁰.

What are the key changes?

3.3. The Government has set out its intention to reform A levels so that they are linear qualifications with all assessment at the end of two years¹¹. It has done so because it believes that linear A levels, assessed at the end of two years, will allow students to develop a deeper knowledge of their subjects and greater intellectual maturity over the duration of their study. In reforming A levels, a priority has been the involvement of leading universities in advising on A level content¹², focusing on those subjects which are most commonly required for entry to leading universities¹³.

⁸ 2012 HESA (Higher Education Statistics Agency) Student Record dataset statistically matched onto a 2010 KS5 National Pupil Database extract.

⁹ John Higon, James Noble, Sarah Pope, Naomi Boal, Steven Ginnis, Rory Donaldson and Helen Greevy of the Ipsos MORI Social Research Institute (April 2012), *Fit for Purpose? The view of the higher education sector, teachers and employers on the suitability of A levels*. Commissioned by Ofqual: <http://www.ofqual.gov.uk/files/2012-04-03-fit-for-purpose-a-levels.pdf>

¹⁰ Irenka Suto, Cambridge Assessment (April 2012), *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>

¹¹ <http://education.gov.uk/childrenandyoungpeople/youngpeople/qandlearning/alevels/a00220415/changes-a-levels>

¹² For the policy background on this, see the exchange of letters here: <http://www.ofqual.gov.uk/qualifications-and-assessments/qualification-reform/a-level-reform/>

¹³ The “facilitating subjects” identified by the Russell Group are: maths and further maths; English (literature); physics; biology; chemistry; geography; history; and languages (modern and classical). Their *Informed Choices* document is available at <http://www.russellgroup.ac.uk/informed-choices.aspx>

3.4. The Secretary of State announced in spring 2013 that when A levels become linear from 2015, the AS qualification will also be decoupled to become a stand-alone qualification that is also linear. AS qualifications will continue to be available to give students the opportunity to study a broad range of subjects, but performance in an AS qualification will no longer contribute towards the final grade of the A level qualification. Making the AS a stand-alone qualification will allow more time for synoptic learning in the A level, minimise teaching that is focused narrowly on modular exams, and reduce the assessment burden on young people taking A levels.

Timetable for reform of other A levels

3.5. Professor Smith's review found that A levels in mathematics and further mathematics require more significant change and development time, so we aim for these to be ready for first teaching in September 2016, along with languages, which was not considered by the review. Ofqual is considering the process and timetable for reforming other A level subjects.

3.6. The Russell Group of universities has agreed to establish an A level Content Advisory Board (ALCAB) to provide advice to Ofqual on the subject content of the new A levels in the mathematics, further mathematics, and languages; A levels which will be available for first teaching from September 2016.

4. Proposed changes to subject content

4.1. The following section outlines the subject content changes to the current A level subject content, following on from the recommendations set out in Professor Smith's report. In each case, the specific changes, summarised below for each subject, are based on further work undertaken by the Awarding Organisations to implement these recommendations.

4.2. Minor changes have been made to the specific wording recommended by Professor Smith's review only where necessary to ensure that Ofqual is able to regulate the qualification and to include the relevant references for AS qualifications. The substance of the recommendations from the review is reflected in the proposed subject content. The proposed content can be found via links on the consultation website.

AS qualification content

4.3. Where possible, the current AS subject criteria content have been retained within the revised A level subject content. Changes have only been made where necessary to reflect changes and additions to the A level subject content. Where content is not specified in the subject content, Ofqual is consulting on the proposal that such content should continue to be drawn from the A level. Where key decisions have been taken on new AS qualification content, to bring it into line with revised A level content, these have been outlined below by subject.

4.4. This approach should enable Awarding Organisations to design AS qualifications that are co-teachable (with A level qualifications) by schools and colleges. The Department for Education supports the development of AS qualifications that are co-teachable with A levels on the basis that this will reduce burdens on schools by making the courses easier to deliver.

Art and design¹⁴

4.5. The only significant subject content revision for art and design AS and A level is a new emphasis on drawing, a skill on which higher education representatives placed great importance when they were consulted.

¹⁴ For the recommendations made in respect of art and design, please see pages I to VIII in Appendix 1 of Professor Mark E. Smith's report.

Business Studies¹⁵

4.6. The revised subject content for Business Studies takes in a range of wording changes to update and clarify the subject content. The name of the A level content has been changed to “A level business”. Stakeholders felt this better reflected the nature and coverage of the A level.

4.7. In addition, a greater emphasis has been placed on application of quantitative skills, in both the AS and A level, in a range of business contexts. Higher education representatives particularly wanted students to develop such skills. A new annex sets out the quantitative skills that AS and A level students should be expected to accomplish as part of their study programme. The quantitative skills set out in the annex are at a level required for a GCSE grade C, but would be applied in an AS or A level context specific to business.

Computing¹⁶

4.8. The name of the A level content has been changed to “A level computer science”. Higher education representatives felt this was a better description of the subject. The subject content introduces a new aim that A level specifications should encourage students to develop ‘computational thinking skills’. This concept is widely understood and accepted within the computer science community as including the mathematical elements of the discipline. Its explicit use within the A level subject content will strengthen the mathematical content of the qualifications and will address the concerns expressed by higher education representatives that the current content does not ensure that all students develop appropriate mathematical skills. A new annex sets out the mathematical content that should be covered in AS and A level computer science qualifications. The mathematical concepts set out in the annex are at a level required for a GCSE grade C, but would be applied in an AS or A level context specific to computer science.

Economics¹⁷

4.9. The subject content for economics AS and A level has been reviewed to ensure that the content is up-to-date (for example, by the inclusion of financial regulation and the role of central banks). It places a more explicit emphasis on developing mathematical skills. A new annex sets out the quantitative skills that should be covered in AS and A level economics qualifications. The quantitative skills

¹⁵ For the recommendations made in respect of business, please see pages XX to XXVII in Appendix 1 of Professor Mark E. Smith’s report.

¹⁶ For the recommendations made in respect of computer science, please see pages XLI to XLV in Appendix 1 of Professor Mark E. Smith’s report.

¹⁷ For the recommendations made in respect of economics, please see pages XLVI to LIII in Appendix 1 of Professor Mark E. Smith’s report.

set out in the annex are at a level required for a GCSE grade C, but would be applied in an AS or A level context specific to economics.

English (language, literature, language and literature)¹⁸

4.10. There are three AS and A levels in the English suite: English language; English language and literature; and English literature. These qualifications aim to encourage students to develop their interest and enjoyment in literature, literary studies and language.

English literature

4.11. The revised content for English literature retains a strong focus on advanced literary studies and the reading of major literary genres. It requires A level students to study a minimum of eight texts which must include at least three pre-1900 works including one Shakespeare play, and a post-2000 work. This will ensure good historical coverage, which was requested by higher education representatives. In considering the number of texts to be assessed, largely through exam at the end of the two year course (see Ofqual's consultation on assessment objectives), eight texts was considered to be an appropriate number to provide the right level of demand for A level students. The proposed change will bring the A level back into line with the previous linear A level.

4.12. English literature A level also introduces a new requirement to be examined on an additional text which has not been previously named for study (an 'unseen text'), set within a context to be defined by the Awarding Organisations. To prepare for examinations with 'unseen texts', students will need to read widely, broadening their knowledge and their critical and comparative understanding of literature. This reflects changes proposed for the GCSE.

4.13. It is proposed that AS students will be required to study a minimum of four texts. This was determined to be the correct level of demand for AS qualifications, equivalent to half of the A level. The study of an unseen text will not be a requirement for the AS qualification. One pre-1900 text must be included in all AS qualification specifications to ensure historical coverage.

English language

4.14. The subject content for English language has been updated to improve the clarity of the requirements for study and to address the change to a linear specification. Minor revisions have been made, for example to clarify and expand the range of language levels required for study, and to clarify the requirement for A level

¹⁸ For the recommendations made in respect of English subjects, please see pages LIV to LXVII in Appendix 1 of Professor Mark E. Smith's report.

students to study social, historical, geographical and individual varieties of English. However, no substantial amendments were considered necessary for the English language subject content.

4.15. Minor amendments have also been made to the A level subject content to differentiate what is expected of AS and A level specifications. For example, expecting A level students to demonstrate higher level skills such as independently investigating language in use.

English language and literature

4.16. The aims and objectives of the subject content have been revised to improve the balance and coverage of the subject, including a requirement to demonstrate how the disciplines of language and literature relate to each other. A level students will study at least six substantial texts: at least three from the genres of prose fiction, poetry and/or drama; and at least three further texts, one of which must be non-literary (e.g. essays and journalism). This represents a minor change from the current subject content in that previously a non-literary text has not been required¹⁹. A non-literary text has been prescribed to remove the opportunity to create a specification with an overly literary bias in which potentially only literary texts could be studied. It was felt that this was not in keeping with the subject standards of an integrated language and literature course. The inclusion of a compulsory non-literary text also allows for making connections across literary and non-literary texts and applying an integrated literary and linguistic analysis to both.

4.17. A new reference to specific language levels (e.g. phonetics, phonology and prosodics) has been included in the knowledge and understanding section to bring it into line with the content in English language.

4.18. Minor amendments have been made to the A level subject content to differentiate what is expected of AS and A level specifications.

Geography²⁰

4.19. The subject content for geography sets out a proposed core of essential subject content and a balance of human and physical geography that is intended to comprise at least 50% of the geography AS and A level. This new approach will provide the opportunity for all students to study the core of subject content required for a proper, balanced grasp of the breadth of the subject, whilst also providing

¹⁹ The current criteria do not make specific reference to non-literary texts: they require students to study four texts from a genre (prose fiction, poetry, drama) and two other substantial written texts.

²⁰ For the recommendations made in respect of geography, please see pages LXXVI to LXXXIV in Appendix 1 of Professor Mark E. Smith's report.

scope for Awarding Organisations to develop their own distinctive subject specifications.

4.20. Minor amendments have been made to differentiate what is expected of AS and A level specifications. As now, A level specifications will require students to undertake individual research and investigative work, including fieldwork, but this will not be a requirement of AS specifications. Maintaining the requirement to undertake fieldwork was particularly supported by the higher education representatives who were consulted, and enables students to relate their learning to real experiences of the world. Ofqual's parallel consultation covers how this aspect of geography A level should be assessed.

4.21. The new subject content includes a new annex setting out the quantitative skills which should be taught and assessed in AS and A level geography. This will ensure that all students have the mathematical skills needed to apply their subject knowledge fully. The quantitative skills set out in the annex are at a level required for a GCSE grade C, but would be applied in an AS or A level context specific to geography.

History²¹

4.22. The subject content for history AS and A level aims to develop students' interest in history, as well as retaining a strong emphasis on the development of broad historical understanding. It no longer requires the study of history from more than one period, but instead introduces a requirement for A level students to study topics from a chronological range of at least 200 years. In practice this means that, for example, if a student studies a topic covering 1500-1600, they then need to also study a topic covering 1650-1700 or beyond. The current criteria stipulate a study of topics from a range of 100 years, which stakeholders who were consulted saw as too narrow. This will enable A level students to develop an understanding of historical events in the context of longer term and broader chronological changes.

4.23. A strong focus on British history has been retained, although the minimum percentage for A level has been reduced slightly from 25% to 20%. This reflects the views of stakeholders who felt that students will have already developed a good understanding of British history by the time they study history at A level. This slight reduction frees up some time for broader and comparative studies, including the history of more than one country, which university representatives who were consulted thought was essential for post-16 study.

²¹ For the recommendations made in respect of history, please see pages LXXXV to XC in Appendix 1 of Professor Mark E. Smith's report.

4.24. The A level subject content also includes an historical enquiry that is independently researched and that investigates specific historical questions, problems or issues. Higher education representatives who were consulted felt that this was important to maintain this requirement to ensure good preparation for undergraduate study. Ofqual's parallel consultation will cover how this historical enquiry should be assessed.

4.25. Minor amendments have been made to the A level subject content to differentiate what is expected of AS and A level specifications. As now, A Level students will be expected to draw on and evaluate a greater depth and range of more sophisticated content and evidence, demonstrating a more complex understanding of historical concepts, producing responses that are more analytical, and judgments that are more effectively substantiated.

Science - biology, chemistry, physics and psychology²²

4.26. The content for biology, chemistry, physics and psychology is currently covered in the AS and A level criteria for science. The proposed subject content for these science subjects includes revised aims and objectives and a range of detailed revisions to improve the clarity, sequencing and coverage of AS and A level content.

4.27. The subject content also includes strengthened and more consistent mathematical requirements, as recommended by the Nuffield Foundation²³ and others in the science community, to ensure that students apply mathematics at the level needed to support fully scientific knowledge, understanding and problem-solving. The revised appendix includes:

- more precise descriptions of the mathematical requirements for each of biology, chemistry, physics, and psychology;
- detailed exemplifications of how these skills could be applied at the necessary level in AS and A level teaching and assessment; and
- mathematical skills at and beyond the level of mathematics required for a GCSE grade C.

4.28. A new appendix sets out detailed practical skills and behaviours that must be encouraged in AS and A level courses in these sciences, to ensure that all students are given the opportunity to acquire the experimental and practical skills essential for

²² For the recommendations made in respect of science subjects, please see pages 11-13 and Appendix 1 of Professor Mark E. Smith's report (IX, XXVIII, CII, CX).

²³ Nuffield Foundation (2012), Mathematics in A level assessments.

http://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/sites/default/files/files/Maths_in_A_level_Assessments_Nuffield_Foundation_WEB.pdf

further study and successful scientific research. Proposals on how practical skills in these subjects will be assessed are included in Ofqual's parallel consultation.

Sociology²⁴

4.29. The revised subject content for Sociology proposes only small wording changes. The review concluded that the current subject content was fit for purpose.

Consultation Questions

- 1. Is the revised A level content in each of these subjects appropriate in view of the issues identified in Professor Smith's report? Please provide evidence to support your response.**
 - (a) Art and Design;**
 - (b) Business Studies;**
 - (c) Computing;**
 - (d) Economics**
 - (e) English Literature;**
 - (f) English Language;**
 - (g) English Language and Literature;**
 - (h) Geography;**
 - (i) History;**
 - (j) Science; and**
 - (k) Sociology.**

- 2. Will the revised A level content in each of these subjects enable students to progress to undergraduate study (particularly study in the same subject)? Please provide evidence to support your response.**
 - (a) Art and Design;**
 - (b) Business Studies;**
 - (c) Computing;**
 - (d) Economics**
 - (e) English Literature;**
 - (f) English Language;**
 - (g) English Language and Literature;**
 - (h) Geography;**
 - (i) History;**
 - (j) Science; and**
 - (k) Sociology.**

²⁴ For the recommendations made in respect of sociology, please see pages CXVII to CXVIII in Appendix 1 of Professor Mark E. Smith's report.

- 3. Are the new names for the A level subject content in Business Studies (changed to 'Business') and Computing (changed to 'Computer Science') appropriate? Please provide evidence to support your response.**

- 4. Is the revised AS qualification content in each of these subjects appropriate? Please provide evidence to support your response.**
 - (a) Art and Design;**
 - (b) Business Studies;**
 - (c) Computing;**
 - (d) Economics**
 - (e) English Literature;**
 - (f) English Language;**
 - (g) English Language and Literature;**
 - (h) Geography;**
 - (i) History;**
 - (j) Science; and**
 - (k) Sociology.**

5. Equalities Impact

5.1. In accordance with the Equality Act 2010, public bodies must have “due regard”, when making decisions, to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination; advance equality of opportunity; and foster good relations, in relation to protected characteristics. It would therefore be very helpful to understand if there is any potential for the subject content to have a disproportionate impact upon any pupils with 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 student groups, in particular the 'protected characteristic' groups? (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 A levels be altered to better advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a protected characteristic and those who do not? Please provide evidence to support your response.**

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Annex A: The consultation process ahead of and during Professor Mark E. Smith's review of A levels

Since April 2012, each Awarding Organisation supplemented its on-going engagement with subject communities by recruiting representatives from universities and learned societies to inform the design of the 14 A levels being developed for September 2015. Each expert panel or group has ensured that the development of new A levels prepare students for the demands of undergraduate study by advising on the effectiveness of the current transition from A level to undergraduate study and on subject-specific developments.

The Awarding Organisations consulted extensively through a range of mechanisms prior to the review, including:

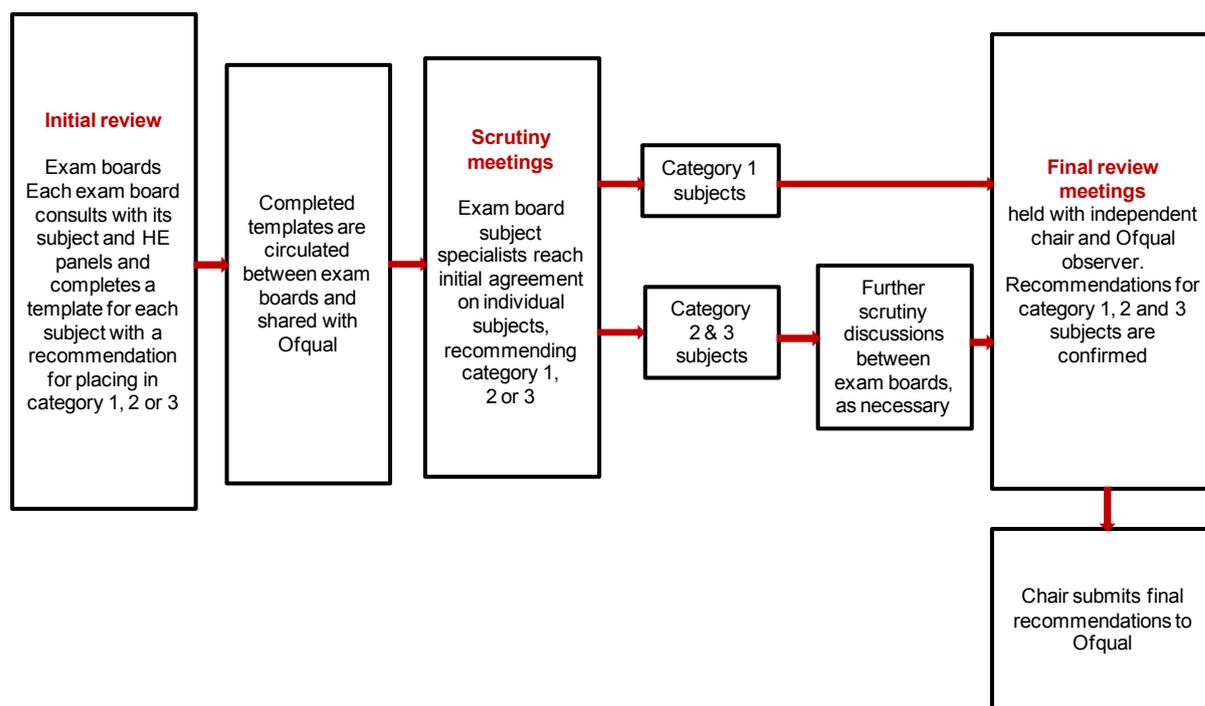
- interviews with higher education institutions;
- consultation with HE Expert Panels or Advisory Groups;
- meetings with learned societies or subject associations;
- teacher forums, panels and meetings;
- surveys of HEIs;
- focus groups;
- surveys of teachers;
- meetings with organisations with an interest;
- stakeholder conferences;
- analysis of literature from interested parties; and
- visits or contact with International jurisdictions.

The review process itself comprised of three stages as set out in the diagram at figure 1 below.

Higher education representatives provided expert evidence to the review of A level content in June 2013 which, along with the extensive evidence gathered as outlined above, for example from some teachers, subject associations and learned societies, informed the recommendations of the independent chair, Professor Mark E. Smith. Throughout, higher education representatives have ensured that Awarding Organisations understood the needs of higher education so that new A level subject content supports the transition to university study.

Each Awarding Organisation has also benefited from its formal and informal engagement with specific academics and universities, mission groups, including the Russell Group, and key sector-level groups such as the Higher Education Academy.

Figure 1: The Review Process²⁵



More details about the review process are available in Professor Mark E. Smith's report which is available at: <http://ofqual.gov.uk/documents/independent-chairs-report-on-the-review-of-current-gce-specification-content-within-subject-criteria/>

²⁵ The review was designed to place each subject in one of three categories:

1. The 'specification content' within the current criteria does not require change to allow change to linear form and allow progression to higher education.
2. The 'specification content' within the current criteria requires minor change to be converted to linear form and allow progression to higher education.
3. The 'specification content' within the current criteria requires significant change to allow change to linear form and allow progression to higher education.