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Advanced qualifications for young people

Information for employers

Extended project

The extended project is a new qualification that requires students to produce a single piece of work of their own choosing, showing evidence of planning, research and autonomous working.

- The extended project:
- can be taken by students alongside A levels or as part of an Advanced Diploma
 - involves planning, preparation and presentation skills and an end product that could be a report, a performance or an object designed and made by a student
 - develops and tests skills needed in employment, such as research, analysis, decision making, presentation and independent working
 - can provide opportunities for involving employers through enterprise activities, work placements or work experience
 - is the same standard as an A level, equivalent in size to one-half an A level and, like A levels, is graded from grade A* to grade E.

Students taking extended projects will start to complete them in early 2009.

For information on the extended project, visit www.qca.org.uk/14-19.

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Information for employers

If you're recruiting any 18- or 19-year-olds from the summer of 2010, you need to know about the qualifications on their CVs and job applications. As well as A levels, 16- to 18-year olds can now study for other qualifications, including the Diploma and the extended project.

These qualifications have been developed to make sure that young people leaving school and college have the skills, knowledge, attitudes and understanding employers want. This leaflet tells you what you need to know about the new qualifications and how A levels are being updated.

What do these changes mean for employers?

Employers need to be aware of the changes because students will start to complete these qualifications from 2010. The changes mean that young people should be better at critical thinking, problem solving and independent research.

These new and revised qualifications have been developed with the support of employers to help young people gain a range of skills and attributes to help them succeed in employment and adult life.

AS and A levels

Each year half a million young people sit A level examinations. While the standards of A levels remain the same, some revisions are being introduced to A level content and A level grades.

A levels are taken in two parts: AS and A2. The revised A levels test students on a wide range of skills, with more focus on thinking and problem solving. After completing an AS qualification, the second half, the A2, includes more stretch and challenge to help prepare students for employment or university.

The changes mean that all A level examinations will include:

- extended writing and marks for quality of written communication
- different types of questions to cover a wide range of skills
- questions to test understanding of the subject as a whole and links between different areas of the subject.

From now on, most A levels contain four separate units, rather than six, and only include coursework if it is essential for the subject, for example in practical subjects like science and design and technology.

The first students to take these A levels will receive their results in summer 2010.

A level grades

AS levels will continue to be graded from grade A to E. A levels will have an additional A* grade from 2010 for students who get more than 90 per cent across their A2 units.

AS and A levels in mathematics

Changes were made to A level mathematics subjects relatively recently, so these subjects (mathematics, further mathematics, pure mathematics and statistics) were not part of these changes and will remain at six units.

There is currently a review taking place for A level mathematics subjects. The A* grade will be introduced from summer 2010 in line with other A levels.

A levels in applied subjects

A levels in applied subjects (that is, applied art and design, applied business, applied information and communication technology, applied science, engineering, health and social care, leisure studies, media communication and production, performing arts, and travel and tourism) have not been restructured but have had stretch and challenge incorporated into their A2 assessments and an A* grade introduced in line with other A levels.

The Advanced Diploma

The Diploma is a new qualification for 14- to 19-year-olds that enables students to gain knowledge, understanding and hands-on experience of sectors that interest them, while putting new skills into practice. The Advanced Diploma will be available in 16 different lines of learning from 2011. Students will start to complete Diplomas for the first five lines of learning in 2010.

Diplomas have three main component parts:

- principal learning, which is in the specific line of learning, such as engineering or IT
- generic learning, which covers the skills young people need for work, higher education and adult life that allow someone to be effective in any workplace – including personal, learning and thinking skills; functional skills in English, mathematics, and information and communication technology; and the extended project
- additional and specialist learning, which is learning of the student's choice.

The Advanced Diploma will be graded from A* to E, which is the same as A levels.

In addition to receiving a certificate showing their grade for their Advanced Diploma, students will also receive a transcript that gives more detail about the component parts of the qualification.

The Advanced Diploma is equivalent to 3.5 A levels. AS and A levels may be incorporated into the Advanced Diplomas as additional and specialist learning where they complement the principal learning. For example, A level biology would complement the Advanced Diploma in society, health and development, and A level mathematics and/or physics could be used with the Advanced Diploma in engineering.

These qualifications offer young people clear and flexible routes into the working world, responding to their own interests and abilities while reflecting the different needs of employers.

Sir Alan Jones of Toyota

For information on the changes to A levels, visit www.qca.org.uk/14-19.

For information on the Diploma, visit www.dcsf.gov.uk/14-19/employers.