

Frequently Asked Questions about Sixth Form

1. What is the difference between an AS and an A2?

A full 'A' Level consists of 2 parts: AS (Advanced Subsidiary) is taken in the first year followed by a second year known as A2. Each part is worth 50% of the final A level grade. The marks from the AS and the A2 parts are added together to make the final A level grade. Typically students take four 'AS' Levels in their first year and then continue just through into A2 so will finish Sixth Form with three and half A levels. A few students may do slightly more or slightly less depending on their circumstances and ability.

2. What are Level 3 courses?

All qualifications are given a level with indicates their difficulty. This goes from entry level to level 8. GCSE's at grades A*-C are known as Level 2 courses (Grades D-G are Level 1) and once a student has passed their GCSE's (typically this means they will have gained five or more GCSE's at grade C or above), they are able to move onto Level 3 courses. A levels are just one example of Level 3 courses. BTEC's and OCR Nationals are another form. On completing A levels students might go onto degree courses which are referred to as Level 6.

http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/EducationAndLearning/QualificationsExplained/DG_10039017 is a government site if you would like further information on levels of various qualifications.

3. Are BTEC's and OCR's the same as A levels?

They are equivalent to each other but involve different ways of getting to the end grade. BTEC's and OCR Nationals for example usually don't involve exams, but instead use portfolio and coursework to assess students. A levels on the other hand will always involve exams and for many subjects it will be 100% exams.

Unlike the A level which has an AS and A2 component, BTEC's and OCR Nationals are taken over two years and students do not get a grade for it until the end of the 2 years.

Grades come in the form of Pass, Merit or Distinction (rather than A-E grades). Each unit of work will be graded (Pass, Merit or Distinction) and goes towards the final grade.

In terms of University, a Pass is the equivalent of a grade E (worth 40 UCAS points), a merit the equivalent of a grade C (worth 80 UCAS points) and a Distinction the equivalent of a grade A (worth 120 UCAS points)

4. Are some A level subjects considered better than others?

This is quite a controversial issue; people have worried that certain Universities have a secret list of A level subjects they prefer, but the reality is that all A-level subjects are of value. Some courses will require specific subjects because they are relevant to the subject of the degree applied for. For example, music A-level is required for a music degree. Top universities like Oxford and Cambridge and [Russell Group](#) universities want to see students who have taken some 'A' levels that indicate students can cope with challenge. They like certain combinations of subjects, because they believe they are more likely to provide an effective preparation for study at their Universities. The important word here is 'combination' of subjects so they aren't saying there are any individual subjects that will be rejected. In the Sixth Form section of the school website there is a leaflet called 'Informed Choices' which may be of further help. The websites below provide some further insights into this issue:

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2011/feb/01/university-preferred-a-levels>

<http://www.cam.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/apply/docs/subjectmatters.pdf>

Apprenticeships and employers may require certain subjects because they provide the skills they are looking for but others are more likely to be concerned with grades rather than the subjects.

5. Do I need to have studied the subject at GCSE in order to study it at A level?

It will depend on the subject. Some subjects like psychology are often not available at GCSE and so there is no expectation that you have studied it previously. This is something that is best discussed with individual Heads of Subject as they will be able to explain the demands of their course and allow you to make an informed decision.

6. What is UCAS?

It stands for Universities and Colleges Admissions Service. This is the organisation responsible for managing applications to higher education courses in the UK. They process more than two million applications for full-time undergraduate courses every year and also help students to find the right course via their excellent website www.ucas.com

7. What are UCAS points?

It is a system for allocating points to qualifications used for entry to higher education. In simple terms a grade A* at A level is worth 140 points, an A worth 120 points, B 100, C 80, D 60 and E 40 points . See http://www.ucas.com/students/ucas_tariff/ for more details of all qualifications

8. What is a Russell Group University

The Russell group of universities is a group of some 20 universities which all have excellent records in academic achievement and research. It is called the Russell

group because meetings of the group take place in the Russell Hotel. The term is used as a sort of short hand for top universities but actually many of the top universities are not part of this group. Durham for example is a top university but did not join the Russell Group and instead is part of the 1994 group which is a similar organisation. Universities who fall into these types of categories generally only take students with top A level grades. Typically the minimum for such universities will be at least ABB grades at A level and many will also look at GCSE results as well, expecting students to have achieved mainly A* and A grades at GCSE.