

IERF UK Educational Update^{'16}

This brief highlights changes that are taking place in the UK. Also included are the results of an admissions survey on a number of related British qualifications.



Snapshot of UK Reforms

Note: Scotland has a separate educational system and has not been included in this summary.

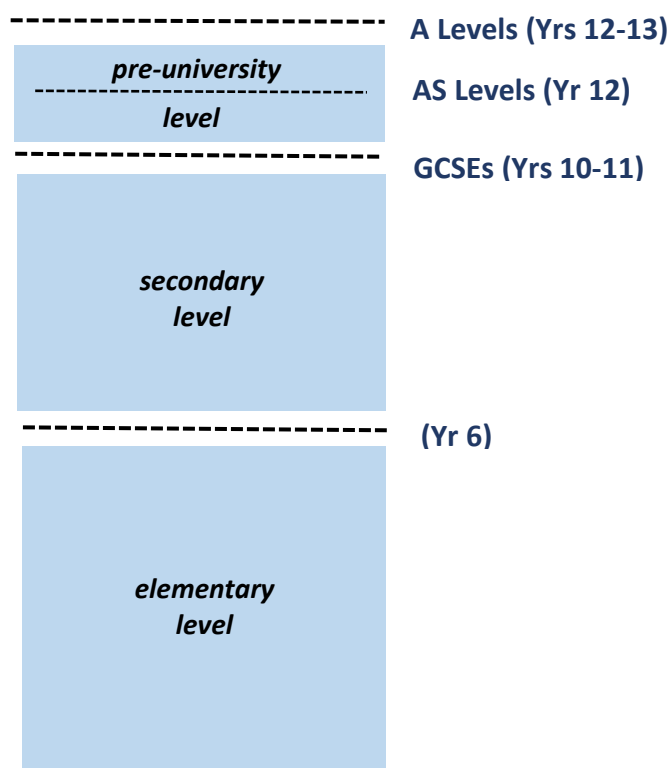
Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF)

A new framework was introduced in October 2015, replacing the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) and the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). The **RQF**, which explains how qualifications relate to one another, covers both general and vocational qualifications in England and vocational qualifications in Northern Ireland. There continues to be **8 general levels** and 3 entry levels. The demand of the levels remain unchanged; however, the descriptors are more outcome-based. Each qualification that sits on the new framework is now described in terms of **total qualification time (TQT)**, that is, how long it takes to complete a qualification. TQT includes time spent being taught, time spent studying, and time spent in assessment. Guided learning hours (GLH), on the other hand, refer specifically to time spent directly under the guidance of an instructor, including lectures and tutorials.

GCSEs, AS Levels & A Levels in England, Wales & Northern Ireland



The General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) represents a total of 11 years of elementary and secondary education in the UK. For students who wish to go on to university, they must typically study an additional 2 years and successfully pass their **Advanced Level (A Level)** examinations, marking a total of 13 years. While they can also be stand-alone qualifications, **Advanced Subsidiary Level** examinations (AS Levels) also represent the content studied during the first half of A Levels. Changes were introduced in September 2015 to create a more rigorous educational system. These changes are being phased in by subject over the next few years. As such, during this time, admissions offices can receive a mix of qualifications (**legacy vs. reformed**), depending on the subjects taken.



The 5 examining board that offer these qualifications are:

- Assessment and Qualifications Alliance (AQA)
- Oxford, Cambridge and RSA Examinations (OCR)
- Pearson
- Council for the Curriculum, Examinations & Assessment (CCEA) in Northern Ireland
- Welsh Joint Education Committee (WJEC) / Eduqas

In **England**, GCSEs will have revised content, while the regulated AS and A Levels will have refreshed content. They will no longer be modular and will primarily be based on final examinations instead. Reformed GCSEs will have a **new grading scale from 9 – 1**, with 9 representing the highest mark. While AS and A Levels will retain the same grading scales of A-E and A*-E, respectively, AS Levels will be **decoupled** from A Levels. As such, they are terminal qualifications and can no longer count toward the A Levels.

Qualification	First Teaching	First Award
GCSEs	2015	2017
AS Levels	2015	2016
A Levels	2015	2017

In **Wales and Northern Ireland**, the modular format will remain. GCSEs will also retain the A*-G grading scale, and AS Levels will continue to lead to the A Level qualification.



International GCSEs / IGCSEs, AS Levels & A Levels

There are 3 bodies that award these qualifications to international learners studying the British curriculum. These are Cambridge International Examinations (CIE), the **newly formed Oxford International AQA**, and Pearson. The qualifications are at the same level as the regulated qualifications in the UK. While CIE will retain the A*-G grading scale for the IGCSEs, Pearson and Oxford International AQA will be adopting the 9-1 grading scale for the International GCSEs. International AS Levels will continue to count toward A Levels for all awarding bodies; however, CIE also provides an option of stand-alone AS and A Levels. Note that International GCSEs / IGCSEs may also be taught at private and independent schools within the UK.

UCAS Tariff System

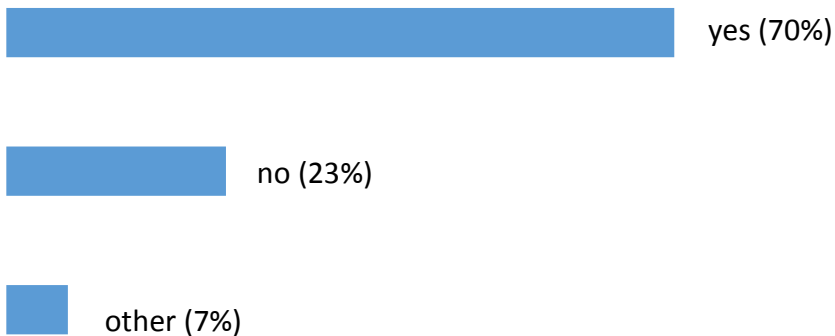
Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) provides centralized application services in the UK. Among their offerings is a tariff point system that serves as a way to compare the various qualifications students have leading to university. A **new point system** is being introduced for courses starting September 2017, to accommodate the reforms taking place and include a wider range of qualifications. Although AS Levels still represent one year of study and **half** the content of A Levels, the reformed AS Levels will count for **40%** of the reformed A Levels under the new tariff system.



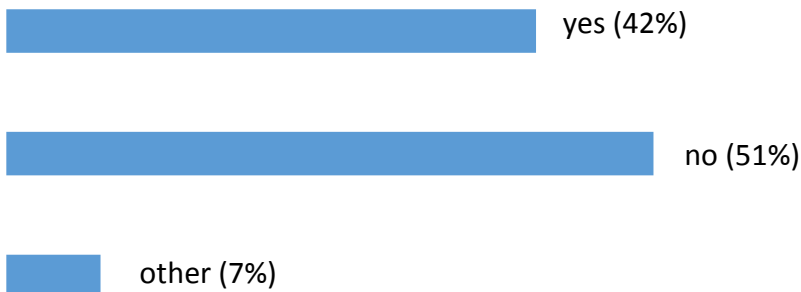
Online Survey Results on Admissions Practices

The following results are from a poll taken on international admissions practices with regard to GCSEs, AS Levels, A Levels and BTEC qualifications. They were shared at a presentation at the 2016 TAICEP conference. A link to the survey was originally posted on 5 different online communities. While this is not a scientific study, the results reflect the policies of 108 institutions (101 US-based institutions, 4 from Canada, 1 from Japan, and 2 anonymous). We are grateful to the respondents that participated in this survey.

Are GCSE holders eligible for undergraduate admission at your institution?

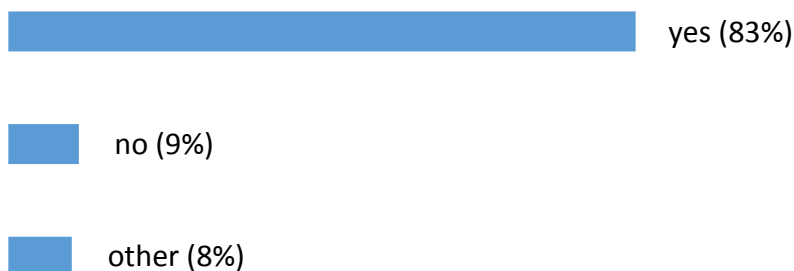


Do you give university-level credit for AS Levels?



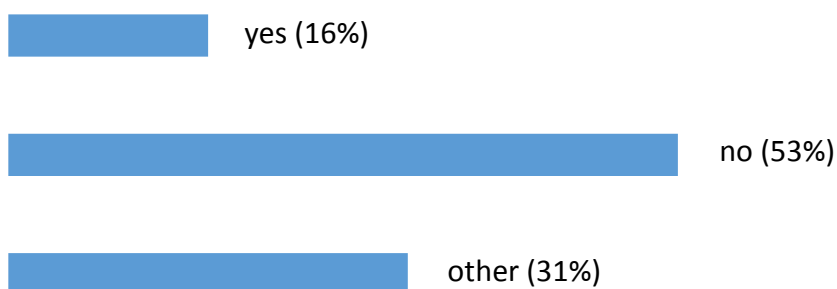
For “no,” respondents who commented often shared that AS Levels represent 12 years of study and do not warrant advanced credit. For “other,” comments included review on a case-by-case basis, the need for faculty review, and “not sure.”

Do you give university-level credit for A Levels?



For comments received for “other,” the prevailing theme was that credit is subject-dependent.

Do you give university-level credit for BTEC qualifications, Level 3 and above?



For “no,” respondents who commented shared that BTEC qualifications were considered to be at the secondary level or vocational in nature. For “other,” comments included review on a case-by-case basis, possible credit for non-vocational subjects, and credit for certain levels only (e.g., Level 3 Diploma & above, Level 4 & above, Level 5 & above...). Other respondents indicated that they rarely receive BTECs.



Selected References

BTECs:

<http://qualifications.pearson.com/en/about-us/qualification-brands/btec.html>

GCSE & A Level Reforms:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/get-the-facts-gcse-and-a-level-reform>

RQF:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/ofqual-to-introduce-new-regulated-qualifications-framework>

UCAS Tariff System:

<https://www.ucas.com/ucas/undergraduate/getting-started/entry-requirements/ucas-undergraduate-tariff-2017>



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