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Starting A levels

Your guide to exam success

Tony Breslin and Mike Moores

A Cambridge University Press Transition Guide

Your AS and A level examinations are amongst the most important that you'll ever take. If you intend to go to university, your A level grades will define what and where you study. If you don't, they're likely to influence the career options open to you. In any case, the subjects that you choose at AS and A level will serve as an indication of your interests, strengths and ambitions.

There is also an additional challenge: you are likely to sit these examinations against the backdrop of much less structure and many more demands than you've been used to in the earlier years of your secondary education. You'll have new freedoms, a more flexible timetable that appears to suggest a number of 'free' lessons, a new set of courses to study and decisions to make about life beyond A levels.

With this in mind, this **Cambridge University Press Transition Guide** is designed to enable you to do the following:

- Understand the nature of AS and A level courses and exams and how they are changing, whatever set of subjects you are studying.
- Understand the differences between GCSEs and A levels, and how you might bridge the gap in terms of rigour and style.
- Deal with the particular demands of post-16 learning.
- Develop the kind of skills, strategies and attitudes to study that will help you to make a great start to your A level studies.
- Be better prepared to make informed decisions about the choices that you'll need to make as you move through this stage in your education.

This guide complements a similar Cambridge University Press Transition Guide: *Starting GCSEs: your guide to exam success*, which focuses on the needs of those embarking on a series of GCSE courses. Both guides conclude with a quick reference section that summarises the key issues that we believe underpin exam success.

We are conscious that we don't expressly cover how you might prepare for other post-16 qualifications in this guide – such as BTECs and similar professional and vocational courses, or programmes such as the International Baccalaureate – but we believe that much of the advice that we offer will also be valuable to those following these kinds of courses.

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Learn more about our resources at www.cambridge.org/ukschools

Part 1
Life in the sixth form or at college

In this opening section, we address five questions that you might have about life in the sixth form or at college:

1. How is studying in the sixth form or at college different?
2. Will I get the chance to study new subjects?
3. What skills and attitudes will I need to succeed in this new environment?
4. Apart from my exam courses, what else might I be expected to get involved in?
5. Is it important to take part in additional (or 'extra-curricular') activities?

Understanding the answers to these questions will help you to prepare for success in your studies – and to understand why striking the right balance between formal study and additional activities is vital if you are to prosper in the sixth form or at college. These extra-curricular activities will provide a break from your studies, but they're not designed to distract you from the task of gaining the grades you need to strengthen your academic performance.

1. How is studying in the sixth form or at college different?

Until now, you will have worked in highly controlled settings, studying particular subjects with particular teachers across a timetable of between 30 and 40 lessons a week in which every lesson is allocated to a particular subject. In short, you'll have had a full timetable set entirely by somebody else.

In the sixth form, or at college, you'll still have a full timetable – it just won't look like one. In fact, you'll probably have whole blocks of time that appear to be 'free': Wednesday afternoons for some, Thursday mornings for others. The most successful students realise right at the start of their AS or A level courses that these are not 'free' lessons' they are 'study' periods or time deliberately set aside for you to undertake additional activities that will help to develop new skills and pursue new interests. In fact, one of the peculiarities of the education system is that the further you go in it, the less time you spend sitting in front of a teacher. You'll probably find that if you go to university, you'll have even more freedom, in some cases whole days without any lectures or tutorials.

"Extra-curricular activities will provide a break from your studies, but they are not designed to distract you from the task of gaining the grades you need to strengthen your academic performance."

At GCSE, you'll have been given more responsibility for completing your own work in your own time and for researching issues outside the classroom than you were in your first years at secondary school. This trend will continue at AS and A level. In fact, you'll find the step change really significant – it's during your AS and A levels that you will complete the move from pupil to student that began during your GCSE years. Realising that you are on such a journey is one of the keys to A level success.

The type of setting in which you're studying for your AS or A levels will have a significant impact on exactly how much freedom you have. If you're studying in a Further Education (or FE) college, you'll probably have more freedom, and you'll be more likely to find yourself working alongside students of all ages. If you're in a school sixth form, you'll probably have a little less freedom to shape your own activities and a little more structure to depend on. If you're based in a sixth form college, you'll probably have a little more freedom than you might in a school setting but a little less than you would have in an FE college.

And these freedoms are not always purely academic. They might relate to dress codes – increasingly common in school sixth forms – and involvement in tutor group or extra-curricular activities, which we will discuss later.

Studying in the sixth form or at college is also different because of the other demands and opportunities placed upon you as you move into adulthood. As we've noted in our opening remarks, you'll be required to balance the focus on your studies with other demands that are increasingly placed upon you: finding and holding down a part-time job that does not leave you too distracted or exhausted to study, maintaining a fulfilling social life and getting involved in the extra-curricular activities that we've just referred to.

> "New subjects like Sociology, Psychology and Economics are commonly taken at AS and A level, and you'll have the opportunity to study existing subjects in greater detail."

2. Will I get the chance to study new subjects?

Yes, almost certainly you will. At AS and A level you'll find many subjects that you don't always get to study at GCSE or earlier in your school career.

Through to the end of Year 11 schools have to ensure that they cover the National Curriculum, a set list of subjects that the government believes it's important for every young person to study.

After GCSEs there are no such restrictions. 'New' subjects like Sociology, Psychology and Economics are commonly taken at AS and A level, and you'll have the opportunity to study existing subjects in greater detail. On this, our advice is simple: think of every AS and A level course as a 'new' subject; you'll be studying it to new depths and in new ways – this guide is designed to help you meet this challenge.

At AS and A level, you'll have the opportunity to explore various 'new' subjects and you'll be studying 'old' subjects in new ways.

Whatever your subject choices, you'll study fewer subjects in greater depth. Usually this means three (or sometimes four) A level courses over two years and possibly an additional AS level in the first year of your studies. Your teachers will give you further advice on this and we'll say more about it later in this guide.

3. What skills and attitudes will I need to succeed in this new environment?

Completing the move from pupil to student is all about becoming a self-starter and an independent learner, and about using your teachers as a resource on which to draw rather than depend. After many years of highly structured learning, you might not find this easy, but you're more likely to succeed if you:

- are passionate about the AS and A level subjects that you have chosen
- have some sense of what you want to do after completing these courses, whether that means going to university or securing employment
- are enthusiastic, willing to take on new opportunities and open-minded about how you study and the range of sources from which you can learn.

Later in this guide we'll say more about what being an independent learner actually means, but for the time being we'd advise that you think about how you:

- ensure that you ring-fence time for study when you are not in taught lessons
- balance the various other demands on your time so that these don't push studying for your AS and/or A levels to the bottom of your 'to-do' list
- form a successful study habit that works for you

"Whatever your subject choices, you'll study fewer subjects in greater depth. Usually this means three (or sometimes four) A level courses over two years and possibly an additional AS level in the first year of your studies."

- make full use of social networking and the internet in building your knowledge and understanding about issues related to your studies.

Speaking to your teachers and tutors and to those students in the second year of their studies that appear to have 'got the balance right' is a good starting point; and a willingness to work all the way through this guide in the next few days is also something that we'd recommend!

4. Apart from my exam courses, what else might I be expected to get involved in?

Especially in school sixth form settings, you'll be encouraged (or required) to get involved in a range of additional (or 'extra-curricular') activities. Those that you might be required to involve yourself in could include:

- Sessions that build on work that you might have undertaken within the Personal, Social and Health Education and Citizenship curriculum during years 7–11, focused around ensuring your health and wellbeing, growing your confidence, developing your personal skills, building your awareness of a range of social and political issues, and developing your capacity as an active and effective citizen.
- Activities dedicated to developing your readiness for the world of work, for instance, work experience, work shadowing, mini-enterprise projects and mock interviews.
- Programmes designed to broaden your experience, develop character and build resilience, such as the Duke of Edinburgh Award or National Citizen Service.

You're also likely to have the opportunity to get involved in:

- Student politics, for instance through the student union, the school council or the local youth council.
- Student leadership projects, including prefect, mentoring and buddy programmes.
- Charitable initiatives designed to identify and support good causes.
- Local community projects.

We talk about why getting involved in such activities is valuable in the next section.

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5. Why is it important to take part in additional (or 'extra-curricular') activities?

Employers and university admissions tutors look for more than just great AS and A level grades. They look for evidence of a whole range of skills and personal qualities that can be difficult to capture in a written exam or a test score. We're talking about things like:

- self-confidence
- good interpersonal skills, including the ability to debate and negotiate, and to present and speak in public
- determination and personal resilience
- an ability and willingness to solve problems, independently and as part of a team
- altruism and a sense of generosity of spirit
- a wide range of personal interests.

Taking part in additional activities can reveal all of these things and others. It also gives you things to talk about at interview or in a job application. And, if you're planning to go to university, it gives you plenty to write about in your personal statement, the written statement that you must produce to support your university application.

Remember, no matter how good your grades are, there will be other students – if not from your own school or college, then elsewhere – who have done just as well. It's often your involvement in the kind of extra-curricular activities discussed in this guide that will set you apart from others. And through involvement in these activities, you will develop all sorts of new capabilities and aspirations that will develop your self-confidence and lay the foundations for success in later life.

The Extended Project Qualification (EPQ), which is regarded as being roughly the equivalent of an AS level or half an A level and through which students produce a dissertation (a long essay, sometimes split into chapters) or a similar piece of extended work to this, is one attempt to capture and record the wider interests and talents of young people in a way that stretches beyond simply their examination grades. Your teachers will advise you as to whether undertaking an EPQ is an option at your school or college.

"Remember, no matter how good your grades are, there will be other students – if not from your own school or college, then elsewhere – who have done just as well. It's often your involvement in the kind of extra-curricular activities discussed in this guide that will set you aside from others."

Activity 1: Getting involved in additional and extra-curricular activities

List and find out about at least three types of additional and extra-curricular activities that you might get involved in at your school or college, or in your local community. Draw up and complete a grid like the one below. Use this as a guide to what you might and might not become involved in.

Activity	Skills, qualities and knowledge that I will gain by taking part in this activity	Impact on studies
Seek election to the school council or student union.	Negotiation, public speaking, the ability to represent others, self-confidence.	May complement A level Government and Politics course; need to manage time commitment given to this.
Undertake an Extended Project Qualification.	Extended writing skills, additional learning about chosen theme.	Will complement my A level grades.
Take part in a volunteering programme with vulnerable people in the community.		
Join, or set up, a special interest group, for instance, an Amnesty International group.		
Participate in a particular sport, at least once a week.		

Part 2
The nature of AS and A level qualifications

In this section, we will be exploring ten key questions that you might be asking as a student new to AS and/or A level study:

- What is the relationship between AS and A level?
- How many AS and/or A level courses am I likely to study?
- Which subjects should I study?
- Why are my AS and A level grades important?
- Who else is concerned about my AS and A level grades?
- Are some A level subjects considered to be more valuable than others?
- How are AS and A levels marked and graded?
- How are AS and A level examination papers produced?
- Is everything down to what happens in the examination room?
- What happens if something outside my control is likely to affect my exam performance?

Understanding the answers to these questions – and those that we pose in the next section on the changes that are gradually being made to AS and A level courses – will enable you to navigate the rest of this guide and, gain an understanding of what AS and A levels are about and how they work.

1. What is the relationship between AS and A level?

A levels have existed in one form or another for over 60 years. They were introduced alongside O levels in 1951, with 'O' standing for Ordinary level and 'A' standing for Advanced level. Both were designated as 'General' Certificates of Education. In the mid-1980s, O levels (and another examination pitched at a lower standard, the Certificate of Secondary Education, or CSE) were replaced by a single examination, generally sat by 16-year-olds, the GCSE (or General Certificate of Secondary Education).

Over the past thirty years the style of the A level examination has been revised on several occasions. Some of the A levels that you will be sitting are based on a style of examination first introduced at the beginning of this century, and some are based on a new style of examination, being introduced for the first time in 2015. In this guide we're simply going to refer to these as 'old' and 'new' A levels.

> "Over the past thirty years the style of the A level examination has been revised on several occasions."

Over the next three or four years all 'old' A level examinations will be replaced by the 'new' style of A level course.

The 'AS' in AS levels stands for Advanced Subsidiary. This title reflects the fact that AS level exam papers are set at a lower standard than A level papers. An old AS level is designed to be taken, typically by a 17-year-old, after one year of A level study; an A level is designed to be taken after two years of study, usually by student who is 18 or over.

With the 'old' A levels, the AS level forms part of the A level qualification; with the 'new' A levels it does not. In the old model most students sit AS papers at the end of the first year of study and A level (or 'A2') papers at the end of the second year. In this model, the AS course is a part of the A level course with the mark achieved in the AS counting towards the final A level grade. The AS papers and the A2 papers are each worth 50% of the final A level grade. Critically, students have often retaken the 'easier' AS level papers at the close of the second year of study to improve their overall A level grade. Some educational experts and politicians have argued that this has 'watered down' A levels, making it too easy to gain a good grade.

"The 'AS' in AS levels stands for Advanced Subsidiary. This title reflects the fact that AS level exam papers are set at a lower standard than A level papers."

In the new model, the AS and A level examinations are completely separate. Some people in your class might be following AS level courses and some might be following A level courses and, in some schools and colleges or in certain subjects, those on the A level course might still do an AS level examination at the end of the first year of study, but performance in these AS papers will not contribute to the final A level grade. To reiterate, in the 'new' model AS and A levels are completely separate courses, even though, in any given subject, the themes and topics on the AS level course usually also appear on the A level course.

2. How many AS and/or A level courses am I likely to study?

To some degree this will be influenced by the mix of 'old' and 'new' format A level courses that you have chosen to study.

In the old model, students generally start four (and sometimes more) AS level courses in the first year of study and drop one (or sometimes more) of these subjects at the end of the year. Usually, students study three A level subjects in the second year of study and, usually, universities ask for your grades across three A level subjects. Typically, students 'drop' the course or courses in which they have not done so well in, or not enjoyed, at AS level.

In the new model, many students (and we suspect most schools) will not ask students on A level courses to do AS level exams at the close of the first year of study. Why? Because it doesn't form part of your final A level grade, and because the school has to pay a fee to the examination board every time that you sit an official (or 'public') examination.

3. Which subjects should I study?

We suggest that you make your AS and/or A level course choices based on the following:

- Your interest in the subject.
- Your ability in the subject.
- The importance of the subject for any future plans – whether they are related to a career or a university course.
- Whether you wish to continue to study certain subjects or whether you might want to explore new subjects that you have not had the opportunity to study at GCSE.
- The experience of students who are following the course at your school or college.

If you've already made your choices we suggest that you review them against the criteria above.

We can't advise you on which of these criteria are more or less important, but we would say that:

- You'll do best on courses that interest you, that you have a talent for and that you enjoy studying.
- Making the 'right' or 'wrong' choices now can affect your future university and career options.
- The experience of other students at your school or college is something that you should consider, but don't let yourself be led by others – make your own choices and be sure of your reasons for doing so.

> "You'll do best on courses that interest you, that you have a talent for and that you enjoy studying."

Remember, making these kind of mature, informed decisions about your future is a key part of making the shift from pupil to student. Pupils study largely what they are told. Students make far more choices about what, how, where and when they study.

4. Why are my AS and A level grades important?

AS and A level grades are designed to provide an indication of how well you've done in the sixth form or at college. Rather than sitting a broad range of different types of subjects, as you have at GCSE, your AS and A level grades provide a stronger reflection of where your personal interests, talents and career intentions lie.

If you're studying any 'old' A level courses, or if you're following any 'new' A level courses and sitting AS papers at the half-way point, university admissions tutors will take the AS grades that you achieve after one year of study as indicators of your potential at A level. If you're taking any of the 'new' A level courses, but not sitting AS levels after the first year of study, they will look at your performance in mock examinations drawn up by your teachers.

A student with very good or top grades in three or four subjects at A level is likely to be attractive to employers and to university admissions tutors based at universities that are particularly difficult to get into and courses that are heavily over-subscribed. The message is simple: success at A level maximises your choice beyond A level. In particular, it's likely to help you to access the so-called 'selective' or 'elite' universities, including Oxford and Cambridge and others in the 'Russell Group'. They will also look at the 'predicted grades' that your teachers suggest you will achieve.

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The courses that you choose will have a longer-term impact on your prospects. For example, if you want to train as a doctor or an engineer, you'll need good grades across the sciences at A level; if you're thinking of a career in accountancy or in business, Mathematics and Economics are likely to be wise choices; English, History, Sociology, and Government and Politics are likely to provide a solid foundation for careers in areas like journalism, politics, law and social work; if you're planning to train as a teacher, an A level in at least one established National Curriculum subject is important, and vital at secondary level. Finally, if you'd like to study languages at university, or have the option of working in a country where English is not the first language, it will be important to study at least one language at A level to demonstrate your ability in this area.

5. Who else is concerned about my AS and A level grades?

We know that your parents or carers and your wider family are concerned about your AS and A level grades.

But your AS and A level grades are also important to your school or college and your teachers: teachers want the young people they have taught to do well and understand that a set of excellent A level grades can be the gateway to a great future. And, out of professional pride, they want you to do well in their subject.

> “Teachers want the young people they have taught to do well and understand that a set of excellent A level grades can be the gateway to a great future.”

They may well want you to continue studying the subject through to degree level and beyond.

Schools and colleges also need the young people in their care to succeed. Individual teachers always want their pupils to do well, but why is your school or college worried about your grades? Partly because schools and colleges have to record the performance of their students at AS and A level in ‘performance’ (or ‘league’) tables and these are published publicly for parents and others to view. Many people, rightly or wrongly, make judgments about schools and colleges based on how successful their students are in examinations, as revealed by these tables. Inspectors monitor GCSE, AS and A level performance at individual schools and colleges and are likely to act if the grades achieved by young people at a particular school or college dip in a certain year, or if they are persistently low, year-on-year.

In any case, good (or bad) news travels fast – and news that, for instance, record numbers of young people are going to university from a particular school or college is the stuff of local news headlines and neighbourhood gossip, and is likely to impact on the number of young people choosing to study in a particular school’s sixth form or a particular FE or Sixth Form college.

Schools and colleges are funded by the government on student numbers, so a decline in the number of students brought on by poor grades the previous year can have a significant impact on a school’s or college’s budget and, ultimately, on teachers’ jobs.

6. Are some AS and A level subjects considered to be more valuable than others?

We’d like to say no, but some would argue that this isn’t entirely true. The answer lies in what you would like to do after you’ve finished your AS and A levels. If you plan to enter medicine you’re likely to find that you have to have high grades in certain subjects – Biology and Chemistry in particular. If your likely career path leads to a future in art or fashion or business, you’re likely to find that other AS and A level courses are more highly valued.

This debate about the value of different subjects has become more heated lately with the emergence of the idea of 'facilitating' subjects. In a recent statement from the Russell Group of universities, the following subjects are described as 'facilitating':

- Biology
- Chemistry
- English literature
- Geography
- History
- Mathematics
- Further Mathematics
- Modern and classical languages
- Physics

"This debate about the value of different subjects has become more heated lately with the emergence of the idea of 'facilitating' subjects."

These subjects are not necessarily any 'harder' or 'more important' than other subjects (and some have criticised the list for being too traditional in nature, with no mention of the business or social sciences or the creative arts) but they might be valuable if you have your heart set on a certain type of course at a particular university.

If you're not sure about a particular type of career or university course, and you're just at the beginning of your AS and A level courses, it might not be too late to review your choices and make a change. Talk to a teacher or careers adviser for further guidance.

Activity 2: Making the right choices at AS and/or A level

If you have a particular career or degree course in mind, talk to your teachers and use the internet to check any requirements in terms of AS and A level subjects and grades.

7. How are AS and A levels marked and graded?

New and old AS and A levels are graded in the same way – on a six point scale where an A* grade is the top grade and an E is the lowest grade. Although the new A levels will be different from those they are replacing, examiners have promised that students sitting the new papers will not be disadvantaged, and, in any particular subject, they'll be pitched against other candidates who are also sitting papers of the same standard and style, new or old.

Your examination paper (or script) is not simply 'given' a grade. All papers are marked out of a numerical total. Examiners then decide on which scores are worthy of which grades. In a particular subject and a particular year they might award an A* grade to scripts in which candidates gain, for example 84 marks out of 100. The following year they might decide to award an A* grade to candidates who gain 82 marks out of 100. Examiners do this by comparing scripts that were awarded an A* in one year with those in another year, so that the standard achieved is the same, year-on-year, regardless of how 'tough' or 'easy' the examination turns out to be. Of course, they also try to ensure that the question papers are of the same standard.

"Your examination paper (or script) is not simply 'given' a grade. All papers are marked out of a numerical total. Examiners then decide on which scores are worthy of which grades."

This approach to grading ensures that where there are minor differences between the standard of question papers from year-to-year, the candidate is not disadvantaged. Comparisons are also made between subjects so as to see that the AS and A level examinations set in each subject are of broadly the same standard.

Whatever you may have read or heard, there are no 'easy' or 'soft' options at AS or A level, just different types of subjects that sometimes need to be examined in different kinds of way.

8. How are AS and A level examination papers produced?

AS and A level papers are produced much in the same way and with the same rigour as GCSE papers. As with GCSE examinations, AS and A level papers prepared for candidates in England have usually been set by one of three 'awarding organisations' or 'examination boards' – AQA, Edexcel or OCR. In Wales, and sometimes in England, candidates will sit examinations set by WJEC (the Welsh Joint Examinations Council). In Northern Ireland candidates usually sit examinations set by CCEA, the Northern Irish Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment, while in Scotland and the Republic of Ireland students sit a completely different set of examinations.

Your teachers will decide on whether you sit examinations set by one examination board or another. An AS or A level examination issued by one board may be different in style from another but it isn't likely to be any harder or easier, and all AS and A levels in a particular subject have to cover the same basic content. The awarding organisations are guided by tough standards about how examinations are set, what level they are set at, and what form they take laid down by an organisation called Ofqual..

Your AS or A level question paper has been on a long journey before it reaches you. Typically, the paper will have been written about 18 months before you sit it by a senior examiner, approved by a committee of experienced teachers and examiners, and tested through a 'scrutiny' process that involves an expert checking, literally, every word on the paper.

The intention, at every step, is not to make questions 'easy', but it's to make them 'clear'. Contrary to myth, examiners don't want to trip you up with confusing questions. They want to challenge you to show, as we have said earlier and will say again, what you 'know, understand and can do'.

The examiner who has written the paper will also have written something called a marking scheme. This sets down exactly what those marking the scripts can and can't award marks for. It's designed to ensure that examination scripts, including yours, are marked fairly and consistently.

All of this work is undertaken before you reach the examination room, and all of the individuals involved are interested only in one thing: to produce a paper that is clear, well written and focused on the content laid out in the examination specification or syllabus.

Most of those involved in writing or checking AS and A level papers are (or have been) teachers and they want you to succeed, something we'll say much more about later in this guide.

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"Most of those involved in writing or checking AS and A level papers are (or have been) teachers and they want you to succeed, something we'll say much more about later in this guide."

9. Is everything down to what happens in the exam room and at the end of the course?

At A level, this depends on whether you are doing 'old' or 'new' A levels, or a mix of the two.

If you're doing an 'old' A level course, your grade is derived from your performance across two sets of papers, the AS papers usually sat after one year of study (and sometimes repeated if you, or your school or college, are unhappy with your grade at this level), and the so-called 'A2' papers, usually sat after two years of study.

If you're doing one or more of the 'new' A level courses, all the papers are sat in one go – usually after two years of study.

The new courses are less likely to have a 'coursework' or 'controlled assessment' component than the courses that they are replacing. Very broadly, the trend is towards less or no coursework, with exams at the end of the course rather than throughout.

Check with each of your teachers to confirm the details of the particular AS and/or A level courses that you are following or planning to follow. We'll say more about this later.

10. What happens if something outside my control is likely to affect my exam performance?

If you have a condition that might impact on how well you do in your exams you may be eligible for extra time to finish the exam. Similarly, if your exam preparations are affected by something outside your control, for instance a serious illness or a change in your family circumstances in the run-up to your exams, you may qualify for 'special consideration', whereby your final grade is adjusted to reflect these difficulties.

Your teacher will be able to give you more information about this. Examiners are not unsympathetic to genuine appeals for extra time and special consideration but you need to make sure that your teachers are aware of your situation and of any medical conditions that you might have before the examination.

"Examiners are not unsympathetic to genuine appeals for extra time and special consideration but you need to make sure that your teachers are aware of your situation and of any medical conditions that you might have before the examination."

Part 3

How and why AS and A levels are changing

In this section, we outline how and why AS and A levels are changing. In particular, we'll focus on:

1. The place of what has been described as 'deep' or 'core' knowledge and 'cultural literacy' in the new-style courses.
2. The switch away from 'modular' assessment and towards 'end of course' testing and the associated switch from 'coursework' to written examinations.
3. The new relationship between AS and A level study programmes.

These changes are being introduced over the next three years: so, if you're doing a certain mix of AS and A levels, you might find that you're doing some 'old' and some 'new' courses. All that is important is that you understand how they differ and any implications for your own study and revision strategies. In this context, we will focus on five questions:

1. How do the new AS and A level examinations differ from those they replace?
2. Why are these changes being made?
3. Which AS and A level courses are amongst the first to change, and which are not changing until later?
4. What about retakes if I don't get the grades that I'm hoping for at the first attempt?
5. Apart from A levels, are there any other changes that I should be aware of?

The examination boards and other organisations, including the publishers of this guide – Cambridge University Press – are amongst those who are working with your teachers to ensure that they are prepared for the changes.

"These changes are being introduced over the next three years: so, if you're doing a certain mix of AS and A levels, you might find that you're doing some 'old' and some 'new' courses."

1. How do the new AS and A level examinations differ from those they replace?

The fundamental change is the separation of AS and A level. In the old model, the AS qualification forms 50% of the examination and the AS papers are usually sat at the end of the first year of study, and sometimes re-sat during or at the close of the second year; the A level (or 'A2') papers are sat at the end of the second year. The AS level papers are pitched at a lower standard than the A2 papers – the standard that an A level student might be expected to reach after one year of their course.

In the new model, the AS and A level qualifications are completely separate examinations. Although the AS level specifications often feature content that is also on the A level specifications, the AS grade makes no contribution to the A level grade. You might be in a group that features AS and A level students, but you're on distinct courses, with the A level papers pitched at a higher standard than the AS papers. If you're following one or more of the new A level courses, you'll sit all of the papers for that A level in one go, usually after two years of study.

> "If you're following one or more of the new A level courses, you'll sit all of the papers for that A level in one go, usually after two years of study."

Finally, as we've discussed in the previous section, the new A level courses are different to those they replace. In particular, they are likely to have the following features:

1. A greater focus on extended writing.
2. A greater focus on spelling, punctuation and grammar (or 'SPaG').
3. Fewer multi-part and low mark questions.
4. A focus on written examinations rather than 'coursework' or 'controlled assessments'.
5. A greater focus on 'English' authors and 'British' history.

Taken together, these changes would suggest that the new A levels will be tougher than the old ones, but remember, every student doing the same subject will face the same level of challenge so you won't be disadvantaged in any way.

The new AS levels will be set at the same standard as the old ones but, in terms of UCAS points, they will be valued at 40% of the value of an A level grade. Traditionally, an AS level has been worth 50% of the value of an A level grade. And, although the standard of AS levels is not changing, we would expect the style of the new AS level papers to reflect that of the new A levels.

2. Why are these changes being made?

When the outgoing AS–A2 model was introduced back in 2000, there was a surge in the number of students gaining higher grades, and critics argued that the 'gold standard' that A level had represented had, in effect, been 'watered down' by the integration of the two qualifications. The numbers gaining high grades has broadly continued to grow, and the government believes that there is a need to make the A level examination more challenging.

Moreover, a generation ago, the government felt that it was important to encourage more young people, especially young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, to go to university. Some now argue that too many young people are going to university, and that sometimes they are studying courses of little value while by-passing career opportunities in areas where there are skills shortages – these critics argue that such career opportunities might better be accessed by a non-university route such as an apprenticeship programme.

And some university-based academics have argued that the current A level model leads to young people arriving at university without necessarily having the literacy or numeracy skills required to succeed at degree level, or the level of knowledge and understanding required for undergraduate study, especially in areas such as mathematics, the sciences and engineering.

The Conservative politician and former Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove – who is seen as the driving force behind these changes – has drawn on the work of an American university professor, E.D. Hirsch, as one inspiration behind the reforms. Hirsch speaks about the three things that have done much to shape the changes currently been made to GCSE, AS and A level examinations:

- The importance of 'deep' or 'core' knowledge.
- The need for young people, especially those from disadvantaged and minority ethnic backgrounds, to have cultural literacy.
- The centrality of a particular body of knowledge to the formation of this literacy.

The new A levels, with their focus on extended writing, better grammar, more demanding mathematical problems, a stronger emphasis on a body of 'core' knowledge (approved by a group of university advisers), and a concentration on English literature (or, rather, English authors) and British history are a reflection of these principles.

The increasing preference for traditional subjects, highlighted for instance in the Russell Group's identification of 'facilitating' subjects, discussed earlier in this guide, and the introduction of a new school performance measure, the English Baccalaureate, that will increasingly lead to young people studying a particular range of subjects at GCSE are also attributed to Hirsch's influence.

Finally, an acceleration of two trends – the first away from 'bite-sized' modular, unit-by-unit assessment and towards 'all-in-one-go' linear final examinations, and the second away from coursework or continuous assessment and towards written examinations is further evidence of the kind of 'core knowledge' approach favoured by Hirsch.

With regard to coursework in particular, the change is striking. In English, History and Computer Science, the contribution that coursework can make to your final grade has been reduced from 40% to 20%. In the sciences, the assessment of practical work will not contribute to your final A level mark but will be reported separately in a 'Certificate of Endorsement'.

Taken together, some have likened these changes to a 'back to the future' approach that emphasises traditional subjects taught in traditional ways and assessed through traditional, written examinations.

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One consequence of all of this is that the step from GCSE to AS level and, especially, A level is likely to feel a little steeper if you're taking one or more of the new courses. Remember, though, the point that we've made several times already in this guide: every student doing the same subject will be in the same position, so you won't be at a disadvantage, even if you'll have to work especially hard for the grade that you achieve.

Activity 3: The controlled assignments or 'coursework' that you will need to complete

Find out which of your AS and/or A levels include an 'out of the exam room' controlled assignment; find out as much information as you can about this assignment – including when, where and how you are expected to do it.

3. Which AS and A level courses are amongst the first to change?

The changes are scheduled to be introduced over the next three years in three phases. The first set of subjects to be examined through the new model will to be taught from September 2015 and examined for the first time in June 2017; the second set of subjects to be examined through the new model will to be taught from September 2016 and examined for the first time in June 2018; and the third set of subjects to be examined through the new model will to be taught from September 2017 and examined for the first time in June 2019.

You can check whether the subjects that you have chosen to study from September 2015 will be examined through the new or old style of examination by studying the following table.

Those subjects scheduled to switch to the new model in 2016 or later are subject to change and, therefore, we advise that you check the detail provided here with relevant teacher at your school or college.

Phase 1

Subject	Course first taught	AS level first examined	A Level first examined
Art and Design	2015	2016	2017
Biology	2015	2016	2017
Business	2015	2016	2017
Chemistry	2015	2016	2017
Computer Science	2015	2016	2017
Economics	2015	2016	2017
English Language	2015	2016	2017
English Language and Literature	2015	2016	2017
English Literature	2015	2016	2017
History	2015	2016	2017
Physics	2015	2016	2017
Psychology	2015	2016	2017
Sociology	2015	2016	2017

Phase 2

Subject	Course first taught	AS level first examined	A Level first examined
Dance	2016	2017	2018
Drama and Theatre	2016	2017	2018
French	2016	2017	2018
Geography	2016	2017	2018
German	2016	2017	2018
Greek	2016	2017	2018
Latin	2016	2017	2018
Music	2016	2017	2018
Physical Education	2016	2017	2018
Religious Studies	2016	2017	2018
Spanish	2016	2017	2018

Phase 3

Subject	Course first taught	AS level first examined	A Level first examined
Accounting	2017	2018	2019
Ancient History	2017	2018	2019
Archaeology	2017	2018	2019
Classical Civilization	2017	2018	2019
Creative Writing	2017	2018	2019
Design and Technology	2017	2018	2019
Electronics	2017	2018	2019
Environmental Science	2017	2018	2019
Film Studies	2017	2018	2019
Further Mathematics	2017	2018	2019
Spanish	2016	2017	2018

Subject	Course first taught	AS level first examined	A Level first examined
General Studies	2017	2018	2019
Geology	2017	2018	2019
Government and Politics	2017	2018	2019
Health and Social Care	2017	2018	2019
History of Art	2017	2018	2019
Information and Comm.	2017	2018	2019
Technology	2017	2018	2019
Law	2017	2018	2019
Mathematics	2017	2018	2019
Media Studies	2017	2018	2019
Music Technology	2017	2018	2019
Philosophy	2017	2018	2019
Statistics	2017	2018	2019

Finally, and controversially, as this guide goes to press, there is a debate about whether certain subjects, such as Anthropology, Citizenship Studies and a number of community languages (such as Bengali, Polish and Punjabi), should continue to be AS or A level subjects.

4. What about retakes if I don't get the grades that I'm hoping for at the first attempt?

Critics have argued that the ability to retake individual papers (or units) in the old combined AS and A level model, especially the chance to retake the 'easier' AS papers, has lowered standards and seen weaker students 'scrape through'. In the new model, students will only be able to retake the whole A level and, as has been the case since 2013, they will only be able to re-sit the written examination the following summer. However, students will be able to carry forward the marks gained in any internally assessed coursework component of an A level examination.

"Students will be able to carry forward the marks gained in any internally assessed coursework component of an A level examination."

If you're sitting one or more of the old A level courses, your retake options will be limited simply because the exam boards will stop producing the papers concerned once the new style courses have been introduced.

5. Apart from A levels, are there any other changes that I should be aware of?

Yes, one in particular; as part of these reforms there is a strong focus on the standard of literacy and numeracy. If you haven't achieved the equivalent of a Grade C (which, in the new GCSE grading framework, is likely to translate into a Grade 4 or 5) in English Language and Mathematics by the close of Year 11, you will be required to continue your study of either or both of these subjects alongside your AS and/or A levels.

Your school or college will have its own arrangements to enable you to continue your studies in either or both areas if you need to do so, and will guide you through these.

"If you haven't achieved the equivalent of a Grade C (which, in the new GCSE grading framework, is likely to translate into a Grade 4 or 5) in English Language and Mathematics by the close of Year 11, you will be required to continue your study of either or both of these subjects alongside your AS and/or A levels."

Part 4

Developing your capacity to succeed as an AS or A level student

In this section, we're interested in helping you to develop the kind of attitudes and skills that will enable you to succeed at AS and A level, whether you are studying the new-style AS or A level courses, the traditional ones or a mix of the two. These include your attitude to completing assignments and to studying when you're not at school, your ability to manage your time and your approach to revision. Again, we've organised what we have to say through trying to answer some of the questions that you should be asking yourself at this stage of your course, such as:

- What are the qualities of a successful AS and A level student and how do I become one?
- What role can I play in planning my A level studies?
- How and where do I learn best?
- How should I organise my revision?
- What about examination practice?
- Why are assessment objectives important at AS and A level, and how do I address these?

Working through the answers to these questions will help you to complete a really important change in how you learn, a change that you'll have begun during your studies in Years 10 and 11, as you worked towards your GCSEs. By completing the transition from pupil to student, you'll lay very firm foundations for success either at university or in the workplace.

1. What are the qualities of a successful AS and A level student and how do I become one?

Primary school pupils and those in the early years of secondary school are largely dependent on their teachers for their learning. By way of contrast, students are required to engage in independent learning.

During the course of your GCSE studies, you will have started out on the path to independent learning, and as you move onto AS and/or A level study, what you achieve will increasingly be down to you.

“Primary school pupils and those in the early years of secondary school are largely dependent on their teachers for their learning. By way of contrast, students are required to engage in independent learning.”

Successful students are independent learners but they do not simply learn alone. Instead, they draw on the expertise of others and a range of on and offline learning resources to develop their skills and knowledge. In particular, successful students engage with their teachers differently. They don't simply depend on teacher instruction to get them through.

Our intention is that, as you get closer and closer to the examination room, you'll become more and more independent, confident and self-starting as a learner. This won't just prepare you for your exams. It will prepare you for the even greater level of independence that you'll find that you are required to demonstrate at university and in the workplace. In the sixth form or at college you're likely to be given far more freedom to manage your own learning, a freedom that you'll be expected to use responsibly.

> "As you get closer and closer to the examination room, you'll become more and more independent, confident and self-starting as a learner."

So, what kind of qualities does an independent learner or successful student have? If you're to successfully find your way through your AS and/or A level courses, you'll need to:

- Know the structure of each examination.
- Be familiar with the examination specification in each subject.
- Be aware of the kind of things that the examiners are most likely to ask about in each subject.
- Have the ability and motivation to go and find things out.
- Be able to organise your time well, so that you use 'free' periods well and hand work in for marking regularly and on time.
- Work out what methods of filing and organising your notes work best for you.
- Balance your life as a student with your developing social life, and with other responsibilities such as finding and holding down a part time job, taking on greater responsibility in the family, or running a car.

The good news is that one of the key aspects of being an independent learner, searching for knowledge – or finding things out – is far easier than it has ever been; think about searching for information on the internet – knowledge that might once have meant a bus journey to a library or a day out at a museum is now just a click or two away, although you should, of course, think carefully about the information that you find. Just like information in newspapers or in books or information provided through advertisements, you should always be seeking not just to accept that information found on the internet is true but also to check that it is.

Activity 4: Learning to study by yourself – becoming an independent learner

Divide a piece of A4 paper into two columns and place the heading 'Dependent learner / pupil' at the top of one and 'Independent learner / student' at the top of the other, listing the characteristics of each in each column. We've made a start for you. See if you can add to this.

Dependent learner/pupil	Independent learner/student
Relies on the teacher to guide them every step of the way.	Has the confidence to 'have a go' at questions and assignments and the maturity to ask for the teacher's help when it is needed.
Tends to just do the work set – and often the minimum required.	Undertakes additional study to find out more about a particular issue or topic.
Uses sources such as the internet as a place to 'copy' facts from.	Uses sources such as the internet to find out about new things and to extend their knowledge.
Only completes assignments when really pushed to do so by teachers, parents and others, and usually at the last minute.	Completes assignments without being pushed to do so by teachers, parents or others and in good time.
Has a full timetable, in which every period is allocated to a certain subject and taught by a particular teacher.	Has a range of apparently 'free' or 'study' periods in which they are responsible for organising their own learning.

2. What role can I play in planning my AS and A level studies?

In each subject your teacher will have a plan to cover all of the things in the examination specification. They will understand it fully, and where the specification has been in use for a number of years, they will have particular strategies to make sure that you're as well prepared as you can be. If it's one of the new AS or A levels they will have read all of the guidance materials in detail and discussed how best to teach the new course with colleagues.

But this does not mean that they do all the planning and you do none. Being a student, rather than just a pupil, means taking control of your own learning. Your teacher is responsible for ensuring that you are familiar with all of the key elements of the examination specification and that you are pointed towards the main things that you can expect to be examined on. Your job is to build on this guidance; this involves working out a plan that means that you'll be able to hand work in on time, ensuring it's to a good standard, and that you'll be able to manage the demands of your studies, whilst also playing a full part in sixth form or college life. Employers and university admissions tutors don't just want young people with great grades in the right subjects; they want rounded young people with a range of interpersonal skills and personal qualities.

"Being a student, rather than just a pupil, means taking control of your own learning. Your teacher is responsible for ensuring that you are familiar with all of the key elements of the examination specification and that you are pointed towards the main things that you can expect to be examined on. Your job is to build on this guidance."

And, as we have noted above, you'll need to ensure that this plan fits with the rest of your life – with your hobbies, your responsibilities at home, seeing your friends, and any part time job that you might have. In this context, we can make a number of recommendations.

During the first half term of the course and at the beginning of each term after that, you should get a list of the key dates and deadlines in each AS or A level course – your subject teachers will help you to do this.

You should work out a rough private study timetable, that allows you to complete work or revision in each subject on a regular basis – one that fits with your subject timetable, your life at school or college and your life beyond the school or college gates.

You should work out your strengths and weaknesses across each AS or A level course, so that you can give extra time to those areas that you feel that you need to improve on – 'practice makes perfect', or at least it will help you to do better in those areas of study where you might be a little less confident.

Drafting out an outline plan for each of your AS or A levels is a part of becoming an effective student and part of taking responsibility for your own learning. By regularly reviewing and adjusting your plans, you can ensure that you remain on track for success.

3. How and where do I learn best?

Everybody has a style of learning that works for them, and everybody learns best in a setting in which they're comfortable. There is now a huge amount of research on how different people learn, and on different learning styles. Experts call this ability to grasp the way that we best learn 'meta-cognition'.

Don't worry, we're not going to go into detail about meta-cognition or the scientific debate about different learning styles and so-called 'multiple intelligences' here but we would suggest that you think about:

- How you prefer to learn about something new. Do you prefer to learn in class, from a book, through talking with others (on or offline), through an interactive software programme, or by doing it and learning from the experience?
- How do you prefer to revise or remember a subject or a topic – for instance, by marking text with a highlighter pen, by making notes, by discussing it in a small group, or by drawing various kinds of diagrams, including spider diagrams and learning maps?
- Do you prefer to work alone and in silence, or with music or television on in the background?

Different people revise in different ways.

> "There is now a huge amount of research on how different people learn, and different learning styles. Experts call this ability to grasp the way that we best learn 'meta-cognition'."

As a student, rather than a pupil, you'll need to begin to think about these things. As you work through your AS and A level courses, you'll be responsible for more and more of your own learning, and you'll need to make sure that you can approach this responsibility in a way that works for you. There are various tests that you can take to work out what your learning style is, or what your preferred learning style is likely to be, some of them available online, but we suggest that considering the issues above is a good starting point.

The other thing that you will need to think about is where you prefer to study. If it's an option, it's good to have a place at home where you can work, but not everybody is in that position. Try to explore how well you can work in various school or college settings, such as the library or the common room. Remember, with or without music in your ear or others around you, you'll need to be able to concentrate;

some people can do that in fairly crowded settings, such as a busy coffee shop, while others prefer silence and isolation or working in small study groups.

You'll already have begun to develop a sense of what kind of setting you learn best in during your GCSE studies. In the early months of your AS and/or A level studies, try to confirm what kind of setting you prefer and explore the new kinds of settings that are available to you as a sixth form or college student, and explore what others are doing too. Even if you don't wish to study alongside your friends, find out what works for them – sometimes, they will discover things that could work for you as well.

4. How should I organise my revision?

As we have seen earlier in this guide, if you are following one or more of the new AS or A level courses, you're likely to be assessed mainly, or completely, on a final examination in controlled conditions in an examination room after almost two years of study.

In contrast, if you're following one or more of the old A level courses, you'll study for an AS level qualification as a part of your A level studies. The AS level 'units' are likely to be examined at the end of the first year of study or earlier, and you may have the opportunity to re-sit these if you, or your school or college, are unhappy with your performance first-time round.

In short, old A levels are essentially modular in nature. This means that your final grade is the result of an examination that is broken down into 'bite-sized' chunks (or 'modules') and you sit module tests at different points during the course so that everything doesn't rest on the final examination. The new A levels are not like this. In the language of the examiners, we are seeing a shift from continuous to terminal (all at once) assessment. Either way, having good revision skills and strategies is vital if you are to fulfil your potential and achieve the best grades that you can at AS and/or A level.

So, what sits at the heart of an effective revision strategy? We'd recommend the following:

1. Revise from the beginning of the course, and make full use of any 'free' periods on your timetable – you can't do two years of revision in a few weeks before the examination or any mock examination.
2. Devise an approach to note taking that works for you and allows you to summarise what you have covered in each area of the specification.

"In the language of the examiners, we are seeing a shift from continuous to terminal (all at once) assessment. Either way, having good revision skills and strategies, is vital if you are to fulfil your potential and achieve the best grades that you can at AS and/or A level."

3. If there are other students in your class or amongst your friends that you work especially well with, think about forming a revision group to share ideas and knowledge and to 'test' each other.
4. Make use of social networking by joining online revision groups, taking all the precautions that you normally would when joining online communities.
5. In the sciences, Mathematics, Economics and other subjects that rely on formulas, revisit and practise these regularly.
6. Consider purchasing the kind of revision guides available for each subject, checking with individual teachers what they regard as the best for the precise course that you are following – but don't leave it until the weeks before the examinations.
7. Make full use of the range of subject focused websites that support revision at AS and A level – but, again, don't leave it until the weeks before the examination.
8. As a rough formula, for every hour you spend studying new material, spend about 20 min revising.
9. Take regular breaks – a 10 min break in every hour or so can help to refresh you, and provides a natural pause between different subjects or assignments.
10. Start modestly – you will be doing more revision and private study later in your course than at the beginning and, for this reason, we'd advise that you start gradually and build up, just as you might if you were planning to run a marathon or climb a mountain.

> "Think about forming a revision group to share ideas and knowledge and to 'test' each other."

And, of course, one other thing is vital – examination question practice. It's to this that we now turn.

5. What about examination practice?

When you learn to drive, as you may well do during the course of your AS and A level studies, you won't get into a car for the first time on the day of your driving test and you won't look at the Highway Code, the guide to the rules of the road that all new drivers must learn, for the first time an hour before you arrive at the testing centre.

In the same way, you should be familiar with the kind of examination papers that you will sit in each subject long before your time in the examination room arrives.

For this reason, we believe that you should practice on 'real' examination questions and actual examination papers from the start of your course. We'll say more about this in the next section, but for now we'd advise that you begin to collect recent examination papers in each of your subjects – these are usually available on the internet – and familiarise yourself with:

> "You should be familiar with the kind of examination papers that you will sit in each subject long before your time in the examination room arrives."

- The way in which the papers are laid out.
- The style of the questions.
- The themes and types of question in each section of the paper.
- The time allocated to each section.
- The number of marks allocated to each question.
- The sorts of theme or question that seem to come up frequently.

Don't expect to be able to answer the questions right at the beginning of the course, but do expect to be able to try them out as you come to the end of certain topics in the classroom.

And remember that examination papers are written in a certain 'language' with key 'trigger' words (like 'assess', 'discuss' and 'describe') that indicate what you need to do to get the marks available. As is the case at GCSE, getting familiar with this language is the route to AS and A level success, and safe in the knowledge that you get 'examiner speak', you can begin to really enjoy your AS and/or A level courses and the subjects that you are studying.

Activity 5: Starting your collection of past examination papers

If you're following one or more of the 'old' A level courses, set yourself the target of getting hold of two or three past papers for each AS and 'A2' unit by the end of your first term in the sixth form or at college. Check with your teacher the precise details of the specification and the papers required and, if you are following one or more of the new AS or A level courses, ask for their guidance on how you might best practice for the examination. Usually, the examination board will have produced a set of 'specimen' papers and you should look at these.

6. Why are 'assessment objectives' especially important at AS and A level, and how do I address these?

Every public examination is underpinned by a set of 'assessment objectives'. An assessment objective is something that the examiners want you to know, understand or be able to do as a result of successfully completing the course. For example, in a number of humanities and social sciences courses, assessment objectives are grouped under the following, or very similar, headings:

- knowledge and understanding
- interpretation, analysis and application
- evaluation.

"Every public examination is underpinned by a set of 'assessment objectives'."

Thus, in terms of 'knowledge and understanding' by the close of the course you'll be expected to know and understand the importance of a particular body of knowledge. With regard to 'interpretation, analysis and application' you'll be expected to be able to analyse information and draw conclusions from this analysis. Finally, you'll be tested on your evaluation skills – your ability to assess the validity of an argument, the quality of a text or the reliability of a piece of data. In other types of subjects, assessment objectives target other skills, for instance, in A level English Literature you will be required to 'Explore connections across literacy texts' and in Physics you will be asked to 'apply knowledge and understanding of scientific ideas, processes, techniques and procedures', theoretically, practically and in the handling of data.

Critically, these assessment objectives inform the way in which questions are written and marks awarded. At A level, in particular, it's not enough to simply 'know' everything that you have read in the textbook. You must be able to analyse and interpret this information, apply the lessons from it to 'real world' settings or to particular case studies and evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of arguments or approaches.

The good news is that examiners will give you very strong hints as to the kind of assessment objectives they are testing in particular questions or parts of questions by the words that they use. Thus, they will ask you to explain, discuss, assess or evaluate particular things.

Becoming familiar with the different assessment objectives that you are being assessed on, and the weighting that they are given, in each of your AS and/or A level courses is vital if you're to emerge with the best grade that you can achieve at the end of the course.

"Becoming familiar with the different assessment objectives that you are being assessed on, and the weighting that they are given, in each of your AS and/or A level courses is vital if you're to emerge with the best grade that you can achieve at the end of the course."

Activity 6: Becoming familiar with the assessment objectives in each AS or A level course that you're studying

Draw up a grid like the one below and list the assessment objectives in each subject. We've completed the details for three subjects as an example.

Subject	Exam Board	Assessment Objectives	Approximate weighting across all papers
English Literature	OCR	**AO1**: Articulate informed, personal and creative responses to literary texts, using associated concepts and terminology, and coherent, accurate written expression.	20%
		AO2: Analyse ways in which meanings are shaped in literary texts.	30%
		AO3: Demonstrate understanding of the significance and influence of the contexts in which literary texts are written and received.	25%
		AO4: Explore connections across literary texts.	12.5%
		AO5: Explore literary texts informed by different interpretations.	12.5%
Physics	Pearson Edexcel	**AO1**: Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of scientific ideas, processes, techniques and procedures.	31–33%
		AO2: Apply knowledge and understanding of scientific ideas, processes, techniques and procedures: • In a theoretical context. • In a practical context. • When handling qualitative data. • When handling quantitative data.	41–43%
		AO3: Analyse, interpret and evaluate scientific information, ideas and evidence, including in relation to issues, to: • Make judgements and reach conclusions. • Develop and refine practical design and procedures.	25–27%
Sociology	AQA	**AO1**: Knowledge and understanding of sociological theories, concepts and evidence.	46%
		AO2: Apply sociological theories, concepts, evidence and research methods to a range of issues.	31%
		AO3: Analysis and evaluate sociological theories, concepts, evidence and research methods in order to: • Present arguments. • Make judgements. • Draw conclusions.	23%

Part 5

The skills and strategies that you'll need for success in the examination room

We've designed this guide to be read at the beginning of your AS and/or A level courses, but you might want to re-read this section as you get closer to the exam season. However, like GCSEs, AS and A level courses are a marathon rather than a sprint, so it's a good idea to have a sense of what the finishing line looks like before you start.

For this reason, we want you to consider three questions right at the start of your studies:

1. As my exams approach, what will I need to do to make sure that I'm 'exam-ready'?
2. What should I do, and not do, in the examination room?
3. How do I best handle the challenge of having a number of exams in a short period of time?

> "Public examinations such as AS and A levels, are designed to confirm what you 'know, understand and can do'."

And remember, if you've taken the advice on revision that we've set out in the previous section and if you've attended classes, followed your teachers' and tutors' guidance, completed the assignments set in each subject and practised answering 'real' examination questions, you'll be fine.

To repeat a point we've made on a couple of occasions already, public examinations such as AS and A levels, are designed to confirm what you 'know, understand and can do', and examiners are human beings, expert in their subject and often with a teaching background. They have no interest in posing 'trick' questions or in 'tripping you up'.

1. As my exams approach what will I need to do to make sure that I'm 'exam-ready'?

In the run-up to your exams, we want you to feel relaxed and confident for six reasons:

- You've worked hard for the best part of a year (for AS level courses) and usually nearly two years (for A level courses).
- You're confident about the subject knowledge that you'll need for each exam.
- You're familiar with the style of each exam.
- You'll have sat a full 'mock' exam in all or most subjects at some stage.

- You've got a clear plan for the two or three weeks over which the exams will take place, and you've built in time for work, rest and hobbies during this period.
- You've discussed this plan with your teachers and your family and they're all on your side.

The key strategies for the final run-in to your AS and A level examinations that we suggest here will not take you from zero to full marks. Your efforts and those of your teachers and parents or carers over the course of your schooling will do that, but our suggestions might give you those few extra marks that move you up a grade or ensure you get the grade that you deserve. And, of course, with regard to going to university, every mark counts!

In this period just before your AS or A level examinations start, your focus should be on what we call being 'exam-ready'. In ensuring that you're 'exam-ready', you'll need to be certain of three things, that you:

- Have a final revision plan for each subject, paper-by-paper that enables you to feel really confident about the knowledge and skills that you'll be assessed on.
- Know the subject, time, date and venue for each paper, and the equipment that you'll need and are allowed to use – remember, there are very precise rules about the use of set texts, dictionaries and calculators, and make sure that you understand these rules well in advance of each examination.
- Know the precise structure, timing and content of each paper.

The good news is that you've done all of this before when taking your GCSEs. At AS and A level, you're studying far fewer courses, so the detail of what is examined on which paper should be a lot easier to grasp.

So, you've studied hard for nearly two years and you've revised virtually from day one. Let's turn to what happens in the examination room. You or your teachers or parents might think that our advice here is mind-numbingly obvious; it is, but as experienced examiners and teachers ourselves, we've seen good students who fail to take these steps year-after-year and across a wide-range of subjects.

"Know the subject, time, date and venue for each paper, and the equipment that you'll need and are allowed to use – remember, there are very precise rules about the use of set texts, dictionaries and calculators, and make sure that you understand these rules well in advance of each examination."

2. What should I do, and not do, in the exam room?

On the day of the examination and in the exam room, we'd strongly advise you to:

1. Arrive in good time, making sure that you're absolutely sure about when the exam starts and where the venue is.
2. Make sure that you enter the examination room with the correct equipment for the specific exam concerned, including a spare pen, and any items that you're allowed to have such as a dictionary, copies of set texts or a calculator.
3. Read the instructions (or rubric) on the front of the paper carefully and slowly so that you're absolutely certain about how many questions to answer in each section, how long you should spend on each section, and the total time available to complete the paper.
4. Read each question on the paper at least twice, checking precisely what the questions are asking you to do and how many marks are available.
5. Try to decipher which skills or assessment objectives the examiners are targeting in each question – very often the trigger word (discuss, explain, analyse, evaluate) will provide a clue.
6. Read any stimulus material or passages of writing at least twice, again underlining key points and annotating the text so as to make sure that you fully understand it and haven't missed any key points.
7. Stick to your timing plan for working through each paper. You should be guided in the time that you spend on any one question by the marks available for that question, leaving perhaps 10 min at the end to read through and check your answers.
8. Use clear English throughout, as marks are given for this and it helps the marker to understand your answer. Remember that the new AS and A level papers, in particular, place a special importance on good 'Spelling, punctuation and grammar (SPaG)' and reward you for this.
9. Put a line through any planning or working out that you don't want the person marking your paper to read or give credit for.
10. Make sure that you have entered the correct personal details in the boxes provided and clearly label any additional sheets.

"Read the instructions (or rubric) on the front of the paper carefully and slowly so that you're absolutely certain about how many questions to answer in each section, how long you should spend on each section, and the total time available to complete the paper."

"Read each question on the paper at least twice, checking precisely what the questions are asking you to do and how many marks are available."

And here are some things we'd advise against doing, don't:

1. Rush into answering a question before you've read and re-read it (and any related material) thoroughly and before you have, especially with extended answers, planned your response.
2. Finish the exam significantly earlier than you are required to – if the examiners have given you two hours to complete an examination paper, you need two hours to complete it; if you've finished it in one hour, you almost certainly haven't written enough, even if you've answered every question, and you certainly won't have achieved as high a mark as you might have.
3. Stray from your timing plan for the paper – if you spend too long on one question, you can't hope to make up that time on another question, and your grade will suffer.
4. Answer fewer than the number of questions that you are required to – some candidates think that they can make up the marks they are missing out on by answering fewer questions in greater detail; they're wrong, you can't.
5. Provide long and detailed answers when only a few marks are available – if only two marks are available, you can't gain four marks by writing twice the amount required – or short answers where there are lots of marks available – if 25 marks are available, you can't get full marks for a very short answer, no matter how 'correct' your response is.

> "If the examiners have given you two hours to complete an examination paper, you need two hours to complete it."

These things may seem obvious, but experienced senior examiners and teachers will tell you that thousands of students ignore this kind of advice every year. We don't want you to make the same error.

3. How do I best handle the challenge of having a number of exams in a short period of time?

How you handle the two or three weeks in which your AS or A level examinations take place will play a key role in how well you do across your examinations. Remember, if you've taken the advice set out in this guide, you'll have completed virtually all of your studying and revision before the exams start. It's now about how you manage the examination period itself.

To be successful during this time, it is a good idea to:

- Make sure that you get a good night's sleep every night – and especially before those days on which you have examinations.
- Leave enough time to relax and recuperate after each examination, or at least after each full day of examinations.
- Make sure that you eat and exercise as you normally would – this is not a time to introduce new approaches to food or fitness.
- Avoid long, last-minute revision sessions that might risk sapping your energy and which could increase anxiety and stress levels.
- Check (and double-check) that you've got the venue and time right for each examination, that you have all the necessary equipment, and that nothing is going to stop you arriving in good time for the start of the examination – we'd suggest arriving about 15 min early (arriving earlier than this might cause you to pace up and down with worry outside the exam room; arriving later introduces the possibility of being late and can leave you feeling rushed and flustered).
- Make sure that your parents or carers also have all of the details about the examination times and venues – it is easy to get these mixed up when you are sitting a lot of papers in a short period.
- Reflect on the next examination, not the last one – people rarely come out of exams thinking that they have done as well as they might have, but remember 'once it's done, it's done' and focus on the next paper.

You'll have lots of support during the examination period, and it's important to remember that your teachers are experienced in supporting students through the examination period, year-after-year, and that almost every one of your friends will be feeling the same. Talk to your friends during the course of your exams; you'll appreciate each other's support and you'll realise that you're not the only one with concerns.

“Talk to your friends during the course of your exams; you'll appreciate each other's support and you'll realise that you're not the only one with concerns.”

Part 6

Beyond A level: your options in terms of employment and Higher Education

If you're reading this guide at the beginning of your AS and/or A level studies, you could be forgiven for thinking that it's a bit early to be talking about beyond A levels. Certainly, you might want to re-read this section in a few months' time, but we think there's no harm in simply understanding your options at this point. It's always useful to have an idea of your possible destinations at the start of a journey, even if you don't know where you might end up. Consider those destinations here. Broadly they'll involve one, or perhaps a mix, of the following:

- Entering full-time employment with a training component, possibly one of the growing number of higher level apprenticeship programmes.
- Going to university, possibly with a particular career in mind or, alternatively, with a desire to keep your options 'open' at this stage.
- Beginning some other kind of course of a professional or vocational nature, at a specialist college (such as an art college), or with a training provider.

In coming to a decision about which direction you wish to go in, you'll need to think about six questions:

1. Do I have any idea about the kind of career I am interested in when I finish my A levels?
2. Does this career require me to have a university degree, and if so, does it require a degree in a certain subject?
3. Are some universities or university courses more highly regarded than others?
4. Apart from A levels, what else might I need to do to get onto the university course – or into the career – that I wish to?
5. Where can I get the advice and guidance to help me make the right decisions about life beyond A levels, and about the worlds of work and Higher Education in particular, especially if I'm not clear about my response to the above questions?
6. Are there other reasons for choosing to go to university or not?

We'll now take each of these questions in turn.

1. Do I have any idea about the kind of career that I want to follow when I complete my AS or A levels?

You might answer this question with a very definite 'yes' or a slightly worried 'no'. If you've answered positively, have you checked that your GCSE performance and your course choice at AS and/or A level mean that you've got any GCSE grades that you need and that your AS and/or A level choices are appropriate?

If you've answered 'no', does the A and/or AS choice that you've made leave enough doors open to a range of employment and/or university options, or does it point towards interest in a particular field? Might this choice of subjects begin to give you a steer on your future career decisions?

The most important thing at this stage is not that you rush to a 'yes' answer, but that you keep the question in mind. A firm idea about career can help you focus on achieving the right grades but it's important to remember that the very idea of 'career' is itself changing. Traditionally, a career was for life. This is unlikely to be the case for many of those leaving school, college or university in the next few years. Somebody entering the workforce over the next decade is likely to have several careers rather than a single one that lasts a lifetime..

In making subject choices and identifying extra-curricular activities to become involved in, it's worth bearing in mind a future made up of a succession of careers, rather than a single career.

> "A firm idea about career can help you focus on achieving the right grades but it's important to remember that the very idea of 'career' is itself changing."

2. Does this career require me to have a university degree, and if so does it require a degree in a certain subject?

Again, this is a matter of checking at this stage. Some students make course choices without having all of the information to hand, only to discover the actual position at a later point when they can't change track. Subject teachers, careers advisers and the websites of professional bodies, individual universities and university departments are important starting points here.

Given that you might find yourself paying tuition fees, taking out a loan to cover your living expenses and devoting three or more (usually very enjoyable) years of your life to studying for a full-time degree, it's vital to make sure that you are clear about the need for a degree and any requirements or benefits associated with this being in a certain subject.

3. Are some universities, or some university courses more highly thought of than others?

Yes, but this is not entirely as straightforward as it may seem. Oxford and Cambridge and the older 'red brick' universities have always been highly thought of, and, very broadly, older, longer established universities have tended to have stronger reputations than the so-called 'new' universities. This is perhaps because many of the latter started life as 'Polytechnics' focused on technical and vocational subjects – subjects that, in the UK, have often been wrongly thought of as being of less worth than traditional academic courses. In the early 1990s, the Polytechnics were given 'University' status.

As we have noted earlier in this guide, many of the older universities are now part of something called the 'Russell Group', a group of leading institutions that has been very influential in recent years. Typically, entry to a Russell Group university requires good A level grades and often there is a preference for the 'facilitating' subjects that we discussed earlier in this guide.

But it's important to note that many newer universities have become 'centres of excellence' in particular fields, especially in emerging areas where the older universities are not as well established. In short, whether you are thinking of an older or newer university, look beyond the title of the institution and make sure that you're choosing not just the right university, but the right course.

"As we have noted earlier in this guide, many of the older universities are now part of something called the 'Russell Group', a group of leading institutions that has been very influential in recent years."

4. Apart from A levels, what else might I need to do to get onto the university course – or into the career – that I wish to?

In any university or job application, or at any interview, you'll need to be able to show that you can offer more than simply a set of great exam grades. In making a university application you'll need to complete something called a Personal Statement, and for many jobs and training programmes, you'll need to do something similar. In this kind of statement you'll need to outline that your skills, abilities and interests are wider and deeper than the three or four AS or A level subjects that you are studying. To some degree, you might do this by referring to your participation in extra-curricular activities or to hobbies and interests that you take part in beyond the school or college gates. You might also refer to your involvement in a General Studies programme or in something like the Duke of Edinburgh's Award, or to your role as a student representative. You might point to the Extended Project Qualification that you are undertaking as evidence that your interests are wide and varied. Whatever the mix, the ability to present yourself in this way will enable you to differentiate yourself from others that you might be competing with for a job or a university place.

These 'extras' are, though, essentially voluntary. On the other hand, to enter certain careers or to study certain things at university, or to get into certain universities, you may need to undertake additional assessments regardless of your A level grades. For example, those who wish to study medicine are often required to undertake an aptitude test such as UKCAT (the UK Clinical Aptitude Test) and those planning to pursue a course in art or design are likely to be asked to present a portfolio of their work. In a similar vein, if you are seeking access to the Universities of Oxford or Cambridge, or to particular courses elsewhere, you will often have to pass additional tests regardless of how good your A level grades are. We outline in the next section who to speak to and how to a get the advice that you will need to make the right decisions.

Remember: don't just check up on the grades and any additional assessments that you might need to undertake to get onto a certain course or into a certain career – check on the professional qualifications that you might need to take either after, or as an alternative to, university, or alongside your degree studies. In other words, try to get as full a picture as you can about your future employment and Higher Education options, as early as you can.

5. Where can I get the advice and guidance to help me make the right decisions about life beyond A levels, and about the worlds of work and Higher Education?

If you're thinking of going to university, start with talking to the teacher responsible for managing university applications (called the UCAS process, because you apply to university through a centralised system organised by the Universities Central Admissions Service), and look out for the range of excellent publications available to support your choice of university and course.

If not, speak to a careers adviser about the range of employment and training options now available to young people with AS and/or A levels.

And, as we have suggested elsewhere in this guide, try to speak to professionals in the careers that you're interested in entering and students at any universities that you're interested in applying to. Also, make sure that you attend careers talks and university and course open days. All of this will inform your decision-making, spur you on in your studies and help you to prepare an appropriate and attractive CV.

6. Are there other reasons for choosing to go to university or not?

Over the past twenty-five years, the introduction of student loans and tuition fees has fundamentally changed the Higher Education landscape. Graduates, though, continue to benefit from what is sometimes called the Graduate Lifetime Earnings Premium, the additional amount that a graduate can expect to earn in comparison with a non-graduate, even when the impact of loans and fees is taken into account.

Recent research from a team at the University of Lancaster suggests that male graduates typically earn 28% more than their non-graduate peers, while for women graduates the figure is 52%, and that the university attended has little impact on this outcome. The researchers conclude: 'it doesn't much matter what type of HE institution you attend. It's just getting there and working for a good degree that counts for life earnings. Differences in the rate of return between a Russell Group institution and a 'lesser' one in terms of rankings is, on average, small – and in statistical terms, insignificant'.

But there are a growing number of options for AS and A level students who don't want to continue their studies into Higher Education, including a range of higher level apprenticeships, typically accessed after A levels. You should make sure that you explore these options fully. Speaking to a Careers Education specialist is the best starting point.

"Recent research from a team at the University of Lancaster suggests that male graduates typically earn 28% more than their non-graduate peers, while for women graduates the figure is 52%, and that the university attended has little impact on this outcome."

Activity 7: Finding out what careers guidance is available at your school or college

Find out who is responsible for Careers Education and Guidance and who organises the university application (or UCAS) process at your school or college.

Part 7

Success at AS and A level: a quick reference guide

1. AS and A levels as qualifications

a. When are A levels usually completed?

After two years of study, usually at the close of year 13 (otherwise known as the Upper Sixth), although sometimes you can complete an A level after one year of intensive study.
In any 'older' style A levels that you're taking, you're likely to sit some or all of the AS level modules (which form 50% of the A level examination) at the end of year 12 and the remaining A level modules at the close of year 13.
In any 'newer' style A levels that you are taking, all of the written papers are likely to be sat at the close of year 13.

b. Why are they so important?

They are seen as the 'gateway' qualification to Higher Education and to some careers; the grades that you gain and the subjects that you study will influence the kind of university courses that you're likely to be admitted to.

c. What about AS levels?

AS level courses are designed to be sat after one year of study, usually at the end of year 12. Traditionally, the AS level has formed the first year of a two year A level study programme, with the AS grade making up 50% of the final A level grade, but, as we explain below, this is changing.

d. Are AS and A levels in different subjects considered to be of the same value?

It depends on what you plan to study or do after you complete the course.

2. Variations between different AS and A level specifications

a. Are there any major differences between the AS and A level specifications issued by different exam boards?

No, the differences are mainly in style – there are no 'easy' or 'hard' exam boards or subjects. Historically, there were lots of exam boards, but now there are four main ones: AQA, Edexcel, OCR and WJEC.

b. Are all AS and A levels graded in the same way?
Yes, AS and A levels are graded on the same A*–E scale but AS levels are set at a lower standard than A levels – the letters 'AS' stand for '*Advanced Subsidiary*' and are targeted at what a young person studying A levels might be expected to achieve at the close of one year of post-16 study.

c. How are the 'new' A levels different from the old ones?
They'll use the same A*–E grading scale that exists for the older courses but they're likely to be tougher than the ones that they replace, with a special focus on 'deep knowledge'.
They're also likely to be based mainly or entirely on written papers designed to be sat at the close of the two-year course.
Remember, though, that all young people sitting the same examination will face the same challenges so you won't be disadvantaged.
Finally, in most subjects, there will be fewer re-take options and more attention given to 'spelling, punctuation and grammar', or 'SPaG'.

d. And what about the 'new' AS levels?
In the new AS and A level model, AS levels are a completely different and separate course and the AS level grade does not count towards the A level grade.

3. Strategies for successful revision

a. What are the characteristics of a successful revision strategy?
Hard work and regular revision in each subject; teachers can sometimes recommend good 'revision guides', which are on sale in bookshops and online.

b. How important is it to practice 'real' examination questions?
It's very important to practice on real questions and real papers where these are available.

c. How can I get hold of old examination papers?
Teachers may have stocks of these and they are also usually available on the examination board websites, but make sure you are practising on the right ones drawn from the precise AS or A level course that you're following.
If you are doing one or more of the 'new' style A level courses, your teacher will be able to point you to 'specimen' or 'exemplar' papers that the examination board has produced, and you should practice on these.

4. Prospering in the examination room

a. What information should I have about the examinations?
Critically, the time, date and venue of every examination, and you should be clear about what is being examined on each paper.

b. How will I minimise stress during the examination period?
By remembering that you have worked hard for nearly two years, by revising regularly and completing assignments on time earlier in the course, and by ensuring that you are well rested during the examination period.

c. Over what time are the examinations usually sat?
A levels are sat across about three or so weeks in early June, after the half term break and often after an additional period of study leave. AS levels are usually sat during May, in the run-up to the half term break.

5. Beyond A levels: starting a career or going to university?

a. What are the key options for further study after AS and A levels?
An undergraduate degree (typically, a Bachelor of Science, Arts or Education) at university or a specialist course at, for instance, an art college. Most undergraduate degrees are three years in length but some are longer, and sometimes these courses are followed by a period of further full-time professional training – this is the case, for instance, if you want to become a lawyer, teacher or doctor.
You can get more information about going to university from UCAS, the central body through which you apply to university: www.ucas.com

b. Do I need to worry about university tuition fees?
Not in the short term and not if your family income is below a specific amount – fees are charged after you've finished your degree course and only when your income reaches a certain level. Fee levels can be checked online.

c. What are the key options in terms of employment and training after AS and A levels?
Employment in a setting where you can begin a career without the need for a degree. In this context, there are now a number of higher-level apprenticeship programmes, some of which lead to qualifications that are equivalent to a university degree, available across a range of industries. You can get more information about apprenticeships at: www.apprenticeships.gov.uk

About the authors

Dr Tony Breslin is an educationalist and public policy analyst. He is Director of the consultancy Breslin Public Policy Limited, Chair of the awarding body Industry Qualifications, a Visiting Fellow in the School of Education at the University of Hertfordshire and a Trustee of Adoption UK. He is also Chair of the Academy Council at Oasis Academy Enfield, Chair of Governors at Bushey and Oxhey Infant School and an associate of the Academy Improvement Team at Oasis Community Learning. A former Chair of Human Scale Education, the Association for the Teaching of the Social Sciences, and Speakers Bank, Tony is a qualified Ofsted Inspector and has served as a Chief Examiner at GCSE and a Principal Examiner and Chair of Examiners at A level.

Between September 2001 and August 2010, Tony was Chief Executive at the Citizenship Foundation, the leading education and participation charity. Prior to this, he was General Adviser, 14–19 Education, in Enfield, North London, where he led on vocational education and cross-borough sixth from arrangements, and produced the council's first lifelong learning strategy. A teacher by profession, he has taught and held management and leadership roles, including Head of Department and Director of Sixth Form Studies, at schools in Haringey and Hertfordshire.

Tony has published and spoken widely in the UK and overseas on education, participation, poverty and inclusion, and is credited, in particular, with the development of the concept of the citizenship-rich school. He is the co-editor, with Barry Dufour, of Developing Citizens, published by Hodder Education (2006), co-author, with Mike Moores, of 40@40: a portrait of 40 years of educational research through 40 studies, published by the British Educational Research Association and Breslin Public Policy (2014) and co-author with Ian Davies and a team based at the University of York of Creating Citizenship Communities: education, young people and the role of schools, published by Palgrave Macmillan (2014).
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Mike Moores has extensive experience as a teacher, trainer and manager in secondary and further education in Hertfordshire and in North West London. In addition, he has worked with all of the major exam boards in various capacities, including Principal Examiner at A level, and for a range of leading educational publishers.

Until August 2011, when he retired after thirty-five years in the classroom, he led on the teaching of Sociology and Politics to A level students at St. Albans Girls' School. Mike has a particular expertise in the teaching of Sociology (in which he has a national profile as a writer and speaker), in delivering CPD to teachers and in study skills and family learning. He has a special interest in equal opportunities issues, including access to Higher Education and disability awareness.

Mike was, for many years, a Vice-president of the Association for the Teaching of the Social Sciences (ATSS) and runs a consultancy that stages conferences for teachers of Sociology and Politics. For many years he organised the ATSS Annual Conference and has served as the warden of a Teachers' Centre. He is co-author, with Tony Breslin, of 40@40: a portrait of 40 years of educational research through 40 studies, published by the British Educational Research Association and Breslin Public Policy (2014).
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About Breslin Public Policy

Breslin Public Policy Limited has worked in partnership with Cambridge University Press to produce this Cambridge University Press Transition Guide, one of a series of three publications – two for students and one for teachers, curriculum and pastoral managers, and school and college leaders. It marks the launch of a new series of Cambridge University Press textbooks designed specifically for the revised GCSE, AS and A level specifications launched in September 2015 and thereafter. It's published as part of Breslin's Transform Education project, a range of activities designed to inspire and support innovative, creative and transformative practice in educational settings.

Breslin Public Policy was established in September 2010; focused on education, participation and the third sector, it works at the interface between public policy and professional practice. Current and recent clients include Adoption UK, Beyond Philanthropy, the Bridge Group, the British Educational Research Association, the British Olympic Foundation, the British Paralympic Association, Cambridge University Press, Character Scotland, CCE England, the Diana Award, East Sussex County Council, Keynote Educational, the London Organising Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games (LOCOG), Marriotts School (Stevenage), Navigation Learning, Oasis Academy Enfield, Oasis Community Learning, the Office of the Children's Commissioner, Ofqual, the Orwell Youth Prize, the RSA, the University of York Department of Education, and vInspired.
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Starting A levels
Your guide to exam success

Starting A levels: Your guide to exam success sets out to enable young people, and their parents and carers, to make sense of, and navigate the AS and A level qualifications that dominate the educational landscape in secondary school sixth forms, sixth form colleges and further education colleges in England and Wales.

Written by qualifications and curriculum specialists, Tony Breslin and Mike Moores, the authors draw on their extensive experience as secondary and further education teachers and senior examiners, and their work in parental engagement and widening participation, to focus on:

1. Reassurance
   Providing young people, and their parents and carers, with reassurance about the nature of the courses that they are about to begin.

2. Induction
   Ensuring that young people are appropriately and generically inducted into these courses.

3. Skills and attitudes
   Giving some sense of the skills and attitudes that young people will need to succeed as they make the transition from 'pupil' to 'student', both during their courses and in the exam room.

4. Exam preparation
   Introducing young people, and their parents and carers, to tactics and strategies for revision and exam preparation.

5. Career and Higher Education opportunities
   Outlining the opportunities in the workplace and in Higher Education that getting the right grades in the right subjects can bring.

6. Reflection
   Encouraging students to continually reflect on the choices before them, enabling young people to make wise, well-informed decisions.

Also available from Cambridge University Press

Starting GCSEs: Your guide to exam success

A complementary guide for those embarking on AS and A level studies in the Sixth Form or at a Sixth Form or Further Education college.

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