

Westminster Education Forum Keynote Seminar: A-level reform - implementation and next steps for policy

Timing: Morning, Thursday, 20th November 2014

Venue: Royal Aeronautical Society, No.4 Hamilton Place, London W1J 7BQ

Agenda subject to change



- 8.30 - 9.00 Registration and coffee
- 9.00 - 9.05 **Chair's opening remarks**
Baroness Sharp of Guildford, Vice-Chair, All-Party Parliamentary Group for Further Education, Skills and Lifelong Learning
- 9.05 - 9.35 **Reforming the A-level system so far, and next steps**
Glenys Stacey, Chief Regulator, Ofqual
Questions and comments from the floor
- 9.35 - 9.45 **A-levels as preparation for university: opportunities and challenges**
Isabel Nisbet, Executive Director, ALCAB
- 9.45 - 10.35 **Still the 'gold standard'? Overhauling the structure, content and assessment of A-levels**
How well will the new linear structure of A-levels, and the focus on synoptic assessment to replace modules, address concerns about a culture of teaching to the test - and will the new A-levels achieve Government's aim of improving students' breadth of understanding and range of knowledge? Will proposals to introduce pre-determined core content make clearer the common requirements for awarding bodies when developing their qualifications and ensure that qualifications in the same subject are comparably demanding? How justified are moves to remove 'soft subjects' from the curriculum and to merge others deemed to overlap, such as Human Biology and Humanities? Does the introduction of a separate practical assessment element for A-level Sciences create a template for other subjects which also have a strong practical element, such as MFL or Art? How favourably do the new A-levels compare with similar exams in other leading nations, and what steps can be taken to safeguard against future grade inflation?
Philip Britton, Headmaster, Bolton School Boys' Division, Greater Manchester
Darren Northcott, National Official, Education, NASUWT
Paul Dodd, Director of Education and Learning (Reform), OCR
Sam Cairns, Co-Manager, Cultural Learning Alliance
Professor Mark E Smith, Vice-Chancellor, Lancaster University
Questions and comments from the floor with **Isabel Nisbet**, Executive Director, ALCAB
- 10.35 - 10.40 **Chair's closing remarks**
Baroness Sharp of Guildford, Vice-Chair, All-Party Parliamentary Group for Further Education, Skills and Lifelong Learning
- 10.40 - 11.05 Coffee
- 11.05 - 11.10 **Chair's opening remarks**
Baroness Sharp of Guildford, Vice-Chair, All-Party Parliamentary Group for Further Education, Skills and Lifelong Learning
- 11.10 - 12.00 **Implementing the new A-levels and the de-coupling of AS and A-levels**
How prepared are schools and colleges to deliver the new A-levels, both in terms of content and in their new linear form? What will be the expected impact of the gradual phasing in of different AS and A-level subjects over 2 years; is there a risk that teaching for the first wave of reformed subjects in September 2015, such as the sciences, will be disjointed and underprepared? Will the expected reduction in resits, multiple entries and the move away from modular qualifications increase the cost for schools when entering exams, given the impact this may have on revenue for awarding bodies? What might be the expected impact of 'de-coupling' AS and A-levels; is there likely to be an increase of students opting to study vocational qualifications instead? How might the expected reduction in the number of tariff points allocated for AS levels by UCAS affect students' choices? Given that AS and A-levels will become independent, how feasible is it that courses will be 'co-teachable'? To what extent will the removal of AS-levels bring about changes in the entry requirements and offer-making strategies of various education institutions?
Dr Tina Isaacs, Programme Leader, MA in Educational Assessment, Institute of Education, University of London
Margaret Farragher, Head of Policy and Qualifications, UCAS
Barry Sindall, Chief Executive, Grammar School Heads' Association
Angela Milln, Director of Student Recruitment, Access and Admissions, University of Bristol
Myles McGinley, Product Management Director, General Qualifications, Pearson
Questions and comments from the floor
- 12.00 - 12.55 **Preparing for Higher Education and work: A-levels and rounded learning at 16-19**
Have arrangements whereby universities and learned societies are involved in advising on A-level content, led to qualifications that better prepare students for Higher Education? How justified are concerns that A-levels are failing to prepare teenagers for the workplace and how might calls from industry for a broader A-level curriculum incorporating 'soft' and non-cognitive skills, such as business ethics and team working, be better implemented? What has been the impact of the 16-19 study programmes on maximising the potential of young people to progress into higher education or skilled employment? With increasing numbers of students undertaking the Extended Project Qualification (EPQ), should all schools be required to offer the EPQ so as not to disadvantage students in university applications? Should the EPQ become a compulsory part of 16-19 study, in response to university and employer concerns about the readiness of young people for further study or work? Would the replacing of A-levels with a European-style 'baccalaureate', as called for by learned societies, in which students study around 6 subjects, be likely to improve students' readiness for the workplace and higher education? Does the proposed 'Core Maths' qualification, designed for post-16 students - with a GCSE grade C or above in Maths but not taking A-level Maths - provide a possible template for broadening 16-19 learning alongside A-levels with similar qualifications for English or Science?
David Pollard, Chairman, Education, Skills and Business Support Policy Group, FSB
Gareth Pierce, Chief Executive, WJEC
Professor Jeremy Hodgen, Professor of Mathematics Education, School of Education, University of Nottingham
Dr Paul Greatrix, Registrar, University of Nottingham
Cherry Ridgway, Curriculum and Assessment Specialist, ASCL
Questions and comments from the floor
- 12.55 - 13.00 **Chair's and Westminster Education Forum closing remarks**
Baroness Sharp of Guildford, Vice-Chair, All-Party Parliamentary Group for Further Education, Skills and Lifelong Learning
Jonny Roberts, Associate Editor, Westminster Education Forum