

**EXPERT GROUP REPORT
FOR
WORK TO BRING THE
RESTRUCTURED GCE A LEVEL
INTO
THE UCAS TARIFF**

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THE CONDUCT OF THE COMPARABILITY STUDY

In order to ensure a robust and transparent procedure for allocating UCAS Tariff Points to qualifications seeking admission to the framework, UCAS approached the University of Oxford, Department of Educational Studies for assistance in developing an appropriate methodology.

Acknowledging the problematic nature of comparability studies, and recognising that a mechanical procedure would not work, the Department proposed a procedure based on the premise that such comparisons can only be achieved through the exercise of collaborative judgement by an Expert Group.

Guidelines were drawn up for the composition of the Expert Group, the evidence that would need to be collected and examined and the choice of a benchmark qualification.

Procedures were developed for the conduct of the work of the Expert Group, including detailed sets of questions to be addressed at different stages in the process. Questions appropriate to the awards under consideration are selected and are used to guide, not constrain, the work of the Expert Group.

The judgements made by the Expert Group in this report are presented as suggested allocations of UCAS points which take account of the size and demand of the restructured GCE A Level. In practice, this work required a different approach from other awards seeking admission to the Tariff, in that it involved benchmarking a new version of a qualification against the old. It was important to undertake this as the GCE A Level Tariff is used as the benchmark to bring other qualifications into the system. The guidelines also provide for an automatic review process to be conducted at a later stage in the light of further evidence. This latter point acknowledges the fact that both benchmark qualifications and those seeking admission to the Tariff may still be relatively new. Consequently there may only be a relatively small amount of evidence (particularly candidate evidence) available at the time of the work of the Expert Group. There is, therefore, a need to review the decisions of the Group when more evidence becomes available and when higher education (HE) admissions tutors have gained more experience of using the awards as entry qualifications.

The work of the Expert Group is subject to a quality assurance procedure by an independent auditor from higher education.



SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

After much deliberation and discussion, and despite some reservations which could not be resolved on the basis of the evidence currently available, the Expert Group arrived at a unanimous decision that there was an indication of increased stretch and challenge in the new GCE A Level specifications, and that an A* grade should attract 140 UCAS Tariff points.

It was confirmed that in terms of size, the newly-specified AS is, as now, half the size of the A Level (although because of the extra points for A* which only apply to A2 or full A Level achievement, in terms of overall points, the 50/50 relationship will not continue).

In view of some uncertainties, it was recommended that as soon as examination papers and candidate scripts for the new specifications are available, ie autumn 2010, an immediate review of the above decision should be undertaken.

SECTION 1: THE COMPOSITION OF THE EXPERT GROUP

The Expert Group comprised of experienced higher education admissions officers and individuals with expert knowledge and experience of the qualifications under consideration in this study:

- Greg Attwood, Edexcel Examiner – Mathematics
- Andy Archibald, AQA Examiner – English Language & Literature
- Andrew Bettley, Coleg Llandrillo Cymru
- Miriam Clift, Northumbria University
- Dianne Francombe, University of the West of England
- Abdul Hamid, University of Manchester
- Chris Martin, OCR Examiner – Geography
- Sukhie Mattu, Buckinghamshire New University
- Paul Teulon, University of Oxford
- John Older, OCR Examiner – Chemistry
- Bob Savill, University of Brighton
- Emma Talbot, Newman University College
- Lesley Wall, North Devon College
- Rob Webb, AQA Examiner – Sociology

Jill Johnson, Director of Policy & Communications, acted as facilitator for the work of the Group, ensuring that the Group worked systematically through the procedures.

Vikki Pickering and Richard Spencer, Policy Executive and Policy Officer respectively, acted as secretaries to the meeting.

The whole process was overseen and quality assured by Dr Geoff Hayward, an independent higher education based consultant.

In addition to the experts mentioned above, David MacKay from QCA provided an initial overview and presentation outlining the overall changes to the GCE A Level from 2008. Matthew Hopkinson from DCSF was also in attendance.

CVs of the experts within the Group are attached as Appendix 2.

SECTION 2: OVERVIEW OF AWARD SEEKING UCAS TARIFF SCORE**2.1 Introduction**

The new GCE A Level (to be taught from September 2008) has not been changed to such an extent that it is unrecognisable from the current version. Rather, it has been further developed to take account of policies introduced by Government, and to respond to criticisms from some quarters that the existing structure does not best serve the needs of the students taking the qualification, and those using the qualification to make judgements about the suitability of applicants for higher education entry.

2.2 Changes

The following changes have been implemented:

- reduction of the number of units of assessment from six to four in most subjects
- the inclusion of coursework only where it is the most valid way of assessing an aspect of the subject (therefore no optional coursework)
- revisions of content where appropriate
- stretch and challenge incorporated into A2 units.

2.3 Stretch and challenge

A2 assessments will be made more challenging by demanding:

- a broad range of question types be used to assess a wide range of skills
- an emphasis on developing thinking and problem-solving skills to help motivate students
- a requirement for extended writing to enable students to demonstrate a breadth of knowledge and understanding
- synoptic assessment to test understanding as a whole.

2.4 Synoptic assessment

Synoptic assessment will be used in all A2 units. It will require candidates to demonstrate that they can:

- effectively use the relevant 'tool kit' of techniques, concepts and theories relevant to the particular subject



- identify from across the programme of study the knowledge, understanding and skills that are required to address a particular task
- demonstrate a high level of independent performance across a range of contexts, some of which may be new and unfamiliar.

2.5 Recognising and reporting high achievement

Stretch and challenge will be recognised, rewarded and reported through an additional A* grade which will be:

- applied to the A Level qualification only (not for the AS qualification or at unit level);
- awarded to candidates who have achieved:
 - A grade A overall (ie 80% of the maximum uniform marks for the whole A Level qualification)
 - 90% of the maximum uniform marks on the aggregate of the A2 units.

Thus the restructured A Level will be graded from A* to E, as opposed to A to E at present.



SECTION 3: OVERVIEW OF THE CHANGES AT SUBJECT LEVEL**3A CHEMISTRY (OCR)****3A.1 Aims and purpose of the existing and new specifications**

The aims are very similar. The removal of all choice from the new specification appears to suggest a different approach but, in practice, the key components of the options contained in the existing specification have been absorbed into the new course. This will ensure a more uniform outcome.

There is some difference in emphasis in the content, with more effort being made to integrate environmental features into the topics covered. The 2008 specification is permeated by a focus on 'How Science Works'. This provides the framework within which concepts can be taught and examined. The intention is to provide a more overtly relevant context for some aspects of the course rather than change the depth of coverage. This should mean that the specification retains its current balance of knowledge and understanding

3A.2 Guided learning hours (GLH)

The National Database of Accredited Qualifications attributes a notional measure of 360 GLH to the GCE A Level. This figure is identical for both the existing and new specification. Both AS and A2 are estimated to require 180 GLH each.

3A.3 Content and structure of the qualification

Table 1: OCR Chemistry GCE A Level unit structure

Existing specification	New specification
Module 2811 - Foundation chemistry <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Atoms, molecules and stoichiometry • Atomic structure • Chemical bonding and structure • The Periodic Table: Introduction • The Periodic Table: Group 2 elements and their compounds <p>1 hour written examination. (15% of A Level)</p>	Unit F321 - Atoms, bonds and groups <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Atoms and reactions • Electrons, bonding and structure • The Periodic Table <p>1 hour written examination. (15% of A Level)</p>
Module 2812 - Chains and rings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Basic concepts • Hydrocarbons: Alkanes • Hydrocarbons: Fuels • Hydrocarbons: Alkenes • Alcohols • Halogenoalkanes 	Unit F322 - Chains, energy and resources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Basic concepts and hydrocarbons • Alcohols, halogenoalkanes and analysis • Energy • Resources



1 hour written examination. (15% of A Level)	1.75 hour written paper. (25% of A Level)
Module 2813 - How far? How fast?	Unit F323 - Practical skills In chemistry 1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enthalpy changes Reaction rates Chemical equilibrium 0.75 hour written examination (10% of A Level) + either coursework 1 or practical examination 1 (10% of A Level)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assessment of practical and investigative skills developed with contexts encountered during AS chemistry. Coursework (10% of A Level)
Module 2814 - Chains, rings and spectroscopy	Unit F324 - Rings, polymers and analysis
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Arenes & phenols Carbonyl compounds Carboxylic acids and esters Nitrogen compounds Stereoisomerism and organic synthesis Polymerisation Spectroscopy 1.5 hour written examination. (15% of A Level)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rings, acids and amines Polymers and synthesis Analysis 1 hour written examination. (15% of A Level)
Module 2815 - Trends and patterns	Unit F325 - equilibria, energetics and elements
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lattice enthalpy, Born-Haber cycles Periodic Table: Period 3 Periodic Table: Transition elements Module 2185 is a half-module with five optional half-units 1 hour written examination (trends and patterns) + 50 min written examination (optional units). (Total 15% of A Level)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rates, equilibrium and pH Energy Transition elements 1.75 hours written paper. (25% of A Level)
Module 2816 - Unifying concepts in chemistry	Unit F326 - Practical skills in chemistry
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How fast? How far? Acids, bases and buffers 1.25 hr written examination (10% of A Level)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assessment of practical and investigative skills developed with contexts encountered during A Level chemistry Coursework. (10% of A Level)

Similarities:

The two specifications both provide candidates with the opportunity to develop the same set of skills. Elements of study covered in both specifications include:

- Atoms, molecules and stoichiometry
- Atomic structure
- Chemical bonding and structure
- The Periodic Table: Introduction



- Enthalpy changes
- Reaction rates
- Chemical equilibrium
- Hydrocarbons: Alkanes
- Arenes and phenols
- How fast?
- Acids, bases and buffers.

Differences:

The 2007 specification included some topics which have been removed for the new specification:

- Ionisation energy pattern simplified
- Emphasis on limestone removed
- Limited coverage on halogenoalkanes
- Elimination reaction
- Carbonyl compounds - reaction with HCN removed
- Acyl chlorides
- Nitriles and amides
- Decomposition of carbonates
- Description of elements with water, oxygen and chlorine
- Colorimetry
- Carbonyl compounds.

Meanwhile, new elements are included in the 2008 specification:

- Pattern of physical properties of group 2 added
- E/Z nomenclature
- IR and mass spectrometry. Simple fragmentation
- Module on 'Resources' - covering the 'Greenhouse effect' in terms of bond absorptions, ozone layer and destruction
- General principles of green chemistry
- Carbonyl compounds - nucleophilic addition exemplified by reduction with NaBH_4
- Triglycerides and fats
- Acid anhydrides
- Solubility
- Entropy and free energy
- Delectrode potentials
- Cis/trans and optical isomerism



- Fuel cells and general aspects of a hydrogen economy
- Iodine thiosulphate titrations.

3A.4 Relative size of the two specifications

The sizes are very similar but the new A2 specification may be slightly more substantial: the amount of knowledge is perhaps marginally less but the conceptual demand is greater.

3A.5 Assessment Objectives (AOs)

The wording of objectives AO1 and AO2 has been amended for the purposes of increased clarity to simplify the terminology, but this does not reflect a substantive change. Whilst they have been re-worded in a simplified form in the new specification, there is effectively no change in their intention. AO3 appears different in the new specification and is given a new name – ‘How science works’ – but the wording of this is close to that of the AO3 in the existing specification.

The weightings given to the various units make it clear that AO3 will be examined to a small extent in the written papers and not exclusively in the practical components. However, this is likely to be reflected in the context of the questions rather than their substance so that while drawing on theoretical concepts, questions may be set which emphasise practical applications of chemistry.

In the new specification, there is no specific mention of the current AO4 – ‘Synthesis of knowledge, understanding and skills’. This was included in the existing specification since not all of the A2 components included synoptic components. In the new specification, it is an integrated feature of all A2 units and so its inclusion was felt unnecessary. There is no change in overall approach intended but, since synoptic components may be present on all papers, it may make them slightly more demanding.

The weightings given to the various objectives are different for the two specifications:

- At AS, the weighting given to AO1 – Knowledge and Understanding’ – has been decreased in the new specification, dropping from 48% to 38% while AO2 – Application of Knowledge and Understanding - increases from 32% to 40%. There is a small difference in AO3 as explained above. This reflects an intention to make AS slightly more rigorous by reducing the credit given to the simple regurgitation of facts.



- At A2, a comparison is harder to make because of the removal of AO4 from the new specification. However, the intention is to retain the previous balance of knowledge, understanding, application and synthesis.

In summary, although the framework has changed in line with QCA requirements, the focus of the assessment objectives remains much the same for both specifications. Certainly the intention is to maintain the same pattern as has been previously used and not to re-balance the requirements of the papers in any significant way.

3A.6 Assessment – procedures, methods and levels

For the existing specification at AS, all candidates take three written papers which collectively total 2.75 hours. In addition, about 32% take a 1.5 hour practical exam while approximately 68% use an internally-assessed coursework option.

In the new specification there are two written papers with a total examining time of 2.75 hours. All must also take an internally-assessed coursework component.

In the existing specification at A2, four written papers are taken totalling 4 hours and 35 minutes of examining. In addition, about 25% take a 1.5 hour practical examination while approximately 75% use an internally-assessed coursework option. For the new specification, there are two written papers with a total examining time of 2.75 hours. All must also take an internally-assessed coursework component.

For the written papers there is equivalence at AS, but at A2 there is a noticeable reduction in the time given to examining in the new specification. This partly reflects the removal of the option papers, but there is also a desire to reduce the assessment burden for candidates. It was certainly the case that for one current specification A2 paper (Chains, rings and spectroscopy), there was unnecessary repetition of the same concepts, but it is unproven whether the reduction in time will adversely affect some candidates. There has been some concern expressed that there will be very little time available for candidates to review their answers and make corrections.

A major change for the new specification is the approach to the assessment of practical skills, although the weighting of 20% at both AS and A2 is the same. For the existing specification, those doing the practical examination have a formal assessment based on an inevitably restricted range of exercises. An attempt is made to assess skills such as planning and evaluation but these are limited. Those using the coursework option are assessed more broadly but, as this is done less formally, there have been inevitable problems of security and reliability. In practice, those taking the latter option obtained marks that were generally higher than those who took the practical examination. Balancing the two different sets of results from the



two pathways required some movement of the grade boundaries of the components to achieve the necessary parity.

Under the new specification, all candidates must be assessed under supervision (and without supporting notes or texts) on the covering skills of performing experiments reliably, analysing and interpreting results, and evaluating procedures. They are able to repeat these 'tasks' using different experiments up to three times, with the best mark counting towards their assessment total.

The demand associated with this form of practical assessment may prove to be greater than under the current regime and could produce a different pattern of results, probably with fewer candidates being able to achieve the higher marks.

3A.7 Grading

There has been extensive re-wording of the grade descriptors in the 2008 specification. The 2007 specification provided general statements referring largely to the qualities that might be expected of candidates at the A/B and E/U boundaries. The 2008 specification translates these into more detailed statements. This perhaps provides a clearer focus and more detailed description of the qualities and achievement of candidates reaching these boundaries, but there is no intention that the standard expected will be different to that required previously.

There would have been some variation in the knowledge of the candidates using the 2007 specification depending on the options that were taken at A2. This variation does not exist within the 2008 specification as only one pathway is allowed. For some, this could mean they will find the content more challenging as there will be no opportunity to select a pathway that is geared to their personal interests. An example would be a knowledge and understanding of electrode potentials; compulsory in 2008 but not in 2007 and generally considered to be conceptually demanding.

The inclusion of some work, new to the specification, such as entropy and free energy, may make the demands of the better grades marginally more exacting.

3B ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE (AQA)**3B.1 Aims and purpose of the existing and new specifications**

These are slightly different in that the existing specification makes a distinction between AS and A2 which involves an intensifying of expectation at A2. This is not stated in the new specification but is still implied. The shared aims are:

- an integrated approach to the study of language and literature
- creative response to a wide range of material
- encouragement of independent study.

3B.2 Guided Learning Hours (GLH)

The National Database of Accredited Qualifications attributes a notional measure of 360 GLH to the GCE A Level. This figure is identical for both the existing and new specification. Both AS and A2 are estimated to require 180 GLH each.

3B.3 Content and structure of the qualification

Table 2: AQA English language and literature GCE A Level unit structure

Existing specification	New specification
<p>Module NTA1 - Language production (NTA1)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examining language in a particular context, requiring candidates to produce a text where they may use unseen material as a springboard for their writing, and then commenting on certain aspects of the written production in a commentary. <p>Written unit - 1.25 hours (15% of total A Level marks)</p>	<p>Unit ELLA1 - Integrated analysis / text production</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analytical question – focuses on the use of language and style to develop and explore issues within the text. • Production task – addresses central issues within the text such as theme, attitude, language and idiom; candidates are asked to adopt a different style or voice. <p>1.5 hour written paper (25% of total A Level marks)</p>
<p>Module - NA2M/P Poetic study</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use literary and linguistic frameworks and terminology to describe key features of poetry meaning and form. • Explain and interpret the language of poetry. <p>Written unit 1.25 hours (15% of total A Level marks)</p>	<p>Unit ELLA2 - Analysing speech and its representation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Features of spoken English – transcribed examples of speech from a literary or non-literary context will be compared to discuss how form and context can help shape meaning. • Speech representation – within the context of set text analysis will focus on speech, style and linguistic issues. <p>1.5 hour written paper (25% of total A Level marks)</p>



<p>Module NA3M/P - Study of language of prose and speech</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The ways in which language is used in prose texts and in speech. Purpose, audience and style are key issues. <p>Written unit 1.5 hours (20% of total A Level marks)</p>	<p>Unit ELLA3 - Comparative analysis /text adaptation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extending the principles of integrated literary and linguistic analysis. Developing questions to consider challenging comparative issues on two set texts selected from poetry and a range including prose and drama. Creation of drafting processes in preparation for the coursework tasks. <p>Written paper 2.5 hours (30% of total A Level marks)</p>
<p>Module NTA4 - Comparative literary studies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The interrelation of language and literature in two paired texts through comparative study. <p>Written Unit 1.5 hours (15% of total A Level marks)</p>	<p>Unit ELLA4 - Comparative analysis through independent study</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Integration of literary and linguistic study, exploring the way that unseen tasks can be analysed and compared through a variety of approaches. Developing production skills by focusing on non-fiction writing, Using appropriate terminology to aid analysis and communication. <p>Coursework (open) (20% of total A Level marks)</p>
<p>Module NTA5 - Dramatic study/ adaptation of texts for audience</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Probing and exploring literary and linguistic issues within dramatic texts. Tests ability to adapt material for a new audience, from a particular stimulus. <p>Written Unit 2.25 hours (15% of total A Level marks)</p>	
<p>Module NTA6 - Language in context</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Synoptic module testing skills learned throughout the course. <p>Written unit 2.5 hours (20% of the A Level marks)</p>	

Similarities:

- balance of open and closed book examinations
- consistent integrated approach
- equal balance of analytic and production tasks
- synoptic tasks.

Differences:

- existing specification has a pre-20th century requirement
- existing specification allows annotated open books whereby candidates can take annotated copies of texts into the examination room
- existing specification requires more reflective commentary on process

- new specification includes a literary production task
- new specification has a coursework element
- new specification introduces comparative skills at AS level.

In terms of volume and study and balance across the two specifications:

- the new AS production task is more demanding as is the comparative element
- the current examination requires a poetry response and commentary on method, and also demands a balance of 20th century and pre-20th century study which is optional in the new specification
- the new specification is better balanced and the individual papers more obviously delineated; set passages will be shorter than for the present examination
- the time required for study and the depth of treatment are equally balanced across the two versions, although the new specification includes stretch and challenge qualities of synthesis and coursework at A2
- overall it is felt that the variations between the existing and new specifications cancel each other out so volume, study and balance are equally comparable.

3B.4 Relative size of the two specifications

Both are of equal size in terms of knowledge, understanding and skills.

3B.5 Assessment Objectives (AOs)

Table 3: AQA English language and literature GCE A Level Assessment Objectives

Existing specification		New specification	
AO1	Communication of knowledge, understanding and insights gained from combined literary and linguistic study; use of appropriate terminology and written accuracy.	AO1	Select and apply relevant concepts and approaches from integrated linguistic and literary study, using appropriate terminology and accurate, coherent written expression.
A02	Distinction, description and interpretation of variation in meaning and form in literary and non-literary texts.	AO2	Demonstrate detailed critical understanding in analysing the ways in which structure, form and language shape meanings in a range of spoken and written texts.
A03	Responding to and analysing texts using literary and linguistic approaches and concepts; use of frameworks.	AO3	Use integrated approaches to explore relationships between texts, analysing and evaluating the significance of contextual factors in their production and reception.
A04	Show understanding of the ways contextual variation and choices of form, style and vocabulary shape the meanings of texts.	AO4	Demonstrate expertise and creativity in using language appropriately for a variety of purposes and audiences, drawing on insights from linguistic and literary studies.



AO5	Identify and consider the ways attitudes and values are created and conveyed in speech and writing.
AO6	Demonstrate expertise and accuracy in writing for a variety of specific purposes and audiences, drawing on knowledge of literary texts and features of language to explain and comment on the choices made.
At A2, AO2 and AO3 are enhanced to -	
AO2ii	Respond with knowledge and understanding to texts of different types and from different periods, exploring and commenting on relationships and comparisons between them.
AO3ii	Use and evaluate different literary and linguistic approaches to the study of written and spoken language, showing how these approaches inform their reading.

The four assessment objectives for the new specification are more streamlined and distinct but still form a synthesis of the six existing objectives. Essentially the existing AO3 and AO4 are fused in the new assessment objectives, the existing AO5 emphasis on ‘attitudes and values’ is implied in the ‘contextual factors’ of the new AOs, and the new AO4 incorporates the existing AO6’s ‘purposes and audiences’ together with a new emphasis on ‘creativity’ within the production tasks.

NB: Despite the neat mathematical divisions between the Assessment Objectives in both specifications, there is inevitably a strong overlap between them. For example, in the ELLA4 coursework module, only AO1 and AO3 are tested within the mark scheme. It is inconceivable, however, that a successful essay here could lack the qualities of AO2 if it were successful at AO1, and yet there is no mark allocated for AO2. Although examiners mark Assessment Objectives individually, there is, inevitably, an element of holistic judgement involved.

3B.6 Assessment – procedures, methods and levels

The new specification introduces coursework on one of the four units (ELLA4) for the first time. This is the only internally assessed unit. The coursework is very tightly modelled on a fusion of Poetic study (Module NA2M/P) and Comparative literary studies (NTA4) from the existing specification, both of which are open book examinations.



3B.7 Grading

The performance descriptors for each specification are practically identical. There is, however, a change in the new specification from five band marking to four band marking. This is an attempt to counteract the compression of marking that frequently occurs as a result of marking to Assessment Objectives individually and the overall mark being a calculation which adds up these Assessment Objectives. It is felt that examiners are more likely to use the higher ranges of marks if the bands are fewer and, therefore, wider.

Grade descriptors at all levels in the new specification, including the A/B and E/U borderlines, remain highly similar to those of the previous specification in their description of the demands expected. They do, of course, vary according to the tasks set.

3C GEOGRAPHY (OCR)**3C.1 Aims and purpose of the existing and new specifications**

The aims of the GCE specification are to encourage candidates to:

- develop and apply their understanding of geographical concepts and processes to understand and interpret our changing world
- develop their awareness of the complexity of interactions within and between societies, economies, cultures and environments at scales from local to global;
- develop as global citizens who recognise the challenges of sustainability and the implications for their own and others' lives
- develop critical and reflective thinking and appreciate the importance of attitudes and values, in decision-making
- become adept in the use and application of skills and new technologies through their geographical studies both in and outside the classroom
- be inspired by the world around them, and gain enjoyment and satisfaction from their geographical studies and understand their relevance.

These aims are broadly similar to the existing specification, although they are set out differently, including distinctions between AS and A2 aims.

Some new aims have been added to increase emphasis on global citizenship, developing critical and reflective thinking and the use of new technology.



3C.2 Guided Learning Hours (GLH)

The National Database of Accredited Qualifications attributes a notional measure of 360 GLH to the GCE A Level. This figure is identical for both the existing and new specification. Both AS and A2 are estimated to require 180 GLH each.

3C.3 Content and structure of the qualification

Table 4: OCR Geography GCE A Level unit structure

Existing specification	New specification
Module 2680: The physical environment	Unit F761 - Managing physical environments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hydrological systems Ecosystems Atmospheric systems Lithosphere <p>1.25 hours written exam (20% of total A Level)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> River environments Coastal environments Cold environments Hot arid and semi-arid environments <p>1.5 hours written exam (25% of total A Level)</p>
Module 2681 - The human environment	Unit F762 - Managing change in human environments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Population Rural settlement Urban settlement <p>1.25 hours written exam (20% of total A Level)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Managing urban change Managing rural change The energy issue The growth of tourism <p>1.5 hours written exam (25% of total A Level)</p>
Module 2682 - Geographical investigation	
0.75 hours written exam and coursework (15% of total A Level)	Now examined at A2 (Unit F764)
Module 2683 - Options in physical and human geography	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coasts Fluvial Glacial and periglacial Hot arid Applied climatology Agriculture and food Manufacturing industry Service activities Tourism and recreation <p>1.5 hours written exam (15% of total A Level)</p>	
Module 2684 Synoptic geography: People and environment options	Unit F763 - Global issues
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> European Union Rural environment Urban environment Natural hazards 	<p>Environmental issues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Earth hazards (Option A1) Ecosystems and environments under threat (Option A2) Climatic hazards (Option A3) <p>Economic issues:</p>



1.25 hours written exam (20% of total A Level)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Population and resources (Option B1) • Globalisation (Option B2) • Development and inequalities (Option B3)
	2 hours written exam (30% of total A Level)
Module 2685 - Personal investigative study (Geography A)	
Optional unit (15% of total A Level)	Now examined in F764
Module 2686 - Investigative skills (Geography A)	Unit F764: Geographical skills
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying a suitable geographical question or hypothesis for investigation • Developing a plan and strategy for conducting the investigation • Collecting and recording appropriate data • Presenting the data collected in appropriate forms • Analysing and interpreting the data • Drawing conclusions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying a suitable geographical question or hypothesis for investigation • Developing a plan and strategy for conducting the investigation • Collecting and recording appropriate data • Presenting the data collected in appropriate forms • Analysing and interpreting the data
Optional unit. 1.5 hours written exam (15% of total A Level)	1.5 hours written exam (20% of total A Level)

Similarities:

The two specifications both provide candidates with the opportunity to develop the same set of skills. Elements of study covered in both specifications include:

- Rivers
- Coasts
- Arid environments
- Cold environments
- Ecosystems
- Hazards
- Population and resources
- Urban change
- Rural change
- Tourism

Differences

The 2007 specification included some topics which have been removed for the new specification:

- EU
- Lithosphere
- Climatology



- Atmospheric systems
- Industry
- Services

Meanwhile, new elements are included in the 2008 specification:

- Energy
- Globalisation
- Development and inequality

3C.4 Relative size of the two specifications

There is less knowledge or specified content but the level of understanding and ability to critically evaluate expected are significantly higher. The variety of skills demanded and tested in examination conditions is undoubtedly greater but the range of generic skill types remain unchanged.

3C.5 Assessment Objectives (AOs)

The specifications require that candidates should be able to demonstrate the following assessment objectives in the context of the content and skills prescribed:

Table 5: OCR Geography GCE A Level Assessment Objectives

Old specification		New specification	
AO1	Show knowledge of the specified content.	AO1	Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the content, concepts and processes.
AO2	Show critical understanding of the specified content.	AO2	Analyse, interpret and evaluate geographical information, issues and view points and apply understanding in unfamiliar contexts.
AO3	Apply knowledge and critical understanding to unfamiliar contexts.	AO3	Investigate, conclude and communicate: select and use a variety of methods, skills and techniques (including the use of new technologies) to investigate questions and issues, reach conclusions and communicate findings.
AO4	Select and use a variety of skills and techniques, including communication skills appropriate to geographical studies.		

Assessment Objectives (AOs) have been changed with AOs1 and 2 now merged into the new AO1. The weighting has been reduced from 47% in the existing specification (combined AO1 and 2) to 40% in the new.



Whilst the wording of each Assessment Objective has been changed, their general purpose remains the same.

3C.6 Assessment – procedures, methods and levels

It is difficult to compare the two specifications as the changing content of the specification means that the assessment emphasis has changed from content (AO1) to understanding cause/effect and evaluation (AO2). Thus the new specification is assessed in a more demanding way as there is an increased requirement to interpret and evaluate materials. Due to the reduction in the number of assessment units, each topic is covered at greater depth in the new specification. There is also a much clearer expectation of the need for students to demonstrate critical thinking and understanding.

The eradication of coursework as an assessment tool has resulted in more stretch and challenge through extended writing at both AS and A2. The new specification examinations provide more open ended content with an expectation of more depth than in 2007. Fieldwork opportunities have increased as opportunities exist in a variety of modules at AS and A2, although candidates no longer have to submit a written report for assessment.

As a general rule, the new specification requires learners to study topic areas to a greater depth than previously, with some units that were formerly included within AS level being moved to A2, with an appropriate increase in demand.

From 2008, all units are to be externally assessed with evidence generated from examinations rather than centre-generated evidence as is the case for three out of six units in the existing specification.

Essentially, the new assessment model is leaner (with four rather than the existing six/seven units). This removal of smaller units will result in a better allocation of time, with greater parity between the papers, and fewer small sub-sections with a reduction in definitions asked, and a greater use of extended writing.

The new specification is characterised by a greater use of AOs in marking all essays so that responses are more consistently assessed against the AOs than in the past. It will be marked online so will be guided by tighter marking instructions and should produce more cohesive marking, hopefully without removing professional discretion.



3C.7 Grading

Grade descriptions have become clearer and specifically tied to the AOs. There is no descriptor given for C grade so performance for middle grade papers may be unclear.



3D MATHEMATICS (EDEXCEL)

3D.1 Aims and purpose of the existing and new specifications

The Mathematics GCE A Level qualification has not been revised. The aims are identical for both specifications - Mathematics and Further Mathematics. These encourage students to:

- develop their understanding of mathematics and mathematical processes in a way that promotes confidence and fosters enjoyment
- develop abilities to reason logically and recognise incorrect reasoning, to generalise and to construct mathematical proofs
- extend their range of mathematical skills and techniques and use them in more difficult, unstructured problems
- develop an understanding of coherence and progression in mathematics and of how different areas of mathematics can be connected
- recognise how a situation may be represented mathematically and understand the relationship between 'real-world' problems and standard and other mathematical models and how these can be refined and improved
- use mathematics as an effective means of communication
- read and comprehend mathematical arguments and articles concerning applications of mathematics
- acquire the skills needed to use technology such as calculators and computers effectively, recognise when such use may be inappropriate and be aware of limitations
- develop an awareness of the relevance of mathematics to other fields of study, to the world of work and to society in general
- take increasing responsibility for their own learning and the evaluation of their own mathematical development.

3D.2 Guided Learning Hours (GLH)

The National Database of Accredited Qualifications attributes a notional measure of 360 GLH to the GCE A Level. This figure is identical for both the existing and new specification. Both AS and A2 are estimated to require 180 GLH each.



3D.3 Content and structure of the qualification

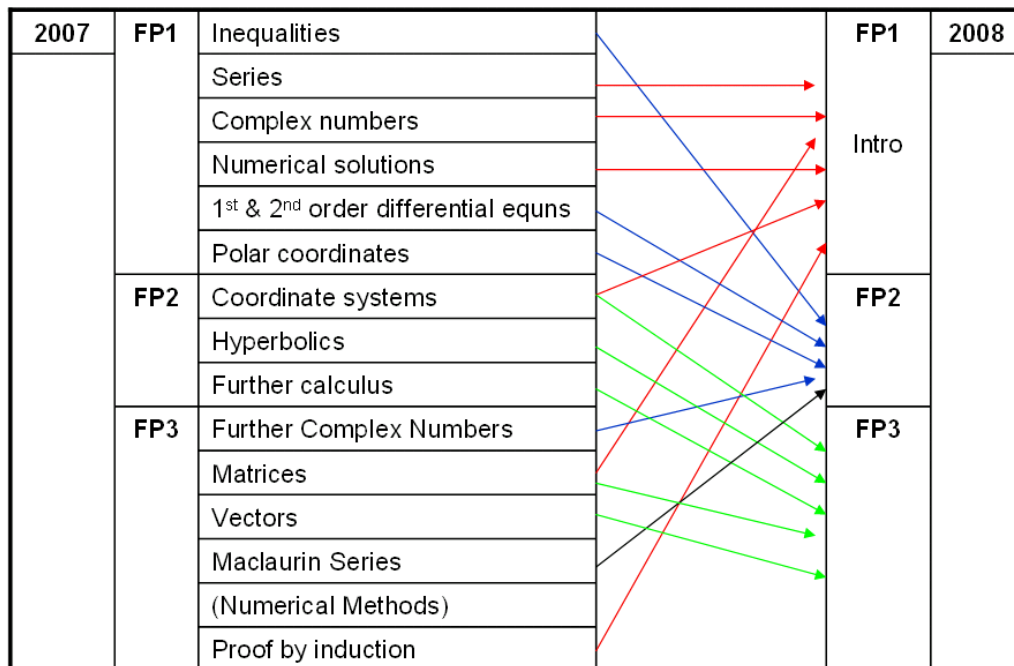
There are no changes between 2007 and 2008 Mathematics specifications. The A Level is still based on six units of which there are four compulsory core units. The four core units are:

Table 6: Edexcel Mathematics GCE A Level unit structure

Unit C1	Core mathematics 1	Algebra and functions; coordinate geometry in the (x, y) plane; sequences and series; differentiation; integration.
Unit C2	Core mathematics 2	Algebra and functions; coordinate geometry in the (x, y) plane; sequences and series; trigonometry; exponentials and logarithms; differentiation; integration.
Unit C3	Core mathematics 3	Algebra and functions; trigonometry; exponentials and logarithms; differentiation; numerical methods.
Unit C4	Core mathematics 4	Algebra and functions; coordinate geometry in the (x, y) plane; sequences and series; differentiation; integration; vectors.

The only change between the existing and new specifications is within Further Mathematics where there is a very small reduction in content from 2007 to 2008. This is portrayed in the following diagram mapping the movement of unit content between the existing and new specifications. Essentially some numerical work has been taken out, along with some work on intrinsic coordinates.

Table 7: Changes to Edexcel GCE A Further maths units



The new FP1 unit is broader but possibly has less depth than the old unit. The designation of FP1 as an AS unit does not affect credit rating as AS Further Mathematics is still awarded for FP1 + two other units.

3D.4 Relative size of the two specifications

The Mathematics specifications are identical and the two Further Mathematics specifications are broadly similar in size.

3D.5 Assessment Objectives (AOs)

Assessment Objectives are identical for both qualifications in the existing and new specifications:

Table 8: Edexcel Mathematics GCE A Level Assessment Objectives

Unit	The assessment will test students' ability to:	Minimum weighting
AO1	recall, select and use their knowledge of mathematical facts, concepts and techniques in a variety of contexts	30%
AO2	construct rigorous mathematical arguments and proofs through use of precise statements, logical deduction and inference and by the manipulation of mathematical expressions, including the construction of extended arguments for handling substantial problems presented in unstructured form	30%
AO3	recall, select and use their knowledge of standard mathematical models to represent situations in the real world; recognise and understand given representations involving standard models; present and interpret results from such models in terms of the original situation, including discussion of the assumptions made and refinement of such models	10%
AO4	comprehend translations of common realistic contexts into mathematics; use the results of calculations to make predictions, or comment on the context; and, where appropriate, read critically and comprehend longer mathematical arguments or examples of applications	5%
AO5	use contemporary calculator technology and other permitted resources (such as formulae booklets or statistical tables) accurately and efficiently; understand when not to use such technology, and its limitations. Give answers to appropriate accuracy	5%

3D.6 Assessment – procedures, methods and levels

There are no changes between 2007 and 2008 Mathematics specifications and all units are externally assessed in both cases.

3D.7 Grading

There are no changes in the alignment of the A Level grades between the two specifications, with the expectation that A Level grades A-E should remain the same.



The A* grade is to be awarded on the basis of a candidate's performance on units C3 and C4. It will therefore require a thorough knowledge of C3 and C4 (and therefore by implication C1-C4) and present a significant challenge beyond the current A grade.

3E SOCIOLOGY (AQA)

3E.1 Aims and purpose of the qualification

The aims of the two specifications are conceptualised in very similar terms. For example, both specifications:

- aim to offer a smooth transition from GCSE Sociology, while neither requires previous study of the subject. Each aims to provide a worthwhile course of study in itself, as well as a foundation for further study and careers in the social sciences
- focus on contemporary society as the context of study, while encouraging the use of comparative and historical material
- aim to foster a wider and deeper knowledge and understanding and more highly developed skills at A2 than at AS
- aim to encourage the integration of sociological themes and seek to develop the understanding of sociological theory and concepts, contemporary social processes and changes, methodology and research methods.

Whilst there is a very close similarity between the two specifications, the 2008 specification goes further in articulating some of its aims. For example, it seeks to encourage candidates to acquire an understanding of methodology 'through active involvement in the research process' and to 'develop their own sociological awareness through active engagement with the contemporary social world'.

3E.2 Guided Learning Hours (GLH)

The National Database of Accredited Qualifications attributes a notional measure of 360 GLH to the GCE A Level. This figure is identical for both the existing and new specification. Both AS and A2 are estimated to require 180 GLH each.

3E.3 Content and structure of the qualification

The two core themes remain the same in both specifications:

- Socialisation, culture and identity
- Stratification, power and differentiation



Table 9: AQA Sociology GCE A Level unit structure

Existing specification	New specification
<p>Module 1 - Families and households; health; mass media</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Families and households Health Mass media <p>Written unit 1.25 hours One data response question (17.5% of total A Level marks)</p>	<p>Unit SCLY1 - Culture and identity; families and households; wealth, poverty and welfare</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Culture and identity Families and households Wealth, poverty and welfare <p>Written paper 1 hour Candidates choose one topic from three and answer one question. Each question consists of five parts. (20% of total A Level marks)</p>
<p>Module 2 – Education; wealth, poverty and welfare; work and leisure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Education Wealth, poverty and welfare Work and leisure <p>Written Unit 1.25 hours One data response question (17.5% of total A Level marks)</p>	<p>Unit 2 SCLY2 - Education; health; sociological methods</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Education Health Sociological methods <p>Written Paper, 2 hours Candidates choose one topic (Education or Health) and answer one question on the chosen topic, one question on sociological research methods in context and one question on research methods. (30% of total A Level marks)</p>
<p>Module 3 – Sociological methods</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The main methods and sources used by sociologists, and their relationship to theory. <p>Either one compulsory data response question (1 hour) and one essay OR coursework. Centre assessed. (15% of total A Level marks)</p>	
<p>Module 4 – Power and politics; religion; world sociology</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Power and politics Religion World sociology <p>Written unit 1.5 hours One short data response question and one essay (15% of total A Level marks)</p>	<p>Unit SCLY3 - Beliefs in society; global development; mass media; power and politics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Beliefs in society Global development Mass media Power and politics. <p>Written paper, 1.5 hours Candidates choose one topic from four and answer one compulsory question and one question from a choice of two. (20% of total A Level marks)</p>
<p>Module 5 – Theory and methods</p> <p>As “Sociological Models” plus issues such as: sociology; science; values and objectivity; post-modernity.</p> <p>Either one compulsory data response question (1.5 hours) and one essay OR coursework (15% of total A Level marks)</p>	<p>Unit SCLY4 - crime and deviance; stratification and differentiation; theory and methods</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Crime and deviance Stratification and differentiation Theory and methods <p>Written paper, 2 hours Candidates choose one topic and answer one question on the chosen topic, one question on sociological research methods in</p>
<p>Module 6 – Crime and deviance;</p>	



stratification and differentiation	context and one question on theory and methods.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crime and deviance • Stratification and differentiation 	(30% of total A Level marks)
One three-part synoptic question – 1.5 hours (20% of total A Level marks)	

Similarities:

The content for each specification is very similar, but split across four units in the new 2008 specification, compared to six units previously. The above table portrays how old Units 2 and 3 are subsumed into new Unit 2, whilst old Units 5 and 6 become Unit 4 in the new specification.

The following broad areas of content (which form optional topics of study within units) are common to both specifications:

- Families and households
- Health
- Wealth, poverty & welfare
- Education
- Sociological methods
- Mass media
- Power and politics
- Religion (2007)/ Beliefs in society (2008)
- World sociology (2007)/Global development (2008)
- Crime and deviance
- Stratification and differentiation
- Theory and methods

Differences:

- 2008 AS topic (Culture and identity) replaces 2007 topic (Work and leisure)
- Crime and deviance has undergone major change
- in the AS topic Families and households, demography has been introduced into the 2008 specification, while “Changes in family and household structure and their relationship to industrialisation and urbanisation” has been removed
- in some topics, there has been a slight increase in the volume of content to be studied
- Work and leisure unit has been removed from the AS specification
- Culture and identity has been introduced into the 2008 AS (including an element of ‘leisure’)



- some features of specific topics, notably Crime and deviance and Beliefs in society
- new 'Methods in context' questions have a significant focus on the new skill of application of research methods: in 2008 AS Unit 2 and A2 Unit 4, candidates are required to apply sociological research methods to the study of a substantive context.

In terms of volume and study and balance across the two specifications:

- Mass media has changed from being an AS option in 2007 to become an A2 unit in the new specification. Hence the depth of study in this topic is greater in 2008
- additional content in the two A2 areas (Crime and deviance and Beliefs in society) represent an additional demand in terms of time.

Stretch and challenge divides the two specifications: in the 2008 specification's requirement that candidates must apply their knowledge of sociological research methods to the study of a substantive area. (It should be noted that this is the case at AS, as well as at A2.) Candidates are also required in both A2 units to synthesise the knowledge, understanding and skills learnt in different parts of the course.

3E.4 Relative size of the two specifications

The two are broadly similar in size. However, the 2008 specification specifies somewhat more knowledge than the 2007 specification. It also requires synoptic understanding and skills across both A2 units (as against only one unit in 2007) and calls for the skill of application, particularly in Units 2 and 4.

3E.5 Assessment Objectives (AOs)

Apart from the change from the 2007 AO2 skill of identification to the 2008 skill of application, the Assessment Objectives are the same, as are their relative weightings.



Table 10: AQA Sociology GCE A Level Assessment Objectives

Existing specification		New specification	
AO1	Knowledge and understanding of the theories, methods, concepts and various forms of evidence and of the links between them; communication of knowledge and understanding in a clear and effective manner.	AO1	Knowledge and understanding of the theories, methods, concepts and various forms of evidence and of the links between them; communication of knowledge and understanding in a clear and effective manner.
AO2	Acquisition and appropriate application of skills of identification, analysis, interpretation and evaluation.	AO2	Demonstration of the skills of application, analysis, interpretation and evaluation.

3E.6 Assessment – procedures, methods and levels

The option of internal assessment was present in the 2007 specification, but this has been removed for 2008.

- 2007: six units, either externally assessed, or up to two units (one AS, one A2) internally assessed. Up to 30% of assessment evidence for the A Level qualification may be centre-generated (15% for AS; 15% for A2), and up to 30% for the AS qualification.
- 2008: four units, all externally assessed. There is no centre-generated assessment evidence.

The 2008 specification allocates a greater proportion of marks to longer essay-style answers written in continuous prose. For example, marks awarded to essay-style answers on AS units:

- 2007 Units 1, 2 & 3: 40/60 (67%)
- 2008 Unit 1: 48/60 (80%) 2008 Unit 2: 72/90 (80%).

A very similar level of support is given in both specifications, with stimulus items supporting many of the essay questions and most (2008) or all (2007) of the shorter questions.

There is a high level of continuity and similarity between the mark schemes for 2007 and those for 2008. Even where a relatively new question-format has been introduced (education; health; sociological methods (SCLY2), Q2/Q5 and crime and deviance; stratification and differentiation; theory and methods (SCLY4,) Q2 (b)/Q5 (b)), mark schemes follow a very similar structure.

Neither of the two sets of mark schemes offers more scope for professional discretion than the other.



The marking criteria and their application are thus very unlikely to result in different grades being awarded as between the two specifications.

3E.7 Grading

There are two notable differences between the descriptions. The 2007 specification:

- includes a C grade descriptor
- does not include grade descriptions for AS level.

Comparing the A Level descriptors for grade A (A/B boundary in 2008) and grade E (E/U boundary in 2008), there are few if any significant differences, though the 2008 specification tends to articulate points more fully and includes explicit statements about the coherence of presentation and quality of written communication.

Candidates achieving top grades and, to a lesser degree, middle grades in 2008 would differ from those externally assessed candidates in 2007 in having to show their ability to apply research methods to specific substantive issues. However, this would not necessarily be the case for 2007 candidates who opted to do coursework, where the ability to apply methods to specific topics is a significant discriminator.

Candidates achieving top, middle and bottom grades in 2008 could be expected to know slightly more content than 2007 candidates.



SECTION 4: THE WORK OF THE EXPERT GROUPS

4.1 Prior to the meeting

Prior to the meeting preliminary work was carried out. Pre-meeting papers were distributed, requiring the Chief Examiners for the five subjects involved to compare aims, content, study hours, relative size and assessment models of the newly-structured GCE A Level in comparison with the existing A Level. The Chief Examiners were also asked to undertake a preliminary scoring of the qualifications against the UCAS Tariff domains.

4.2 QCA presentation

To begin, it was explained that the purpose of the day was to consider the relationship between AS and A2 for the new and present specifications, to confirm evidence of stretch and challenge in the new specifications, and to recommend a value for the new A* grade. The exercise started with a presentation from David MacKay of QCA in order to set the scene by providing information on the new specifications for GCE AS and A Level. As any value determined for the A* in the new A Level will also apply (proportionately) to the A* grade in the Advanced Diploma, some information about the grading structure of the Diploma was also provided. The main points of the presentation are reflected in Section 4.3.

A number of queries were raised:

- The relationship of the Extended Project to A Level: it was confirmed that the Extended Project is half an A Level in size, but examined at the full A2 standard. It is therefore not directly equivalent to AS.
- Whether the Diploma had the same AS/A2 relationship as A Level: it was confirmed that there is no A2 structure for the Diploma, and that the entire Diploma is assessed at full Level 3 standard.
- Whether the A* grade is quantitative, and whether it operates in the same way across all specifications: it was confirmed that Applied A Levels would not be restructured in a major way immediately but would include an A* grade. It was also explained that 'stretch and challenge' has not yet been incorporated into A Level mathematics qualifications as they were not reviewed along with the other A Levels.
- Whether all candidates would take 'stretch and challenge' questions: it was confirmed that this would be the case irrespective of final grade awarded, and explained that cut-off points for grades A and E would, as now, be determined



by examiner judgement and use of statistics, with those for intervening grades, and A*, extrapolated from the grades A and E positions.

- Whether AS examinations contained 'stretch and challenge': QCA indicated that this had not been a requirement of the new specifications. However, this statement was not borne out by the descriptions of the changes as reported by the Chief Examiners and it was reported that challenge had been increased at AS in Chemistry, Maths, Geography and Sociology through the inclusion of more application of knowledge and synopticity.
- Whether it would be possible to achieve grade A without performing well in stretching questions: it was confirmed by David MacKay that this would not be the case but that in practice stretch and challenge would make papers harder, so it may be possible to get grade A with lower raw marks than at present. However, the Chief Examiners for Geography and Sociology considered that these issues would be dealt with through marking schemes; the Chief Examiner for Maths considered that in practice nothing had changed as candidates at the top end were already being stretched, and in Chemistry it was indicated that it may be possible to achieve a grade A without doing well on the stretching questions by virtue of high marks on the AS units.
- Exactly what the A* was: David MacKay confirmed that it rewarded candidates who evidenced stretch and challenge, and that specifically it is about synoptic assessment.
- Whether the modelling for the A* had taken into account possible student behaviour, eg if an HEI included A* in an offer whether a student currently taking 4.5 A Levels would drop a subject in order to concentrate on achieving a sufficient UMS score in order to be awarded A*: It was confirmed that the modelling had been undertaken on the basis of current student behaviour, but that QCA would be monitoring the situation very closely to ensure the papers deliver what has been planned. Nonetheless, QCA recognised the challenge for awarding bodies.

4.3 Subject presentations

The Chief Examiner for each subject area made a presentation based on the preliminary work undertaken before the meeting of the Expert Group. The outcomes of the work are described in Sections 4.3.1 to 4.3.5.



4.3.1. Chemistry

For Chemistry the following was confirmed:

- the structure of the specification has not changed but content has
- option units at A2 have been dropped, and there is no longer the opportunity to combine units from other subject areas, eg Biochemistry
- all units are theory-based although there will be three practical exercises as mini examinations in class (the best of the three will go forward)
- incorporation of stretch and challenge is not difficult in Chemistry as a harder section can be added to each question (although this is a concern in respect of grade E candidates who would view this as being 'nastier')
- there is the inclusion of the context 'How does science work?' across the qualification
- length of examination papers has been decreased from 4.5 to 2.75 hours at both AS and A2
- the stretch and challenge questions will be less atomistic, candidates will be required to make connections, and there will be more extended writing
- it may be difficult to get high marks on practical components and it is likely that there will be a very small pool of A* candidates for HE entry (the 90% band may therefore be too inflexible).

4.3.2 English language and literature

In respect of English language and literature:

- AS units have additional content
- annotations in open books will no longer be allowed
- a requirement for a pre-20th century text has been dropped
- there is no poetry requirement for AS
- there is a new coursework unit in A2
- poetry is a requirement for A2, as is a non-fiction set text
- generally, the units are less cluttered, they are discrete with no crossover
- Assessment Objectives are tested in the same way
- stretch and challenge is introduced through literature-based production and analytical tasks
- there is a focus on depth and insight in the transition from AS to A2.



4.3.3 Geography

Focusing on the new specification, for Geography, the following additional points were made:

- the aims have been re-addressed and now include global citizenship and updated terminology
- the new specification contains more critical and reflective thinking skills with a reduced emphasis on recall of factual information
- the external assessment of coursework has been removed; this increases challenge as candidates will be required to refer to their own research and field skills in order to contextualise external assessments
- the AS units focus on the physical and human environments
- A2 units covers global issues and geographical skills and assessment is fully synoptic
- all units are larger (because of the reduction from six to four), although broadly the content will be familiar to both teachers and candidates
- the same set of skills are included although they may be examined in a different way
- there will be two examinations at AS; the structure has changed in that candidates will be required to write essays
- at A2 there is an added emphasis on synopticity and stretch and challenge (the latter through the requirement to address particular issues and interpret associated data and respond accordingly)
- Assessment Objectives have been reduced from four to three with knowledge and understanding now incorporating communication
- it is anticipated that candidates will find it difficult to get above a score of 80 UMS and currently roughly only 1% of the candidature would get A* with 90 UMS.

4.3.4 Maths (and further maths):

- there is no change to the specification for 2008 teaching (2010 award) although the A* grade will be introduced
- each unit will continue to be assessed by 90 minute examinations
- A* will be awarded on the basis of 180+ UMS from C3 and C4 units
- the currently large number of option units available will continue
- the A* candidate will need to have a thorough knowledge of the material but will also need to be very precise and accurate



- on the basis of 2006 awards, based on achievement of 90% in C3 and C4 units, 15.4% would have been awarded A* in Maths, and 37.6% in Further Maths.

4.3.5 Sociology

The Chief Examiner for Sociology indicated the following:

- aims remain broadly the same
- the focus will be on contemporary society
- AS content no longer covers mass media
- the new specification requires an emphasis of understanding of methodology through active involvement in the research process
- coursework options have been dropped with sociological methods replacing current coursework outcomes
- the assessment objectives are very similar, although interpretation of these will change in order to take account of stretch and challenge
- stretch and challenge will be confirmed by giving more weighting to longer answers.

4.4 General discussion

Some reference was made to the Advanced Extension Award which particularly in Maths was considered to be very successful at integrating stretch and challenge. However, the debate necessarily concentrated on whether stretch and challenge in the new specifications was indeed present, whilst recognising that pragmatically the Maths position would need to be ignored for the time being (but in anticipation of changes for 2011 awards). Notwithstanding the latter, it was suggested that stretch and challenge is already present in Maths because of the progressive nature of the course of study, with one core unit forming the building block for the next. It was thought that stretch and challenge was present in all subject areas, but uncertainty was voiced in some subjects as to whether examiners would recognise it. The examiners pointed out that in practice it is very difficult to envisage how stretch and challenge will work insofar as question setting is concerned, or how candidates will respond to a different question setting approach. It was also thought that approaches will differ by subject; for example, in Chemistry the style of questions would not change although the demand would be greater. There was also initially some confusion about the connection between stretch and challenge and the A* grade, and whether the A* was a manifestation of stretch and challenge or merely a technical device to come up with an additional grade. Discussion led to the conclusion that in



practice there were two different interpretations of the intentions of adding an A* grade:

- setting new types of question
- a purely mathematical process of top slicing candidates but the introduction of an additional grade based on achievement of 90 UMS or higher.

It was pointed out that an awarding committee dealing with the new specification would be dealing with grades A and E as at present, with an algorithm assigning A* (this algorithm is still being worked on by QCA). In practice, therefore, stretch and challenge might effectively drive down the overall mark for the award of grade A.

The Group was reminded that the 2004 White Paper, which initiated the changes to A Level, specifically put forward the integration of stretch and challenge as a key to the current problems with differentiating students, many of whom achieve grade A. The HE representatives confirmed that on the basis of what had been heard there was anticipation that the new specifications would mean a return to A Level developing the skills needed by HE, ie there would be a return to the position which existed prior to the introduction of Curriculum 2000.

4.5 AS/A2 relationship

Although without sample assessment materials and candidate scripts it was not absolutely clear as to whether stretch and challenge would appear in both AS and A2, the consensus was that stretch and challenge was definitely going into A2 but that it would also be evident in AS in some subjects. There was also discussion about the relationship in terms of size between AS and A Level, and, in terms of Tariff points it was recognised that it would be educationally undesirable for AS to be designated as anything other than one half an A Level. Any change may affect student choice and reduce progress achieved since the introduction of Curriculum 2000 in encouraging more breadth of study. It was recognised that there would always be shifting sands, not least because of differences between subjects, for example, whether content or skills predominated in AS in one and in A2 in another. It was pointed out that any change in the relationship in terms of size could lead to a psychological impact on students and lead to fairness and transparency issues. It was acknowledged that if a qualification was being completely re-designed (as opposed to tweaked), the starting point might be different, but following considerable debate the final position was not disputed: in terms of size, AS should continue to be half a full A Level as it represented a full year of work, and there would be considerable disincentives in changing this relationship.



4.6 A*

In working towards a recommendation in respect of a potential value within the Tariff for the A* grade, the Expert Group returned to consideration of Advanced Extension Awards. It was thought that there was no doubt that this qualification epitomised stretch and challenge because it assesses additional skills over and above the A Level, even in the new specifications (this was particularly so for Maths AEA). In the circumstances it was thought that the A* grade in A Level should not reach the value for a Distinction (currently 160 points). However, it was thought that despite the evidence currently available being somewhat thin, the presentations and contributions from the Chief Examiners had confirmed the addition of stretch and challenge in the new specifications.

Pragmatically therefore a score for the A* might be 130 or 140 points – to confirm this it was stressed by the Chemistry Principal Moderator that a score of 90% on A2 papers would represent a fantastic achievement.

However, before confirming this decision, there was some debate about how a score of 140 points for A* would work in practice, and it was pointed out that four grade As would be worth more in Tariff terms than three A* grades (480 points as opposed to 420 points). It was queried as to whether this would represent fair scoring, and whether an additional score of only 20 points would act as the necessary incentive for a student to achieve at this level. A number of representatives considered that this was a definite problem and that an overall value which gave less to a three A*s student than a four As student would be problematic.

In addition, there was discussion about whether the relationship between the A* grade and the A grade was bigger than that between grades A and B, and although it was thought that this might be the case, it was considered that there was not sufficient evidence on the table to confirm this position at this particular point in time.

It was also pointed out that although the new AS had been confirmed as being one half of the new A Level, an additional score for A* would distort this relationship in terms of points. On the other hand, it was confirmed by the DCSF officer present that points for performance tables would also operate in this way.

4.7 Recommendations for awarding UCAS Tariff Points

Expert Group members were asked to take all the above into account (including differences between subjects) in deciding whether a score of 140 points for A* grade should be recommended. Despite the reservations expressed above, and the exhortation of Dr Geoff Hayward that a principle of caution should be applied, a



UCAS Tariff Expert Group Report

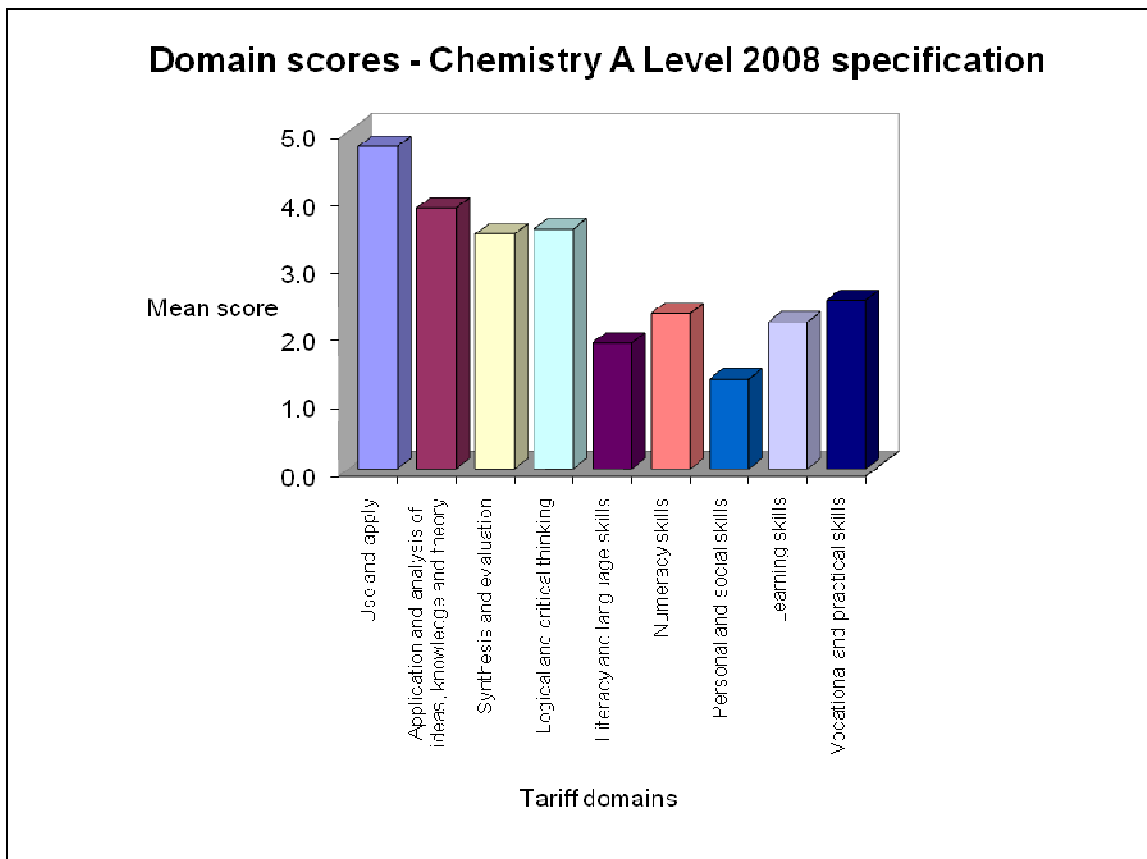
'round the table' assessment confirmed that the A* grade should be given an additional 20 UCAS Tariff Points, but that as soon as examination papers and candidate scripts were available, ie autumn 2010, the recommendation should be reviewed.



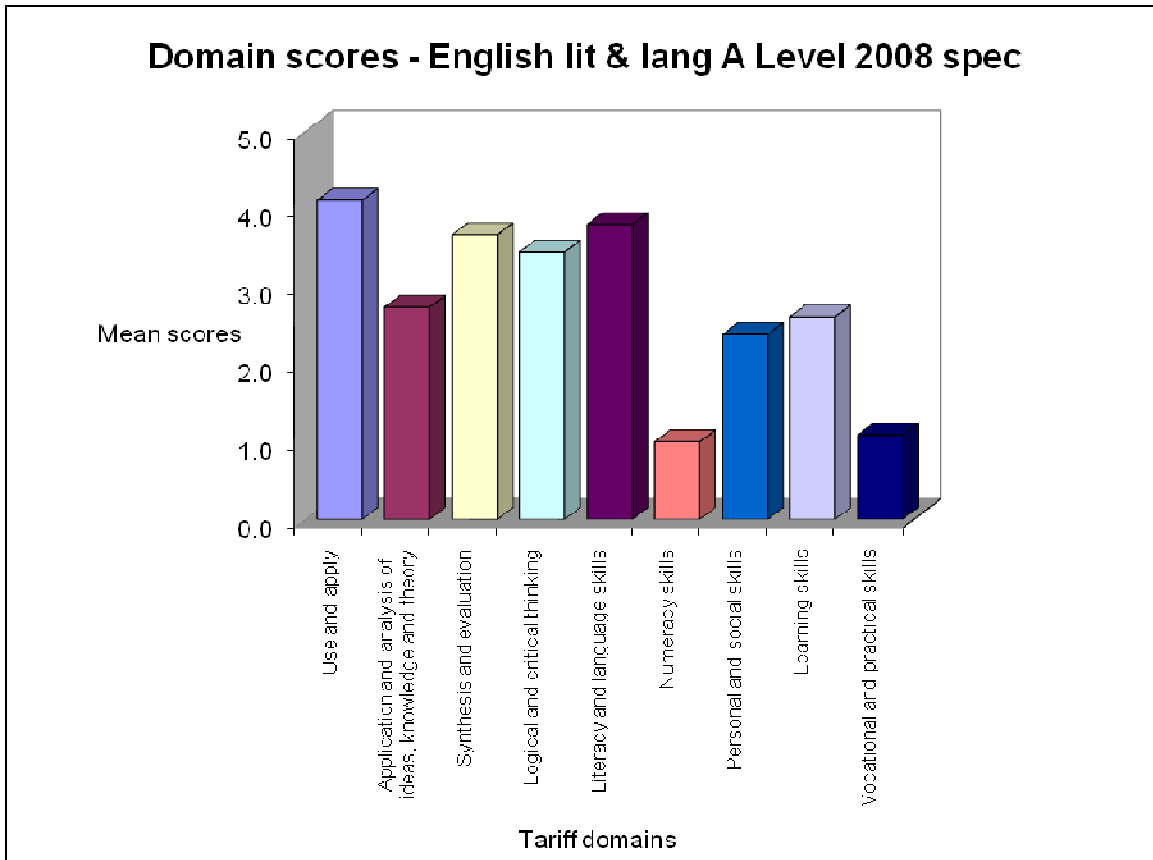
APPENDIX 1 SCORING AGAINST THE DOMAINS

Readers wishing to receive further information on the following appendix are invited to contact UCAS who will be happy to provide it.

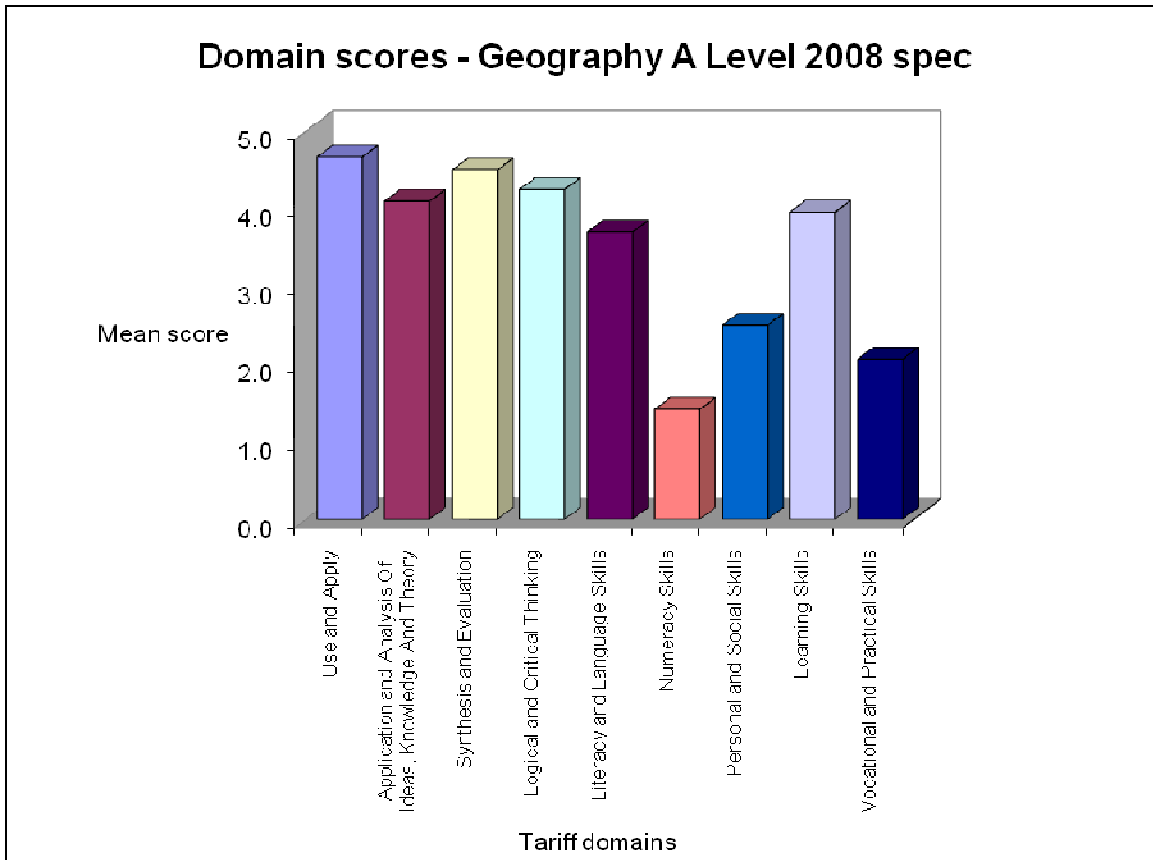
A1A Chemistry



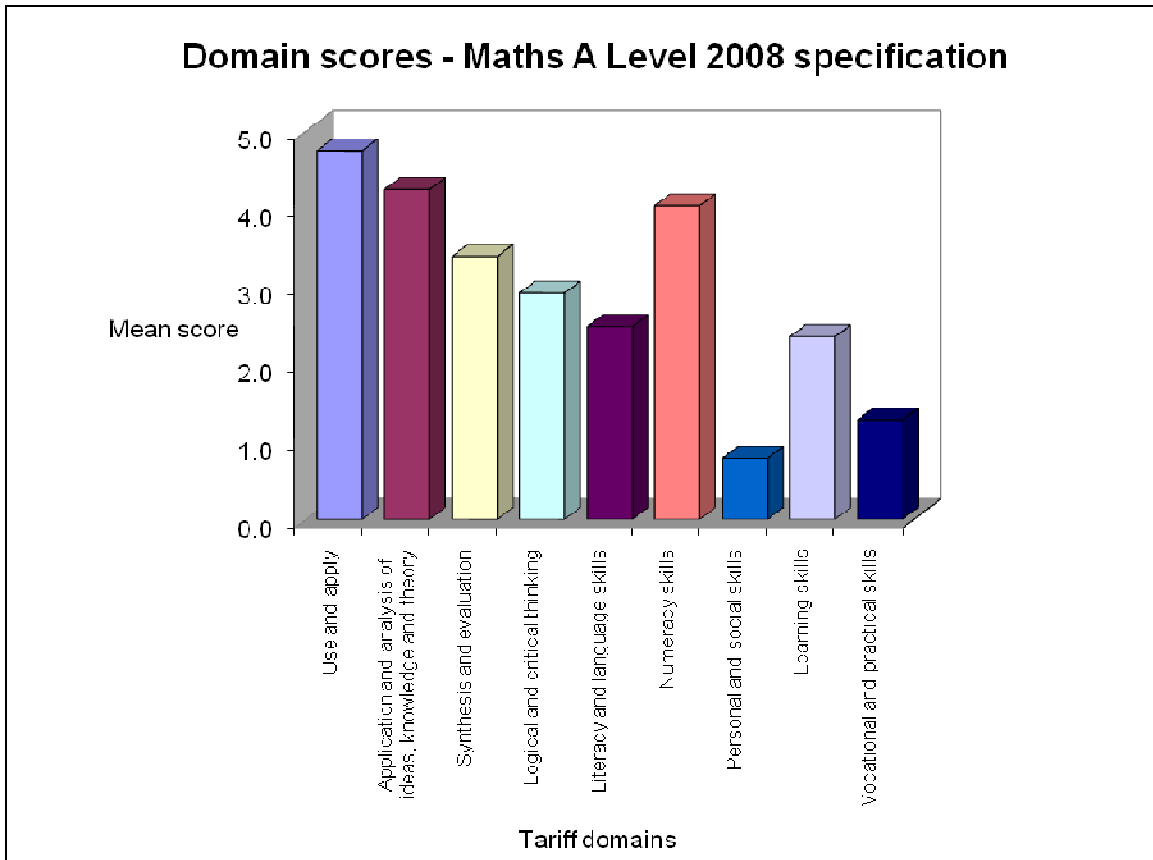
A1B English language and literature



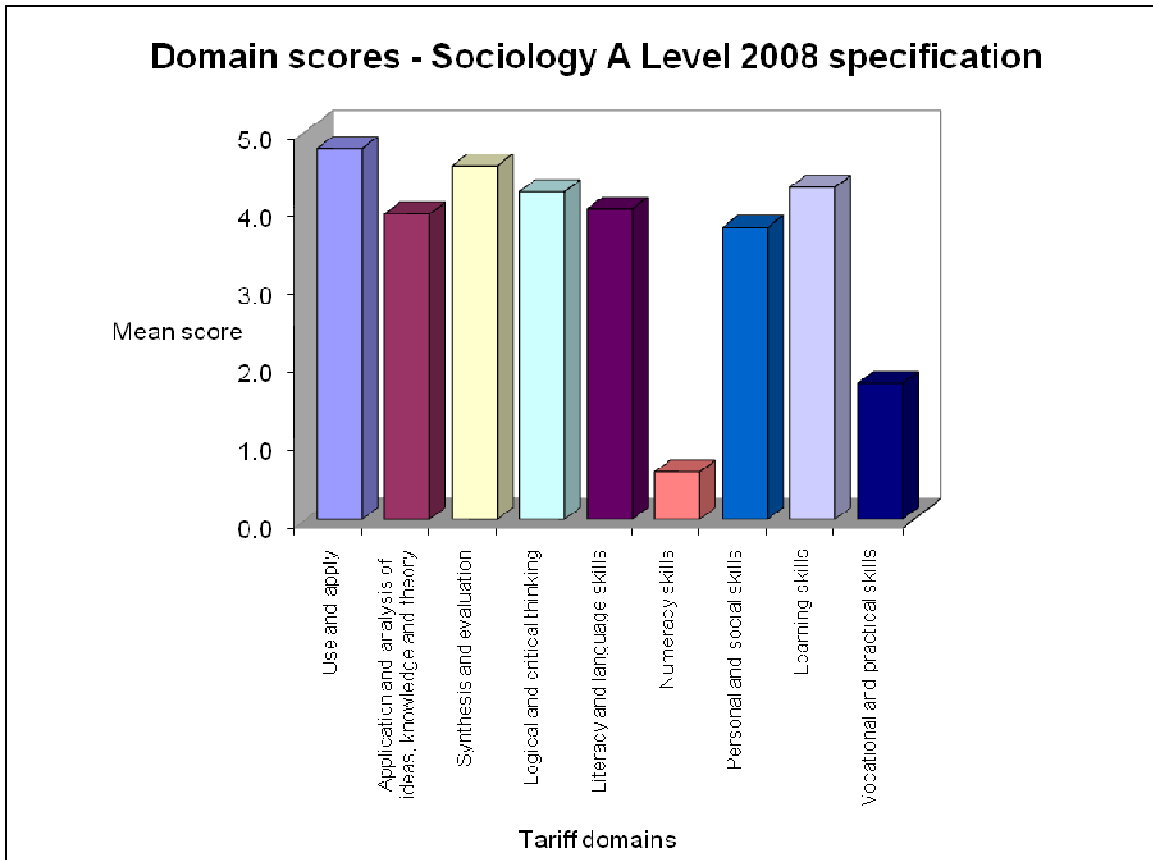
A1C Geography



A1D Mathematics



A1E Sociology



APPENDIX 2: BIOGRAPHIES OF THE EXPERT GROUP MEMBERS

UCAS COMPARABILITY STUDY**Outline Biography of Expert Group Member**

Name: **Greg Attwood**

Current Position: Chief Examiner

Organisation: Edexcel & Repton School

Qualifications: BA, MSc

Brief Biography

Currently a full time teacher of Mathematics and Examinations Officer at Repton School. Have taught at Repton School for 30 years, having been Head of Mathematics and Housemaster .

Became a Chief/Principal Examiner for A Level Mathematics in 1991. Involved in all aspects of AS and A Level Mathematics setting papers in Pure Maths, Mechanics and Statistics. Currently also Chief Examiner for Statistics.

Has been in charge of AEA qualification since original pilots and was part of the UCAS Tariff meeting for AEA.

Have been part of various other QCA projects, scrutinies, A Level vs. IB comparability studies and Tomlinson phase 2 including the production of exemplary materials.

Currently part of the Chartered Educational Assessor pilot project being run by IEA.



UCAS COMPARABILITY STUDY

Outline Biography of Expert Group Member

Name: **Andy Archibald**

Current Position: Principal Examiner English Lang. & Lit. A

Organisation: AQA

Qualifications: MA, BA, B.Ed.

Brief Biography

Examining:

2009 - Principal Examiner (ELLA 4) AQA GCE English Lang. & Lit. Spec A.
 2002 - Principal Examiner: AQA GCE English Lang. & Lit. Spec A. Unit 2 (Poetry)
 2003- Grade Awards Panel Eng. Lang. & Lit. Spec. B.
 2004- UCAS Tariff Allocation Committee: Expert Group
 Irish Leaving Certificate (2004); International Baccalaureate (2005);
 USA Advanced Placement Program (2005); Singapore CIE A Level (2007)
 1996-02 Assistant Examiner / Team Leader: AQA Eng. Lang & Lit. (0623)
 2001-05 Assistant Examiner: CIE English Language (O Level)
 2002- Assistant Examiner: CIE Literature in English (A Level)
 2004- Assistant Examiner: IBO Extended Essay
 Training and Support: 2002-AQA Teacher Support; 2003-Philip Allan Updates
 2004 Sovereign Education 2007 Keynote Educational

Publications:

2006 Student Unit Guide to AS English Language & Literature Spec. A.
 Module 2: Poetic Study (Hodder /Philip Allan Updates)
 2008 Coursework Guide:A2 English Language & Literature Spec. A. (Nelson Thornes)

Teaching:

2000-01 Royal Russell School, Croydon: English to A Level.
 1993-99 Trinity School, Croydon: English to A Level.
 1991-92 University of Houston: English (BA classes).
 1978-91 Dulwich College, London: Director of Drama/ English to A Level.
 1974-77 Whitgift School, Croydon: English to A Level.

Education:

2004-07 SOAS, London University: BA Southeast Asian Studies.
 1999-00 University College, London: MA Phonetics.
 1992-93 University of Sussex: MA English Lit.
 1991-92 University of Houston: MA Studies Eng.Lit./ C.Writing
 1969-73 Loughborough University BEd Eng. Lit / PE/ Education



UCAS COMPARABILITY STUDY

Outline Biography of Expert Group Member

Name: **Andrew Bettley**

Current Position: Head of Advanced Studies

Organisation: Coleg Llandrillo

Qualifications: BA Hons English, Certificate in Secondary Education Teaching
MA in English Literature, Postgraduate Diploma in Education
Management

Brief Biography

PRESENT POST

Head of Advanced Studies Coleg Llandrillo

PREVIOUS EMPLOYMENT

Head of Programme Coleg Llandrillo

School Manager Coleg Llandrillo

Senior Lecturer Coleg Llandrillo

Lecturer in English Literature North East Wales Institute of Higher Education

Assistant Head of Year & Teacher of English - 11-18 sector

PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATIONS

BA Hons English

Certificate in Secondary Education Teaching

MA in English Literature

Postgraduate Diploma in Education Management

EDUCATION

University of Durham

The Open University

Sheffield Hallam University



UCAS COMPARABILITY STUDY

Outline Biography of Expert Group Member

Name: **Dianne Francombe**

Current Position: Director, Admissions and International Recruitment

Organisation: University of the West of England

Qualifications:

Brief Biography

Dianne is the Director of the University of the West of England's highly integrated Enquiry and Admissions Service. The activities of the service include responsibility for education liaison activities in the UK; student recruitment and partnership building overseas; management of enquiries and admissions functions for both UK and international applicants for undergraduate and postgraduate programmes and links with external bodies.

Dianne has many years' experience in this specialised field and has been invited to serve on a number of national and international committees and is a regular contributor at conferences. She is currently Chair of the UCAS Tariff Advisory Group and member of the UCAS Tariff Reference Group.



UCAS COMPARABILITY STUDY

Outline Biography of Expert Group Member

Name: **ABDUL HAMID**

Current Position: Qualifications Officer

Organisation: University of Manchester

Qualifications: BSc, PGCE, CCOT, MSc, MPhil

Brief Biography

WORK HISTORY

Nov 2006 - date Qualifications Officer
University of Manchester

Aug. 2001 – Nov 2006 Development Manager
Open College of the North West (OCNW) / Lancaster University

Aug. 1993 – Aug. 2001 Lecturer in Psychology
Accrington and Rossendale College

1991 - 1993 Part-time Lecturer in Psychology
Runshaw Tertiary College, Leyland / Southport College of Arts & Technology.

HIGHER EDUCATION TEACHING

2006 – date Associate Lecturer DSE212 Exploring Psychology
Open University

1998 to 2001 Open University Summer School Tutor. DSE202 Memory.
Stirling University and Durham University.

1993 – 2001 BA (Hons) Applied Social Studies, BA (Hons) Health Studies, BA (Hons)
Cultural Studies.

EXAMINERSHIPS

2005 – date External Examiner
University of Ulster

2001 to 2006 Chief Examiner for Psychology (OCNW Lakes Access)

1994 to 2001 Examiner for AEB A Level Psychology
Module 4. Social and comparative Psychology.
Module 5. Bio- and Abnormal Psychology.



UCAS COMPARABILITY STUDY

Outline Biography of Expert Group Member

Name: **CHRIS MARTIN**

Current Position: CHIEF EXAMINER GCE GEOGRAPHY

Organisation: OCR

Qualifications: MSc, PGCE, BA hons, DMS (ED man)

Brief Biography

Retired (3 years ago). Headteacher of a large comprehensive in Essex, Spent 34 years teaching geography in all types of state school, secondary advisor for 3 years in a small unitary LEA, Also worked as a Geography Inspector for Ofsted and a SIP.

I have spent nearly 30 years in examination work as moderator, examiner, reviser, subject officer and Chief Examiner. I was Chief Examiner for EDEXCEL Spec A GCE Geography for 10 years until 1998. Currently I am Chief Examiner for OCR GCE Geography Spec A and the new OCR Spec as well as Principle Examiner on OCR GCE Geography Spec B

I am also a HTLA assessor for the Eastern region, GTP assessor for STTP, and a PGCE Geog assessor for the OU in the Eastern region. Currently I am also involved with training teachers for the new Geography Spec and authoring various support materials.



UCAS COMPARABILITY STUDY

Outline Biography of Expert Group Member

Name: **John Older**

Current Position: Principal Examiner

Organisation: OCR

Qualifications: PGCE University of Sussex, BSc (Hons) University of Sussex, S' levels: Chemistry, Mathematics for Science, A' levels: Pure Mathematics, Applied Mathematics, Chemistry, Physics

Brief Biography

University College School, London - Vice Master 1997 – 2004
University College School, London - Assistant Master - Head of Chemistry -
Housemaster - Director of Studies (1967 - 2004)

Syllabus Advisor UCLES (Cambridge Assessment) (1975 - present)
Principal Examiner and currently Principal Moderator (1979 - present)
Reviser for AS Chemistry (2004 - present)
Wrote specification for the Environmental Chemistry option and the supporting guidance
booklet (1996). Reviser for Environmental Chemistry
Member of panel producing the new AS and A2 specifications for 2008
Co-author of textbooks covering the new specification to be published by Hodder
Headlines in 2008 and 2009

Member of the Royal Institution and the Association for Science Education



UCAS COMPARABILITY STUDY

Outline Biography of Expert Group Member

Name: **Rob Webb**

Current Position: Chief Examiner, GCE Sociology

Organisation: AQA

Qualifications: B.Sc. Hons Sociology, LSE (First); MA Area Studies: Europe, LSE (Distinction); Cert Ed FHE, Univ Greenwich (Distinction)

Brief Biography

(include responsibilities, career development, relevant research, industrial experience etc.)

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Teaching social sciences in inner city FE colleges and in HE (School of Slavonic & E. European Studies, Univ. London; PNL). Curriculum development in FE adult returner courses. Managing FE early years courses and foundation degree.

Research: Govt Research Division, LSE; open and flexible learning projects (MSC; ILEA, London Borough of Lewisham).

CPD for GCE Sociology teachers/examiners, Early Years teachers.

Publications for GCE Sociology: lead author "AS level Sociology" (Napier Press 2004, 2008), numerous topic books, revision aids, teachers' guides etc for commercial publishers and AQA.

Currently working on development of an A Level Anthropology specification in conjunction with the Royal Anthropological Institute.



APPENDIX 3: THE EVIDENCE CONSIDERED

Syllabus and specification

2007 and 2008 GCE A Level specifications, sample assessment material and specimen mark schemes for the following subjects

- Chemistry (OCR)
- English Language and Literature Specification A (AQA)
- Geography (OCR)
- Mathematics (Edexcel)
- Sociology (AQA)

