

# Changing times, changing qualifications

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## Introduction

During recent years there have been many changes in education and assessment in England. Since 2000, curricula have been updated, particular skills have been included then removed from assessment, several new qualifications for students in English secondary schools have been added to the Register of Regulated Qualifications and other qualifications have been withdrawn. When so many changes occur in a short space of time it is difficult to keep track of them, and the time at which they happened. This is particularly problematic when identifying the dates that qualifications were available.

This article tracks some of the changes that have occurred in England since 2000 in secondary school education and general qualifications. The year 2000 was chosen as the starting year for the analysis because it coincided with the first teaching of a new version of the National Curriculum in England and a major change to A levels. The article is divided into three sections: qualifications being added and withdrawn from the Register of Regulated Qualifications; changes to GCSEs (including the proposed English Baccalaureate Certificates); and changes to A levels.

For each section, a time line is included to provide an overview of the

most important dates. Following on from this are summaries of the major events associated with each qualification/reform and references that have been identified for this information. These summaries do not give a comprehensive account of any particular event or document. Instead, relevant references are provided as a useful starting point to enable the reader to investigate further. Where possible, the references given are for published documents and publications, so that the reader can use them as a reference for the dates of particular events without needing to carry out further research. Occasionally it has been necessary to provide links to web pages instead. If this has been done, every effort has been made to ensure that the links are likely to prove permanent.

## Introduction and withdrawal of qualifications

Since 2000, several new qualifications have been introduced and further qualifications have been withdrawn from the list of accredited qualifications. This section lists key dates and information for some of the qualifications offered in schools and colleges represented in Table 1 and the timeline in Figure 1.

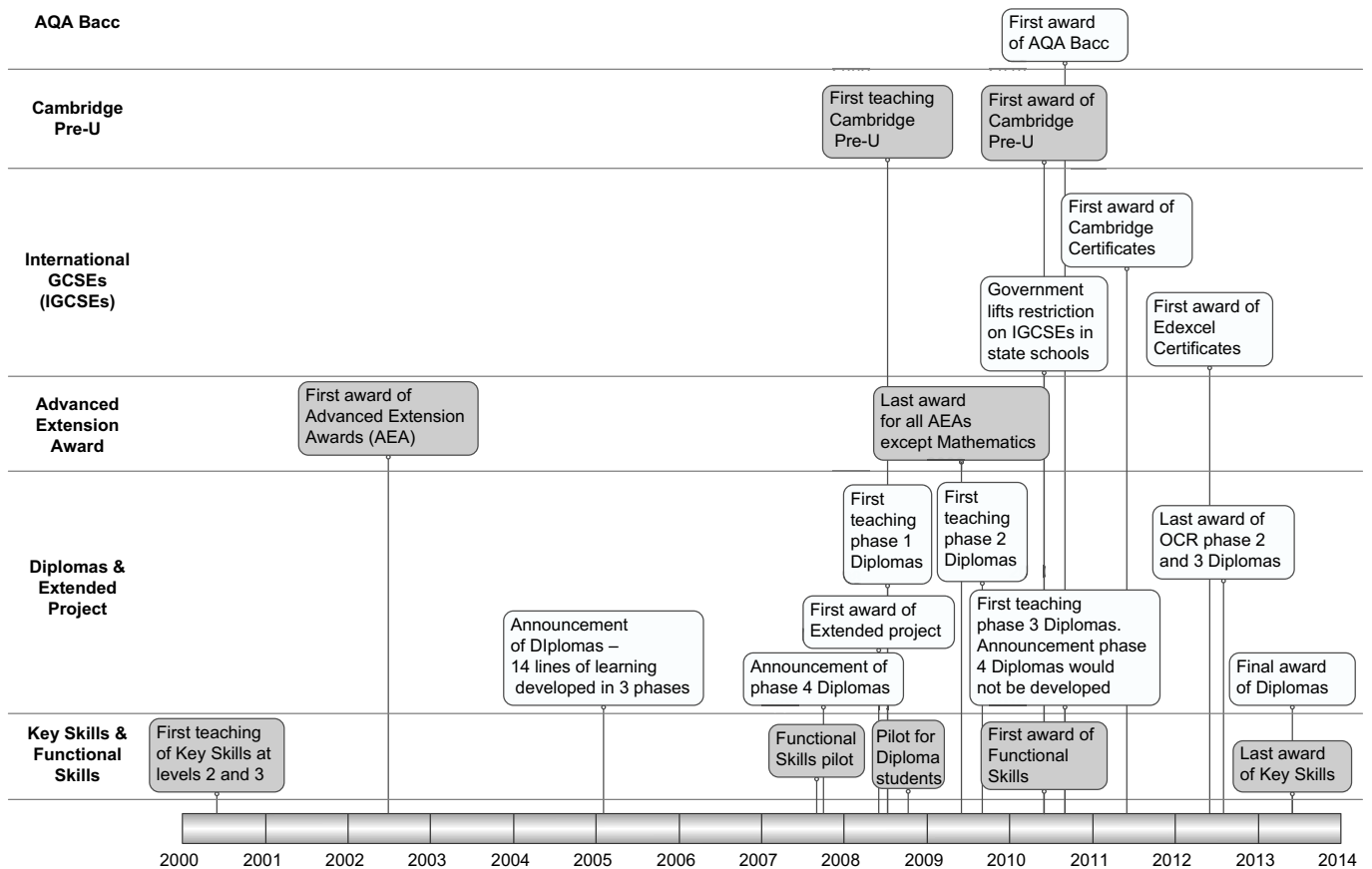


Figure 1: Key dates for offering qualifications

**Table 1: Details of qualifications**

Year	Details
<b>Advanced Extension Award</b>	
2002	The Advanced Extension Award (AEA) was introduced in 17 subjects, with the first examinations taking place in the summer of 2002 (UCAS, 2004). The specification <sup>1</sup> was based on the existing A level subject criteria and required no extra teaching. The examination was aimed at the top 10% of A level candidates and aimed to stretch them through more challenging questioning.
2009	All AEA examinations except Mathematics were withdrawn by the government, with the final examination taking place in the summer 2009 session. They were withdrawn as part of the changes to the A level specifications, which introduced stretch and challenge questions (QCDA, (2009).
On-going	Mathematics continues to be offered as an AEA award and has been accredited until 2015. No other AEAs are now available.
<b>AQA Baccalaureate</b>	
2008	The AQA Baccalaureate (AQA Bacc) was piloted. To qualify for the AQA Bacc, students must: gain an E or above in three A levels; take a further AS level in Citizenship, Critical Thinking, General Studies, Science in Society or World Development; complete an extended project qualification and undertake 100 or more hours of enrichment activities. (AQA, 2012).
2010	The AQA Bacc was awarded to any students meeting the criteria from 2010. (AQA, 2012).
<b>Cambridge Pre-U</b>	
2008	The Cambridge Pre-U was first available for schools to teach from September 2008. To qualify for the Cambridge Pre-U students must complete three Principal Subjects (A levels can be substituted for up to two subjects), undertake an Independent Research report and undertake a course in Global Perspectives. Each of these elements can also be undertaken as free-standing qualifications. (CIE, 2011a).
2009	The first students sat Cambridge Pre-U short course examinations in their Principal Learning subjects. Short courses were only available in Modern Foreign Languages for this session.
2010	The first (full course) students sat the Cambridge Pre-U examinations for their Principal Learning subjects.
<b>Diplomas</b>	
2005	A Diploma was first proposed in the Tomlinson report (DfES, 2004). In response the government announced the creation of Diplomas in 14 'lines of learning' <sup>2</sup> that would be available at levels 1, 2 and 3. The Diplomas were intended to prepare students for further education or employment by studying both specialised subject materials related to the 'lines of learning' (Principal Learning), and English, Mathematics and other subjects. The lines of learning were assigned to three phases for development, so that they would be introduced in three consecutive years. (DfES, 2005).
2007	The Government announced three new 'lines of learning' would be added to the Diploma. The new 'lines of learning' were: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Science</li> <li>● Humanities and Social Sciences</li> <li>● Languages and International Communication.</li> </ul> It was anticipated that the first teaching would take place in September 2011 (Ertl <i>et al.</i> , 2009).
2008	The first teaching of the phase 1 Diplomas started in September. This included the following 'lines of learning' (and their related Principal Learning components): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Construction and the Built Environment</li> <li>● Creative and Media</li> <li>● Engineering</li> <li>● Information Technology</li> <li>● Society, Health and Development.</li> </ul> (Ertl <i>et al.</i> , 2009).

Year	Details
2009	The first teaching of the phase 2 Diplomas started in September. This included the following 'lines of learning' (and their related Principal Learning components): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Business, Administration and Finance</li> <li>● Environmental and Land-Based Studies</li> <li>● Hair and Beauty Studies</li> <li>● Hospitality</li> <li>● Manufacturing and Product Design.</li> </ul> (Ertl <i>et al.</i> , 2009).
2010	The first teaching of the phase 3 Diplomas started in September. This included the following 'lines of learning' (and their related Principal Learning components): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Public Services</li> <li>● Retail Business</li> <li>● Sports and Active Leisure</li> <li>● Travel and Tourism.</li> </ul> (Ertl <i>et al.</i> , 2009). In June 2010 the new Coalition Government announced that all development of the phase 4 diplomas would cease immediately. (DfE, 2010a).
2012	The last award of the phase 2 and 3 OCR Diplomas at levels 1 to 3 took place in summer 2012. This included the following 'lines of learning' (and their related Principal Learning components): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Business, Administration and Finance</li> <li>● Hospitality</li> <li>● Manufacturing and Product Design</li> <li>● Public Services</li> <li>● Retail Business</li> <li>● Sports and Active Leisure</li> <li>● Travel and Tourism.</li> </ul> (OCR, 2011a).
2013	The last award of Diplomas by any awarding organisation will take place in the summer of 2013 (Ofqual, 2010). This includes the 'lines of learning' for the following OCR phase 1 Diplomas and their related Principal Learning components (OCR, 2011a): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Creative and Media</li> <li>● Information Technology</li> <li>● Society, Health and Development.</li> </ul> Some aspects of Diplomas will continue, although the actual elements that will be continued and abandoned depend upon the individual awarding organisations. For example, OCR will still offer the Principal Learning in Engineering and the Foundation, Higher and Extended Project as stand alone qualifications (see below), and successful elements of other subjects which are also popular will be reflected in the development of future OCR qualifications (OCR, 2011b).
<b>Extended Project</b>	
2008	First teaching of the Extended Project. This requires students to project a report, dissertation, design, artefact or performance on a topic that they have chosen. It was introduced as a part of the Diploma, but was also available as a separate qualification in addition to A levels (OCR, 2008). The Extended Project will continue to be available after the final award of the Diploma (OCR, 2011b). OCR is also continuing Level 1 (Foundation) and Level 2 (higher) Project qualifications.
<b>Functional Skills</b>	
2007	The first pilot of Functional Skills started, with first teaching from September 2007. Functional Skills are practical skills of relevance to life, further education and employment in English, Mathematics and ICT. (Tribal, 2011).
2008	The Functional Skills pilot was extended in September to include all centres where students were studying for the Diploma. These students had to take functional skills as a compulsory part of their Diploma. (QCA, 2007a).
2010	First teaching of Functional Skills. This qualification is available to all students aged 14+ in English, Mathematics and ICT. (OCR 2010).

*Table continues overleaf*

1. A specification is "The document describing what will be assessed and how it will be assessed. Some awarding bodies use the more recent term 'specification' whilst others retain the traditional term 'syllabus'." (Elliott, 2011, p.11).

2. The lines of learning were: Construction and the Built Environment; Creative and Media; Engineering; Information Technology; Society, Health and Development; Business, Administration and Finance; Environmental and Land-Based Studies; Hair and Beauty Studies; Hospitality; Manufacturing and Product Design; Public Services; Retail Business; Sports and Active Leisure; Travel and Tourism.

**Table 1: Details of qualifications (continued)**

Year	Details
<b>IGCSEs<sup>3</sup></b>	
2010	The Government lifted restrictions upon state schools offering International GCSEs. From September 2010 state schools were able to offer accredited International GCSE courses alongside GCSE courses. (DfE, 2010a).
2011	The first state school students sat CIE's Cambridge IGCSEs (accredited by Ofqual as 'Cambridge International Level 1/Level 2 Certificates') in the summer 2011 examination session (CIE, 2011b). (Unaccredited Cambridge IGCSEs, which keep their name, continue to be offered to overseas schools and non-state schools in the UK.)
2012	The first state school students sat Edexcel International GCSEs (accredited by Ofqual as 'Edexcel Level 1/Level 2 Certificates') in the summer 2012 examination session. (Edexcel, 2012).

Year	Details
<b>Key Skills</b>	
2000	Key Skills assessed students' achievement in three skills valued by employers and higher education: communication, application of number, and information technology. The first teaching of Key Skills at levels 2 and 3 took place in 2000. (QCA, 1999).
2013	The last certification of Key Skills will take place by the end of September 2013. (OCR, 2012a).

3. There may be some confusion about the IGCSE and the International Certificate qualifications. IGCSEs were developed by CIE and Edexcel as the International version of GCSEs. The IGCSEs offered by CIE are called Cambridge IGCSEs, whilst those offered by Edexcel are International GCSEs. International Certificates are the accredited versions of the International GCSEs. They appear on the Register of Regulated Qualifications as Cambridge International Certificates if they are offered by CIE and Edexcel Certificates if they are offered by Edexcel. Whilst they are often informally referred to as IGCSEs or International GCSEs, any documentation falling under the remit of Ofqual (e.g. results certificates) cannot use these titles.

## Changes to GCSEs

There have been many changes to GCSEs since 2000, as detailed in Table 2 and the timeline in Figure 2. For the first few years these were limited to changes that were introduced with the introduction of new specifications. Since the beginning of 2009 the changes have been rather more frequent, and have been implemented for a number of reasons. Some changes, such as the revisions of the science specifications, have followed recommendations arising from Ofqual's qualification monitoring programme. Others, such as the change back to linear specifications,

have been implemented as a result of the policy changes following the change of government. As the Coalition Government has made so many changes, they have been reported in their own timeline (Figure 3) to make it easier to follow when each change was made. In addition, as the changes related to the replacement of GCSEs with English Baccalaureate Certificates (EBCs) overlapped with several earlier changes, the details of these changes are reported in their own table (Table 3).

**Table 2: Details of GCSE changes**

Subject	Details
<b>2001</b>	
Most subjects	First teaching of new specifications for most GCSEs. <sup>4</sup>
<b>2002</b>	
Applied Art & Design, Applied Business, Applied ICT, Applied Science, Engineering, English, English Literature, Health & Social Care, Leisure & Tourism, Manufacturing, Psychology	First teaching of new GCSE specifications in remaining subjects (see left). <sup>4</sup>
<b>2003</b>	
Most subjects	First examination of new specifications for most GCSEs. <sup>4</sup>
<b>2004</b>	
See 2002 list	First examination of new GCSE specifications in remaining subjects (see 2002 subject list). <sup>4</sup>
<b>2006</b>	
Science	First teaching of new Science GCSEs. Includes Twenty First Century Science suite. <sup>4</sup>

Subject	Details
<b>2009</b>	
Most subjects	First teaching of new specifications. Changes included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Controlled assessment replaced coursework</li> <li>● Most courses became modular</li> <li>● A requirement was added that 40% of assessment is terminal (taken at end of course) (QCA, 2009).</li> </ul>
Science specifications	Ofqual (2009a) reported on monitoring new Science from the first full examination session. Variation between boards and concerns about reliability and validity lead to the recommendation that criteria were redeveloped and new specs drawn up in response to this.
<b>2010</b>	
English, Mathematics, ICT	First teaching of new specifications for English, Mathematics and ICT. (QCA, 2009).
N/A	In November, the White Paper 'The Importance of Teaching' (DfE, 2010b) was published. It contained the coalition policies for education. Of importance to GCSE were announcements that the re-sit rules would change; linear exams would be re-introduced; and spelling, punctuation and grammar (SPAG) would be given more importance.
<b>2011</b>	
Most subjects	The first certification of the new modular single and double award GCSEs with a 40% terminal requirement and controlled assessment instead of coursework. (QCA, 2009).

Table continues on page 6

4. Note: No direct reference is available for this. Dates were taken from the books of specifications from that examination year.

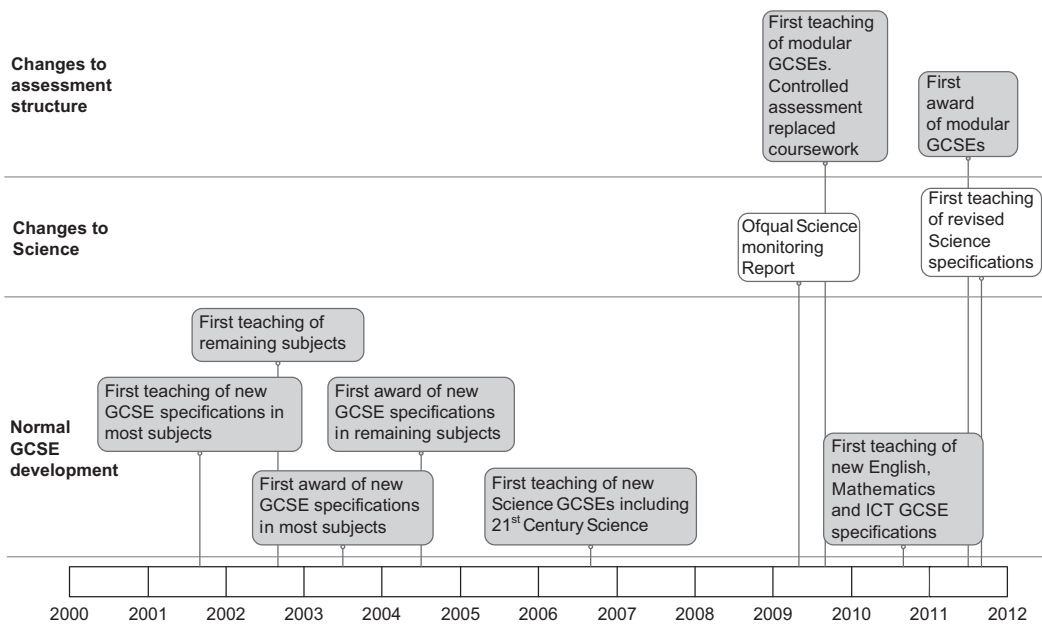


Figure 2: Changes to GCSEs prior to Coalition Government

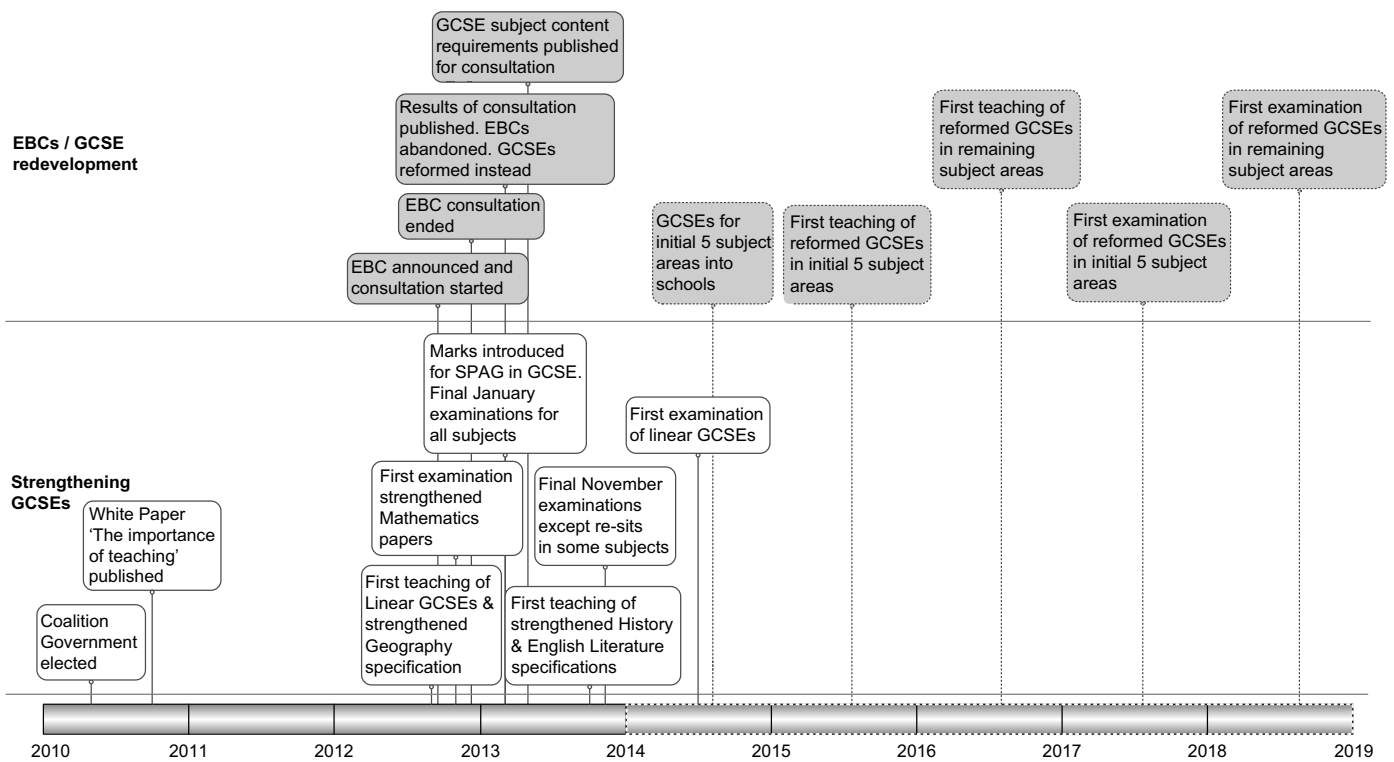


Figure 3: Changes to GCSEs since the election of the Coalition Government

**Table 2: Details of GCSE changes (continued)**

Subject	Details
<b>2011 (continued)</b>	
Science	The first teaching of the new science GCSEs, altered in response to the Ofqual comparability report. (Ofqual, 2011).
N/A	The <i>Daily Telegraph</i> published their report into the exam seminars run by the awarding organisations. ( <i>The Telegraph</i> , 2011).
<b>2012</b>	
All subjects	First teaching of linear GCSE specifications in September 2012. (OCR, 2012b).
Geography, English Literature, History and Mathematics	After the 2011 <i>Daily Telegraph</i> investigation into examination seminars ( <i>The Telegraph</i> , 2011), Ofqual announced that these four subjects would be strengthened. Changes were announced for the papers in Mathematics and the specifications of the other subjects. (Ofqual, 2012a).
Geography	First teaching of the strengthened Geography specification from September 2012. (Ofqual, 2012b).
Mathematics	First examination of the strengthened Mathematics papers in the November session (the specification remained unchanged from 2010). (Ofqual, 2012b).

Subject	Details
<b>2013</b>	
English, English Literature, Geography, History, RE	Increased emphasis on spelling, punctuation and grammar with extra marks awarded for this from the January examination session onwards. (OCR, 2012b).
All subjects	Final January GCSE session. January examinations will only be available to candidates who will certificate in 2013. (OCR, 2012b).
English Literature, History	Projected first teaching date for strengthened specifications from September 2013. (Ofqual, 2012b).
Most subjects	Final November session for most subjects. November examinations will only be available to students who will certificate in 2013. Future November sessions will only be available for English, English Literature and Mathematics, and students will have to re-take the whole qualification rather than individual units/examinations. (OCR, 2012b).
<b>2014</b>	
All subjects	First certification of linear GCSEs in June examination session. (OCR, 2012b).

**Table 3: Changes to GCSEs since the election of the Coalition Government**

Details
<b>2012</b>
On the 17th September, the Government announced the development of new qualifications, EBCs, to replace GCSEs. Initially EBCs were intended to be available for six subjects: English, Mathematics, Sciences, History, Geography and Languages. It was proposed that each subject should be examined by one awarding organisation, (market reform) following a franchised model, and that all the assessment should be through examinations at the end of the course. The qualifications would be designed so that they were suitable for the full range of candidates taking GCSEs, but there would not be any tiering <sup>5</sup> used in the examination papers. It was also proposed that a new grading structure would be developed for the qualifications, but was not revealed in the initial announcement. (DfE, 2012a). A consultation on the proposed changes ran from the 18th September until the 10th December 2012. (DfE, 2012b).
<b>2013</b>
On the 7th February, the results of the consultation were announced. The proposed EBCs would not be developed and the market reform involving the franchised model would be abandoned. There would be major reforms to the existing GCSEs, retaining many of the changes initially proposed for EBCs. It was proposed that the reformed GCSEs would be linear, with more stretching assessments. Although tiered papers would still be abandoned, it was suggested that core and extension papers may be allowed if all students could be entered for them. The changes would be made to the first five subject areas <sup>6</sup> so that they were ready for first teaching in 2015. (House of Commons, 2013).

Details
<b>2014</b>
Projected date for specifications in initial five subject areas being available in schools. (Ofqual, 2013).
<b>2015</b>
Projected first teaching of new GCSEs in the initial five subject areas. (House of Commons, 2013).
<b>2016</b>
Projected first teaching of new GCSEs in the remaining subject areas. (DfE, 2013a).
<b>2017</b>
Projected first examination of new GCSEs in the initial subject areas.
<b>2018</b>
Projected first examination of new GCSEs in the remaining subject areas.

5. Currently, GCSE papers have two tiers: Foundation and Higher. Students can only be entered for one tier, and the range of grades that they can achieve depends upon the papers that they are entered for.

6. The initial five subject areas will be: English, Mathematics, the Sciences, History and Geography.

# Changes to A levels

A levels have undergone fewer changes than GCSEs over the years since 2000. Like GCSEs, several of the changes have been as the result of

government policy changes. As with GCSEs, the changes (represented in Table 4 and in the timeline in Figure 4) generally affect all subjects.

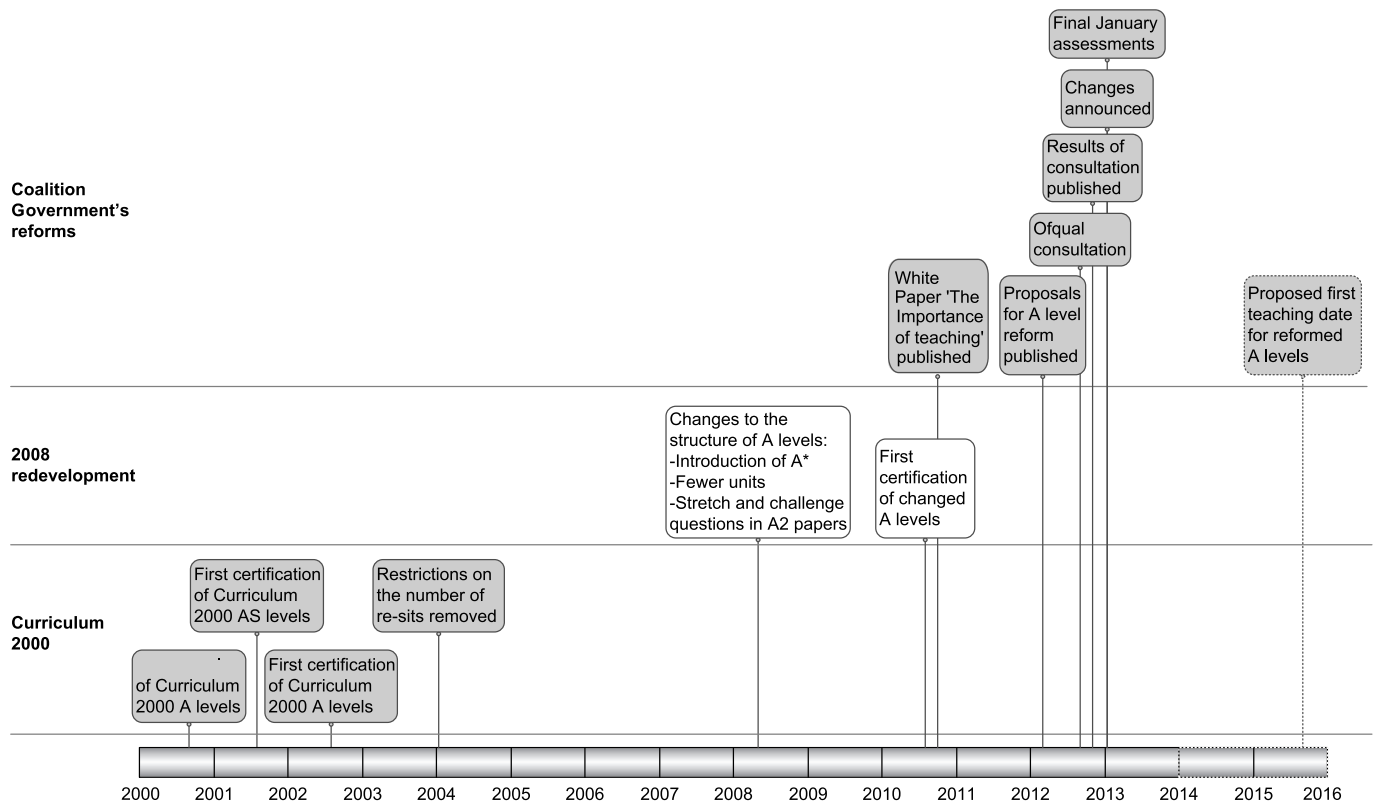


Figure 4: Changes to A levels since 2000

Table 4: Details of A level changes

Details	Details
<p><b>2000</b></p> <p>First teaching of Curriculum 2000.</p> <p>AS levels were introduced as a half-way stage for all A levels and were worth 50% of the final A level mark.</p> <p>The new specifications were divided into modules, with an examination at the end of each module. Most subjects consisted of six modules: three at AS level and three at A2 level. Students could either sit these examinations as they went along (a modular course) or sit them all at the end (a linear course).</p> <p>Students were able to re-sit each module once to improve their marks.</p> <p>The modular nature of the course and the inclusion of the AS level meant that students were expected to take more subjects in the first year of their courses, dropping one or two to specialise in the second year. This was done to bring England in line with the courses offered in European countries. (Ofsted, 2003).</p>	<p><b>2004</b></p> <p>Following recommendations made by Tomlinson (2002) in the report into A level grading in 2002, restrictions on re-sits were removed from the January 2004 session onwards. This meant that students were able to re-sit each module an unlimited number of times. (Poon Scott, 2012).</p>
<p><b>2001</b></p> <p>First certification of the new AS levels following the introduction of Curriculum 2000.</p>	<p><b>2008</b></p> <p>A levels were changed for first teaching in September 2008.</p> <p>The units for most subjects were reduced from six to four, with two units for AS and two units for A2. Science, Mathematics and Music kept six units.</p> <p>Stretch and challenge questions and synoptic assessment were introduced in the units for A2.</p> <p>The A* grade was added to the A level grade (but not AS) for students who had achieved a grade A at A level and had achieved 90% or more of the UMS<sup>8</sup> marks on their A2 units.</p> <p>(QCA, 2007b).</p>
<p><b>2002</b></p> <p>First certification of the Curriculum 2000 A levels.</p>	

Table continues on page 8

7. Before Curriculum 2000, AS levels were usually stand-alone qualifications which were intended to have half the breadth and depth of an A level. However, in certain subjects which were assessed modularly (for example, Mathematics and Science) some of the modules could contribute to either an AS or an A level.

8. The uniform mark scale (UMS) is a scale where the range of marks for a particular A level grade is identical, regardless of the subject, paper or year. The marks awarded on individual A level assessments are converted onto the UMS scale to allow the marks on each assessment to be added up and a final grade to be calculated. (Ofqual, 2009b).

**Table 4: Details of A level changes (continued)**

*Details*

**2010**

The first certification of the new A levels.

In November, the White Paper 'The Importance of Teaching' (DfE, 2010b) was published. It contained the coalition policies for education. Of importance to A levels were announcements that:

- Ways of involving universities in A level development would be explored
- Assessments would be modified to contain deep synoptic learning
- The re-sitting rules would be evaluated and possibly changed.

**2012**

In April, proposals for a further reform of A level were published. The proposals arose from the government's education White Paper (DfE, 2010b) and were a response to concerns that A levels were not good preparation for undergraduate study. The proposals were:

- For universities to be involved in the design and development of A levels
- To consider whether the division of A levels into AS and A2 should continue
- To consider whether January re-sits should be allowed. (DfE, 2012c).

Ofqual held a consultation on the proposed reforms between June and September 2012 (Smith, Mitchell and Grant, 2012). The findings from the consultation were published in November 2012 and Ofqual announced that there would be no more January examination sessions after September 2013 (Ofqual, 2012c).

**2013**

Final January GCSE session for all candidates. (Ofqual, 2012c).

In late January the following changes to A levels were announced by the Government (Gove, 2013):

- An advisory group, consisting of representatives from the Russell Group universities, would advise Ofqual on the content of A levels
- AS level would be retained, but as a standalone qualification which was at the same level as A levels, rather than as a part of A levels
- A levels would be made fully linear.

**2015**

September 2015 is the proposed first teaching date for reformed A levels. (DfE, 2013b).

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*Introduction and withdrawal of qualifications*

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# A level reform: Is the Government in tune with its stakeholders?

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## Introduction

Reformed GCE A levels are on the educational horizon for many students and their teachers. Awarding bodies are in the process of redeveloping their courses and from September 2015, the new syllabuses will be taught in sixth forms across England. In this article, we give a chronological account of the recent developments in Government policy which have fed into these plans. Alongside this account, we describe five studies that we have undertaken within our Higher Education (HE) Engagement research programme. An overarching aim of our research has been to ascertain the views and experiences of

stakeholders in schools, colleges and universities on multiple aspects of A level reform.

## Early Coalition Government policy

In November 2010, the Department for Education (DfE) published a White Paper – *The importance of teaching* – in which it signalled its intentions for whole-system reform in England. The paper set out the (then) recently elected Coalition Government's early views and concerns relating to a range of educational issues, including teaching and leadership, behaviour, accountability, school improvement, and funding.