



## SHIPLAKE COLLEGE

HENLEY-ON-THAMES

11 February 2015

Dear Parents

In response to the upcoming reform to A Levels, it is necessary to outline Shiplake's strategy as we move forward. Against a backdrop of fluid political reform, the College has given much thought to identifying the best strategy for our pupils. As Chairman of the Education Committee for the Society of Heads, I have been at the forefront of questioning changes and listening to the debate surrounding this significant educational policy.

The main changes relate to the structure and timing of public exams. Currently A Levels are 'modular' with students sitting AS exams in the summer of Year 12 and A2 exams in the summer of Year 13. The results of the AS and A2 exams are then combined to give an overall A Level grade. The new reformed A Level will be linear with all public exams at the end of the two year course in the summer of the Year 13. AS exams will still exist in reformed A Levels, however, these stand-alone (decoupled) qualifications will not contribute to final A Level results.

**Shiplake will not be offering new AS Level qualifications in reformed subjects.** It is our understanding that the reformed A Levels were intended as two year courses, and that the AS Level qualification is a concession to schools that are unwilling to change their practice. We see the value in a linear course structure and we intend to take advantage of the benefits of linear assessment, namely a reduction of high stakes testing in favour of more time for exploration and 'deep learning'. **We feel strongly that our pupils will benefit from more time learning, and less time being tested.** There is no doubt that AS Level qualifications over the last few years have been useful and valuable; however, the new AS Levels are valued and assessed differently, and do not ultimately count towards the A Level qualification. We believe that the new AS Levels will prove a distraction and will not enable our pupils to achieve their best. Unreformed subjects will be delivered in accordance with their design as modular courses with public AS exams at the end of both the Year 12 (2016) and Year 13 (2017). The timeline of A level reform can be viewed [here](#)<sup>1</sup>. Thus, and for example, in September 2015, a student studying Geography, French and History will not take an AS level in History in the summer of 2016 but will take AS levels in Geography and French. A student studying Biology, Chemistry and Economics will not take any AS levels at all in 2016 but will sit all papers at the end of the linear course in June 2007.

**We will still expect most pupils to begin Year 12 studying four subjects.** We feel that starting with four offers the greatest flexibility and, more importantly, breadth of study. However, unlike the current model whereby pupils 'drop' their weakest subject after the AS exam results, **we expect greater value to be placed on the January mock exams as an indicator for making subject choices.** We expect some pupils and tutors to consider dropping a course as a response to mock exam results. Students who have shown good progress through Year 12 will also be offered the opportunity to complete the [Extended Project Qualification](#)<sup>2</sup> which many universities value.

**How will this affect university applications?** Schools are asked to give full indication of Year 12 subject progress in students' university references, regardless of whether or not they have sat an AS qualification or whether they have dropped the subject at the start of the upper sixth.

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As such, Year 12 students will sit internal (i.e. Shiplake) exams in reformed subjects and AS exams in unreformed subjects, the results of which will be used as the basis for university reference statements and predicted grades.

Parents will be regularly informed about their child's progress in Year 12. GCSE grades, school references, A level predicted grades and personal statements will form the basis of admission offers as universities adjust to the withdrawal of AS grades. By 2016-17 nearly all sixth form subjects will have moved to a linear structure with public exams only at the end of the upper sixth.

As is the case with any kind of education reform, there will be a period of uncertainty ahead. However, we are confident that we will continue to offer excellent advice and that our high standards will not be affected by change: we are a forward-looking school, and choose to see the upcoming changes as opportunity rather than inconvenience. Changes to the timetable for reform are being made regularly, which is making it even more difficult for schools to plan effectively and to keep their stakeholders correctly informed. I have asked Ian Munro, our Director of Studies, to make a Podcast outlining the salient changes to augment this letter. This will be available on our website by the end of the month.

With warm good wishes



Gregg Davies  
Headmaster

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/388819/New\\_Timeline\\_of\\_A\\_level\\_reforms\\_17-12-14-3.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/388819/New_Timeline_of_A_level_reforms_17-12-14-3.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <http://filestore.aqa.org.uk/subjects/AQA-W-7993-SP.PDF>

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