

Collective response to an enquiry regarding use of A*s (November 2007)

I am writing on behalf of the Cambridge Colleges collectively in response to your letter concerning the use of A* in our admissions process. This was discussed at the meeting of our Admissions Forum on 16 November 2007.

The transition to new systems always throws up such issues. My response, however, must be one hedged around with qualifications. Until we know exactly what the A* will signify and whether the Boards will be altering their criteria and specifications (for example will an A* in a two-module English A2 weigh coursework and examined modules equally?) we cannot reply definitively.

What I can say at present is that no-one will be disadvantaged by taking A2 subjects at the end of Year 12 in 2009. It is highly unlikely that we would make extensive use of A* in offers in 2010, that being the first year of the new grading. Until we see the new grade in operation we will have to reserve judgement on how useful it will be. So we will not look unfavourably upon anyone who 'bridges' the old and new style of marking.

We do, however, look forward to using A* in our offers. It will, we hope, restore a meaningful cover ratio in subjects other than Mathematics, where STEP continues to allow us to work to one. Currently we make approximately 1.05 offers per place. That said, it will take a few years before we become confident in using the system and for us to generate the sort of research that has allowed us to place such emphasis on A* attainment at GCSE and module scores (average across three subjects) at AS in recent years. Until then, I envisage using the new grade rather sparingly.

Yours sincerely, and on behalf of the Admissions Tutors of the Cambridge Colleges,

Dr Mike Sewell
Chair of the Admissions Forum