



**UNIVERSITY OF
CAMBRIDGE**

Pro-Vice-Chancellors' Office

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23 January 2013

The Rt Hon David Willetts MP
Minister of State for Universities and Science
1 Victoria Street
London
SW1H 0ET

Dear David,

REFORM OF GCE A-LEVELS: DETRIMENTAL IMPACT ON FAIR ACCESS

I should like to bring to your attention our serious concerns about the impact on fair access and widening participation of one aspect of the reforms proposed by the Secretary of State for Education in his letter to OFQUAL, sent on 22nd January 2013.

Improving A Level does not require the removal of Year 12 examinations, which would be to take a seriously retrograde step from the perspective of widening participation.

Year 12 results are one of the key factors which have enabled us to achieve the highest levels of state-sector participation in Cambridge in over 30 years.

The abolition of a Year 12 public examination would put our progress towards fair access and widening participation at significant risk, for the following reasons:-

- Knowledge of their AS performance at the end of Year 12 allows students to make their HE choices with greater confidence. This is particularly valuable in encouraging applications to highly selective universities from students from low-participation backgrounds, who might otherwise lack the confidence to make such applications.
- Public exams at the end of Year 12 indicate applicants' most recent academic development and achievement, and provide valuable evidence of progress since GCSE. In effect, our use of AS grades and marks means we are operating a system which has all the benefits of Post Qualification Application without the disadvantages.
- Without Year 12 results, we should have to fall back on GCSE results, interviews, bespoke admissions tests and predicted grades. This would be highly undesirable. None of these are as reliable and transparent an

indicator of future success as is AS, achieved in public examinations at the end of Year 12.

We remain very confident in the effectiveness of A Level as a preparation for Cambridge and, while we agree that there are aspects of some A Levels that should be improved, none of this requires or even suggests abandoning Year 12 exams.

We greatly fear the deleterious impact this will have on widening participation and urge you to encourage the Secretary of State to reconsider this element of his plans.

Best regards,



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