



UNIVERSITY OF  
CAMBRIDGE

Pro-Vice-Chancellors' Office

**Professor John Rallison** MA PhD  
Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Education

The Rt Hon Michael Gove MP  
Secretary of State for Education  
Sanctuary Buildings  
Great Smith Street  
Westminster  
London SW1P 3BT

23<sup>rd</sup> January 2013

Dear Michael,

### **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 you propose in your letter to OFQUAL, sent on 22<sup>nd</sup> 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 reconsider this element of your plans.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Rallison". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

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Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Education

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