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## Pocket Watch – A further bout of A level consultations

### Introduction

It's nearly two years since the Education Secretary set out his plans for A level reform and while debate has never been far away, as the recently reported comments from the Director of Admissions at Oxford indicate, the Government has remained intent on pressing ahead albeit with an extended introduction. These two consultations, **one** from the DfE on subject content and **one** from Ofqual on assessment arrangements, both released at the end of last week, allow for some modifications but not many. The central principles, namely clearer rationale, university endorsed content, linear assessment and perhaps most contentiously of all, an uncoupled but co-teachable AS level, remain and provide the context for this latest round of consultations.

### What does the consultation on subject content cover?

This covers the 14 subjects being prepared for first teaching from Sept 2015. These and indeed other 'facilitating' A levels will be subject in time to regular scrutiny by an A level Content Advisory Board (ALCAB) led by the Russell Group. For the present however, development work is being led by the four Awarding Organisations (AOs) in England under the stewardship of Professor Smith, Vice-Chancellor of Lancaster University. It's this group that carried out the initial review of A levels last summer to see how many could be made ready for 2015 and it is their updated work on the subject criteria content on which the Dept is now seeking views.

In many cases the subject content has not changed dramatically although of course individual subject teachers will want to study specific details carefully. English Literature for instance now requires "A level students to study a minimum of eight texts which must include at least three pre-1900 works including one Shakespeare play and a post-2000 work." History "no longer requires study from more than one period but instead introduces a requirement to study topics from a chronological range of at least 200 years" while science "includes strengthened and more consistent mathematical requirements." In each case, the aim has been to retain the current AS content within the revised A level so that co-teaching is possible.

Consultation on the subject content closes on 20 December and once subject teachers and others have had a good go at what's being proposed, Professor Smith will get his group back together early in 2014 and advise what, if any, further changes are needed prior to having the specs ready for planning purposes from autumn 2014. Maths and Languages follow a year later.

### What about the assessment arrangements?

These can be found in a separate consultation from Ofqual which remains open slightly longer at 17 January 2014. The consultation sets out the assessment arrangements and objectives for each individual subject and broadly mirrors the approach being developed for GCSE whereby AOs will be required to provide a rigorous assessment strategy and most assessment will be by linear exam, ("*this should be the default method,*") with non-exam assessment to be used only where particular skills and knowledge require it. This has resulted in some changes notably in biology, chemistry and physics where practical assessments will be separately reported and geography where fieldwork will be subject to non-exam assessment. Unlike GCSE, however, the grading scale will remain the same. As for the uncoupled AS, different assessments will be used, generally exam only, and "*set and assessed at the same level of demand as now.*"



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**A level developments Oct 2013**