

AS and A Levels explained

The terminology of public examinations, especially AS, A2, UMS marks and UCAS Points, can be very confusing. We hope this guide will explain how they work and help with your understanding.

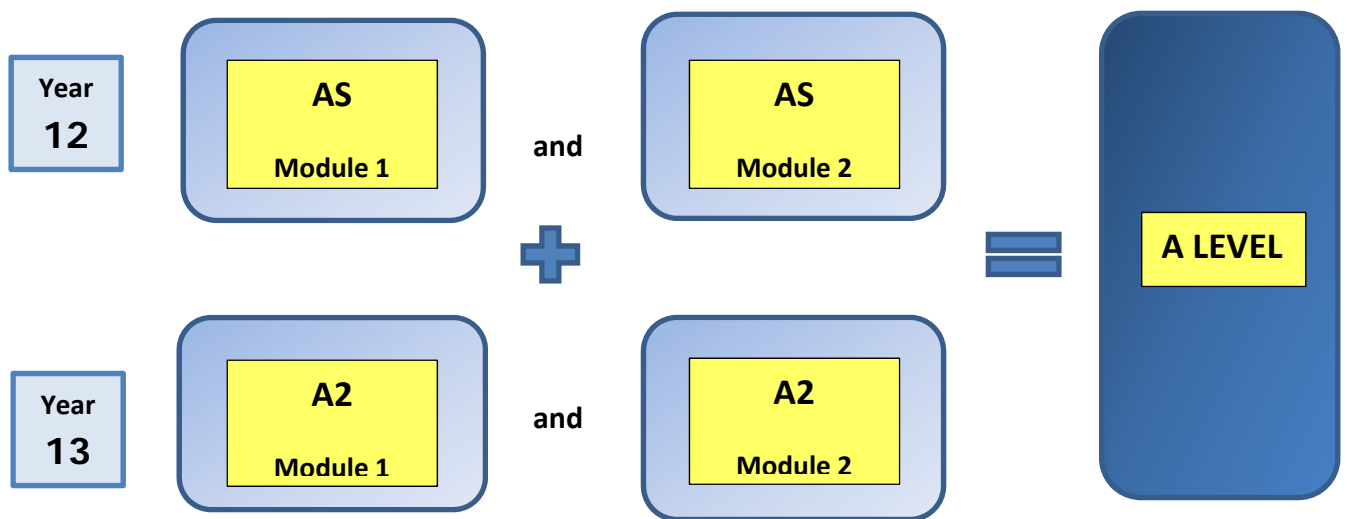
What are AS and A Levels?

AS and A Levels are the traditional qualification offered by schools and colleges for 16-19 year olds. They're highly valued by universities and employers and focus on academic subjects, although some are work-related.

AS levels can be taken as a stand-alone qualification, or as the first part of an A Level course.

AS levels are completed at the end of Year 12 (Lower Sixth year) and usually consist of two examined modules per subject (although some subjects have three examined modules). A2 exams and coursework are added to an AS level at the end of Year 13 (Upper Sixth year) bringing it up to a full A Level qualification.

AS and A2 levels are examined separately and it is possible to re-sit modules to improve the overall grade. They are mostly assessed by written exams, which are taken in June, although some subjects have an element of coursework which is completed and submitted to the examination board in advance of the final examinations.



Most pupils take four subjects in Year 12. After AS level exams they drop one subject, and continue the other three through Year 13 to complete A Levels. The subjects you choose to study at AS and A Level can help shape your future. They involve much more in-depth study than GCSE and to do well you will need to become absorbed in your subject, so it is important to choose subjects that you really enjoy and find interesting.

Uniform Mark Scale (UMS)

AS and A Levels are graded A*-E. Each AS or A2 unit is marked; the raw mark achieved in each unit is then scaled using the Uniform Mark Scale (UMS). The UMS balances out differences between exams and is a way of making sure people get the correct grade, no matter when they took a particular unit. The UMS marks from the AS and A2 units are then added together to determine an overall grade for the A Level qualification.

The maximum total score per A Level is 400 (200 each for AS and A2). In Biology, Chemistry, Further Mathematics, ICT, Mathematics and Physics candidates sit three modules at AS and three modules at A2 with the maximum total score being 600 (300 each for AS and A2). The percentage for each grade boundary is unchanged (80% for an A grade etc).

The overall score is converted into an A Level grade using the boundaries contained in the following table:

Score (out of 400)	Score (out of 600)	Percentage	Grade	UCAS Points
320	480	80%	A	120
280	420	70%	B	100
240	360	60%	C	80
200	300	50%	D	60
160	240	40%	E	40
Below 160	Below 240	<40%	U	0

In all subjects (except Mathematics and Further Mathematics) to be awarded an A* grade, a pupil must achieve an A grade/80% overall with at least **90% in the A2 component** of the course.

For Mathematics, A* is awarded for an A grade overall and 180 or more in units C3 and C4. For Further Mathematics and A* is awarded for an A grade overall and 270 or more in their three best A2 units.

An A* is worth 140 UCAS points.

A Level results, or their equivalent, are the gateway to most university and college courses. Each A Level grade that a pupil achieves is worth UCAS points. When applying for higher education, universities make offers to applicants based on (i) A Level grades or (ii) UCAS points. For example, a pupil applying to study a course in Business and Finance may receive an offer of BCC from one university and 180 UCAS points from another.

An AS level is worth half as many UCAS points as a full A Level grade.

Applied GCE (General Certificate of Education) courses are equivalent to an A Level. They have the same grading system and UCAS points as an A Level, however, the courses have a more vocational emphasis. The teaching and learning are different as there is more research and project work for pupils to do.