

Frequently asked questions for A level Economics B

These are questions we have received in our Getting Ready To Teach training events. If your question is not here, please get in touch with Colin Leith and his team who will be able to help.

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1. Regulatory changes

How has AS and A level changed?

AS and A level have been 'decoupled'. This means that students can still take AS exams at the end of Year 12; however, the grade obtained does not contribute towards the overall A level grade. A level assessments will be set at a higher level of demand than AS assessments.

If a student does the AS do they need to resit the exams again at A level?

The AS and A level exams are separate. If a student takes the AS qualification they will sit both AS exams and achieve an AS grade. If they choose to take the A level, they will sit the three A level papers and achieve an A level grade. Whatever grade or marks they achieved at AS will not 'count towards' their A level.

Can a student take the AS and then the A2 exams?

There are no A2 exams. Currently, units 1 and 2 form the AS and units 3 and 4 form the A2. These four units combined form the A level. This has now changed. Theme 1 and Theme 2 form the AS. Theme 1, 2, 3 and 4 form the A level. Theme 1 and 2 is the same content at AS and A level so you can co-teach but the assessments are separate. The A level exam papers cover content from across the full A level specification.

What do universities think about AS? Will AS have UCAS points?

Universities set their own entry requirements so may have different views about AS. We always recommend checking this direct with universities.

The number of points for AS is a process decided by UCAS and universities not the awarding organisations. UCAS has announced a new tariff for university courses starting in September 2017. As part of this, AS will be 'worth' 40% (rather than 50%) of the A level. Information about the new tariff can be found on the UCAS website:

<https://www.ucas.com/ucas/undergraduate/getting-started/entryrequirements/tariff/new-tariff>

Are centres still going to offer the AS?

This is a centre by centre decision. Our research told us that co-teaching was important so we have designed our qualification to allow for co-teaching. Different centres tell us they are taking different approaches to AS – some will get all students to take the AS exams at least until all A levels change (2017) as students will have time out of lessons to take AS in unreformed subjects (such as Geography, changing in 2016 or Maths changing in 2017). Others will get students to choose four AS in 'year 1' and use AS results to choose 3 A levels in 'year 2'. Others will use the AS papers as a mock. Others will do A level only.

Some centres are making a decision across all subjects. Ultimately the 'right' decision depends on what is best for your students and centre.

What do you mean by co-teaching?

Co-teaching means that you teach Theme 1 and Theme 2 to all students / in the same class regardless of whether they are doing the AS, the A level or both. This means that students can decide whether or not they want to do the A level after the first year of study. It also means that you will avoid separate AS and A level classes which might have small numbers.

Will there be January exams? Can students re-sit exams?

There will be no January assessment window and it will not be possible to take exams for the same qualification in different exam series: all assessments must be completed together at the end of the course. It will not be possible for students to re-sit individual components. Students may re-take the whole AS or A level qualification.

2. Our research and development

You mentioned research, what research have you done?

Our research for the new course began in 2011. Our specifications have been developed in consultation with the teaching community, higher education, learned societies and subject associations. Teachers from a range of schools and colleges — in focus groups, surveys, phone interviews and face-to-face conversations — have provided feedback at each stage and have helped us to shape the specifications. Academics in UK universities have helped us understand how to build on the strengths of the 2008 A level Economics specification and advised on how progression to undergraduate study could be improved. We have commissioned and conducted our own research projects, including international benchmarking. The specifications are also aligned with our World Class Qualification principles to ensure they are appropriate for a range of students.

How many universities did you speak to?

Around 30 universities from a range of groups, including Russell Group. We also had a panel of university academics to advise us more closely through the development process.

Why should I teach Edexcel – how is your specification different / better?

We are very proud of the qualifications we have developed. Drawing on feedback from all parts of the economics subject community, our specifications have been designed to support students in developing the following skills that have been identified as key for progression in this subject:

- Thinking like an economist
- The application of economic concepts and theories to real-world contexts
- The application of appropriate quantitative skills to relevant economic contexts
- Engagement with economics through wider reading and an awareness of the current issues impacting on the subject.

Our approach and design principles show our focus for the new qualifications. It wouldn't be appropriate for us to comment on other awarding organisation specifications.

3. Our specification

Why are there four themes?

The specification is structured into four themes to support progression through the course and to ensure that it supports teacher specialisms through enabling two teachers to teach different themes. It also makes for a very clear structure. The four themes work together, enabling students to build on their knowledge and understanding as they progress through the course. This also becomes a useful revision tool and preparation for linear exams as students are revisiting and building on prior knowledge. It also makes explicitly clear which themes are AS and A level to support co-teaching. The specification also provides clear guidance on what students need to learn, providing clarity for planning, teaching and assessments.

What content is new?

This depends on which awarding organisation specification you are currently teaching. In developing the AS and A level 2015 specifications we have retained the strengths of the 2008 specification:

- engaging and updated content
- global focus

Changes have been made to the specification content and the assessments to ensure the revised subject content and assessment requirements are met and to bring the specification up-to-date. To find out more, read the 'What's changed' section of the **Getting Started Guide** and have a look at the **mapping documents** (which map the current specifications to our new specification). These documents are available to download from our website.

Is there a 'third column' like in the current specification?

No, the new specification provides clear guidance on what students need to learn, providing clarity for planning, teaching and assessments. Teaching and learning guidance to support planning and delivery is provided in the **Getting Started Guide**. All required content is specified in the specification.

There is quite a lot of content. Will there be enough time to get through it all?

We have worked hard to develop a qualification with the appropriate balance between breadth and depth. We consulted with a wide range of subject experts throughout the development to ensure we included the core content areas agreed as being vital for progression to further study of economics. We also tested the content with a number of practising teachers. Current teachers also developed our **course planners** which give a suggested approach to how the course can be taught. The course planner, which can be downloaded from the website, assumes 28 teaching weeks in each year to allow for time taken by other events.

4. Our assessment

Why assess two themes in one paper?

It is a requirement that the new AS and A level assessments have synoptic assessment which means that students have to draw on their knowledge and understanding from across the full course rather than 'compartmentalising' which can happen with a unitised approach. As Theme 1 and Theme 2 are the same at AS and A level and Theme 3 and 4 build on 1 and 2 in the A level, we must assess across 'year 1' and 'year 2' content to make sure the A level assessments do not assess AS content in isolation.

All the extended responses have the command word 'assess', 'discuss' or 'evaluate', why?

We have reduced the variety of command words used, and provided careful definition of the skills that comprise each command word (in the levels based mark scheme). This reflects the skills we are asking students to demonstrate and ensures consistent application of the command words within and across assessments. Questions are differentiated by the content.

Does having fewer command words mean the assessments are more predictable?

No, questions are not predictable because the knowledge, understanding and skills being assessed will be different. We will assess all specification content over the life of the specification.

How do the new levels-based mark schemes work?

These are 'skills based mark schemes' which focus on the **qualities** students are required to demonstrate in their answers rather than the **quantity** of points within responses. The levels descriptors are indicative of the overall response students will produce. Clarity of the skills comprising each command word reflects how teachers and examiners describe the qualities of student work, so the expectations are clear for teachers and for markers and reduces subjectivity. Examiners will read the descriptor as a whole and decide if the student shows reasonable coverage of the skills outlined in that band. It is important to consider the driving skill evidenced in the descriptors. In the top band there is lots of descriptive language about 'evaluation' as this is the predominant skill. If students are not meeting these requirements it is unlikely that they will be in this band. Once in the band the examiner then has to decide where in the band the student falls. If their response meets all the requirements in the band then they will be placed at the top. If some of the other skills are not fully addressed examiners will begin to move them further down the scale (within the same band). That is not to say that for every criteria a student doesn't fully meet they knock off a mark. Again, consideration needs to be given to the importance of that skill in the band.

How do you envisage centres approaching the pre-release? Will this add a lot of time to the course?

The purpose of the pre-released context is to enable students to conduct independent learning and research (important skills to develop for progression to university). This provides for an enriching course of study. It is an opportunity for them to become familiar with current issues and trends and enable them to draw on this familiar context to respond to unfamiliar stimulus material. It is a tool to use in teaching and learning. It does not require large amounts of research and should not become the main emphasis.

The pre-released context provides an opportunity for students to complete some independent research. We see this as a homework task or as a context to be brought into lessons. We do not envisage students producing large research reports or 'teaching' the pre-release paper.

How will you ensure the unseen stimulus material / extracts in exams are accessible (in terms of the language used)?

All papers include unseen stimulus material (qualitative and quantitative) to ensure the questions are in real economic contexts. This is something we do currently so have experience in producing extracts that are accessible. Our written papers go through a number of stringent checks to ensure all materials are accessible – this includes language checks, checking lengths of extracts and ensuring the chosen context is appropriate for students.

Have you changed the exam timings?

We have reviewed the timings of the papers to ensure students have enough time. The extracts are chosen to ensure there is appropriate reading time. We found that students spent a lot of time on the supported multiple choice questions which meant they spent a lot of time on a small number of marks, for example.

Will students be given a formula sheet in the exam?

No, students are required to know the formulae. The formulae students need to know are on page 57 of the A level specification.

Reliability of marking is the most important thing to me. How reliable is Edexcel? Do you have online marking?

We take our responsibility to issue the correct results first time very seriously. Have a look at our **Quality of Marking** brochure which talks through our quality assurance processes throughout every stage of the exam cycle. We have electronic marking and the brochure includes information on this.

http://qualifications.pearson.com/content/dam/pdf/Support/Quality%20Assurance/Quality_of_marking_updated.pdf

5. Support and resources

How can I access the free resources?

All of the free resources are available to download from the Economics subject page of our website. You can also sign up to receive free subject advisor e-updates which will keep you up-to-date when new resources are made available.

<http://qualifications.pearson.com/en/qualifications/edexcel-a-levels/economics-a-2015.html>

Will there be textbooks?

We are working with publishers who are looking towards getting their resources endorsed. This information will be available on our website. It is not necessary to purchase endorsed resources to deliver our qualifications.

6. Other

I can't find the answer to my question, who can I contact?

Colin Leith and his team are here to help. You can e-mail Colin on TeachingEconomics@pearson.com or call him on 0207 010 2182.

You can also visit the Economics subject page:

<http://qualifications.pearson.com/en/qualifications/edexcel-a-levels/economics-b-2015.html>