

The UCAS reference: A view from LSE

Lorna Stevenson
Access and Admissions Specialist



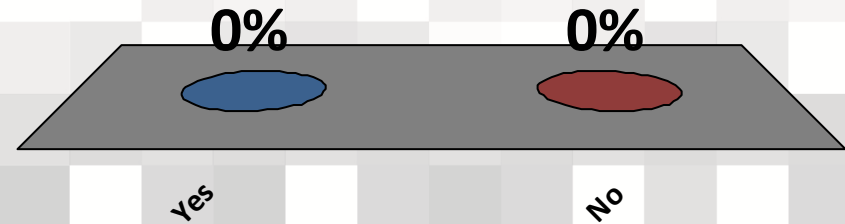
THE LONDON SCHOOL
OF ECONOMICS AND
POLITICAL SCIENCE ■

Does the online voting work?



A. Yes

B. No



Selecting students...



Student	Predicted Grades	AS Grades	GCSE Grades	Extenuating Circumstances
Alice				
Bilal				
Caro				
Dieter				
Emily				
Fran				

Selecting students...

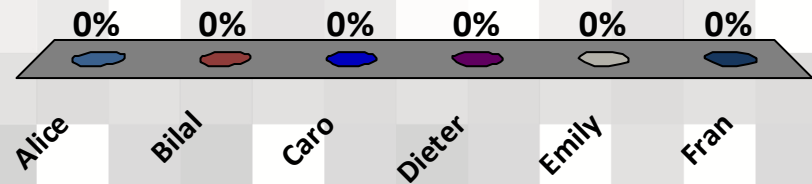


Student	Predicted Grades	AS Grades	GCSE Grades	Extenuating Circumstances
Alice	AAA			
Bilal	AABB			
Caro	A*AA			
Dieter	AAC			
Emily	A*A*B			
Fran	A*A*A			

Who is your second preference?



- A. Alice
- B. Bilal
- C. Caro
- D. Dieter
- E. Emily
- F. Fran



Selecting students...

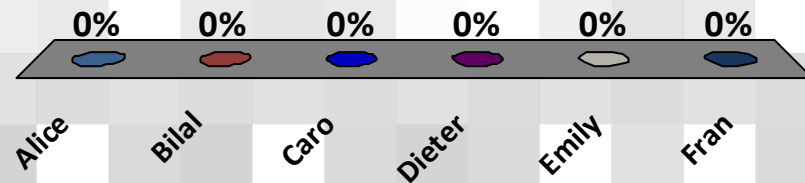


Student	Predicted Grades	AS Grades	GCSE Grades	Extenuating Circumstances
Alice	AAA	ABBB		
Bilal	AAB	AABB		
Caro	A*AA	AAAA		
Dieter	AAC	ABC		
Emily	A*A*B	AAA		
Fran	A*A*A*	ABBC		

Who is your second preference?



- A. Alice
- B. Bilal
- C. Caro
- D. Dieter
- E. Emily
- F. Fran



Selecting students...

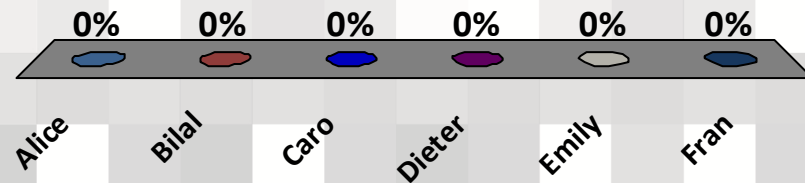


Student	Predicted Grades	AS Grades	GCSE Grades	Extenuating Circumstances
Alice	AAA	ABBB	5A 5B	
Bilal	AAB	AABB	11A*	
Caro	A*AA	AAAA	9A 1B 1C	
Dieter	AAC	ABC	8B 2C	
Emily	A*A*B	AAA	4A* 3A 2B	
Fran	A*A*A*	ABBC	7A* 3A	

Who is your second preference?



- A. Alice
- B. Bilal
- C. Caro
- D. Dieter
- E. Emily
- F. Fran



Selecting students...

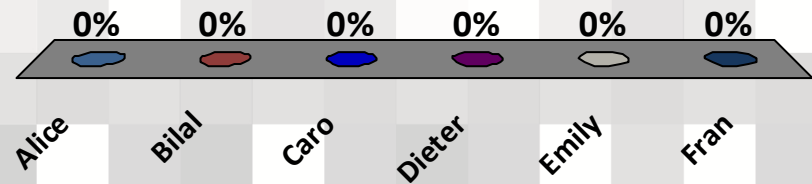


Student	Predicted Grades	AS Grades	GCSE Grades	Extenuating Circumstances
Alice	AAA	ABBB	5A 5B	GCSE School was in Special Measures
Bilal	AAB	AABB	11A*	None
Caro	A*AA	AAAA	9A 1B 1C	None
Dieter	AAC	ABC	8B 2C	Arrived in UK (Y9) with no English
Emily	A*A*B	AAA	4A* 3A 2B	None
Fran	A*A*A*	ABBC	7A* 3A	Family issues in Y12

Who is your second preference?



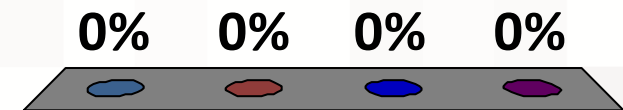
- A. Alice
- B. Bilal
- C. Caro
- D. Dieter
- E. Emily
- F. Fran



What was the most crucial piece of information for you?



- A. Predicted grades
- B. AS grades
- C. GCSE grades
- D. Extenuating Circumstances



Predicted grades

AS grades

GCSE grades

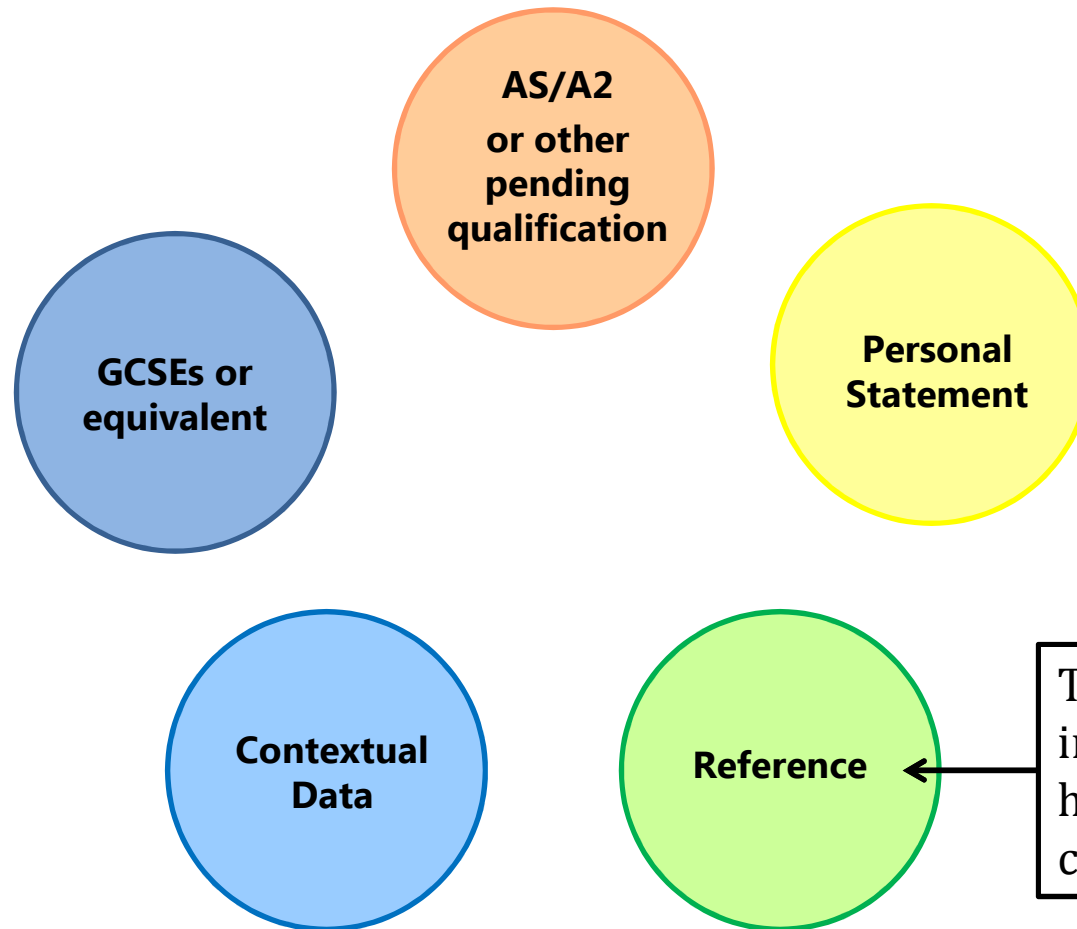
Extenuating Circumstances

References: purpose?

- An essential part of our holistic assessment
- Assessment of a student's *academic ability & potential* for degree-level study in their chosen field
- Offer a *clear, comprehensive & realistic evaluation* from an educational professional
- Tell the *story of the student* and help us place the student's achievements in context



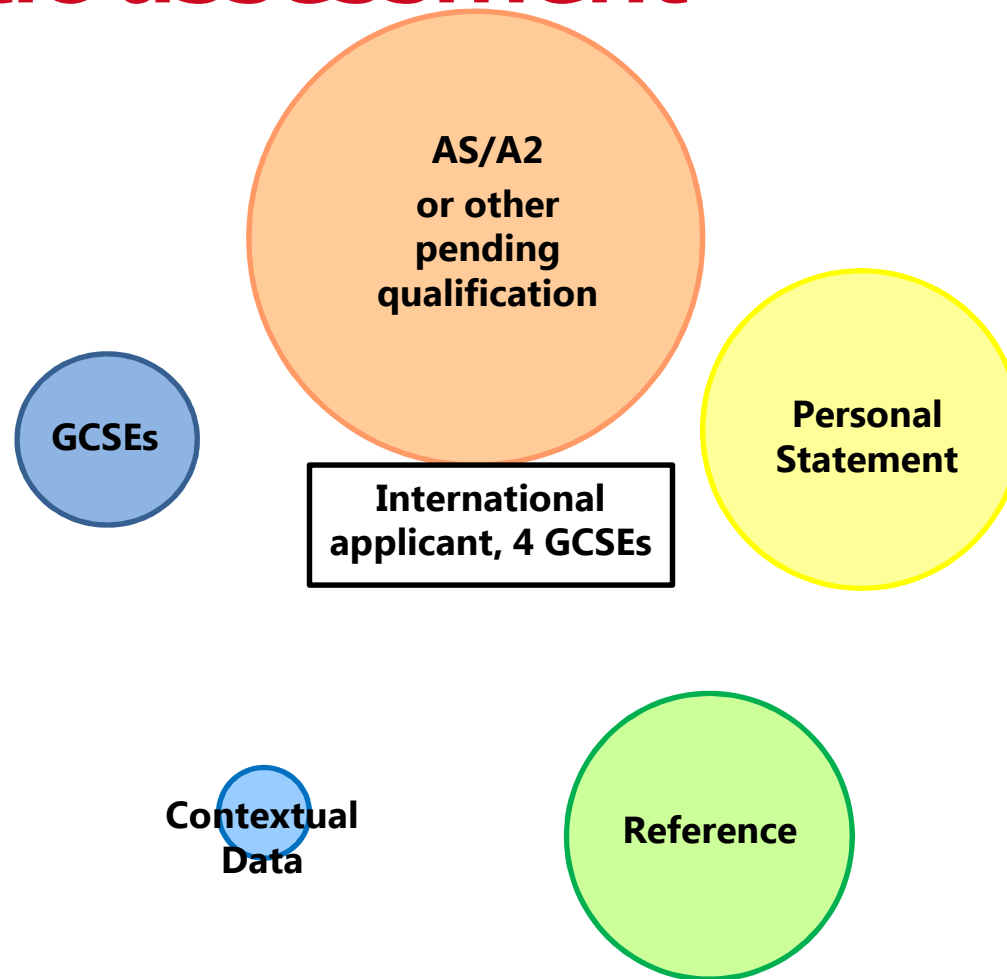
Holistic assessment



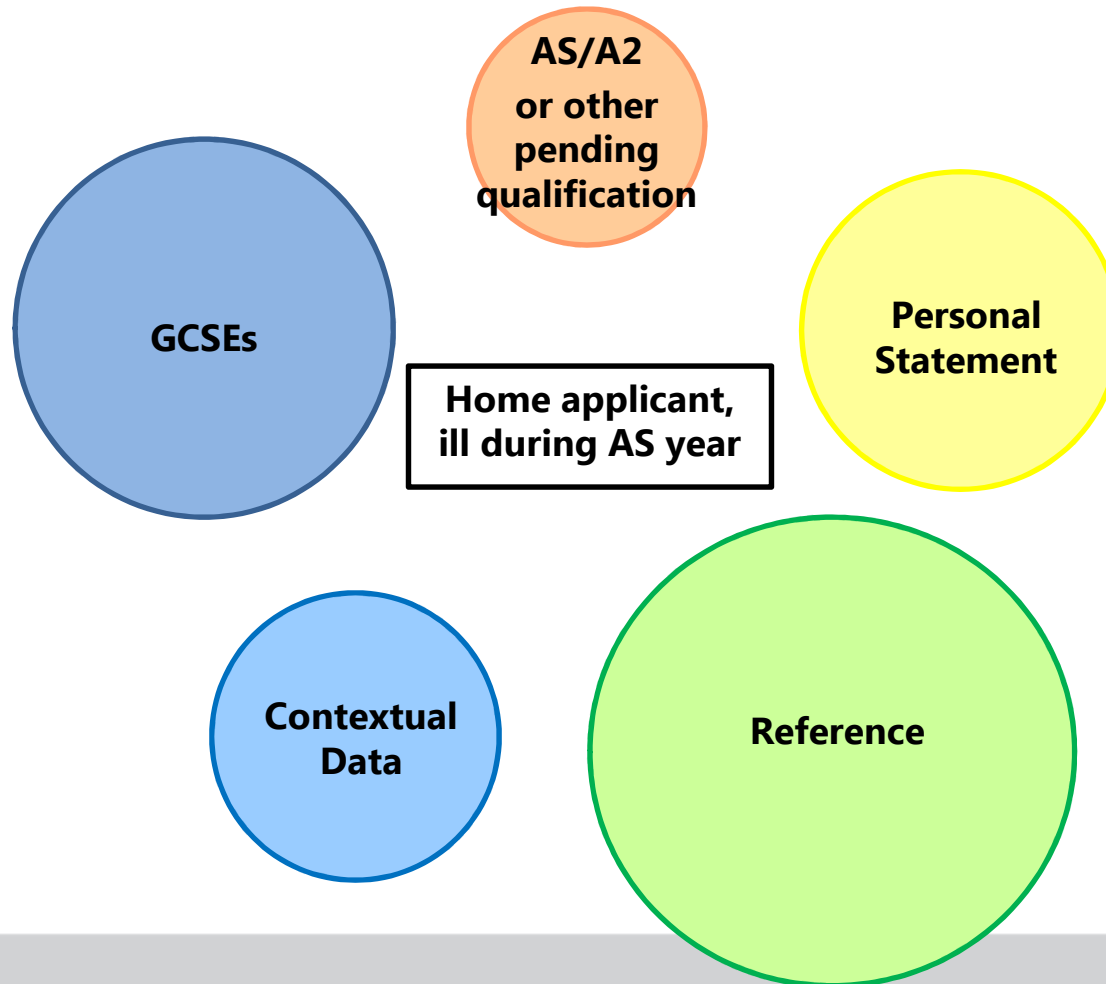
The reference is an important part of LSE's holistic assessment criteria.



Holistic assessment



Holistic assessment



References: purpose?

- An essential part of our holistic assessment
- Assessment of a student's *academic ability & potential* for degree-level study in their chosen field
- Offer a *clear, comprehensive & realistic evaluation* from an educational professional
- Tell the *story of the student* and help us place the student's achievements in context

Help us to understand the opportunities available to students, especially in light of qualification reform



References 2016-2018

- SPA have produced a guidance document for schools and colleges
- UCAS recommend schools include a weblink with details of their curriculum offer

Supporting Professionalism in Admissions
www.spa.ac.uk



SPA NETT on Qualification Reforms

Guidance for school and college references – what HEPs would like to know

July 2015

Introduction

In 2014/15 the Supporting Professionalism in Admissions (SPA) programme convened a National Expert Think Tank (NETT) consisting of practitioners from a range of higher education providers, plus representatives from SPA and UCAS, to consider the impact of pre-HE qualifications and curriculum reforms throughout the UK.



Thoughts

Use bitly, tinyurl or a simple webpath and include edited highlights in the main reference



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What we already see at LSE
GCSE 5A*-C inc. EandM for GCSE year
A level points score per entry for previous year
School type
What we don't see
Historical data – have you improved/dipped
Ofsted reports/grades – how does your performance compare to your intake?
For academies any additional detail i.e. selective, convertor, sponsored, merger
Free Schools Meals, Pupil premium or IDACI
Finer detail on GCSE performance i.e. 5A*-A
Standard GCSE or sixth form offer – has the applicant done more or less than usual?
Availability of subjects pre and post 16.
Problems with teaching, resourcing etc
Anything else!



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References: School Info

“Pontypandy Community School is a large rural comprehensive school. Students come to us from a range of backgrounds, including a significant proportion with no family experience of HE. Our small sixth form (150 students) teaches in mixed classes and offers 9 subjects to A2 and a further 4 to AS only. Students study 4 subjects in Year 12, then 3 in Year 13, although the most able are permitted to continue with 4. Students taking new A levels may sit an AS exam in one subject only, chosen in March. AS Further Maths is offered as an off-timetable option with two hours teaching time a week. The EPQ is offered as an enrichment activity to all students, around 30% take this up.”



References: Predictions

- Be supportive, but realistic
- Where possible, consider predictions in the whole
- **Please tell us how you are making predictions,** particularly if you don't have AS grades
- Extra rationale appreciated if you are predicting up or down from academic record

AS levels

Mocks

Coursework

ALIS

Formative
assessment

Professional
judgement



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References: The Applicant

- Give prominence to subjects most relevant to chosen degree, but include all subjects.
- What is the student like as a learner: quiet, thoughtful, bold, lively? What do they stand out for?
- Include strengths and weaknesses, particularly where grades aren't perfect.
- Is read alongside the personal statement.
- No surprises: tell us about false starts, extenuating circumstances etc.



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What we already see at LSE
All qualifications entered
All declared schools/colleges
POLAR 3 – postcode data on progression to HE
Care leaver
Any declared disabilities or special educational needs
Age – is this student in cohort?
Participation in an LSE widening participation scheme
What we don't see
Free Schools Meals, Pupil premium or IDACI
Acorn/SEC data
Free School Meals
If they have a disability – when was this diagnosed. Have they always had adjustments in place?
Anything about their home/family situation



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References: Ex Circs

- If extenuating circumstances have affected a learner please give *detailed, specific* information about how they have affected their *education*.
- If it does not fit in the reference, please include a line that further information will be sent.
- We try to trust your judgement on the level of impact.
- LSE Deadlines:
 - by 31st July for examination circumstances (A levels)
 - by 30th June for examination circumstances (IB)



References: Ex Circs

Robin's father was recently diagnosed with Arthrofibrosis. He has to take 240mg of Exprofulene daily. He has had two fibriolcty's to remove fibroids from his lower sacrolectum and is currently on the waiting list for a diplodoidectomy. Please see attached letter and scans from his consultant.

Robins' father was diagnosed with Arthrofibrosis, a curable but debilitating disease in December 2015. He has had two two-week stays in hospital (December and February) during which Robin missed several days of school to visit him. She has also assumed greater caring responsibilities for her two siblings. Her father is on the waiting list for a further surgery which could occur at any time in the next sixth months. This has caused considerable worry to Robin.



Examples

- Look at the mock application forms provided.
- **Ignore the Personal Statements.**
- Consider the references alongside the other information provided.
 - How was each reference helpful?
 - Was there any information missing?



Hannah

Predicted grades: Maths A*, Economics, A*, Psychology, A, Geography A*

Hannah is a highly original, intelligent, analytical student with enormous determination and unusual independence of mind. She is a remarkably quick learner. Her GCSE results, obtained at a time of some personal unhappiness involving absence from school at crucial periods and a change of school, by absolutely no means do justice to her ability. Putting that aside, she has been at the lead in lessons, been to class discussions. Above all she has steamed ahead independently and obtained four strong grades at AS level and we are confident she will achieve more.

Mathematics (261/300 at AS level): Hannah is a natural mathematician who never accepts that things are true; she questions and works away at that which appears inconsistent, illogical or incorrect. She has a brevity of mathematical solutions and can work quickly and efficiently. This year she has taken part in a mathematics pursuit outside school, and is predicted a grade A.

Economics (179/200 at AS level): Hannah loves to pursue her own line of enquiry and research new lines of interest independently. She has developed a rich knowledge of economic facts, concepts and theories. She has excellent powers of analysis and her understanding of the links between the different theories, particularly in macroeconomics, is frequently documented in her essays. Her strong mathematical ability enables her to tackle data manipulation questions with confidence. With her independent study of Further Mathematics, she will have no problem meeting the mathematical requirements of an undergraduate course in Economics. As Economics Prefect, she is an assured and persuasive ambassador for the subject at Open Evenings.

Psychology (159/200 at AS level): Hannah reads widely and she demonstrates, in discussion and in her written work, an impressive knowledge and understanding of concepts, theories and case studies far beyond the curriculum. As in Economics, she can argue effectively both orally and on paper; she often pursues a line of enquiry right up to the boundary between Psychology and Philosophy. She has a particular interest in Psychopathology.

Geography (192/200 at AS level): Hannah studies Geography outside school. As with her other subjects, she is keen, very able and self-motivated.

Hannah is independent-minded and self-motivated, but she is also considerate and ready to support others, for example by helping at a games club at lunchtimes at our local primary school. She participated in the Young Enterprise Scheme last year and was a vocal, cooperative but powerful team member with clear leadership instincts.

Hannah is an exceptionally intelligent, curious, deep-thinking and ambitious student who challenges received truths and pursues alternative lines of enquiry, seemingly on a daily basis. Her sense of humour is a bonus. Although often eloquent, Hannah might not perform well initially at interview; perseverance will pay dividends.

Hannah is totally committed to the study of Economics and I very strongly recommend this very interesting young woman to you.

How much absence?
When did she move?
Did it affect all subjects
equally (different exam
boards etc)



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Mathematics (261/300 at AS level): Hannah is a natural mathematician who never accepts ideas simply because she is told that they are true; she questions and works away at that which appears inconsistent, illogical or incomplete. She appreciates the beauty and brevity of mathematical solutions and can work quickly and efficiently. This year she has taken up AS Further Mathematics as an extra pursuit outside school, and is predicted a grade A.

Economics (179/200 at AS level): Hannah loves to pursue her own line of enquiry and research new lines of interest independently. She has developed a rich knowledge of economic facts and figures, and her powers of analysis and her understanding of the links between the different theories, particularly in the area of microeconomics, is well documented in her essays. Her strong mathematical ability enables her to tackle data manipulation questions with confidence. With her independent study of Further Mathematics, she will have no problem meeting the mathematical requirements of an undergraduate course in Economics. As Economics Prefect, she is an assured and persuasive ambassador for the subject at Open Evenings.

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Does 87% justify A*?
Is it because of
upwards trajectory
from GCSE? Flexibility
from AS FM?

Taught or through
self-study?



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Hannah is an excellent student who challenges received truths and pursues alternative lines of enquiry. Although often eloquent, Hannah might not perform well initially.

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Nice to see a high B. Why are they predicting up?

Why? Was this also the case at AS? Self-study or taught? Who has provided the prediction?



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Why not?



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Clive

A:Sociology = A A:Psychology = A A1:Government & Politics = A

Newtown Sixth Form College serves a diverse community of students from the local area. We offer a broad range of A-Level and vocational courses and are proud to extend educational opportunities to learners who have some of the lowest qualifications on entry of any sixth form college in the country.

Clive is a student who has been able to make links between other social sciences which has not only strengthened his understanding of the subject but also given him a deep philosophical foundation to evaluate and assess cultural aspects of society. He has a strong understanding of the subject and is able to differentiate between positivist and interpretive approaches. His work has been strengthened through political convictions and a general attitude that real social change can only be achieved through political action. He has developed beyond classic A Level approaches and is more akin to an undergraduate understanding. He has covered topics such as the sociology of the family, education and research methods and has made a swift transition to the higher demands that a second year of study entails. His written work is detailed and will often go beyond assessment criteria; an A* grade is in his grasp.

Likewise, in Psychology, Clive presents as a conscientious, mature and polite student who has worked exceptionally well throughout the course to develop and maintain his natural flair for the subject. His work ethic has led to a number of outstanding test results and other written pieces. He has an impressive grasp of psychological concepts and theories. He also has an excellent understanding of research methods, which he has applied effectively when preparing for the research methods exam. In addition to this, he has consistently demonstrated that he also has an excellent understanding of the key evaluative issues in Psychology, which he discusses to an impressive level in each of his essays. He has advanced organisational skills, which he has used to complete all work to an exceptional standard by the deadlines set. He has maintained an excellent level of motivation and interest in the subject throughout the course, which has led him to become an admirable independent learner.

Clive is passionate about political, economic and social issues; he writes and speaks eloquently on a range of matters and is able to reflect on issues from a range of standpoints. Clive picks up complex concepts with ease and can analyse political arguments using complex terminology. He enjoys exploring topics which link his Economics and Political studies to Sociology; he is particularly articulate when discussing the impact of fiscal and welfare policy on families in poverty and is very interested in how social policy changes like how the legal position of gay marriage reflects wider social change. Clive works tremendously hard and as a result should gain an A grade in AS Government and Politics; he has already gained a B for Economics A Level.

Clive is an active member of the college, and wider, community. To name just a few examples, he is Secretary for the Student Union, fully utilising his excellent organisational and people management skills; he runs his own society in college (Film and Visual Culture Club) where he has recruited regular attendees and is effective in communicating with staff to follow internal policy and procedures; he confidently represents the college at local secondary schools and marketing events and has even chaired a borough assembly holding parliamentary candidates to account on local issues. Clive is mature, proactive and hard-working. He is an ideal candidate for Higher Education and will be an excellent student and an asset to the university community.



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Newtown Sixth Form College serves a diverse community of students from the local area, offering a range of vocational courses and are proud to extend educational opportunities to learners who would not otherwise have access to any sixth form college in the country.

Clive has a strong understanding of sociological perspectives that can be applied readily to real life. He is a keen reader, enthusiastic and passionate about sociology. He has been able to make links between the various social sciences which has not only strengthened his understanding of the subject but given him a deep philosophical foundation to evaluate and assess cultural aspects of society. He has understood that theory should be underpinned with sociological research and can easily differentiate between positivist and interpretivistic stances. His sociological thoughts are strengthened through his political convictions and a general attitude that real sociology is 'action' based. His knowledge of feminism, Marxism, functionalism and other theories has developed beyond classic A Level approaches and is more akin to an undergraduate understanding. He has covered topics such as the sociology of the family, education and research methods and has made a swift transition to the higher demands that a second year of study entails. His written work is detailed and will often go beyond assessment criteria; an A* grade is in his grasp.

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Clive is passionate about political, economic and social issues; he works hard and is able to reflect on issues from a range of standpoints. Clive picks up complex concepts quickly and is able to use complex terminology. He enjoys exploring topics which link his Economics and Political Studies to Sociology; he is particularly articulate when discussing the impact of fiscal and welfare policy on families in poverty and is very interested in how social policy changes like how the legal position of gay marriage reflects wider social change. Clive works tremendously hard and as a result should gain an A grade in AS Government and Politics; he has already gained a B for Economics A Level.

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Shows clear potential for university study – good.

But AS grade is a B – what happened?



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Clive

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Clive has a strong understanding of sociological perspectives that can be applied readily to the wider world. Clive is insightful, well read, enthusiastic and passionate about sociology. He has been able to make links between other social sciences which has not only strengthened his understanding of the subject but given him a deep philosophical foundation to evaluate and assess cultural aspects of society. He has understood that theory should be underpinned with sociological research and can easily differentiate between positivist and interpretivistic stances. His sociological thoughts are strengthened through political convictions and a general attitude that real sociology is 'action' based. His knowledge of feminism, Marxism, functionalism and other theories has developed beyond classic A Level approaches and is more akin to an undergraduate understanding. He has covered topics such as the sociology of the family, education and research methods and has made a swift transition to the higher demands that a second year of study entails. His written work is detailed and will often go beyond assessment criteria; an A* grade is in his grasp.

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Only mention of prior
Level 3 study



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Rachel

Predicted grades: Government and Politics A*, RE B, Sociology A*

St Genia's Sixth Form College is located in the most deprived ward in Manchester. Our students are predominantly from the local area and almost all follow A-level programmes. 45% come from Widening Participation backgrounds. Rachel came to St Genia's in September 2013 with a very good GCSE profile and has made a smooth transition to the demands of A-level study. She is estimated to achieve the following A-level grades: Government and Politics A*, RE B, Sociology A*

GOVERNMENT & POLITICS: Rachel is a joy to have in a politics class as she as a total pleasure for her academic studies which is to learn about and immerse herself in the world of politics ensures that she is incredibly hard-working both independently and in class and is always a worked hard to mature and develop her academic skills, readily taking on board and acting on a number of top marks for assessed personal work including a strong 'A' for her mock exam. I know that Rachel wishes to study for a politics related degree and I wish to recommend her wholeheartedly.

Three similar subjects,
one two grades lower.
Any reason?

RE: Rachel is a very mature and responsible student who takes her studies very seriously. This was evident from the start of her lessons, where she enthusiastically approaches any topic or idea, no matter how complex, and develop, her own knowledge and understanding. She has seldom achieved anything less than a 'B' for her work, demonstrating her intellectual capacity, as well as her hard work and determination. She is very independent, and arches things herself, thus enhancing her philosophical insights and capacity for forming her own views about certain topics, she is very willing to listen to the ideas of others, and is open-minded about the different perspectives that exist in a given area. She can also consider both sides of an argument effectively, and draw well-supported conclusions. She would be an asset to any degree course, and I fully recommend her to you.

SOCIOLOGY: Rachel is a very mature and responsible student who takes her studies very seriously. Consequently she is hard-working, extremely conscientious and reliable. She organises herself very well. Her written work reflects a deep enthusiasm for all matters sociological and is often effectively organised. It also demonstrates a perceptive understanding of complex sociological concepts and ideas which are consistently articulated to a high standard. She is also very good at analysing a range of sociological data and sees the need for frequent and balanced evaluation. She works exceptionally well as part of a problem-solving team. I have no doubts that Rachel has the maturity, attitudes and skills to be a success in higher education and I therefore recommend her unreservedly to your institution.

Rachel is an open and friendly student who relates well to her fellow students and teachers alike. She enjoys all her studies and consequently her record of attendance and punctuality at St Genia's is very good. She is considering all her options for future studies since her interests and abilities are wide ranging and she will be researching her chosen courses thoroughly. Outside her academic work, she has demonstrated her leadership qualities as a scout leader and through her teaching work at a supplementary school. She has recently completed her Silver Duke of Edinburgh's Award and was particularly proud of achieving a high standard in Circus Skills. Her joy in succeeding to juggle three balls after many months of practice was a delight to behold. She has the maturity and intellectual ability to embrace the demands of study at university and I strongly recommend her to you.

Is it normal to only do 3?



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GOVERNMENT & POLITICS: Rachel is a joy to have in a politics class as she is a total politics obsessive. She has one very clear aim for her academic studies which is to learn about and immerse herself in the world of politics and debate. Her considerable motivation ensures that she is incredibly hard-working both independently and in class and is always a very enthusiastic contributor. She has worked hard to mature and develop her academic skills, readily taking on board and advice given. She has gained a number of top marks for assessed past-paper work including a strong 'A' for a politics related degree and I wish her well and recommend her wholeheartedly.

RE: Rachel has a true aptitude for both Philosophy and Ethics, and a genuine enjoyment of the course, and it has made her a pleasure to have in lessons, where she can make things as simple as possible. She is always keen to comprehend, and develop, her own knowledge. She has achieved a lower than an A or B throughout the year, further demonstrating her intellectual capacity, as well as her hard work and determination. She is fully capable of independent work: she researches things herself, thus enhancing her philosophical insights and capacity for original thought in the subject. Despite having strong views about certain topics, she is very willing to listen to the ideas of others, and is open-minded about the different perspectives that exist in a given area. She can also consider both sides of an argument effectively, and draw well-supported conclusions. She would be an asset to any degree course, and I fully recommend her to you.

SOCIOLOGY: Rachel is a very mature and responsible student who takes her studies very seriously. Consequently she is hard-working, extremely conscientious and reliable. She organises herself very well. Her written work reflects a deep enthusiasm for all matters sociological and is often effectively argued. It also demonstrates a perceptive understanding of complex sociological concepts and a high standard. She is also very good at analysing a range of sociological data and is a very good team player. She works exceptionally well as part of a problem-solving team. I have no doubts that she will be a success in higher education and I therefore recommend her unreservedly.

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Any solid examples of this? Extra curriculars, volunteering etc.

It's all positive comments: why the B prediction?



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Overview

- We do read them, carefully and with interest.
- Focus on academic ability and potential
- Indicate achievement and ability within school/class context
- Be positive and supportive, but honest
- Tell the story of the student



Thank you

- PowerPoint presentations will be available on the website after the event
- Presentations will be available to download from our website as video/podcasts after the event

We will email you when they are ready



Please fill in your evaluation form and hand it to a member of staff before you leave.

