

The UCAS reference: A view from LSE

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THE LONDON SCHOOL
OF ECONOMICS AND
POLITICAL SCIENCE ■

Session overview

- ☐ The purpose of references
- ☐ What to include about:
 - ☐ The school
 - ☐ The predicted grades
 - ☐ The applicant
- ☐ Assessing references
- ☐ Any questions?

Starter task



- Look at the information on the next slide about the grades some students received or were predicted
- Rank the students from most to least likely according to how likely you would be to make them an offer for a programme with the entry requirements AAA



Selecting students



Student	Predicted Grades	AS Grades	GCSE Grades	Rank?
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	

Does this change your opinion?



Student	Predicted Grades	AS Grades	GCSE Grades	Extenuating Circumstances
Alice	AAA	ABBB	5A 5B	GCSE School was in Special Measures
Bilal	AAB	AABB	11A*	Mother has been severely ill over last 6 months
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	Staffing issues in school – supply teacher for one subject
Fran	A*A*A*	ABBC	7A* 3A	None

The purpose of references

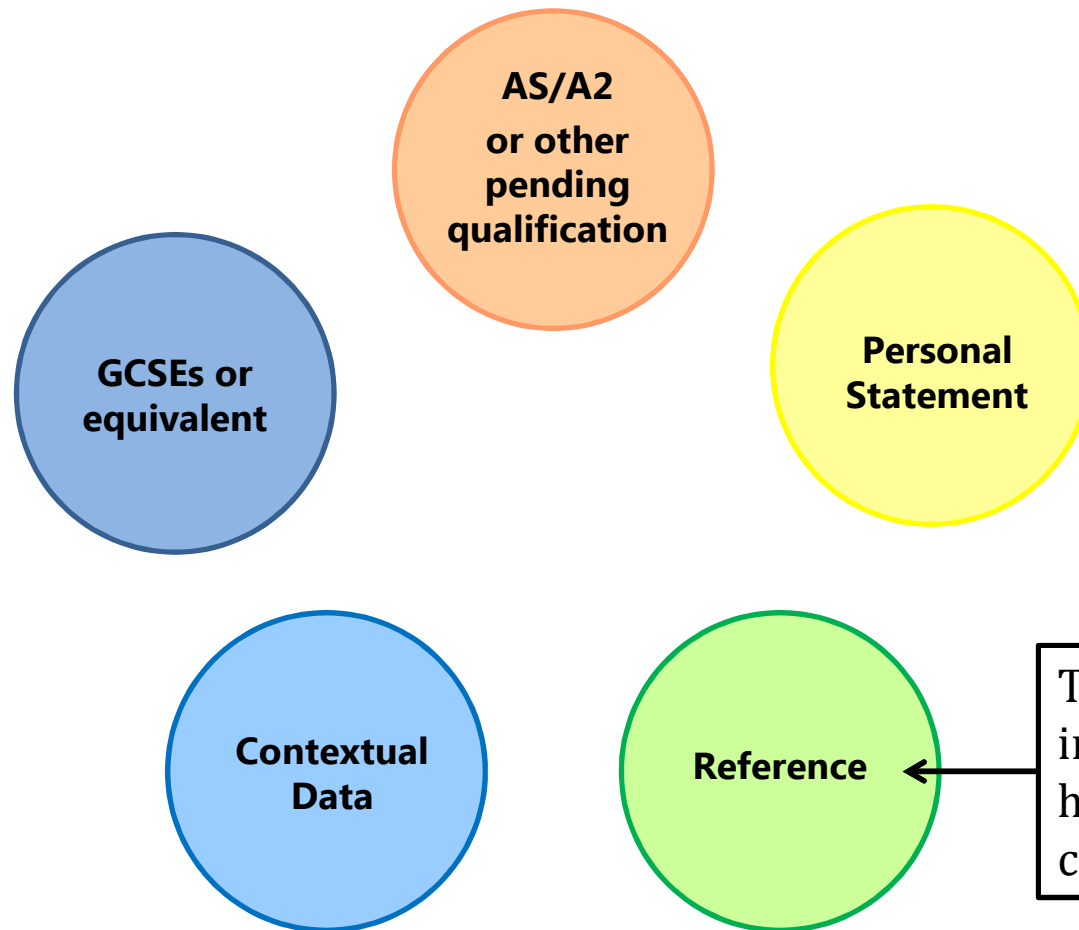


References: purpose?

- ❑ 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



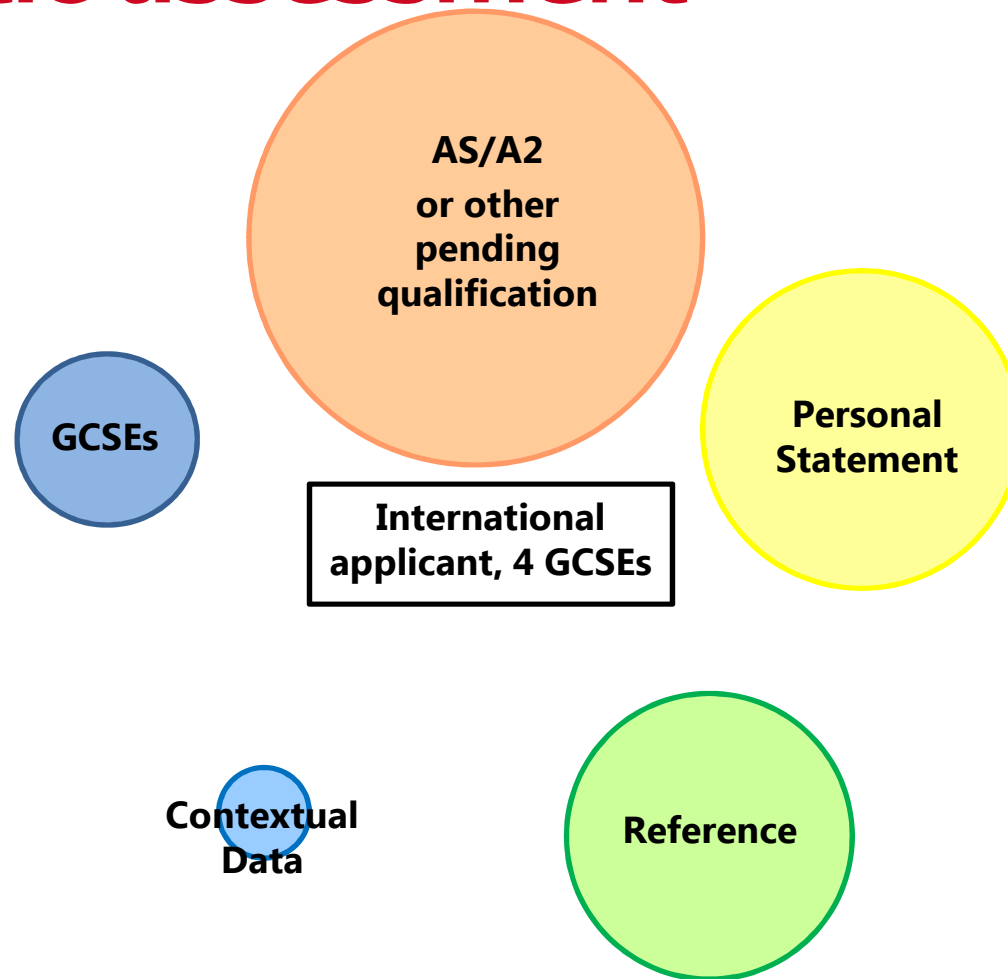
Holistic assessment



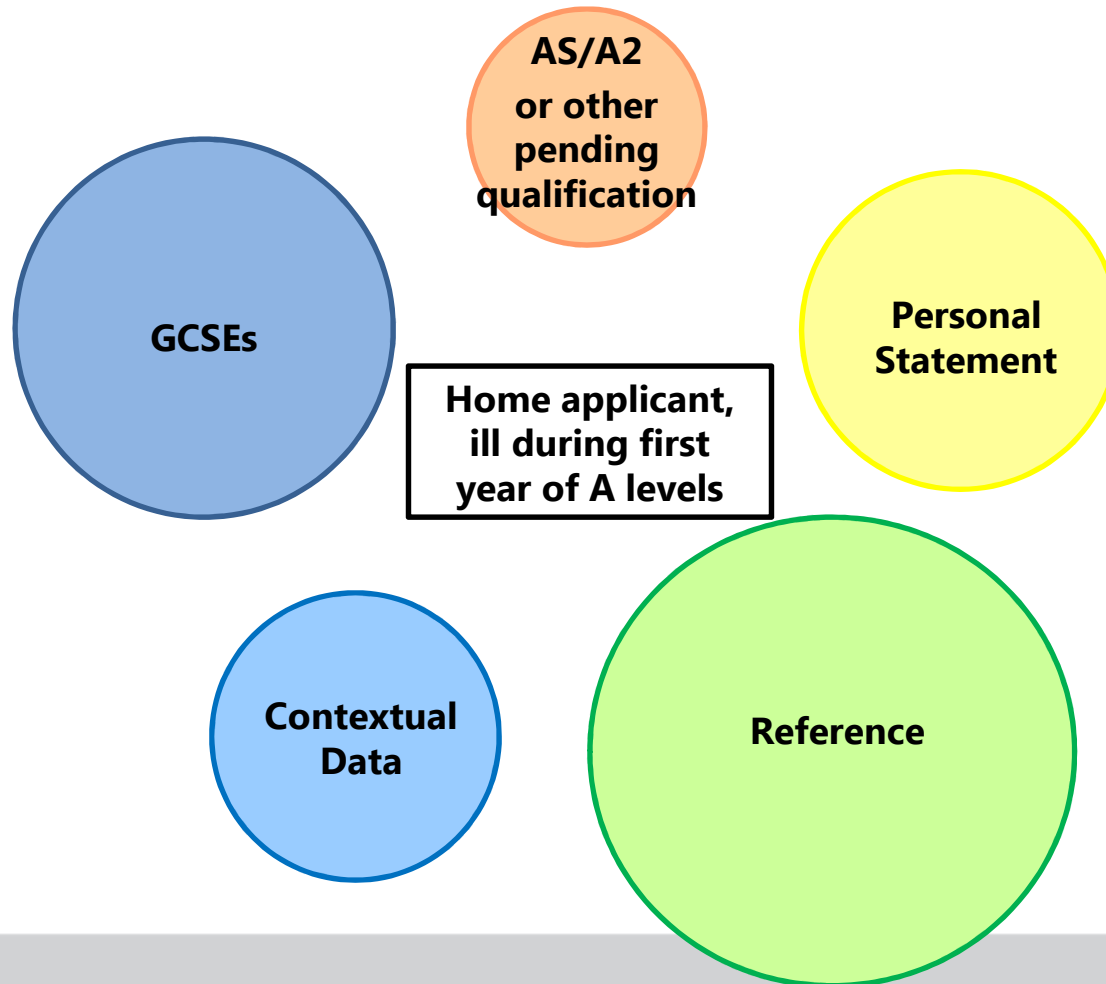
The reference is an important part of LSE's holistic assessment criteria.



Holistic assessment



Holistic assessment



References: purpose?

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



Information about the school



References: School Info

What we already see at LSE

GCSE 5A*-C incl. English & Maths for GCSE year

A level points score per entry for previous year

School type



lse.ac.uk/study

References: School Info

What we don't see
Historical data – have you improved/dipped
Ofsted reports/grades – how does your school's 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!



References: School Info

“Erinsborough High School is an oversubscribed large multicultural school. The sixth form of about 200 students reflects this diversity.”

“Grange Hill School is situated in an area of high social and economic deprivation.”

“Waterloo Road is a school undergoing challenges with staffing difficulties a major concern.”



References: School Info

“Pontypandy Community School is a large rural comprehensive school with majority of students living in areas of deprivation. 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 four subjects in Year 12, then three in Year 13, although the most able are permitted to continue with 4. Students 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 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

“Details of Rydell High School’s policy on A-levels and details on the school can be found at <http://bit.ly/s23dcgi>”



lse.ac.uk/study

Predicted grades



References: Predictions

- ❑ Be supportive, but realistic
- ❑ **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



Information about the applicant



References: The Applicant



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

References: The Applicant

What we don't see
Free School 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

References: The Applicant



Assessment of student's **academic suitability** for their chosen degree, with specific examples:

- ❑ Attitude to study: motivation & commitment
- ❑ Potential
- ❑ Intellectual flexibility & curiosity
- ❑ Independent & original thinking
- ❑ Analytic ability & logical reasoning
- ❑ Ability to cope with sustained workload & flourish in intensive academic environment
- ❑ What is the student like as a learner: quiet, thoughtful, bold, lively? What do they stand out for?

References: The Applicant



- ☐ Give prominence to subjects most relevant to chosen degree, but include all subjects
- ☐ Include strengths and weaknesses, particularly where grades aren't perfect
- ☐ Extra-curricular achievements & responsibilities
- ☐ Leadership skills, social skills
- ☐ No surprises: tell us about anything that has affected performance or progress

References: The Applicant



“Frank is a hardworking student who works well in class.”

“Rebecca is a pleasant student who is a credit to the Sixth Form. She is a form captain and has raised some money for a local charity.”

“Ahmed works well both in the classroom and in his own time. He is a dedicated student. Mathematics is a particular strength and she excels in this area, scoring highly in tests.”

“Nyola would make an excellent student of Economics.”

“Zaima is an extremely capable linguist. I am confident that Zaima is the most academically able student I have taught over the previous 10 years. In assessments Zaima has regularly achieved near perfect grades and in a recent mock exam based on AS content she scored 92% placing her at the top of a very able class. Zaima is confident when speaking in class and engages readily in debates and discussions. Her wider reading is apparent as she often asks challenging questions suggesting she is thinking about the subject beyond the curriculum requirements.”

References: Extenuating Circumstances

- ❑ 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

Rasheed'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.

Rasheed's 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 Rasheed missed several days of school to visit him. He has also assumed greater caring responsibilities for his two siblings. His 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 Rasheed.



Looking at references



Examples

- ❑ Look at the mock application forms provided
- ❑ The Personal Statements have been removed
- ❑ 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 continued to be good to the lead in lessons, be to class discussions. Above all she has steamed ahead independently. She has obtained four strong grades at AS level and we are confident she will achieve more.

Mathematics: Hannah is a natural mathematician who never accepts ideas simply because they are presented and works away at that which appears inconsistent, illogical or incomplete. She appreciates elegant solutions and can work quickly and efficiently. This year she has taken up AS Further Mathematics and is predicted a grade A.

Economics: Hannah loves to pursue her own line of enquiry and research and she always seeks to understand things 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: 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)



lse.ac.uk/study

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Mathematics: 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: Hannah loves to pursue her own line of enquiry and research and she always studies independently. She has developed a rich knowledge of economic facts, concepts and theories and her understanding of the links between the different theories, particularly in macroeconomics, is impressive. Her essays are well written and clear. 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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Any evidence to justify an A* at A-level, especially when she achieved a B grade at GCSE?

Taught or through self-study?



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Economics: Hannah loves to pursue her interests independently. She has developed a rich understanding of the links between Mathematics and Economics. Her strong mathematical ability enables her to tackle complex 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 a confident and persuasive ambassador for the subject at Open Evenings.

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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 joined the Young Enterprise Scheme last year and was a vocal, cooperative but poor negotiator.

Hannah is an excellent student who excels in traditional academic settings. She is a diligent worker and performs well initially.	<p>Why? Was this also the case at AS? Self-study or taught? Who</p> <p>who challenges received truths and pursues her own. Although often eloquent, Hannah might not</p>
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Hannah is totally convinced that she has provided the prediction. And this very interesting young woman to you.



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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Economics: Hannah loves to pursue her own line of enquiry and research and she always seems to be exploring 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.

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Why not?



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Clive

A:Sociology = A A:Psychology = A AS: 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
read, e
streng
societ
and in
sociol

**Does this apply to A
level as well as
vocational courses?**

...ectives that... applied readily to the wider world. Clive is insightful, well... able to make links between other social sciences which has not only... him a deep philosophical foundation to evaluate and assess cultural aspects of... pinned with sociological research and can easily differentiate between positivist... e strengthened through political convictions and a general attitude that real... 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.

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.



lse.ac.uk/study

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, 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?



lse.ac.uk/study

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Only mention of prior study – what happened?



lse.ac.uk/study

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 2016 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 past 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?

Rachel has a genuine interest in the subject of Politics and Ethics, and a genuine passion for the subject. This was evident from the start of her A-level studies, where she enthusiastically approaches any topic or idea, no matter how complex, and develops her own knowledge and understanding. She has seldom achieved anything less than a top mark in her work, demonstrating her intellectual capacity, as well as her hard work and determination. She always 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 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 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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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 2016 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 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?

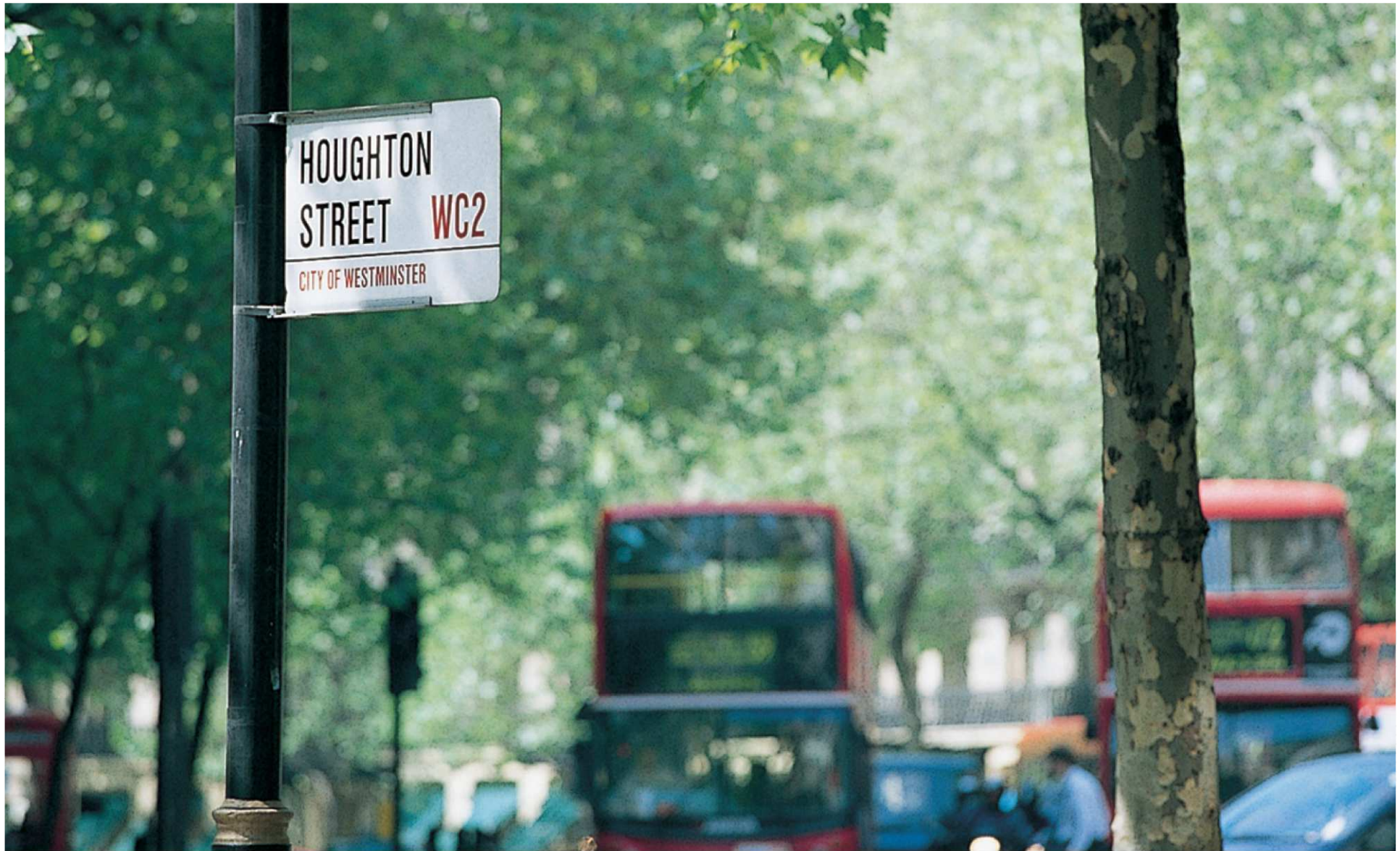


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Summary

- ❑ 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
- ❑ <http://www.lse.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/informationForTeachersAndSchools/Admissions-Advice-for-Teachers.aspx>





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Any questions?