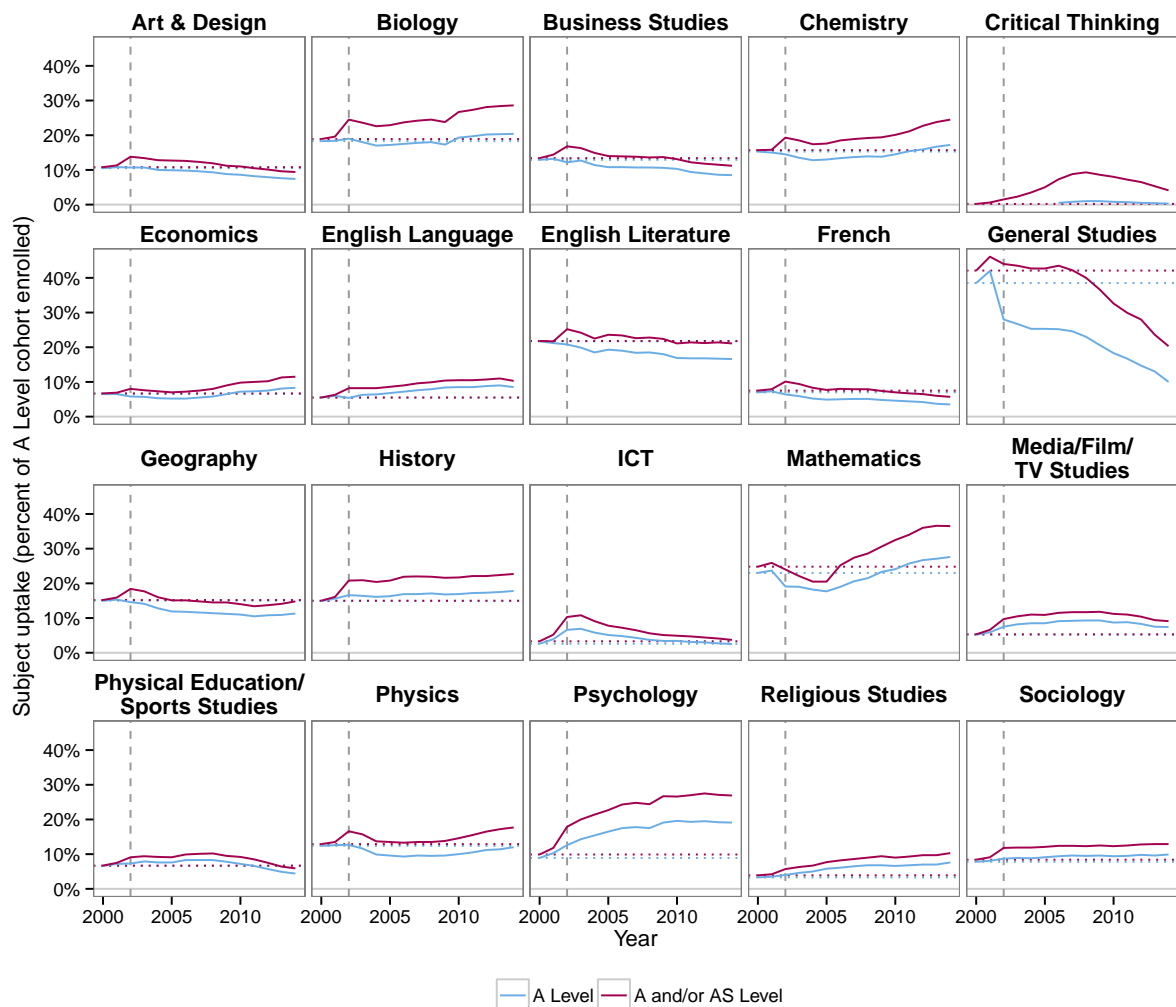


## The most popular A Level subjects since 2000

### Summary

Since September 2015, schools and colleges have been teaching **reformed A Levels** in the first tranche of subjects. The main changes to the design of the qualification are that assessment will take place at the end of the course (instead of the previous division into modules), and the AS and A Level are decoupled. It is likely that this reform, combined with funding changes for educational institutions for 16–19 year olds, will affect subject uptake, with students each taking fewer subjects. Here we look at how the uptake of popular subjects has evolved since 2000, when the previous system of linear A Levels was in place.



### What does the chart show?

The chart shows the uptake of the 20 most popular subjects (as a percentage of all students studying A Levels) for each year since 2000. The year shown on the chart is the year in which

the students were in Year 13 and typically took their A Levels. The blue line is the proportion of students who took an A Level in the subject; the red line is the proportion who took an A Level and/or an AS Level.

The vertical dashed line in 2002 represents the first cohort that took the 'Curriculum 2000' A Levels, which featured the new Advanced Subsidiary Level that formed the first year of the A Level course. Prior to this, the AS Level (Advanced Supplementary) was a standalone qualification that was not linked to the A Level.

The data are sourced from the National Pupil Database, managed by the Department for Education.

### **Why is the chart interesting?**

The introduction of Curriculum 2000 boosted the uptake of many subjects after GCSE, even if students did not pursue them to A Level. The subjects that have enjoyed particularly large increases in uptake at A Level are Mathematics, Psychology, Biology and Chemistry.

General Studies was formerly a very popular A Level, taken by 38.5% of the A Level cohort in 2000, but its popularity has fallen dramatically. Under Curriculum 2000, a large number of students took only the AS Level rather than the full A Level, and the uptake of both has continued to fall. Critical Thinking AS Level became very popular about ten years ago but it too has declined since.

The decoupling of AS Level may reduce uptake of 'new' subjects that students have not taken at GCSE. Our [research on Psychology and Sociology](#) suggests that students have used the AS Level to 'try out' these subjects, then subsequently pursued them to full A Level. The full picture of how schools and colleges are responding to the reforms is not yet known, although early indications are given by the [report published by UCAS in January 2015](#).

### **Further information**

Our series of [Statistical Reports](#) contains detailed information on annual subject provision and uptake for GCSE and A Levels.