

lot them were working meetings, but where - we call them accountability meetings where we're holding people to account for what happens, and I've chaired those meetings - where we've got agreement on how to go about tightening up the grading standards.

Richard: And could that come into force for this year is that again something...?

Kathleen Tattersall: Well the only thing that could be applied this year was the very last modules.

Richard: Yeah, because obviously they'd done most of it, yeah.

Kathleen Tattersall: Yeah and you can't do it in a heavy-handed way because it's just not fair to say those last modules of a sequence of modules should be the ones that bear the brunt of all the standards. But if you looked at the science results the additional science overall was just slightly down on last year and the science package was just generally up, I think it was about point eight up on last year, and I think but for the work we did those figures could have been different, but there was this general agreement that there would be this whole leading standard.

So it's a rolling programme, basically, and we do it, what we've been trying to do is ensure that we take the awarding bodies with us because they're the ones who, you know, set the papers, they're the ones whose examiners mark and make the decisions on awarding, and it's important that they're signed up to the same agenda that we want because they're the ones who are going to implement it. The last thing that, I think, anybody wants and wouldn't be in the interests of candidates is if the regulator were making demands which other people thought to be wrong.

Richard: Yeah, ie there was friction between the regulator and the exam boards?

Kathleen Tattersall: Yeah. I mean down the line there may be occasions when there is friction, but I think if you can avoid it, and if you can be firm but also collaborative then that's the better of achieving the results, and I think what happened this summer demonstrated that. Overall I thought the results were very fair, both GCSE and in particular the new AS exams, and what I'm describing about working with the awarding bodies I mean we did exactly the same anticipating the new AS, and of course we've been able to do that over the period, the life period.

Richard: Yeah, and that's one of the problems that actually none of us in the media tend to focus on the AS actually do we. We look at the A2, and we look at the GCSEs, so.

Kathleen Tattersall: But the AS is a big part of it. You know, it's like a qualification embedded in a qualification, or rather the A-level is a qualification which has something embedded within it. So it was

important that the change to the structure of AS maintained the standard and so going from three to two didn't create a big difference in the outcomes. And we published a letter - I can't remember when, it's going back to a while, the beginning of this year, February time.

Mike: I think it was March.

Kathleen Tattersall: March?

Mike: I think it was March actually.

Kathleen Tattersall: March time, you might have seen it Richard, and if you haven't we can get you a copy.

Richard: Lovely, yeah.

Kathleen Tattersall: I mean basically it was on the website, and it was an open letter to schools telling them how we were going about working with the awarding bodies to ensure that the AS standard was appropriate and carried forward the standard of the previous qualifications. If you could sort that our Mike that would be ...

Mike: Yeah, and it's definitely still up on the website so I'll send you the links.

Richard: Oh right, well actually if you just send me a link to it actually then that will ...

Kathleen Tattersall: And it talked about the information that will be used in making decisions. You know, it's a little bit obvious like candidate scripts, others, using prior performance is an indicator. Not prior performance of individuals, you know, Richard Gardner's GCSE results and this is what you're going to get AS, but the collective of the whole of the population of using prior attainment in GCSE as an indicator of the level of ability, as it were, of the nature of the candidature. And at the moment the same goes on with GCSE of using Key Stage 3 - which of course begs the question what we're going to do when Key Stage 3 goes, and people are talking about that.

Richard: Actually, it was interesting that one of the schools I featured on GCSE results day was a school that had concentrated Key Stage 3 into two years and started the students off on the GCSE a year earlier ...

Kathleen Tattersall: How interesting.

Richard: ... and it improved its results quite markedly and also given them more time for extracurricular activities.

Kathleen Tattersall: So it was win-win.

Richard: Yes.

Kathleen Tattersall: Sounds good.

Richard: I wonder whether everybody else will follow that soon actually.

Kathleen Tattersall: Yeah, well I mean I'm sure there are so many patterns up and down the country. You know, I mean increasingly kids start their GCSE or their A-level earlier don't they immediately after what ever the series of tests have been. You know, there's no longer that kind of period at the end of a term where people have a great time and aren't seen until the next time, in the next term. You know, it's nose to the grindstone I think all the time. But I mean it's all there, I mean it's all out in the open of the information that's used to try to get a handle on the ability range of the full national group of candidates taking examinations and breaking that down in terms of the differences between awarding bodies because populations do tend to differ a little bit across the awarding bodies.

Richard: I remember my school was so relaxed after my A-levels that I managed to persuade the headmaster to allow me to stay off school to write a book.

Kathleen Tattersall: Right. You'll have to get it out, dust it down.

Richard: Yeah, unchain it, you know, bring it up to date actually.

Kathleen Tattersall: That's right, bring it up to date.

Richard: I mean a couple of sort of trends that, well things that I noticed or interviews that I did during GCSE and A-level time, one was with, the obvious one was the GCSEs actually, that in maths where the coursework had been reduced this time that suddenly the boys actually improved and got better, and there was speculation from one or two people, John Dunford, in particular, and Mike Creswell that we might see that trend extending to other subjects next year.

Kathleen Tattersall: Possibly, I mean if that was showing, as some of the research that others have done, that girls tend to do better on coursework than boys, and then people kind of extrapolate from that and say ah but boys are so careless and all this. You know, they're okay when it comes to short sharp shock. You know, I mean I don't know how true that is but certainly there is some research that kind of supports the fact that different forms of assessment marginally favour one or other of the sexes. But if that is the reason why the boys improved in maths, and there could be other reasons, you know, I mean I don't know how much the curriculum had changed, and it might be in the curriculum change that they

were more interested and more gripped by it, but it could of course happen in other subjects if that's an indicator. But it's all if, if, if.

Richard: Yeah, but that's, the mantra that Mike Creswell used is two years don't make a trend actually.

Kathleen Tattersall: Absolutely, and I think Mike is right.

Richard: Yeah.

Kathleen Tattersall: And now I'm quite certain that somebody will have some research lined up for down the line which will look at the changes in coursework to controlled assessment. You know, so it's not as if the skills that coursework assessors are totally being ignored because it's being moved to this context where it's being done in different circumstances with constraints placed around it. So in that sense it will be interesting to see whether it has a full effect that some might claim that it would have.

Richard: Because actually it's really wrong to talk in terms of abolishing coursework isn't it?

Kathleen Tattersall: That's absolutely right.

Richard: Because you've still got coursework, you've just got a different way of measuring coursework.

Kathleen Tattersall: That's right. So it's more controlled to the circumstances in which you do it so that all these allegations that have been made in the past that, you know, candidates have been helped by family members or they've used the internet in an inappropriate way or that is negated by the context in which the coursework is being done, so that would suggest that it wouldn't have such a marked effect overall.

Richard: Yeah, and the other, it was an interview with Geoff Parkes actually that I did about, just before A-levels came out and he was talking about the number of triple A candidates that he'd to not make a provisional offer to this year.

Kathleen Tattersall: Yeah, because you made quite a bit about it.

Richard: I did, yes.

Kathleen Tattersall: Yeah, you really set it all running on this one, Richard. It was the story that ran most I think, isn't it, you know, kids not getting into university.

Richard: Yes. But one of the points that he, one of the things that he was talking about there was the impact of the changes to A-level next year, and he was saying that actually if you've got the more open-

ended questions, more searching questions, that there was a chance that this could be the last year that we see the continuous rise in grades.

Kathleen Tattersall: I don't know really. I mean the introduction of the stretch and challenge questions and, you know, the more thoughtful style questions isn't actually intended to change the overall standard of A-level. You know, it might actually tease out excellent performances from the best candidates, and of course that might then be linked with the introduction of A-star because what might have been more useful, and indeed the universities wanted it, is having a distinguishing point within A-level so that those who do really well on the stretch and challenge question who get their A-level and have performed really well, they've got it, you know, they go into it with an A-star, sorry the AS, as at A level, they have performed really well and get a UMS score of ninety plus on their A-level and then ...

Richard: UMS is what, sorry?

Kathleen Tattersall: UMS, the Universal Mark Scheme; in other words, it's the standardised scheme that applies across A-level, regardless of what the raw scores might be, it's all kind of scaled up to a Universal Mark Scheme. And if they get 90% on that, I think that's the rule, then they will get their A-star, and that probably is what he's really thinking about, that that might then give the universities something else to discriminate among the A grade population.

Richard: Because Cambridge has actually said that it will accept, you know, it's standard offer is going to be one A-star and two As from next year, but a number of the universities I think are a bit less reluctant to sort of use it quite so quickly actually.

Kathleen Tattersall: They are. I mean I was really quite interested because I mean it was the universities who were pressing for something which would help them make decisions, you know, give them a better basis for decision making, and then when of course it comes into being, or it's announced that it's coming into being in 2010, some of them as you say express reluctance to use it, and I think probably their reluctance is all to do with equity issues and making sure that every student has the opportunity to attain highly. I feel the way it's been introduced and the very straightforward and published data as to what the basis of the A-star grade will be should actually address any concerns that the university have about equity.

Richard: And would you think therefore that over a fairly brief period of time that more and more universities will come to use it in their judgements?

Kathleen Tattersall: I would have thought so, but I'm simply second guessing what the universities will do. And of course it all depends doesn't it what grades they offer to students, how many places there are and how many students there are.

Richard: Yes.

Kathleen Tattersall: And this year of course has been a bold year hasn't it with fewer places for whatever reason. So hopefully next year students won't find it quite as difficult to find a place.

Richard: It's probably not within your remit but I was going to ask you what sort of advice would you give to some of those rejected university candidates this year?

Kathleen Tattersall: Well it isn't within our remit, except we do have our exams doctor.

Richard: Oh of course yes.

Kathleen Tattersall: Who is George Turnbull, as you know.

Richard: Yeah.

Kathleen Tattersall: Now what advice would George give them? I think he probably would advise, depending on the individual circumstances of a student, one is that if they didn't quite get the grades that they wanted and that was part of the reason why they didn't find a place, and some of them will be sticking out for exactly what they wanted as opposed to being willing to look at other courses, that they go back and they repeat some of the modules where they didn't do as well as they ought to have done and that they apply again next year. And some other advice may well be there will be some courses which you might be able get on to even at this late stage provided of course you are not so wedded to the notion that you should do course X and nothing else in your life will do.

Richard: Yes.

Kathleen Tattersall: And is very much an individual choice isn't it?

Richard: Yes.

Kathleen Tattersall: But I think, you know, kind of sticking around and trying to better your grades would be some of the advice that we might give through George.

Richard: Because I mean the irony of that situation that we've had this year is that if the places were available we'd have got much nearer the 50% target that's been set - you know, been set in stone for several years actually.

Kathleen Tattersall: I know it is very ironic and very unfortunate for the young people who have worked very hard and not found a place. I haven't really been keeping up with the clearing, I mean I don't know how that's going, but the clearing places were going pretty rapidly weren't they in the first place.

Richard: They were. I think there was slightly more places than UCAS had first thought there were going to be actually because originally they were estimating they'd only have about 22,000 but the last statistics I saw they've actually filled 29,000.

Kathleen Tattersall: Right, so they obviously had more.

Richard: So they did have more.

Kathleen Tattersall: And they're still working to fill other places.

Richard: Yeah, but only a handful of, well a handful's hundreds rather than thousands actually.

Kathleen Tattersall: Yeah. So it may turn out that the students who haven't been able to find a place are fewer in number than anticipated, and it may well be that those who don't find a place really do intend to repeat their exams in order to get on the course that they really wanted in the first place.

Richard: Mmm, yeah. And the other thing that they've, well it's been reported to us actually is that some of the distance learning courses have actually taken on many more students straight from ...

Kathleen Tattersall: Have they?

Richard: You know, Open University.

Kathleen Tattersall: Oh right, okay.

Richard: Birkbeck actually as well.

Kathleen Tattersall: Yes, so they have benefited from this?

Richard: Yes, which is quite interesting.

Kathleen Tattersall: It is isn't it?

Richard: Yeah.

Kathleen Tattersall: Mmm, because I always associate those courses with more mature students.

Richard: Yeah.

Kathleen Tattersall: But obviously it, I mean I'm sure there'll be a lot of people doing their A-levels who are not in the age bracket of the 18 year-old.

Richard: Yes, that's true, yeah. And also, yes, the applicants this year, I think the percentage of mature applicants was higher this year than it has been in previous years actually so that would again lead to that.

Kathleen Tattersall: Yeah, and again I suppose that's partly maybe the recession and people wanting to go back into learning and actually get some other skills.

Richard: Yeah, and I've promised myself that I'm going to be one of them when I give up this job actually.

Kathleen Tattersall: So you're going to write your novel and then ...

Richard: Do a degree.

Richard: I know. Yes, so what, I mean during the next year presumably you'll be monitoring the way that the new A2 is coming in actually?

Kathleen Tattersall: Yeah, we'll be continuing to work with the awarding bodies and we kind of have an agreed basis of data exchange with the awarding bodies and regular meetings to discuss the meaning of the emerging data and whether or not the information on which all the grades are being based is actually being used consistently across the awarding bodies and, you know, I have to say the awarding bodies who are as signed up to standards as Ofqual is, and I really couldn't stress that enough. You know, it's in their interests to maintain standards as it is in Ofqual's, and they do that, and they work incredibly hard to do that.

So those meetings have been incredibly useful and we will continue to work in that fashion with them so that there will be no surprises hopefully when we come to this point next year and the A-level results are coming out. When I say no surprises there will be some surprises for some candidates I mean some may have done wonderfully well and some may not have done as well as they should, as is always the case. But I went to a couple of schools, on a GCSE day and also on A-level day and I just wish more people

would go to those events or could go to those events because you just see this range of emotions that young people have. You know, those who are utterly elated who have got their straight As and those who are a bit glum because they know they could have done better and.

Richard: Yes, I mean we went to a couple of schools actually. We went to - I mean I didn't go, I was just in the office - to an inner-city comprehensive in Birmingham and to a sort of selective grammar school in Chelmsford to try and get a sort of range of different sort of emotions.

Kathleen Tattersall: And were there differences between the two or?

Richard: There was far more emotion, actually there was far more emotion from the girls who hadn't done quite so well at the grammar school than anywhere else actually. In fact almost embarrassing to ...

Kathleen Tattersall: Because they had high aspirations?

Richard: Yes, almost embarrassing to be there, I mean not for me but for the person who was there as a reporter actually because, you know, you don't want to intrude on what is grief actually.

Kathleen Tattersall: Absolutely and, you know, I mean I was there kind of talking to the kids, you really have to have an eye on those who are clearly upset and you don't want to intrude. The last thing they want is to talk to a stranger. You know, all they want to do is to curl up and go home. But at the school I went to I mean one of the things that struck me was that one or two of the disappointed students, and they were generally girls, were ones who had tremendous results but clearly not quite as good as they thought they were going to get, so they had a range of As and Bs, and the Bs weren't good enough. Which all bears out that qualifications do raise people's aspirations in spite of what some people say of, you know, abolish this, that or there other, I think there is still a role for qualifications in setting people's sights and hopefully raising their game.

Richard: Because the other thing that we'll have more of next year is the Diplomas coming online actually. And there's a report coming out tomorrow actually from the British Education Research Association saying that quite a large minority of young people in their last year of Key Stage 3 or last year of GCSE are still unaware of the Diplomas. Have we got a job to do still to sell the Diplomas?

Kathleen Tattersall: I'm sure we have on all fronts from what you say the job to sell it to young people themselves and their parents, and that I think is something that Ofqual will have to address because it again is part of our remit to raise the profile of qualifications. It's not part of our remit to kind of hold the candle for them, you know, but to at least make people aware of what is out there. And of course this year for the Diplomas has been an abnormal year, you know, because just under two hundred students

actually came out with a Diploma, but they did it in one year, and so it's not the typical Diploma cohort. Next year will be a little closer to normality but of course it is being introduced in a fairly phased manner both in terms of the lines of learning and in terms of the schools coming on board. But it does sound as though unless you are a school that's actively involved in the Diploma that the Diploma is still an unknown quantity. So yeah I think there is something that we could usefully look at there and I'll remember that.

Richard: How would you, I mean as you said not promote it but how would you raise the awareness?

Kathleen Tattersall: Well I think in terms of the opportunity which Diplomas provide of continuing learning across a range of experiences, you know, and I think this is the big offer of the Diploma that it's not, as it were, just pursuing particular subjects at GCSE and A-level but it is actually also pursuing those subjects alongside a range of skills, like functional skills, which society values and particularly employers value. So I think what we would do is set out the features of the Diploma. We wouldn't want to be seen to be promoting it but we want to make clear what its advantages were, and we would also want to make clear that it is a very demanding qualification by virtue of the fact that you have to actually attain across a range of experiences.

Richard: Facets, yeah, because actually that was one of the bits this research teased out that the youngsters who were asked felt it was not as demanding as an A-level, and that must be just an impression they've got rather than any basis on solid facts actually.

Kathleen Tattersall: Absolutely, and I think the very fact that there's principal learning, there's the extended project, there's the functional skills, there are some other elements as well that I can't remember, subsidiary learning, but there are all sorts of different facets, and in order to get your Diploma you've got to have achieved in all of those aspects. So in terms of demand I think it makes great demands on people and I think it begins to change the concept of attaining a qualification. Because we tend to think of qualifications as something that you do in two years, you know, generally this is school qualifications you do it over two years, occasionally you might do it over a year but that's not the normal thing, well AS of course is over a year but you know what I mean, the full A-level package over two years. Whereas the Diploma it may take you more than two years to actually attain it because of the way in which you've got to perform in so many different aspects. So that might change it and to represent a student as having failed the Diploma if they haven't actually got one element of it, be it functional skills or extended project or whatever it might be, I think doesn't actually help to embed a concept of breadth of education within the system. So I think we've got to get used to the fact that some people will take longer than the traditional two years to do this.

Richard: In history you can't get the Diploma without the functional skills element isn't it?

Kathleen Tattersall: You can't?

Richard: No.

Kathleen Tattersall: But then, you know, there are all the bits which are kind of there as elements. Now principal learning and the extended project make up one of those elements, so that's one, but you've got to have got that, you've got to have passed it for want of a better term, and you've got to have passed your functional skills, and there are three functional skills so there are, as it were, three hurdles within that, and it's all part and parcel of the design of something which is intended to broaden the basis of attainment which makes for a very demanding qualification. So I think in terms of our explanation we would want to explain the demand and we'd want to explain the range of learning that people have to experience and have an attainment in.

Richard: Actually I visited some schools that were doing the Diploma and I was very impressed by the enthusiasm that the students showed for what they were learning actually. I mean the comment that came from one of them was well this is not like school this is great, you know, and I thought well actually it is school but.

Kathleen Tattersall: Yeah, but they would also have some work experience for things of that kind.

Richard: Yeah, they were doing the construction and the built environment, and it had taught them bricklaying skills to start off with, and it was then teaching them skills of how to become an architect actually and design flats and homes and things which was quite a wide mixture.

Kathleen Tattersall: So again it was raising their, broadening their own horizons, their personal horizons and raising aspirations.

Richard: Yeah.

Kathleen Tattersall: You know, and again you might start thinking all I can do is bricklaying and then you might think oh I could do a bit more on that.

Richard: Well actually I quite enjoy doing, yeah. So it kind of changed, well not changed my perception because I always thought the Diploma would be a very useful qualification actually. I'd still have liked it to have been introduced the way that Mike Tomlinson wanted it introduced but there you go.

Kathleen Tattersall: Well I mean I was on the Tomlinson committee so I agree. I mean it's very difficult for any qualification, be it Diploma or anything else to kind of make its way within a mass of other qualifications, and particularly qualifications which aren't very well respected like GCSE and A-level.

Nevertheless there is a lot of good things to say about what Diplomas can do for young people, you know, raising their levels of attainment, of introducing them to skills which are wider than just the subject expertise that they might attain, and in that sense I think Diplomas have much to offer the educational landscape.

Richard: Actually that brings me onto another point there about the different range of qualifications, I mean obviously you've got, I mean GCSEs have the IGCSE which some independent schools have moved towards, although not that many of the figures have got into the figures that we've got.

Kathleen Tattersall: No, I mean Greg Watson's talked about the IGCSE and, you know, it's not rising at the rate that people have said. I think, but I'd need to check this out, Richard, but it's not IGCSE that we have approved. We have approved the Cambridge package.

Richard: That's right, yes it is, yeah.

Kathleen Tattersall: And I think people kind of talk about it.

Richard: Confused the two actually.

Kathleen Tattersall: They do, they confuse the two as though that were a qualification which is approved by Ofqual and isn't it awful that state schools can't do it.

Richard: Can't take it, yeah.

Kathleen Tattersall: But it's the Cambridge package that we've approved and they can sit alongside GCSEs and of course it's up to schools to decide what to do, and certainly the school I was at last week alongside its A-levels it offered IB. You know, so schools, and this is just an ordinary state school we're talking about, you know, we're not talking about a school in the private sector, this was a school in the state sector, so they were offering a range of qualifications - ironically they were not doing the Diploma.

Richard: Well maybe that will come actually.

Kathleen Tattersall: Yeah, perhaps it will. But no, but IGCSE yeah okay some people are taking it but it's not one that we've actually approved. But we have approved Cambridge's own suite of qualifications.

Richard: And does it help the landscape of qualifications to have so much sort of variety of qualifications. I'm thinking more of A-levels, because obviously you've got the IB and you've got others, but you've also got the Pre-U sort of making its appearance as well.

Kathleen Tattersall: Yeah. Does it help?

Richard: Yeah.

Kathleen Tattersall: Well if we were talking about personalising learning which is very much the kind of in thing isn't it?

Richard: Mmm.

Kathleen Tattersall: Making sure that learning is personalised and that every individual is treated as an individual, some qualifications may well suit some individuals more than others, and obviously from a regulatory point of view, for those qualifications that we have approved, the important thing is that we've approved them on a basis where people can trust those qualifications and that they will open doors so that nobody is going to be misled by doing something and then find that down the road it's not going to be recognised for entry into university or whatever it might be.

So in that sense I think a range of qualifications helps with the choice diversity and personalisation agenda of the wider educational field. The important thing I think in all of this is that people understand those qualifications so that teachers, particularly, understand what they might be taking on, what the demands might be, what they've got to do to enable their students to benefit fully from those qualifications, and the more you have then the more difficult I think it becomes for teachers to help students make the right choices. The more you have within the school then the greater the administrative challenges there are. So it depends which way you're looking at it. Personalisation yes, organisationally it may not be quite as easy.

Richard: And to me it does seem as if the changes that we've got to A-level are answering some of the criticisms of the people who've said that they've ditched A-levels to move towards the Pre-U.

Kathleen Tattersall: I think that's so, I mean the stretch, the challenge, the new reporting arrangement for A-star, all of that will actually enhance the value of A-level it seems to me, and A-level has been a remarkably durable qualification. You know, let's not forget it's 58 years ago that A-level came into being, and it's undergone lots of changes which have enabled it to remain kind of a modern qualification and not rooted in the past. But it all depends what's motivating people for wanting to do a Pre-U or in some cases an IGCSE or the Cambridge suite of qualifications and so on, all of that I think may well be rooted in the sort of curriculum that people want to teach, and if that's the case then the choice will be based on solid ground. If it's because they fear that A-level doesn't discriminate enough then the measures which are now being taken to improve A-level should answer those critics.

Richard: Yeah. We often, probably I'm guilty of it in my newspaper as well actually, we often talk about the changes to A-levels and making A-levels tougher, do you think that's right?

Kathleen Tattersall: Well as I said about the stretch and challenge, the intention is that the standard of A-level remains the same. There'll be kind of more challenge to students right through the grading scale and it will particularly manifest itself I think at the A-star. I think our job is to try to ensure that there is a consistency of standard across time in spite of the fact that the curriculum changes the nature of examinations change, you know, particularly their form, their format, so that the recent change, six to four units generally within A-level now, and of course if you go back less than ten years the big change from end of course exams to modular exams, and so what we are looking for is consistency, not that something suddenly becomes tougher, or god forbid that it becomes easier, and of course the challenge always is that something becomes easier because it doesn't look quite the same as it used to over the past. And what we've got to be able to demonstrate through the various studies that we do and the investigations we do is that those charges of being easier or tougher aren't based on reality and that we can demonstrate through evidence that we are consistent, and where the evidence doesn't support that, as in the case of science, that we're doing something about it.

Richard: Yeah. The other point that I forgot to raise actually was the point that Gerry Jarvis made during the, well I think it was of A-levels but he said that you actually want to look at the whole grading system of A-levels.

Kathleen Tattersall: That we want to?

Richard: No, no, well I think he said that he would ask Ofqual to do it actually but he may not have done yet actually. No, but, you know, obviously he thought yes you had to look and see what impact the A-star had at the moment but that there's, because of the perception of the exam getting easier more and more students are actually getting higher grades year on year that perhaps you have to look at the whole grading structure and not just the introduction of the A-star.

Kathleen Tattersall: Well I mean in terms of the studies we do, and they're obviously retrospective studies based on the whole package of an examination. You know, for example science was based on what had happened in 2008, it was the syllabus looked at, the papers, the grading and so on, and any future studies would be based on the same sort of retrospective look at a particular point in time. You do look at whether the grading scheme is being applied appropriately and inline with standards from last year. So I'm quite sure that when we come in the future to be looking at the way in which these first A-level examinations, which are being reported at A-star, have worked out that we'll be looking to ensure that there hasn't been any sort of shift at the lower level grades which are damaging to the concept of carrying forward standards. Because, you know, I suppose people's mindsets, as it were, change once you actually get something new introduced and it's important that they haven't changed to the point where

they have made wrong decisions. So I think that is something we were looking at and if that's what he meant ...

Richard: I think he generally meant making it, you know, moving the barrier up for gaining a C grade ...

Kathleen Tattersall: Kind of, what's the word I want? Recalibrating is it?

Richard: That's the word. Yeah, that's the word.

Kathleen Tattersall: Recalibrating?

Richard: Yeah.

Kathleen Tattersall: Well, certainly not part of our plan at the moment, it might be something which is occasionally talked about as a theoretical possibilities, but I think we'd have to think very carefully before we do something of that kind because while there might be some plusses insofar as you kind of have a clean sheet all of a sudden and this is the benchmark now and you move from there and that's where you actually point back to, there'd also be some downsides in a world where people of all ages, including yourself Richard, will be seeking a university place with grades which are based on a different premise.

Richard: Yeah, I'd be all right because I was under the old system.

Kathleen Tattersall: Oh well you see, standards were high. Or indeed of course universities wouldn't even bother about you're A-levels these days you're a mature student, life experience, you'd be there, you'd be in. But no in all seriousness I mean one of the whole points about standards over time is that you have a consistency which is understood by those who use qualifications. Once you move into an area for recalibration, for whatever good reason there might be, and I can't at this moment, I personally am not so enamoured of it but there must be some ...

Richard: No, actually, I can accept the way you put that argument that if you've got somebody who took A-levels three years ago coming to you and somebody who took them now the person who took them now, if you'd recalibrated, the person who took them now with lower grades might actually have done better than the person, yeah.

Kathleen Tattersall: Well, exactly, and also, you know, I mean do you need a conversion chart, you know, one of these things that we all carried around when we were converting from feet and inches into centimetres and the lot, you know, metre, centimetres, do you need it, you know what I mean?

Richard: Yeah.

Kathleen Tattersall: It's messy in my judgement. So I'm not enamoured of the thought but I can understand why it's a concept, which is talked about, and I know Isabel spoke about it at ...

Richard: Actually I do, yeah.

Kathleen Tattersall: I had a meeting about a year ago, floating theoretical possibilities but, you know, theoretical possibilities once press reports become fact.

Richard: Yeah and then it's a u-turn if it doesn't happen actually.

Kathleen Tattersall: And then it's a u-turn if it doesn't happen. You know, this one here is quite firmly looking ahead not thinking about oh let's recalibrate it there must be something wrong, I don't think that.

Richard: Yeah. That's fine as far as I'm concerned.

Kathleen Tattersall: Great.

Richard: That's great.

Kathleen Tattersall: As ever Richard it's so nice to see you.

Richard: And you, yeah.