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No second chance [1]

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Some universities have declared they will ignore the results of A-level resits, writes Jack Grimston in the Sunday Times. Students will have to pass them first time. Since between a third and a half of students resit papers, this will have quite an effect. The medical school at UCL and Bath University's prestigious architecture course are among those implementing this policy.

One can see their point, given the large numbers gaining 3 A-levels. How are universities to pick the most talented among so many who qualify? Other institutions are demanding the new A*, with Churchill College at Cambridge being the first to demand two A*s to qualify.

Yet there is another factor. This new policy basically tells students that they only get one chance. A-levels already subject them to immense pressures, and the new policy will only increase them. It rules out the idea that you can have another go, and puts all the eggs in the basket of your first attempt.

Not everyone does get it right first time. F1 drivers get more than one practice lap; high jumpers get more than one shot at it. Not everything in life works perfectly first time out. We learn from our mistakes and we improve on our efforts.

Some university admissions tutors tell me that they already question resit passes, asking the candidates what made them under-perform the first time. This seems reasonable, for there is often a reason. But the idea that you cannot learn and try again, and that second attempts don't count, is not a message we should be putting across.

Life itself is not like that. Sometimes you get it wrong and come back for another go, experienced now and wiser, and you make a go of it. Ask Lord Mandelson.

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