

# **Recognition & Equivalency Help Pack**

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## Comparison of International A and AS Level with UK GCE A and AS Level

### Background to International A Level and Advanced Subsidiary Qualifications

The starting point for any comparison between the two types of GCE qualification is to understand that the International A Level and Advanced Subsidiary qualification was created as a GCE examination for international use, specifically because the UK A Level examination was perceived as unsuitable (primarily because of its anglo-centricity) by international schools. It follows from this that, while the academic demands or 'standards' of the International A Level are equivalent to those of the UK A Level, small differences exist in syllabus content and schemes of assessment.

### Key Facts – How CIE International AS and A Levels differ from UK AS and A Levels

1. Specifically designed to suit the needs of an international student body.
  - Contexts or examples used in syllabuses and question papers are culturally sensitive in an international context.
  - In some cases, country-specific variants developed to meet local needs, for example in Brunei a suite of Religious Studies A Levels focussing on Islam and the Quran.
  - Used as the national qualifications in a number of countries, for example Singapore, Mauritius and Brunei.
2. Much wider range of subjects available, for example the wide range of languages offered.
3. With a few exceptions, retakes of individual papers components are not permitted - candidates must retake the whole A or AS Level examination, as it is essentially not modular. Most A Level syllabuses are divided into an AS part and an 'A2' part (which candidates typically cover in the second year of a two-year course), but they are not further fragmented into modules.
4. Many CIE candidates take all papers of the A Level course in the same examination session, usually at the end of the second year of study.

### UCAS UK Qualifications Handbook Entry

*Cambridge International A and AS Levels*

*Acceptable at grades A\* - E in lieu of UK GCE A and AS Level on a subject-for-subject and grade-for-grade basis.*

*It should be noted that the Cambridge International A Levels are different in structure from the UK A Levels. Whereas the UK A and AS Levels are modular and students can retake individual components, the International A Levels have a linear structure which encourages a more integrated study of the entire subject. Most candidates take all their A Level papers in one session. Candidates who take AS Level first and then want to retake it must generally take the whole of the AS.*

### Equivalence of Grades

The following table gives the grade equivalencies between International A Level and the UK A Level.

International A Level	UK A Level
A*	A*
A	A
B	B
C	C
D	D
E	E
U	U

Please note that the A\* grade is not awarded at AS Level.

The content of International A Levels maps closely on UK specifications, but they are principally designed to meet the requirements of an international customer base.



## Comparison of AICE and A Level/AS Level

### Background to AICE

The Advanced International Certificate of Education (AICE) is a 'group' award. It offers an international pre-university curriculum and examination system which emphasises the value of broad and balanced study for academically able students. It requires the study of subjects selected from three curriculum areas – Mathematics and Sciences, Languages, and Arts and Humanities. A wide range of subjects is available from the International A and AS Level qualifications.

Performance which meets the requirements of the group award will receive the AICE Diploma. The full AICE Diploma is awarded on the basis of a points system, as shown in the table below.

DOUBLE-CREDIT STUDY (A double credit = one A Level)		FULL CREDIT-STUDY (Single credit = one AS qualification)		HALF-CREDIT STUDY	
Grade	Points	Grade	Points	Grade	Points
A*	140	A*	<i>n/a</i>	A*	<i>n/a</i>
A	120	A	60	A	30
B	100	B	50	B	25
C	80	C	40	C	20
D	60	D	30	D	15
E	40	E	20	E	10

Candidates who meet the requirements of the group award will receive a Diploma at one of three levels: Pass, Merit or Distinction on the basis of their overall AICE score, see below.

AICE Diploma with Distinction awarded to candidates with a score in the range:	320 – 360 points
AICE Diploma with Merit awarded to candidates with a score in the range:	220 – 315 points
AICE Diploma -Pass Level awarded to candidates with a score in the range:	120 – 215 points

NOTE: Candidates who fail the AICE Diploma will still receive a GCE Certificate reporting their performance in AS and A Level syllabuses and an AICE Half Credit certificate where applicable.

AICE students obtain academic credit equivalent to Passes in three A Levels or six AS Levels.

Please refer to the website for more information on <http://www.cie.org.uk/qualifications/academic/uppersec/aice>

## Comparison of Cambridge Pre-U with UK GCE A Level

### Background to the Cambridge Pre-U

The Cambridge Pre-U was developed in response to requests from UK schools who were concerned, as were many in Higher Education, about the impact of modularity on UK A Levels and wanted a qualification designed to address the issues raised by HE; a qualification that would specifically focus on preparing students for higher education. In order to develop the Cambridge Pre-U an extensive consultation was held with schools, subject associations, HEIs and the UCAS Curriculum and Development Group.

### Educational values of the Cambridge Pre-U

- Encouraging the development of well-informed, open and independent-minded individuals
- Promoting deep understanding through subject specialisation, with a depth and rigour appropriate to progression to higher education
- Helping learners to acquire specific skills of problem-solving, critical thinking, creativity, team-working, independent learning and effective communication
- Recognising the wide range of individual talents and interests
- Promoting an international outlook and cross-cultural awareness

### Structure of the Cambridge Pre-U

The linear approach of Cambridge Pre-U (with exams taken at the end of the two-year course) provides for coherence and progression. Cambridge Pre-U syllabuses can be taken separately, and are graded individually. Students may choose to combine them to achieve a full diploma.

To qualify for the full diploma a student must pass in three Principal Subjects and the Global Perspectives and Independent Research (GPR). One or two A Levels may be substituted for Principal Subjects.

There is freedom to choose subject combinations without constraint. To qualify for the Diploma, students study at least three Principal Cambridge Pre-U subjects from a choice of 26.

There are also additional Short Courses available in Languages and Mathematics.

### Equivalence of Grades

The following table shows the grading for the Principal Subjects, Short Courses and GPR and where the grades are aligned to A Levels:

Pre-U Grade	A Level
D1	
D2	A*
D3	A
M1	
M2	
M3	
P1	
P2	
P3	E
U	U

The UCAS tariff for A and AS Levels and Cambridge Pre-U is as follows:

UCAS Tariff points	Cambridge Pre-U Principal Course	Cambridge Pre-U Short Course	Cambridge Pre-U Global Perspectives and Research	A Level	AS Level
TBD	D1	D1, D2	D1		
145	D2				
140			D2	A*	
130	D3				
126			D3		
120				A	
115	M1				
112			M1		
110					
101	M2				
100				B	
98			M2		
90					
87	M3				
84			M3		
80				C	
73	P1				
70			P1		
60		D3		D	A
59	P2				
56			P2		
53		M1			
50					B
46	P3	M2			
43					
42			P3		
40				E	C
39		M3			
35					
32		P1			
30					D
27					
26		P2			
20		P3			E
11					

NOTE:

- **TBD**= To be determined
- The tariff score reflects the qualification's utility for higher education
- Points scores can be aggregated from different qualifications, e.g. A Level and Pre-U.
- There is no ceiling to the number of points which can be accumulated, thereby recognising the full breadth and depth of students' achievements.
- There will be no double counting, e.g. students cannot count a grade for an AS Level if they then go on to complete the full A Level and gain a pass grade.
- Tariff points for D1 in Principal Subjects and D1 and D2 in the Short courses will be assigned after there is candidate evidence.

It is not obligatory for Higher Education to use the tariff but they are encouraged to do so. Entry requirements expressed as points scores may also be qualified to require a minimum level of depth, for example, two A Level passes and/or achievement in specified subject, e.g. 100 points or grade B in Mathematics A Level.

For further information on entrance to UK universities please consult the UCAS website at [www.ucas.com](http://www.ucas.com).

**For more information on Cambridge Pre-U visit the website at :**  
<http://www.cie.org.uk/qualifications/academic/uppersec/preu>

## Comparison of IGCSE and UK GCSE

### Background to IGCSE

The starting point for any comparison between the two types of GCSE qualification is to understand that IGCSE was created as a GCSE examination for international use, specifically because the UK GCSE examination was perceived as unsuitable (primarily because of its anglo-centricity) by international schools. It follows from this that, while the academic demands or 'standards' of IGCSE are equivalent to those of GCSE, significant differences exist in syllabus content and schemes of assessment.

For example, it was recognised that many international Centres would not, for a variety of reasons, be able to offer coursework; in most IGCSE subjects it is therefore optional. It was also appreciated that the majority of IGCSE candidates would not have English as their first language. This, and broader issues of possible cultural bias, led to the use of IGCSE teachers in many subjects as moderators of question papers.

In short, IGCSE examinations are tailored for a multi-cultural, multi-lingual audience in a way that UK GCSE examinations are not. Grade for grade, though, they are aligned to the standards of the UK GCSE, and this has always been recognised as the case by 'users' of the qualifications. UCAS and universities in the UK and overseas recognise IGCSE qualifications as equivalent grade for grade with UK GCSE qualifications.

IGCSE syllabuses have been developed to support modern curriculum development, and to encourage good teaching practice. They set internationally recognised standards (equivalent to British GCSE). IGCSEs can be taken as individual subjects or as qualifications towards the International Certificate of Education (ICE), which is awarded for seven IGCSE passes, including two from Group I subjects and one from each Group II to VII subjects. (For a list of these subjects and groups, please request a copy of the IGCSE brochure.)

### Features of IGCSE

- IGCSE is aimed at a wide ability range of students, with a range of grades awarded from A\* (highest grade) to G (lowest). There is a core (C to G) and extended (A\* to E) curriculum available in some subjects, as with the UK GCSE.
- IGCSE uses a variety of assessment techniques to test oral and practical skills, initiative and problem-solving, and application of skills, knowledge and understanding.
- A coursework option is available in many syllabuses, allowing Centres an element of personal choice and giving teachers the chance to share in the process of assessment.
- Candidates are rewarded for positive achievement (what they know, understand, and can do).
- IGCSE prepares for progression to employment, or to further study. It prepares students very well for Cambridge International A and AS Levels as well as the IB Diploma.

### Differences in Content and Assessment

- Significant differences exist in syllabus content and schemes of assessment.
- Most IGCSE subjects have an optional coursework element, whereas with many GCSE subjects it is compulsory.
- The content of IGCSE subjects is tailored to the multi-cultural, multi-lingual audience they serve, in a way the UK GCSE does not.
- IGCSE subjects can be taken as individual subjects or as qualifications towards the International Certificate of Education, unlike UK GCSEs.



### Equivalence of Grades

The following table gives the grade equivalencies between IGCSE and the UK GCSE.

IGCSE	UK GCSE
A*	A*
A	A
B	B
C	C
D	D
E	E
F	F
G	G
U	U



## **Equivalence of Higher International GCSE (HIGCSE)**

### **Features and Background of HIGCSE**

Initially HIGCSE evolved in Southern Africa (1995) to meet the needs of students in Namibia who traditionally sought entrance to university courses in South Africa. As a benchmark, it was pitched at the level of the Senior Certificate (Higher Grade) examination in South Africa taken after 12 years of schooling. HIGCSE was designed specifically to meet the needs of senior secondary education in Southern Africa and is recognised by Higher Education South Africa (HESA). As Namibia has now developed its own examination system HIGCSE will be withdrawn as from 2010.

### **Standards and Equivalency**

HIGCSE is an extension of the IGCSE curriculum. It requires a one-year course of study beyond IGCSE and the exam is offered after 12 years of schooling. It is designed as a broad five- or six-subject curriculum to prepare students for university entrance for three-year degrees (ordinary) or four-year degrees (honours). The content/standard of HIGCSE would take students to approximately one year below A Levels (year 13), half way between 16-plus and 18-plus qualifications in the UK. The nearest UK equivalents would therefore be AS Levels and Scottish Higher.

HIGCSE is also accepted for direct entrance to universities in Australia and North America and elsewhere where a qualification for entry to four-year degree courses is required. In the UK a bridging course of one year is usually required for students seeking entrance to three-year honours degree courses.

The definition of HIGCSE standards is what an IGCSE student would be able to achieve after an additional year's study HIGCSE is graded 1 (highest) to grade 4 (lowest) for certification purposes. Those who proceed from IGCSE to HIGCSE could expect to obtain the following after one further year of study. The correlation of IGCSE grades against HIGCSE is as follows:

- HIGCSE grade 1 – what a student with IGCSE grade A in that subject could be expected to achieve after a further year's study
- HIGCSE grade 2 – IGCSE grade B + one year
- HIGCSE grade 3 – IGCSE grade C + one year
- HIGCSE grade 4 – IGCSE grade E + one year

However, it is possible to offer HIGCSE on its own for those who have successfully completed 11 years of formal schooling, e.g. have completed O Levels or other appropriate examinations. This equivalence has been accepted by the relevant authorities in South Africa, and it is now possible for students with a combination of IGCSE/HIGCSE grades to satisfy South African university entrance requirements.

## Comparison of IGCSE and O Level Qualifications

### Background to International GCSE (IGCSE)

IGCSE syllabuses have been developed to support modern curriculum development, and to encourage good teaching practice. They set internationally recognised standards (equivalent to British GCSE and to GCE O levels). IGCSEs can be taken as individual subjects or as qualifications towards the International Certificate of Education (ICE), which is awarded for seven IGCSE passes, including two from Group I subjects and one from each Group II to VII subjects. (For a list of these subjects and groups, please request a copy of the IGCSE brochure).

### Features of IGCSE

- IGCSE is aimed at a wide ability range of students, with a range of grades awarded from A\* (highest grade) to G (lowest). There is a core (C to G) and extended (A\* to C) curriculum available in some subjects.
- IGCSE uses a variety of assessment techniques to test oral and practical skills, initiative and problem-solving, and application of skills, knowledge and understanding.
- A coursework option is available in many syllabuses, allowing Centres an element of personal choice and giving teachers the chance to share in the process of assessment.
- Candidates are rewarded for positive achievement (what they know, understand, and can do).
- IGCSE prepares for progression to employment, or to further study. It prepares students very well for Cambridge International A and AS Levels.

### Features of O Level

O Level shares some of these features, but the following differences should be noted:

- O Level candidates are only awarded grades from A\* to E, where A\* is the highest achievable grade.
- O level offers fewer coursework options than IGCSE.
- Some O Level syllabuses were developed to meet specific local needs, such as minority languages.
- The focus of O level languages is on writing and reading skills
- There are more restricted practical test options in O Level sciences. (These constraints are advantageous to some teaching Centres where resources are limited, no oral examiner is available, etc).

### Differences in Content and Assessment

The example below, comparing IGCSE and O Level Mathematics, outlines some of the differences between the two qualifications:

- For IGCSE Maths, candidates can do coursework if they want to (it is available with or without coursework), whereas for O Level there is no coursework.
- IGCSE has core and extended options (grades C to G and A\* to E available respectively), O Level has grades A\* to E available.
- O Level Maths has a non-calculator paper whereas IGCSE Maths requires a calculator for both papers.
- The examining time is 4.5 hours for O Level Maths compared with 3 hours for core IGCSE Maths and 4 hours for extended IGCSE Maths.
- There is no question choice for IGCSE Maths, while for O Level Maths there is limited question choice in Paper 2.
- O Level Maths question paper weighting is 50% per paper; IGCSE Maths (without coursework) is 35% for the first paper, 65% for the second.



### Equivalence of Grades

The following table gives a broad approximation of grade equivalencies between O Level and IGCSE.

O Level	IGCSE
A*	A*
A	A
B	B
C	C
D	D
E	E
	F
	G

## Comparison of School Certificate and Higher School Certificate with O Level and A Level Grades

### Equivalence of Grades – School Certificate

The individual subjects in the School Certificate are equivalent to O Level grade for grade, but there is sometimes a numerical score present on the certificate.

The equivalence is as follows:

O Level Grade	School Certificate Grade	School Certificate – Numerical Equivalent
A*	A*1	1
A	A2	2
B	B3 or B4	3 and 4
C	C5 or C6	5 and 6
D	D	7
E	E	8
U	U	9

The best six subjects are combined for an aggregate score.

### Equivalence of Grades – Higher School Certificate (HSC)

The principal subject at HSC level is equivalent grade for grade with A Level, but again there is sometimes a numerical score present on the certificate.

The equivalence is as follows:

A Level Grade	Higher School Certificate Grade	Higher School Certificate – Numerical Equivalent
A*	A*	*
A	A	1 and 2
B	B	3
C	C	4
D	D	5
E	E	6
Compensatory AS	Compensatory AS	7-12
U	U	13

HSC can be made up of principal and subsidiary subjects (AL and AS). The subsidiary subjects are normally General Paper and a local language but a compensatory AS Level may be awarded to a candidate who has not achieved the standard required for A level/Principal subjects.

Further information on HSC and SC can be obtained from the Ministry of Education in Mauritius.