

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.

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

Changes to the A and AS Level Structure

The subject content of each of the new A level syllabuses has been subdivided into two parts: the AS syllabus content which is expected to be covered in the first half of the course and part two of the syllabus, commonly referred to as A2 which is covered in the second half of the course.

The syllabuses are designed to provide more flexibility, with the new AS Level examination available for first examination in 2001 and the A2 examination in 2002.

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 |
| B | B |
| C | C |
| D | D |
| E | E |
| U | U |

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

| International AS Level | UK AS Level |
|------------------------|-------------|
| A | A |
| B | B |
| C | C |
| D | D |
| E | E |
| U | U |

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 new AICE and A Level/AS Level

Background to AICE

The Advanced International Certificate of Education (AICE), first introduced in 1994, 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 including the International A and AS Level qualifications.

Changes for 2002 Assessment

A number of changes were introduced into the existing award for first examination in 2002 in line with the introduction of *Curriculum 2000* in the UK and the introduction of revised A and AS Level qualifications.

With effect from June 2002, performance which meets the requirements of the group award will receive the AICE Diploma. The new tariff for the AICE Diploma has been re-calculated to bring it into line with changes to the university admission points score for post-16 qualifications which came into effect for students applying to universities in 2002. 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 | 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 and above
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 do not meet the requirements of the group award will receive a certificate recording the individual subject results. This certificate may declare the results either as an achievement within the AICE group award or as A/AS Level performance as required.

The AICE programme continues to carry academic equivalence to a benchmark performance indicated by the study of three A Levels.

Please refer to AICE brochure for more details on subject availability.

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 many 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.

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 (minimum 5 subjects) or a combination of HIGCSE and IGCSE is accepted by the South African Universities and Vice-chancellors' Association (SAUVCA) for university entrance. HIGCSE was designed specifically to meet the needs of senior secondary education in Southern Africa and elsewhere where a qualification for entry to four-year degree courses is required.

Standards and Equivalency

HIGCSE has considerable potential as a qualification throughout the Southern Africa region but it is also accepted for direct entrance to universities in Australia and North America. 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 (not that they generally do an extra year – they simply take an accelerated course). 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. This gives HIGCSE considerable potential as a qualification throughout the Southern Africa region. HIGCSE is equivalent to the South African Matric (Higher Grade), taken after 12 years of school education. HIGCSE is also suitable for direct entry into four-year university degree courses (honours) or three year technician courses in South Africa.

Equivalency with A Level?

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.



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 (D to G) and extended (A* to C) curriculum available in many 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.
- There is less oral and listening assessment in O Level languages than in IGCSE languages, and 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 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 |
| 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 and 2 |
| B | B | 3 and 4 |
| C | C | 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 | 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.

Pakistan

GCE certificates issued in Pakistan have a percentage score next to the letter grade – this is a special scale used for Pakistan only.

Comparison of Cambridge International Diplomas and CIE General Qualifications (GQs)

Cambridge International Diplomas can be taken at five different levels:

- Foundation
- Standard
- Advanced
- Professional
- Higher professional

Three of these levels – Foundation, Standard and Higher – can be compared to CIE GQs. Candidates taking a Diploma at these Levels are awarded a Pass or Distinction. The table below gives the equivalence of a Pass and a Distinction in the Foundation, Standard and Advanced Level Diplomas with CIE GQs.

| Cambridge International Diploma Level | GQ Grade Equivalent | Related UK Qualifications |
|--|---|--|
| Foundation Distinction Pass | IGCSE – C/D IGCSE – E/F | GNVQ Foundation NVQ Level 1 – Semi Skilled |
| Standard Distinction Pass | IGCSE – A*/A, O Level – A IGCSE – C, O Level – C | GNVQ Intermediate NVQ Level 2 – Craft |
| Advanced Distinction Pass | A Level – A/B A Level – C/D | GNVQ Advanced NVQ Level 3 – Technician, Advanced Craft, Supervisor |

At Foundation Level, Diplomas are available in IT, ICT and Office Administration.

At Standard Level, Diplomas are available in IT, ICT, Office Administration, Business, and Travel and Tourism.

At Advanced Level, Diplomas are available in ICT, Office Administration, Business, Travel and Tourism and Computing.