

What is IGCSE? The one-page guide: meaning, boards, grading, subjects, and how it compares with GCSE

IGCSE = International General Certificate of Secondary Education: the international version of the English GCSE, taken at 14 to 16 (Year 10 and 11, grade 9 and 10) in international schools in more than 140 countries.

The facts

Who sets it	Cambridge International (CAIE, 'Cambridge IGCSE', since 1988), Pearson Edexcel ('International GCSE'), Oxford AQA (International GCSE)
Age and years	14 to 16; a two-year course in Years 10 and 11 (UK naming) or grades 9 and 10
Subjects	70+ at Cambridge; students usually take 6 to 10; a typical set is English, maths, two or three sciences, a language, a humanity, plus options
Core and Extended	Cambridge offers two tiers in many subjects: Core (grades C to G) and Extended (A* to E). Edexcel has Foundation and Higher in maths
Exam sessions	Cambridge: June and November (plus March in India). Edexcel: January and June
Assessment	Mostly written exams at the end of the course; coursework or practicals in some subjects; no modular retakes of parts
Group award	ICE (International Certificate of Education): seven Cambridge IGCSEs across five subject groups, at Distinction, Merit or Pass
What comes next	A-levels, the IB Diploma, AP courses, or national Year 12 programmes; universities treat IGCSE like GCSE

Grading

Scale	Grades	Notes
Cambridge, letters	A*, A, B, C, D, E, F, G (U = ungraded)	The traditional scale; still the most common outside the UK
Cambridge, numbers (where chosen)	9 to 1	Offered for schools that want the GCSE 9-1 scale
Edexcel International GCSE	9 to 1	9 is above the old A*; 4 is a standard pass, 5 a strong pass
Rough equivalence	9 = A** / high A*; 8 = A*; 7 = A; 6 = high B; 5 = low B / high C; 4 = C; 3 = D/E; 2 = F; 1 = G	The same mapping the UK uses for GCSE

IGCSE vs GCSE

	IGCSE	GCSE
Where	International schools worldwide; some UK independent schools	State and most independent schools in England, Wales, Northern Ireland
Set by	Cambridge, Pearson Edexcel, Oxford AQA	AQA, Edexcel, OCR, WJEC/Eduqas, CCEA
Regulated by	The boards themselves (not Ofqual)	Ofqual (England)
Content	Same level; some differences in topics (e.g. more international examples, Core/Extended tiers)	Reformed 2015-17 specifications
Coursework	Some subjects offer it; most are exam-only	Mostly exam-only since the reform
Exam sessions	Two or three a year	May/June (November resits in English and maths only)
Is one harder?	Neither is officially harder; universities and employers treat them as equivalent	
Recognition	UK universities, US colleges (as the high school record), Indian universities via AIU equivalence for Class 10	The same

A typical IGCSE timeline

When	What
End of Year 9 / grade 8	Subject choices made (usually 7 to 9 subjects)
Year 10 / grade 9	First year of the two-year course; the syllabus is published and the past papers are the best preparation
Year 11 / grade 10, by November	Mock exams; Core or Extended tier confirmed
May and June (or October and November)	The exams; results in August (or January)
Year 12	A-levels, IB or AP, chosen on the IGCSE results

Questions to ask the school

- [] Which board, and which syllabus code, for each subject?
- [] Core or Extended, and when is the tier decided?
- [] Which exam session, and are retakes possible?
- [] Is the ICE group award offered?
- [] How are IGCSE results used for the Year 12 programme (A-level or IB entry requirements)?

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