

IGCSE vs GCSE: the comparison sheet

	GCSE	IGCSE
Set by	AQA, Pearson Edexcel, OCR, WJEC Eduqas; regulated by Ofqual	Cambridge International and Pearson Edexcel International; not Ofqual-regulated
Taken in	England, Wales, Northern Ireland: state and independent schools	About 150 countries' international schools; many UK independent schools; private candidates
Grading	9 to 1 (4 standard pass, 5 strong pass)	Edexcel 9 to 1; Cambridge A* to G, or 9 to 1 on the 0980-series codes
Tiers	Foundation (5 to 1) and Higher (9 to 4) in maths, sciences, languages	Cambridge Core (C to G) and Extended (A* to E); Edexcel Foundation and Higher in maths
Coursework	Almost none since 2017	Almost none; optional in Cambridge English and a few subjects
Exam sessions	May to June (November resits in English and maths)	May to June and October to November; Edexcel also January in some countries
Practicals	Assessed in the written papers	Assessed in written papers; Cambridge has a practical or alternative-to-practical paper
Recognised by	Universities worldwide; English school performance tables	Universities worldwide; equivalent to GCSE for UK universities and independent schools; not in state school tables

Grade equivalents

9 to 1	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
A* to G	above A*	A*/A	A	B	B/C	C	D/E	E/F	F/G

Is IGCSE harder? Three things true at once

[] The top of IGCSE maths is harder than the top of GCSE maths (Cambridge Extended: sets, functions, a non-calculator paper; Edexcel Higher: basic differentiation)

[] IGCSE English Language is generally easier to score in: predictable tasks, modern texts, which is why UK independent schools choose it

[] The sciences are close; IGCSE questions more direct, GCSE more wrapped in context. Ofqual, UCAS and every UK university treat the two as equivalent

Subject by subject, who should take which, and what to ask the school

Where IGCSE differs from GCSE

Subject	The difference
Mathematics	Cambridge Extended goes beyond GCSE Higher (sets, functions, vectors; non-calculator paper from 2025). Edexcel 4MA1 Higher is closest to GCSE Higher and adds basic differentiation. GCSE has more statistics and context
Sciences	Close; IGCSE slightly more direct. GCSE Combined Science = IGCSE Double Award Science (two grades each)
English Language	IGCSE: international texts, predictable tasks (summary, directed writing, composition), coursework options. GCSE: unseen 19th-century texts and comparison
English Literature	Both set texts and poetry; different lists; IGCSE open-book options
History, Geography	Different set topics; IGCSE's international, GCSE's often British
Languages	IGCSE heavier on reading and writing; GCSE a larger speaking component

Who should take which

Situation	Take
At an international school	IGCSE (the school chooses Cambridge or Edexcel)
Moving to the UK before Year 10	GCSE at a state school; either at an independent
Moving to the UK in Year 11	Finish the IGCSE course, at the school or as a private candidate; switching boards in the last year costs a grade
Moving abroad from the UK mid-course	Edexcel IGCSE, the closest to GCSE; Cambridge Extended maths needs sets and functions taught
Home-educated or private candidate	IGCSE: no coursework or practical endorsement, more sessions, easier private entry

Questions to ask a school

- [] Which board, and which tier, for each subject, and who decides the tier and when?
- [] Which exam session, and is there a November or January resit?
- [] For English: examined route or coursework route?
- [] For the sciences: separate sciences or Double Award, and what practical work is done?
- [] If we move: can my child finish this board's course elsewhere?

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