



Understanding A Levels compared to IB



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What are A Levels?

A Levels are subject-based qualifications usually taken in the final two years of high school (Grades 11 & 12). They are the national qualification of schools in the United Kingdom.

What is the difference between an AS Level and an A Level?

An A Level is the name given to the qualification that the students receive after two years of study.

AS is the first year of A Level. An examination is taken at the end of the first year and the student receives an AS qualification.

A2 is the second year of A Level. A2 examinations are taken at the end of the second year and builds on the knowledge and skills learnt in AS.

AS + A2 = A Level

How are the International A Levels different to those taken in the UK?

They have been created specifically for an international student body with content to suit a wide variety of schools and avoid cultural bias. The contexts or examples used in syllabuses and exam question papers are culturally sensitive in an international context.

What is an Examination Board?

There are several organisations which offer A Levels. These are called Examination Boards. They create the curriculum and the content to be studied and they set the examinations. All the Examination Boards have to meet government standards.

Which Examination Board does Brilliantmont use?

Brilliantmont uses the Cambridge Assessment International Education board. This is a part of the University of Cambridge. We were awarded Fellowship Centre status several years ago.

Who takes Cambridge International AS & A Levels?

Cambridge International AS & A Levels are taken by over 175 000 students in more than 125 countries every year.

Why choose A Levels?

The qualifications aim to develop students' knowledge, understanding and skills through:

- in-depth subject content
- learning to work independently
- applying knowledge and understanding to new as well as familiar situations
- handling and evaluating different types of information sources
- thinking logically and presenting ordered and coherent arguments and explanations
- studying and communicating in English

What is studied at A Level?

For every subject, Cambridge publish a syllabus which clearly details the content which the students must study.

How many A Levels do students usually take?

Most universities require a minimum of three full A Levels, therefore most students take at least three, though some may take more.

What are the examinations like?

The examinations take place in May / June. Typically, students will take several examination papers and language students will take an oral examination.

Where are the examinations taken?

Brilliantmont is a Cambridge International Assessment testing centre, which means that students can take their examinations in the school, under strict examination conditions. Once the exam is finished, all the scripts are sent directly to Cambridge where they are graded by external examiners. Brilliantmont's teachers are not involved in the grading of the A Level examinations.



How are the AS and A Level examinations graded?

Grading and assessment Cambridge's internationally recognised grades are reported with clear guidelines to explain the standards of achievement.

- Cambridge International AS Levels, are graded from A to E. There is no A* grade for Cambridge International AS Levels.
- Cambridge International A Levels are graded from A* (highest) to E (minimum required performance).

Each subject is graded separately and no Grade Point Average is calculated.

Separate certificates are issued for each examination series. Grades are awarded only for subjects that candidates pass.

When are the AS and A Level examination results released?

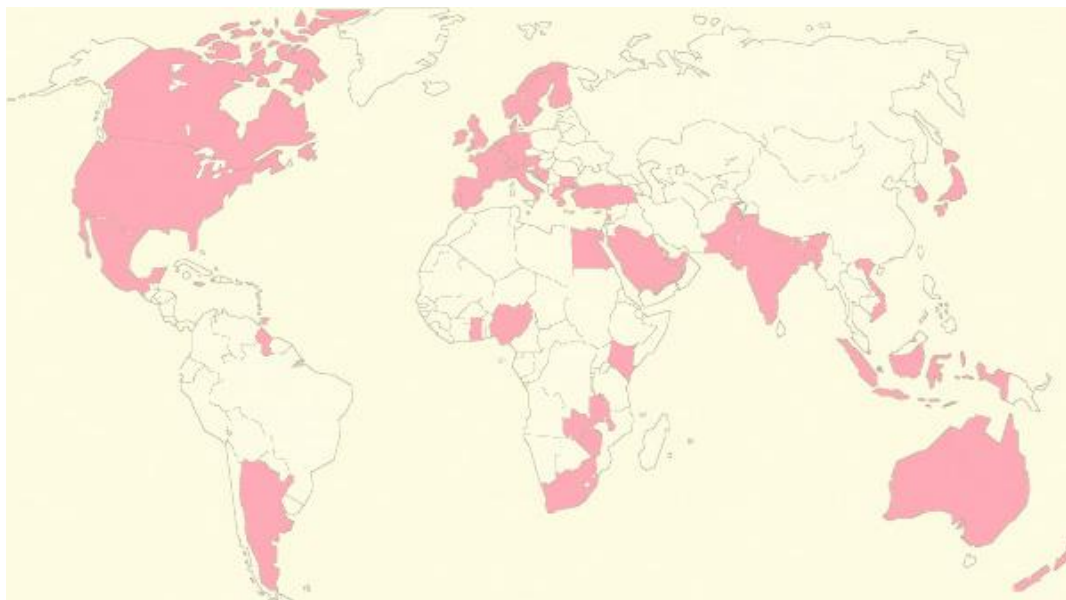
The results are released mid-August.

Are A Levels recognised across the world?

Cambridge qualifications are recognised and valued by universities all around the world, including in the US, the UK, Australia, Canada, Germany and beyond. In a 2018 survey of higher education admissions tutors at the world's universities, 100 per cent of respondents said Cambridge programmes give students excellent preparation for university.

In the UK, all universities accept Cambridge qualifications.

The map below shows countries where A Levels are accepted in the world. However, this is changing rapidly because A Level is the fastest growing qualification in the world.



To get the most up to date information about the recognition of A Levels, take a look at the Cambridge recognition database at www.cambridgeinternational.org/recognitionsearch

What happens if a student wants to apply to a university which is not listed in the Cambridge recognition database?

Many more universities than just those listed on the database will also be happy to accept Cambridge qualifications upon application as proof of academic ability.

What A Level grades do I need to go to university?

Each university decides which A Level grades a student needs to achieve in order to enter. This information can be found in the Admissions section of the university website or by contacting the university's Admissions office.

It is very important to remember that university entry is always competitive so achieving the minimum entry requirements is not a guarantee of admission. The higher the grades and the stronger the application documents, the better the chance of a student being accepted on his /her chosen course.

Do I need to take an English test to go to university or are my A Levels enough?

Students need to be aware of any language requirements in addition to the academic entry standards. They may need to show evidence of their English language ability if English is not their first language, such as an IELTS or TOEFL test.

What about applying to Universities in Switzerland with A Levels? Are they accepted?

Often, our students are with us for several years. They like the Swiss lifestyle and fall in love with the country so much that they decide they would like to continue their university study here. This is wonderful news and makes us happy that we won't lose sight of them!

Each university in Switzerland defines the examination grades it requires for entrance, so it is important to check each website.

The website Swiss Universities centralises much of the information regarding Admissions.

<https://www.swissuniversities.ch/en/topics/studying/admission-to-universities/international-advanced-level-international-gcse>

Specific subject combinations are required, so it is important to make the decision to apply to a Swiss university relatively early on.

- International Advanced Level (IAL) + International GCSE (IGCSE) or International Advanced Subsidiary Level (IAS)

with the following general education subjects

1. First language (native language)
2. Second language
3. Mathematics
4. Natural sciences (biology, chemistry or physics)
5. Humanities and social sciences (geography, history or economics/law)
6. Elective (one subject from category 2, 4 or 5 or computer science or philosophy. Computer science and philosophy can only be chosen as a sixth subject)

Language skills and/or exams under reserve

Which grades are required for entry?

Each university in Switzerland defines the examination grades it requires for entrance, so it is important to check each website.

What about applying to Colleges in the United States with A Levels? Do the US Colleges like them?

Over 600 universities in the US accept Cambridge International AS & A Levels, including all Ivy League and Ivy Plus universities. These universities include Brown, Harvard, MIT, Stanford and Yale. Colleges will often give credit for the first year of study. This means that students commence directly with second year courses. This means a shorter study programme which means less fees.

“Students we have who have taken Cambridge International A Levels do very well at our campus. They are very well-prepared for our curriculum and we find that they have a lot of confidence, but also that they have a good, deep subject knowledge, [and] the ability to think critically and well.”

Stuart Schmill, Dean of Admissions, Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), US

“We have been impressed by the depth and breadth of knowledge exhibited by Cambridge students. They arrive on campus well-prepared and excited about learning, regardless of where they come from in the world.”

Greg Roberts, Dean of Admissions, University of Virginia, USA

Where can I find out more about recognition?

This video from Cambridge talks about recognition in the USA

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O2UH_9wVWkQ&list=PL390NZtWYTBBjGdy3-A6lu6v41WYn1UEN&index=7&t=0s

This video from Cambridge talks about how International A Levels set you up for university

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ogW-luIDpO4&list=PL390NZtWYTBBjGdy3-A6lu6v41WYn1UEN&index=8&t=0s>

This video from Cambridge explains International A Levels.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3mmRdQgqwaQ&list=PL390NZtWYTBBjGdy3-A6lu6v41WYn1UEN&index=4&t=0s>

What is the IB Diploma?

The IB Diploma Programme is slightly younger than the A Levels. It is an international diploma and is not specifically linked to the national curriculum of a particular country.

When do students study for the IB Diploma?

It prepares students in the final two years of school (Grades 11, 12).

What subjects are taken at IB?

There are five themed groups of subjects. Each group contains several subjects.

Group 1 – Language and literature

Group 2 – Language acquisition

Group 3 – Humanities

Group 4 – Sciences

Group 5 – Mathematics

Group 6 – The Arts

Students must choose one subject from each of the five groups (1 to 5) & either an arts subject from group 6, or a second subject from groups 1 to 5.

Students must take at least three and no more than four subjects at a higher level and the other subjects are taken at standard level.

What else do students need to prepare?

In addition to the subjects chosen, students must also:

-Write an Extended essay: research study on a subject of choice

-Study the Theory of knowledge

-Undertake a minimum number of hours of Creativity, action, service (CAS)

How is the IB graded?

Students take written examinations which are graded by external examiners. The Diploma is awarded to students who gain at least 24 points. The highest total of points is 45. Three points are available for the extended essay.

Where is the IB recognised for entry to university?

IB is recognised in many countries across the world. To learn more on IB recognition information at the national level, [read about the IB by country](#). Universities around the world admit students based on their IB score and many have specific admissions policies and guidelines for IB students. Students need to check directly with the university to see the number of points required to access their chosen course of study.

Why does Brillantmont prefer A Levels to IB?

A Levels offer students flexibility and choice.

In the IB, the programme is fixed and students have to study a range of subjects, including those which they may not enjoy. With A Levels, students get to choose three, four or even five subjects, which they can study in depth. They can focus on subjects they like and enjoy and not be pulled down by having to study subjects they don't want to study.

Example 1: if you know that you would like to study Medicine, you need to focus on Science and Maths. This is possible with the A Levels. In the IB programme, it would be impossible to do this, because you need to study a range of subjects.

Example 2: if you know that you would like to study Art and Design, you would choose Art A Level and 2 or 3 other subjects. You would not need to continue studying Maths and Science, whereas with the IB programme, you would.

A Levels prepare students for university

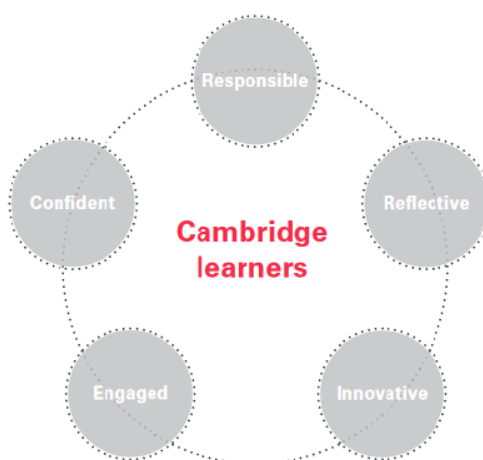
A Levels are recognised all over the world. Universities will specify the grades and the subjects required to enrol in their degree programmes. The depth of study and the autonomy that students take for their learning, prepare them for university.

“Our experience is that Cambridge Advanced qualifications such as Cambridge International AS & A Levels are consistently robust and reliable and prepare students very well for higher education.”
(Admissions Officer, University of Newcastle, UK)

A Levels develop the attributes that we promote in our Vision of Learning

We want students to be:

- Confident in working with information and ideas
- Responsible for themselves, responsive to and respectful of others
- Reflective as learners, developing their ability to learn
- Innovative and equipped for new and future challenges
- Engaged intellectually and socially ready to make a difference



(courtesy www.cie.org.uk/alevel)

Some people say that IB is much harder than A Levels and is a better choice for strong academic students. Is this true?

No, this is not true. At Brillantmont, we have students who are very academically strong and who achieve high A Level grades, later entering top-ranking universities. The amount of independent work and study required at A Level to get those high grades is massive and it is unfair to our students' and teachers' efforts to suggest that A Levels are an easy option!

Many people think that the Community Service aspect of IB is appealing. Why do A Levels not do this?

At Brillantmont, we think Community Service is very important. We have many opportunities to get involved in this – the weekly Soup Kitchen commitment, ecological projects, Habitat for Humanity and others. However, we do not impose this in order for students to simply get their diploma!

We feel strongly that wanting to give something back to others is a personal choice and they should not be forced to do this. Our positive encouragement means that we have a very high level of engagement.

If a student is academically good all round, won't they be held back by A Levels?

No, because if a student is very strong academically, he or she will take a wider range of A Levels – perhaps even five. This is absolutely possible. Many of our students leave with more than three A Levels because we want to challenge them intellectually.

Our timetabling and our personalised approach to learning means that every student can take the class that they would like.



(updated May 2020)