

Benchmarking the Edexcel International A Level Executive Summary

Submitted to Pearson Education Ltd by UK NARIC

The National Recognition Information Centre for the United Kingdom

The national agency responsible for providing information and expert opinion on
qualifications and skills worldwide

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Commercial in confidence

Context and Scope

Pearson has offered a self-regulated suite of Edexcel International A Levels (IALs) since 2013, alongside Ofqual accredited GCE A Levels. The updating of IAL content and assessment takes account of the in-depth research conducted for the subjects offered as part of the GCE qualification reform in the UK. This ensures both qualifications incorporate the most up-to-date thinking and best-practice regarding content and assessment. The IALs however retain their modular structure, with three examination series in January, June and October. IALs will continue to be assessed by written examinations with students able to re-sit individual units; whilst GCE A Levels are now offered as linear qualifications with one examination series in June.

In this context, UK NARIC has been commissioned by Pearson to conduct an independent benchmarking exercise to evaluate the comparability of the new modular IALs against the reformed national GCE A Level.

Methodology

Adopting a well-established approach to credential evaluation, this study comparatively analyses IAL core qualification design components against the GCE A Level, including the IAL's entry requirements, duration and size, content and structure, learning outcomes, assessment, associated outcomes (progression) and quality assurance. Particular consideration is also given to overarching IAL assessment design principles and content development processes to ensure alignment with the GCE reforms. Informing the overall comparative analysis, IALs were examined in Psychology and English Literature in 2016, followed by an analysis of Chemistry, Economics and Mathematics in 2017. Subject-specific analyses provide evidence of the IAL design principles applied in practice.

Key Findings

In conclusion, whilst acknowledging differences between the linear structure of the GCE A Level and the modular IAL, the study finds clear similarities in terms of size, content, learning outcomes and assessment methods between the two awards offered in the selected subjects. In addition, the content demonstrates comparable coverage with the GCE A Level counterparts with the same emphasis on breadth as well as depth while minor identified differences reflect the international focus of the IAL awards.

The IAL and GCE A Levels both adopt the same assessment objectives in English Literature and Psychology with similar weightings. In Chemistry, Economics and Mathematics, IAL and GCE assessment objectives place emphasis on evaluating a comparable range of subject specific skills. A review of sample assessment materials and mark schemes in these subjects also highlighted similarities in the type of questions used and in the cognitive skills and knowledge assessed. As a key design principle, the IALs include the same proportion of synoptic assessment as the GCE A Level, which facilitates overall comparability in terms of demand between the two assessments.

Overall, the IAL qualification design can be considered appropriate for international learners at upper secondary level. Providing a flexible structure and entry routes and internationally relevant content, the IAL can be integrated alongside national provision across different education systems worldwide. Reflecting Pearson's World Class Qualifications Design Principles, IALs also aim to develop a wide range of skills and attributes important for higher education readiness, which facilitate progression to universities internationally. These include organisation, communication, problem solving, research skills and numeracy skills alongside attributes of independence, collaborative working practices and self-reflective thinking.

The development of IAL assessment is underpinned by robust quality assurance processes, enabling a comparable balance to be maintained between low, medium and high demand questions across IAL and GCE examination papers. Secure and transparent marking processes and mark schemes ensure all IAL candidates receive a result deserving of their overall performance. Furthermore, the conduct of the IALs and appeals processes will follow guidelines set out for GCE A Level examinations, published by the Joint Council for Qualifications. Both the GCE and the IAL share a common grading system, with processes in place to ensure that comparable levels of performance are required to score grades from A* to E in both qualifications.

In conclusion, the following level of comparability can be recommended based on the combined findings of this study:

Qualification:	Edexcel International Advanced Level
Awarding Institution:	Pearson Education Ltd
Comparability:	Is considered comparable to GCE A Level standard

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