

Benchmarking the Pearson Edexcel International GCSE



Ecctis has found the Linear and Modular International GCSE, awarded by Pearson Edexcel, comparable to UK GCSE standard.

Context and scope

Pearson Edexcel offer a range of qualifications for UK and international markets. Self-regulated by Pearson, International GCSEs are aimed at 14–16-year-olds and are designed to support progression onto upper secondary. Offered both in the UK and internationally, Pearson Edexcel International GCSEs are designed for students around the world and are adapted for local contexts.

Pearson Edexcel International GCSEs are currently offered in two assessment routes, Linear and Modular. The Modular International GCSE was first introduced in 2023. As such, Ecctis was commissioned by Pearson to conduct an independent evaluation and benchmarking of the Linear and Modular International GCSEs in relation to the UK GCSEs. This follows a benchmarking evaluation in 2019 which found the Linear International GCSE comparable to GCSE standard.

Five International GCSEs were evaluated and compared to their GCSE subject counterparts in terms of their aims, content, learning outcomes (aims and assessment objectives) and assessment. The sample included Chemistry, Geography, English Language A, History and Mathematics A.

Pearson Edexcel International GCSEs

International GCSEs are two-year programmes and consist of 120 guided learning hours (GLH). This sits at Years 10 and 11 in the UK education system. There is a degree of flexibility with the duration, as some students may be able to complete their studies in one year, and the delivery of International GCSEs may be adapted to the needs of various countries' secondary education systems as well as individual schools and candidates.

International GCSEs do not have specific entry requirements. However, certain subjects do have recommended guidelines for levels of prior learning. The International GCSEs help students

prepare for a variety of upper-secondary qualifications, such as (International) A-Levels or (International) BTECs.

Assessment of the International GCSE may be completed in a variety of formats. All assessments are undertaken in the final year of study for the Linear International GCSE, while the Modular International GCSE allows students to spread assessment out over the course of study at the end of individual units. In addition, from 2022, a selection of subjects¹ have become available for assessment via onscreen exams, exams that are available to be taken on a computer or laptop.

Key Findings

In summary, there are evident similarities between the Modular International GCSE, Linear International GCSE and the GCSE in relation to the qualification size, duration, content covered, learning outcomes and assessment across all the subjects.

Whereas the Linear International GCSE and the GCSE employ a linear assessment structure, the Modular International GCSEs employs an alternate assessment structure which enables more flexibility for learners when sitting the examinations. Learners can sit or resit units in any order prior to receiving an overall grade for the qualification. The modular structure was not found to impact the development and assessment of knowledge and skills comparable to GCSE standard.

The assessment of the International GCSEs and GCSEs consists of written examinations that are externally set and marked, with the exception of the Linear International GCSE which offers a coursework component as an alternative to one of the examinations for English Language A.

The content covered in the Modular International GCSEs is the same as the content in Linear

International GCSEs. Although, the International GCSEs are modified for an international audience, the depth and breadth of content covered in each subject reviewed can be considered comparable to the GCSEs.

The assessment objectives demonstrate comparability of scope and the balance of skills being assessed across the different subjects between the GCSE and International GCSE. The Linear and Modular International GCSEs were also found to set the same assessment objectives in each subject, further demonstrating the comparability in the knowledge and skills assessed, regardless of the modular or linear assessment route. The sample assessment materials and associated mark schemes further display the similarities in the volume of assessment, question types and the cognitive skills assessed.

Methodology

Based on Ecctis' well-established methodology for credential evaluation, this independent evaluation and benchmarking study comprised a detailed review of Pearson Edexcel International GCSEs in terms of:

- Entry requirements
- Duration
- Content and structure
- Modes of learning and assessment
- Learning outcomes and assessment objectives
- Associated outcomes.

Quality assurance and control mechanisms and processes were also considered for the International GCSEs paper-based and onscreen assessments for the purposes of Ecctis determining comparability.

¹ Onscreen examinations were first introduced for the International GCSE English Language A and English Literature examinations in 2022 and 2023, and then for Business, Economics and History in 2024.