

*International GCSEs,  
AS and A-levels from OxfordAQA*

# A guide for parents



**Developing skills**  
*Building success.*  
**Accessing universities**  
**worldwide.**

Part of **Oxford** International Programme



# Developing skills. *Building success.* Accessing universities worldwide.

Hello. We are OxfordAQA – a partnership between Oxford University Press, a department of the University of Oxford, and AQA, the UK’s largest provider of GCSEs and A-levels. We bring together over a century of educational expertise with a deep understanding of international learners.

We are delighted to work with schools around the world, helping them ensure that every student has the right foundations to excel – whatever they choose to do next.

We believe that empowering students to think critically, apply their knowledge, and collaborate is crucial for preparing students to progress confidently in their academic journey.

Our qualifications help students develop the skills they’ll need to succeed in exams, thrive at university and be ready for life.

We’ve put together this guide to show parents the benefits of choosing OxfordAQA qualifications for your child.

“

**At OxfordAQA, we want students to achieve success in their exams, so they can access the universities they want and then go on to reach their full potential.** ”

*Andrew Coombe,  
Managing Director, OxfordAQA*



## Contents

<b>An introduction to the British education system</b>	page 3
<b>About OxfordAQA</b>	page 4
<b>Introducing the Oxford International Programme</b>	page 5
<b>Reasons to choose OxfordAQA</b>	page 6
<b>Globally recognised qualifications</b>	page 7
<b>Building skills for the future</b>	page 8
<b>Tailored to the needs of international students</b>	page 9
<b>Our qualifications expertise</b>	page 10
<b>2 Our student-focused approach to assessment</b>	page 11

# *An introduction to the* **British education system**

From the age of 14 in England, students study a broad range of subjects including English, Mathematics, Science, Humanities and Languages.

## **What are GCSEs?**

GCSEs (General Certificate of Secondary Education) are typically taken by students aged 14–16. In England, students usually take 8–10 subjects at GCSE level.

GCSEs are mostly exam-based, with some coursework depending on the subject. Final exams are usually taken at age 16.

GCSEs in England are graded on a scale of 9 (highest) to 1 (lowest). Please see page 10 for more information about the grading scale for GCSE.

## **What are A-levels?**

A-levels are typically taken by students aged 16–18. Students in England usually study 3–4 A-level subjects over two years.

A-levels prepare students for higher education, or specific career paths. They are important for university admissions.

A-levels are graded from A\* (highest) to E (lowest).

AS levels (Advanced Subsidiary) are usually taken over the course of one year as standalone qualifications, or as the first half of a full A-level course. AS levels are recognised by universities.

OxfordAQA AS and A-levels are 'modular', meaning the final AS and A-level grade is made up of several sections, or modules, that can be taken throughout the course. This means that students can re-sit exams for individual modules if they wish to. Modular A-levels are a more flexible option than a 'linear' approach where all exams are taken at the end of the course. You can read more about linear and modular on page 9.

## **International GCSEs and A-levels**

International GCSEs and A-levels are globally recognised qualifications, equivalent to the GCSEs and A-levels taken by students in the UK, but with an international perspective.

The subjects and content offered for International GCSE and A-level can be more relevant to students studying in schools outside the UK.

International GCSEs and A-levels offer an excellent foundation for further study, including at universities worldwide.



# An introduction to the different exam boards

If your child's school is in the Middle East, the Gulf, Asia, Europe or Africa, there are three International GCSE, AS and A-level providers to choose from for the popular subjects. These are OxfordAQA, Cambridge and Pearson Edexcel.

There are also other exam boards providing GCSEs and A-levels for schools in the UK, which are sometimes offered by international schools. These include AQA and Pearson Edexcel.

Ofqual, the exams regulator in England and Wales, does not regulate International GCSEs or A-levels from *any* exam board.

## About OxfordAQA

AQA is the awarding body for OxfordAQA's international qualifications, which means our assessments are designed, marked and processed using the same systems that AQA uses for its UK exams.

OxfordAQA's international qualifications are based on the reformed GCSEs and A-levels taught in the UK. They have been adapted to meet the needs of international students.

OxfordAQA qualifications help students to develop important critical thinking skills, such as analysis and evaluation – essential for ensuring a smooth progression to undergraduate study, and beyond.

“

**Benchmarked to UK standards, our exams only ever test subject ability, not language skills or cultural knowledge. This gives every student the best possible chance to show what they can do and get the results they deserve**”

*Jamie Kirkaldy,  
Head of Teaching and Learning Support, OxfordAQA*



## Celebrating excellence with the Go Further Awards

Every year, our prestigious Go Further Awards celebrate the successes of the top performing OxfordAQA students from around the world. Awards for Top in Country, Top in Region and Top in World are given to students achieving the highest marks for their subject.

Congratulations to all our winners!

*Find out more  
about the  
Go Further Awards*



# International education that goes *further*

OxfordAQA is part of the Oxford International Programme – combining the Oxford International Curriculum with OxfordAQA qualifications, creating a whole-school approach for international schools, from Early Years to A-level.

The world is changing, and education must evolve to ensure your children are prepared for whatever the future holds.

The Oxford International Programme offers a flexible approach to learning, guiding students from age 2 to 19 through the Oxford International Curriculum and OxfordAQA – empowering students to make a meaningful impact, and equipping them with the skills and attitudes needed for academic, career, and personal success.

The Oxford International Programme develops learners who are:



## Empowered & independent

Our students are independent, critical thinkers who are adaptable and look to develop strategies to be lifelong learners. They are confident leading on projects but also work well in a collaborative environment.

## Inventive & curious

Our students are inventive, resourceful, and creative. They question the world around them with a sense of wonder, and aspire to shape a better future for themselves and their community.

## Future-ready

Our students are more prepared to succeed in the world that lies ahead and have the knowledge, skills, and drive to achieve any objective they may set themselves. They are comfortable being challenged, acquiring new skills quickly, and seeking new adventures.

## Ambitious & self-motivated

Our students are ambitious and want to strive for success in every aspect of their lives. They take the initiative, approaching every task with an eagerness to learn and take ownership of their own learning with the utmost integrity.

The Oxford International Programme Learner Attributes

Join us in nurturing a brighter future where your children can strive, thrive, and find joy in their educational journey.



# Reasons to choose *OxfordAQA*

International schools will have many reasons for selecting an exam board. They will consider the content of the specifications, the approach to assessment, along with the support provided for teachers.

Schools don't have to use just one exam board, they can choose different exam boards for different subjects. Universities worldwide recognise and accept students with results from multiple exam boards.

As a parent, we know that your focus will be on ensuring your child achieves the best possible outcomes to prepare them for further study, and the world beyond.

Here are some of the reasons why international schools choose OxfordAQA as their exam board.





# Our qualifications are *globally recognised*



One of the most important aspects of any qualification is how it is recognised by higher education institutions and employers.

International A-levels, including those from OxfordAQA, are widely recognised and valued by universities around the world for entry onto undergraduate degree programmes. Students with OxfordAQA qualifications have progressed to leading universities worldwide.

UK ENIC, the independent body responsible for benchmarking academic qualifications from across the globe, confirmed that all OxfordAQA qualifications are equivalent to the UK's domestic GCSEs and A-levels accredited by the national examinations' regulator, Ofqual.

*Our qualifications are recognised by the top 100 universities ranked by QS<sup>®</sup>, including the **British Russell Group**, the **American Ivy League** and the **Australian Group of Eight**.*

The QS<sup>®</sup> World University Rankings portfolio is the world's most popular source of comparative data about university performance.

Every year, hundreds of thousands of UK school-leavers enrol in top global universities with AQA certificates.

Since AQA is the awarding body for all OxfordAQA qualifications, your child's certificate will carry the same weight as the AQA certificates used by UK school-leavers.

In some countries, the Ministry of Education formally recognises international qualifications, providing guidance for public university admissions. OxfordAQA qualifications are officially accepted across the Middle East, South and South East Asia, China, Pakistan, Japan and Europe.

Students with OxfordAQA qualifications have progressed to leading universities worldwide, including The University of Oxford and Yale University in the US.

*Find out more about university progression with OxfordAQA qualifications*



# Our project-based learning qualifications build the skills *students need for their futures*

**Schools are increasingly looking to integrate project-based learning into their curriculum to better prepare their students with skills that are essential for university study and the workplace.**

With OxfordAQA, your child can complete an extended project alongside their International GCSEs or A-levels, to develop important transferable skills such as **research, problem solving, critical analysis and extended academic writing.**

The **International Extended Project Qualification (EPQ)** is an international version of AQA's highly successful UK EPQ. Worth half an A-level, the International EPQ is a supplementary course that requires students to produce a research project on a subject of their choice. The qualification is highly regarded by UK universities, who see it as excellent preparation for higher education. Furthermore, research has revealed that students doing an EPQ typically perform better in their other A-levels, on account of the skills they acquire through the EPQ process.

*Read the blog: five reasons to choose the International EPQ*



The **International GCSE Global Skills Projects** is a new qualification that develops essential planning, research and report-writing skills through project-based learning. Offering clear progression to both A-level study and the International EPQ, the qualification enables students to consider their roles as global citizens and start developing the skills they'll need for success.

Both the International EPQ and International GCSE Global Skills Projects prepare students for the project-based, analytical and independent style of learning that they'll be expected to use in the next stage of their education.

“

**[EPQ]...provide[s] an applicant with the opportunity to develop research and academic skills relevant for study at Oxford. Candidates are encouraged to draw upon relevant EPQ experience when writing their personal statement.**”

*University of Oxford*



# Our qualifications are tailored to the *unique needs of international schools*



OxfordAQA's specifications are aligned to the latest versions of UK GCSEs and A-levels – but are designed exclusively for students outside of the UK.

When considering subject content or assessment structure, we always prioritise the needs of international students.

By taking the best of the UK curriculum reforms whilst understanding the needs of students studying internationally, we have ensured our specifications are globally relevant, motivating for students and excellent preparation for onward progression.

“

**OxfordAQA exams were the first time our students could just answer the science, rather than worrying about the language of the exams or the contexts they were being asked about.**”

*Samina Rashid,  
Head of Science,  
Dubai, United Arab Emirates*

”

## Modular or linear?

Linear means that all exams will be taken at the end of the course. Modular means that the final grade is made up of several sections – or modules – with exams that can be taken throughout the course.

At OxfordAQA, our International GCSEs are linear (in line with the UK), and our International AS and A-levels are modular. We believe, and teachers agree, that the two approaches work best for students at different stages of their educational journey.

Our linear GCSEs are designed to give students time to develop their skills without the stress of multiple exam series, while giving teachers the maximum amount of classroom time. Modular A-levels, on the other hand, provide an effective balance between structure and flexibility, meaning students can compartmentalise their learning and exam preparation, while working with the safety net of knowing they can re-sit individual units.

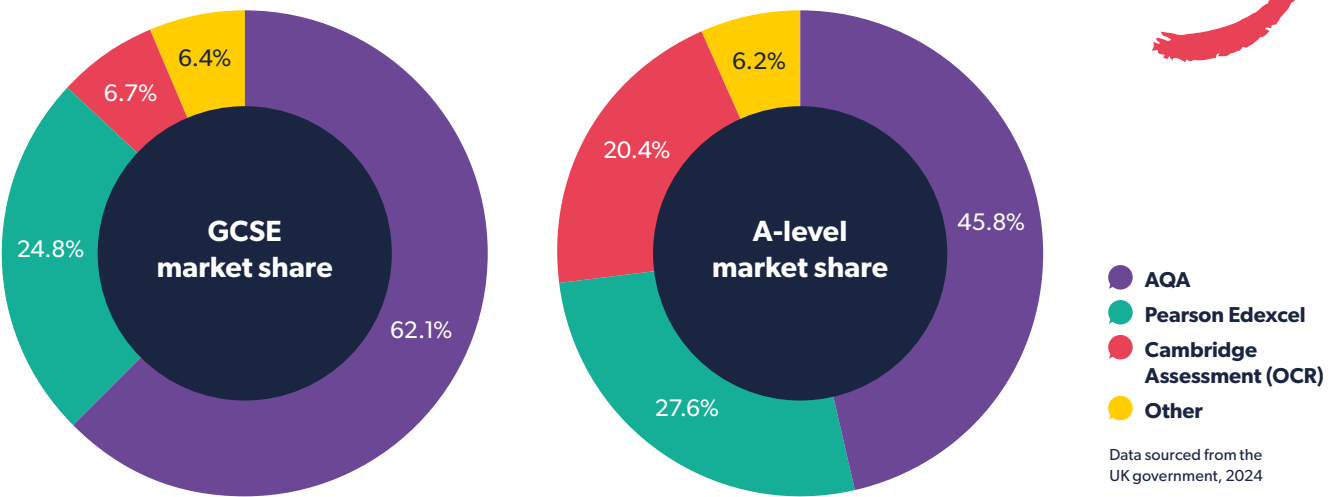
*Read more  
about modular  
vs. linear  
assessment  
in our blog*



# We bring leading qualifications expertise *to international schools*

Founded in 1903, AQA brings over 120 years of experience to every OxfordAQA qualification. This means that our assessments are designed, marked and processed using the same systems that AQA uses for its UK exams. AQA's qualifications are taught in 92% of schools in England, and AQA marks over 10 million exam papers every year.

## Market share of AQA's equivalent qualifications in the UK, 2024



## How are International GCSEs graded?

OxfordAQA International GCSEs are based on the latest version of GCSEs taught in England, which are graded from 9 to 1. Some exam boards still offer International GCSEs based on the old system, graded from A\* to G, which was phased out in England in 2015 as part of a nationwide educational reform.

The 9 to 1 grading system was designed to raise the standard of UK education, with Grade 9 set above the level of the outgoing A\*, meaning truly exceptional students can stand out when applying to competitive universities.

At OxfordAQA, we felt it was important that our International GCSEs matched this updated approach so that overseas students are not disadvantaged.

Universities and employers around the world recognise 9 to 1 as the primary approach to GCSE grading and have aligned their expectations accordingly. The transition has been smooth and is well understood by all stakeholders.

New GCSE grading structure									
9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	U
A*		A		B	C	D	E	F	G
Old GCSE grading structure									

# We focus on assessing **subject ability** *rather than understanding of English*



The fairness of an assessment – whether that be an exam or coursework – can make the difference between a student getting the grade that they deserve or getting one that doesn't reflect their knowledge and skills. That difference can be life changing.

OxfordAQA was founded on the belief that all students deserve a fair opportunity to demonstrate what they have learned and that their language level shouldn't be a barrier to this.

With validity, reliability and comparability at the heart of our assessment design, **we only use clear language and internationally relevant cultural contexts to test students' subject knowledge.**

## **The Oxford 3000™**

To ensure our papers are valid, we use the Oxford 3000 to review our exam questions. This is a list of the most frequent and useful words in English and helps to make sure that the language we use is as clear as possible.

## **Positive marking**

Our mark schemes are designed to be used positively, rewarding students for the knowledge and skills they have demonstrated, rather than punishing errors or omissions. This means students go into exams not fearing they are going to be 'caught out' by the questions they encounter.

## **Fair, accurate grading**

All OxfordAQA exam papers are marked by experienced, expert examiners, ensuring accuracy and consistency for all candidates. After marking is complete, the senior examining team for each qualification meets to assign the grade boundaries for that series. This is supported by AQA's academic research and many years' experience, to ensure that all students' grades are fair and accurate.

*Read more about  
our student-focused  
assessment design*



**Developing skills.  
*Building success.*  
Accessing universities  
worldwide.**

**At OxfordAQA, our globally recognised International GCSE and A-level qualifications blend subject knowledge with higher-order critical thinking skills – to encourage curiosity, independent thinking and a deeper understanding of the world.**

**These are the skills that will help students succeed in exams, thrive at university and be ready for life.**

**Ask your child's school if they're using OxfordAQA qualifications.**



*For more information about OxfordAQA,*  
**visit [oxfordaqa.com/parents](https://oxfordaqa.com/parents)**