

Cambridge International A-Levels

C.I.E. A-LEVELS

The Cambridge Assessment International Education, popularly known as “Cambridge International”, also offers a curriculum for class 11 and 12 apart from IGCSE and 0-Levels (which is offered till class 10). This curriculum is called the Cambridge International A-Level Qualification. The Cambridge International A level is a two year qualification.

The A-Levels curriculum is designed to help students become confident, responsible, reflective, innovative and engaged. The program is designed with the help of expert educators in schools and universities to challenge students, and get them excited about what they're learning.

The program prepares students for higher studies. Universities and top colleges around the world hold the A-Levels in high esteem. That's why success with Cambridge opens doors to the world's best universities- in the US, the UK, Australia, and Canada etc.

The program is designed to be flexible. Students are offered a wide range of subjects so that every student can choose the subjects they love and the subjects they are best at.

The CAIE A Levels curriculum develops the following skills in the students:

- In-depth subject content
- Independent thinking
- Application of knowledge and understanding of new as well as familiar situations
- Handling and evaluating different types of information sources
- Logical thinking and presenting ordered and coherent arguments
- Judgment making ability, and the ability of making recommendations and taking decisions
- Presenting reasoned explanations, understanding implications and communicating them logically and clearly
- Working and communicating in English

Compared to IGCSE and O Levels, A Levels qualification is a huge jump in terms of both content and understanding of subjects. The CAIE A-Levels helps the student in developing independent thinking with a special emphasis on English. The course advances the learner from the IGCSE or O-Levels to a higher stage of knowledge as the studies become more rigorous and the subjects become deeper.

At this stage, students develop a deep understanding and thinking skills they need for university. They work towards Cambridge International AS & A Level qualifications- giving them the choice to specialize, or study from a range of diverse subjects.

Cambridge International A Levels is a curriculum which can be divided into two parts.

- Cambridge International AS Levels (for class 11) and
- Cambridge International A2 Levels (for class 12) A2 Levels are often referred to as the A Levels also.

In other words, the Cambridge International A-Level is a two-year course where students can complete AS levels in first year and A2 levels in second year.

Some subjects can be started as a Cambridge International AS Level and extended to a Cambridge International A Level.

Cambridge International AS Levels often represent the first half of an A Level course but may also be taken as a freestanding qualification. The content and difficulty of a Cambridge International AS Level examination is equivalent to the first half of a corresponding Cambridge International A Level

The A-Level curriculum has a huge cache of 55 subjects of which schools can offer any combination. The subjects offered in the A-Levels are categorized under 4 groups.

- **Group 1: Mathematics and Sciences**
- **Group 2: Languages**
- **Group 3: Arts and Humanities**
- **Group 4: Interdisciplinary and skills-based subjects (optional)**

Group 1: Mathematics and Sciences

- Applied Information and Communication Technology
- Biology
- Chemistry
- Computer Science
- Design and Technology
- Environmental Management (Single Credit)
- Further Mathematics (Double Credit only)
- Marine Science
- Mathematics
- Physical Education
- Physical Science (Single Credit)
- Physics
- Psychology

Group 2: Languages

- | | | |
|-------------|--------------------|--------------|
| ➤ Afrikaans | ➤ English Language | ➤ Portuguese |
| ➤ Arabic | ➤ French | ➤ Spanish |
| ➤ Chinese | ➤ German | ➤ Urdu |

Group 3: Arts and Humanities

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|-------------------------------------|-------------|
| ➤ Accounting | ➤ Geography |
| ➤ Art and Design Business | ➤ History |
| ➤ Classical Studies | |
| ➤ Design and Textiles | |
| ➤ Divinity | |
| ➤ Economics | |
| ➤ Food Studies (Double Credit only) | |
| ➤ French Literature (Single Credit) | |

- Islamic Studies
- Language and Literature in English (Single Credit only)
- Law
- Literature in English
- Music
- Portuguese Literature (Single Credit only)
- Psychology
- Sociology
- Spanish Literature (Single Credit only)

Group 4: Interdisciplinary and skills-based subjects (Optional)

- General Paper (Single Credit only)
- Global Perspectives & Research
- Thinking Skills

The subjects offered by the A-Levels are considered to be the most customizable among all the other curricula. Students can take different subjects and there need not be any uniformity in the levels of all subjects they are taking

Grading and Assessment

As mentioned before, the whole 2 year curriculum of A-Levels is considered one complete course. However, it is divided into AS-Levels. In order to secure the A-Level qualification, a student should have a minimum of 6 credits. These 6 credits can be secured over a span of two years. One credit is awarded after passing one subject

Each subject is awarded grades separately. At the A2 level there are 6 grades overall starting from A* to E, where A* is the highest. At the AS level grades start from A to E. Each subject is graded separately and no Grade Point Average is calculated. Grades are awarded only for subjects that candidates pass. In the last module we explained what Percentage Uniform Mark is.

There the reference was with respect to IGCSE/ O level. Let us now have a look at the reference PUM Table for A level

AS Level Grade	PUM range
a	80-100
b	70-79
c	60-69
d	50-59
e	40-49

AS Level Grade	PUM range
A*	90-100
A	80-89
B	70-79
C	60-69
D	50-59
E	40-49

If a student secures marks which are below 40%, they are ungraded and have to retake the paper.

Earlier, the Cambridge International A-Level exams were held twice every year, in June and in November, the results of which were announced in August and January respectively. However, the Cambridge International has started a new exam series in the month of March so that students can meet the admission deadlines in Indian colleges.

However, it is to be informed that not all subjects offered at A level are offered for the March exam cycle. The subjects get added year by year. Hence it is suggested that the students do look at what subjects are offered for the March exam cycle in-case they are planning to sit for it.

There is no age set for students to take the exams, those who take it are generally aged 17 or 18 years. For students who take the AS-Level exams in the first year require taking the A2-Level exams within 13 months. For students who retake the exams to improve the scores have to re-attempt them within 13 months. If they do not, then they have to start the course afresh.

You remember that in IGCSE, there was a certificate called ICE which is awarded to those students who take 7 subjects from all subject groups! Similar to that, there is a certificate called AICE at the A- Levels which is awarded to those students who take subjects from all subject groups to achieve the minimum required 6 credits for the qualification.

Cambridge AICE Diploma is the group award of the Cambridge International AS and A Level. It gives schools the opportunity to benefit from offering a broad and balanced curriculum by recognizing the achievements of candidates who pass examinations in different curriculum.

An important point to be noted:

Results of the Cambridge International A-Levels are declared in the months of August and January (depending on which exam session a student had taken).

By the time these results are declared, the deadline to apply to most universities/colleges in India has already passed and the students in many cases have to wait for the next admission cycle and then apply to the colleges in India. However, to help students solve this problem some of the top universities like Delhi University, Mumbai University, FLAME Pune, O P Jindal etc. do provide Provisional admission to such students on the basis of predicted scores received from their school. On receiving the actual results, they are then required to submit it to the admissions department of the university/ college to turn their provisional admission to the confirmed admission.

In case of international universities, students can submit 'predicted grades' while applying to the universities and after receiving the actual scores, they get a confirmed offer letter to be able to apply for the Visa.

For results declared in the third week of August, after the May/June examination cycle, the student applies in the regular application deadline and then submits the actual scores in August to proceed further. This way he/she does not require to waste any time or wait. But if the student appears for the Oct/Nov exams cycle, then he has the option of applying to the universities with the actual scores in the next admission cycle.

Also note that students need to take an equivalency certificate from the Association of Indian Universities (AIU) if they are applying to Indian universities. There are three ways to take the Cambridge International A Levels exam.

1. Students ideally take the AS level exams first and then can take the A levels in the second year

Example: John is a student who has passed his IGCSE exams with good grades. He wants to take up the Cambridge International A-Levels for his 11th and 12th. He enrolls for the course and gives staged examinations. In his first year, he completes the Cambridge International -AS Levels in the May/ June session and in the next year, he takes the A2 Levels exams in May/June and completes the entire A- Level course.

For a better understanding staged exams are when the student takes the AS level and then takes the A level exams in that particular subject. Now there are subject-wise availability and conditions for the staged exams as well.

Depending upon the subject offered by the student's institution, one should make a decision.

2. Or, students can take the AS level exams only

Example: John's friend Raj has also completed his IGCSE and enrolled for the Cambridge International A- Levels. Raj wants to become an artist.

Therefore, he thinks that taking all the subjects at the A-levels is not necessary. So, he takes only Art and Design as a subject in the A2-levels. He takes all the other required subjects at AS-level, but in the A-level, he takes only Art and Design.

3. Another option for students is they can take both the AS levels exams and A2 level exams in a single exam cycle (i.e., either both exams in June or both in November of a year.)

Example: Pooja is also a classmate of John and Raj. She passed her exams with good grades in the IGCSE. When she enrolled for the A-Level course, she does not take the exams in a staged manner. Instead, after studying the courses for two years (AS and A2 levels) she takes the exams of both levels in a single examination session of the same year.

Another example for this is: Edward is a young student who is very interested in Accounting. When Edward enrolled for the Cambridge International A-Levels, he had not chosen Mathematics as a subject. However, during his second year in the A-Levels, he realized that if he wanted to pursue a bachelors in Accounting and Finance in top universities and then Mathematics was a prerequisite for it. Therefore, in his second year, he took Mathematics and appeared for the AS and A- Levels exams for Mathematics in a same exam cycle to meet the admission requirements of the University.

It should also be noted that the exams of the AS-Levels can be taken in different exam cycles, but all the A level subjects are to be attempted in one session only.

One more important thing to note is: these three options are only in terms of taking the exams. A student won't get the A- Level qualification unless and until he or she studies two years (AS-Levels+ A2 Levels) and earns a minimum of 6 credits.

KEY TAKEAWAY

- Cambridge International A-Levels is a qualification which can be taken after IGCSE or O-levels. It is offered by The Cambridge International Examination, the same board which offers IGCSE and A- levels
- The Cambridge International A-Levels are divided into two parts. AS-levels which is for class 11 and the A2-levels which is for class 12
- A2 is graded on a 6 point grading scale from A*-E
- AS is graded on a 5 point grading scale from A to E
- In order to get the Cambridge International A-Levels certificate, students have to secure a minimum of 6 credits. One credit is awarded after a student passes one subject
- Exams are conducted in the months of June and November every year. Their results are declared in the months of August and January respectively.
- The timing of the declaration is such that they come after the admission window of Indian universities is closed. To solve this, students submit 'predicted grades' while applying in to Indian universities