

## **IGCSE AND O –LEVELS**

On the international level, there are several educational boards which offer courses and qualifications on different levels. However, the Cambridge Assessment International Education, also known as “Cambridge International” is one of the largest and well known boards in the world. This board offers various certifications and curricula for different classes. It offers IGCSE and GCE O-Levels for class 10, CIE-A Levels for class 11 and class 12.

### **IGCSE**

IGCSE or the International General Certificate of Secondary Education is one of the most well-known curricula in the world. It starts from class 9 and ends in class 10.

More than 140 countries have this curriculum taught in their schools.

IGCSE enjoys recognition from top universities and educational institutions around the world. It is also considered equivalent to the UK GCSE examinations. It can be taken by students aged 14 to 16 years. However, there are no formal age restrictions in some countries. For parents who relocate constantly around the world, IGCSE is considered the best choice of curriculum for their wards because of its web of schools all around the world.

IGCSE is spread across two years but students have the option to complete the course on a different time-scale. However, in general the IGCSE courses take two years to complete and exams are taken at the end of that period. Examinations are held in June and November each year with results issued in August and February respectively.

### **Subjects Groups offered in IGCSE:**

There are over 70 subjects available at Cambridge IGCSE, including 30 languages. Schools can offer these subjects in any combination. The subjects are divided into 5 subject groups:

1. Group I: Languages
2. Group II: Humanities and Social Sciences
3. Group III: Sciences
4. Group IV: Mathematics
5. Group V: Creative, Technical and Vocational

Subjects offered in IGCSE:

Group 1 : Languages		
First Language	Second Language	Foreign Language
Afrikaans	Afrikaans	Arabic
Arabic	Chinese	Dutch
Chinese	English	French
Czech	Hindi	Indonesian
Dutch	IsiZulu	Italian
English	Kazakh	Japanese
French	Urdu	Malay
German		Mandarin Chinese
Japanese		Portuguese
Korean		Spanish
Portuguese		
Russian		
Sesotho		
Spanish		
Thai		
Turkish		

**Group 2 : Humanities and Social Sciences****Bangladesh Studies****Islamiyat****Development Studies****Latin****Economics****Literature (English)****Environmental Management****Literature (Spanish)****Geography****Pakistan Studies****Global Perspectives****Religious Studies****History****Sociology****India Studies****World Literature****Group 3: Sciences****Agriculture****Co – ordinated Sciences (Double Award)****Biology****Environmental Management****Chemistry****Physical Science****Combined Science****Physics****Group 4: Mathematics****Additional Mathematics****Cambridge Assessment International Mathematics****Mathematics**

### Group 5: Creative and Professional

**Accounting**

**Drama**

**Art and Design**

**Enterprise**

**Business Studies**

**Food and Nutrition**

**Cambridge Global Perspectives**

**Information and Communication  
Technology**

**Child Development**

**Music**

**Computer Science**

**Physical Education**

**Design and Technology**

**Travel and Tourism**

In IGCSE, students have the choice to select subjects based on their ease. This means that subjects are of two types, the core curriculum and extended curriculum. The Core Curriculum is designed in such a way that a large number of students can take it. It provides a full overview of the subject and is mainly targeted at students who score grades from C to G. On the contrary, the extended curriculum is more rigorous and consists of the core curriculum along with the supplement which are the extra topics added to the core curriculum. The extended curriculum is usually taken by students who are more academically able and are expected to achieve top grades.

A student who has taken the core curriculum cannot score more than the grade C. The grades above C can be scored only if the student opts for the extended curriculum. Furthermore, students can start a subject on the level they desire and these levels can vary from subject to subject.

In other words, a student can take an extended curriculum in some subjects while taking the core curriculum in others. This has made IGCSE a highly flexible curriculum.

A student studying in the IGCSE must take a minimum of 5 subjects from these 5 subject groups. There is a special certification for those students who take 7 subjects one each from all the subject groups. This certification is called ICE.

### **Grading:**

Students must take two different languages from Group I, and one subject from each of Groups II, III, IV, and V. The seventh subject can be taken from any of the five subject groups.

When it comes to exams and assessment, marks are not awarded in IGCSE. The grading system consists of an 8-point scale starting from 'A\*' and ending with 'G.'

There are 5 groups of subjects as mentioned, and students have to choose a minimum of 5 subjects from any 5 groups. Grade A\* is awarded for the highest level of achievement. Performances below the standard of grade G (g) are not recorded on certificates.

Also, please note that the minimum number of subjects varies per school and the students have to study anywhere between 7-10 subjects.

### **ICE Certification:**

There is a special certification, which is awarded to students who take up 7 IGCSE subjects in such a way that all subject groups are covered. This certification is called ICE. In other words, the Cambridge ICE is awarded to students who pass in at least seven Cambridge IGCSE subjects, this should include two subjects from the group 1 and one subject from the other groups. The seventh subject may be chosen from any of the syllabus groups. It should be noted that students should be officially registered for the ICE through their schools, only then the student will be awarded ICE along with the other requirements.

## Candidates who qualify for the Cambridge ICE award will be placed in one of three categories:

- **Distinction:** Grade A or better in five subjects and grade C or better in two subjects.
- **Merit:** Grade C or better in five subjects and Grade F or better in two subjects.
- **Pass:** Grade G or better in seven subjects

Another important thing to note is that, in IGCSE, the overall certificate is issued only if a student opts and succeeds in getting ICE. Then, they will get an overall certificate along with certificates for every subject they have passed. However, if a student does not take ICE, they will not be issued an overall certificate. They will be given separate certificates for all subjects they have passed and a statement of result.

## Grade Thresholds:

The assessment in the IGCSE is done through grades. It is interesting and essential to know how these grades are awarded. Every grade has a minimum number of marks which should be achieved to get that particular grade. This minimum number of marks is set for each grade, right from A\* to G. These are called '**grade thresholds.**'

The grade thresholds do not remain same every year. For example, if the grade threshold for the grade A\* in a certain subject is 147 marks or above, the next year, it may change depending on the toughness or ease of the exam paper and the syllabus. This can be better understood through the following example:

John and Shweta are two students studying in IGCSE but in different years. John's exams were quite straightforward. Therefore, the grade threshold for him to get grade A in the subject of Business Studies was 128 marks.

However, Shweta's exam process and syllabus was more advanced so the grade threshold for her in that subject was 122 instead of 128. Refer to the following tables:

**Grade threshold details for John in Business Studies**

Grade	Grade Threshold (Min. required marks)
A*	147
A	128
B	109
C	90
D	78
E	66

**Grade threshold details for Shweta in Business Studies  
(Syllabus and exams were tougher)**

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

**Percentage Uniform Marks:**

Percentage uniform marks correspond to the grades available (A\*, A, B, C, etc.) and will give students additional information about their performance. They will show students whether they are in the middle of a grade, or near either the top or the bottom. The percentage uniform mark is provided in addition to the grade for a syllabus. It is not the total marks achieved for the syllabus.

It is a point on a common scale for all syllabuses to show whether the student’s performance is close to the top, middle or bottom of the grade.

For example, a student who gets the minimum mark necessary for a Grade A\* obtains a percentage uniform mark of 90. A student who gets a mark halfway between the Grade D threshold and Grade C threshold achieves a percentage uniform mark of 55. The percentage uniform mark is stated at the syllabus level only. The percentage uniform mark is not the same as the actual total mark that the candidate achieves on the syllabus. This is because the percentage uniform mark depends on both the actual total mark for the syllabus and the position of the grade thresholds (which may vary from one exam series to another and from one syllabus to another. The percentage uniform mark is also different from the actual mark because it is always calculated out of 100.

These are the percentage uniform mark range which will help you in understanding the grades, equaling them to marks and percentages.

Grade Percentage Uniform Mark Range	
A*	90–100
A	80–89†
B	70–79
C	60–69
D	50–59



<b>E</b>	<b>40–49</b>
<b>F (Cambridge IGCSE only)</b>	<b>30–39</b>
<b>G (Cambridge IGCSE only)</b>	<b>20–29</b>
<p><b>†In The case of the Cambridge Assessment International AS Level qualification, where there is no Grade ‘A*’, the percentage uniform mark range for Grade ‘a’ is 80–100.’</b></p>	

**Here is a guide to understanding the results better:**

- A student who obtains full marks receives a percentage uniform mark of 100%.
- A student who obtains the minimum mark necessary for a Grade A\* obtains a percentage uniform mark of 90%.
- A candidate who obtains the minimum mark necessary for a Grade A obtains a percentage uniform mark of 80%.
- A candidate who obtains the minimum mark necessary for a Grade B obtains a percentage uniform mark of 70%.
- A candidate who obtains the minimum mark necessary for a Grade C obtains a percentage uniform mark of 60%.
- A candidate who obtains the minimum mark necessary for a Grade D obtains a percentage uniform mark of 50%.
- A candidate who obtains the minimum mark necessary for a Grade E obtains a percentage uniform mark of 40%.
- A candidate who obtains the minimum mark necessary for a Grade F (in qualifications where Grade F is awarded) obtains a percentage uniform mark of 30%.
- A candidate who obtains the minimum mark necessary for a Grade G (in qualifications where Grade G is awarded) obtains a percentage uniform mark of 20%.

## **Benefits of IGCSE**

**Cambridge IGCSE develops learner knowledge, understanding and skills in:**

- Subject content.
- Applying knowledge and understanding to familiar and new situations.
- Development in Intellect and enquiry-based thinking.
- Flexibility and responsiveness to change.
- Working and communicating in English.
- Influencing outcomes.
- Cultural awareness.
- Cambridge IGCSE subjects are modern, relevant and stimulating.

### **KEY TAKEAWAY**

- The IGCSE is a curriculum offered by the Cambridge Assessment International Education also known as “Cambridge International” till class 10. It is equivalent to the UK's GCSE
- IGCSE offers more than 70 subjects which are divided into 5 subject groups. Every student has to take a minimum of 5 subjects spread across these 5 subject groups.
- If a student takes 7 IGCSE subjects from every subject group and is entered for the award, they are given the ICE certification.
- The course is further divided into the core curriculum and extended curriculum. The extended curriculum is an advanced version of the core curriculum and is taken by students who are more able academically.
- The highest grade for those students who take the core curriculum is 'C'. The higher grades than 'C' can be achieved only if a student opts for the extended curriculum.
- Students will receive grades from A\* - G.

**GCE O - Levels**

Cambridge Assessment International offers another international curriculum for class 10 called the GCE O-Levels. The O-Levels is a curriculum which is considered equivalent to the IGCSE but is relatively less rigorous. O-Levels offer 40 subjects in its syllabus. O-Level courses are renowned for developing vital educational skills, including the recall of knowledge, problem solving, decision making, evaluation and investigative skills. The resulting qualification provides a foundation for higher level courses, such as Cambridge Assessment International A and AS Levels.

**Subjects:**

There are 5 subject groups in the GCE O-Levels.

**Group I:** Languages

**Group II:** Humanities and Social Sciences

**Group III:** Sciences

**Group IV:** Mathematics

**Group V:** Creative, Technical and Vocational

Group 1: Languages	
English Language	Setswana
Literature in English	Sinhala
Arabic	Spanish
Bengali	Swahili
French	Tamil
German	Urdu
Nepali	-

**Group 2: Humanities and Social Sciences**

<b>Geography</b>	<b>Commerce</b>
<b>Global Perspectives</b>	<b>Commercial Studies</b>
<b>History (Modern World Affairs)</b>	<b>Economics</b>
<b>History (World Affairs, 1917-1991)</b>	<b>Principles of Accounts</b>
<b>Religious Studies</b>	<b>Sociology</b>
<b>Business Studies</b>	<b>Travel and Tourism</b>

**Group 3: Sciences**

<b>Agriculture</b>	<b>Food and Nutrition</b>
<b>Biology</b>	<b>Marine Science</b>
<b>Chemistry</b>	<b>Physics</b>
<b>Environmental Management</b>	<b>Science- Combined</b>

**Group 4: Mathematics**

<b>Mathematics - Additional</b>
<b>Mathematics D</b>

### Group 5: Creative, Technical, and Vocational

<b>CDT: Design and Communication</b>	<b>Fashion and Fabrics</b>
<b>Computer Science</b>	<b>Fashion and Textiles</b>
<b>Computer Studies</b>	<b>Art</b>
<b>Design and Technology</b>	<b>Art and Design</b>

The assessment in O-Levels is held at or towards the end of the course and includes written, oral and practical examinations. This means that students can show their knowledge and skills, especially when their first language is not English.

Students have to take at least 7 subjects and every subject is assessed on a scale of 6 grades. Grade A\* is awarded for the highest level of achievement, and grade E indicates minimum satisfactory performance.

For every grade, there is a set limit of minimum marks which is called 'grade threshold.' The interesting thing is, this minimum marks or grade threshold doesn't remain same every year and can be changed based on the advancement of curriculum. This is done because the main IGCSE report covers 2 years and it is essential that a standard is set to calculate the marks of both years.

### Transfer from IGCSE / O – Levels to other National or State Boards

In India, many students think of the option of transferring from the IGCSE/O – Levels or other International Boards to other National or State Boards. The procedure for this would remain the same: going to the educational institution of choice and submitting the filled in application form. However, there are some points that every student should consider before making a choice to move to another board. Following are some of the important points to be considered:

- 1. Preferred mode of study:** Theoretical or Practical Based: While Cambridge promotes a holistic learning and all-round development, CBSE tends to lean towards more of a theoretical learning approach. Most of the state boards would also have a theoretical approach to learning.
- 2. Flexibility with respect to subject choice:** Another important aspect is with respect to the subject choices offered. While the National and State Boards schools that follow CBSE have a more traditional offering of subjects based on clusters or Streams, namely Science, Commerce and Humanities, the schools that follow Cambridge and IB curriculum offer a large number of subject choices. This offers more flexibility to the students and helps them select the subjects based on choice. Although the choice of subjects in CISCE is partly dependent on the school, and many schools offer subjects in 4 groups, with students getting the choice to choose 1 from each and English is compulsory.
- 3. Focus on Extracurricular activities:** As mentioned before, the Cambridge curriculum has a focus on holistic development. It builds extracurricular activities into the curriculum itself. The syllabus has activities that are mandatory for the students to participate in, which include a wide variety of activities including ballet, art, design, drama, etc. The National and State Boards, on the other hand, direct their focus more towards academics than extracurricular activities. Not to say that these activities are not factors in the school, but they merely do not play an active part in the syllabus. Classes 11 and 12 are usually considered to be crucial for academics, thus not leaving a desired amount of time for extracurricular interests.
- 4. School fees:** This is perhaps the most important factor that has to be taken into consideration when making a choice. The fees for Cambridge and other International Boards would be significantly higher when compared to the other National or State Level Boards. An in-depth understanding on the parent's side about the pros and cons of each of the boards is important in order to make an informed choice.

In conclusion, it can be said with confidence that there are several factors that come into play when making a choice about changing boards. Factors such as the new environment, new friends and new teachers to build a rapport with, etc. also have to be counted before making a choice.

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### **KEY TAKEAWAY**

- The GCE O-Levels is also offered by Cambridge Assessment International for class 10. However, it differs from IGCSE in several ways.
- The O-Levels has lesser coursework options and is devised to suit the local needs, including minority languages.
- Students are assessed through grades. However, the grades are from A\* to E. The grading thresholds apply in the O-Levels too like in the IGCSE.
- The focus of the O-Levels is more on writing and reading skills.
- The practical test options in the O-levels are more restricted than the IGCSE. This is an advantage for those schools whose resources are limited.