

Benchmarking Cambridge IGCSE in the Context of the UK Education System

Executive Summary

Submitted to Cambridge International Examinations 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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Scope and Methodology

In March 2016 UK NARIC completed an independent and objective benchmarking analysis of Cambridge International Examinations' International General Certificate of Secondary Education (Cambridge IGCSE)¹ to the UK education system. Cambridge IGCSEs (hereafter referred to as IGCSE) are established and well-recognised single-subject lower-secondary awards available in more than 70 subjects, currently offered in over 5,500 schools worldwide in more than 140 different countries, including the UK.

The study applied UK NARIC's established methodology for benchmarking qualifications to compare the IGCSE with the UK GCSE, against the backdrop of reforms currently being implemented to national GCSEs in England, Wales and Northern Ireland². Founded on the principles of credential evaluation, the methodology for benchmarking the IGCSE involved reviewing and comparing its core design components such as:

- Entry requirements
- Duration
- Structure and content
- Learning outcomes – assessment objectives
- Methods of learning and assessment
- Associated outcomes.

The study considered a sample of subjects including business studies, English, history, mathematics and physics³. The aims, content, outcomes and assessments for these IGCSE subjects were independently analysed against similarly-focussed subjects in the GCSE. IGCSE Global Perspectives was also reviewed. With no similarly-focussed subjects among the UK provision at this level, consideration was given to the overall knowledge and skills it develops, with reference to a range of subjects in both systems. Observations of IGCSE delivery in two UK schools supported UK NARIC's comparative analysis of IGCSE learning methods. In addition to qualification design, the quality assurance and control mechanisms framing the IGCSE were evaluated to assess the robustness of the qualification.

Key Findings

Having reviewed the IGCSE in depth, UK NARIC finds the IGCSE to be a rigorous and robust international lower secondary-level qualification, underpinned by sufficient quality assurance policies and procedures in place to maintain standards. IGCSEs can be integrated with schools' existing teaching and curriculum frameworks – any number of IGCSE subjects can be taught in schools alongside national programmes of study. Alternatively, schools may wish to utilise IGCSE Global Perspectives' interdisciplinary nature and cross-cultural learning by

¹ IGCSE® is the registered trademark of Cambridge International Examinations. Cambridge International Examinations (Cambridge) is part of Cambridge Assessment – a not-for-profit organisation that operates and manages the University of Cambridge's three examination boards.

² Further information on GCSE reforms in England, Wales and Northern Ireland can be found on GOV.UK, 2015. At the time of study, new syllabuses in GCSE English and Mathematics are being taught from September 2015 for first examination May/June 2017.

³ IGCSE (9-1) English 0627 syllabus (England only); IGCSE (9-1) Mathematics 0626 syllabus (England only); IGCSE Business Studies 0450 syllabus; IGCSE History 0470 syllabus; IGCSE Physics 0625 syllabus; IGCSE Physics 0625 syllabus.

using it as a core qualification on which to build their remaining curriculum around. Key design components facilitating IGCSE integration in schools across different education systems are:

- Non-prescribed teaching approaches – teaching and learning methods are encouraged and are observed to be both compatible and relevant to national programmes as well as with local practices and requirements
- Development of transferrable skills such as enquiry, critical thinking and analysis that can be applied across a range of IGCSE subjects and other national / local programmes of study
- Different options for assessment that schools can choose appropriate to their needs and circumstances, with full training on the assessment of coursework given to teachers by Cambridge in addition to external moderation of assessed work. Each of the IGCSE assessment methods analysed in this study adequately evaluate the key knowledge and skills outlined in the syllabuses. Furthermore, Cambridge's quality assurance procedures for assessment development ensure that all students are assessed appropriately at the outcomes intended in the syllabuses.
- Recent changes to national GCSEs have reduced the proportion of non-exam assessment (to only be used where the knowledge, skills and understanding cannot be tested validly through an exam) in certain subjects. This difference is therefore less significant when considering the IGCSE in the context of reformed national GCSEs still to be implemented.
- It is important to note that with the IGCSE assessment methods demonstrate closer alignment to those for the reformed national awards, given the introduction of terminal, linear assessment.

Comparability in the UK Education System

In the context of the UK education system, UK NARIC finds the IGCSE comparable to GCSE standard.

The IGCSE and GCSE have comparable entrance requirements and associated outcomes, indicating similar orientation in the UK education system. For the IGCSE subjects analysed in this study, there is little notable difference between the IGCSE aims and learning outcomes with those found in similarly-focussed GCSE syllabuses. In catering for an international audience, minor differences in IGCSE subject content, assessment methods and assessment weightings have been observed with UK GCSEs in certain subjects, but on the whole has little, if any, overall impact on the comparability of the IGCSE in the UK education system. Even if IGCSE Global Perspectives is taken as an IGCSE qualification on its own, the learning through enquiry-approach (e.g. research, critical analysis, independent / collaborative working, communication, self-reflection and peer-review) provides students with suitable study skills for post-secondary study or employment, as might similarly be expected on completion of national GCSEs in other subjects. With its wider international focus, the IGCSE Global Perspectives connects students from different cultures through cross-cultural collaboration learning methods.

Identification of similar examination tasks and mark schemes across a range of IGCSE and GCSE subjects confirms that the breadth and depth of knowledge, understanding and skills that the IGCSE develops and assesses compares very well to the national GCSEs examined in this study.

Qualification:	Cambridge IGCSE (International General Certificate of Education)
Awarding Institution:	Cambridge International Examinations
Comparability:	Is considered comparable to GCSE standard

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