

Benchmarking the Edexcel International Advanced Level against the GCE A Level

Executive Summary

On behalf of Pearson Education Ltd

Submitted 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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Pearson Education Limited has commissioned UK NARIC to undertake an independent benchmarking exercise to assess the comparability of its new self-regulated International Advanced Level (IAL) against the Ofqual regulated GCE A Level as offered in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. As a brief introduction, Pearson's Edexcel IALs are a self-regulated international alternative to its Ofqual regulated Edexcel A Level qualifications, and have been developed to be offered at registered international centres. The self-regulated Edexcel IALs are modular programmes offered in eight subjects: accounting, business studies, biology, chemistry, economics, law, physics and mathematics. The first examinations will be taken in January 2014 and January and June examinations will be available to support students wishing to progress to local and international universities. It is important to note that the Ofqual-regulated Edexcel GCE A Level will continue to be offered in the UK and internationally in June of each year, whereas the IAL will only be offered internationally in both January and June of each year.

In accordance with UK NARIC's well-established methodology for benchmarking qualifications, the evaluation process considered the comparability of the IAL programme design, entry requirements and progression, course content and structure, learning outcomes, assessment framework, including the assessment objectives, methods and performance descriptors. A review of quality assurance processes was also conducted, taking into account external marking, standardisation, certification, and examination and assessment development. In order to gauge the comparability with the GCE A Level, the study examined the IAL programmes in four selected subjects against the Ofqual Subject Criteria, the principal framework used by awarding bodies in the design of GCE A Level programmes in England.

In summary, the study has found that the IAL programmes in Chemistry, Biology and Physics follow a similar structure as the Ofqual regulated Edexcel GCE A Level programmes and cover the same core units of study. It is noted, however, that the IAL assessment is conducted entirely through externally marked written examinations including those units which cover practical and investigative skills. The GCE A Levels in the sciences, by contrast, assess practical and investigative skills through coursework.

The IAL programme in Mathematics was found to include a greater synoptic assessment and fewer, integrated units in relation to the GCE A Level in Mathematics. Nonetheless, the core content of the IAL in Mathematics aligns to that covered in the Ofqual regulated Edexcel GCE A Level.

The IALs in Law, Accounting, Economics and Business Studies were examined in further detail. The study has found that the design and structure of the Edexcel IALs in all four subjects relate closely to the core requirements for regulated GCE A Level qualifications as outlined in the Ofqual Subject Criteria, including similar core content as nationally regulated GCE A Levels in these subjects. The IAL programmes nevertheless include additional topic areas outside of the scope of the GCE A Level programmes, reflecting the nature of study of these respective subjects in the wider, global context and ensuring the broader relevance of the curricula to the needs of international candidates.

Similarly, the assessment framework, including the schemes of assessment, assessment objectives and the performance descriptors for the IAL programmes, follow the current Ofqual national requirements, ensuring that comparable standards can be applied in assessing student performance in both Edexcel IALs and the GCE A Levels.

The quality assurance of the IAL, including the external marking, standard-setting procedures, examination paper development and certification will be conducted using the same processes as those used for the assessment of the Ofqual regulated GCE A Level qualifications. Quality assurance adheres to the Ofqual Code of Practice, which will help to ensure that all IAL candidates, as with GCE A Level candidates, receive the results their performance merits when judged against the relevant specification content and assessment criteria.

In summary, in light of the findings from the review of qualification design and structure, the in-depth comparative analysis of the four individual IAL programmes and the review of quality assurance processes, UK NARIC concludes that the Edexcel IAL qualifications can be considered comparable to the overall GCE Advanced Level standard. The recommended level of comparability is summarised in the following statement:

Edexcel Qualification	Comparability
Edexcel International Advanced Level	Is considered comparable to the overall GCE A Level standard

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