

10 May 2019

Dear Colleagues,

## **Cambridge IGCSE comparability to GCSE: a clarification & an update**

We understand recently that some parents and schools have expressed concerns regarding Cambridge IGCSE standards and comparability to the GCSE in England, either via phone calls, messages or social media. In response to this, we would like to share with you a clarification and update on our activities on Cambridge IGCSEs.

### **Cambridge IGCSEs are comparable in standard to the UK GCSE**

Cambridge IGCSE equivalence to UK GCSE has been maintained for more than 30 years, through many changes. Cambridge IGCSEs are equivalent to, but different from UK GCSEs. Our decisions what to include in the curriculum and how to assess learning are based on international best practice and on what is relevant to schools, universities and employers worldwide. For example, Cambridge IGCSE History includes a wide, international suite of options for study, beyond a UK-centric view. Cambridge IGCSE Literature in English explores texts written in English outside the UK. These choices, welcomed by our schools worldwide, are different to what UK GCSEs can offer.

In the UK, the national agency responsible for the recognition and comparison of international qualifications and skills is UK NARIC. In their benchmarking report on Cambridge IGCSEs<sup>1</sup>, the agency confirms their comparable standard to the UK GCSEs:

Cambridge IGCSEs 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. [...]

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. [...]

In conclusion, based on the findings of the review and comparative analysis, **UK NARIC finds the IGCSE comparable to GCSE standard in the UK.**

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<sup>1</sup> Cambridge International Examination's International IGCSE. UK NARIC Benchmarking Report. March 2016

The IGCSE compares very well to the UK GCSE in many aspects, with clear similarities identified in the knowledge, skills and competencies to be developed and assessed for all the subjects analysed in this study. At the same time, **the IGCSE has a distinctly international focus** whilst the IGCSE Global Perspectives promotes learning through cross-cultural collaboration, adding weight to the overall aim of Cambridge's IGCSE awards in terms of applying knowledge and understanding to new and unfamiliar situations and cultural awareness.

Differences in assessment methods and objectives, though observable, are not significant when considered in the context of the national reforms to GCSEs in the UK. The review has found the IGCSEs assessments evaluate the key knowledge and skills outlined in the corresponding IGCSE syllabuses and to test the full range of achievement levels. Finally, when comparing the range, type and overall level of examination tasks and questions used to assess students in the IGCSE and GCSE, clear similarities could be identified.

The assessment in this report is still current and valid. An [executive summary](#) can be found here.

Similarly, at a recent Education Committee hearing, England's qualifications regulator Ofqual put on the record that international GCSEs are not systematically easier than England's GCSEs, which supports our own research about Cambridge IGCSE. It is very important to us that awarding standards are aligned, as you will know from our [Code of Practice](#). 'Aligned awarding standards' means that a student would expect to get the same grade whether they sat the subject as a GCSE or Cambridge IGCSE. We ensure this [using a range of well-established methods](#).

### **Recognition of Cambridge IGCSEs by universities in the UK**

Cambridge International IGCSEs continue to be recognised by all UK universities. This was confirmed most recently during the UCAS annual admissions conference in April 2019. The conference is for heads of admissions from universities and colleges across the UK, and included those from University of Cambridge, University of Oxford, UCL, Imperial, Warwick, York, Bath and other Russell Group admissions departments. The universities confirmed that they had no concerns regarding Cambridge IGCSE standards and comparability to the GCSE in England. Universities remain clear that Cambridge IGCSE and GCSE are equivalent, and they have no intention of treating them differently.

## UK performance tables

Cambridge IGCSE had already been running for 20 years when we submitted 21 of our syllabuses for regulation in England. The purpose of such regulation was so that English state schools could include them in their performance tables. However, several years ago the UK Department for Education announced that IGCSEs would come out of schools performance tables from 2017. This concerns only English state schools. Independent schools in the UK remain unaffected, and many of them, including Eton, Winchester and Westminster, continue to take Cambridge IGCSE in large numbers.

Despite IGCSE's removal from performance tables, Schools Minister Nick Gibb supported the standard of Cambridge IGCSEs at a meeting of the Education Select Committee on 3rd April 2019: "The question for us is: should we allow the IGCSE in performance tables? The decision we took was no. **This is not a concern about the particular IGCSE that Cambridge International produce. That has been around a long time, it is regarded as a very high standard.**" This ministerial statement reiterates previous assurances that the Department for Education has confidence in Cambridge IGCSEs.

In summary, as the UK agency responsible for providing information and expert opinion on international qualifications and skills, UK NARIC confirm the comparable standard of Cambridge IGCSEs and the UK GCSEs and continue to stand by their report. The UK government has expressed full confidence in the Cambridge IGCSEs, and UK universities continue to recognise them as equivalent to UK GCSEs.

Should you require further clarification, please do not hesitate to contact Cambridge International in the UK or Singapore or the Cambridge Malaysia Office in Petaling Jaya. We sincerely thank you for continuing to support the Cambridge IGCSE and the other Cambridge qualifications.

Yours sincerely,



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