

# Comparing international GCSEs and GCSEs in England, 2018

## Introduction and background

In England pupils can take a range of types of qualifications at Key Stage 4 (age 14-16), including GCSEs offered by 4 awarding organisations in England and international GCSEs. International GCSEs are offered overseas by several different awarding organisations, 2 of which (Cambridge Assessment and Pearson) provide international GCSE qualifications which are also used in England. These qualifications provide the focus for this analysis.

International GCSEs have not counted in school performance tables since the reformed GCSEs were introduced from 2017 onwards. International GCSE entries represented 45 per cent of entries by pupils in independent schools in 2018.

This report looks at attainment in GCSEs and international GCSEs and progress to key stage 5 by pupils in independent school pupils in England. It covers three separate strands of analysis, namely pupil level analysis, subject-level analysis with a focus on the EBacc subjects and progression to Key Stage 5.

## Key points

### Pupil-level analysis

- This part of the analysis compares each pupil's average point score in GCSEs and international GCSEs. The results are then aggregated to assess the proportion of pupils who gained a higher or lower point score in their international GCSEs compared to their GCSEs.
- Scores were adjusted for subject variation. This was done by: calculating the average point score achieved for a certain subject (e.g. physics); calculating the average point score across all entries for other subjects which were taken by those who took physics; and subtracting the cross-subject score from the physics score. A negative result would mean that pupils tended to score lower in physics than in other subjects. The point scores achieved in a subject were adjusted to account for this difference, e.g. if the difference was -0.1, 0.1 was added onto the point scores achieved in the subject.
- For pupils who took both IGCSEs (Cambridge) and GCSEs, 47 per cent achieved a higher average point score in their IGCSEs and 53 per cent achieved a higher score in their GCSEs. On average, pupils achieved an average point score of 0.08 more in their GCSEs.
- For pupils who took IGCSEs with Pearson and GCSEs, 59 per cent achieved a higher average point score in their IGCSEs and 41 per cent achieved a higher average point score in their GCSEs. Overall, pupils' average score in Pearson IGCSEs was 0.24 higher than their GCSE scores.
- The analysis looked at pupils' average GCSE point score in EBacc subjects by attainment at Key Stage 2 (the end of the primary phase).
- Pupil entries in Cambridge IGCSEs achieved a higher average point score than in GCSEs for all Key Stage 2 prior attainment groups at or above level 4C, with a difference of between 0.1 and 0.4 of a grade.
- There was a higher percentage of entries to Cambridge IGCSEs which achieved grade 7/A and above than GCSEs for all prior attainment groups at or above level 4C.

- Pupil entries in Pearson IGCSEs achieved a higher average point score than GCSEs for all Key Stage 2 prior attainment groups. The difference was significant – between 0.7 and 0.8 of a grade higher than in GCSEs. For all prior attainment groups, a higher percentage of grades achieved Grade 7 or above in IGCSEs.
- Pupils who took at least one international GCSE achieved a higher average point score in their GCSEs than pupils who only took GCSEs. For prior attainment groups at level 4C and above, IGCSE pupils achieved 0.3 to 0.6 grades higher in their GCSEs than pupils who only took GCSEs.

### Subject level analysis

- The analysis calculated the difference between the average point score in Cambridge IGCSEs and the average point score in GCSEs, and between the average point score in Pearson IGCSEs and the average point score in GCSEs. This was done at a subject level for all subjects where there were more than 100 entries by pupils in both GCSEs and the relevant IGCSE.
- In 13 out of 21 subjects analysed with more than 100 entries, independent school pupils achieved a higher average point score in Cambridge IGCSEs than the equivalent GCSE. These subjects were business studies, computer studies/computing, design & technology, economics, English language, English literature, French, German, history, mathematics, music, physical education/sports studies and Spanish.
- The gap between IGCSE scores and GCSE scores differed markedly according to exam board. In chemistry, pupils scored on average 0.84 points lower in the Cambridge IGCSEs than in the GCSE. However, pupils who took the Pearson IGCSE achieved on average 0.41 points more than those who took the GCSE. There was a similar gap in biology where pupils who took the Cambridge IGCSE



- scored an average of 0.52 points lower than in the GCSE, whereas those who took the Pearson IGCSE scored an average 0.61 points higher than in the GCSE.
- In all subjects included in the analysis with the exception of business studies, pupils achieved a higher average point score in the Pearson IGCSEs than in the equivalent GCSE.
  - Looking at prior attainment, for pupils taking Cambridge IGCSE, a greater than expected proportion achieved Grade 7 or above in English language and English literature by around 5 to 6 percentage points. A smaller than expected proportion achieved grade 7 or above in biology and chemistry by around 14 to 15 percentage points, in mathematics and physics by around 5 to 7 percentage points, and in French, Spanish and geography by around 3 to 4 percentage points.
  - There was no difference with the expected proportion at grade 7 or above for German and history.
  - For pupils taking IGCSEs with Pearson, a greater than expected proportion achieved grade 7 or above in English language by around 25 percentage points, in English literature, mathematics, Spanish and German by between 8 and 13 percentage points, and in biology, physics, French and geography by around 2 to 4 percentage points. There was no difference with chemistry and history.
  - With Pearson IGCSEs, there were no subjects in which a smaller than expected proportion of pupils achieved less than Grade 7.
  - They also achieved lower A level grades than GCSE pupils in English language, English literature, German, history and geography, by around 0.1-0.3 grades.
  - There were no subjects in which pupils taking international GCSEs with Pearson attained statistically higher A level grades than those who took GCSEs.

### Progression to Key Stage 5

- The analysis looked at A level entries by independent school pupils aged 16 to 18 in 2018, in the main EBacc subjects, and calculated the average A level point score for those who took the subject as an IGCSE at Key Stage 4, and those who took a GCSE. This was to test whether pupils who take IGCSEs are better prepared for A level and make more progress between Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 5. For this part of the analysis, 2016 GCSE data was used, which means that the results analysed were those from the legacy GCSE. In recording A level results for this part of the analysis, a fine grade was used. Fine grades, e.g. B-, B and B+ are assigned by evenly distributing the points around the point score – e.g. 40 for Grade B.
- Pupils taking Cambridge IGCSEs achieved the same A level fine grade as those taking GCSEs in 8 out of 9 subjects.
- Looking at progression to individual A level subjects in the main EBacc subjects for a previous cohort of independent school pupils who were mostly at the end of key stage 4 in 2016, pupils who entered Cambridge IGCSEs in a subject achieved, on average, around a sixth of a grade lower than expected at A level than pupils who entered a GCSE in that subject.
- They achieved statistically significantly lower A level grades than GCSE pupils in English literature, English language, history, geography, French and biology by around 0.2-0.4 grades. They achieved statistically significantly higher A level grades than GCSE pupils in mathematics (by 0.7 grades) and physics (by 0.2 grades), but entries in these subjects were small, together representing only 4 per cent of entries in Cambridge IGCSEs in this analysis.
- Looking at progression to individual A level subjects in the main EBacc subjects for the independent school cohort who took GCSEs in 2016, pupils who entered International GCSEs with Pearson in a subject achieved, on average, over a quarter of a grade lower than expected in A level than pupils who entered a GCSE in the same subject.
- They achieved lower A level grades than GCSE pupils in mathematics and the sciences by 0.2-0.4 grades.

The full document can be downloaded from:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/comparing-international-gcses-and-gcses-in-england-2018>