



Partner Schools Network

A GUIDE TO SCHOOL
EXAMINATIONS FOR
PARENTS AND STUDENTS

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A GUIDE TO SCHOOL EXAMINATIONS FOR PARENTS AND STUDENTS

INTRODUCTION TO THE GUIDE

The purpose of this guide is to give candidates & parents an introduction to school examinations.

INTRODUCTION TO SCHOOL EXAMINATIONS

Whether you are thinking of pursuing higher studies or planning for your future career, it is likely that you will be competing in a global market. This intense competition means universities and employers expect candidates to have a solid educational foundation, demonstrated by recognizable and renowned qualifications. UK qualifications provide this recognition.

UK qualifications are recognized by Governments, Universities, Professional bodies and Employers around the world.

With more than 50 years of experience in administering school exams worldwide, the British Council works in partnership with UK awarding bodies, Cambridge International Examinations & Edexcel International to deliver UK qualifications on their behalf in Pakistan.

We create opportunity for nearly a half a million people every year worldwide to achieve their life goals by obtaining UK qualifications. British Council offers its services from offices in Islamabad, Lahore

and Karachi and has a network of over 500 associated schools. It conducts exams at more than 100 venues throughout Pakistan.

UK school qualifications are split into two levels.

General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE), International GCSE (IGCSE) or Ordinary Level (O Level) qualifications are taken at around the age of 16. The General Certificate of Education Advanced Level (A Level) or International A Level qualifications are typically taken at 18.

What is an O-Level/IGCSE?

An O-Level/IGCSE is usually taken at the age of 15 or 16. You can take any number of O-Level/IGCSE examinations, depending on the qualifications that your chosen institution asks for. Most candidates in Pakistani schools take up to eight O-Level/IGCSE examinations after studying for two to three years in their chosen subjects, such as in the fields of Science, Commerce or Humanities. It is important that candidates who are considering taking more than the above number of examinations consult their school counsellor before doing so, as well as their parents. Taking on an excessive workload could result in detrimental effects on the overall results a candidate ultimately attains.

Candidates in Pakistan can sit for O-Levels or IGCSEs (or a combination of both). From summer 2011 Edexcel has stopped offering O-Levels and replaced them with IGCSE. Cambridge International Examinations continues to offer both O-Level and IGCSE.

Why should I take an O-Level/IGCSE?

Eight O-Levels/IGCSE are equivalent to the Pakistan Secondary School Certificate (SSC) but many parents and guardians are aware that UK qualifications have a much wider recognition and acceptance outside Pakistan. They also consider that the style of learning and assessment provide a better foundation for future success. Please note IGCSE is equivalent to UK GCSE.

What is an A-Level/International A Level?

These are advanced qualifications for students who want to go to university. The International A Level is equivalent to the A Level taken by students in the UK.

You can take any number of A-Level / International A Level qualifications and they are available in a wide range of subjects. In the UK, most college candidates take three or four A-Levels for their final two years of study. The number of A-Levels/International A Levels you take will often depend on the qualifications that the university you have chosen requires.

Why should I take A-Level/IAL?

A Level and International A Level results can open doors for you to undergraduate studies at some of the best higher educational institutions in the world, and to a wide range of professional and vocational courses that can help build your skills for an exciting and rewarding career.

A-Level and International A Level qualifications are also accepted at nearly all national and private universities in Pakistan. Please contact the universities directly for information.

Cambridge International A Level

Cambridge International A Levels are available in 55 subjects. They develop the deep understanding and thinking skills you need for university.

There are two types of qualification: Cambridge International A Level and Cambridge International AS Level. The AS Level is half of the content of the A Level, and is typically a one-year course.

You can choose from a variety of assessment options. For example, in most subjects, you can take the Cambridge International AS Level as a standalone qualification or it can count towards your final International A Level grade.

Cambridge International AS Levels help to broaden your learning, and you can study them alongside Cambridge International A Levels. For example, if you are specialising in science subjects at Cambridge International A Level, you might choose to study a foreign language at Cambridge International AS Level.

Every year, thousands of learners use Cambridge International AS & A Levels to gain places at leading universities, including in the UK, US, Canada and Australia. All UK universities and over 500 US universities recognise the qualification.

Edexcel International A level

Edexcel International Advanced Level is an international alternative to Edexcel Ofqual-regulated A-Level qualifications. This new suite of qualifications, regulated by Pearson, has been written to the highest standard, with the global learner in mind. They are:

- Flexible
- Modular structure
- January and June examinations to support students wishing to progress to local and international universities.
- AS qualifications can be taken as stand-alone qualifications or used as a stage on the way to completing an Advanced Level. AS represents 50% of an Advanced Level
- 100% external assessment with no coursework.
- Specifications can be delivered in an international context to fully equip the international learner. Available in 8 popular subjects: Accounting, Business Studies, Biology, Chemistry, Economics, Law, Physics and Mathematics.
- Written to the same rigorous standards as all Edexcel qualifications.
- Regulated by Pearson.
- Provides progression from Edexcel International GCSEs.

What subjects can I take?

Please contact us for an updated list of the

subjects currently on offer. However, if you are considering taking up any specialist subject, which may require special facilities or accredited examiners, please contact us well in advance to find out whether you are able to sit for that examination in Pakistan

Introduction to primary and lower secondary programmes

Cambridge International Examinations and Edexcel International offer primary and lower secondary programmes, which support pre-GCSE/IGCSE. These programmes are designed specifically for international schools for students and are available in English, Mathematics and Sciences. The test papers are marked by the awarding bodies and provide an external international benchmark for your child's performance.

These programmes cover all major areas of learning required in the early years of an international secondary education. Learners receive a statement of achievement, which gives an indication of their academic progress during this education stage and detailed feedback on their strengths and weaknesses.

Below is a summary of the programmes offered by Cambridge International Examinations and Edexcel. For more details, please visit their websites (see back page).

Cambridge Primary

The Cambridge Primary programme is typically for children aged 5 to 11 years. It develop a strong foundation of skills in

English, Mathematics and Science and sets clear learning objectives for each year of primary education, providing a natural progression path. Cambridge Primary includes optional assessments to help teachers monitor your child's learning and identify areas of strengths and weakness. Learners can take Cambridge Primary Checkpoint tests in Maths, Science and English at the end of the final year of Cambridge Primary. These tests are marked by Cambridge and provide an international benchmark of achievement. Each learner receives a statement of achievement and a detailed feedback report that gives invaluable information to schools and parents.

The curriculum is international and flexible. Cambridge provides comprehensive support to schools including a secure Cambridge Primary website where teachers can download teaching materials, assessment and analysis tools.

International Primary Curriculum

Designed specifically for international schools, the Edexcel International Primary Curriculum caters for pupils in years 3 to 6 (ages 8-11) and is available for English, Maths and Science. Based on the UK National Curriculum Key Stages 1 and 2, it gives pupils a well-rounded education while giving teachers an easy-to-implement frameworks and an easy way to monitor pupil progress. Created by experienced primary authors and teachers, The Edexcel International Primary Curriculum:

- Gives pupils a solid foundation for

lifelong learning, with a structured curriculum that provides excellent preparation for eventual further study at International GCSE and GCE A level or equivalent

- Provides an international benchmark of achievement, with externally marked achievement tests and certification at the end of Year 6 to ease the transition to secondary education is easy to implement and administer, with free training and a fully flexible structure that allows you to teach it alongside other curriculum
- Is engaging and up to date, with ideas for lessons and a framework that allows you to embed knowledge creatively
- Allows you to track pupils' progress and identify barriers to learning through a variety of age-specific progress and achievement tests
- Offers unrivalled and unique delivery support with detailed suggestions of published resources embedded within each unit to help you implement the curriculum
- Gives you and your pupils a seamless and cohesive teaching and learning experience, especially when used alongside other Edexcel qualifications for ages 8-19.

Cambridge Secondary 1

The Cambridge Secondary 1 programme is typically for learners aged 11 to 14 years. It develops skills and understanding in mathematics, English and science.

The programme:

- includes optional tests to allow teachers to assess your child's learning as they progress
- develops students' global outlook and equips them for success in the modern world
- prepares students for the next stage of their education, including GCSEs/IGCSEs.

Children can sit Cambridge Secondary 1 Checkpoint tests at the end of Grade 8 at 11-13 years. The tests are available in English, English as a second language, mathematics and science. They are marked by Cambridge International Examinations and provide an external international benchmark for your child's performance. Each learner receives a statement of achievement, which gives an indication of their academic progress during this education stage, and detailed feedback on their strengths and weaknesses. This helps teachers to give advice on your child's progression routes.

Cambridge Secondary 1 Checkpoint provides excellent preparation for higher Cambridge qualifications including the IGCSE. It builds on the foundations of Cambridge Primary, but it is not essential to have completed that stage before beginning Cambridge Secondary 1.

International Lower Secondary Curriculum

Pearson Edexcel International Lower Secondary Curriculum designed specifically

for international schools, the Edexcel International Lower Secondary Curriculum caters for pupils in Years 7 to 9 (ages 12-14) and is available for English, Maths and Science.

Based on the UK National Curriculum Key Stage 3, it gives pupils a well-rounded education while giving teachers an easy-to-implement framework and an easy way to monitor pupil progress.

The Pearson Edexcel International Lower Secondary Curriculum develops English, mathematics and science skills and knowledge in young children aged 12 to 14 years.

- Giving them a solid foundation for lifelong learning
- Providing an international standard of achievement
- Allowing you to track their progress and identify barriers to learning
- Giving them a love of learning that will stay with them through school, university and beyond.

The tests are marked by Pearson Edexcel and provide an external international benchmark you're your child's performance.

Frequently Asked questions

What school exam bodies are there in the UK & Pakistan?

The UK has five awarding bodies offering school level qualifications. Schools and colleges are able to freely choose between them on a subject-by-subject basis.

Many schools use a mixture of awarding bodies.

Their school examinations are recognized by the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual) in England and are recognized by employers and universities across the world.

The awarding bodies differ in the number of subjects that they offer, the contents of the syllabus and the ways in which they set their examinations.

Does it make any difference which board I sit my examinations under?

No. If a university employer or government accepts O-Levels, IGCSE, GCSE and A-Levels they will not ask which board awarded the certificate. Your school will choose the board after considering a number of factors such as the subjects on offer, the syllabus, the style of the examinations, the availability of resources, the preferences of the school governing board, teachers and parents.

Where are my examinations marked?

All O Level, A Level and IGCSE examination papers for the whole world are marked in the UK by examiners appointed, trained and monitored by the boards.

Can examiners be biased towards certain countries?

As candidates are only identified by a number, the examiner also has no way of knowing the identity of the candidate.

Do I have to register through a school?

Students who are enrolled at a registered school are normally expected to enter for their examinations through their school as a school candidate. If you are not a school student, you can register online with the British Council as a private candidate and can take the examination. The services provided to private candidates throughout the entire process are exactly the same as what a candidate from a recognized school would get. Just because you want to register independently does not mean that things will become harder for you.

Will having foreign qualifications make it harder for me to find a job in Pakistan?

No. The majority of employers welcome O-Level/IGCSE and A-Levels/International A Levels. Many prefer staff from an A-Level / International A Level background as they appreciate the analytical and problem solving skills which are a key part of success in UK qualifications. This is especially true for international organisations.

Do I need to sit for practical examinations?

Whether you are following the Cambridge or Edexcel curriculum for subjects such as Chemistry, Biology and Physics, you will not be required to take practical examinations at O-Level but instead will need to take 'alternative to practical' units to demonstrate that you have completed the practical syllabus during your course of study in school. However, you will be required to sit for a

practical examination when sitting for certain A-Level subjects.

I have heard of a body called IBCC. Can you tell me more about it?

Inter board committee of chairman (IBCC) IBCC is an important body of which you should be aware especially if you wish to pursue higher studies within Pakistan.

IBCC is a government educational regulatory authority that grants equivalence of foreign qualifications with corresponding Pakistani qualifications. This becomes very important if a student wishes to enter Pakistani higher education institutes after doing their GCE exams. Please visit IBCC website for comprehensive information on equivalence, subject combinations, compulsory subjects and conversion formula

IBCC website: <http://ibcc.edu.pk/>

Does British Council do anything for schools and students apart from exams?

Indeed. The PSN (Partner Schools Network) is a new global initiative by the British Council, aimed at strengthening our relationship with schools that offer these UK qualifications. In Pakistan alone nearly 500 schools are part of the PSN. Although we already enjoy a healthy relationship with a large number of these schools our goal is to add further value by going beyond exams delivery. To this end we offer :-

Learners: learning support via cutting-edge digital resources & extra-curricular

opportunities, that add value to their CV's when applying to universities

Leaders: conferences, networking events, study visits and more

Teachers: training & workshops for professional development

To find out more about the PSN and how it can help you or your school contact Sara Qureshi at

sara.qureshi@britishcouncil.org.pk



SOME FACTS ABOUT OUR EXAMINATION ADMINISTRATION

How do we choose the venues?

We go to great lengths to identify suitable premises which meet the UK boards' and British Council regulations before contracting them as examination venues. We choose our venues based on a number of factors including size, location, lighting, air conditioning, generator support and other facilities. But above all, we give priority to the security of our venues.

What items are candidates allowed to take into the examination hall?

Candidates must bring black or dark blue writing pens, pencils, erasers, non-programmable calculators and any other permitted equipment required for the examination along with their Statement of Entry, valid national identification card / passport or smart card.

Branded drinking water is available for candidates inside the examination hall. All candidates need to undergo strict security checks before they are allowed into the examination hall. Bring only permitted items and get through quickly. If you do bring your own drinking water, please make sure the bottle is transparent and unlabeled.

Where can I sit for examinations?

To cater to the needs of candidates who live outside of major cities i.e. Islamabad, Lahore, Karachi, we conduct examinations at a large

number of outreach venues.

How are the examinations conducted?

In addition to our dedicated staff who are present at all venues to assure standards at every examination session, we have experienced and professional invigilators. They all go through rigorous recruitment and professional training on examination administration every year. Some of our invigilators are doctors, university professors, teachers and engineers.

We ensure that all of our invigilators are neutral and are not connected in any way with the candidates sitting for the examination at the same venue.

We ensure that all our support staff are fully trained; every venue has at least one member of staff who is a trained First-Aider, though often there are more trained staff available to assist.

What arrangements are there for Special Needs candidates?

We make every effort to cater for candidates with special needs. If your circumstances require special administrative arrangements to be made, for example extra time, you must apply to us when you register for your examinations. Please inform us when you register if you have special needs.

What if a candidate suddenly falls sick?

We try to assess the candidate's condition as quickly as possible and contact the parent. If the candidate recovers within 15

minutes, we allow the candidate to continue the examination. Additional time is not granted but a report is made of the incident and sent to the exam board who will take this into consideration.

What facilities are there for parents at venues?

Our primary concern is the security and comfort of the candidates. Due to the security situation prevailing in the country we are unable to offer parents or teachers any waiting facilities. Parents are requested to drop their children at the venue and pick them up at the end of the examination.

How do we communicate with candidates?

Our website www.britishcouncil.pk is the prime source of information for all examination candidates. Both before and during the examination session candidates are strongly advised to regularly visit the British Council Pakistan website for any important announcements regarding their examinations. For private candidates we inform them of any urgent updates through SMS. We are also in constant communication with all schools and institutes, candidates, whether private or school, must communicate with their centre and not directly with the awarding body.

Study Tips

Cambridge International Examinations and Edexcel provide study resources and advice for students on their websites. For more details, go to:

www.cie.org.uk
www.edexcel.com



WHERE CAN I FIND OUT MORE?

For more information and advice on GCE examination and other UK qualification please call us toll-free at 0800 22000 (Monday to Saturday 9:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. or write to us at info@britishcouncil.org.pk

Or visit British Council website: www.britishcouncil.pk

You can also visit Awarding body websites for further information.

Edexcel International: www.edexcel.com

Cambridge International Examinations: www.cie.org.uk

Legal Disclaimer

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