

International GCSE Plus: FAQ

General

Q: Is International GCSE Plus available anywhere else?

A: No, it is exclusively available with Oxford AQA International GCSEs. The taught skills syllabus and assessment objectives are based on the Level 1 and 2 Higher Project Qualification (HPQ), which is a GCSE-standard qualification offered by AQA in the UK. However, the assessment methodology and the processes involved in applying the assessment objectives are very different to the HPQ, making International GCSE Plus totally unique.

Q: Which subjects are available?

A: All of our International GCSE subjects are available with International GCSE Plus with the exception of English Language (which already has a speaking and listening endorsement).

Q: What's the difference between International GCSE Plus and IPQ?

A: The IPQ is an A-level standard qualification and is therefore much bigger and wider in scope; 120 hours in total (30 hours taught skills and 90 hours study), whilst an International GCSE Plus project is 30 hours in total (10 hours taught skills and 20 hours of study). With the IPQ, students are free to select any discipline, whereas with International GCSE Plus the topic explores an aspect of the associated International GCSE subject.

International GCSE Plus is designed to be appropriate for 14-16 year-olds, recognising students in Years 10 and 11 have less subject knowledge to explore than A-level students and will be unfamiliar with researching and writing long reports. Therefore the taught skills focus on the three key areas of planning, researching and writing, providing an introduction to some of the key academic skills associated with these three areas. At IPQ level, students will go into much more depth in their taught skills programme, and will also be introduced to oral communication skills. This is one reason why International GCSE Plus is an excellent preparation for success in the IPQ.

Q: How much is it?

A: For the 2019-20 academic year all International GCSE Plus subjects will cost £27 per entry. This is an additional fee to the £54 entry fee for single award International GCSEs. So for example, if a student is studying Oxford AQA International GCSEs for Biology, Chemistry and Physics, and does an International GCSE Plus project with Physics and Chemistry, the overall fee would be £216 for that student (3x £54 and 2x £27). If a student does an International GCSE Plus with Combined Science, the overall fee would be £105 (£78 + £27).

If a student completes an International GCSE Plus project but doesn't achieve the desired grade, the student can request the school not to enter the project, in which case the standard International GCSE fee will be charged and not the International GCSE Plus entry fee.

Our fees are explained on our website: oxfordaqaexams.org.uk/become-an-oxford-aqa-school/fees

Assessment and Entries

Q: How will International GCSE Plus be assessed?

A: International GCSE Plus is an internally assessed endorsement. The supervisor grades the overall project using guidance in the specification. The centre coordinator submits the grades to OxfordAQA with their associated International GCSEs. Standardisation training will be provided for supervisors before it's time to grade projects.

We are adopting a verification model, which means teachers will be standardised before they start marking, then OxfordAQA will check a random selection of projects following submission. If the school's grades are out, guidance will be given for the following year, but grades will not be amended.

Q: How are International GCSE Plus entries made?

A: International GCSE Plus entries are made with the standard International GCSE entries for the May/June series using the International GCSE Plus code. So for example, if a student plans to enter International GCSE Plus for Business then the entry they make is for both the International GCSE and the International GCSE Plus, using the International GCSE Plus code (there are not two separate entries made).

So in this case, exams officers would enter the code for International GCSE Plus Business, 9225E, which is listed in the International GCSE Plus specification. The exams officer would NOT enter both 9225E and 9225 (the International GCSE Business code).

If for any reason the student decides to withdraw their Plus entry, the exam officer would need to re-enter for the International GCSE on its own.

International GCSE Plus projects can currently only be submitted for the May/June series, not the November series.

Q: What year should it be taken in?

A: International GCSE Plus projects are submitted after candidates are entered for their associated International GCSE exams in the same way as coursework. So if a school starts teaching an Oxford AQA International GCSE in September 2018 in preparation for the 2020 June exams, the corresponding International GCSE Plus project would be submitted in March 2020. If a school started teaching an Oxford AQA International GCSE in September 2017, the corresponding International GCSE Plus project would be submitted in March 2019

– although this would not apply to International GCSE Geography, as the first assessment for this specification is 2020.

Projects can be completed at any time prior to final exams; the school would simply withhold submitting the grades until entry time. Therefore International GCSE Plus can be completed over the full two years of the International GCSE, in the first year of the course, or in the second year of the course. It could even be completed before the start of the International GCSE if the school wishes. However, it's important to note that once a project has been graded by the supervisor, it cannot be further refined by the student.

Q: Can the students submit artefacts?

A: No. The outcome of International GCSE Plus is a 2000-word written report. Part of the student's research can involve gathering primary research through conducting experiments, surveys, observations, etc, but this would only be an aspect of a range of research, not the final outcome.

If a student wishes to do an artefact based project, below are some examples of project titles that supervisors may want to use to direct students towards a report based project on the same topic.

Don't allow: *Painting a picture in the style of the great artists.*

Do allow: *Which European painter of the seventeenth century was the most gifted in terms of technique?*

Don't allow: *Designing a sculpture.*

Do allow: *What was the most significant development in the representation of the human body in sculpture from the 19th to 20th century?*

Don't allow: *Cooking a meal in the style of restaurants with Michelin stars.*

Do allow: *To what extent can cooking be considered a science?*

Q: Which series should International GCSE Plus be entered in?

A: International GCSE Plus entries can only be made for the May/June series; they cannot be made for the November series.

Support for schools

Q: Will training be offered?

A: Yes. Three types of training will be available: 'Taster' sessions will be offered at various points in the year. These may be face-to-face or webinar-based. In addition to scheduled tasters, schools that are interested in teaching International GCSE Plus can request one-to-one taster sessions at any time, which would either be via webinar or face-to-face. Schools should contact their OxfordAQA Qualifications Consultant to request Tasters.

For schools that have decided to teach International GCSE Plus alongside their Oxford AQA International GCSEs, a general orientation will be provided as part of our 'Prepare to Teach' training in June.

The third type of training is webinar-based 'standardisation', for schools that are offering International GCSE Plus and need to prepare for the assessment. Supervisors must attend standardisation training before grading projects. These webinars will be scheduled at a certain point in the academic year (likely to be November, tbc); if that does not fit into the school's International GCSE Plus timetable, schools may request private standardisation training when required. In addition to this, a recording of our standardisation training will be available to approved schools in the OxfordAQA website login area.

Q: What teacher support will there be?

A: The key support items are:

- The Specification: this includes guidance on how to grade projects
- The Classroom handouts: these can be used to teach the taught skills. The first two will be available in March 2018, the rest will be available July 2018.
- The Scheme of Work: this provides extra guidance on how to teach the taught skills, and comes with an accompanying slide deck teachers can use in class
- The Teacher Guidance Document: this has more information about the roles and responsibilities of the supervisor and centre coordinator. It also includes example project titles
- Marked exemplars: these include extracts from example projects and notes on how they should be graded (available from March 2018)
- Standardisation training: webinar-based training for supervisors to ensure they are clear on assessment standards.
- Prepare to Teach training: orientation in June for schools who are looking to start International GCSE Plus next academic year.

Q: What sample materials do you have available?

A: Materials are available at oxfordaqaexams.org.uk/gcseplus – including the essential resources: Specification, Teacher Guidance Document, Progress Diary template and Scheme of Work. Exemplars and classroom handouts will be available on the website from March 2018.

Timetabling and Logistics

Q: Can we still do it if we do International GCSEs with another board?

A: Schools need to be offering an Oxford AQA International GCSE in order to offer International GCSE Plus for that subject. This is because the endorsement from OxfordAQA can only be awarded as part of the Oxford AQA International GCSE; it will appear on the student's Oxford AQA International GCSE certificate alongside their 9-1 grades. Of course schools may undertake a similar project alongside another exam board's GCSE or as part of the school's own extra-curricular activity, but the result will not be recognised as an International GCSE endorsement.

Of course, schools are free to select just one Oxford AQA International GCSE so that they may offer International GCSE Plus for that subject, whilst continuing with their current exam board for all other subjects.

Q: How many subjects do you suggest students should do a Plus project in?

A: This is a decision for the school, and it will depend on the GCSE options available and the structure of the school's timetable. Students could do just one International GCSE Plus project, or they could do several.

It's worth noting that the 10 hours of taught skills cover one or more International GCSE Plus project. So if a student does 3x International GCSE Plus projects, the student will need to do 10 hours of taught skills, plus 60 hours of independent learning time (3 x 20 hours per project).

We would recommend that students do a maximum of five International GCSE Plus projects.

Q: Can some of the students take it but not others?

A: International GCSE Plus is open to all students doing our International GCSEs with the exception of English Language (this Oxford AQA International GCSE already has a speaking and listening endorsement).

Q: How would the teachers manage this if not all the students will be opting for International GCSE Plus?

A: It depends on how the school wishes to implement International GCSE Plus. If the school decides that all students should complete at least one International GCSE Plus for a subject / subjects of their choice, the 10 hours of taught skills can be taught in a dedicated timetabled slot, for example PSHE. This is possible because the taught skills are common to all subjects.

If the school wishes to make International GCSE Plus completely optional, ie, students are not required to do any International GCSE Plus subjects unless they opt in, the school may wish to teach the taught skills outside of the school timetable, for example, as part of an extra-curricular club.

Alternatively schools may feel, having reviewed the taught skills syllabus, that all their students would benefit from this tuition regardless of whether they opt-in to completing a International GCSE Plus project or not. This would apply especially to schools where students go on to do IBDP and therefore need to prepare for the Extended Essay, as well as schools that encourage their A-level students to take an EPQ or IPQ.

If we hear that there is a demand for a flipped learning approach we will investigate options for helping schools achieve this, for example, by developing video tutorials for the taught skills syllabus.

Q: How can we fit it in the timetable?

A: It will depend on how the school's timetable is structured, whether the school wishes to make International GCSE Plus compulsory or optional, and whether the school wishes to

make International GCSE Plus more of a homework/holiday activity or an activity for completion in scheduled curriculum time. There are various options:

- Teach the taught skills in a subject class and have students work on their projects as homework.
- Teach the taught skills in a 2-day intensive course at the start of term, students then complete their projects as homework.
- Teach the taught skills at the end of Year 1/Semester 1 of the International GCSE; have students plan their projects over the holiday, and complete their projects during the first 2 weeks of Year 2 / Semester 2.
- Cover the taught skills and independent study during PSHE, extra curricula time, or in an after-school club.
- Offer video-based tutorials of the taught skills for students to access at home or during holidays; students complete their projects as homework.
- Offer International GCSE Plus as extra tuition for gifted and talented students.
- For students who take some International GCSEs a year early, International GCSE Plus could be integrated into the subjects' timetable at the end of year 1 after the exams (from May/June up until the holiday).
- Reduce the number of International GCSEs, eg, from 10 to 8 if covered in two years, or 5 to 4 if covered in one year, to create more time for dedicated student-led study.

Q: How much time should we allow for a project?

A: We recommend a minimum of 10 hours of taught skills (which would not increase if a student is doing multiple International GCSE Plus projects), and 20 hours of independent study per project. Students should also have opportunities to discuss their progress with their supervisor. There's no minimum time students need to complete International GCSE Plus, but generally we'd expect students to require at least 2 months to cover a whole project from start to finish, allowing enough time for ideas and reflection as part of the development process. However, the taught skills element can be covered in two days of intensive classes and it's feasible that bright students could complete the project itself in under 2 months.

Holidays could also be used for students to scope their project for approval, conduct their research, or draft their 2000-word report. However, teachers must be confident that any work not done under direct supervision is the work of the student alone.

Educational benefits and Recognition

Q: Do you have anything that can help us present/explain it to parents and students?

A: We are commencing a campaign of parent-focused communications for schools to use. We are keen to know what particular items and support schools would value as part of this communication. Initially we will provide a presentation for schools to customise, a video for parents that will feature International GCSE Plus, and a leaflet introducing parents to the features and benefits of International GCSE Plus, all of which will be ready mid-April 2018.

Q: How will it help bridge the gap to A-level and/or IBDP? Have you got any evidence to support this?

A: When students progress to A-level they need to work more independently and in more depth than at GCSE. International GCSE Plus prepares students for this by developing appropriate skills such as independent learning, research, report writing and reflection. This is ideal preparation for studying any subject with a degree of specialism, and also excellent preparation for students going on to study the IPQ / EPQ or the IB Extended Essay.

Since International GCSE Plus is completely new there is not yet any specific research to support these assumptions, but there has been [research into the extended project approach at KS5](#) that suggests student-led projects result in improved motivation levels, improved results in students' other subjects, improved lifelong learning and improved performance in students' next stage of education. There is no reason to assume that the same observations would not be true for student-led projects at GCSE level. "There is a case for speculating that extended project work at GCSE level might have a greater positive effect on factors such as student motivation, given that students have less autonomy over what they study than at A-level, thus potentially amplifying the effect of work where the student determines what and how to learn" (Robin Drummond, lead developer for International GCSE Plus).

Q: Will parents see the value of International GCSE Plus?

A: A good degree from a good university is for most parents the ultimate return on their educational investment in their children. International GCSE Plus is designed to prepare students for this goal by developing university-ready skills at an early stage, so by the time children leave school they have a portfolio of work to refer to in their university application and they have the skills necessary for success at university. This is of vital importance because there is a tendency for many students to focus on getting the grades required to be accepted at their chosen university, and not to focus on developing the academic skills and competencies to thrive when they are at university:

"Erasmus students agreed that whilst overall their workload was similar to their home institutions, with the same intellectual demands, British Universities put more emphasis on independent learning."

Lord David Willetts, UK Minister for Universities and Science 2010-2014, from *A University Education* (OUP, 2017, p.207)

There is also a very valid argument to be made that International GCSE Plus can lead to improved grades in students' standard GCSEs. [Research into the extended project approach at KS5](#) suggests that students who undertake an EPQ (which is a similar type of student-led project involving a syllabus of taught skills followed by independent research and a final report), are 29% more likely to achieve a grade A*-B in most of their A-level subjects. There is no reason to assume that the same conclusions would not be true for student-led projects at International GCSE level.

Q: What do universities think about it?

A: As of February 2018 we are making universities and UK sixth form centres aware of International GCSE Plus and inviting them to comment. Those comments will be added to the International GCSE Plus page of our website as soon as we have them.

Results

Q: If students fail, would this appear on their certificate?

A: No, as this is an optional endorsement, an unclassified grade would not appear on the student's certificate even if the grade is submitted.

As International GCSE Plus is internally assessed, the school will know that the student has failed before entering the student, so we would assume schools would prefer not to enter the fail grade to save on the International GCSE Plus fee.

Q: Would universities prefer a student with 8x International GCSEs at grade 9 and 2x International GCSE Plus distinctions - or 10x International GCSEs at grade 9?

A: We cannot speculate how International GCSE Plus grades will be externally valued in relation to International GCSE standard grades. For the moment we should assume that the International GCSE standard grades will be the first priority for students and educators.

The value in the graded International GCSE Plus endorsement is that it allows students to demonstrate a set of attributes that extend beyond the knowledge assessed in standard International GCSEs. Other educational institutions and future employers can use these grades as an indicator of the students' aptitude for working independently on a research-based piece of analytic work, such as finding a solution to a complex business-related problem.