

OXFORD

INTERNATIONAL
AQA EXAMINATIONS

International GCSEs, AS and A-levels from OxfordAQA

A GUIDE FOR PARENTS



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oxfordaqaexams.org.uk



> INTRODUCTION

For many parents whose children study at an international school, the decision around which International GCSEs and A-levels to study isn't just limited to subject choices. Parents may also be consulted on the school's preference of qualification providers.

This report explores the various considerations for international schools as they decide on which qualifications to choose. It introduces the new International GCSEs, AS and A-levels from OxfordAQA and shows why it's a good thing that schools now have a greater choice of qualification providers.

> CONTENTS

An introduction to the different awarding bodies	page 3
OxfordAQA.....	page 3
Deciding on an exam board.....	page 4
1. GCSE standards and grading structure	page 4
2. A-levels: Linear or Modular.....	page 4
3. Syllabus content	page 6
4. Optionality	page 6
5. Cross-disciplinary options.....	page 6
6. Exam design.....	page 8
7. Assessment Objectives.....	page 9
Recognition of OxfordAQA qualifications.....	page 10

> AN INTRODUCTION TO THE DIFFERENT AWARDING BODIES

If your child's school is in the Middle East, South East Asia or China, there are now three alternative International GCSE, AS and A-level providers to choose from for the popular subjects. They are Oxford International AQA Examinations (OxfordAQA), Cambridge Assessment International Education (Cambridge) and Pearson Edexcel (Pearson).

There are also other exam boards providing GCSEs and A-levels for schools in the UK, which are sometimes offered by international schools. These are AQA, OCR, Pearson Edexcel, WJEC and the CCEA. Most international schools prefer International GCSEs and A-levels because exams tend to be timed more conveniently and the content tends to be better suited to students studying outside the UK.

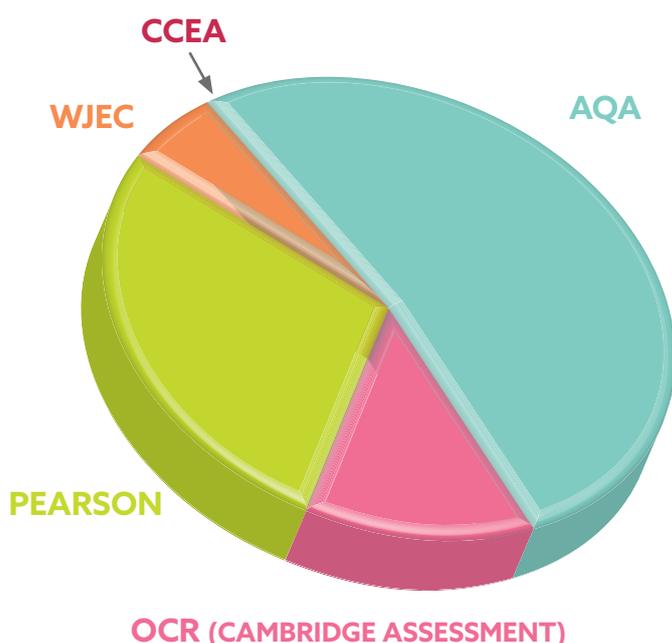
> OXFORDAQA

OxfordAQA is a partnership between Oxford University Press, a department of the University of Oxford, and AQA, the UK's largest provider of GCSEs and A-levels. AQA is the awarding body for OxfordAQA's international qualifications, which means the assessments are designed, marked and processed using the same systems that AQA uses for its popular UK exams.

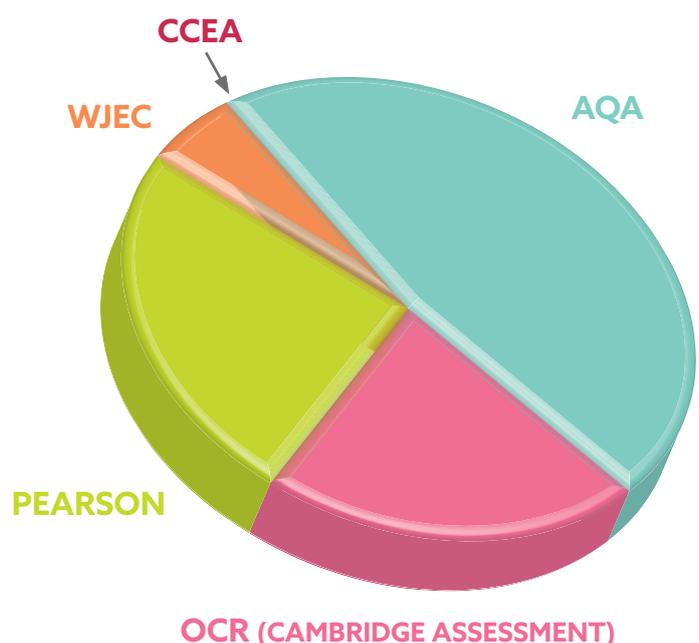
AQA is by far the largest provider of GCSEs and A-levels in the UK. Its qualifications are taught in almost all of England's 6,000 schools, colleges and learning centres, and each year AQA marks over 7 million exam papers. By comparison, OCR (Cambridge Assessment's UK exam board) marks considerably fewer exam papers as the pie charts below demonstrate.

OxfordAQA's international qualifications are based on the reformed GCSEs and A-levels taught in the UK. They have been adapted to meet the needs of international students, and the exams are scheduled conveniently for students based in the Middle East and Asia.

GCSEs awarded in England by exam board (2016-17 academic year)



A-levels awarded in England by exam board (2016-17 academic year)



Source: Ofqual: Annual qualifications market report: academic year 2016 to 2017

www.gov.uk/government/statistics/annual-qualifications-market-report-academic-year-2016-to-2017

➤ DECIDING ON AN EXAM BOARD

Schools don't have to use just one exam board across all subjects. They can pick and choose qualification providers on a subject-by-subject basis. The decision will largely be based on the school's preferences in syllabus and exam approach. Below are seven considerations for schools when choosing qualification providers, with an explanation of the approaches taken by OxfordAQA.

1. GCSE standards and grading structure

Some International GCSEs are based on the new reformed GCSEs that are being taught in England and graded 9-1. However, some boards still offer International GCSEs based on the old GCSEs which are being phased out in the UK and were graded A*-G. OxfordAQA International GCSEs are based on the reformed GCSEs, which means they are aligned to the standard of the GCSEs that students in England are now taking. This new standard is characterised by a greater emphasis on critical thinking skills in the assessments, new syllabus content and new 9-1 grades.

The new 9-1 grading system was designed to measure student performance against this new higher standard, whilst allowing for the new standard to be benchmarked to the old. So a Grade 7 is comparable to a Grade A and a Grade 4 is comparable to a Grade C. With more questions targeting higher ability students, the reformed International GCSEs give students the opportunity to demonstrate higher levels of ability, with a new 'exceptional' Grade 9, higher than the old A*.

The opportunity to achieve a Grade 9 enables applicants to stand out from the crowd as competition for places at top-ranking universities increases. This is even more important now that A-levels in England have been made 'linear' and universities are increasingly using GCSEs as evidence of a student's prior attainment.

It is expected that most countries will recognise these higher standard International GCSEs differently to other International GCSEs in their own national equivalencies. This is already the case in Egypt, where a Grade 8 is equivalent to a Grade A*, and a Grade 9 is recognised as the 'highest grade in the Egyptian system'.

2. A-levels: Linear or Modular

A-levels in England have changed in format, but most International A-levels remain unchanged. International schools can now choose whether to offer the new reformed 'linear' A-levels from the five UK exam boards, or stick with the 'modular' approach retained by International A-levels.

The modular approach gives students the option to drop a subject after Year 1 and still achieve an AS qualification. This means students can start with four or five A-levels with a view to completing the three they are strongest in, whilst also achieving a universally recognised AS qualification for those they discontinue. The flexibility of the modular approach is preferable for many schools and students.

OxfordAQA International A-levels are modular. We also allow students to retake single papers as many times as they wish, so if students miss out on a preferred grade, they can retake the paper they performed weakest in rather than the full qualification.



Schools don't have to use just one exam board across all subjects. They can pick and choose from the qualification providers on a subject-by-subject basis.

3. Syllabus content

The syllabuses of qualifications are generally similar across all three international exam boards, but there are some differences. OxfordAQA's syllabuses are informed by the curriculum reforms recently implemented in England, so there's an appropriate alignment between the curriculum your child will study and the curriculum followed by students in the UK. This alignment to the new curriculum also makes for a more up-to-date and relevant syllabus. For example, our International GCSEs in Science include fresh new units on Space Physics, Animal Behaviour and Nanoparticles – topics that will excite students because they offer a grounding in the latest scientific principles.

However, not all of the reformed changes to UK GCSE content suit students studying in international schools, so we have made modifications where appropriate. For example, contextual problem solving is now a compulsory component for all UK Mathematics GCSEs, but exam questions that test performance in this way may disadvantage students whose first language is not English. That is why it is not included in our International GCSE. Similarly our international English Literature qualifications do not require students to study Shakespeare, as is compulsory in England.

By taking the best of the UK curriculum reforms whilst understanding the needs of students studying internationally, we have ensured our syllabus content is globally relevant, motivating for students and excellent preparation for onward progression.

4. Optionality

Some qualifications allow schools to choose assessment units, for example, coursework or exam. Coursework allows students to explore an area of the subject in greater depth, and we believe that's particularly important for a subject like English. That's why OxfordAQA's First Language English qualifications allow schools to offer coursework at both International GCSE and A-level. This is not the case for UK GCSEs and A-levels, or for some other International A-levels.

For International A-level Mathematics, students have different options for exam papers, allowing them to choose a specialised area of study. Our approach to optionality in Mathematics reflects the preferences of higher education. Top British universities want students to have a thorough grounding in Pure Maths and an essential grounding in both Statistics and Mechanics before specialising in one preferred option – so this is how we have structured our International A-level.

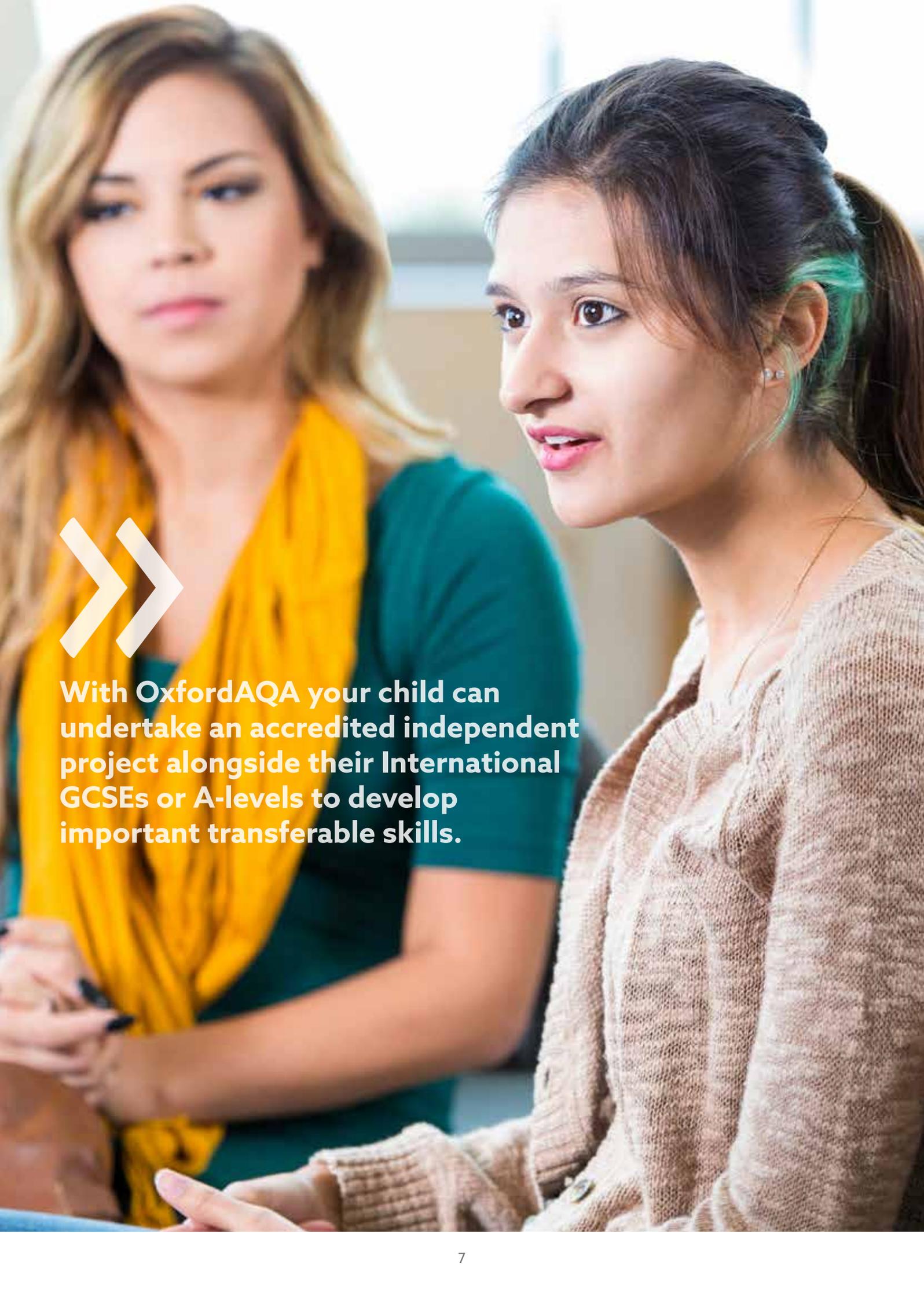
5. Cross-disciplinary options

Schools are increasingly looking to integrate cross-disciplinary opportunities into their curriculum. With OxfordAQA your child can undertake an accredited independent project alongside their International GCSEs or A-levels to develop important transferable academic skills such as problem solving and research.

The [Independent Project Qualification \(IPQ\)](#) is an international version of AQA's highly successful Extended Project Qualification (EPQ). Worth half an A-level, the IPQ can be taken as a supplementary course to your child's three desired A-levels, requiring students to produce a project on a subject of their choice, underpinned by a syllabus of taught academic skills. The qualification is widely recognised by UK universities as being excellent preparation for higher education. Research in the UK has also revealed that doing an extended project alongside A-levels can increase the chances of students achieving [higher A-level grades in most subjects](#).

At GCSE level, [International GCSE Plus](#) gives students the option to undertake a mini project alongside the OxfordAQA International GCSEs they are studying. The process is similar to the IPQ; students complete a research-based piece of analytic work, directed by a short syllabus of academic skills. Successful students achieve a Pass, Merit or Distinction endorsement on their International GCSE certificate, alongside their standard grade.

Both the IPQ and International GCSE Plus equip children with the skills they need to thrive when they get to university, where they are expected to study independently, think critically and link ideas between different disciplines.



With OxfordAQA your child can undertake an accredited independent project alongside their International GCSEs or A-levels to develop important transferable skills.

6. Exam design

An exam board's qualification is made up of the syllabus which is taught and the assessment which provides evidence of what a student knows, understands and can do. Years of research goes into the development of exam papers to ensure assessment items measure students' performance as accurately and consistently as possible. After all, their futures depend on them getting the results they deserve.

That's why exam paper design has become a science in its own right, and OxfordAQA is continuously innovating and incorporating emerging best practice. Our exam papers draw on over 100 years of assessment expertise from AQA. So much so, that every tiny aspect of an exam paper is considered and reviewed, from the precise wording of exam questions to the mark scheme that examiners use to judge performance.

OxfordAQA also draws on expertise and linguistic research from Oxford University Press when designing the international exam papers. Exam writers use the [Oxford 3000](#) wordlist to ensure the language and examples used in exam questions don't disadvantage students who have never lived in the UK or who aren't fluent English speakers. All of these activities help OxfordAQA to achieve [fair assessment](#) for all students.



OxfordAQA's exam papers draw on over 100 years of assessment expertise from AQA, the UK's largest academic awarding body.



7. Assessment Objectives

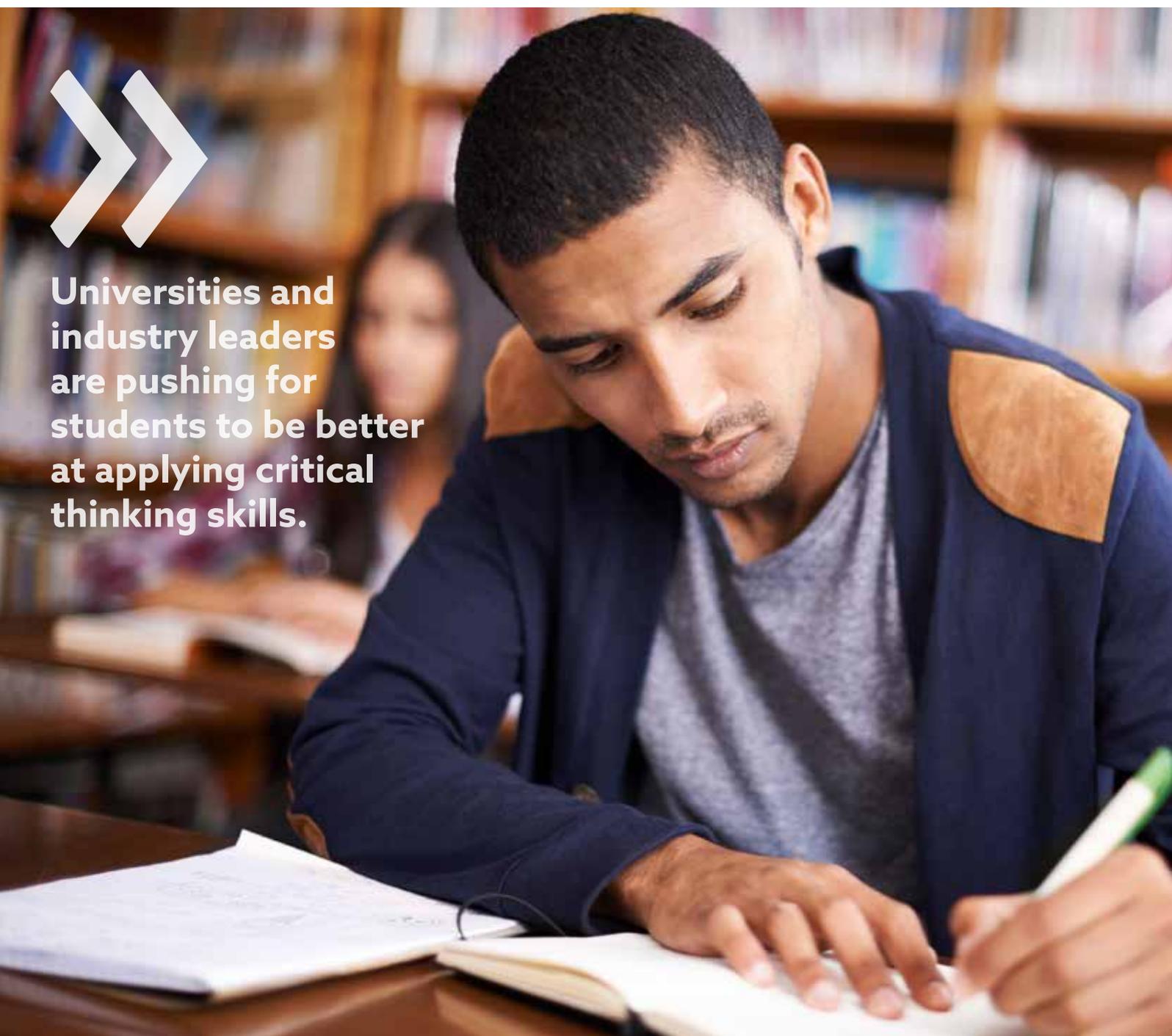
Assessment Objectives, or 'AOs', set out the types of skills that will be assessed in the exams, and therefore direct the style of the teaching. AO weightings usually vary between subjects. They can also vary between the different exam boards for the same subjects. Generally speaking, OxfordAQA qualifications have the most emphasis on 'higher order' thinking skills in their AOs, such as application, analysis and evaluation.

Universities and industry leaders are pushing for students to be better at applying these critical thinking skills. Top universities often require their Mathematics, Computing and Physics applicants to sit a university entrance exam such as the STEP or MAT. These exams require students to solve challenging, unstructured mathematical problems. Clearly, students who have studied International GCSEs and A-levels that prioritise higher order thinking skills will be at an advantage.

School leaders are also well aware that the jobs of tomorrow may not require the same skills as the jobs of today. In an age where artificial intelligence is advancing at an unprecedented rate, the ability to synthesise and evaluate ideas is likely to become an increasingly attractive skill to employers as automation gradually replaces some aspects of traditional 'knowledge'-based responsibilities.



Universities and industry leaders are pushing for students to be better at applying critical thinking skills.



› RECOGNITION OF OXFORDAQA QUALIFICATIONS

One of the most important aspects of any qualification is how it is recognised by higher education and employers. All OxfordAQA International GCSEs and A-levels have been evaluated by UK NARIC, the government agency responsible for ensuring qualifications are comparable and offering advice on international qualifications to universities. UK NARIC has approved OxfordAQA International GCSEs, AS and A-levels as being comparable to the reformed GCSEs and A-levels offered in England.

Understandably, if your school plans on teaching OxfordAQA qualifications you'll want to see evidence that your child's target university will accept them. We list [recognising universities](#) on our website. They include the majority of the top 100 universities ranked by QS, including the British Russell Group, the American Ivy League and the Australian Group of Eight. They also include top-ranked international universities in Canada, Europe and Asia.



Some universities don't appear on our website but do formally recognise OxfordAQA qualifications. Others will be going through the recognition process now. You can check whether a particular university recognises OxfordAQA qualifications by [contacting us](#).

In some countries, the Ministry of Education formally recognises international qualifications, providing guidance for public university admissions. Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Malaysia and Oman are a few countries where this is the case and where OxfordAQA qualifications are officially accepted.

Rest assured, your child can still apply to an international university that hasn't yet advanced through our recognition process. Every year, hundreds of thousands of UK school-leavers enrol in top global universities with AQA certificates. Since AQA are the awarding body for all OxfordAQA qualifications, you can feel confident that your child's certificate will carry the same weight as the AQA certificates valued by school-leavers in the UK.



**For more information about OxfordAQA,
visit oxfordaqaexams.org.uk**





Oxford International AQA Examinations aims to improve education through excellence in teaching, learning and assessment. It is a joint venture between Oxford University Press, a department of the University of Oxford, and AQA, the UK's largest academic awarding body.