

Cheat sheet

The GCSE, from first subject choices to the move into the IB.

The British qualification that closes lower secondary, taken at around 16. In Switzerland, international schools almost always offer its international version, the IGCSE.

At a glance

Ages 14 – 16 Year 10 and Year 11	2 years of study	8 to 10 subjects as a rule	Final exams end of Year 11	Next A-levels, IB Diploma or BTEC
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Subjects

Compulsory core

English

language, often literature too

Maths

Foundation or Higher

Science

two routes to choose from

Combined Science

counts as 2 GCSEs

Triple Science

separate biology, chemistry and physics, more demanding

Options

Modern languages

History

Geography

Computer Science

Art

Music

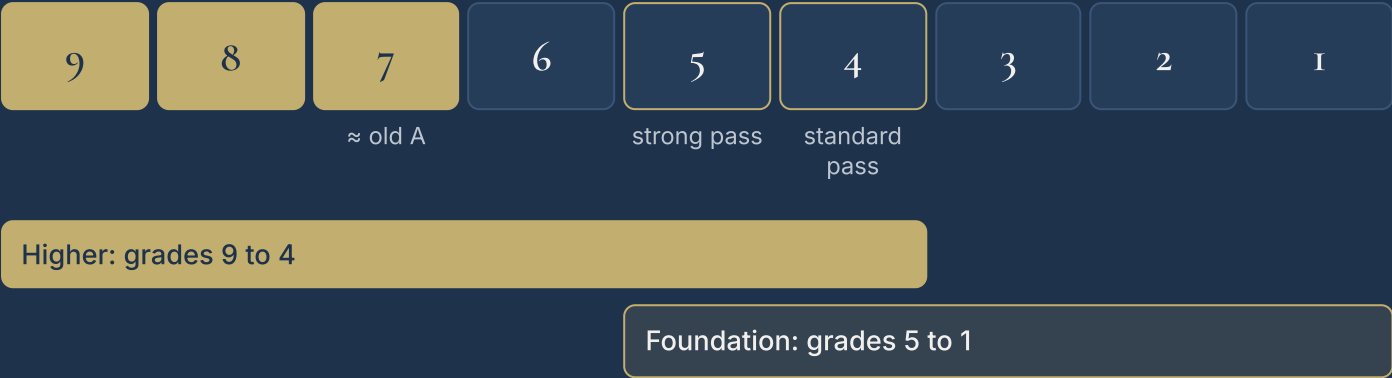
Economics

In England, the EBacc encourages a language plus history or geography.

Art, design and computer science include some coursework marked during the year. The Combined or Triple choice matters: Triple is better preparation for the sciences at IB or A-level.

Grading

In England, grades run from 9, the highest, down to 1.



In maths, sciences and languages, students sit one tier or the other. It is a decisive choice: with Foundation-tier maths, going on to demanding maths becomes difficult.

Wales, Northern Ireland and some IGCSEs still use letter grades A* to G.

Exam boards

The school chooses the board, subject by subject; families choose indirectly, through the school. Standards and recognition are equivalent from one board to another.

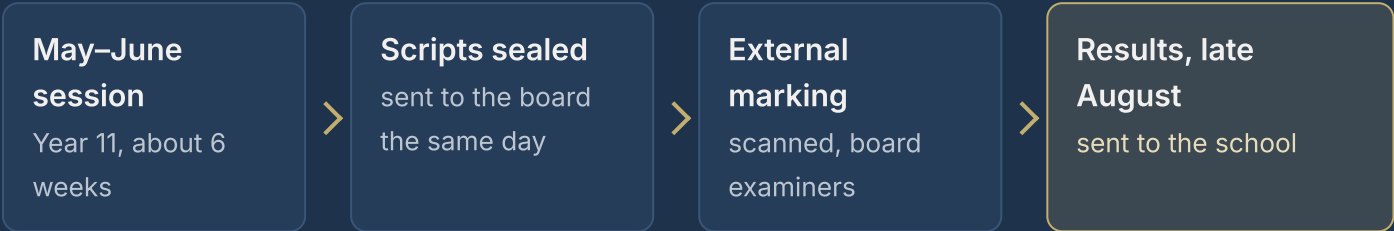
Board	Qualification	Area	Key point
Cambridge International	IGCSE	International	The most widespread in international schools
Pearson Edexcel	GCSE, International GCSE	England, international	Strong in maths and history; second player internationally
AQA	GCSE	England	The largest: English, sciences, maths
OCR	GCSE	England	Strong in computing and sciences
WJEC Eduqas	GCSE	England	Less common
WJEC	GCSE	Wales	Own syllabus
CCEA	GCSE	Northern Ireland	Own syllabus
OxfordAQA	International GCSE	International	Less common

Schools choose based on their teachers' expertise, syllabus content, teaching resources and exam logistics. Only private candidates choose for themselves.

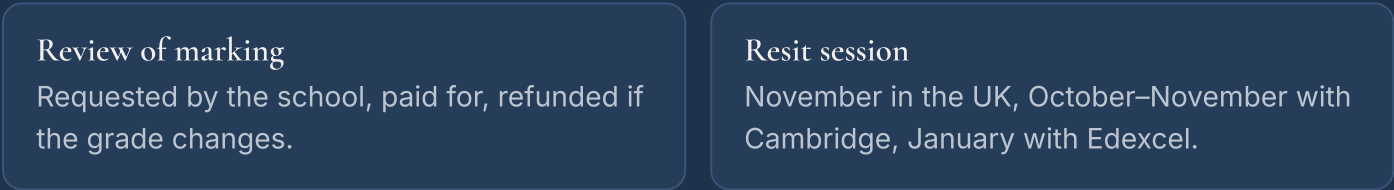
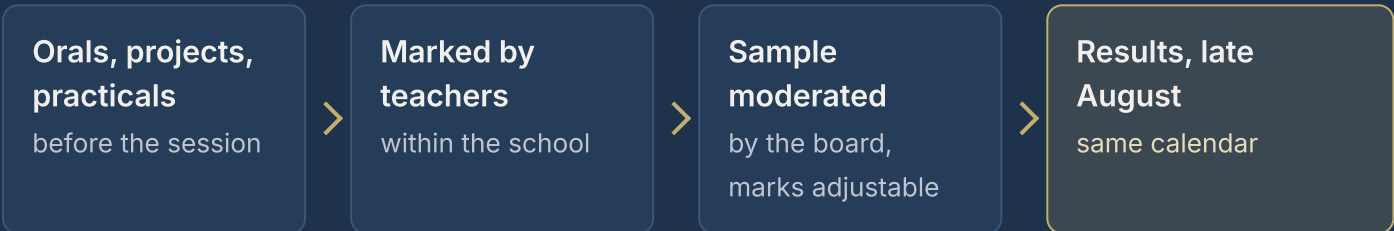
Exams

Written, standardised and marked by the board, never by the school.

Final exams



Coursework



Format	2 or 3 papers per subject, 1 h 30 to 2 h 30; often more than 20 papers in total
Venue	At school, an approved centre; private candidates use an external centre, with fees per paper
Access arrangements	Extra time, a computer, a separate room, on application submitted in advance by the school

A note on the IGCSE

GCSE

Designed for UK schools, overseen by the English regulator.

same level

IGCSE

- less coursework
- more subjects, including English as a second language
- more exam sessions

Same recognition by schools and universities. In Switzerland, almost all international schools offer the IGCSE.

After the GCSE

Three routes at 16, often with a 6 or 7 minimum in the subjects taken further

A-levels

3 or 4 subjects in depth

IB Diploma

6 subjects in parallel, plus TOK, Extended Essay and CAS

BTEC

vocational route

Moving on to the IB is common. The difficulty depends on the student's profile, not on the qualification. Profiles to watch:

Highly specialised

has dropped whole areas: languages, sciences

Weak in maths

took Foundation tier; Maths AA is hard, even at SL

No second language

Language B becomes demanding

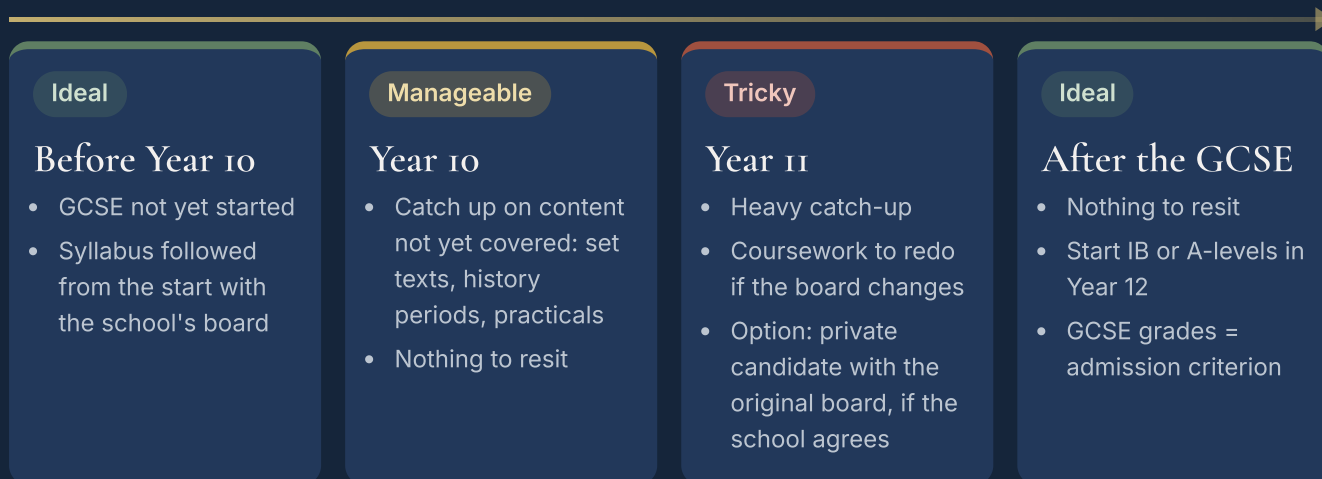
Not very independent

TOK, Extended Essay and CAS require organisation

A student who is solid across a broad range of subjects generally adapts well.

Changing programme along the way.

The GCSE is linear: almost nothing needs to be resat. The real risk is the gap in syllabus and coursework already submitted.



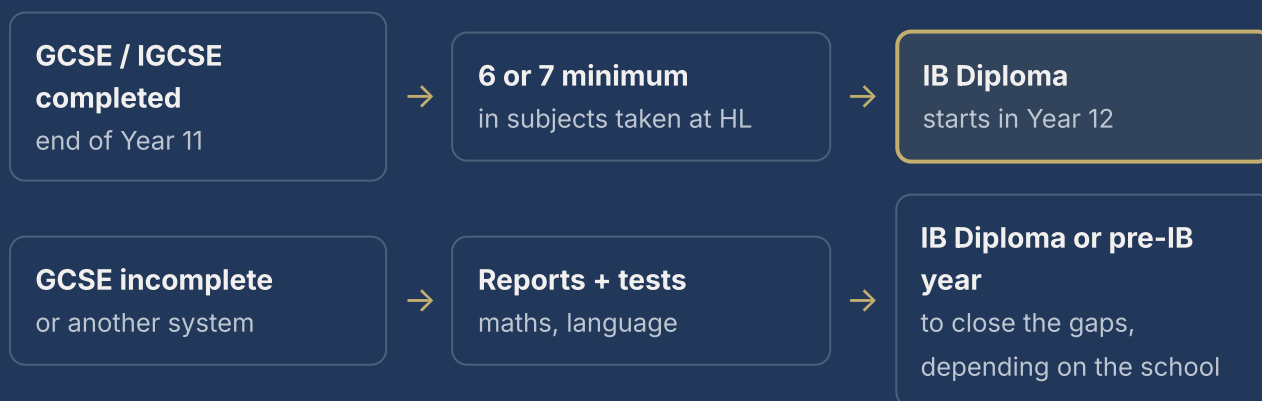
Changing board

- **Content:** each board has its own syllabus; the student catches up on what they haven't covered.
- **Coursework:** generally does not transfer and must be redone to the new board's requirements.
- **GCSE to IGCSE:** the subject stays, the syllabus changes; a fairly easy transition in this direction.

Moving to the IB

- **Nothing to resit:** the IB Diploma starts in Year 12.
- **Admission:** often a 6 or 7 minimum in subjects taken at Higher Level, sometimes maths or language tests.
- **The MYP is not a prerequisite.**

Two routes into the IB Diploma



The right time to move: before Year 10 or just after the GCSE. In between, check the new school's board subject by subject.

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