

Cambridge International A Levels Stream 2023: Frequently Asked Questions

Has the A Levels stream been a success since 2019?

Definitely! There were 16 pupils who made up the first A Levels stream in 2019 and 2020: 13 boys and 3 girls. They excelled academically, took ownership of their learning, worked independently and really enjoyed the subjects they were taking. In their first year, over 70% of their application marks were recorded as “R” for “remarkable”. Many of them achieved exceptional results for their AS Level examinations at the end of their first year (our top candidate achieved 6 straight As), and those who were not satisfied with their results had the opportunity to improve them in the examinations at the end of 2020. Their final A Level results at the end of 2020 were better than anyone could have expected: 98% A*-C, over 75% A* or A symbols, and acceptance to many of the top universities in the world. Similarly, our 2021 results were excellent. Our top candidates achieved extraordinary results.

What changes have you introduced and are you planning for the A Levels stream in 2023?

We introduced the **AS Level English Language & Literature** course for Grade 11s in 2021, to replace the AS Level English Language course we were offering until 2020. This course is more similar to what the Grade 11s would normally study on the IEB. Although it is perhaps more accessible for those not intending to carry on with English in Grade 12, it also provides excellent grounding for those interested in pursuing A Level English Language or A Level English Literature in Grade 12.

Cambridge are introduced **AS/A Level Drama** for the first time in 2021, and it looks like a very exciting and rewarding course. We have the resources and expertise to offer the subject, but because of the group work required in the subject, and the limited teaching capacity in the Drama Department, we will only be able to offer AS/A Level Drama if a minimum number of pupils take up the subject.

We offered **AS/A Level Economics** for the first time in 2022. We have not offered any commerce subjects previously, due to staff constraints and the fact that they are not a prerequisite for university / faculty entry anywhere in the world. However, the demand for this highly respected course has meant that we should be in a position to continue to offer it for the foreseeable future.

If there is sufficient interest, and it is recognised for exemption purposes in South Africa (as we expect), we will consider offering **AS / A Level Marine Science** from 2023.

Most importantly, for the 2023 intake, we intend to **start the A Level programme in the last half term of Grade 10**. This will allow our A Level pupils to get a month’s head start on their AS Level studies, which will put them in a much better position for success in their Grade 11 year.

What is the makeup of the A Level classes?

We have been looking to attract more girls to the A Levels stream in particular, in order to balance the numbers a little better, and we achieved this in 2021 with 8 girls out of the 19 A Level pupils in Grade 11. Those pupils taking A Levels tend to lean quite heavily towards the sciences: of the 16 A Levels pupils in Grade 12, 14 were taking Physics, Chemistry, or both. This year in Grade 11, 18 of the 19 pupils take one of the Sciences. This is understandable, as the structure of the A Levels suits those wanting to specialise in Science well, and the benefit of taking Science subjects in the depth offered by A Levels is significant for those wishing to pursue further studies in the sciences. However, we would also like to encourage more pupils taking humanities subjects in 2022, as the deeper level of engagement in A Level subjects makes these subjects very valuable and enriching. This is one of the reasons that we are willing to move some of the optional subjects in options 4, 5 and 6 to other options if they suit the needs of our A Levels pupils in 2022 better.

Who are the Grade 11 teachers for 2023?

These will be confirmed by the end of this term. Some subjects will have the same teachers as in 2022, and other subjects will rotate teachers.

Are the teachers suitably qualified and experienced to teach the A Level course?

Yes, absolutely. All of these teachers are very experienced and highly qualified, and most of the teachers have previous experience in teaching the A Level syllabus. Teachers have done further training through Cambridge online or in person at schools already offering Cambridge AS and A Levels. All teachers will be fully ready to teach the AS Levels in 2023.

Are all the “best” teachers moving to the A Level stream?

No. We consider all of our teachers to be “good teachers”. We have more than enough suitably qualified and experienced teachers to continue teaching the IEB classes at the highest level. Those chosen to teach the A Level classes either have previous experience in teaching the A Level syllabus, have been nominated by their heads of department, or have volunteered to do so. They will continue to teach the IEB syllabus in other grades, and this should be of benefit to the children in those classes, as they will gain from the broadened teaching experience of their teachers.

How do we expect pupils’ results for A Levels to compare to their potential IEB results?

It is quite difficult to predict results, as there are so many factors that contribute to them. Work ethic and the ability to work independently is important for the A Level programme, as is the ability to understand a subject broadly and in depth, rather than learning a set of facts. The A Levels are more difficult than IEB Matric subjects, but not unreasonably so, and the smaller number of subjects should account for the difference in depth required. What we are confident about is that, with the right approach and work ethic, pupils should be able to achieve equivalent results in the A Levels compared to what they might have achieved on the IEB.

Is a good set of IEB results better than a poor set of A Level results?

Yes. It is fair to say that better IEB results are more valuable than poor A Level results: but A Level results do count for more in terms of university entrance (AS Level results count the same in SA).

What happens if a pupil’s AS Level results are bad?

Pupils do find the AS Level year in Grade 11 particularly challenging, and AS Level results can sometimes be disappointing. AS Level subjects can be rewritten in Grade 12 if necessary, either in May/June or along with the A Level exams in November. The obvious consequence of this is reduced time for preparation and studying for the A Level examinations.

How and when are Exemption Certificates issued to candidates for entry to South African universities?

In July/August of the Grade 11 year, the school will be sent a spreadsheet by Cambridge asking for student approval to share their data/results with Universities South Africa (USAf) and Universities. We will complete this exercise and send the spreadsheet back to Cambridge International. We will apply on the student’s behalf to USAf, making one bulk payment and sending a list of student names to USAf in preparation for exemption letters. There are also some universities that apply on behalf of students so the student may need to find out what their university’s process is. USAf generally issue exemption letters on or a few days after results are released. USAf are very aware that universities require the letter for admission so try their utmost to issue the letters as quickly as possible, but obviously a complete application and proof of payment is required to make this possible. USAf state that it can take up to 8 weeks for the final certificate to be issued. Given that our pupils will be using their Grade 11 results for exemption, any delays in receiving the certificates should be irrelevant.

What are the entry requirements for South African universities, and how are the APS points calculated?

Each university and each faculty has different ways of determining entry requirements. The UCT 2020 Prospectus can be found [here](#). The APS table is on page 14 and each faculty explains entry

requirements for 'International School-Leaving Certificates'. See page 21 as an example – Faculty of Commerce.

1. IGCSE, AS-LEVEL AND A-LEVEL APPLICANTS

Combine at least: three A-Levels plus three subjects which may be O-Level or AS-Level **OR** four AS-Levels plus two O-Levels **OR** three AS-Levels plus one A-Level and two O-Levels Double your points for Mathematics and English. **Each subject can only be counted once at A-Level or AS-Level or O-Level. Only National Senior Certificate equivalent subjects will be considered.**

If English is taken as a 2nd Language, then you must have another language as a 1st Language in order to be considered further. English Literature is not accepted.

Bachelor of Business Science specialising in: Computer Science Economics Economics with Law Finance Finance with Accounting Information Systems Marketing Organisational Psychology Analytics	A-Level 53 points English E at A-Level or B at IGCSE Mathematics C AS-Level 53 points English D at AS Level or B at IGCSE Mathematics B
---	--

It is far from simple to work out, but it seems on the face of it that UCT would prefer candidates to arrive with 6 subjects at AS/IGCSE level rather than 5. They do indicate that all applications will be considered individually. For comparison, the Stellenbosch entry requirements can be found [here](#). They only require 4 AS levels and 1 IGCSE. Also, the admission requirements for the University of Pretoria can be found in [this](#) document. Universities are aware of the Cambridge results release dates and do cater for Cambridge students as long as students submit their results as soon as possible. The universities also have access to the Cambridge online system so they are in a position to verify results as soon as they are received.

What are IGCSEs and O Levels, and does it matter than we don't do them?

IGCSEs and O Levels are similar level examinations which equate to a Grade 10 qualification. IGCSEs are the normal precursor to AS/A Levels in schools which follow the full Cambridge pathway, and O Levels are very similar examinations, taken in countries like Zimbabwe where they have a history of writing O Levels. IGCSE results are sometimes requested by overseas universities, but they are not a requirement for foreign students applying to overseas universities. We can supply Grade 10 results if the particular university requests them.

Will pupils have a large deficit to make up, having not done IGCSEs, particularly in subjects like Physics and Chemistry?

The IGCSE syllabi cover a broad range of content, but in very little depth. In many cases, our Grade 10 syllabi are of similar depth and complexity as the IGCSE syllabi. In the Sciences, since we do not currently "spiral" content anyway (by repeating or revising work done in previous years before carrying on), we would start each new section of work (which hasn't been covered before) from

scratch and cover the IGCSE part of it in very little time before carrying on. In addition, we have adjusted our Grade 10 syllabi in the last two years to include more IGCSE work. The AS Level syllabus in both Physics and Chemistry is not dissimilar to the IEB Matric syllabi in these subjects. The IEB syllabus is benchmarked against the AS Level syllabus. As we will have double the time to complete the content in Grade 11, as compared to Physical Science, there will be adequate time to cover both Physics and Chemistry as separate AS Level subjects. Some extra practical sessions will be scheduled to make up any shortfall in practical skills. Success in the AS and A Level courses, particularly Physics and Chemistry, will require consistent work and focus, both in class and independently. However, we are certain that our boys and girls will be well prepared for the examinations in grade 11 and 12.

Who can provide subject choice guidance and discuss the suitability of pupils for the A Levels stream?

Graham Creese (Head of A Levels; email g.creese@sacschool.com) is available to discuss individual subject choices and the suitability of candidates for the A Levels stream. The respective Academic Heads (Petra Gentz and Aidan Smith) can also provide the necessary guidance. Tutors, LO staff, house staff and teachers will also be able to provide useful input in making a decision about the A Levels stream. There is also plenty of information available online regarding A Levels and how to go about choosing A Level subjects. Particularly recommended are the Cambridge Recognitions database and the Informed Choices brochure, published by the Russell Group.

Who is eligible for exemption from taking a second language?

There is the option for immigrant pupils to be exempt from the 2nd language option and to apply for a conditional exemption through USAf. Much like for the IEB, though, we would suggest that it would be of benefit to continue with a 2nd language in Grade 11 if possible. Those exempt from taking a 2nd language would still be required to take 5 subjects in Grade 11, which means they would have to choose subjects from each of options 1,3,4,5, and 6. Immigrant pupils are defined (by law) as foreign students who began their schooling in South Africa after the beginning of Grade 7.

Are the subject choices cast in stone?

The options presented in the booklet are the most likely combinations on offer. We will consider moving those subjects marked with an asterisk to different options if this suits the majority of 2023 applicants.

Is it possible to take A Level subjects not offered by the school by private arrangement?

No. As all subjects will count towards pupils' final A Level qualification, we cannot be responsible for A Level subjects that are not supported by us and taught by our staff. Tutors may not be available for the full 2 years and may not be suitably qualified. The only case where we may consider this is for alternative an second language (eg. Mandarin, German) where a suitable tutor can be found. An extra cost would be attached to such an arrangement.

Why are Business/Accounting/IT not offered?

None of these subjects are prerequisites for any university or faculty admissions. We also do not have the staff complement to offer these subjects currently, without negatively affecting IEB classes. The same applies to Computing / IT.

Where can we find more information about A Levels and the A Levels Stream?

For more information about our Cambridge International A Levels stream, please contact Graham Creese (HOD A Levels) at g.creese@sacschool.com.

More information on Cambridge courses and qualifications can be found on the Cambridge International website: www.cambridgeinternational.org.

We also recommend the Cambridge International Recognitions Database, which details specific entry requirements for universities around the world for pupils with A Level qualifications:
<http://recognition.cambridgeinternational.org>

Please browse the internet links below for more information.

Universities South Africa – requirements for SA Universities

<https://www.cambridgeinternational.org/Images/523166-university-recognition-south-africa.pdf>

- Cambridge International AS and A Level Recognition
<https://www.cambridgeinternational.org/programmes-and-qualifications/recognition-and-acceptance/>
- Cambridge International Recognition Brochure
<http://www.cambridgeinternational.org/images/467908-recognition-brochure.pdf>
- Destination South Africa
<https://www.cambridgeinternational.org/Images/533726-destination-south-africa-brochure.pdf>
- Destination USA / UK / Australia / Canada
<https://www.cambridgeinternational.org/Images/255267-destination-usa.pdf>
<https://www.cambridgeinternational.org/Images/255268-destination-uk-brochure.pdf>
<http://www.cambridgeinternational.org/images/339434-destination-australia.pdf>
<https://www.cambridgeinternational.org/Images/505903-destination-canada-brochure.pdf>
- Informed Choices – Russell Group (UK)
<https://www.russellgroup.ac.uk/media/5686/informed-choices-2018-1-6th-edition-final.pdf>
- Video: Why UCT Welcomes Cambridge Students
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G_hrz9KdLWI
- UCT undergraduate prospectus 2020
http://www.uct.ac.za/sites/default/files/image_tool/images/434/prospective/ug_prospectus/ug_prospectus.pdf
- Stellenbosch entry requirements for Cambridge Students
<https://www0.sun.ac.za/international/pages-base-1/undergraduate-enrolments/admission-requirements-for-undergraduate-international-curricula.html>
- University of Pretoria entry requirements for Cambridge Students
<https://www.up.ac.za/media/shared/368/Document/Brochures%202020/undergraduate-programme-info-2020-final-07.12.2018.zp168891.pdf>
- Wits University entry requirements for Cambridge Students
<https://www.wits.ac.za/media/wits-university/study/undergraduate/documents/guide-2019/Undergrad%20Guide%202019%20All%20Faculties.pdf>
- Rhodes University entry requirements for Cambridge Students
<https://www.ru.ac.za/admissiongateway/application/entryrequirements/>

