

Benchmarking the International Arab Baccalaureate (IAB) against Canadian and US Upper Secondary Qualifications

UK NARIC Executive Summary

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The International Arab Baccalaureate (IAB) is an international diploma qualification designed to be taken by secondary school students alongside the national secondary school qualifications in a number of schools in Lebanon and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. It is developed and awarded by the IAB Board, a constituent body operating under the auspices of the Educational Research Center (ERC) based in Beirut, Lebanon. First offered in 2010, the IAB was revised in 2014, with the first cohort of the new IAB graduating in 2017.

Having conducted an independent evaluation and benchmarking exercise of the IAB to UK standards in 2017, the ERC has commissioned UK NARIC to undertake a further benchmarking exercise¹ to determine the comparability of the IAB in the context of the US and Canadian systems.

Overview of the IAB

Entry and duration

The IAB programme starts at the beginning of the secondary education cycle in Lebanon and Saudi Arabia, Grade 10, and lasts three years until the end of secondary schooling in Grade 12. The entrance level for the IAB is successful completion of Grade 9, lower secondary education in Lebanon and Saudi Arabia. The programme is intended for students choosing to study the Sciences Stream from Grade 10 to Grade 12 in Lebanon and Saudi Arabia.

Structure and Content

The IAB comprises six subjects including compulsory study of mathematics, chemistry, biology, physics, Arabic language and a choice of either French or English language. The curriculum for the IAB academic subjects is based on the national curriculum of subjects studied in Lebanon for Grades 10-12.

Assessment, Grading and Certification

Students are assessed individually in the six subjects, through a combination of continuous tests in Grades 10 and 11 and a comprehensive exam for each subject in Grade 12. Students receive a certificate and academic transcript detailing their grade for each subject (out of 100) as well as an overall grade for the IAB.

The overall grade, also on a 0-100 scale, is calculated from the student's performance in the individual subjects (weighted at 13.3% each) and a cross-disciplinary project. To be awarded the IAB diploma, students must achieve a minimum of 60% overall, with no less than 40% in any of the individual subjects and no less than 50% in the cross-disciplinary project.

¹ As with the original benchmarking exercise, this report reflects on the IAB awarded from 2017.

Methodology

The study involved an independent review of the IAB, and an in-depth comparative analysis of its components in relation to selected qualifications: the High School Diploma and Advanced Placement (AP) in the US education system; and the Alberta Diploma in the Canadian education system. Specifically, this analysis considered the qualifications':

- Entry requirements
- Duration
- Structure and content
- Modes of learning and assessment
- Learning outcomes
- Associated outcomes.

As part of this, UK NARIC undertook a detailed comparison of five of the six IAB subjects to similarly-focussed subjects in the AP and Alberta Diploma.

Furthermore, consideration was given to the quality assurance and control mechanisms in place to oversee and underpin the design, delivery and assessment of the IAB².

The study drew on the findings of the 2017 report which was the product of a desk-based document review and two site visits to Lebanon: in 2015 to meet with teachers and administrators at IAB schools; and in 2017 to conduct further interviews with the IAB management team following the administration of the new comprehensive exam. IAB lessons were observed during both site visits at IAB schools in Lebanon.

Key findings

Overall the IAB provides a well-rounded preparation for higher education, through the development of subject knowledge and skills in mathematics, the sciences and languages alongside the ability to analyse, discuss and compare. Transferable skills such as time management, team work, organisation and problem-solving are also developed. The cross-disciplinary project provides a further opportunity to develop and enhance personal and social skills of IAB students as well as personal initiative in solving a real-world problem.

The student-centred delivery at the IAB schools was observed to closely reflect the main aims and ethos of the programme. Delivery methods that include open-ended questions, discussion and debate, support the development of critical and creative thinking, and communication skills.

Quality assurance policies and procedures were found to be sufficient for the purposes of determining the comparability of the IAB in an international context, whilst noting some issues in the continuous and comprehensive assessments that need to be addressed in future sittings in order to strengthen their overall validity.

² Including those in place for developing, administering and marking assessment; and for registering and monitoring IAB schools.

US education system

In conclusion, when comparing the IAB in the context of the US education system, broad similarities can be identified with the US High School Diploma in terms of entry requirements, duration, structure and associated outcomes (i.e. progression to higher-level studies).

Comparative analysis of the IAB and the AP also identified some similarities in content and learning outcomes whilst noting that overall the learning outcomes and assessment of the AP are pitched at a higher level. This reflects the aim of the AP to provide college- [higher education-] level courses, with the potential for students to earn credit exemptions in their subsequent higher education studies.

The study has found that whilst the US does not offer a qualification to which the IAB is directly comparable; the level of subject knowledge, cross-disciplinary component and transferable skills developed by the IAB would support preparation for higher education in the US.

As such, the IAB may be considered to meet the general academic requirements for direct entry to four-year institutions in the US, at institutional discretion.

Canadian education system

Comparative analysis of the IAB and the Alberta Diploma has found that the two are of the same duration, with similar entry requirements and overarching structures; both qualifications require study across a range of subjects.

At a subject-level, some differences are apparent in the content and skills assessed, with the Alberta Diploma placing more emphasis on experimental and practical skills than the IAB. However, both set similar expectations for students to develop key knowledge and understanding of the subjects and mathematical problems solving skills.

In terms of assessment, the IAB and Alberta Diploma differ in their weighting of internal and external assessment, with the IAB favouring external assessment (75%) and the Alberta Diploma focussing primarily on internal assessment (70%, with 30% for external assessment). Nevertheless when comparing the specific assessment tasks used by both qualifications in the external assessments, clear similarities can be seen in the type and level of knowledge and skills being assessed.

Overall UK NARIC considers the IAB to be of a comparable level to the Alberta Diploma, meeting the general academic admissions requirements for entry to higher education institutions in Canada at institutional discretion.

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