

A Level Curriculum Overview

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Introduction to the A Level at EF Academy Oxford

EF Academy Oxford offers the A-Level (GCE Advanced Level) qualification as part of our academically rigorous and internationally minded curriculum. Located in the heart of Oxford, our school welcomes students aged 16–19 from over 40 countries, creating a diverse and globally aware learning environment. Our A-Level programme is designed for students who are ready to specialise in subjects they enjoy and excel in. It provides a structured, linear approach to learning, with final exams taken at the end of the two-year course. This pathway is ideal for students with clear academic interests who prefer to explore subjects in greater depth.

At EF Academy Oxford, students benefit from small class sizes, expert teachers, and individualised support through academic tutorials, pathway advising, and university preparation. Alongside A-Level courses, all students study English to prepare for the IELTS exam, and take part in our Pathways Support programme, which includes Study Skills, Growth Mindset, PSHE, and personalised university guidance.

It is recommended that students take three subjects. Most top UK universities require three A-Level subjects. Students may also take Further Maths as a fourth subject, subject to an internal assessment by the Maths Faculty at the beginning of the first term.

Students may also be able to take an A-Level in their native language, subject to availability. In addition to A-Level subjects, students will take English to prepare for the IELTS exam, and attend weekly sessions in Pathways Support, covering Study Skills, Growth Mindset, PSHE, and University Preparation.

Choosing the Right A-Level Subjects

As an international student, this may be the first time in your academic career that you are able to choose which subjects you study. For many, this is an exciting opportunity to begin focusing on a potential career path or academic interest. You will need to select three subjects to study, and all option choices will be reviewed by the A-Level Coordinator and the University Guidance team. We will consider the results of your assessments to ensure you have chosen appropriate combinations that support your future aspirations.

A-Levels are internationally recognised qualifications and widely accepted for entry into university degree courses around the world. While you are studying for your A-Levels, our University Pathways programme will support you in tailoring your university applications and identifying the courses best suited to you.

With so many degree options available – including combinations you may not have considered – it is important to explore your choices thoroughly.

To make informed subject choices, consider the following:

- **Assess your ability**: Reflect on your results and abilities, and speak with your teachers for guidance.
- **Understand course requirements**: Avoid limiting your options by dropping subjects that may be required for your intended university course.
- **Reflect on your goals**: Think about your long-term ambitions, interests, skills and preferred ways of working. Choose subjects that align with your goals.
- **Research course content**: Read each subject guide in this booklet carefully to understand what is covered.
- **Consider your enthusiasm**: Do you enjoy the subject? Are you willing to study beyond the classroom to deepen your knowledge?

Important: Some subjects may not run if there is insufficient student interest, and it may not always be possible to accommodate all course combinations due to timetable constraints.

Subject Descriptions

Art

Exam Board: OCR

Prerequisites: Ideally grade 6 in GCSE or IGCSE Art & Design, or equivalent.

Course Description:

The A Level Art course is creative and flexible, allowing students to develop independent projects based on personal themes, topics, and artistic techniques.

Course Content:

Component 1: Personal Investigation (60%) – A practical portfolio and contextual research.
Component 2: Externally Set Task (40%) – Preparatory project and 15-hour supervised exam in Year 2.

Assessment:

Internally assessed and externally moderated. No written exam.

Sample Questions:

- Design four postage stamps celebrating 'The Moon'.
- Curate an exhibition on 'The Moon', with analysis of key works.

Click here for more details of this course, including a detailed description of the specification which can be downloaded as a pdf document.

Biology

Exam Board: OCR

Prerequisites: Biology studied in the previous two years.

Course Description:

A Level Biology builds knowledge in genetics, biodiversity, physiology, and ecosystems. The course develops analytical and practical laboratory skills.

Course Content:

Modules:
1. Practical Skills
2. Foundations in Biology
3. Exchange and Transport
4. Biodiversity, Evolution and Disease
5. Communication, Homeostasis and Energy
6. Genetics, Evolution and Ecosystems

Assessment:

Paper 1: Biological Processes (37%)
Paper 2: Biological Diversity (37%)
Paper 3: Unified Biology (26%)
Practical Endorsement: Pass/Fail

Click here for more details of this course, including a detailed description of the specification which can be downloaded as a pdf document.

Business Studies

Exam Board: AQA

Prerequisites: Basic interest in business. Grade C or above in GCSE/IGCSE Mathematics is recommended.

Course Description:

This course develops an understanding of business contexts, decision-making, leadership, and strategic change. It emphasises creativity, ethics, and analytical skills.

Course Content:

Topics include: What is Business? • Management & Leadership • Marketing • Finance • Operations • HR • Strategic Analysis & Change

Assessment:

Paper 1: 2 hours (33.3%) – Multiple choice, short answer, essays
Paper 2: 2 hours (33.3%) – Data response questions
Paper 3: 2 hours (33.3%) – Case study and essay questions

Click here for more details of this course, including a detailed description of the specification which can be downloaded as a pdf document.

Chemistry

Exam Board: OCR

Prerequisites: Chemistry studied in the previous two years.

Course Description:

A Level Chemistry develops theoretical and practical skills to explore the composition and behaviour of matter, linking concepts to real-life applications such as medicine and materials science.

Course Content:

Modules:

1. Practical Skills
2. Foundations in Chemistry
3. Periodic Table and Energy
4. Organic Chemistry
5. Physical Chemistry and Transition Elements
6. Analysis and Synthesis

Assessment:

Paper 1: Periodic Table & Physical Chemistry (37%)
Paper 2: Organic Chemistry & Analysis (37%)
Paper 3: Unified Chemistry (26%)
Practical Endorsement: Pass/Fail

Click here for more details of this course, including a detailed description of the specification which can be downloaded as a pdf document.

Computer Science

Exam Board: OCR

Prerequisites: Interest in programming and logical thinking. GCSE/IGCSE Maths grade C or higher is helpful.

Course Description:

This course explores computational thinking, programming, algorithms, hardware, networking, and the ethical impacts of computing. Students complete a personal project applying these skills.

Course Content:

Topics include: Programming • Data Structures • Algorithms • Computation • Architecture • Databases • Networking • Functional Programming • NEA Practical Project

Assessment:

Paper 1: 2.5 hours (40%) – Programming and theory
Paper 2: 2.5 hours (40%) – Theory of computation and systems
NEA Project: (20%) – Design and implementation of a real-world solution

Click here for more details of this course, including a detailed description of the specification which can be downloaded as a pdf document.

Economics

Exam Board: Edexcel

Prerequisites: A strong interest in current affairs and global economic issues. Competence in IGCSE Mathematics recommended.

Course Description:

A Level Economics introduces key concepts in microeconomics and macroeconomics, examining national and international markets, government policies, and global trade.

Course Content:

Paper 1: Markets and Business Behaviour
Paper 2: National and Global Economy
Paper 3: Microeconomic and Macroeconomic themes including Globalisation and Development

Assessment:

Paper 1: 2 hours (35%) – Markets
Paper 2: 2 hours (35%) – National and Global Economy
Paper 3: 2 hours (30%) – Synoptic essay-style questions

Mathematics and Further Mathematics

Exam Board: Edexcel (Mathematics A & Further Maths)

Prerequisites: Strong performance in IGCSE Mathematics. Further Maths requires an internal assessment.

Course Description:

These courses provide a rigorous foundation in algebra, calculus, mechanics, and statistics. Further Maths extends into complex numbers, matrices, and deeper problem-solving techniques.

Course Content:

Mathematics includes: Pure Mathematics • Statistics • Mechanics
Further Maths includes: Core Pure Maths • Optional units such as Decision Maths or Further Mechanics

Assessment:

Each subject is assessed via multiple written exams (2 hours each). Grades are awarded separately for Maths and Further Maths.

Click here for more details of this course, including a detailed description of the specification which can be downloaded as a pdf document.

Physics

Exam Board: OCR

Prerequisites: A good understanding of IGCSE Mathematics and Physics.

Course Description:

Physics explores the fundamental principles of the universe, from quantum mechanics to cosmology. The course is analytical and includes extensive practical work.

Course Content:

Modules:

1. Practical Skills
2. Foundations of Physics
3. Forces and Motion
4. Electrons, Waves and Photons
5. Astrophysics and Newtonian World
6. Particle Physics and Medical Applications

Assessment:

Paper 1: Modelling Physics (37%)
Paper 2: Exploring Physics (37%)
Paper 3: Unified Physics (26%)
Practical Endorsement: Pass/Fail

Click here for more details of this course, including a detailed description of the specification which can be downloaded as a pdf document.

Psychology

Exam Board: AQA

Prerequisites: GCSE/IGCSE (or equivalent) Mathematics is essential due to statistical analysis requirements.

Course Description:

Psychology examines human behaviour and mental processes, including memory, development, mental health, and social influence. It integrates scientific research and critical thinking.

Course Content:

Core units: Social Influence • Memory • Attachment • Psychopathology • Approaches • Biopsychology • Research Methods • Issues and Debates
Optional units from: Relationships • Schizophrenia • Forensic Psychology, etc.

Assessment:

Paper 1: Introductory Topics (2 hrs, 33.3%)
Paper 2: Psychology in Context (2 hrs, 33.3%)
Paper 3: Issues and Options (2 hrs, 33.3%)

Click here for more details of this course, including a detailed description of the specification which can be downloaded as a pdf document.

Sociology

Exam Board: OCR

Prerequisites: Interest in current affairs and social issues. Willingness to engage in reading, debate, and essay writing.

Course Description:

Sociology explores society, institutions, and social change. It helps students understand identity, inequality, and the impact of culture, media, and digital society.

Course Content:

Topics include: Socialisation and Culture • Families • Youth Subcultures • Inequality • Globalisation • Crime and Deviance • Education • Religion

Assessment:

Paper 1: Culture and Identity (1.5 hrs, 30%)
Paper 2: Social Inequality (2 hrs 15 min, 35%)
Paper 3: Contemporary Debates (2 hrs 15 min, 35%)

Click here for more details of this course, including a detailed description of the specification which can be downloaded as a pdf document.

Extended Project Qualification (EPQ)

Exam Board: AQA

Prerequisites:
The Extended Project Qualification is ideal for students who have academic interests that extend beyond the traditional A-Level curriculum. It offers an excellent opportunity to demonstrate independent research, academic curiosity, and the kind of essay writing and project management skills that are essential at university.

Course Description:
The EPQ is a standalone qualification, equivalent to half an A-Level but carrying up to **28 UCAS points**, due to the availability of an A* grade. It is designed to stretch and challenge students by developing a project based on either an area of personal interest or a subject related to their A-Level studies.

The EPQ can take two forms:

- A written research report of approximately 5,000 words
- A practical artefact (such as an artwork, musical composition, website, or engineered product) accompanied by a reflective report

This flexibility means the EPQ is suitable for students across all academic pathways – from Science to the Arts.

Skills Developed:
Students will gain a wide range of transferable academic and professional skills, including:

- Developing titles, research questions, and project proposals
- Managing a project: planning, setting goals, meeting deadlines, and self-monitoring progress
- Conducting ethical and effective research, including data collection, analysis, and evaluation
- Producing an extended written report
- Delivering a presentation and responding to questions with clarity and confidence

Assessment:
Students are assessed on their ability to plan, research, develop, and present their project. The qualification is internally supervised and externally moderated by the exam board.

Click here for more details of this course, including a detailed description of the specification which can be downloaded as a pdf document.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Are A-Levels important?

Yes, A-Levels are essential qualifications for entry into UK universities and many institutions worldwide. They demonstrate academic rigour and commitment.

What else will I study alongside A-Levels?

All A-Level students at EF Academy study English (for IELTS preparation), Pathways Support, and you will also take the Extended Project Qualification (EPQ).

When are A-Level exams held?

Final A-Level exams are held in May and June of the second year. Results are published in mid-August.

How are A-Level exams marked?

Final exams are externally marked by the exam boards. Throughout the course, your teachers will mark practice assessments based on official criteria.

How do A-Levels compare with other qualifications?

A-Levels are considered rigorous, academic qualifications and are highly regarded by universities globally.

Can I change my A-Level subjects after starting?

You can request changes during the first 2–3 weeks of the course. Speak to the A-Level Coordinator as soon as possible to discuss your options.

What if I need exam access arrangements?

Speak to your Pathway Manager or A-Level Coordinator. You will be referred to the Educational Needs Coordinator for formal assessment.

Who can I speak to about university choices?

Your University Guidance Counsellor and A-Level Coordinator are available to help with course planning and applications.

How do international universities view A Levels?

A Levels are widely respected by universities around the world. Institutions in the US, Canada, Europe, Australia, and beyond recognise A Levels as a rigorous academic qualification. They are often accepted for direct entry into undergraduate programmes.

Why should I choose A Levels over the IB Diploma?

The A Level programme allows you to specialise in subjects that interest you most, offering greater depth in chosen areas. It is ideal for students who prefer to focus on 3–4 subjects rather than a broader range. A Levels also have a more exam-focused structure and may suit students looking for more subject-specific preparation for university.

Suggested Subject Combinations by University Pathway

Science, Technology and Engineering

- Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, Further Mathematics
- Mathematics, Computer Science, Physics
- Mathematics, Physics, Economics
- Mathematics, Physics, Art (for Architecture)

Bio-Medical Sciences

- Biology, Chemistry, Psychology
- Biology, Chemistry, Mathematics
- Biology, Chemistry, Physics
- Biology, Chemistry, Sociology

International Relations, Economics, Law and Politics

- Economics, Psychology, Sociology
- Economics, Politics (via EPQ), Mathematics, Psychology
- Economics, Sociology, History (via EPQ), Business Studies
- Psychology, Sociology, Mathematics, EPQ in Global Affairs

Business, Finance and Management

- Mathematics, Business Studies, Economics
- Economics, Psychology, Business Studies
- Business Studies, Sociology, Mathematics, EPQ in Entrepreneurship
- Mathematics, Business Studies, Computer Science

Arts, Media, and Cultural Studies

- Art, Psychology, Sociology
- Art, Media/Film (via EPQ), Business Studies, Psychology
- Art, Economics, Sociology, EPQ in Culture
- Psychology, Sociology, Business Studies, EPQ in Cultural Studies