

Option Internationale du Baccalauréat (OIB), France

British version



What is the OIB (British version)?

- The British version of the OIB is an integrated Franco-British school-leaving certificate. It combines the breadth and rigour of the French Baccaulaureate with extra subjects taught and examined in English to A Level standard, in a single certificate.
- It is jointly certified by University of Cambridge International Examinations and the French Ministry of Education.
- It provides students with a university entrance qualification valid in both France and Britain.
- It makes academic and linguistic demands to an equal level in English and French.



“ Moving to an English University I realised how well rounded my education was. ”

Suzanna: Surrey, International Hospitality & Tourism Management

Introduction

The OIB was developed as a special version of the French Baccalaureate, based on partnerships between the French Ministry of Education and a number of foreign authorities. These partners quality-assure and accredit examinations in Literature and History–Geography in their own language, at university-entrance level, which are integrated into the French Baccalaureate.

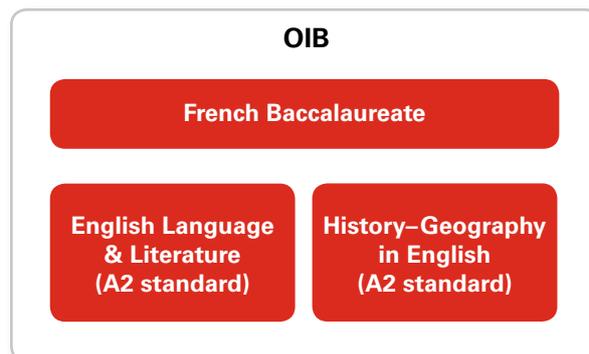
The British version has the greatest number of candidates, with 37% of those entered for all OIB versions in 2009. Other versions include German, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, Dutch, Norwegian, Swedish, Danish, Polish, Japanese, Arabic and American.

The British version of the OIB is built upon a long-standing Anglo-French partnership between University of Cambridge International Examinations and the French Ministry of Education.

University of Cambridge International Examinations is the world's largest provider of international education programmes and qualifications for 5–19 year olds and is part of Cambridge Assessment, a not-for-profit department of the University of Cambridge, and is accredited by Ofqual, the regulator of examinations in England.

“ The transferable skills acquired from the OIB (problem solving, ability to cope with large workloads) enabled me to do well. ”

Jonathan: Bristol, MSc Chemistry



Two subjects, English Language & Literature and History–Geography, are added to the full syllabus of the traditional French Baccalaureate. These extra subjects are examined in English* and certified by Cambridge as equivalent to A2 in standard.

The bicultural nature of the OIB is illustrated by the fact that History–Geography is taught in both English and French. Few students are capable of managing the demands of the OIB; the 800 or so students taking the British version of the OIB are taught in schools that run a dual, Franco-British curriculum.

Students who succeed in this dual curriculum develop a capacity for hard work, and an intellectual and cultural flexibility, that give them the potential to become excellent undergraduates in Britain, France and elsewhere.

*Although candidates have the possibility of taking the History–Geography written examination in French, around 99% of British Option candidates take it in English. The English examinations and the History–Geography oral can only be taken in English.

Key features of the OIB

How does the OIB (British version) full diploma compare with A Levels?

A Levels	OIB
1620 guided learning hours for 4 A Levels & 5 AS levels	Between 2124 & 2394 guided learning hours, depending on stream chosen
6 'passing' grades A* - E	Overall aggregate 'pass' mark between 10/20 and 20/20; individual subjects assessed on a 0-20 point scale
Modular examinations, taken over the two-year period of study	Between one and four subjects taken at the end of the first year of study; most taken at the end of the second year
Key language: English	Key languages: French and English
Assessment through written exams and coursework	Assessment through written and oral exams, and coursework



What does the OIB consist of?

The OIB adds the subjects taught in English (Language & Literature, History–Geography) to the traditional French Baccalaureate. The OIB thus makes great demands in terms of breadth and workload – in two languages. The well-recognised standards of the French Baccalaureate permit successful students to pursue the full range of subjects for undergraduate study in the most selective British universities.

Despite the breadth of the Baccalaureate, and the number of subjects studied, English Language & Literature and History–Geography are substantial in depth and coverage. The standard of the examinations in English Language & Literature and History–Geography is equivalent to A2 Level; the breadth and depth of the programmes are validated by University of Cambridge International Examinations.

The typical guided learning hours for OIB English and History-Geography are 80% of the GLH for A2 subjects. The units in English Language & Literature and History–Geography consist of written and oral examinations. The Written examinations assess knowledge, understanding and skills comparable to those of A2 examinations. The Oral examinations assess the candidate’s ability to present, analyse and evaluate literary texts or historical–geographical content, and to defend a point of view before two examiners.

Students who have taken the OIB routinely study English, History or Geography very successfully at the most selective UK universities.

An unusual feature of the OIB is that all students, whatever their future undergraduate subject choices, are examined at A2 Level in English Language & Literature and History–Geography.



“ Many of my more science-orientated contemporaries at Cambridge hadn’t written an essay since their GCSE years. On a less serious level, I’ve always enjoyed the fact that I can hold a decent conversation in a variety of areas – science, history, literature, philosophy etc. ”

Frederick: Oxford, Maths

The OIB: one certificate, three streams

The OIB is available in the three academic streams of the French Baccalaureate. These are:

- L – Languages and Literature
- ES – Economics and Social Sciences
- S – Maths and Sciences

The OIB examinations in English Language & Literature and History–Geography are the same in all three streams.

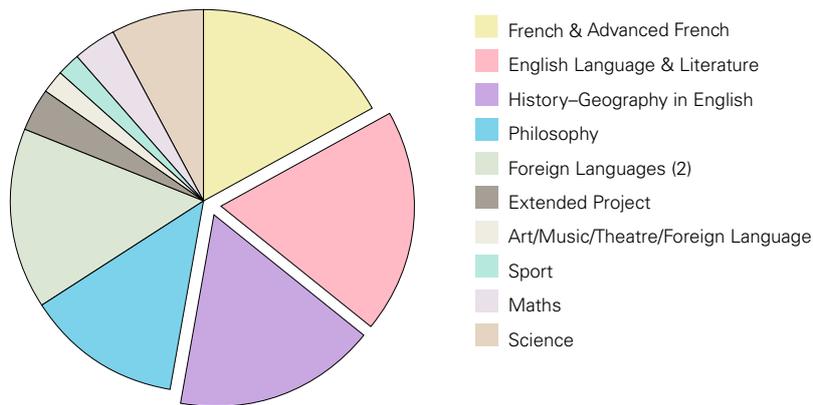
“ In my mind, doing the OIB brings to light the importance of placing literature (in the case of my degree) in a larger cultural, historical and philosophical context. I think those who graduate with the OIB are particularly well-rounded, regardless of which version of the baccalaureate they choose. ”

Emilie: Bristol, English

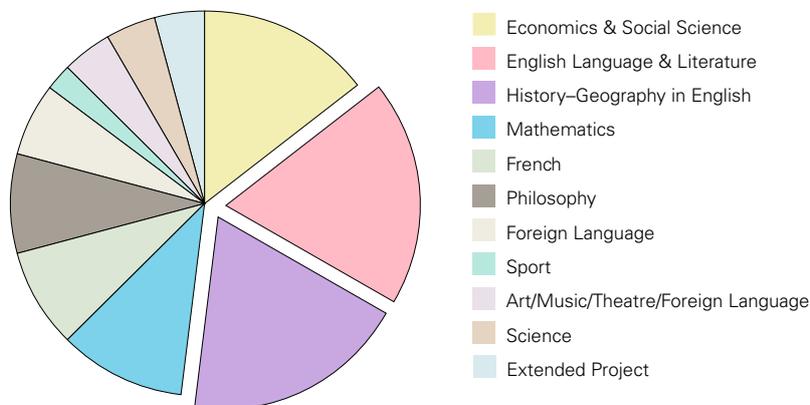


How are different subjects weighted in the three OIB streams?

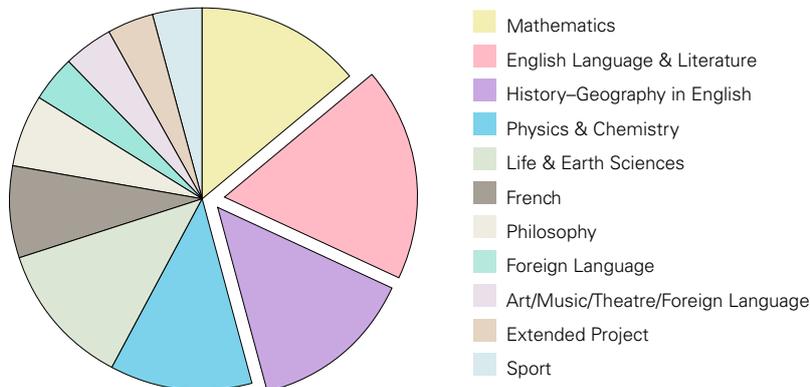
OIB L Stream – Languages and literature



OIB ES Stream – Economics and Social Sciences



OIB S Stream – Mathematics and Science



University Entrance Requirements for the OIB

University admissions tutors often consider reducing the entrance requirements for students taking the OIB compared with those taking the standard French Baccalaureate, to reflect:

- Recognition of the additional demands of the OIB compared with the standard French Baccalaureate
- The particular suitability of OIB graduates for higher education in the UK.

How should OIB entrance requirements be expressed?

- a required overall mark out of 20 (e.g. 13/20)
- if appropriate, a required overall mark out of 20 together with a specified mark level in a relevant subject (e.g. 13/20 with 13/20 in Mathematics for an Engineering applicant).

The OIB as proof of English Language competence

The British version of the OIB is widely taken by British universities as proof of English language competence, without the need for further proficiency tests. Unlike conventional English language certificates, it requires an ability to write – and speak – in an extended analytical mode, and thus fully demonstrates an appropriate level and use of English for university study in Britain.

Making comparisons with A Level

It is possible for admissions tutors to ‘translate’ A Level grade combinations into OIB terms. The main published sources of comparison are the OIB Handbook and tables created by individual universities such as the University of Bristol (opposite). These comparisons are based mainly on equating the achievements of the two national cohorts in their final examinations.

A mention bien (14/20) is generally seen as the equivalent of AAA at A Level in the UK (OIB Handbook).

“ There was never any question of my ability to speak/write English – academically or professionally (hence no need for supplementary language examinations). ”

Dylan: MEng Bristol; Ecole Supérieur des Arts et Métiers (diplôme d’Ingenieur); MBA Harvard Business school.

“ Coming away from school with a grasp of a broad range of subjects... I think has helped me choose studies and a career which really suited me. ”

Helen: Warwick, European Law

University of Bristol table of equivalencies between A Level grades and OIB marks

UK A Level grades	OIB (overall grade, plus this score in specified subjects)
AAA	14
AAB	13
ABB	13
BBB	12
BBC	12
BCC	11
CCC	11

Source: University of Bristol website

Comparing grades awarded at A Level and in the French Baccaalaureate

Since all the traditional subjects of the French Baccaalaureate are contained within the OIB, achievement in these subjects reflects French national standards.

The table below demonstrates the small proportion of Baccaalaureate candidates who achieve a mention bien (aggregate mark of 14/20) or more.

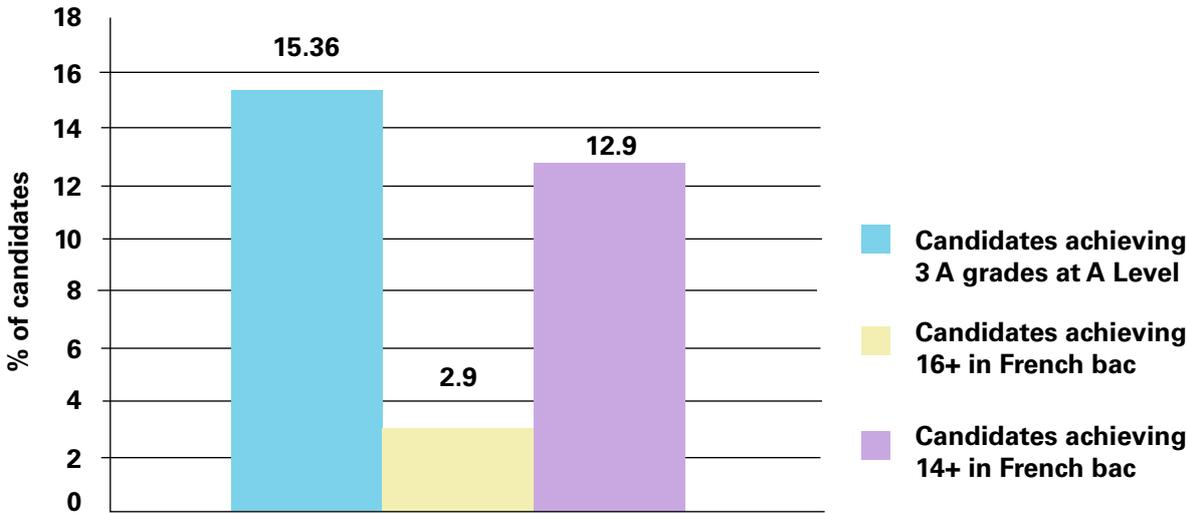
It is useful to compare the percentage of A Level students who achieve (e.g.) AAA at A Level with the percentage of Baccaalaureate students achieving a mention bien (14/20) and a mention très bien (16/20) overall (see table below and graph on next page).

OIB aggregate marks and honours grades (mentions) 2006* (*last published official statistics)

Mark/20	'Mention' (honours grade)	% of national Baccaalaureate cohort achieving this level
16-20	Très bien	2.9%
14-15	Bien	10.0%
12-13	Assez bien	27.3%
10-11	Passable	43.5%

Source: French Ministry of Education website

Comparison of grades awarded to UK national cohort at A2 and in the French Bacallaureate



Source: French Ministry of Education website for French Bacallaureate; Statistics Report No 6 (Cambridge Assessment, 2007) for A Level

The proportion of A Level candidates attaining AAA at A2 is significantly higher than the proportion of French bacallaureate candidates achieving 14 or more. This reflects the difficulty of attaining the higher mark bands (mention bien and mention très bien) in the Bacallaureate and the OIB.

“ It developed my critical thinking and the way I make choices. ”

Julien: UCL, Environmental Geosciences

Special features of the OIB

- OIB students learn to handle an unusually heavy workload, and to prioritise conflicting commitments
- OIB students acquire a cultural mobility – the ability to think from a French cultural viewpoint or a British cultural viewpoint – that gives them different perspectives on their university studies, whatever the subject.
- OIB students have learned different approaches to thinking and methodology from two different education systems; this can give them unusual flexibility in problem-solving or in adopting a suitable method for a particular task
- History–Geography is taught in both English and French. This gives an unusual experience in standing back from national cultural assumptions
- Literature is taught in both English and French, at the same level, giving all students an awareness of both British and French literary heritage
- All students prepare an Extended Project in Year 12. This is generally multi-disciplinary and develops research skills useful to university study
- All students study Philosophy in Year 13. This offers an introduction to some of the political, ethical and social issues in Western philosophy
- All students – whatever their subject choices at university – have learnt to write essays to A2 Level in English Language & Literature and History–Geography.

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