



University Entry Credentials in the United Kingdom

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Credential	Awarded by	First Seen	Number of Years and Entry Requirement	Comments
GCSEs	Assessment and Qualifications Alliance (AQA); Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA); Oxford, Cambridge and RSA Examinations (OCR); Pearson (Edexcel); Welsh Joint Education Committee (WJEC)	First awarded in 1988, replacing the General Certificate of Education Ordinary Level (O Level).	5 years after completion of primary school (years 1-6)	Stands for General Certificate of Secondary Education. These individual subject examinations are taken upon completion of the secondary education cycle in England, Wales and N Ireland, with a minimum of 5 passes required for access to pre-university studies (A Levels).
GCE A Levels and GCE AS Levels	Assessment and Qualifications Alliance (AQA); Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA); Oxford, Cambridge and RSA Examinations (OCR); Pearson (Edexcel); Welsh Joint Education Committee (WJEC)	A Levels were first introduced in 1951, replacing the Higher School Certificate. AS Levels were first awarded in 2001, replacing the Advanced Supplementary Levels.	A Levels: typically 2 years after GCSEs AS Levels: typically 1 year after GCSEs	Stand for General Certificate of Education Advanced Levels and Advanced Subsidiary Levels, respectively, which are individual subject examinations. A minimum of 2 A Level passes are typically required for university entrance in England, Wales, and N Ireland. AS Levels represent the 1st year of an A Level in content. In 2016, AS Levels will stand alone and will not count toward A Levels.

Credential	Awarded by	First Seen	Number of Years and Entry Requirement	Comments
BTEC Level 3 Qualifications (Nationals)	Pearson (since 2013), Edexcel (1996-2013)	BTEC qualifications first awarded in 1984; were restructured for the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) in 2010. Pre-cursors (Ordinary and Higher National Certificates and Diplomas – ONC/OND/HNC/HND) date back to 1921.	Typically 1-2 years after GCSEs / BTEC Level 2 Qualification	Stands for Business and Technology Education Council, referring to a previous awarding body and now representing a brand of technical qualifications. Based on the QCF, Level 3 qualifications are considered at the same level as A-Levels with approximate equivalencies ranging from 1 AS-Level to 3 A-Levels. More emphasis is placed on coursework than on exams. Subject areas are also more applied.
BTEC Level 4 Qualifications (Higher Nationals)	Pearson (since 2013), Edexcel (1996-2013)	See above.	Typically 1 year after BTEC Level 3 Qualification / A Levels	The primary qualification at Level 4 is the Higher National Certificate, which often grants holders direct entry into the 2 nd year of a university degree program. See also Comments from BTEC Level 3.
BTEC Level 5 Qualifications (Higher Nationals)	Pearson (since 2013), Edexcel (1996-2013)	See above.	Typically 2 years after BTEC Level 3 Qualification / A Levels OR 1 year after BTEC Level 4 Qualification	The primary qualification at Level 5 is the Higher National Diploma, which often grants holder direct entry into the 3 rd year of a university degree program. See also Comments from BTEC Level 3.

Credential	Awarded by	First Seen	Number of Years and Entry Requirement	Comments
Scottish Qualifications Certificate (SQC) Standard Grade	Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA)	<p>Awarded from 1986 to 2013.</p> <p>Replaced the Scottish Certificate of Education Ordinary Grade.</p>	<p>2 years, after year 9</p> <p>Represents completion of year 11.</p>	<p>Offered at 3 different levels (Foundation, General, Credit). Examinations usually taken at 2 of these levels. Replaced in 2013 by the National 3, 4 and 5 Qualifications, respectively, as part of the Curriculum for Excellence.</p>
Scottish Qualifications Certificate (SQC) Access 1, 2 and 3	Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA)	First awarded in 2000.	<p>Varies.</p> <p>See Comments.</p>	<p>Access 1 and 2 are designed for students who require additional support. Access 3 is comparable to the Standard Grade Foundation Level. There are no external assessments. To be phased out by 2015 in favor of National 1, 2 and 3 Qualifications, respectively.</p>
Scottish Qualifications Certificate (SQC) Intermediate 1 and Intermediate 2	Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA)	First awarded in 2000.	<p>1-2 years, after SQC Standard Grade or Access 3.</p> <p>Also offered as an alternative to SQC Standard Grade, representing years 10 and 11.</p>	<p>At the same levels as Standard Grade General and Credit Levels, respectively. Intermediate 2 is often a stepping stone to the SQC Higher Grade. To be phased out by 2015 in favor of National 4 and 5 Qualifications, respectively, as part of the Curriculum for Excellence.</p>

Credential	Awarded by	First Seen	Number of Years and Entry Requirement	Comments
Scottish Qualifications Certificate (SQC) Higher Grade	Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA)	Awarded on the SQC by the SQA since 2000. Scottish Highers date as far back as 1888.	Typically 1 year after SQC Standard Grade / Access 3 / Intermediate 2 / National 5, representing completion of year 12.	A minimum of four Higher Grade passes is required for university entrance in Scotland. New Highers will be introduced in 2015 as part of the Curriculum for Excellence.
Scottish Qualifications Certificate (SQC) Advanced Higher Grade	Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA)	First awarded in 2001, replacing the Certificate of Sixth Year Studies.	Typically 1 year after SQC Higher Grade, representing completion of year 13.	Not normally required for university entrance in Scotland. A few universities grant advanced credit, depending on the field of major. New Advanced Highers will be introduced in 2016 as part of the Curriculum for Excellence.
Scottish Baccalaureate	Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA)	First awarded in 2010.	Typically 2 years after SQC Standard Grade / Access 3 / Intermediate 2 / National 5	Represents a group award, comprised of 1 Higher, 2 Advanced Highers, and 1 Interdisciplinary Project. Offered in 4 areas presently: Expressive Arts, Languages, Sciences, and Social Sciences.
Welsh Baccalaureate Diploma	Welsh Joint Education Committee (WJEC)	2007	Typically 2 years. No specific entry requirements, but students should qualify for the chosen traditional qualifications (GCSEs, A-Levels, BTECs).	Offered at Foundation, Intermediate, and Advanced Levels, which correspond to QCF Levels 1, 2, and 3, respectively. Traditional academic and vocational qualifications (GCSEs, A-Levels, BTECs) are studied alongside "The Core," a curriculum of personal development skills, to make one wider award.

Credential	Awarded by	First Seen	Number of Years and Entry Requirement	Comments
Cambridge Pre-University Diploma	University of Cambridge International Examinations (CIE)	First awarded in 2010. Short Courses first assessed in 2009 and Principal Subjects first assessed in 2010.	GCSEs typically required for entry. Principal Subjects last 2 years, Short Courses last 1 year, and Global Perspectives and Research (GPR) is taught over 2 years.	The Cambridge Pre-University Diploma is awarded to students who have passed 3 Principal Subjects and the GPR. Developed as an alternative to A-Levels for a smoother transition to university study.
Access to Higher Education Diploma	Access Validating Agencies (AVAs)	Replaced the Access to Higher Education Certificate in 2008. First Access to HE courses introduced in the late 1970s.	Typically 1 year, no particular qualifications required for entry	Geared toward adults who have left school without the usual qualifications. The Access to Higher Education Diploma requires 60 units and has a specific subject focus.
Foundation Year Certificate	Typically universities	Around the 1980s	Typically 1 year after secondary education cycle	Normally a preparatory program for international students who do not quite meet standard entry requirements for degree programs in the UK (particularly in mathematics and science fields). May also serve as a bridge program to help international students further develop English language and general academic study skills. Not to be confused with the 2-year Foundation Degree.