



What is Cambridge Pre-U? A guide for Higher Education Admissions Staff and employers

Cambridge Pre-U is an alternative to A Level, and is offered by a growing number of UK schools. This leaflet gives you all the key facts about Cambridge Pre-U, and will help you make application decisions.

Cambridge Pre-U is taken by students typically aged 16 to 19 who want to go to university. It was developed by Cambridge Assessment International Education in consultation with schools and universities, and launched in UK schools in September 2008. The first full exam series took place in June 2010.

Cambridge Pre-U is a rigorous programme of study that prepares students with the knowledge and skills they need for university. All the courses are designed to develop in-depth subject knowledge, research skills, and the ability to work independently.

What types of qualification are there?

Cambridge Pre-U is available in 25 individual subjects (Principal Subjects). Students can take three or four Cambridge Pre-U Principal Subjects.

Some students take a combination of Cambridge Pre-U Principal Subjects and A Levels. For example, a student might study A Levels in French and English alongside a Cambridge Pre-U Principal Subject in History.

Cambridge Pre-U at a glance

- Students can take Cambridge Pre-U only, or in combination with A Level.
- Available in 25 Principal Subjects including Global Perspectives and Independent Research – a two year course that includes an extended project. A Short Course (one year) Global Perspectives option is also offered.
- Develops in-depth subject knowledge, research skills and independent thinking.
- Has a scale of nine grades, and the top grade reports achievement above A* at A Level.

“ Cambridge Pre-U provides students with the independent learning skills which are a prerequisite for success both in Higher Education and in the world of work. ”

Eton College, UK

You can expect to see the following types of Cambridge Pre-U qualification presented on applications:

Cambridge Pre-U Principal Subject Example: Cambridge Pre-U Principal Subject in French	Typically a two-year course, examined at the end of the course when students are in Year 13. Equivalent to A Level.
Cambridge Pre-U Short Course	Typically a one-year course, examined at the end of Year 12. Available in Global Perspectives, it is equivalent to AS Level. A range of languages were previously offered as a short course – the last assessment for these was June 2018.
Cambridge Pre-U Global Perspectives and Research (GPR)	A two-year course that broadens students' learning beyond their subject specialism. Global Perspectives develops research and thinking skills on a range of global issues in the first year, preparing students for the extended project in the second year (the Research Report).
Cambridge Pre-U Diploma	Students gain the Cambridge Pre-U Diploma by taking any three Principal Subjects (one or two Principal Subjects can be substituted with A Levels) with Cambridge Pre-U Global Perspectives and Research.

What skills does Cambridge Pre-U develop?

Cambridge Pre-U courses create opportunities for students to take responsibility for their own learning, supporting the development of independent-minded individuals. Most Cambridge Pre-U Principal Subjects include an extended essay, requiring students to research a topic that interests them and communicate their ideas effectively.

Key skills developed by Cambridge Pre-U include critical and creative thinking, problem solving, communication, research skills, the ability to work independently and working within a team.

Cambridge Pre-U UCAS tariff points

UCAS Tariff points	Cambridge Pre-U Principal Subject	Cambridge Pre-U Short Course	AS Level	A Level
56	D1, D2			A*
52	D3			
48				A
44	M1			
40	M2			B
36	M3			
32				C
28	P1			
24	P2			D
22		D1		
20	P3	D2, D3	A	
18		M1		
16			B	E
14		M2		
12		M3	C	
10		P1	D	
8		P2		
6		P3	E	

Please note that grades D1 and D2 are both within the highest grade band, at the top of Level 3/SCQF Level 6. However, most universities make offers based on the D2 grade being equivalent to an A* at A level.

How is Cambridge Pre-U graded?

Cambridge Pre-U has a scale of nine grades. The top grade, Distinction 1, reports achievement above Grade A* at A Level. Distinction 3 is aligned to Grade A at A Level, and the lowest pass grade, Pass 3, is aligned to Grade E.

Is Cambridge Pre-U recognised by universities?

Yes. Cambridge Pre-U was developed with universities in response to their requests for a qualification that better prepares students for degree-level studies. UK universities accept Cambridge Pre-U for entry to undergraduate courses from students who are either studying towards the full Cambridge Pre-U Diploma or certain Principal Subjects within the qualification in combination with A Levels if three subjects are offered overall. It is also accepted by a number of US universities, including all the Ivy League, and a growing number of universities around the world.

What do Cambridge Pre-U certificates look like?

Here is an example of a Cambridge Pre-U certificate. You will notice that the qualification title includes the phrase 'Level 3'. This phrase relates to the UK framework for qualifications. Level 3 qualifications include A Level and Cambridge Pre-U.

