

Comparison of Senior Secondary Curricula and Senior Secondary Public Examinations Among Different Places

(A) Senior Secondary Curriculum

Country/Region	New South Wales ¹	Victoria	England	California
(1) Primary and secondary structure	6+4+2 ²	6+4+2 ³	6+5+2	8+4
(2) Duration of senior secondary education	Years 11-12	Years 11-12	2-year Sixth Form	Grades 9-12
(3) Number of subjects/units a senior secondary student should take	(Units) ⁴	(Units)	(Subjects)	(One-year courses)
• Minimum	12+10 ⁵	16	1 A-level ⁶	13+ ⁸
• Maximum	--	--	--	--
• Average	12+11	20-24	3 A-levels ⁷	13+
(4) Minimum graduation requirements for senior secondary education ⁹ :				
• Compulsory subjects/units	2 units of English	3 units of English + 2 units from Group A + 2 units from Group B ¹⁰ + at least three additional sequences of Units 3 and 4 ¹¹ studies	--	13 one-year courses (3 in English, 2 in math, 2 in natural sciences, 3 in social sciences, 2 in physical education, 0.5 in American government, and 0.5 in economics) + other requirements as set by individual local school districts
• Elective subjects/units	20 units	Yes ¹²	-- (A total of one to three A-levels ¹³)	Requirements as set by individual local school districts
(5) Structure of senior secondary curriculum (e.g. level 1 followed by a more advanced level 2)	Preliminary courses (usually taken in Year 11), and HSC courses (usually taken in Year 12)	Units 1 & 2 courses (usually taken in Year 11), and Units 3 & 4 courses (usually taken in Year 12)	AS subjects for lower Sixth Form and A2 subjects for upper Sixth Form	Vary across different local school districts

¹ In 2000 New South Wales introduced a New Higher School Certificate curriculum.

² In New South Wales, primary education lasts for six years. Together with the one-year kindergarten before it, it forms a cohesive curriculum covering seven years.

³ In Victoria, primary education lasts for six years. Together with the one-year Preparatory year before it, it forms a cohesive curriculum covering seven years.

⁴ The notion of "unit" in New South Wales and Victorian curricula is similar to that of "credit". In New South Wales, most courses comprise two units/credits; whereas in Victoria, a typical course comprises one unit/credit only.

⁵ At senior secondary level, students must complete at least 12 units of Preliminary courses (usually in Year 11), and then at least 10 units of Higher School Certificate (HSC) courses (usually in Year 12).

⁶ Although there are no system-wide minimum subject requirements in England, most six-formers study at least one A-level subject during their two-year Sixth Form.

⁷ One AS (Advanced Subsidiary) subject and its corresponding A2 subject form a full A-level subject. In England, most sixth formers take four or five AS subjects in lower Sixth Form, and concentrate on three A2 subjects in upper Sixth Form.

⁸ 13 one-year courses plus any other requirements as specified by the local school district where the student studies.

⁹ To fulfil the minimum graduation requirements, a student is required to study all the compulsory subjects/units as well as the required electives subjects/units. Beyond this minimum, students may take "extra electives", which have nothing to do with their graduation. This table does not include this category of "extra electives".

¹⁰ Group A of Victoria Certificate of Education (VCE) studies include the Arts, LOTE (Languages Other Than English), Health and Physical Education, Studies of Society and Environment or vocational training and education programmes in related industry areas. Group B of VCE studies include Mathematics, Science and Technology, or vocational training and education programmes in related industry areas.

¹¹ The term "Unit" in "Units 3 and 4" refers to the "level" of the course concerned, instead of the number of units which it carries.

¹² To fulfil the minimum graduation requirements, a student is required to take all the compulsory and required elective courses that carry at least 16 units in total.

¹³ In England, there is no system-wide subject requirements for all sixth formers. However, different departments at the universities may set their own minimum admission requirements. As a result, the kind and number of subjects which a student should take depend on the requirement of the course which he/she intends to apply for.

(A) Senior Secondary Curriculum (cont'd)

Country/Region	Ontario ¹⁴	Beijing	Shanghai	Guangdong
(1) Primary and secondary structure	8+4	6+3+3	6+3+3	6+3+3
(2) Duration of senior secondary education	Grades 9-12	Senior Middle School, Years 1-3	Senior Middle School, Years 1-3	Senior Middle School, Years 1-3
(3) Number of subjects/units a senior secondary student should take	(Credits)	(Subjects)	(Subjects)	(Subjects)
• Minimum	30	4	5	5
• Maximum	--	--	--	--
• Average	30	4	5	5
(4) Minimum graduation requirements for senior secondary education ¹⁵ :				
• Compulsory subjects/units	18 credits (4 in English, 3 in math, 2 in natural sciences, 1 each in French as a second language, Canadian history, Canadian geography, arts, health & physical education, etc.) + 40 hours of community involvement activities	3 subjects (i.e., Chinese, math and a foreign language)	3 subjects (i.e., Chinese, math and a foreign language)	3 subjects (i.e., Chinese, math and a foreign language) + "Large integrated" subject ¹⁷
• Elective subjects/units	12 credits	"Small integrated" subject (either "integrated arts" subject or "integrated science" subject) ¹⁶	"Small integrated" subject (either "integrated arts" subject or "integrated science" subject) + one single subject	One single subject
(5) Structure of senior secondary curriculum (e.g. level 1 followed by a more advanced level 2)	Grades 9 and 10 courses, and Grades 11 and 12 courses	A subject usually takes three years.	A subject usually takes three years.	A subject usually takes three years.

¹⁴ In 1999 Ontario started to implement the new Ontario Secondary School Curriculum.

¹⁵ To fulfil the minimum graduation requirements, a student is required to study all the compulsory subjects/units as well as the required electives subjects/units. Beyond this minimum, students may take "extra electives", which have nothing to do with their graduation. This table does not include this category of "extra electives".

¹⁶ "Integrated arts" subject covers politics, history and geography. "Integrated science" subject covers physics, chemistry and biology.

¹⁷ "Large integrated" subject covers politics, history, geography, physics, chemistry and biology.

(B) Senior Secondary Public Examination

Country/Region	New South Wales	Victoria	England	California
(1) Name of the senior secondary public examination	New South Wales Higher School Certificate Examinations	Victoria Certificate of Education External assessments	AS and A2 Exams ¹⁸	N/A
(2) Purpose of the examination: certification (C) and/or selection (S)	C & S	S	C & S	N/A
(3) Do students' results in internal school assessments constitute a part of their final examination results? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weightings for internal school assessments • Any mechanism that moderates the internal school assessments results across different schools? 	Yes 50% Yes ²⁰	Yes Varied across different subjects Yes	No ¹⁹ N/A N/A	Yes 100% No ²¹
(4) Timing for taking the examination	Year 12 ²²	Year 12	AS exams at the end of lower Sixth Form, and A2 exams at the end of upper Sixth Form	N/A
(5) Prior to the senior secondary final public examination, are students required to sit any other public examination(s)?	NSW School Certificate Examinations in Year 10	General Achievement Test (GAT) ²³	Prior to Sixth Form, students sit the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) Examinations at the end of Form 5 (usually at the age of 16)	State-wide California High School Exit Exam to assess students' abilities in English language and math. Students usually take this examination in Grade 10 ²⁴

¹⁸ They can also be called A/AS exams, i.e. Advanced/Advanced Subsidiary exams. It is because A2 exams are similar to A-level exams in terms of standards.

¹⁹ Some science subjects (e.g. biology) require students to have practical training and skills, such as doing experiments and/or projects. In such cases, internal assessments are conducted prior to the external examination, and the results of the internal assessment will constitute a part of the final examination results.

²⁰ There is a system-wide moderation mechanism whereby each student's school-based assessment marks are moderated by his/her external examination marks in the respective subjects before calculating the total HSC mark.

²¹ California's State Board of Education sets the state-wide content standards, which provide guidelines for local districts in developing their individual district content standards.

²² Preliminary courses, usually taken in Year 11, are assessed by schools internally. HSC courses and Extension courses, usually taken in Year 12, are assessed through external HSC Examinations.

²³ Participation in GAT does not fulfil any part of the VCE graduation requirements. Besides, students' GAT results would neither be counted towards their VCE results, nor their ENTER (i.e. the aggregate score for tertiary entrance purpose). Nevertheless, GAT is an important part of the VCE assessment procedures.

²⁴ Students who fail the Exam in Grade 10 may re-take it for several times before graduation. They must pass this Exam in order to graduate. The Exam was introduced in the 2001-02 school year.

(B) Senior Secondary Public Examination (cont'd)

Country/Region	Ontario	Beijing	Shanghai	Guangdong
(1) Name of the senior secondary public examination	N/A	Joint Entrance Examinations for Mainland Chinese Universities (i.e. 3 + "small integrated" exam)	Joint Entrance Examinations for Mainland Chinese Universities (i.e. 3 + "small integrated" exam + 1)	Joint Entrance Examinations for Mainland Chinese Universities (i.e. 3 + "large integrated" exam + 1)
(2) Purpose of the examination: certification (C) and/or selection (S)	N/A	S	S	S
(3) Do students' results in internal school assessments constitute a part of their final examination results? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weightings for internal school assessments • Any mechanism that moderates the internal school assessments results across different schools? 	Yes 100% No ²⁵	No N/A N/A	No N/A N/A	No N/A N/A
(4) Timing for taking the examination	N/A	SS3	SS3	SS3
(5) Prior to the senior secondary final public examination, are students required to sit any other public examination(s)?	Students are required to take the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test in Grade 10 ²⁶	Localised Senior Middle School Graduation Examinations taken by students on specified dates during the three-year senior secondary education	Shanghai abolished its Senior Middle School Graduation Examination in 2002	Localised Senior Middle School Graduation Examinations taken by students on specified dates during the three-year senior secondary education

²⁵ Ontario Ministry of Education has devised province-wide "achievement charts" which provides common guidelines for use by individual schools in conducting school-based assessments.

²⁶ Students who fail the Test in Grade 10 may re-take it for several times before graduation. From the 2001-02 school year onwards, students must pass this Test before graduation.