# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Benchmarking the Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools (NIS) Grade 12 Certificate



**Ecctis' independent evaluation and benchmarking has found the NIS Grade 12 Certificate comparable to the GCE A Level standard.**

## Context and scope

The Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools (NIS) is an autonomous educational organisation, and a network of 21 schools in Kazakhstan, which offer the NIS Programme, covering primary (Grades 1-5), lower secondary (Grades 6-10) and upper secondary education (Grades 11-12). Upper secondary education at NIS aims to develop students communication, social, research and problem-solving skills. The NIS Grade 12 Certificate is awarded upon completion of the two-year high school component of the NIS Programme (Grades 11 and 12). In 2017, Ecctis undertook an independent benchmarking study of the NIS Grade 12, concluding that it was comparable to the GCE A Level standard in the context of the UK education system. Since the previous study was undertaken, the programme has continued to evolve. In 2024, NIS updated the subject programmes for upper secondary education (Grades 11 and 12), revised 22 course plans for Grade 11, and made the educational process in Intellectual schools more focused on the development of skills and competencies.

## About the NIS Programme

### Entry and duration

Entry to the upper secondary stage of the NIS Programme (Grades 11 and 12) is contingent on successful completion of lower secondary education, including the Grade 10 State Examination, after which students are awarded a Certificate of Secondary School Education. Admission to NIS secondary schools is through a competitive entry examination at Grade 7.

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### Structure and Content

The NIS Programme (Grades 11 and 12) consists of nine compulsory subjects and a range of elective subjects (including two at advanced level and one at standard level), as well as further elective courses and club activities.

### Assessment, Grading and Certification

Subjects assessed externally include Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Computer Science, Mathematics, History of Kazakhstan, and English. Assessment is conducted primarily via written examination on completion of the NIS Grade 12, with the exception of the Global Perspectives and Project Work which is assessed via a portfolio and a research paper at Grade 11. The development, administration and delivery of these assessments are overseen centrally by NIS.

## Key findings

Overall, the study found that the NIS Grade 12 Certificate develops and assesses a comparable level of knowledge and skills to GCE A Level standard. These include independent study skills, and higher order thinking skills such as problem-solving, reasoning, analysis and evaluation. Both the NIS Programme (Grades 11 and 12) and GCE A Level are designed to prepare students for progression into higher education by developing academic knowledge and subject-specific understanding. alongside effective communication skills and personal and social competencies.

Across all subjects reviewed in this study, clear comparability was observed in the assessment objectives of the NIS Grade 12 and the GCE AS and A Levels, with both aiming to assess a similar range of knowledge and skills.

At subject level, the review of the NIS Programme's subjects (Grade 11 and 12) found that the content covered was comparable to corresponding subjects at GCE AS/A Level. Minor differences in the subject content were observed, particularly in the breadth and depth of content in some subjects, reflecting the number of subjects studied within the overall NIS Grade 12 Certificate.

Both the NIS Grade 12 and GCE A Levels use predominantly examination-based assessments at the end of the studies. The study found that the assessment methods of the selected subjects of the NIS Grade 12 present similarities to those of similarly focused GCE A Level subjects, with both assessing similar knowledge and skills. Given the differences in the nature of the two qualifications, there are differences in the assessment structure, duration, weighting, and mark allocation. However, the NIS Grade 12 assesses knowledge application, problem-solving, evaluation, and independent inquiry to GCE A Level standard.

## Methodology

Based on Ecctis' well-established methodology for credential evaluation, this independent evaluation and benchmarking study comprised a detailed review of the NIS Programme's design in terms of:

- Entry requirements
- Duration
- Content and structure
- Modes of learning and assessment
- Learning outcomes and assessment objectives
- Associated outcomes.

To support the overall comparative analysis, a sample of NIS Grade 11 and 12 subjects were comparatively analysed against similarly focused GCE AS/A Level subjects in the UK, focusing on learning outcomes, subject content, assessment objectives, and assessment methods. This sample included the following NIS subjects: Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Mathematics, History of Kazakhstan, and Global Perspectives and Project Work.

Quality assurance and control mechanisms and processes were also considered for the purposes of Ecctis determining comparability.

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