

A levels or International Foundation Course ?

Overseas students who are over 17 years old have two ways to qualify for university entrance: A levels or Foundation courses. Each type has advantages (and drawbacks!). For some students A level is the best choice but, in some cases, Foundation courses are better. Here are the main differences.

A-level advantages:

- Many colleges provide A-level courses, so students have plenty of choice for how and where they study; there is less choice if students want to take Foundation courses.
- All UK universities accept A-level qualifications, so students can apply to any university they want. It is difficult to get into the best UK universities (such as Oxford, Cambridge, London School of Economics etc) without A levels.
- For some courses, such as Medicine, universities will only accept students who are taking A levels.
- Universities generally expect students to take three A-level subjects, and there are a great many different subjects to choose from. However universities do not like students to take an A-level combination which is too specialised (such as the combination of Business, Accounting, and Economics A levels).

A-level drawbacks:

- An overseas student needs to have good English skills before starting A-levels, even in subjects such as Mathematics.
- The failure rate is higher than in Foundation Courses, though the difference is not great.

Foundation Course advantages:

- The course is usually designed specifically for overseas students, and includes language and study-skills support.
- Students can often join Foundation courses with a lower level of English than A levels need.
- The failure rate is lower than A level, though students need to get high marks on Foundation courses if they want to go to a better university. Students who might fail A level can sometimes succeed with Foundation courses.
- Foundation courses are designed to take one year. Students can complete A level in one year, but it is harder.
- Students generally specialise in the subject area they will study at university

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Foundation Course drawbacks:

- The qualification is not accepted by all universities. Foundation courses generally give entry to a limited range of universities. Each Foundation course provider is different. It is essential that you check which universities and courses accept the Foundation Course offered by the college you are thinking of joining (and what marks they expect!!).
- Foundation courses do not bring students up to as high a level as A-level courses do, so students may find the first year at university more difficult.
- Because Foundation courses are not nationally recognised, there is variation in the standard of courses, so a student needs to be very careful when choosing

So, which is the better qualification?

The answer depends on your academic achievements, your language skills, and your ambitions!! The higher these are, the more likely it is that you will be aiming at the top universities in the UK, and for them A level is the better choice.

However, Foundation is widely accepted by universities which will provide you with a good education and is a good choice if you want to be sure of completing your pre-university study in one year.

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