

Switching to OCR A from AQA

Introduction

We are really excited about our GCE Biology A qualification. Whether taking on the AS or the full A Level, this fantastic course is a great qualification for those with an interest in the subject. Why choose Biology A?

- The 'Big Ideas' of Biology are covered
- The topics are selected and structured to underpin the knowledge and understanding needed for the next generation of biologists
- Biology A is enjoyable to teach and learn, giving students the essentials for biology-related higher education courses as well as many transferable, marketable skills
- There are many opportunities for 'hands-on' practical, linking to our flexible practical assessment model
- The biological topics are presented in a clear and logical linear order with practical and maths opportunities highlighted.

Our offer

- Our A Level Biology team, Richard and Katherine, are passionate about biology and education. With biological research and teaching experience, they are fully committed to supporting centres' delivery of Biology A.
- We have produced a wide range of [support materials](#), from our handbooks (covering practical, maths and drawing skills) to delivery guides, lesson elements, practical activities, candidate exemplars and more.
- Join our conversation on the [OCR Community](#) and [@ocr_science](#) to talk about and share good practice.

[#PositiveAboutPractical](#)



Key differences

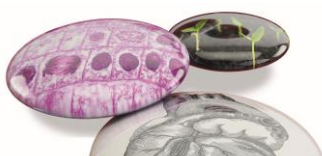
OCR Biology A	AQA
Flexible practical assessment allows you to use your own practical activities or select from our suggested activities	Fixed set of 12 practical activities you have to deliver
Practical skills take centre stage, detailed in full at the start of the specification in a separate module for clarity and prominence	Required practical activities listed in the specification
A section of multiple choice questions in the exams to allow breadth of coverage	No multiple choice questions
No essay questions – shorter extended response questions throughout the exams to allow a range of topics to be assessed	A long essay required at A Level
All 28 maths skills covered in our free maths skills handbook and further supported with online resources	Some skills supported by online resources



Content

The content within the [OCR Biology A specification](#) covers the ‘Big Ideas’ of biology and will be very familiar. We’ve laid it out in a logical progression to support co-teaching the AS level and teaching the A level in a linear way.

OCR Biology A	AQA
<p>Module 1: Practical skills Planning, implementing, analysis and evaluation Plus all the skills to be covered in the Practical Endorsement</p>	<p>The same practical skills, as mandated by the DfE, are listed in Chapters 7 and 8 of the AQA specification</p>
<p>Module 2: Foundations in Biology</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cell structure • Biological molecules • Nucleotides and nucleic acids • Enzymes • Biological membranes • Cell division, diversity and organisation 	<p>3.1 Biological molecules (all sub-sections: monomers and polymers; carbohydrates; lipids; proteins, nucleic acids; ATP; water; inorganic ions)</p> <p>3.2 Cells (3 of the 4 sub-sections: cell structure; all cells arise from other cells; transport across cell membranes)</p> <p>3.4 Genetic information, variation and relationships between organisms (3 of the 7 sub-sections: DNA, genes and chromosomes; DNA and protein synthesis; Genetic diversity can arise as a result of mutation or during meiosis)</p> <p>3.8 The control of gene expression (1 of the 4 sub-sections: Alteration of the sequence of bases in DNA can alter the structure of proteins)</p>



OCR Biology A	AQA
<p>Module 3: Exchange and Transport</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exchange surfaces • Transport in animals • Transport in plants 	<p>3.3 Organisms exchange substances with their environment (3 of the 4 sub-sections: surface area to volume ratio; gas exchange; mass transport)</p>
<p>Module 4: Biodiversity, evolution and disease</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicable diseases, disease prevention and the immune system • Biodiversity • Classification and evolution 	<p>3.2 Cells (1 of the 4 sub-sections: Cell recognition and the immune system)</p> <p>3.4 Genetic information, variation and relationships between organisms (4 of the 7 sub-sections: Genetic diversity and adaptation; species and taxonomy; Biodiversity within a community; investigating diversity)</p>
<p>Module 5: Communication, homeostasis and energy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication and homeostasis • Excretion • Neuronal communication • Hormonal communication • Plant and animal responses • Photosynthesis • Respiration 	<p>3.5 Energy transfers in and between organisms (2 of the 4 sub-sections: photosynthesis; respiration)</p> <p>3.6 Organisms respond to changes in their internal and external environments (all sub-sections: stimuli, both internal and external, are detected and lead to a response; nervous coordination; skeletal muscles; homeostasis)</p>
<p>Module 6: Genetics, evolution and ecosystems</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cellular control • Patterns of inheritance • Manipulating genomes • Cloning and biotechnology • Ecosystems • Populations and sustainability 	<p>3.5 Energy transfers in and between organisms (2 of the 4 sub-sections: energy and ecosystems; nutrient cycles)</p> <p>3.7 Genetics, populations, evolution and ecosystems (all sub-sections: inheritance; populations; evolution may lead to speciation; populations in ecosystems)</p> <p>3.8 The control of gene expression (3 of the 4 sub-sections: Gene expression is controlled by a number of features; using genome</p>



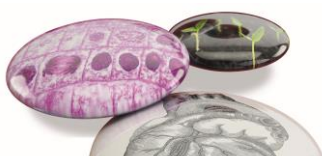
OCR Biology A	AQA
	<p>projects; gene technologies allow the study and alteration of gene function allowing a better understanding of organism function and the design of new industrial and medical processes)</p>
<p>Appendix 5d: Mathematical requirements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arithmetic and numerical computation • Handling data • Algebra • Graphs • Geometry and trigonometry 	<p>Chapter 6: Mathematical requirements and exemplifications</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arithmetic and numerical computation • Handling data • Algebra • Graphs • Geometry and trigonometry

*Note: one major topic present in the AQA specification does not appear in the OCR A specification: **3.3.3 Digestion and absorption.***



Assessment

OCR Biology A	AQA
<p>AS Paper 1: Breadth in Biology, Modules 1-4 50% of AS Written paper 1hr 30 minutes 70 marks</p> <p>Section A multiple choice questions, 20 marks. Section B short structured questions, covering problem solving, calculations, practical and theory, 50 marks.</p>	<p>AS Paper 1: Topics 1-4 & practical skills 50% of AS Written paper 1hr 30 minutes 75 marks</p> <p>65 marks short answer questions, 10 marks comprehension.</p>
<p>AS Paper 2: Depth in Biology, Modules 1-4 50% of AS Written paper 1hr 30 minutes 70 marks</p> <p>Short structured questions and extended response questions, problem solving, calculations, practical and theory.</p>	<p>AS Paper 2: Topics 1-4 & practical skills 50% of AS Written paper 1 hr 30 minutes 75 marks</p> <p>65 marks short answer questions, 10 marks extended response.</p>
<p>A Level Paper 1: Biological processes, Modules 1, 2, 3 & 5 37% of A level Written paper 2 hours 15 minutes 100 marks</p> <p>Section A multiple choice questions, 15 marks. Section B short structured questions, and extended response questions, problem solving, calculations, practical and theory 85 marks.</p>	<p>A Level Paper 1: Topics 1-4 & practical skills 35% of A level Written paper 2 hours 91 marks</p> <p>76 marks short and long answer questions, 15 marks extended answers.</p>



OCR Biology A	AQA
<p>A Level Paper 2: Biological diversity, Modules 1, 2, 4 & 6 37% of A level Written paper 2 hours 15 minutes 100 marks</p> <p>Section A multiple choice questions, 15 marks. Section B short structured questions and extended response questions, problem solving, calculations, practical and theory 85 marks.</p>	<p>A Level Paper 2: Topics 5-8 & practical skills 35% of A level Written paper 2 hours 91 marks</p> <p>76 marks short and long answer questions, 15 marks extended answers.</p>
<p>A Level Paper 3: Unified Biology, Modules 1-6 26% of A level Written paper 1 hour 30 minutes 70 marks</p> <p>Short structured questions and extended response questions, problem solving, calculations, practical and theory.</p>	<p>A Level Paper 3: Topics 1-8 & practical skills 30% of A level Written paper 2 hours 78 marks</p> <p>38 marks structured questions. 15 marks analysis of experimental data 25 marks essay question.</p>



Want to switch to OCR?

If you're an OCR-approved centre, all you need to do is download the specification and start teaching.

Your exams officer can complete an [intention to teach form](#) which enables us to provide appropriate support to them. When you're ready to enter your students, you just need to speak to your exams officer to:

1. Make estimated entries by 10 October so we can send you any early release materials, prepare the question papers and ensure we've got enough examiners.
2. Make final entries by 21 February

If you are not already an OCR-approved centre please refer your exams officer to the [centre approval section](#) of our admin guide.

Practical Endorsement Administration (A Level only)

The requirements for the practical endorsement have been set by the Department for Education and Ofqual working with all awarding bodies to ensure a common approach. Just as when following the AQA A Level Biology qualification, your A Level students studying OCR Biology A will need to demonstrate to you, their teacher(s), that they are consistently and routinely competent in each of the skills and techniques defined for A Level Biologists. You will need to:

- Keep records of carrying out practical activities as well as your assessment of competence of each of your students in each of these skills and techniques. This can be done, if you wish, using our OCR tracker spreadsheet.
- Register the name of a 'lead teacher' who will act as the contact point for arranging a monitoring visit (organised centrally through the JCQ). You will need to indicate that you are teaching the OCR Biology A qualification. Your exams officer will have received an [email with details](#) of how to do this. If and when a monitoring visit takes place it will be done by an OCR-appointed monitor applying the criteria agreed across all awarding organisations.

Students need to keep records of their practical work, which can be done in whatever format best suits you and your students, be it a lab book, a loose leaf folder or an electronic record. Help and guidance are available from our [Positive about practical page](#).



Next steps

1. Familiarise yourself with the specification, sample assessment materials and teaching resources on the [OCR Biology A](#) qualification page of the OCR website.
2. Browse the [online delivery guides](#) for teaching ideas and use the [Scheme of Work builder](#) to create your personal scheme of work.
3. [Get a login](#) for our secure extranet, [Interchange](#) – allows you to access the latest past/practice papers and use our results analysis service, [Active Results](#).
4. Sign up to receive [subject updates](#) by email.
5. Sign up to attend a [training event](#) or take part in webinars on specific topics running throughout the year and/or our Q&A webinar sessions every half term.
6. Attend one of our free [teacher network events](#) that are run in each region every term. These are hosted at the end of the school day in a school or college near you, with teachers sharing best practice and subject specialists on hand to lead discussion and answer questions.

