

in this *issue*

1

Exams at 16?  
More common than thought  
*Page 3*

2

Education's new normal  
Building back, post-pandemic  
*Page 5*

3

Top teacher  
Dedicated Teacher Award winner  
announced  
*Page 7*



Achieve

July 2021

The latest news from Cambridge Assessment,  
the University's international exams group.  
[cambridgeassessment.org.uk](https://www.cambridgeassessment.org.uk)

## The path to a Natural History GCSE

*Four out of five children in the UK are unable to identify a bumblebee, while one in two cannot identify a nettle[1]. The lack of connection to nature which this shows has driven a proposal by naturalist Mary Colwell to create a new qualification in natural history, an event has heard.*

Mary told a Cambridge Assessment Network seminar that, in contrast to previous generations, 40% of children now spent barely any time playing outdoors. This was leading to a deficit of knowledge and understanding of our neighbours in the natural world, she said.

Not knowing names is indicative of a deeper gulf between us and nature: "If we don't know the name of something, it's very difficult to have a meaningful relationship with it," she said, noting how the Oxford Junior Dictionary had removed a number of nature words such as 'conker', 'magpie' and 'otter' because they "are now not considered useful to children in early secondary or late junior school".



Mary's proposal for a GCSE in Natural History is currently with England's Department for Education (DfE) for approval.

During the seminar Mary charted her 11-year journey to develop the proposal. She had the idea after working at the BBC Natural History Unit. Support

was garnered with a 10 000-strong petition but then Mary said the project lacked traction until Green Party MP Caroline Lucas got involved. Mary described Ms Lucas' role as "like [Peter Pan character] Tinker Bell with a magic wand", with the MP securing a meeting with then Environment Secretary Michael Gove. That in turn led to a meeting with Cambridge Assessment's

## News in Brief

### Right prescription



Sujata Stead

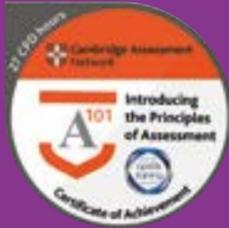
Pharmacists who are interested in working in Britain can now benefit from a decision from the General Pharmaceutical Council about how they can prove their English language ability.

To work in Britain, Pharmacists and Pharmacist Technicians must prove they have the English language skills needed to carry out their jobs as part of the registration process with the regulator. Professionals choosing this route can now prove their English language proficiency with OET, an English language test specifically developed for the healthcare sector.

Sujata Stead, CEO of OET, said:

"It's essential that healthcare professionals coming to work in an English-speaking environment have the English language skills they need to communicate clearly and deliver safe and quality care. We've designed OET so it reflects the real-life communication scenarios that pharmacists are likely to face, so it's a really fit for purpose test."

### Badge of success



Learners who successfully complete one of several popular online professional development courses can now access digital badges to display their achievements.

Cambridge Assessment Network is offering digital badges for successful completion of their A10 series of online courses, including A101: Introducing the Principles of Assessment and A103: Introducing Data Literacy.

Sally Brown, Assistant Director of Cambridge Assessment Network, said:

"This is another exciting development for the Assessment Network and follows on from our awarding of accreditation from CPD standards last year. The digital badges show our commitment to professional development and will allow learners to share their achievement to the assessment community via social media."

### Mastering the language

A new Master's degree in English Language Assessment has been launched.

The part time Master of Studies (MSt) course will give participants a deep understanding of the ways in which English is assessed and the expertise to develop new assessment tools and strategies. It is aimed at English language teachers, educational practitioners and other assessment professionals seeking to enhance and consolidate their knowledge in English language assessment.

The course will be delivered by Cambridge Assessment English, the Cambridge Language Sciences Interdisciplinary Research Centre and the University of Cambridge Institute of Continuing Education.



Getty Images

## Joint commitment to the environment

*Cambridge Assessment and Cambridge University Press have introduced a joint target to reduce their energy-related emissions to carbon zero by 2048.*

The organisations have set science-based targets and are measuring themselves against the three scopes of the Greenhouse Gas Protocol. They have pledged to:

- work sustainably and ethically
- reduce their environmental impact
- seek assurances from their suppliers that forestry products are legally sourced
- promote their environmental ambitions to their people, suppliers, customers and partners around the world.

Vicky Evans, Head of Sustainability at Cambridge Assessment and Cambridge University Press, said: "At Cambridge, we recognise there is a climate emergency and we have a responsibility to our customers, teachers, learners and communities to drive sustainable change. Most importantly, we know we need to go on the journey together."



Vicky Evans

Both organisations are participants in the United Nations Global Compact – the world's largest corporate sustainability initiative – and support the compact's 10 principles of human rights, labour, environment and anti-corruption.

## Former Microsoft executive takes charge in South Asia

*Cambridge Assessment and Cambridge University Press have announced the appointment of Arun Rajamani as the new Managing Director for Cambridge South Asia. He will lead all teams in the region across both organisations as they prepare to unify.*



Arun Rajamani

Mr Rajamani has worked in the education sector for several years, first with Microsoft and then with Pluralsight, with a focus on improving digital literacy for teachers and students. He has also advised several education technology start-ups to transform the way people learn through self-based education and mentoring.

"I am so pleased to be joining an organisation with such a rich heritage," he said. "It's an exciting time to be involved in education in India as our education ecosystem is rapidly transforming. My aim is to build on the strong foundations to make Cambridge the most preferred and trusted brand in the region."

Saul Nassé, Chief Executive of Cambridge Assessment, said: "Cambridge already makes a big impact across South Asia, but there's even more we can do across the worlds of learning and assessment. Arun has a proven commitment to supercharging education for students and teachers, and I'm delighted to welcome him to the team."

Peter Phillips, Chief Executive of Cambridge University Press, said: "Arun brings huge experience which will be of enormous help as we continue to respond to the evolving needs of teachers and learners. I am delighted that Arun has joined us at such an exciting time as we prepare to unify our two organisations and I look forward to working together as the South Asia team develop their plans for the future."

Continued from page 1

Tim Oates CBE, who Mary described as “the second Tinker Bell” in the project.

“Not only was Tim interested, but he really took it seriously,” she said. “He provided the introduction into this extraordinarily complex world of education that I had no concept of at all. He was the guru that led us through.”

The draft syllabus includes highly active engagement with nature through observation and fieldwork; suitable for young people in both urban and in rural settings. If approved by the DfE and then the England exams regulator Ofqual, the new qualification could be taught from as soon as September 2023.

Tim, who chaired the review of the National Curriculum in England, said that if approved, the qualification would “provide an antidote to fatalism which can so easily beset

society these days in the face of the extraordinary challenges facing our natural world, such as climate change”.

Mary echoed Tim's comments, summing up by saying: “A GCSE in Natural History would reconnect our young people with the natural world around them. Not just because it's fascinating, not just because it's got benefits for mental health, but because we'll need these young people to create a world we can all live in, a vibrant and healthy planet.”

You can watch the full video of Mary's talk at [www.cambridgeassessment.org.uk/news/the-path-to-a-natural-history-gcse](http://www.cambridgeassessment.org.uk/news/the-path-to-a-natural-history-gcse).

[1] According to a survey for family activity app Hoop in 2019, [www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/49331144](http://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/49331144)



Mary Colwell

## Exams at 16 are more common than thought

*External assessment at the end of basic secondary education is more common than is often claimed, according to new research.*

A study by Cambridge Assessment's Irenka Suto and Tim Oates CBE into Repeatedly High Performing Jurisdictions (RHPJs) around the world found that two out of three use external assessment at the end of basic secondary education, either exclusively or in addition to internal assessment.

In addition to England, Wales and Northern Ireland, the list of external assessment users at age 16 includes four other European RHPJs: the Republic of Ireland, Poland, Estonia, and Belgium's French-speaking community. Beyond Europe, the list includes China's Beijing, Shanghai, Jiangsu and Zhejiang provinces, Singapore, South Korea, Ontario in Canada, and the Russian Federation.

In many of these RHPJs, external assessment plays a critical role in determining students' directions in upper secondary education – just as in England, Wales and Northern Ireland where GCSEs will help students choose which A Level subjects to take, or maybe whether to pursue a vocational route. In addition, in many of these RHPJs, external assessment was found to play a critical role in providing students with qualifications in subjects that they might not study again – so just like in England,



Irenka Suto



Tim Oates

where a student might choose to specialise in the arts at A Level they have nonetheless been given a solid grounding and formal qualifications in maths and science, courtesy of the GCSEs they took.

The researchers also found no evidence to suggest that abandoning assessment at the end of basic secondary education – or not adopting it in the first place – was associated with higher student performances at system level. They also examined concerns about using assessment at the end of basic secondary education for the secondary purpose of accountability, concluding that England is not unique in this respect. Repeat high performers such as Estonia and Shanghai also do so.

The report, 'High stakes testing after basic secondary education: How and why is it done in high performing education systems', builds on and updates an international review published in 2015, 'Are claims that GCSE is a white elephant, red herrings?'

Tim said: “The aim of this new report is to bring clarity to the global situation so that everyone who is engaging in the debate about the future of education can base their views on facts rather than assertions.

“Overall, we provide an evidence-based argument that when it comes to high stakes testing at age 16, England, Wales and Northern Ireland are by no means atypical. Our approach to assessment is, in fact, strikingly similar to the approaches of many countries and other jurisdictions whose educational achievements are most admired.”

Irenka said: “Our conclusions cohere with literature on the need to appreciate the complexity and context of national education systems and to understand relationships across components when considering change. Importing changes is no guarantee to securing a perfect education system and there is no reason to believe that internal assessment is a panacea. It is essential to focus instead on coherence across elements such curriculum, pedagogy and assessment.”

## A view from... Barnaby Lenon

### The future of exams? Here's what we could do



Barnaby Lenon

There are currently four groups thinking about the future of exams in England. In some ways this is not a good time – the government has just reformed every part of the exam system. On the other hand, it takes several years for reforms to be put in place. So what might be done?

I would avoid replacing written exams with too much teacher assessed coursework. In England we cut back on this after 2012 and there were good reasons for that: the system was unfair; coursework was stressful and burdensome and sometimes formulaic and dull.

There are however things we could do. Independent schools are free to choose and some, such as Bedales, Sevenoaks and St. Edward's Oxford, have already moved away from GCSEs. The important thing is to persuade universities – will you accept our alternative qualification? – and parents. However, many schools which have embarked on the International Baccalaureate have found it hard to build demand.

Nevertheless, we could well move to a less rigid system than 'GCSEs or nothing', starting with those subjects that find the GCSE particularly limiting. Many English teachers are unhappy with the GCSE, maths and science teachers less so. If different schools used different types of assessment for English at age 16, universities would almost certainly not object. A new type of English GCSE is needed for those who have to resit at age 17.

Some syllabuses need to evolve. Computational thinking should be added to maths A Level, for instance, while new subjects should come along.

We should encourage schools to move away from an undue focus on exams. The recent Ofsted inspection reforms point in the right direction in this respect. The growth of the Extended Project since 2015 is another encouraging trend.

We should begin a national programme to ensure every pupil aged 11 and above has access to a computer, keyboard and internet access at home. If we had that, we would be able to contemplate exams done online and using a keyboard rather than a pen.

To deal with the problem of 'the forgotten third' we could require all pupils to take online tests of basic literacy and numeracy when they are ready to do so. A much higher proportion would then get a qualification.

Some will argue in favour of vocational alternatives to GCSEs for those who are less academic. But the only way this can be made to work is if the course is so good that it leads onto other good vocational courses which in turn lead to good jobs.

There is nothing new about plans to scrap GCSEs. But the formation of groups such as Rethinking Assessment is a useful reminder that there is no system that can please everyone. Reforms take a decade to put in place, so now is not a bad time to start thinking afresh.

*Barnaby Lenon is Professor and Dean of Education at the University of Buckingham. A former Head Master of Harrow School and member of the board of England's exams regulator Ofqual, he is chairman of the Independent Schools Council.*



## First face-to-face China conference held since pandemic

*More than 100 school leaders and counsellors from over 90 schools attended international exam board Cambridge Assessment International Education's first national event in China since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic.*

The East Asia Schools Mini Conference 2021 in Guangzhou focused on university admissions and some sessions were streamed live so that school counsellors who could not attend in person, and the audience outside of China, could still participate. The live sessions for Cambridge International Schools attracted 715 participants from 28 provinces and special administrative regions of China, Japan, Mongolia and Korea.

Dr Jing Zhao, Cambridge International's Regional Director, East Asia, described how the global pandemic had transformed the trends for studying abroad. Cambridge International's East Asia team is working to provide a platform for school counsellors to share best practice and experience to support Cambridge learners in mainland China.



Recipients of Outstanding Cambridge Learner Awards.

Panel discussion during the East Asia Schools Mini Conference.

Professor Youmin Xi, Board Member and Executive President, Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University, shared the challenges faced by the internationalisation of education during the coronavirus crisis, and the university's response to those challenges. Iris Cheung, Head of Faculty for University and Communications, Shenzhen College of International Education, shared her insights on how to find the right fit for students using a holistic approach.

Dora Duan, Cambridge International's Senior Recognitions Manager, East Asia, chaired a panel discussion to answer questions from participants. Professor Youmin Xi, Iris Cheung and Dr Jing Zhao were joined on the panel by Ms Jo Hawley, British Consul-General Guangzhou, and Dr Sherwin Liu, Director of Academics, Operation Centre, Bright Scholar Education Holdings Ltd.

The afternoon breakout sessions were devoted to exploring issues in various destination countries, which provided an opportunity for school counsellors to share insights with colleagues about the rapidly changing admission landscape.

Dr Jing Zhao said: "We are fortunate that the Covid-19 situation is well under control in China and a conference



of up to 500 people is permitted. The East Asia team is planning to host a principals forum in Shanghai and a teacher forum in Beijing in the coming months with the themes of 'Building an Active and Reflective School Community' and 'Building an Active and Reflective Learning Community' respectively. These events will provide a platform for Cambridge schools to share their challenges and best practice after the pandemic and build a stronger community to support each other."

Cambridge International also used the event as an opportunity to host the Outstanding Cambridge Learner Awards. Winners from South and West China, their families and the conference participants celebrated the success together.

## New data literacy test launched

*Research shows that making decisions based on relevant data can help businesses increase their profits and boost productivity. But only one in five global workers are confident that they understand how to use data properly.*

Now online assessment provider Questionmark has teamed up with Cambridge Assessment to help employers measure and improve data literacy levels among the workforce.

The Questionmark Data Literacy by Cambridge Assessment test enables employers to measure data literacy skills across the workforce. The results indicate which team members can understand, apply, communicate with and evaluate data in their job role.

Lars Pedersen, CEO of Questionmark, said: "By ensuring team members understand how to use the wealth of data at their disposal, employers can increase efficiency

and boost productivity. But if employees are not confident in using data, it can add to confusion and cause organisations to miss crucial opportunities.

"The Covid-19 crisis has forced organisations to speed up plans to deliver services digitally. As a result, many in the workforce have access to new data sources, which could lead to a world of opportunities. The new data literacy assessment will give employers confidence that the right decisions are being made with data and identify training needs for those that are struggling."

Sally Brown, Assistant Director of Cambridge Assessment Network, added: "Data literacy skills have never been more needed than they are now. We are delighted to be partnering with Questionmark on this data literacy test as having employees that can derive meaningful insights from data and apply these insights to benefit the business is a great asset to have. This test will help to measure data literacy skills across the workforce and identify the necessary training needs."

The assessment is aimed at anyone who might benefit from better understanding data and covers:

- understanding data and data visualisations
- applying knowledge of data to understand its implications
- evaluating the quality and appropriateness of data
- communicating data appropriately and effectively.





Schoolchildren and members of the public participate in a 'Super haka for Christchurch' traditional Maori dance in support of the victims of the Christchurch earthquake.

"You don't need to go for high attainment by, for example, neglecting the development of the least able," Tim added.

He said it was vital for all young people that educators were highly trained and took part in regular Continuing Professional Development. Fair assessment which supports learning and progression was another important part of what was needed going forward, particularly "more of the right kind". High quality educational resources also continued to play an important role, both paper and online.

Referencing the work of one of the leading thinkers on international comparisons in education, Prof Bill Schmidt, Tim said that focus, rigour and coherence are all features of high performing systems. And he said that the pandemic had taught us that our arrangements need to be robust and resilient.

Turning to recovery learning, Tim pointed to the value of Prof John Hattie's insights into the action in New Zealand in response to interruption of schooling after the Christchurch earthquake. There, standards actually rose after interruption, since schools did something different rather than "rushed normal teaching to catch up". What worked was a period of one-to-one diagnosis and support around learning loss, followed by concentrated programmes to accelerate and consolidate learning. Monitoring needed to take place, with immediate action on misconceptions, and rich questions from the teacher encouraging classroom discourse.

Tim's talk was followed by a session in which he took questions from an engaged and interested audience on the post-pandemic education landscape.

## Education's 'new normal'

*Just what will be the 'new normal' in education, post-pandemic? That's the question that Tim Oates CBE set out to address in a keynote speech to 4000 educators.*

Tim, Cambridge Assessment's Group Director of Assessment Research and Development, was speaking at the Harris Federation's professional development conference, held online this year due to Covid-19. The Harris Federation is an education charity led and operated by teachers which runs 50 primary and

secondary academy schools in London and Essex, and trains thousands of teachers per year.

Introducing Tim's talk, Harris Federation Chief Executive Sir Dan Moynihan said: "Tim is a person who is really worth listening to, because what he says is based on in-depth research over an extended period of time on high performing educational systems and the kinds of approaches that are likely to work best in the 'new normal' post-pandemic."

Tim began his talk by looking back at the pre-Covid landscape and what was going well, saying: "We must not lose the things we were doing pre-pandemic that were resulting in high achievement and high equity for our young people."

Referencing the economist Prof Eric Hanushek's work on global education surveys, Tim said that both equity and attainment "can and must be secured, not traded-off one against the other".

## Leading UK exam board launches diversity review

*Leading UK exam board OCR has announced a review of its syllabuses to ensure they better reflect contemporary society.*

Alongside a review of diversity within its English Literature GCSEs and A Levels, OCR has announced that it is a named partner in the 'Lit in Colour' campaign which aims to explore how to increase students' access to books by writers of colour and those from minority ethnic backgrounds.

Jill Duffy, OCR Chief Executive and an English literature graduate, said: "We're honoured to join the excellent Lit in Colour campaign and to play our part in helping to give young people greater access to works by authors of colour.

"We plan to work shoulder to shoulder with our Lit in Colour partners to support access to a more diverse

English literature curriculum in a number of ways. It's an exciting time to be joining the campaign and for OCR's broad approach to improving diversity."

Zaahida Nabagereka, Lit in Colour Programme Manager, said: "We're really excited to bring OCR on as a named partner for Lit in Colour. This campaign is all about starting a conversation and then following through with meaningful actions that will result in students having more access to literature by writers of colour. OCR has already started those conversations, and we want to do our best to support them through the rest of the process as the campaign develops."

OCR has been talking to English teachers about ways of improving the diversity of the texts English literature students engage with at GCSE and at A Level. At A Level, it is planning to add five new texts to its wider text lists. This is in addition to the current texts by writers of colour, such as Toni Morrison, Andrea Levy and Zora Neale Hurston, that can already be studied.



Five new texts will join US author Toni Morrison on the OCR A Level text lists.

At GCSE, it is asking teachers for views on introducing a new set play text and refreshing its poetry anthology with a range of new poems by authors of colour. It is looking to add new authors to its lists to sit alongside Meera Syal, Jackie Kay, Derek Walcott and John Agard.



Representatives from NEEA pictured with people from Cambridge English and Cambridge Assessment during a meeting in 2018 to celebrate 25 years of collaboration.

## China to set up English language Innovation Centre

*An Innovation Centre has been set up to support English language teaching, learning and assessment in China.*

China's National Education Examinations Authority (NEEA) has teamed up with Cambridge Assessment English to establish the centre, which will aim particularly to improve English teachers' understanding of educational assessment, to provide guidance for exam practitioners, and to promote the application of China's Standards of English Language Ability.

The centre will build on three decades of collaboration between Cambridge and NEEA, which has provided examinations for millions of teachers and learners and generated a unique repository of research, insights and data on language learning in China.

A memorandum of understanding to establish the new centre was signed by Francesca Woodward, Chief Executive of Cambridge English and Zheng Yihui, Vice President of NEEA. Guided by the General Plan for Deepening the Reform of Education Evaluation in the New Era issued by

the State Council of the People's Republic of China, the two organisations will work together to promote the reform and development of foreign language education and assessment.

Cambridge Assessment English and NEEA have been working closely together since the early 1990s to deliver the full range of Cambridge English Qualifications from young learners to C2 Proficiency, including the Business English Certificates. NEEA also supports IELTS tests, which are jointly owned by the British Council, IDP: IELTS Australia and Cambridge Assessment English.

**"This is an incredibly exciting development that will help support teachers and language assessment professionals in China."**

Fran Woodward said: "This is an incredibly exciting development that will help support teachers and language assessment professionals in China. The level of commitment and innovation in language teaching in China is inspiring, and Chinese educators have unique expertise in many areas, including delivering high-quality learning on a very large scale. We are delighted to be able to collaborate and jointly contribute to the enhancement of the understanding of assessment, which makes a vital contribution to effective teaching and learning."

## Best in class

*Three US school districts have been recognised for their performance.*

Broward County Public Schools (BCPS), Charlotte County Public Schools (CCPS), and Volusia County Schools (VCS) have received District of the Year awards from Cambridge Assessment International Education for the 2020–21 school year.

The award recognises US school districts that have consistently strong student performance in their schools and who have also continued to expand their offering of the Cambridge Pathway. Each year, Cambridge International awards one district in each of the following segments (based on enrolment in public schools):

- large size districts – districts with over 20 000 students enrolled in high school
- medium size districts – districts with between 10 000 and 20 000 students enrolled in high school
- small size districts – districts with fewer than 10 000 students enrolled in high school.

"We are excited to recognise BCPS, CCPS and VCS as the recipients of our 2020–21 District of the Year awards. Each of these districts has demonstrated their commitment to providing all students with access to coursework that prepares them for their future," said Mark

Cavone, Regional Director of Cambridge International, North America. "Congratulations to each of the districts, their students, educators, and families on this success."

BCPS, which received the District of the Year award in the large district category, has partnered with Cambridge International for more than 10 years, offering innovative programmes at three elementary schools, 11 middle schools and 21 high schools, as well as Cambridge Magnet Programs at one middle school and one high school.

"This is an awesome accomplishment by our schools," said Steve Dionisio, Superintendent of CCPS. "I am so proud of all of the students and staff on how hard they have worked and continue to push themselves during this difficult time. Just amazing. The partnership Charlotte County Schools has with Cambridge International is outstanding and one I hope will continue for many years to come. Congratulations to all involved." CCPS received the District of the Year award in the small district category. Since 2017–18, CCPS has expanded access to Cambridge International exams by well over 100% and has achieved a phenomenal pass rate.

"We are honored to be selected for this national recognition," said VCS Superintendent Dr Scott Fritz. "Volusia County Schools' vision is to 'create life-long learners prepared for an ever-changing global society', and the

Cambridge International programme's broad, international curriculum provides a strong foundation for our students as they prepare for college and careers." VCS, which received the District of the Year award in the medium district category, introduced the Cambridge programme four years ago at three high schools. Today, nearly 1700 VCS students are taking Cambridge courses at five high schools.

Each year, nearly 1 million students study in Cambridge programmes worldwide. First introduced in the US in 1995, the Cambridge International programme has grown rapidly in popularity. Over the past decade, Cambridge Advanced exams in the US have grown by over 200%. More Cambridge Advanced coursework and exams are now taken in the US than in any other country, and Cambridge International partners with schools across 35 states and the District of Columbia.

**A fleet of Broward County School Buses. The school district is one of three to be recognised for its performance.**



## Global Dedicated Teacher named

*The winner of the 2021 Dedicated Teacher Award has been announced – and it's Annamma Lucy, a social studies teacher working in Dubai.*

Teachers are nominated for the Cambridge University Press awards for something wonderful they have done. This year, students were encouraged to thank teachers who are going above and beyond during the coronavirus pandemic, resulting in 13 000 nominations for primary or secondary teachers in 112 countries, double last year's entries.

After being nominated for the prestigious Dedicated Teacher Award by her students and colleagues at GEMS Our Own English High School Sharjah – Boys' Branch in the United Arab Emirates, Annamma Lucy was chosen as one of six regional winners by a panel of judges and then

gained more than 30% of the public vote in the final to secure the top spot.

Annamma Lucy has been a teacher for 23 years. Originally from the garden city Bengaluru, India, Annamma lost her parents when she was three years old and was taken in by the Good Shepherd nuns who influenced her greatly. She began her teaching career in 1997 at the Good Shepherd Convent Girls' High School, before moving to the UAE in 2007 for a position at GEMS Our Own English High School where she teaches grades 7 and 8 social studies. Annamma's dedication to her own students and inspirational impact beyond the classroom to help young people during such a challenging time made her stand out in the judging round.

Dr Kenan Barut, Director for Education and English language teaching in the Middle East and North Africa, at Cambridge University Press, said:

"I would like to congratulate this year's winner, Annamma, on behalf of everyone at Cambridge University Press. Inspirational teachers such as Annamma help to build brighter futures for young people."

Along with the title of Dedicated Teacher 2021, Annamma will receive 2,578 AED (500 GBP) of Cambridge University Press books for her school. She will also be invited to take part in the Cambridge Panel, an online community of specialists who shape the Press's education publishing. Annamma will appear on a thank you page in every Cambridge University Press Education book published from May 2021.

Annamma Lucy said: "I feel overwhelmed with joy after winning this prestigious award and it motivates me for years to come. I truly believe that this success is because of 'we' and not because of 'me'. I would like to thank first and foremost my students, and I would also like to thank the Good Shepherd nuns, teachers and parents for supporting me to get here. Lastly, thank you to Cambridge University Press for this amazing opportunity."

Winners of the Dedicated Teacher regional awards included Peggy Pesik, Sekolah Buin Batu International School, Indonesia; Nonhlanhla Masina, from African School for Excellence, South Africa; Raminder Kaur Mac, Choithram School, India; Anna Murray, from British Council France and Melissa Crosby, Frankfort High School, Kentucky, USA.



## Summer 2020 grades as generous as expected

*New research concludes that the extent of generosity shown by schools and colleges in determining GCSE and A Level grades in England in summer 2020 was logical, rational and justifiable, but is cautious about the implications for grading standards in future.*

The paper by Tom Benton, Principal Research Officer at Cambridge Assessment, says that schools and colleges recognised their ability to determine grades was less reliable than if exams had taken place last summer. He says that teachers wanted to avoid students being awarded a worse grade than might otherwise have been the case and the generosity they exhibited was rational in the circumstances. However, he notes that it is impossible to know which individual students benefitted from or were disadvantaged by the switch from exams.

Tom says: "Once we know that the reliability of an assessment is lower than normal, the natural human inclination is to try to ensure that students do not lose out. Reduced reliability will increase the chances of a student ending up with a better grade than they would have achieved with a more reliable assessment."

The paper's findings are based on an analysis of the extent to which grade boundaries might have had to change in 2019 to deliver different choices about standards. The analysis uses the difference between forecast A Level grades submitted to the exam board OCR by teachers in 2014 and actual exam grades that year. This direct comparison for the same students in the same subjects is the best source of information for considering the reliability of centre assessed grades in 2020. In one set of circumstances based on these previous estimates of the reliability of teacher grading – where grade boundaries are set to ensure that the overall proportion of students awarded a lower grade than merited by their true ability does not increase as the reliability of assessment falls – the proportion of students awarded A and above at A Level could have been expected to increase last year from 25.5% to 36.2%. As it turned out, schools and colleges submitted grades to exam boards that increased the proportion awarded A and above from 25.5% overall in 2019 to 37.6% in 2020.

Tom adds: "The final distribution of grades in summer 2020 was similar to what might be expected from a logical application of giving students the benefit of the doubt from a position of uncertainty about how they would have performed in real exams."

The paper concludes by considering arguments that the generous distribution of GCSE and A Level grades in England from 2020 should be carried forward into the future when 'normal' examinations resume, as not doing so would, according to some, be unfair to subsequent cohorts of students. However, Tom argues that this fails to recognise the possible role of benefit of the doubt in teachers assigning grades in 2020, which helped protect individual students from being under-rewarded.

Responding to the research, Jill Duffy, CEO of leading UK exam board OCR, said:



Tom Benton

"The means of determining grades in 2021 is different from normal and from 2020, so the overall grade distribution in 2021 is likely to look different from 2020 and previous years. Teachers should ensure that they take an evidence-based approach to determining grades this summer in line with the detailed guidance and training provided by exam boards and try to be as accurate as possible. Decisions about potential must not factor into students' grades; if a student is currently performing consistently at a grade B standard, they should be awarded a grade B. This evidence-based approach, together with both the internal quality assurance schools and colleges will undertake and the external quality assurance that exam boards working together will conduct, will provide confidence in the grades awarded this summer."

# What's blocking change in education?...

*What will it take to achieve real change in education? That was the question debated at an event which explored the steps we should be taking after a year in which the world of education has been completely shaken up.*

'What is blocking real change in education?' was held by SHAPE Education, an initiative from Cambridge Assessment and University of Cambridge Judge Business School that seeks to connect the complex real-world problems of education with creative educational ideas and research to build the next generation of educational solutions and thought leadership for the good of global education.

The April event brought together people who represent key elements of the ecosystem: Dr Alison Wood, Academic Director of Homerton Changemakers at the University of Cambridge, Mohit Midha, Co-founder of Mangahigh, Andreas Schleicher, Director for Education and

Skills at the OECD, Jon Smith, CEO of Pobble, and Valerie Hannon, Board Director of Innovation Unit.

In his talk, Andreas Schleicher spoke about the OECD's Future of Education and Skills 2030 project which has identified three transformative competencies that students need in order to contribute to our world and shape a better future: creating new value, reconciling tensions and dilemmas, and taking responsibility. He said that technology was opening up great possibilities, for instance around the integration of learning and assessment, but that a challenge was that "education takes so much time to translate better ideas into better outcomes".

Andreas's talk was followed by a fireside chat with Alison Wood, who said: "We need a social change... At the heart of this is an imaginative change about what education really does and what it's for."

In her talk, Valerie Hannon praised the theme of the event, saying it was right first and foremost to ask what is blocking real change in education. Similarly to Alison, she said any conversation about change needed to begin with "new, real conversations about the purpose of learning and education".

Mohit Midha said technology was helping to create "pull rather than push" education, where students wanted to learn rather than having to. But he said there were blockers to real change, particularly around support and funding, leading to the risk of a two-tier system. Similarly, in his talk Jon Smith said that funding was a barrier to change, but also teacher time and pressure and lack of infrastructure in some areas.

# ...And what makes a great teacher?



*A lecturer at Harvard Graduate School of Education launched the latest Cambridge Schools Conference by asking: 'What makes an excellent teacher?'. In her keynote video, Rhonda Bondie explored the use of language, student engagement and lesson planning and gave practical tips and advice on how to create an agile online classroom benefitting all learners.*

'Education in a changing world: Remote teaching and learning' was the theme of the Cambridge Schools Conference Online, hosted by international exam board Cambridge Assessment International Education.

Dr Bondie followed up on her opening keynote speech by hosting a question and answer session, which provided delegates the opportunity to quiz her over her keynote speech and wider work.

The conference had 5 200 registrations, of which 50% of the delegates were first time attendees at a Cambridge Schools Conference.



Recordings from the event are now available on the [SHAPE website](#).

One of the drawings captured on the day by SHAPE resident Graphic Recorder Rebecca Osborne.

## Research conference goes online

The BERA (British Educational Research Association) Annual Conference is set to take place online this year.

The keynote speakers are Dr Katy Vigurs, Reader in Education at Birmingham City University, Vanita Sundaram, Professor of Education at the University of York, Iram Siraj, Professor of Child Development and Education at University of Oxford, and Prof Becky Francis, Chief Executive Officer of the Education Endowment Foundation.

The virtual conference will be held from 13 to 16 September 2021.

More details are available on the BERA website at [www.bera.ac.uk/conference/bera-conference-2021](http://www.bera.ac.uk/conference/bera-conference-2021).



Watch this space

## Contact us

Please feel free to contact the Editor at any time:

Hilary Fletcher  
Head of Public Affairs  
Cambridge Assessment  
The Triangle Building, Shaftesbury Road  
Cambridge, CB2 8EA, United Kingdom  
+44 (0)1223 556018 (direct)  
[public.affairs@cambridgeassessment.org.uk](mailto:public.affairs@cambridgeassessment.org.uk)  
Also find us on Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram and YouTube.

Cambridge Assessment is the brand name of the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate, a department of the University of Cambridge. Cambridge Assessment is a not-for-profit organisation.

© 2021 University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate

## Credits

Design: H2 Associates, Cambridge