

Achieve

Summer 2012



CAMBRIDGE ASSESSMENT



Welcome to *Achieve*

The latest news from Cambridge Assessment, the University's international exams group.



Debating the value of vocational education

Debate supports the launch of OCR's new post-16 Cambridge Technical qualification range. see page 5



Lessons from the East

International education expert, Isabel Nisbet, offers an insight into South-East Asian education systems and culture. see page 6

Non-natives not negative on native speakers

There is no association, on average, between the number of non-native speakers in primary schools and the attainment of English-speaking children, according to Dr Sandra McNally, of the Centre for Economic Performance.

Speaking at an animated Cambridge Assessment debate, "Can't speak, can't learn: what is the impact of non-native speakers in schools?", Dr Sandra McNally was one of several speakers addressing the challenges presented by pupils with English as an Additional Language (EAL), and how the curriculum might be adapted to accommodate their needs.

Dr McNally's analysis found that "schools are very well equipped to deal with increasing numbers of non-native speakers, and they organise things such that there is no negative impact on native English speakers". She also explained that parental factors had an effect on children with EAL that helped to offset any disadvantage they might have, with some immigrant parents being very motivated and others well educated. However, former immigration minister Phil Woolas pointed out that this was not true for all communities and that policy errors had sometimes undermined parental aspiration.

Another speaker, Lee Donaghy – an Assistant Headteacher in Birmingham in a school where more than 90 per cent of its pupils have EAL – explained the benefits of adopting "scaffolding" teaching techniques to build a

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Bene't Steinberg, Chair and Group Director of Public Affairs, Cambridge Assessment; Dr Philida Schellekens, consultant, author, teacher and teacher trainer; Phil Woolas, former immigration minister; Dr Sandra McNally, London School of Economics and Political Science; Lee Donaghy, Park View Business & Enterprise School, Birmingham.



Xiangdong Gu, Visiting Professor
at Cambridge ESOL.

Parents in China play positive role in English language learning

With school children in China learning English at increasingly younger ages, it's essential not to underestimate the positive influence parents have in motivating their children's English language learning progress. Parents' perspectives and attitudes to children's language learning has been one of the key focuses of a year long study I'm carrying out in collaboration with Cambridge ESOL – sponsored by the National Scholarship Council and the Fundamental Research Funds for the Central Universities in China.

Nearly 150 parents in Beijing whose children have taken Cambridge English exams took part in the study. We found that it was common for English language learning to take place both in and out of the classroom, with parents indicating that their children invested a great deal of time in learning English. Half the parents said their children participate in up to one hour extra English learning at home each day – with writing being the most popular skill practised. Perhaps not surprisingly, parents identified schools and training institutions as the most popular places children can gain access to English classes.

Parents also told us their children started to learn English as young as five years old on average which reflects a national trend in China. You only have to look at my own family to see this. When I was 16, I started learning English in High School whereas my son (who is now 21) started learning English at 12 in Junior Middle School. This has taken a step further with today's generation – my younger nephews and nieces for example started their English learning at 10 in primary school. English language learning has become embedded in compulsory education in China over the last few decades. Our study also looked at parents' motivation for encouraging English language learning, and for taking Cambridge English Exams. The reasons given included for better education as well as language proficiency. As a parent myself, I find this very encouraging.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Cambridge Teachers Conference

'Confident learners, confident teachers: new ways of looking at leadership' is the theme of this year's Cambridge Teachers Conference on 17–19 September in Cambridge. This annual event hosted, by University

of Cambridge International Examinations, will bring together around 200 teachers from Cambridge schools worldwide to exchange ideas and experiences. Learn more at www.cie.org.uk/ctconf2012

Cambridge Pre-U gets state school vote

Take-up of Cambridge Pre-U is nearing 50:50 in terms of the state versus private school split in the UK – with 64 state schools and 74 independent schools entering their pupils for Cambridge Pre-U subjects. Since its introduction in 2008 appetite for

the qualification, which aims to prepare students for the rigour of university study, has grown across the board. Overall entries for June 2012 are up 30 per cent on last year, according to the latest exam entry figures.

(English language) tips for restaurant staff



Jonathan Deer of
Cambridge ESOL.

"Do you speak English?" must be the most common question asked at hotel front desks, restaurants and cafés all over the world. When you consider that hundreds of millions of people speak English, it's no wonder that it's the first language which people turn to.

"When employing those who need to use English in their jobs, there are a number of tips that will help you ensure they have the right level of English language ability," writes Cambridge ESOL's Jonathan Deer in *Caterer and Hotel Keeper* magazine. Jonathan's guest editorial looked at the importance of common standards and internationally recognised language tests when developing a truly multilingual workforce. Read the full article here

www.caterersearch.com/Articles/05/04/2012/343159/How-to.-improve-communication.htm

Deputy Prime Minister understands importance of learning English



Cambridge ESOL's East Asia office caught up with the Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg – who was guest of honour at a British Embassy event in Seoul. Cambridge's Jim So introduced the Deputy Prime Minister to the work of Cambridge ESOL and they both chatted about the importance of English language across the world.

East Asia is a major growth area for Cambridge ESOL – developments in Japan, China and Korea are coordinated from its office in Beijing.

Helping adults to read, write and count

An estimated five million people of working age in the UK lack basic literacy or numeracy skills. This lack of skills is especially marked in sectors such as the prison population where an estimated 75 per cent of inmates are functionally illiterate and innumerate.

UK exam board OCR, has drawn on its RSA heritage to address the basic skills issue with the launch of two new English and Maths qualifications this summer. OCR's new English and Maths Proficiency qualifications have been developed with a focus on core skills and knowledge, simple assessment and bite-sized, credit-based units. To support the new adult learning initiative, OCR teamed up with TRIBAL – specialists in providing educational resources across the public sector – to design a range of support materials such as teachers' guides and practice assessments.

To make teaching as flexible as possible, individual units from the English and Maths Proficiency qualifications can be stand alone or delivered as part

of programmes of learning by FE colleges and training providers. Learners can "step off" once they have mastered a relevant English or Maths skill to take other qualifications such as Functional Skills or GCSEs.

Paul Steer, OCR Director of Partnerships, explained: "The number of adults with low basic skills is an enormous problem and OCR is committed to playing its part in providing qualifications that help motivate learning. Our new fully-funded qualifications will fill a gap in provision. We believe that the stepping stone approach is good for learners and teachers who will benefit from the flexibility that's vital for success within this sector. We've deliberately kept it simple, so what you see is what you get."

Non-natives not negative on native speakers

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child's independence. He also said that one of the key challenges at Park View was to ensure that teachers were confident enough themselves in their knowledge of language. Educationalist Philida Schellekens agreed, stressing the importance of giving pupils feedback.

During the debate the 120 attending and over 1,000 engaging online were also given a number of opportunities to express their opinions. Asked whether the current curriculum created obstacles for EAL students, 73 per cent of the audience said yes. In the debate that followed it emerged that few people thought that the UK had a single, cohesive EAL curriculum in any event.

Building on these ideas, the panel agreed that plurilingualism in schools is something that adds value and should therefore be fostered. Dr Nick Saville, of Cambridge ESOL, stated that "developing a plurilingual competence and a wide range of skills in several languages should be taken as the norm, an accepted part of educational processes, as it is in fact in many parts of the world."



"Schools are very well equipped to deal with increasing numbers of non-native speakers, and they organise things such that there is no negative impact on native English speakers."

Dr Sandra McNally

The audience.



Panellist Tim Chadwick, consultant and teacher trainer.



The presenters sharing their experiences and views on the impact of EAL on teachers and the education of mainstream students.



Panellist Professor Dr Piet Van Avermaet, Ghent University.

Dr Frank Monaghan reiterated this point, adding that there was a need for the curriculum to be linguistically principled. Dr Piet van Avermaet, of the University of Ghent, presented his research in the Flemish context in Belgium and education consultant Tim Chadwick stressed that language support should be provided for all pupils, not just non-native speakers, at all levels of education. A key strand of the debate was around whether language teachers should use immersion techniques or whether subject teachers be well-grounded in EAL to be able to deliver courses as well as language learning. Interactive voting demonstrated that 93 per cent agreed that every subject teacher should be trained to support non-native speakers in their classroom.

A point consensus that all speakers reached was on the need for improved and more extensive continuing professional development in knowledge of language being made available to teachers.

To view the debate and download presentations, visit www.cambridgeassessment.org.uk



The panel discussing how the curriculum can respond to the impact of non-native speakers in schools.

Exams and textbooks ties examined

In the UK there is a lot of media and political discussion around whether exam boards should be allowed to produce text books. Cambridge Assessment's Tim Oates and teacher union leader Mary Bousted clashed views at a recent seminar on this matter.

"International studies make clear that introducing policy which breaks the link between textbooks and exams is simply contrary to what is happening in systems which have radically improved their performance," explained Tim Oates, Group Director of Assessment Research and Development at the organisation. Tim called for a tightening of the linkage between textbooks and the aims and content of the curriculum and qualifications, rather than artificially separating them. He also raised the question of what sort of linkage should we encourage.

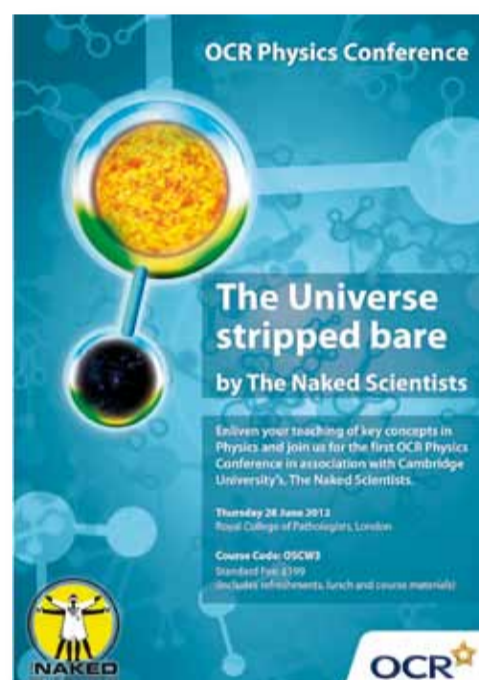
The positioning of textbooks in overall educational policy is a critical part of system management in Singapore, Hong Kong, Finland, and Alberta, amongst others. Tim gave examples of lessons that could be learned from the high quality resources that are 'closely coupled' to the curriculum and to assessments in Singapore and Hong Kong.

Dr Mary Bousted, General Secretary of the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL), in response to Tim's presentation, said: "There is a real danger that our education system will become even more obsessed by exam results for their own sake. Close alignment of text books and tests might underpin exam performance, but it would also diminish creativity and innovation in teaching. There is every danger that closer linkage of text books and exams would drive a further wedge between the real pupil engagement and learning which should go on in schools, resulting in even more teaching being driven by test performance and test results. ATL believes that this approach will not raise, but depress educational standards."

While the relationship is a focus of deliberate and stable policy in other nations, it is clear the debate here continues to rage.

The universe stripped bare

Star-gazing Physics teachers were offered the engaging company of the Naked Scientists at the first OCR Physics conference held at the Royal College of Pathologists in London in June. Entitled 'The Universe Stripped Bare', the conference involved presentations in 'hot' areas of research such as astronomy, the elusive Higgs Boson particle, and the weather in space by top scientists including the Cambridge-based Naked team whose radio shows and podcasts draw huge audiences from around the globe. The event was designed to enhance the knowledge and practical skills of Physics teachers, regardless of level or exam board.



Alien landing gives boost to language learners

Learners can now improve their English language ability, thanks to a new alien inspired game from Cambridge language experts.

Academy Island is a free educational game aimed at English language learners. It's available from Cambridge ESOL's official Facebook page – which currently has over 120,000 fans.

Players of Academy Island have to progress through different difficulty levels by helping the alien use English in a range of situations such as shopping in a bakery and visiting places such as an art gallery and library.

"Educational computer games can be a really good way of exposing learners to the English language and this has been the driving force

behind Academy Island," explains Cambridge ESOL's Digital Marketing Manager Lorna Pedersen. She continues: "We've worked with experts to create an environment which encourages learners to improve their key language skills in a progressive but fun way."

A team of language experts from Cambridge ESOL came up with the questions and tasks. They worked closely with TAMBA, an award-winning digital marketing agency who specialise in social media games. Players who take on the Academy Island challenge can post their scores on a global leader board through their Facebook profile.

Cambridge standards for US schools

A new education programme to prepare US high school students for university has been developed by University of Cambridge International Examinations and the College Board's Advanced Placement Program (AP).

The AP | Cambridge Capstone Program and Credential was developed following feedback from higher education institutions requesting that US high school students develop stronger backgrounds in independent research, collaborative teamwork, and 21st-century knowledge and skills.

The College Board is a membership association in the United States that was formed in 1900 as the College Entrance Examination Board. It is composed of more than 5,900 schools, colleges, universities and other educational organisations.

Ann Puntis, Chief Executive of University of Cambridge International Examinations, said: "We know that colleges want their undergraduates to be well prepared for higher education. Likewise, we know schools want programmes that help to deliver this preparation for their students. I'm therefore delighted that we have collaborated with the College Board to bring together this project, which I'm confident will benefit teachers and students in high schools throughout the US."

The programme combines the in-depth subject-matter study offered through AP courses and exams with the interdisciplinary global curricula and the assessment of research projects and presentations offered by the exam board.

"The AP | Cambridge Capstone Program – with its concentration on research methodology, global issues and challenges, and team collaboration – will enable motivated high school students to take their advanced studies to the next level," said Trevor Packer, senior vice-president of Advanced Placement and College Readiness for the College Board.

The pilot programme will begin in autumn 2012. Around 15 to 18 schools will take part in the pilot which will determine how the programme can best be implemented in AP schools.



Play the game here
www.facebook.com/CambridgeESOL

Welsh framework offers Polish insight

A delegation of seven education experts from Poland visited the Welsh office of OCR earlier this year as part of a fact-finding mission on the structures, credit and quality assurance of qualifications frameworks.

The experts, from the Polish Educational Research Institute, were seeking to find out more on the development and implementation of Wales' national qualifications framework. The Institute is currently developing terms of reference for the implementation of a National Qualifications Framework and a National Qualifications Register for lifelong learning in Poland.

The delegation was especially interested in Quality Assured Lifelong Learning (QALL), which is unique to Wales. QALL allows bespoke in-house company training, continuing professional development and other learning to be recognised and awarded credit. As part of their tour, the experts visited Cardiff and Vale FE college to

talk to teachers and see OCR's Creative and Digital Media Apprenticeship, set up in close collaboration with local Sector Skills Council Skillsset, being taught.

Robin Hughes, National Manager for OCR in Wales, explained: "The Polish delegation was keen to explore how a nation's culture and structures should be taken into account when considering how a proposed qualification framework might work, and to debate the role of Ministers and regulators within frameworks. They said OCR's experiences had provided them with much valuable information to guide their work in Poland." The Institute has now submitted its report to the Polish Education Minister.

Debating the value of vocational education

"I believe passionately that we need both the vocational and academic route in society. Vocational education needs to refine its offer, and more employers need confidence in it, to stop it being perceived as second best."

During an exciting debate on vocational education organised by OCR at London's County Hall this spring, Liberal Democrat peer Baroness Brinton put forward her views. Having worked in the education sector for more than 20 years, she takes a special interest in the House of Lords in education, skills and learning. She praised the qualities of a good vocational education: "What vocational education offers is exactly what the UK economy needs in the 21st century – no longer second best, but reliable, high quality and essential."

The debate took place to mark a major vocational initiative – the launch of OCR's new post-16 Cambridge



Baroness Brinton, Liberal Democrat.

Technical qualification range. Baroness Brinton was supportive: "The Cambridge Technical qualification has a real role to play, providing much more appropriate qualifications, which both student and prospective employers understand, with rigorous standards which mean it can't be belittled by academic purists." Cambridge Technical's reward 16+ learners for their practical skills but also carry UCAS points so students can progress to higher education or employment.

The contributions of key speaker Professor Joy Carter – Vice-Chancellor of Winchester University, OCR's Mark Dawe and Paul Steer, as well as the debating team from the Cambridge Union Society, led to a lively exchange of views on the importance of vocational education for the 100 plus delegates attending.

Survey of language competence completed

On 21 June, the European Commission published the European Survey on Language Competences, a major report on the language skills achieved by school pupils in 14 European countries.

The survey was designed, administered and analysed by SurveyLang, a consortium headed by Cambridge ESOL. Questionnaires and specially developed tests of English, French, German, Italian and Spanish were administered in a rigorously selected sample of schools in each country, with a total of 53,000 students taking part.

The survey – the first of its kind in Europe – was established to provide participating countries with comparative data on foreign language competence and insights into good practice in language learning. It will support the establishment of Europe-wide targets for language learning at school, in line with the 2002 'Barcelona' objectives, which called for "action to improve the mastery of basic skills, in particular by teaching at least two foreign languages from a very early age".

"The situation with language learning in schools differs widely across Europe, and so do outcomes."

Dr Neil Jones

Cambridge ESOL's Dr Neil Jones, the project director, says: "The situation with language learning in schools differs widely across Europe, and so do outcomes. It's not surprising, for example, given the dominant role of English in the world, that we find English schoolkids who learn French or German doing worse than kids in other countries who learn English. But having hard data on levels of achievement is very useful."

Supporting education reform in Mongolia

A new initiative that will introduce a bilingual education into state schools in Mongolia has been signed. The Mongolia-Cambridge initiative will also align the national education system of Mongolia to Cambridge international education standards.

University of Cambridge International Examinations is already advising and supporting the country's Ministry of Education on their work to reform national education policy and develop new school curricula and teacher education programmes. The first in a group of new state schools which will offer young Mongolians the opportunity to follow a bilingual programme has already opened. Plans have also been announced to widen participation through the opening of additional schools in the capital Ulaanbaatar and in the regions.

This bilingual education programme incorporates Cambridge programmes and qualifications, such

as Cambridge IGCSE. As well as providing the programmes and assessments, the exam board is also supporting and training teachers to introduce bilingual teaching programmes.

This initiative in Mongolia is one of many international education projects undertaken by Cambridge International Examinations. The exam board works in partnership with more than 30 ministries of education around the world, and is currently involved in projects to support countries in raising educational standards, including Kazakhstan, Bahrain and Egypt.



Simon Lebus, Group Chief Executive of Cambridge Assessment (left), and Minister of Education, Mongolia, H.E. Yondon Otgonbayar, signing the agreement on 13 April 2012.

Bridging the gap to university

Language students who attended a Cambridge Pre-U 'Bridging the Gap' event earlier this year said it had reaffirmed their decision to study languages at university.

Almost 70 language students from 12 schools joined teachers and language experts for the event at Fitzwilliam College, Cambridge, in March 2012. They came to find out more about language study at university and to develop their language skills in university-style seminars. For teachers, the event offered a chance to explore how best to prepare students for the transition to university.

Dr Helen Swift, a guest speaker who is a tutor in French at the University of Oxford, said participants had gained insight into the type of thinking required at university. "In their groups, the students were particularly looking at the challenges facing young people in Europe – and they were looking at those challenges from a genuinely European perspective. Most people are quite familiar with news coverage and relating it to current affairs in the UK, but looking at news events from a French perspective or a German perspective and doing so in an authentic way starts to prepare students for those more challenging ways of thinking about culture that you experience at university level," she said.

Cambridge Pre-U is a qualification for students who want to go to university and the courses were developed with input from schools and universities. More 'Bridging the Gap' events will take place later this year aimed at giving Cambridge Pre-U students insight into the skills and knowledge needed to study science, English or history at degree level.



Dr Helen Swift, tutor in French at University of Oxford, at the event.



Grammar for teachers

A growing online community of more than 5,000 English language teachers from around the world has been given access to a free online language awareness course – as part of an initiative to raise English teaching standards worldwide.



'Grammar for Teachers: Language Awareness' is a free online self-study course developed by experts to give teachers more confidence in using English grammar. The course is available to guests who register with Cambridge English Teacher – a professional development resource from Cambridge ESOL and Cambridge University Press.

"We're seeing some really encouraging teaching practices all around the world, but the key to raising English standards further is through ongoing professional development which has been the driving force behind Cambridge English Teacher," says Andrew Nye, Stakeholder Relations Manager at Cambridge ESOL. "We're encouraging teachers to take our language awareness course to give them even more confidence in English grammar so they can develop really effective classroom practices."

Andrew Nye says the project is building an online community that encourages English language teachers to share ideas and approaches on a global scale as part of their ongoing career development.

Find out more here
www.cambridgeenglishteacher.org

Lessons from the East

"The UK's education system can learn a lot from 'the East'. Indeed, we must if we are to remain globally competitive. However, context is everything and we can't simply transpose lessons from one culture to another", says international education expert.

Speaking at a recent seminar, Isabel Nisbet, former Chief Executive of exams regulator Ofqual and now Senior Education Advisor to University of Cambridge International Examinations, offered a fascinating insight into South-East Asian education systems and culture, and challenged assumptions and prejudices.

Ms Nisbet suggested that the UK should use the experience of very different cultures to hold a mirror up to our own practice. She also cautioned about drawing conclusions and generalising about 'the East', which juxtaposes educationally high-achieving countries with those doing poorly in international league table terms.

According to Ms Nisbet, there are a number of 'real reasons' for high educational standards in the East:

- Highly positive attitudes to learning and scholarship among all classes;
- High expectations for educational achievement – they don't accept mediocrity;
- Family support: parents make sacrifices, which children feel obliged to repay;
- A belief in discipline, effort, resilience, concentration and humility;
- A strong sense of group identity and a supportive peer culture that values study and learning;
- A respect for authority and the knowledge of parents and teachers;
- A recognition that education can be tough and isn't always fun.

From which, Ms Nisbet says, we can draw three key lessons:

- To value education: because of its intrinsic value and as a means of advancement for individuals, as

The Confucian tradition is one of diligence, persistence and deep satisfaction in the process of learning. The emphasis is on effort, with the teacher as a figure of wisdom and authority. The focus is on the community, the family and the group rather than the individual. Although they give less praise than they do in the West, they have a deeply ingrained belief that everybody can succeed if they try hard enough.

The Socratic tradition, on the other hand, promotes the skills of questioning and learning through enquiry. The emphasis is on ability, with the teacher as a facilitator of learning. The focus is on the individual.

well as for its contribution to economic success and social cohesion.

- To value and respect teachers: selecting the best; giving them social status; and ensuring continuous development throughout their career.
- The importance of peer group support for students and teachers. Teenagers in Singapore can often be seen in cafés discussing a lesson, with one showing the others how to do it. They assume that it's their responsibility to help each other.

Neither the West nor the East, Ms Nisbet concluded, has really worked out how to recognise different forms of success rather than dismissing as failures those that don't or can't conform. Perhaps to be truly successful, every country needs a healthy mix of both Confucian and Socratic ideals.

Clarifying English language learning levels

Newly published research into what different levels of English language ability mean in practice will benefit senior policymakers and immigration officials – according to a language assessment expert from Cambridge.

Speaking at English UK's Annual Parliamentary Event at the House of Commons, Dr Nick Saville from Cambridge ESOL gave an insight into the latest thinking on defining English language ability levels. The research – which has been going on for six years – is part of the English Profile Programme and brings together researchers from different disciplines across teaching and assessing English.

"The English Profile has taken a huge step forward in aligning English language ability to common European standards," explains Dr Saville. "Increasingly English tests are being used to make decisions for high stakes purposes such as immigration, and this new research provides policymakers and practitioners with concrete

reference points which are specific to English. It can help anyone interested in language levels to understand better what people can do with the English language in different contexts."

English UK's Parliamentary event was hosted by Robert Syms MP and attended by policy makers, language schools and parliamentary members. The work unveiled by Dr Saville is available in the first two volumes of English Profile Studies – a new series which publishes the latest thinking in this area.

In volume 1: 'Criteria Features in L2 English', Prof John Hawkins and Dr Luna Filipović of University of Cambridge look at the extent to which learners



Dr Nick Saville, Robert Syms MP, Tony Millns (Chief Executive English UK) and Steve Brine MP.

know the grammar, lexicon and usage conventions of English at each level of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). In volume 2: 'Language Functions Revisited', Dr Anthony Green of University of Bedfordshire provides guidance to users of the CEFR on adapting the framework to meet local needs

Sharing best practice



Delegates from 16 countries including Botswana, Malaysia, Mongolia and Argentina attended this year's Cambridge Assessment Network International Study Programme. The two-week course provides a comprehensive insight into the development and delivery of public examinations for a multi-national audience and provides an opportunity to discuss issues and challenges from international contexts. Delegates are pictured at Emmanuel College, Cambridge.

Supporting access to Cambridge

The recipients of this year's University of Cambridge 800th Anniversary Scholarships and Manmohan Singh Scholarships have been announced, opening the way for exceptional students in Pakistan and India to take up their places at the University of Cambridge.

Launched in 2009 with funding from Cambridge Assessment, the scholarships provide financial assistance to students who would not otherwise be able to afford to go to Cambridge.

The University of Cambridge 800th Anniversary Scholarships have been awarded to two students in Pakistan. Three students in India have been offered Manmohan Singh Scholarships.

Rabbiya Naveed, a Cambridge International A Level student at Lahore Grammar School in Pakistan, will take up her scholarship to study engineering at Jesus



College in September 2012. She said: "While I am humbled by the immense honour bestowed upon me, I hope to live up to everyone's expectations at Cambridge as an ambassador for Pakistan, and continue my journey towards the stars."

Gaurav Kumar, a student at DPS International in New Delhi – a Cambridge International School – said he was elated to hear about his scholarship: "It really is a dream come true and I would like to thank everyone, especially my parents, teachers and friends who stood by me throughout. I look forward to the challenge of living up to the faith bestowed on me."

More than 500 schools in Pakistan and 290 schools in India are registered with University of Cambridge International Examinations to offer Cambridge programmes and qualifications.

Rubina Shakeel (left), Cambridge International A Level Coordinator; Rabbiya Naveed, winner of a University of Cambridge 800th Anniversary Scholarship; and Gul Rukh Rahman, Vice Principal – all from Lahore Grammar School, Pakistan.

Analysis of the pressures on assessment in England

As featured in the spring issue of *Achieve*, the issue of risk in examinations is the theme of the 2012 biennial Cambridge Assessment Conference

The conference on 10 October 2012 at Downing College, Cambridge, will bring together speakers from a wide range of backgrounds to help stimulate new thinking on risk in the world of examinations.

The keynote speakers are Professor Alastair Scotland who will share insights from his time as Director of the National Clinical Assessment Service, and Professor Ragnar Löfstedt, Director of the King's Centre for Risk Management, King's College London, who will discuss the relationship between risk communication and regulation, and the challenges presented by new forms of regulation.

A panel discussion on contemporary issues will involve Amanda Spielman, Chair of Ofqual; Russell Hobby, general secretary of the National Association of Head Teachers; Tim Oates, Group Director of Assessment Research and Development at Cambridge Assessment; and David Skelton, Deputy Director of the think tank Policy Exchange.

Two parallel sessions will address risk in the context of public exams. In one session, Isabel Nisbet, former Ofqual Chief Executive and now of University of Cambridge International Examinations, together with Mick Walker, former Executive Director of Education at the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency, will consider lessons learned from the national curriculum testing crisis of 2008. In the other, Dr Michelle Meadows of exam board AQA and Glenys Stacey, Chief Executive of Ofqual, will explore risk from the perspectives of exam board and regulator, respectively.

To register for the event, visit www.canetwork.org.uk/conference2012

New websites coming soon!

Cambridge Assessment and its three exam boards are launching new websites this year, with the first roll out due in late summer. The sites' fresh look and feel modernises the Group's digital presence.



The sites will have a completely new look using horizontal scrolling instead of vertical - allowing users to take in much more information without constantly clicking to get around. This bold style is one which is being adopted on many well-known sites as we move to hand held and tablet devices.

All the websites will have the same basic structure and architecture whilst retaining all the individual elements that customers are familiar with. By sharing features in this way, the exams Group hopes to improve the user experience.

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Design: H2 Associates, Cambridge



Language tests for Italian universities

An agreement between the Italian Ministry of Education and Cambridge ESOL will help Italy's universities benefit from the growing internationalisation of the higher education sector.

Under the new arrangements, Cambridge ESOL will provide admissions tests for Italian and overseas students planning to study for degrees in the growing number of Italian universities offering courses taught in English. The Italian Minister of Education Professor Francesco Profumo recently told *Sole 24 Ore* – a leading Italian financial and economical newspaper – that the move comes at a time when there is a substantial demand for the service with over 100 Italian courses already taught in English, together with the recent decision by the Polytechnic of Milan to run all Masters and PhD courses in English from 2014.

Minister Profumo said "A project like this benefits everyone", and that opening up Italian universities to overseas students is a key priority which builds on work he previously did as rector of the Turin Polytechnic. He also said the initiative will help familiarise foreign graduates with Italian culture, whilst encouraging Italian students to get used to a more international environment.

The admissions tests will be available in a range of subjects including medicine, engineering, architecture, economics, basic science, humanities.

Nick Beer, Regional Manager, Italy & Malta at Cambridge ESOL, explains how the admissions tests



The Italian Minister of Education, Professor Francesco Profumo, meets Chief Executive of Cambridge ESOL, Dr Mike Milanovic.

will work: "The tests will assess applicants' aptitude for their chosen subject, as well as their general readiness for admission to higher education. This combination is really important when matching overseas students to appropriate courses in Italian universities not least because it will provide a fair and internationally available route to studying in Italy."

The agreement consolidates and extends a long-standing collaboration between Cambridge ESOL and the Italian Ministry of Education, who are working to raise the standard of English language teaching and learning in Italian schools through a programme of assessment, advice and consultancy including a range of internationally recognised language certificates.

Reforming A Levels

As reported in the spring issue of *Achieve*, Cambridge Assessment has been taking an active role in finding out what core subject expertise and knowledge universities expect from A Levels.

Its research findings – which attracted widespread media coverage – together with the findings from UK exam board OCR's extensive subject-based forums, provide a firm evidence base to design the next generation of A Levels to the standards expected by universities.

Dr Irenka Suto, Senior Research Officer at Cambridge Assessment, said: "Our research shows that university academics want A Levels to: include more advanced content for more able students; cover core subject areas in greater depth; and encourage critical thinking, independent study, experimentation, exploration and more extensive reading.

"Our 18 month-long Higher Education (HE) engagement research programme also discovered that universities want less 'teaching to the test' and for A Levels to be reformed they have to be: less predictable; have more essay/open-ended style questions; and limit the number of resits."

Research conducted included a survey of lecturers' views on the preparedness of new undergraduates for degree level study; focus groups on the design of A Levels; and a literature review of the pedagogical differences between Levels 3 and 4.

Dr Suto continued: "Our initial research forms part of a wider programme which extends over several years. Systematic research methods, both qualitative and quantitative, have been used to ensure the rigour of the findings. This work is an important means of restoring and strengthening links with universities by investigating perceptions of HE lecturers and by identifying the key differences in pedagogy reported in the educational literature."

As part of Cambridge Assessment's HE engagement programme OCR has set up a central HE Forum with representation from across the sector from admissions tutors, managers and other personnel. In addition, eleven subject groups have been set up with over 70 institutions and nearly 200 HE staff, with learned societies, employers and teachers being involved in direct development discussions.

Cambridge Assessment's Research Division is supporting OCR with a significant programme of research to provide evidence to support developments in qualifications and curricula.

To find out more about A Level reform visit www.cambridgeassessment.org.uk/ca/Viewpoints/Viewpoint?id=138742

OCR is also using the power of social media to find out what teachers think about A Level reform. An online forum was launched with TSL Education this summer, enabling potentially thousands of teachers across the country to share their views on the new generation of A Levels, due to be in schools by Autumn 2014. Listening to teachers is vital to the success of future qualifications says OCR. To find out what teachers are saying, take a look at www.tes.co.uk/greatdebate