

Achieve

Autumn 2016



CAMBRIDGE ASSESSMENT



Welcome to *Achieve*

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



Malaysia looks forward

National programme aims to enhance English proficiency. see page 3



Masters of assessment recognised

First postgrads complete their course. see page 4

UK politicians visit 'world's oldest school'

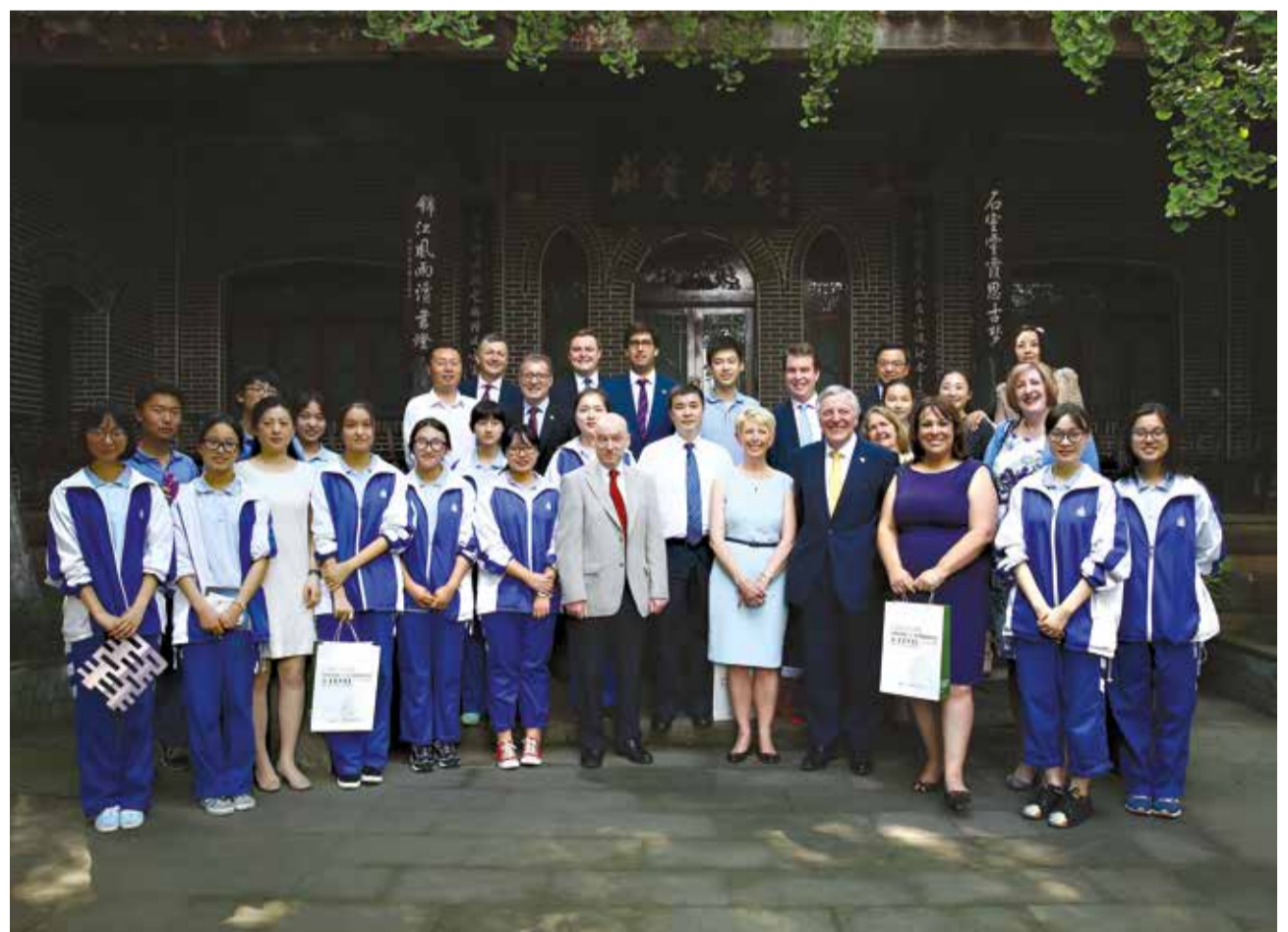
A delegation of UK politicians has seen how the oldest school in the world looks forward.

Members of the All Party Parliamentary China Group (APPCG) joined Michael O'Sullivan, Chief Executive of Cambridge International Examinations, on a visit to Chengdu Shishi High School in China's Sichuan province.

The school stands on the site of the first Chinese state school, founded around 141BC. Despite changes of school names over the years, the address still remains the same and has evolved into the current Chengdu Shishi High School. The school offers a range of Cambridge programmes including Cambridge International A Levels and Cambridge IGCSEs.

Michael O'Sullivan briefed the delegation, which was led by APPCG Deputy Chair Lord Clement-Jones, about why Cambridge programmes are proving increasingly popular with Chinese parents. He explained that one of the reasons was the desire for an education which equips students with an international outlook and 21st century skills.

The delegation – which included seven UK Members of Parliament: Yvonne Fovargue, Ranil Jayawardena, Mark Pawsey, Will Quince, Paula Sherriff, Angela Smith and Craig Williams – was also briefed by the Chengdu City



The delegation pictured with students and teachers from Chengdu Shishi High School and staff from Cambridge International Examinations.

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UNIVERSITY of CAMBRIDGE
Local Examinations Syndicate

Cambridge Assessment is a department of the University of Cambridge, and a not-for-profit organisation.

www.cambridgeassessment.org.uk

Iceland joins the Cambridge community

The oldest private school in Iceland has become the country's first Cambridge school.

Landakotsskóli, established in 1897, now offers Cambridge IGCSEs to 30 students representing 14 nationalities.

Teacher Laurie Berg said: "Our students love learning with the Cambridge curriculum. In addition, we have already seen improvements in our academic progress tests this year.

"We are immensely proud to be the only school in Iceland to offer Cambridge programmes. We are confident that Cambridge will support our vision of being an empowered and connected global community, where learning is adaptive, continuous and relevant."



Students at Iceland's first Cambridge school, Landakotsskóli.

BBC explores fascinating history of exams

One of the most significant exam archives in the world has featured in a BBC radio documentary.

In *You May Now Turn Over Your Papers* on BBC Radio 4, Cambridge Classics professor Mary Beard visited the Cambridge Assessment Group's archives, speaking to guests including Group Archivist Gillian Cooke. She looked at a typical question from the 20th century, noting the differences and similarities between exams of past and present. And she heard how examiners' reports in particular provide a valuable insight.

She also looked at a famous letter in which the father of a disappointed candidate tried to bribe the Group Secretary John Neville Keynes (whose son John Maynard Keynes went on to change the face of economics) with the offer of a trip to Paris.



BBC producer Adele Armstrong (left) records Prof Mary Beard (centre) and Group Archivist Gillian Cooke (right).

The documentary was broadcast in the UK in July and, at the time of writing, was still available through the BBC's iPlayer service.

Free boost for English learners

The millions of students who take the IELTS language test each year can now enrol on a free course to help with exam preparation and development of academic English skills.

The open online course provided by Cambridge English Language Assessment covers the essential skills needed for success in the IELTS Academic test, including how examiners assess levels and what students need to do to improve their band score.

Inside IELTS: Preparing for the Test with the Experts has been produced in collaboration with FutureLearn, a social learning platform owned by the UK's Open University.

Tom Booth from Cambridge English said: "IELTS has a huge audience, which makes an open online course a perfect fit as it's a great way of reaching as many learners as possible."

IELTS is jointly owned by British Council, IDP: IELTS Australia and Cambridge English Language Assessment.

A maths first for exam board

Nearly 100 maths teachers attended the first ever Maths Teaching and Learning Conference held by UK exam board OCR.

Under the theme of 'Inspired Maths', the conference provided lots of ideas, rooted in real classroom practice, to help teachers engage their students and enhance their mathematical understanding. Two guest presenters – the 'Standup Mathematician', Matt Parker and science writer Timandra Harkness – shared teaching experiences and ideas on how to make maths interesting and deliver great results in the classroom. The conference, which was held at Queen Mary University of London in July, was aimed at anyone teaching maths at GCSE or AS/A Level.

Timandra Harkness addressed the topical issue of 'Big Data: does size matter?', giving teachers knowledge

and examples to use in the classroom when discussing one of the decade's big ideas.

Matt Parker closed the day with a presentation on 'The Magic of Mathematics'. As Public Engagement in Mathematics Fellow at Queen Mary University, his first love is visiting schools to give maths talks and run hands-on activities.

Teachers who attended the conference responded positively. One said: "The choice of talks was great and the presentations were engaging." Another said: "Lots of ideas to integrate into schemes of work to support problem solving at all levels."

Matt Parker and his presentation on 'The Magic of Mathematics'.



Global popularity of Cambridge IGCSE soars

Cambridge IGCSEs are more popular than ever before, with a record number of UK students taking them this year.

Entries for Cambridge IGCSE examinations in the UK rose to nearly 300,000 in June 2016, an increase of 4% on 2015. This is despite the UK government's decision to remove regulated Cambridge IGCSEs from school performance tables from 2017.

Entries for Cambridge IGCSE English Language in particular increased again this year. More than 224,000 students sat these exams in over 2,500 schools in the UK – an increase of 4%. Once again, it means that one in three students in England taking an English Language GCSE-level qualification this year took Cambridge IGCSE English Language.

The huge popularity of Cambridge IGCSEs has also continued globally, with an 8% rise in entries from schools in 145 countries this year.

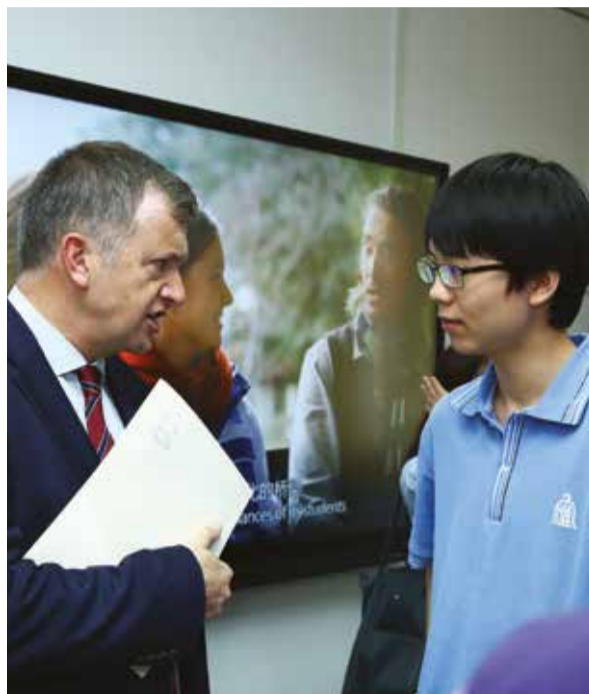
Michael O'Sullivan, Chief Executive, Cambridge International Examinations, said: "Cambridge IGCSEs are more popular than ever, with thousands of students in the UK and around the world taking them this summer. They are popular because they are high quality, internationally respected and have well maintained standards. Schools tell us they like the content of Cambridge IGCSE syllabuses and that their students find it engaging. Teachers tell us how enjoyable the syllabus is to teach."

UK politicians visit 'world's oldest school'

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Director of Education and the Principal of the school. But the highlight was a campus tour in which each MP had a personal student guide drawn from the Cambridge International A Level class. Without exception, all the students from the class gain admission to highly ranked universities in the USA, UK and Canada.

"The students handled the tour very well," Michael said, "leaving the MPs with a deep impression of what these programmes achieve."



Michael O'Sullivan, Chief Executive of Cambridge International Examinations, talks to a student.



The highlight of the visit was a campus tour.



The final part of the programme at the school was a press conference at which Lord Clement-Jones spoke about the importance of UK–China relations and the UK welcoming Chinese students. Michael, who is fluent in Mandarin Chinese, praised the

school, Cambridge programme partners and the Chengdu government for their steadfast support. He pointed out that this Cambridge International A Level programme has a zero failure rate.



The delegation heard how the school stands on the site of the first Chinese state school, founded around 141BC.

New Chief Executive for OCR

Cambridge Assessment has appointed Leo Shapiro as the new Chief Executive of its UK arm Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations (OCR).



Leo was previously serving as Group Strategy & Development Director for Cambridge Assessment and is a member of its Corporate Board. His priority is to help guide OCR to a

sustainable future by continuing the implementation of priorities and activities identified in a strategic review of OCR, completed in Spring 2016.

Leo has more than 20 years' senior management experience gained in the insurance, management consulting and retail sectors. Since he joined the Group, he has developed a good understanding of OCR, having worked closely with the senior management team over the last 12 months and with partners including Cambridge University Press as well as with the University itself.

Simon Lebus, Group Chief Executive of Cambridge Assessment, said: "I am pleased to confirm Leo Shapiro as OCR's new Chief Executive. This appointment will ensure OCR continues to meet the needs of teachers and learners and overcomes the challenges facing all exam boards."

Malaysia looks forward

Malaysia's Ministry of Education has signed a five-year contract with Cambridge English Language Assessment to provide support for a national programme which aims to enhance English proficiency among teachers and students.

The collaboration builds on the recommendations of Malaysia's Education Blueprint 2013–2025 and the findings of the Cambridge Baseline Project, an in-depth study of the learning, teaching and assessment of English in Malaysian schools that was carried out in 2013. The partnership is part of a national strategy which aims to ensure every child is proficient in Bahasa Malaysia as the national language of unity and in English as the international language of communication. The collaboration will be across a range of areas, from advice on the curriculum and assessing the learning materials to be used in the classroom, to raising the standards of in-service and pre-service teacher education.

It will see Cambridge English use a tried and tested cascade model where it will train 'master trainers' who will train teacher-trainers. Cambridge English says this approach and its subsequent monitoring and evaluation will enable Malaysia to reach millions of learners and promote educational change across the whole country.

Saul Nassé, Cambridge English Language Assessment's Chief Executive and Tan Sri Dr. Madinah binti Mohamad, the Secretary General of Malaysia's Ministry of Education, signed the contract in a ceremony attended by YB Dato' Seri Mahdzir Bin Khalid, the Minister of Education.



Pictured from left to right: the British High Commissioner to Malaysia Vicki Treadell, Dr Hanan Khalifa, Head of Research and International Education Strategy, Tan Sri Dr. Madinah binti Mohamad, the Secretary General of Malaysia's Ministry of Education, YB Dato' Seri Mahdzir Bin Khalid, Malaysia's Minister of Education, Cambridge English Language Assessment Chief Executive Saul Nassé, YB Tuan Kamalanathan Panchanathan, Deputy Minister of Education and Tan Sri Dr. Khair bin Mohamad Yusof, Director General of Education.

Saul Nassé said: "The fact that this collaboration is between government and us is significant. It is very much the government's priority and their project.

"It's within a wider programme of education reform which will see policy changes at a national and local level, the Malaysia Education Blueprint. But by collaborating with us, they will magnify the effects of those changes, infusing them with the latest pedagogical thinking and international standards."

Exam board expands

An international exam board has opened new offices in Africa in order to provide greater support to schools.

Kenya and Ghana have joined the network of regional Cambridge International Examinations offices, which has expanded significantly over recent months to deliver more services, events and support to Cambridge schools locally.

Cambridge International Examinations now has staff working in 26 locations across the world, from New York to Auckland.

These local offices run more than 1,100 training events a year. Cambridge has also created roles for specialists to continue to build recognition of Cambridge qualifications among universities.

“We’re growing so we can provide all Cambridge schools with local support.”

“We’re growing so we can provide all Cambridge schools with local support,” said Janet Morris, Director, International Network at Cambridge. “We want to understand their context, relate to their culture, and we want to be there for them during the working day.”

Cambridge International Examinations has also just opened a new contact centre in Manila to allow it to provide for the first time 24-hour support for customers worldwide, six days a week.

Students get to make history

History students are being offered the chance to design a display for the UK’s first ever museum of migration.

UK exam board OCR and the Migration Museum Project have teamed up to launch a competition which is open to 14- to 16-year-olds studying migration as part of OCR’s new History GCSEs this September. The challenge is to design an exhibition on the theme of the UK’s migration history that would be engaging to other young people and could be used in Britain’s first migration museum.

Sophie Henderson, Director of the Migration Museum Project, said: “OCR is operating at the cutting edge of student education and interaction in relation to the brand new migration-focused GCSEs. We cannot think of a better way of finding out how young people would actually like to learn about the important topic of migration than this competition.”

Mike Goddard, OCR Subject Specialist, commented: “Migration has played a constant, if not defining feature, in Britain’s history. We are delighted that students taking OCR’s new History GCSEs from September will have the opportunity to be creative, thoughtful and engaged through a national competition, while at the same time contributing to their knowledge and understanding for their exams.”

The competition complements the new GCSEs but is flexible so teachers could set it during lessons on migration, as part of an extra-curricular activity, or as a revision exercise.



Talking migration history at the launch.



Teachers discover the rich history of immigration in London’s Spitalfields area.

Clare Broomfield, Head of History at Villiers High School in Southall, said: “A competition with an exam focus that develops students’ analytical writing is a winner for me. It’s also a fantastic opportunity for the students to develop independent research skills, whilst engaging with their own past and placing it in the grand narrative of British History.”

The deadline for schools to submit entries is March 2018. To find out more, visit www.ocr.org.uk/history.

Masters of assessment recognised

The first people to take a new postgraduate certificate in assessment are celebrating completing their course.

Forty-eight education professionals from across the UK embarked on the Postgraduate Certificate in Educational Assessment and Examinations last autumn.

The Master’s-level, part-time course is run by the Cambridge Assessment Network in partnership with Cambridge University’s Faculty of Education, and is designed to provide students with a deeper understanding of educational assessment and its evaluation. It is delivered through a mixture of

online learning and day schools, giving delegates the opportunity to learn from each other as well as the course tutors.

One student on the course said: “I have met so many amazing people and never expected to network with so many individuals who are equally intrigued and enticed by the workings of educational assessment.”

The 2016/17 course, which was fully booked, finishes in July next year.



Students and tutors on the 2015/16 Postgraduate Certificate in Educational Assessment and Examinations course.



Day schools gave delegates the opportunity to learn from each other (above) as well as from the course tutors (below).



Bilingual schooling: how to do it

Two exam boards have joined forces to create a free course for Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) teachers.

Teaching Your Subject in English is the result of a collaboration between Cambridge English Language Assessment and Cambridge International Examinations. It aims to give subject teachers greater confidence in using English in the classroom and to raise their awareness of how appropriate use of language by the teacher can lead to higher levels of learner engagement and improved learning outcomes.

The exam boards developed the course in response to an identified need for language support for teachers who are teaching their subject content in English. Thousands of people have signed up for the course, which began last month.



Cambridge English says the popularity of the course shows how Massive Open Online Courses are a perfect fit for the bilingual teaching community because their high accessibility means participants can interact with other learners from all over the globe.

In order to ensure that the course meets the needs of teachers delivering content in English, Cambridge English engaged a group of experts in the field to advise on subject content and the linguistic strategies teachers need to use in the classroom to promote learning and develop their learners' thinking skills. Here Monica Poulter from Cambridge English (pictured left) selects her top five:

Principle 1: Focus on the quality and effectiveness of teacher talk

Teachers are often admonished for talking too much and not giving learners sufficient opportunity to construct their own ideas and develop their thinking skills. However, teacher language is an important resource in helping learners to construct knowledge. So, rather than measuring the quantity of teacher talk, think about the quality of talk – the purposes for which language is used, for example to elicit prior knowledge, and the language you need to do this.

Principle 2: Use teacher talk to promote learners' thinking skills

Think about how to stimulate learner talk and critical thinking through teacher questioning including probing questions. For example 'Why do you think this happens?' Or questions which require learners to clarify their answer ('Could you give some examples of the effects of climate change?') or questions that give learners the opportunity to confirm or challenge another student's answer. ('Is he right?' 'Has anyone got another suggestion?')

Principle 3: Talk purposefully

Teachers are often told to limit their teacher talking time but be careful not to throw out the baby with the bath water! Recognise opportunities for engaging learners through teacher talk, for example setting a context at the beginning of a lesson, outlining a problem to be solved in the lesson, or telling a personal anecdote related to the lesson content.

Principle 4: Keep things very simple

When developing our new online course, we worked with teachers and teacher trainers from a range of contexts. One trainer we collaborated with emphasised one basic rule, which is to use as simple language as possible when giving out instructions. As he put it, 'keep it short and simple' and you will succeed in the classroom.

Principle 5: Study but take small steps

There are an increasing number of professional development opportunities out there for bilingual teachers around the world. If you are new to the sector, you can quickly build your confidence by taking small steps. For example, using this 'learning ladder' approach could be as simple as learning a few new phrases every week. It sounds obvious but you'll soon improve.

Registration for *Teaching Your Subject in English* can be found at:

www.futurelearn.com/courses/cambridge-teach-in-english.

New agreement for exam that 'bridges two worlds'

The French Ministry of Education has signed a memorandum of understanding with an international exam board over the development of the British version of the Option Internationale du Baccalauréat (OIB).

Cambridge International Examinations' Chief Executive Michael O'Sullivan and Hervé Tilly from the French Ministry of Education signed the document at a ceremony in Paris. The agreement will see the exam board continue to work closely with the French government on the development of the school-leaving certificate.

Cambridge began working with the French Ministry of Education in 1984. Since then it has continued to work closely with the Ministry and with colleagues at the Association des Sections Internationales Britanniques et Anglophones (ASIBA) – its Associate in France – on the development both of the examination and of a dynamic learning community of British International Sections.

Since the British version of the OIB was first created over 30 years ago, the board has seen examination entries increase year on year. Over 40 British Sections in international lycées in France and Belgium now enter candidates for the examination, with further international expansion expected in the coming years.

"It enables students to navigate two cultures and creates a bridge between the francophone and anglophone worlds."



Hervé Tilly from the French Ministry of Education (left) and Michael O'Sullivan, Cambridge International Examinations' Chief Executive (right) sign the agreement.

Cambridge is responsible for quality assurance of the British version of the OIB examinations (English language and literature, and history–geography), ensuring that standards correspond to those of Cambridge International A Levels.

Michael O'Sullivan said: "The British version of the OIB provides academic and linguistic demands to an equal level in English and French, encouraging biculturalism as well as bilingualism. It enables students to navigate two cultures and creates a bridge between the francophone and anglophone worlds. The result is a well-balanced academic qualification based on a stimulating, challenging curriculum for bilingual students... Those who succeed in this dual curriculum develop a capacity for hard work, and an intellectual and cultural flexibility which, at a practical level, opens up multiple options for study in both anglophone and francophone universities and for diverse international careers."



Cambridge has been working with the French Ministry of Education since 1984.



Picture: Schools Week

... journalist Richard Garner

As he retires after 36 years as an education reporter in the UK, journalist Richard Garner offers a personal view on what has changed in the UK exam world over the decades.



I had cause to glance through the education press in the 1980s recently for some research I was doing and it was almost as if I was inhabiting a totally different world.

The most obvious difference was over the reporting of UK exam results – A Levels and O Levels in those days.

These days the results are analysed from several different standpoints – has the gap between girls' and boys' performance grown, which subjects are becoming more popular and which are on the slide, which state schools have achieved the best results? Back then there was nothing. In fact, looking at the *Times Educational Supplement* for August 1982, I could find only one paragraph on A Level results (recording the fact that Prince Edward had passed the three A Levels he took in English Literature, History and Economic and Political Studies at Gordonstoun school. I did not realise my erstwhile alma mater set such store by the Royal Family).

Of course, there are various reasons for this. For a start, there was no publication of national results in the UK. The individual boards (and there were more of them in those days) published their own results but there was no national picture for the press to latch on to. Even if there had been, the results in those days were norm referenced so as to ensure the pass rate was the same each year – every year 30% routinely failed their A Levels.

The numbers taking the exams were far lower, too – O Levels were taken by a minority of the school population, with the rest opting for CSEs. A Levels were taken by fewer students as well. As far as university admissions were concerned, even by the end of the decade there were still fewer than 100,000 young people seeking entry compared with the figure of half a million nowadays. It was only with the advent of GCSEs in the late 1980s that the exam boards formed the Joint Council for Qualifications and they decided to release a national results picture.

With the rise in university admissions also came a scramble for places, until the situation today when routinely thousands of A Level candidates with straight A grades are refused entry to Oxford and Cambridge Universities. It is a stark contrast with my day when a student could get into Cambridge with an E in Religious Studies – as my friend Philip, who went on to become a vicar, did. There were stories of youngsters getting into Cambridge with this qualification and then switching subjects once they had got their feet under the table. I never had the opportunity. My school was quite strict about who they allowed to take Religious Studies at A Level. You had to want to go into the church before they would let you sit it.

Professor Alan Smithers, head of the Centre for Education and Employment Research at the University of Buckingham, also has recollections from about this period. "The Universities and Colleges Admissions Service didn't exist when I went to university," he said. "The exams at A Level didn't really matter – although you had to get the A Level passes if you wanted the scholarship to go to university.

"Most of my time that year was spent sitting university exams – Cambridge colleges, King's College London and Bristol. I was sitting in the staff room and taking these papers and then getting down to A Levels so I could go to university – thanks to the scholarship.

"The relationship between the student and the teacher was different. He was your friend. His job didn't depend on whether he got you through your exams."

Things nowadays in the UK are different, though, – a fact that Professor Smithers puts down to two factors: the 'deliverology' approach to education advocated by former Prime Minister Tony Blair's government (through his erstwhile chief adviser on education, Professor Michael Barber) plus the accent put on parental choice by the Conservative Party. The performance tables – turned into league tables of exam results in the media – first introduced under the John Major government also played its part in this.

"I remember when performance tables were introduced in England. I was working for The Daily Mirror and halfway through the afternoon I began to notice a number of senior executives queuing up at my desk to see how their local schools had fared. I knew then that this information was here to stay."

I can remember the first year they were introduced – I was working for *The Daily Mirror* newspaper at that time which backed the then Labour Party line that these tables were a waste of time in that they failed to measure a school's real achievements. We therefore decided not to publish them in full (although we wrote a news story from them). Halfway through the afternoon I began to notice a number of senior executives queuing up at my desk to see how their local schools had fared. I thought then that we had lost the argument over non-publication and that this information – once published – was here to stay. Professor Smithers has a similar recollection: "It was

a real eye-opener. I was still at Manchester at the time and I remember a train journey down to London," he said. "Nearly all the people travelling down were looking at their newspapers with these tables."

Not to be outdone, the newspapers – realising the attraction to parents of school exam results – started devising their own league tables for publication to coincide with the overall national results. Arguably, these tables – although they did not necessarily cover the same ground (some on the Right concentrated on the percentage of A and B grades gained by students whilst the more egalitarian amongst us – *Mirror*, *Independent* and *Guardian* – just published the schools' point scores) – were of more use to parents, coming out as they did in plenty of time before the actual choice of school had to be made. The keenness of those schools that had achieved top grade results to get into these league tables never ceased to amaze me – it was despite the fact that, if you asked every headteacher independently what they thought of the league tables, they would say they were against them.

Thus, from a whole host of points of view – growing numbers of pupils taking the exams, thousands more being involved in the scramble for university places, parents desperately searching through newspapers on results day in an attempt to find out which school would be the 'best' for their child – interest in the exam results has reached fever pitch. "Which university you get into is very important," said Professor Smithers. "A number of employers only go to a handful of universities to recruit."

Added to that there is the pressure on schools to perform well – which has created a different relationship between the teachers and their pupils. A series of policy initiatives – the 'naming and shaming' of schools that are said to be underperforming, the setting of minimum floor targets that schools have to reach to avoid compulsory take-over by a private sponsor to become an Academy – has helped chart this difference. The teacher, therefore, is no longer the benign friend who helps see you through your A levels but a frenzied species who puts you through test after test to make sure you are well prepared for what is coming up on examination day – now the accent has been put back on the end-of-term examination rather than coursework during the exam syllabus. After all, his or her job is on the line.

Will we ever step back from this more frenzied approach to exams – and the reporting of results? Well, there have been some encouraging signs over the last couple of years. It started with the Confederation of British Industry speaking about the need for schools to produce more 'rounded and grounded' pupils to cope with the modern economic world rather than just act like exam factories. Their clarion call was seized upon by both Tristram Hunt, then Labour's education spokesman, and then Education Secretary Nicky Morgan, during the last UK election. Both of them spoke of the need to concentrate more on character building. Ofqual, the UK exams regulator, has also addressed the perceived problem of grade inflation – with A Level results going up every year for more than 20 years – by introducing a policy of 'comparable outcomes' which has had the effect of stopping the year-on-year rises in the pass rate. But I have to say there is no noticeable less pressure for schools to act as exam factories yet, and there are critics of the comparable outcomes approach who say it is not compatible with the government's demand for improved standards. Suffice to say, I think August exam frenzy is here to stay with us for a while yet.



One in three UK schools moving beyond 'Hitler and the Henrys'

One in three UK schools is going beyond 'Hitler and the Henrys' and is teaching at least one new topic offered in the new OCR A Level History – with *Popular Culture and the Witchcraze of the 16th and 17th Centuries* at the top of the list.

Cambridge Assessment researchers Karen Dunn, Ellie Darlington and Tom Benton analysed information from more than 400 schools teaching UK exam board OCR's new History A Level course. Their study is published in the latest edition of Cambridge Assessment's biannual research publication *Research Matters*.

Popular Culture and the Witchcraze of the 16th and 17th Centuries was the most popular topic new to OCR's History A Level that was chosen by teachers, followed by *The American Revolution 1740–1796* and *The Middle East 1908–2011: Ottomans to Arab Spring*.

The topic covers a period in early modern European history when thousands of Europeans were tried and executed for witchcraft, and explores the reasons for the growth and decline of this persecution.

Mike Goddard, OCR History Subject Specialist, said: "It's perhaps not surprising that this topic is so popular – it's exciting, real bums-on-seats stuff, with some fascinating and at times gruesome stories.

"I imagine teachers are thinking *Our students will be really inspired by this*, particularly as it's a different style of history. It allows students to explore so many different approaches: gender, cultural, political and

intellectual, over a wide geographical space. So it gives students the chance to study themes which they might not encounter in other areas of history, including considering the interaction between elites and ordinary people.

"It is great as well to see teachers taking advantage of the breadth of topics on offer."

Professor Alison Rowlands, from the University of Essex, who teaches and researches the history of witchcraft and witch persecution, said she was thrilled, but not surprised, to see how popular the witchcraze topic was proving to be.

"It's a fascinating subject, which gets students to the heart of early modern culture and society, and to the beliefs and fears of people at all levels, from the peasant who was terrified that witches could destroy the harvest to the highly educated men who feared that witches were in league with the devil and plotting to undermine godly order," she said.

"It enables students to look at the wider historical themes of gender, legal change, and religious tension, and to think about change over time and regional variation in witch persecution. More broadly I would



'Witch-burning in the County of Regenstein', Germany, 1550.

TOP 5 | Top 5 topics new to OCR's History A Level that schools were intending to teach when surveyed in October 2015

- 1 Popular Culture and the Witchcraze of the 16th and 17th Centuries
- 2 The American Revolution 1740–1796
- 3 The Middle East 1908–2011: Ottomans to Arab Spring
- 4 (joint fourth) China and its Rulers 1839–1989 and The Making of Georgian Britain 1678–c.1760
- 5 The Origins and Growth of the British Empire 1558–1783

hope it also encourages students to think more critically about issues which still have relevance today, such as why and with what consequences some people are scapegoated by others, and what constitutes a 'fair' trial."

The new, reformed A Level History has been taught in schools since last September. The researchers collected information from schools about topic choice by using OCR Specification Creator, a tool that allows teachers to build a syllabus that will most inspire their students. In all, nearly one in three schools surveyed (29.31%) were intending to teach at least one topic new to the syllabus.

Researchers say that while the most popular topics remain the 'tried and tested' ones such as the Tudors and the 20th century, the interest in topics such as witchcraze shows that there is appetite amongst schools for something new to teach.

Other new topics include *Genghis Khan and The Explosion from the Steppes c.1167–1405*, *African Kingdoms c.1400–c.1800* and *The Rise of Islam c.550–750*.

Pathway to success

Demand for so-called 'pathway programmes' – which give international students the language and academic skills required for university-level study – is expected to continue to rise, according to a new report.

The study, released during the European Association for International Education annual conference in Liverpool, found that the global market for English-medium pathway programmes has a value of \$1.4 billion.

Routes to higher education: the global shape of pathway programmes examined 2,275 programmes – both pre-bachelor and pre-master – representing an estimated 80% of programmes worldwide.

The study was conducted by international study choice platform StudyPortals and exam board Cambridge English Language Assessment.

"The USA, UK and Australia offer the majority of pathway programmes, delivered mainly on the university campus by an outsourced private tuition provider," said Virgil Ierubino, of Cambridge English.

"It also shows that most students originate from Asia, especially from China, typically follow a 12-month programme, and spend up to half their study time improving their English skills so they are ready for academic study."

The report examines additional programme features, including fees and entry requirements, and highlights some of the key emerging trends.

"We're seeing a rise in the number of pathway courses delivered around the world," said Carmen Neghina, Head of Intelligence at StudyPortals.

"We also predict major growth in pre-master pathway programmes, which currently only make up 20% of the sector, as well as a diversification of the models for offering pathway programmes, such as off-shore, or wholly owned private enterprise."

The report also underlined the importance of careful selection and screening of potential pathway students, especially regarding language ability, to ensure they are able to acquire the skills they need for degree-level study by the time they finish their programme.

The report is available to download for free from the Cambridge English Language Assessment or the StudyPortals websites.

Don't miss unique report

A unique report on changes in students' writing in formal English examinations will be launched at a seminar in London later this month.

Variations in Aspects of Writing in 16+ English Examinations will be launched at the British Academy in Central London on the morning of Wednesday 30 November 2016.

The study, which has generated much debate following publication of previous reports, explores the changes in a range of aspects of students' writing in the context of formal English examinations between 1980 and 2014.

It looks at aspects including spelling, punctuation, sentence structure and the use of paragraphs. The findings are sure to interest researchers, teachers and the educational community.

Professor Debra Myhill, Pro-Vice-Chancellor and Executive Dean of the University of Exeter, will provide a pre-recorded introduction to the study, and Urszula Clark, Professor of English and Linguistics at Aston University, will contribute to the seminar in person.

Places to attend the seminar are very limited but you can register to watch online at www.cambridgeassessment.org.uk/events/aspects-2016.

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Meeting of minds

The second of a series of three conferences for Cambridge schools has just been held.

This year, to cater for demand, Cambridge International Examinations is running three Cambridge Schools Conferences. St John's College in Johannesburg, South Africa, hosted the first conference in April, and this was followed by a September conference at Homerton College Cambridge. The last conference will take place in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, in December.

The focus of all three conferences is on the subject of 'Leading learning'. Each conference explores the theme through a series of workshops and keynote speeches. Delegates have been enthusiastic, with one attendee at the Johannesburg Cambridge Schools Conference saying: "Exactly what I needed professionally – I have left inspired and invigorated."



Cambridge International Examinations' Chief Executive Michael O'Sullivan talks to delegates.



The conference explored the theme of 'Leading learning' through a series of workshops (above) and keynote speeches (below).



Bursary boost for talented students

A group of talented students from the UK's West Midlands region have been awarded bursaries of £3,000 a year towards their studies at the University of Cambridge.

The students, who studied A Levels at schools and colleges in Birmingham, Coventry, Leamington Spa, Shrewsbury, Stourbridge, Tamworth, Worcester and Warwick, received the bursaries at a ceremony at UK exam board OCR's Coventry offices. They will receive £3,000 for each year of their undergraduate studies, which they can use for living or tuition costs, or a combination of both.

Congratulating the students on their achievements, Simon Lebus, Chairman of OCR and Chief Executive of its parent organisation Cambridge Assessment, said: "This is an exceptional group of young people, who are very worthy recipients of the OCR bursary. Not only are they high achieving academically, but every one of them has taken their studies beyond the A Level curriculum, such as by representing Britain at the Physics Olympiad. They have also shown themselves to be outstanding people, volunteering in Africa, charity fundraising and mentoring younger students. Many of them are the first in their families to go to university and I hope the OCR bursary will go towards helping any financial pressures that could get in the way of them making the most of their study and lives at Cambridge."

The 2016 Bursary Award winners, pictured front row from left to right, are Isabella Ingram, Denicia Bernard, Ellie Mullett and Lauren Fletcher. Back row: Michael Samuelson-Beulah, Thomas Gessey-Jones, Tommy Chong, Matthew Paterson and George Williams.

Now in its 13th year, the OCR bursary was set up to encourage a greater number of talented young people from the West Midlands to apply to the University of Cambridge. OCR is part of the University of Cambridge's international examinations group, which incorporated the West Midlands Examinations Board at one time. As well as offices in Cambridge, OCR has had a base in Coventry for 25 years.

One of the bursary students, Denicia Bernard, will be studying Education with English at Clare College in Cambridge. She said: "I would like to say that I'm incredibly grateful to receive this bursary as it is massively levelling out the playing field for me, and as a result it will provide me with wonderful opportunities that I wouldn't otherwise have had."

