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Achieve

Autumn 2017

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

A Cambridge Approach to Improving Education

Governments should avoid the temptation to "cherry pick and policy borrow" from successful education systems, the architect of the overhaul of the National Curriculum in England has said.

Tim Oates CBE was speaking at the launch of A Cambridge Approach to Improving Education, hosted by the leading UK think tank Policy Exchange. The Cambridge Approach, the result of a wide-ranging study of educational improvement across a range of jurisdictions, is designed to guide thinking on policy formation and ensure governments take a more comprehensive view of the forces and factors at work in education systems.

"Policy borrowing and cherry picking is naïve; there is a long list of things in education that have failed because they did not take account of national context and national culture" said Tim, who is Director of Assessment Research and Development at Cambridge Assessment.

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Tim Oates CBE launches A Cambridge Approach to Improving Education.

News in brief

Rewarding awarding

Every summer, UK exam board OCR invites stakeholders such as teaching unions and professional associations to observe some of the key processes involved in delivering results for students. This includes 'awarding' – where grade boundaries are set and 'screening' – where provisional results from the awarding meetings are checked to ensure they are fair, appropriate and valid for the cohort of students as a whole. In 2017, the programme for observers expanded to include one of the new 9 to 1 graded GCSEs as well as Level 3 vocational qualifications which have external assessments.

Sarah Hannafin, Senior Policy Advisor for the National Association of Head Teachers, said the union had welcomed the opportunity:

"OCR's transparency helps to increase confidence in the robustness of the process and the results in a period of large scale reform."

Asylum seeker course nominated for top award



A course developed to help refugees and asylum seekers prepare to study at a UK university has been nominated for a top sector award. The 'Aim Higher' Massive Open Online Course (MOOC), developed by Cambridge Assessment English, was part of a raft of initiatives praised by the Professionals in International Education website. It was nominated under the Championing Diversity category in the inaugural PIEoneer Awards which were held in London in September. The picture shows the team behind the MOOC at the awards ceremony.

Green light for key IT qualification

UK exam board OCR is celebrating the news that its redeveloped Cambridge National in Information Technologies has been approved for inclusion in the 2019 performance tables in England. The announcement by the Department for Education in England means that all OCR's Cambridge Nationals submitted to England's Department for Education have been included in performance tables for 2019.

Rebecca Grayson, Head of Vocational Qualification Products at OCR, said: "We look forward to supporting all schools, including those teaching the qualifications for the first time this term, to get off to a flying start."

Head to the OCR YouTube channel to see a short video explaining more about the new Cambridge National in Information Technologies.



Cambridge expansion continues

Figures show that more schools than ever are choosing Cambridge Assessment International Education to educate and assess students at every stage of the curriculum.

Entries are growing across the international exam board's programmes. Cambridge International AS & A Level entries rose by 10 per cent in June 2017 and Cambridge IGCSE continues to be the world's most popular international curriculum for 14 to 16 year olds, with entries increasing by seven per cent internationally.

Cambridge Assessment International Education has also seen a huge increase in the number of younger students now studying Cambridge programmes. Entries for Cambridge Primary Checkpoint tests grew by 17 per cent this year, and Cambridge Lower Secondary Checkpoint increased by nine per cent globally.

"It is an immensely successful global curriculum that aptly fits in the educational ecosystem of a country."

Kavita Kalra, Principal at Sancta Maria, a Cambridge International School in Hyderabad, India, praised the depth of curriculum which she said "enhances student perspectives beyond the limits of the syllabus".

"It is an immensely successful global curriculum that aptly fits in the educational ecosystem of a country," she said.

New names give better alignment

Cambridge Assessment has announced that its exam boards Cambridge English Language Assessment and Cambridge International Examinations have changed their names.

Cambridge English is now called Cambridge Assessment English, while Cambridge International Examinations has become Cambridge Assessment International Education. "Today, what we provide has expanded well beyond our programme 20 years ago when we first used the name Cambridge International Examinations, so much so a change of name is called for," said Michael O'Sullivan, Chief Executive of Cambridge Assessment International Education.

 Cambridge Assessment International Education

 Cambridge Assessment English

"Our new name shows more clearly that we are part of Cambridge Assessment, sharing the biggest assessment research team in Europe and unrivalled depth of experience in national education systems, international education and English language learning."

His comments were echoed by Saul Nassé, Chief Executive of Cambridge Assessment English, who said: "By changing from 'Cambridge English Language Assessment' to 'Cambridge Assessment English', we are reflecting that we are part of a leading international education and assessment group, with English at the heart of everything we do."

Continued from page 1

He also warned governments against looking for a single solution to a country's educational challenges, saying it was not so simple: "Performance is more than the shape of single aspects of systems – we have to avoid this myopia of single models," he said.

The Cambridge Approach identifies 14 'control factors' and a further six 'explanatory factors' that can be used to "hold a mirror up" to education systems, from pedagogy to accountability and curriculum content, and from culture to political structures.

In his talk, Tim went on to identify a phenomenon in which countries were "like ships passing in the night," adopting strategies that had already proved a failure in other countries.

"Just as one country abandons something, another country thinks it's going to be the saving grace of its education system," said Tim. He also said that there was no such thing as a perfect system, and that you "constantly have to watch, you constantly have to nurture, you constantly have to analyse" – levers had to be regularly tweaked and adjusted to ensure optimum performance.



John Jerrim, Reader in Educational and Social Statistics at the UCL Institute of Education (pictured above on the right), who led the questioning, said he agreed with the warning about policy borrowing. "How are you ever going to pin down what Singapore or Finland does to make its education such a success and therefore borrow from it? You can't pin down the data in that way."

An informed and appreciative audience attended the event, which was chaired by Policy Exchange's Head of Education and Social Reform, John Blake. There was a wide-ranging question and answer session afterwards, covering areas including whether smaller jurisdictions do better in international comparisons, how to explain the recent success of London, and how governments should respond to the challenges created by the digital revolution.

Transformational leadership praise for CEO

The Group Chief Executive of Cambridge Assessment Simon Lebus has been praised for the "extraordinary work" he has done to transform the Group from a mainly domestic exam board to a large and successful international organisation operating in over 170 countries.

Cambridge University's Vice-Chancellor Professor Sir Leszek Borysiewicz was paying tribute to Simon following the news that he is leaving after 15 years at the helm in order to develop a portfolio of non-executive interests.

"Under Simon's leadership, Cambridge Assessment has expanded into the globally successful organisation we know today," Sir Leszek said.

"I am grateful to him for the extraordinary work he has done at the helm of Cambridge Assessment, and wish him the very best in all his future endeavours."

During his time in charge, Simon has overseen the growth of Cambridge Assessment into an organisation with over 2,500 staff and a turnover of more than £400 million. He has been responsible for a more than trebling in size of the Group, which is a not-for-profit department of the University of Cambridge and consists of English language exam board Cambridge Assessment English, international exam board Cambridge Assessment International Education, and UK exam board OCR.

This has coincided with a period of major organisational and industry change, and Simon has been closely involved with a variety of modernisation and technology initiatives

such as the introduction of on-screen marking and computer-based testing and the development of various digital services. He has also supported a major expansion of Cambridge Assessment's international network, with offices now operating in 40 different international locations. In addition, the Group has significantly boosted its research operation, an important platform for the development of its education and curriculum reform practice and the introduction of innovative new qualifications.

Most recently Simon has been responsible for the construction of Cambridge Assessment's new 350,000 square foot purpose-built Cambridge headquarter office, Triangle, completion of which is scheduled for spring 2018.

"By the time of my planned departure in March, I will have served under four Vice-Chancellors," said Simon. "That seems like a good time for me to start thinking about the next phase of my career and it also coincides with the move to Triangle, which I believe represents a key point in the organisation's development."



Simon Lebus

"It has been a great privilege to work at Cambridge Assessment. I have hugely enjoyed my time here – the work itself has been fascinating and it has been rewarding to be part of an endeavour that has been able positively to impact the education of the many millions of people who take our exams each year. I have also been lucky enough over the years to have been supported in my job by an outstanding group of colleagues, without whose efforts these achievements would have been impossible, and whose wisdom and camaraderie I shall miss."

A view from...

Deep Ghataura

The ethical issue of assessment literacy

Deep Ghataura



Teachers and professional bodies in the UK are now focusing on assessment in ways that have not been seen before. The removal of reported attainment 'levels' and the introduction of a new National Curriculum have made teachers more aware of their role in assessment. Previously, 'assessment' was a class of policies and emergent phenomena 'done' to teachers, but with the changing educational landscape there are opportunities for clever teachers, schools and awarding bodies.

Whatever the opportunities (and there are many), there is an unmet need: the need for assessment literacy. Teachers and school leaders already have, arguably, a sense of 'folk knowledge' about assessment. This can lead to some lucky and unlucky accidents. Concerns over content validity are well tackled but consequential validity is not. As a result, naïve assessment policies have unintended negative consequences for performance appraisal. At the level of individual schools, the need for assessment literacy is an ethical demand that is: how can we fairly perturb the professional lives of teachers?

Slightly more controversially, I think the ethical demand goes beyond classroom assessment. If teachers are held accountable for large-scale, high-stakes, national assessments they need to know about those assessments. This is where awarding bodies have a crucial role to play.

The powerful knowledge that comes with an intimate understanding of accountability measures strengthens the teaching profession. But in national contexts where many (and sometimes, for-profit) awarding bodies exist, the question of who moves first and with what is a complex question. Ultimately, whatever is said about assessment literacy as a technical and professional need is missing the point. Assessment literacy is at its heart a deeply ethical issue and one that, I hope, in the coming years we tackle with full fervour.

Deep Ghataura is a science teacher from London. He has just completed a Postgraduate Certificate in Educational Assessment and Examinations run by Cambridge Assessment and the University of Cambridge Faculty of Education.

New science practicals get the thumbs-up

Research shows that a new approach to the assessment of A Level science skills in the UK is working well.

At the start of the A Level science reform process, Cambridge Assessment and its UK exam board OCR argued for radical change to the practical science assessment, because research showed that the old coursework model didn't work well as an assessment, nor did it support the good teaching and learning of practical skills.

Practical work is a core part of science education, so it is vital that these skills are assessed in a way that enables students to experience a wide range of activities. For the new A Levels, 15 per cent of marks in the written papers assess practical skills, while practical work will be assessed and reported separately from the A Level grade, as a pass/fail endorsement. In each science, students are required to complete practical activities from 12 different areas, which



will be assessed using Common Practical Assessment Criteria. The new approach aims to support students to develop competency in a key range of techniques, and allow teachers to better integrate effective practical work into their teaching, so that students are better prepared for further study.

This summer, the first students completed the new A Level courses in science, and the first A Levels with the practical endorsement were awarded.

Frances Wilson, Principal Researcher at OCR, as well as OCR Subject Advisor Neil Wade and Head of Product Development Steve Evans have been working together to evaluate the changes. In 2015 (before the reforms were introduced) they started a series of annual questionnaires about practical science in schools, to track any changes in practical work in schools, and to find out the impact of the reforms to practical science assessment on teaching and learning.

The results show that the endorsement model is proving effective, and is supporting the teaching and learning of theory better than the so-called 'legacy' A Level. Teachers were asked whether the new style of assessments had a positive or negative impact on teaching and learning of theory at A Level. Comparing results from 2015 (legacy model) and 2016 (reformed A Level), teachers were more positive about the reformed model than the old model.

Similarly, compared to the legacy A Level, teachers were much more likely to agree that the reformed A Level encouraged them to undertake a wide range of practical activities with their students, suggesting that the practical endorsement will help students to gain much wider experience of practical work. One teacher commented: "I much prefer the new system of practical work at both A Level and GCSE as teachers now have freedom to carry out more meaningful practical work, rather than teaching students to 'jump through hoops'."

How big data is benefiting learners

A major conference for English educators from across Latin America has heard how big data yields enormous potential for language learning.

"Today, we are at the dawning of a new era, where we can achieve unparalleled knowledge, unparalleled learning, unparalleled insight."

In a speech to the sixteenth Association of Latin American British Cultural Institutes (LABCI) 2017 bi-annual conference, Saul Nassé, Chief Executive of Cambridge Assessment English, talked about how the exam board

he runs uses super-statistics to check its exams are accurate, reliable and fair. He said the board was using language insights generated from millions of answers to its new Test your English site, while machine learning was being powered by tens of thousands of lines in the Cambridge Learner Corpus, created in partnership with Cambridge University Press for the Write & Improve website. He also demonstrated how learners were already benefiting from the data being produced by a new language app, Quiz your English.

"Today, we are at the dawning of a new era, where we can achieve unparalleled knowledge, unparalleled learning, unparalleled insight. It is up to us to grasp this opportunity, not to let it slip through our fingers," he said.

You can read the full speech on the Cambridge Assessment blog site.

Mexico to go bilingual

Mexico has unveiled ambitious plans to turn the country bilingual. Cambridge Assessment English is helping synthesise and implement the plan, which will involve the near-40 million children at school in Mexico and its near-two million teachers. Saul Nassé, Chief Executive of Cambridge Assessment English, said: "Finding a way to upskill teachers who will in turn upskill students is going to require imagination and commitment and I could certainly feel both of those at a meeting we had with several wings of the Mexican government. I am really excited we're part of the project."



Saul Nassé speaks at the LABCI conference.

Major research study into leading admissions test

New research has highlighted the effectiveness of a leading university admissions test.

The study by Cambridge Assessment Admissions Testing into its BioMedical Admissions Test (BMAT) highlights the test's ability to predict on-course examination results, future course performance, and also provides evidence that the assessment can predict which students are most likely to be successful in medical study. The findings, accumulated over 10 years, also show that the test can help support the goal of widening access to medicine to students from diverse backgrounds.

BMAT is a well-established admissions test used by leading universities in the UK including Oxford, Cambridge and Imperial College London, and is also used in institutions around the world including the Netherlands, Spain, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand.

It assesses the cognitive competencies – such as critical and creative thinking skills – which facilitate the effective problem solving and decision making needed for success on demanding medical and healthcare courses.



Andy Chamberlain, Head of Cambridge Assessment Admissions Testing (pictured left), said: "There are many qualities, as well as academic ability, that students require to excel in challenging medical,

biomedical and dentistry courses and the research validates BMAT's method of determining the candidates with the greatest chance of success – adding value to the admissions process.

"We recognise that admissions tests such as BMAT should not pose a barrier to potential applicants and in fact our research findings indicate that applicants' perceptions of admissions tests do not pose a deterrent to applying to medical study. We know that students from more privileged backgrounds might receive extra help in preparing for the BMAT through their schools or from commercial courses. Our research, however, shows that this extra help does not give these students an advantage in terms of better performance on the BMAT. Institutions should rest assured that all test takers are equitably measured with BMAT."

China/Cambridge cooperation grows

More opportunities for Chinese students to study Cambridge programmes are expected after the signing of strategic cooperation memoranda with three education groups in the country.

The agreements were signed during a visit to China by Janet Morris, Director of International Network, Cambridge Assessment International Education. Cambridge International hopes to work with the organisations as Cambridge Associates later this year.

"...we believe that, together with these partners, we can give thousands of students the very best start in life."

In Shanghai, Janet met with Guanghua Education Group, one of the largest education companies in the Yangtze River Delta. The next stop was Guangzhou and the impressive campus of Huanggang Middle School Guangzhou Experimental Primary School. Janet's visit coincided with the school art festival, so she was able to watch a series of student performances. The school belongs to Huanggang Education Group, a well-known educational organisation in China.

Finally, Janet visited Agile Education Group's head office in Guangzhou city centre. The Group devotes itself to developing high-quality bilingual and international education. Demand for Cambridge international education is growing strongly in China where it now counts 230 Cambridge schools. Janet said, "We are signing these memoranda of understanding because we believe that, together with these partners, we can give thousands of students the very best start in life."



Helping learners show what they know

One of the world's leading language apps has announced a major new partnership in English learning. German firm Babbel has teamed up with Cambridge Assessment English on a new Babbel English Test.

Released in October at a cost of €39, the test allows adult learners of English to assess their listening and reading

skills online from level A1 (beginner) up to and including B1 (intermediate). Test takers will earn a certificate of achievement, which can be downloaded and used to demonstrate English skills to potential employers, for self-assessment, when warming up for an exam, or to enhance an online career profile.

"With 10 years of experience teaching languages online behind us, we are well aware of the need for flexible and mobile language tests. However, ensuring the test's quality and validity was paramount," said Thomas Holl, founder and Chief Strategy Officer at Babbel. "This is why we are immensely proud to launch the Babbel English Test with Cambridge Assessment English, the biggest and best name in language assessment. Together we've created the highest quality English test on the digital learning market."

The Babbel English Test features a set of around 70 different questions per session, each testing a variety of

listening and reading comprehension skills. Like Babbel's lesson content, these tasks reflect authentic, real-life situations, while the exam itself has hundreds of potential variations and will never be the same twice, no matter how often it is taken.

"Online language learning is taking off in a big way."

"Online language learning is taking off in a big way," said Juliet Wilson, Director of Assessment at Cambridge Assessment English. "Until now it's been difficult for learners to know whether they are really learning the right skills, or to demonstrate their real level. By working with Babbel, we can give learners reliable evidence of their progress and a certificate of achievement that demonstrates what they have learned."

Ed tech – mirage or future reality?

A substantial amount of money is spent on technology by UK schools, families and policymakers with the hope of improving educational outcomes. However, the results of these initiatives have been mixed. Now, the UK think tank, the Centre for Education Economics (CfEE), has published research into this area at a launch event sponsored by Cambridge Assessment. Evidence on Uses of Technology in Education is available to download for free from the CfEE website.

In the audience at the launch event was Joe Nutt, international educational consultant and author, and here he expounds his argument that digital literacy is “just code for cultural illiteracy”. In the other corner is Geoff Stead, Director of Digital and New Product Development at Cambridge Assessment English, who says ed tech can be amazing, but the buyer has to take control...



Joe Nutt

It's been almost two decades since Neil Postman issued his prescient warning that culture always pays a price for technology. Two decades in which schools and other educational organisations

have spent huge sums of mostly public money on technology. Technology is now the second highest item on any educational organisation's budget, after salaries. Anyone who thinks technology businesses aren't entirely focused on making it the first in the next two decades is fooling themselves.

The implications for schools, teachers and children are simply huge yet the quality of debate remains, as it has been from the moment the BBC joined forces with Acorn computers in 1981 and sanctioned technology in classrooms, pitifully poor. In my career I have watched the rise of educational technology with a mixture of frustration and dismay. Not because I am against it, anything but, but because I have been constantly and repeatedly frustrated when trying to make sure educational technology is just that...educational.

Why do we still have a situation where huge sums are spent, with minimal if any effort being made to ensure the money delivers educational outcomes people can see, measure and believe in?

The reason is quite simply because the individuals who hold the purse strings are completely incapable of dictating educational terms to the businesses they deal with. Should we be surprised when national governments and even the EU have to resort to huge fines to try and exert some authority over technology giants?

The debate needs to take place where the marketing teams in technology companies know it counts, at the level of language. Digital literacy is a perfect example. A beautifully simple, innocent combination of terms used ubiquitously by anyone eager to convince schools to spend more on technology. After all, who can argue with literacy? Doesn't adding digital just bring it up to date?

There's no agreed definition of digital literacy; plenty have tried and failed because it is marketing, pure and simple, no different from the famous ad slogans for Audi and L'Oreal. Now consumers are free to buy a car or cosmetics. If they don't care to look beyond the seductive promise of mere words, that's their business, literally.

Education is different. The real customer for any educational technology is always a teacher or a child, but they are never the buyer. The buyers in this market have

a duty to show more discernment: to participate in the debate not capitulate.

What digital literacy really means is cultural illiteracy: more pictures instead of words; more Twitter and less articulacy; more demagogues and less debate – and lots and lots more emojis.



Geoff Stead

While I certainly agree that our educational landscape is littered with examples of ed tech snake-oil, and money wasted on what can only be described as vanity projects, I think that seeing the enemy

as large tech-mega businesses that need to be reined in is oversimplifying dramatically, and side-stepping the role that educators (the buyers) play too.

I'm with others in believing that 'literacy' in today's world has to include the skills to manage, and be critically demanding of the technologies that surround us. This applies to all of us – especially those guiding and teaching today's students.

Technology can be amazing. It is a tool to make, to share, to collaborate. Standards like the web, and open educational resources, have brought quality, free resources to far corners of the globe. My team creates digital content for teachers and learners that reach millions of people in countries we'd never get to without it.

There is no denying the relevance and impact of tech. The question is how to include it meaningfully in education. By ignoring it we do a disservice to our students, and their futures.

When I look around me I see an entire ecosystem of small, energetic, ed tech startups. Some may be selling snake-oil, but many more are really trying to make a difference and to keep technology in its rightful place as a constructive tool.

The problem? Nobody is buying. Those very same 'holders of the purse strings' seem to put up hurdles that exclude the smaller more innovative businesses and only allow the big guys in.

If the buyers were asking more meaningful questions, the suppliers would be quick to adapt. Surely one way to address this is to move beyond the dated idea that you can buy one big system to do everything and rather support a more agile, eclectic mix of tools and technologies that individual teachers can mix and match to suit their needs?

Leading the way in assessment learning

A group of senior education leaders from around the world have spent a week in Cambridge for the Cambridge Assessment Network's annual Leadership in National Assessment course.

Delegates came from a variety of backgrounds including Aga Khan University in Pakistan, the Ministry of Education



in Malaysia and Arizona State Preparatory Academy, USA. The programme was delivered at the Møller Centre by experts from Cambridge Assessment and a wider network of education professionals. Topics included system disruption, the place for national policy, innovation opportunities and risks in education.

A course delegate commented: "This course has broadened my knowledge about educational assessment. Assessment is a powerful tool that can help to improve and/or reform education systems. Leaders in education should know how to make decisions based on the foundation of research based and evidence based assessment."

For more information go to: www.canetwork.org.uk

Learning and achievement for all

Delegates from 44 countries explored the theme of 'Learning and achievement for all' at the Cambridge Schools Conference at Churchill College.



In a packed programme of workshops and keynote speeches, delegates examined some of the ways in which schools can overcome barriers to learning and help students realise their potential. Over the next year

Cambridge Assessment International Education will be hosting similar conferences in Dubai and Miami. You can find out more about Cambridge Schools Conferences at www.cambridgeinternational.org/conference

Teachers praise "great opportunity"

More than 400 delegates from across the UK have attended conferences to explore the latest developments in vocational qualifications.

The events, staged by UK exam board OCR, took place in London, Coventry and Leeds this summer, enabling delegates to find out more about its suite of Cambridge Nationals and Cambridge Technicals, full-time vocational

courses designed to meet the needs of 14 to 16 and 16 to 19 year old students.

OCR's subject, development, resources and support teams were on hand to provide teachers with all the information needed to plan and teach OCR's vocational qualifications with confidence.

The format allowed delegates to explore their individual subject areas in detail, including the support available in the form of textbooks from publishers Hodder Education. Delegates were also able to meet other teachers and share best practice, with one Cambridge National teacher sharing her experience of delivering the Child Development qualification which led to the formation of a professional network on the messaging service WhatsApp.

Delegates were full of praise for the events, with one saying it was "a great opportunity to meet other teachers who deliver the subject and share ideas and good practice".

Popularity of leading English test soars

More than three million International English Language Testing System (IELTS) tests were taken in the past year, reflecting the growing importance of the world's leading test of English for international higher education and migration.

IELTS is the most widely used test of English for migration to Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the UK. It is recognised by more than 10,000 universities, schools, employers and immigration bodies, including all universities in Australia and the UK, and many of the leading institutions in the USA.

Established in 1989, and jointly owned by the British Council, IDP: IELTS Australia and Cambridge Assessment English, IELTS is now a household name in many countries around the world.

Warwick Freeland, Managing Director at IDP: IELTS Australia said: "IELTS opens doors for millions of people every year, helping them to study abroad, migrate to English-speaking countries or take advantage of the growing need for English in professional life."

The success of IELTS rests on the high quality of the test, which measures the four key language skills – listening, speaking, reading and writing. It is backed by dedicated research teams in the UK and Australia, and administered by centres in more than 140 countries around the world.

James Shipton, Head of IELTS at the British Council, said: "The continued growth of IELTS that we've seen around the world is testament to the popularity of the test with test takers, and to the trust that organisations place in IELTS to provide scores that are a reliable indicator of a person's ability to communicate in English."

Top US admissions tutors visit Cambridge

Admissions staff from 12 leading US universities have met in Cambridge to advise on extending the recognition of Cambridge qualifications in North America, and hear the latest news and research about its programmes.

Twelve institutions' representatives make up the group: Arizona State University, Columbia University, Duke University, Florida State University, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, University of California, University of Maryland, University of Southern California, University of Pennsylvania, University of Washington, University of Virginia and Vanderbilt University.

A highlight of the visit this year was a tour of DC10, parent organisation Cambridge Assessment's secure storage and despatch facility. Security of standardisation of the tests is of the utmost importance in the US context.



Cambridge Assessment International Education's Head of Recognitions, Val Sismey, said: "We've worked closely with members of the Council for many years. Their views are incredibly important in helping us shape the development of Cambridge Advanced qualifications to ensure they are fit for purpose, and also to increase understanding of Cambridge qualifications in US higher education institutions."

Douglas Christiansen, Vice Provost for University Enrollment Affairs, Dean of Admissions at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, described the challenge facing admissions staff – 32,000 students apply for 1600 places at the university. "Memorisation is not what we are looking for," he said. "We are looking for thinkers and those that can draw conclusions. ... Students are very prepared for Vanderbilt if they come through the Cambridge curriculum."

New basics of assessment course launched

A new, online course designed to introduce the principles of assessment is being launched next year.

A101: Introducing the Principles of Assessment is being provided by the Cambridge Assessment Network and covers validity, reliability, fairness, standards, comparability, practicality and manageability of assessment.

Tim Oates CBE, Group Director of Assessment Research and Development at Cambridge Assessment, explained the impetus behind the new learning opportunity:

"There is no shortage of excellent academic research and analysis about assessment, but it's a subject

which is regarded as technical and intimidating. Since assessment is an essential yet controversial element of education and training, wider understanding of the principles of assessment is extremely important. A101 provides accessible but thorough grounding in the key principles of educational assessment and describes and explains important assessment issues around the topics covered.

"The course aims to address the need for a definitive, accessible understanding of assessment principles – it's interesting and engaging in its own right, but it also serves as a foundation for higher level professional development."

The nine-week course is broad enough to be suitable for anyone with an interest in educational assessment and its role in society today, including examiners, assessment writers, teachers and exam board staff working day to day in the field of educational assessment. The inspiration for the name comes from an outstandingly successful course run by the UK's Open University in the late seventies, which provided a complete foundation in the social sciences. The number 101 is also often used for introductory courses in American university departments.

No previous knowledge or experience of assessment is required to participate in A101 and it has been designed so learners can follow it at a time and a place which is convenient to them, keeping up with the weekly course schedule (approximately two hours per week). It is also designed to be interactive, which includes participating in discussions with fellow students.

For more information about the course go to: www.canetwork.org.uk/a101



Star students get help with Cambridge

Thirteen star students from the UK's West Midlands region have been awarded bursaries worth £3,000 per year to support their studies at the University of Cambridge.

The students, who have recently started their studies in a range of subjects from Architecture to Philosophy, were awarded the funds by UK exam board OCR.

The bursary gives them £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, Chair of OCR and Group Chief Executive of its parent organisation Cambridge Assessment, said: "This year's applicants were such an incredibly talented group of students that we gave a higher number of awards than in many previous years. We wish them great success at Cambridge and beyond."

The bursary award winners, pictured front row from left to right: Natalie Chapman, Jason Quach, Simon Campbell Colwill, Ella Jones and David Pearce. Middle row: Daniel Williams-Ruiz, Soraya George, Rebecca Teagles and Natasha Rai. Back row: Triveni Patel and Alex Keir.

Join us in Questioning Questions



"Good assessment is about helping students to learn" is what the Chief Executive of Cambridge Assessment International Education, Michael O'Sullivan, said to the world's education

ministers gathered at this year's Education World Forum (pictured above). Now a one-day conference will expand and explore this statement further. 'Questioning Questions: effective learning – how can assessment help?' will be held at Kings Place, London, on 23 November. As well as Michael O'Sullivan, speakers will include assessment expert Daisy Christodoulou and education explorer Lucy Crehan.

To register for a place, go to:

www.cambridgeassessment.org.uk/events or watch the event live via the Cambridge Assessment website.

Watch this space

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