

Education Select Committee Inquiry

How should examinations for 15-19 year olds in England be run?

University of Cambridge International Examinations is the world's largest provider of international education programmes and qualifications for 5–19 year olds, operating in over 160 countries. In the UK, Cambridge offers syllabuses and examination of them in International GCSEs, International A-levels and the Cambridge Pre-U. It is part of a department of the University and a not-for-profit organisation.

We have sought to give the Committee evidence of how matters work overseas when addressing the arguments *“in favour of and against having a range of awarding bodies for academic and applied qualifications”*. We have also drawn upon the experiences of our sister not-for-profit organisation, University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations, which delivers the world's most valued range of English qualifications to over 3 million people in 135 countries each year. More than 12,000 universities, employers and governments rely on Cambridge ESOL certificates as proof of English language ability.

Summary

Many countries deliberately include international qualifications within the qualifications offered to students in their national education systems to provide diversity and contestability. The primary reasons for doing so are:

- to enrich the curriculum, using innovative syllabuses not otherwise available in the national curriculum;
- to ensure that the national curriculum is exposed to ideas from abroad,
- to check the quality of their own examinations and drive improvement
- to link the national education system and standards to an international benchmark of excellence

Other states, engaged in system reform, set out to include such syllabuses and qualifications to enhance the quality of learning and teaching through the provision of state 'beacon' schools designed to inspire the rest of the system. They use them as 'incubators' of innovation and reform (see paras 22-27).

1 The provision of diversity and contestability

1. Singapore's population is one-tenth of that of England in a geographical area comparable with the Isle of Wight. The country's rapid development has largely been achieved through top-down planning. There is a single core system of public examinations (A levels and O levels) in most academic subjects. Cambridge works in partnership with the Ministry of Education in running and continually improving this system.

2. However, even in such a centralised system, the government believes in promoting diversity in the educational qualifications offered in its state schools. This was clearly set out a few years ago in a speech by the then Minister for Finance and Education - and the approach has not changed:

[There is a] growing diversity in our education system. The Singapore-Cambridge GCE "O" and "A" level exams and curricula will remain the mainstay of the school system. They are seen internationally as carrying the rigour and consistency of standards that has defined Singapore's reputation in education, and we will ensure that we sustain and build on that reputation. But we are also encouraging the emergence of alternative curricula in Singapore education, both amongst our state-funded schools and in the private field. The alternatives include new, special subjects in niche areas that are being developed by our schools, together with our universities and polytechnics, within the framework of the Singapore-Cambridge qualifications. But they also include whole alternatives, like the IB or the new diploma being adopted by the NUS High School for Maths and Science.

These alternatives are being encouraged not because the mainstream national system is losing credibility, as is the context in some other countries. They are being encouraged because we believe that diversity will add to Singapore's strengths.

First, a more diverse system will cater to Singapore students who have different intellectual styles and preferences, especially in their upper secondary

and tertiary years. It allows us to nurture Singaporeans who are themselves diverse in their ideas and ways of thinking, in all fields of life.

Second, we need this diversity in education because Singapore education is no longer about Singaporeans alone, or about Singaporeans who spend all their school years in Singapore. More Singaporeans are working abroad, and having their children educated abroad for part of their growing years.

Singapore is also a fast-growing hub for people of all nationalities, some of whom on transit and others here for long stays.

These are fundamental trends, which will reshape many things we do in Singapore. We need a diversity of schools and educational curricula to keep our attractiveness as a destination and home for families of all backgrounds - as a city that makes its mark by being the world in Asia¹.”

- 3.** All pupils must study at least one of the three recognised “mother tongues”. Curriculum and examinations in these areas have been opened to best international practice; with the support of the government, Nanyang Technological University has established a Confucius Institute which directly influenced the syllabus in Singapore’s Chinese schools.
- 4.** Singapore also makes use of the International Baccalaureate programmes and qualifications in a small number of selected publicly-funded schools where these are judged best to meet the needs of the students.
- 5.** In recent years, Singapore has increased the qualifications available to students who follow vocational routes, or favour applied learning, as well as on meeting the needs of pupils who are highly talented in the arts or sport. These developments are pursued in partnership with the Singapore tertiary sector, employers and the centres of excellence overseas.
- 6.** In **Hong Kong**, Cambridge provides specific international syllabuses for Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority centres with students for the HK

Diploma of Secondary Education take a number of Cambridge AS language examinations (e.g. Hindi, Japanese, Spanish, Urdu). Cambridge also provides annual benchmarking of standards for HKEAA qualifications.

7. France has several alternative syllabus and qualification routes.

The Option Internationale du Baccalauréat (OIB) is an examination administered jointly by the Ministry of Education and “foreign partners”; the partner for the British option being University of Cambridge International Examinations. The programme is open to bilingual students in designated schools with those in the British programme substituting two OIB papers for their French counterparts. The examination is of A-level standard and the results form part of the overall result of the Bacc. The OIB is seen as an essential part of international provision within French schools, designed to be not only bilingual but also 'bi-cultural'. Two educational cultures come into contact - two ways of teaching and assessing, of approaching the subjects in question, and two different approaches to education.

8. University of Cambridge ESOL provides English language certification to state secondary schools across France as part of a nationwide project to improve school-leavers' second-language ability. It is assessed within the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). The CEFR provides a practical tool for setting standards to be attained at successive stages of learning and provides a basis for the mutual recognition of language qualifications.

9. Cambridge developed a specific test to be taken by students in the first year of the lycée. The certificates are offered to schools running 'European Section' classes (where particular subjects are taught in a foreign language) and more than 100,000 students have taken the certificates over a four-year period.

10. Several other local education authorities (académies) across France have participated in a scheme whereby pupils in French collèges or lycées take a Cambridge (or Goethe Institut, Instituto Cervantes or Perugia) examination partly

¹ Speech by Mr Tharman Shanmugaratnam, Minister for Finance and Minister for Education, at the International Baccalaureate

or wholly funded by the Conseil régional or Conseil général. Pass rates in Cambridge examinations were higher than both the world average and the average in the rest of France, indicating a positive washback effect on language learning and teaching – the aim of the exercise.

11. Since 2009 nearly 3000 students in schools with European sections sat an exam largely paid for by the Conseil Régional de Bretagne and the Académie de Rennes, enriching the CVs of many young Bretons with an internationally-recognised qualification. Lower secondary school pupils in the Nice area, including some in Zones of Educational Priority, have taken the Cambridge English: Key. Many high school students in the Académie de Reims and in lycées in the Académie de Limoges take various different levels of Cambridge English.

12. Germany has a not dissimilar approach.

The AbiBac is similar to the OIB, though it is not aimed at students with a bilingual background. The product of a Franco-German agreement, students who pass are awarded the French baccalauréat diploma as well as its German equivalent, the Abitur. Schools teaching the AbiBac have French-German bilingual sections based on the twinning of a French and a German school. The Abibac can be used for admission to both French and German universities.

13. Over the past decade a number of German states have begun to work with Cambridge. Approximately 7,500 students in the Realschulen of Baden-Württemberg, Berlin and Bavaria have been able to take advantage of Cambridge English tests, mostly delivered at age 15. The Baden-Württemberg Ministry of Education in particular sees the good results as an external confirmation of the quality of its education system.

14. In **Spain** a joint project with the Ministry of Education, the British Council and Cambridge to encourage bilingual education is under way. There are now some 80,000 students in 120 schools pursuing at least part of their studies through

English. In the last four years students have taken Cambridge International GCSEs (IGCSE) in up to 10 subjects and, at lower levels, have followed the Cambridge Primary curriculum. The partners have been involved in teacher training with marked improvement being shown in results from the first year to the second year thanks to the further injection of professional development.

15. At local and regional governments level The Comunidad de Madrid launched a bilingual programme aimed at raising the levels of English language ability in state schools. Starting with 26 schools, this project has now grown to cover more than 200 schools. Due to its success, there are plans for it to expand in 2012. More recently, education authorities in the autonomous region of Murcia are offering Cambridge exams in 39 schools to more than 6,000 students in schools across the region, alongside exams run the Alliance Française and Goethe Institut.

16. Throughout Spain there are networks of UK Academy style schools. Cambridge is delivering a wide range of English exams to the Federación Española de Religiosos de Enseñanza (FERE-CECA), a network of 340 schools with around 210,000 pupils in Madrid and Castilla-La Mancha, the Fundació Escola Cristiana de Catalunya, with 434 schools and 264,000 pupils and Kristau Eskola, a network of 151 schools in the Basque Country with around 83,000 pupils in order to improve efficiency in language education within the school network. As part of an annual project to evaluate the English levels of the Kristau Eskola students against the Basque Trilingual Programme, Cambridge provides benchmarking services, using a bespoke test to evaluate the language abilities of both primary and secondary students.

17. In **Switzerland** it was agreed in 1998 that external examinations could be integrated within the Swiss curriculum as part of the leaving certificates of the commercial or professional schools (Berufsmatura). Cambridge ESOL was one of the examination boards whose certificates were allowed to be integrated.

In 2003, further reform meant that students on the extended basic training profile in vocational schools for commercial business training are required to reach CEFR B1 with Cambridge English: Preliminary accredited as an approved qualification for this purpose.

18. In support of the exams in the Swiss State Education Sector, Cambridge provides supplementary grade information to schools in certain areas to enable the results to be used as part of the official school assessment system - in combination with external assessment.

19. In **Colombia** the Ministerio de Educación Nacional launched a National Bilingual Project designed to equip the population with English skills for work and higher study. Cambridge was invited to help with a benchmarking project and to assist in producing a new series of state exams linked to the CEFR. Following on from the project, the government requested support to develop new national English language tests to be incorporated into the national school exit exam (Examen de Estado) taken by more than 500,000 school-leavers in 2007. Cambridge also provided training and support to the government's testing body so that Colombia could produce its own English language tests according to Cambridge quality standards, linked to international levels.

20. In addition, a new test for final year Colombian university students was introduced which included an English language component produced by Cambridge. It was taken by more than 100,000 students in 2007.

21. In the **USA** Cambridge International GCSE is used by many state schools for a number of subjects in their G9-10 curriculum and this has encouraged the adoption of these types of examinations by some states, adapting Cambridge syllabuses and examinations in a collaborative project.

22. Many states use non-state qualifications as 'Incubators' of innovation and reform in their national education systems.

23. Cambridge is working with the **Egyptian** Government to provide curriculum and assessments services to pilot schools (Nile Egyptian Schools). It is intended that the schools will be completed and fully populated with approximately 1000 students each from ages 4 to 18 by 2016. The goal is, depending on the success of the pilot, to expand the new school model across the country.

24. The Schools will be not-for-profit, with the majority of funding coming from the Egyptian Government, extending access to families for whom private education is out of reach. They will offer continuous teacher training and professional development as well as English and Arabic-medium education through new curricula, benchmarked to Egyptian and international standards, with internationally accredited certificates at grade 10, 11 and 12 (ages 16 to 18).

25. Cambridge is also developing a tailor-made English curriculum for grades 1-8 (ages 6/7-13/14), specifically designed to fit with a bilingual international education programme, as well as producing curricula and assessments for up to 13 subjects for age 4-18, teacher and leadership CPD and specific inputs relating to institutional development.

26. In **Bahrain** Cambridge has focussed on the extensive revision of the national school exams system. This began several years ago with help in the setting up of a new National Examinations Unit tasked with raising quality in all aspects of the assessment process, including test item writing, operational processes involved in the distribution and marking of examinations, and the introduction of new technologies for the grading and analysis of test results. In 2012 the programme advances with the introduction of a new Critical Thinking pilot assessment for Grade 12 students.

27. In **Kazakhstan**, the government has set up a network of Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools (NIS), the first step in a wide-ranging programme of reform aimed at improving the quality of teaching and learning in schools in line with international best practice.

Cambridge, in partnership the University's Faculty of Education, is involved in advising the NIS on the strategy for innovative curriculum reform, the training of teachers in new pedagogies, and the move toward the establishment of a trilingual education system (Russian, Kazakh and English).

28. Finally, it is worth mentioning that in recent years the growth in multi-national industries and occupations has impacted 'nationalistic' views of curriculum and accreditation provision. The growth of the European economic space and off-shore workforces have seen a rise in global certification programmes which can be integrated with National Curricula or used to extend their offering. This trend has been most noticeable in the IT sector with the rise of vendor-specific accreditation programmes: Microsoft (MCP, MCSE, MCTS, MCITP, MOUS), Novell (CNE, MCNE), Oracle (OCA, OCP, OCM), Sun (000-060), Adobe, Intel and a number of more generic IT programs such as ITQ, ECDL/ICDL, A+. Regardless of the provision available in national systems, more and more people are seeking qualifications with currency in a particular sector whoever may provide them.

29. Conclusions

Even in those countries which possess highly centralised systems for the delivery and development of assessments, qualifications, syllabuses and curricula, governments will actively either invite third party providers into the sector or engineer means of competition. In that regard the UK is extremely fortunate. It already has a mature, diverse and competitive market in place. That market allows for contestability, innovation and a diverse range of multi-layered partnerships to develop. This is one of the reasons why the expertise of UK exam boards is so readily sought by foreign governments and institutions.

30. Recommendations:

- (a) The government should actively encourage the existence of multiple syllabus and examination providers;**

(b) The government should remove regulations that might reduce either the number of providers in either a single subject or across the entire qualifications sector;

(c) UK regulators are given a statutory objective to encourage and remove barriers to competition and diversity of provision for assessments, qualifications and syllabuses;

(d) The process of certification for qualifications should be made simpler and more transparent to encourage new providers and a more diverse catalogue of qualifications.