

# Achieve

Spring 2012



CAMBRIDGE ASSESSMENT



## Welcome to *Achieve*

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

## Learning comes first: shifting the focus from examining to the curriculum

Debate tackles the importance of curriculum coherence. see below, continued page 3

## A level reform: what's happening?

Find out about our HE engagement and research programmes. see pages 5 and 6

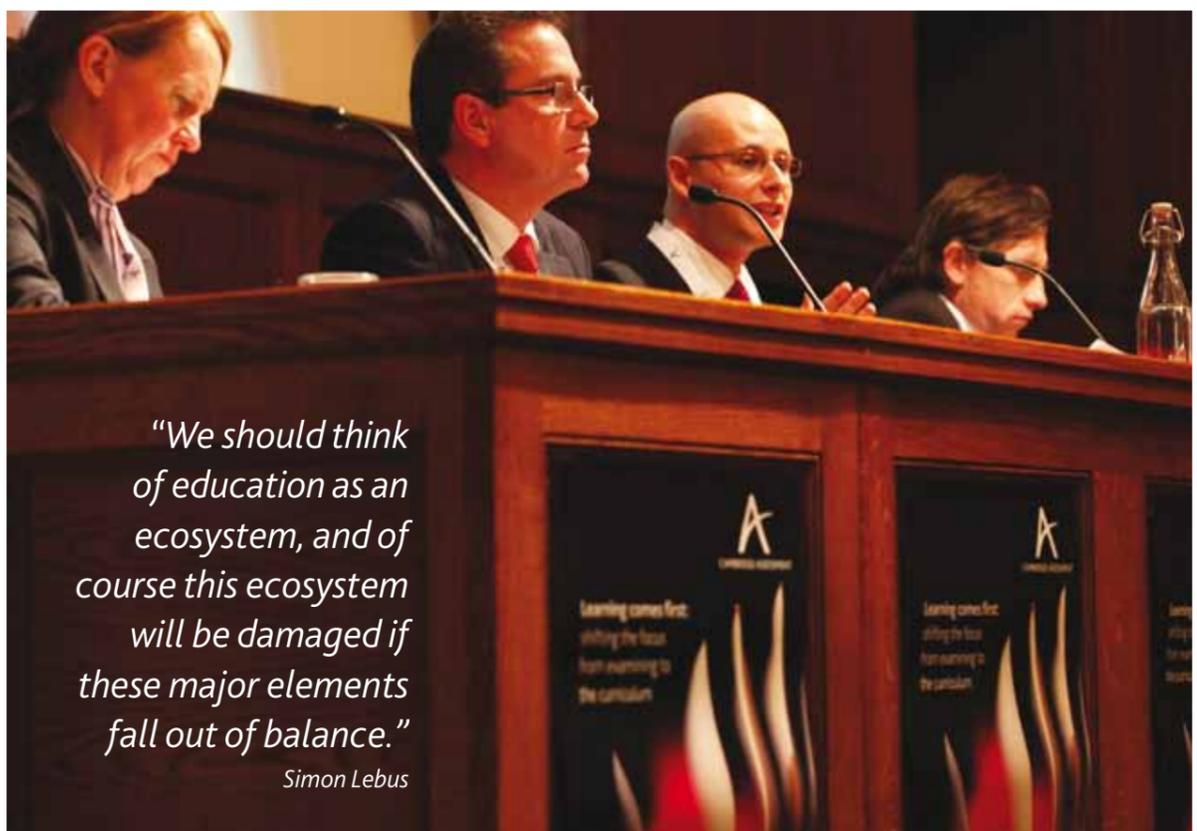
## Exams should not define the curriculum

**"An excessive focus on exams and examining has been at the expense of coherence and curriculum," says head of international exams group.**

Speaking at Cambridge Assessment's debate on 'Learning comes first: shifting the focus from examining to the curriculum' on 31 January, Group Chief Executive, Simon Lebus, continued: "We should think of education as an ecosystem, and of course this ecosystem will be damaged if these major elements fall out of balance."

Simon was clear that "exams can only sample the key concepts and body of knowledge associated with a subject, and do not constitute its totality". He went on to say that: "A curriculum's legitimacy and relevance are firmly grounded in local conditions but we live in an age where the curriculum needs also to look to best international practice and to cultivate an awareness in students of the impact of globalisation."

The solution to shifting the focus back from exams to the curriculum – in particular in relation to A levels – is to re-connect exam boards and Higher Education (HE) said Mr Lebus. OCR, Cambridge Assessment's UK exam board, is currently running nine subject consultative committees with some 242 representatives of HE and the learned and professional societies in relation to the next round of A level change [see 'A level reform: what's happening?' story on page 5].



*"We should think of education as an ecosystem, and of course this ecosystem will be damaged if these major elements fall out of balance."*

*Simon Lebus*

*continued on page 3*

Nansi Ellis, Head of Education Policy & Research, ATL; Richard Earp, Education & Skills Manager, National Grid; Dale Bassett, Research Director, Reform; and Dr Graeme Atherton, Executive Director, Aimhigher, were among the panellists.



Richard Partington, Senior Tutor at Churchill College, University of Cambridge.

## Richard Partington, Senior Tutor at Churchill College, University of Cambridge

A sojourn out of power characteristically makes politicians eager. So it came as no surprise when Michael Gove hit the ground running. I take issue with a good deal of what he has said, and some of what he has done, but I have been delighted by the momentum that has quickly built around placing HE at the centre of A level provision, as the UK's major post-16 examination is revised. There was a time when bashing A levels seemed to be approaching the status of a national sport. Thankfully, the introduction of both the A\* grade and stretch and challenge has latterly taken the sting out of a good deal of media criticism. And, while I remain a tad worried that the baby might be chucked out with the bathwater, I now think that we will probably see sensible change made to an examination that most know fulfils its brief. A level allows students to specialise without depriving them of the opportunity to sustain breadth; it imparts a good deal of core knowledge, while also testing skills; if used appropriately, it permits admissions tutors to select undergraduates fairly and effectively; it also provides a very good indication of future academic potential.

There is, I believe, an emerging consensus about how A level should be strengthened. We must retain – and universities should better utilise – AS level at the end of Year 12. But we should probably reduce re-sits, and there is an argument for losing January units altogether. It would also be excellent if the qualification could better test and reward technical fluency. But the thing that HE practitioners are especially interested in is that reform might reinforce the core knowledge that A level delivers, and which first-year undergraduates bring to the table. I have little doubt that university teachers will in principle wish to seize the opportunity to re-engage with the school and college curriculum, and with examination. But I think this will need to be at a strategic and structural level: I cannot envisage hard-pressed lecturers being able to make the time for assessment and marking on the frontline. Thus far, government thinking does not seem to have extended either to the detail of the process or the question of how academics will receive appropriate reward for spending time away from research. So I am delighted that OCR's HE Fora have made an excellent start at establishing dialogue with subject-specialists in universities, and hope that this will translate into our leading the progression by which discussion becomes change and then a sustained relationship between exam boards, universities, and schools and colleges around the curriculum.

### NEWS IN BRIEF

## Cambridge Teachers' Conference

The 2012 Cambridge Teachers' Conference will take place in Cambridge on 17–19 September.

The theme of the conference, hosted by University of Cambridge International Examinations, is leadership. There will be keynote speeches and workshops to explore what leadership means for principals, teachers and students, and what role schools can play as leaders in their communities.

The Cambridge Teachers' Conference offers a chance for teachers from Cambridge schools around the world to collaborate on education issues, and share expertise to raise standards of teaching in classrooms worldwide.

## Cambridge supports better English for doctors

"Currently, doctors from outside the EU sit a rigorous international test to ensure they have a high standard of English. The NHS should be able to apply the same standards to staff from EU countries," says Dr Mike Milanovic, Chief Executive of Cambridge ESOL, in a

letter published in The Daily Telegraph. Dr Milanovic's letter was in response to a call for more English language skills testing of overseas doctors from the presidents of the Royal College of Surgeons and the Royal College of Physicians.

## Tower of Babel

A recent survey found that Cambridge ESOL employees can use over 55 languages – well above the organisation's expectations. The survey which took place at the end of last year asked employees which

languages other than English they could use. A similar survey of 650 people in the European Parliament in September found that 78 different languages could be used.

## Cambridge fills global skills gap

Two Cambridge qualifications have been recognised as appropriate preparation for students entering the global economy in reports emphasising international employers' demand for 'global skills'.

Cambridge IGCSE Global Perspectives and Cambridge Pre-U Global Perspectives and Research (GPR) are highlighted in reports commissioned by the British Council and Think Global, the Development Education Association.

The first report, 'The Global Skills Gap', summarises the results of an ICM poll of 500 UK business leaders. Ninety three per cent of businesses think it is important for schools to help young people think globally. Three-quarters of the business leaders polled were worried that young people's horizons are not broad enough to operate in a globalised and multicultural economy.

The second report, 'Cultivating a Global Outlook for the Global Economy', reveals that learning about global issues at school equips young people with the skills they need for the best graduate careers. All teachers surveyed agreed that helping young people to think critically and creatively about global issues improves their academic attainment.

Both Cambridge qualifications develop students' ability to think critically about a range of global issues where there is always more than one point of view.

Global Perspectives schools around the world are encouraged to form links and offer their students a global learning experience.

Anne Needham, Cambridge Pre-U GPR coordinator at Walthamstow Hall, UK, says her students work with Cambridge Pre-U GPR students at Eastchester High in the US every week via Skype. She said: "The course really lends itself to forging international relationships and collaborative work. What better way to gain global perspectives, liven up the classroom and take students out of their often closeted world?"



Cambridge Pre-U GPR students at Walthamstow Hall, UK, and Eastchester High School, US, work together via Skype.

## Exams should not define the curriculum

*continued from page 1*

Addressing the issue of what makes a good education, Roger-Francois Gauthier, Inspector General for Administration of National Education and Research in France, and Dr Nadia Touba, Project Director of Nile Egyptian Schools in Egypt, shared their lessons learned from overseas.

Paul Pritchard, Chair of Governors at the JCB Academy, Andrew Hutchinson OBE, Executive Principal at the Parkside Federation in Cambridge, and Dr Stephen Spurr, Headmaster of Westminster School, gave insights into the different types of learning programmes. The consensus was that assessment should not over-determine what is taught.

Finally, Jon Coles, former Director General for Education Standards and now Chief Executive of United Church Schools Trust/United Learning Trust, warned of the increasing range of tactics used for raising attainment and called for moral courage to address the issues.

More than 150 people attended and over 700 more watched a live stream of the event online.



Paul Pritchard, Chair of Governors at the JCB Academy.



Jon Coles, former Director General for Education Standards and now Chief Executive of United Church Schools Trust/United Learning Trust.



Simon Lebus, Group Chief Executive of Cambridge Assessment.

To view films or download the presentations and podcasts from the event, visit:  
[www.cambridgeassessment.org.uk](http://www.cambridgeassessment.org.uk)

## Australia accepts Cambridge English for student visas

Australia's Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) is now accepting scores for Cambridge English: Advanced (CAE) for student visas, alongside IELTS – another exam developed by Cambridge ESOL.

Last year DIAC announced the approval of CAE scores as proof of English language skills for student visa applications.

The new rules, which came into force on 5 November last year, will benefit students who want to prove that they have in-depth English language skills and the ability to use them effectively in an educational context. It will also help universities, colleges and schools to be confident that the students they recruit are able to deal with the demands of academic study in English across all four skills – listening, speaking, reading and writing.

To help ensure the security of CAE tests for immigration and other high stakes purposes, Cambridge ESOL has introduced 'Identica' – a new biometric technology system developed by Aware Inc.

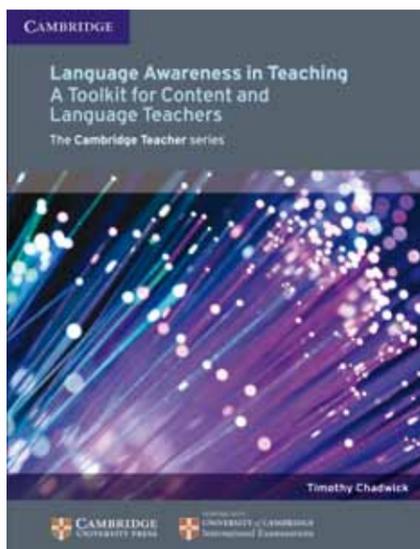
Cambridge English: Advanced is recognised by over 3,000 organisations in 76 countries. It is accepted by the majority of universities in Australia and the UK and by the UK Border Agency for all categories visas including Tier 4 student visa.



Addressing the issue of what makes a good education, Roger-Francois Gauthier, Inspector General for Administration of National Education and Research in France, and Dr Nadia Touba, Project Director of Nile Egyptian Schools in Egypt, shared their lessons learned from overseas.

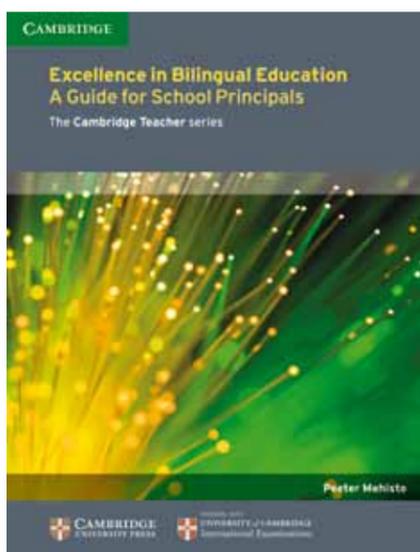
## Bilingual education takes off – support needed

Two new books aimed at supporting schools with language-related issues in the classroom have been commissioned by University of Cambridge International Examinations following its research into bilingual education.



'Excellence in Bilingual Education: A Guide for School Principals', by Peeter Mehisto, is the first guide to focus on the role of the school principal in setting up and managing a successful bilingual education programme. 'Language Awareness in Teaching: A Toolkit for Content and Language Teachers', by Timothy Chadwick, will help teachers become more aware of the language issues students face when they study content subjects like science or maths through English.

The books are one of the first practical outcomes to emerge from a new bilingual education research programme set up by the exam board. The research will develop the board's expertise in bilingual education so that more support can be offered to schools around the world on language issues. This support will not only benefit bilingual schools where teaching takes place through both English and another language, it will also benefit English-medium schools with multicultural student populations.



In recent years, University of Cambridge International Examinations has worked with schools in countries including Argentina, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, Turkey and Sweden to integrate Cambridge international qualifications into bilingual education programmes. It is becoming increasingly popular for schools in Europe to offer Cambridge IGCSE in some subjects – alongside the national curriculum – to develop students' global outlook and skills in communicating and working in English. The guides will be published by Cambridge University Press in April 2012. To read case studies, go to [www.cie.org.uk/bilingual](http://www.cie.org.uk/bilingual)

## Top Chinese professor: Research is essential for testing transparency

The important role academic research plays in language assessment was highlighted by Visiting Professor Xiangdong Gu at Cambridge ESOL this January. Xiangdong – who is the Director and a research fellow of the Language Assessment Research Institute in Chongqing University – is currently working with Cambridge ESOL's research team on a study which will measure the impact Cambridge English is having in schools in China

"Research in language assessment provides the evidence needed to back up what test providers say," Xiangdong commented. She explained: "This transparency is essential for the increasingly high level stakeholders who rely on language test results for important decisions."

Xiangdong – who has published widely on language assessment – gave a unique insight into her work in Cambridge and back in China. Xiangdong who is working with Cambridge ESOL until mid October explained the scope of her work: "In China we carried out questionnaire surveys, interviews and classroom observation on the impact Cambridge English is having in schools. I'm now working with the team in Cambridge to analyse this impact. It's early days for these exams as they've only just been introduced in China but we expect the test takers to quickly increase which will make our study even more relevant."

## New approaches to maths and science teaching

Finding new and exciting ways to engage students in maths and science lessons can be a challenge and so University of Cambridge International Examinations has been holding seminars around the world to give teachers new strategies for teaching these subjects.

The Global Learner seminars are led by experts from the University of Cambridge Faculty of Education – Charlie Gilderdale, a leading mathematics education specialist, and Mark Winterbottom, a lecturer in science education. They combine educational theory with practical methodology, offering teachers a chance to try out activities that will help their students think mathematically and scientifically. The seminars have already taken place in Pakistan, India, Egypt and Bangladesh – and more are planned in 2012, including Dubai, Qatar and Kuwait.

Waseem Haider Jafary, Senior Mathematics Teacher, The International School of Choueifat, Lahore, attended one of three maths seminars held in Pakistan in November 2011. He said it was a good learning experience: "I have shared the experience

with my colleagues and will be passing it to my students as well. I will definitely try to remove fears of mathematics from my students' minds and make the subject a part of their daily routine even outside the classrooms."

University of Cambridge International Examinations holds a wide range of education events around the world to help raise international standards in education. The events bring teachers from different Cambridge schools together, to share learning and develop their teaching skills.



Charlie Gilderdale at a Global Learner seminar in Pakistan, November 2011.



## A level reform: what's happening?

**"A levels are a crucial way that universities select candidates for their courses, so it is important that these qualifications meet the needs of higher education institutions."**

This was the position set out by the Government in 'The Importance of Teaching – the Schools White Paper'.

Cambridge Assessment agrees that Higher Education (HE) should have a greater role in the design of post-16 qualifications in the UK and as early as June 2011 it produced the policy paper 'A Better Approach to Higher Education / Exam Board Interactions for Post-16 Qualifications' laying out how Government could best support such an approach.

Since then its UK exam board OCR has implemented a wide-ranging HE engagement programme in relation to the next round of A level change.

Cambridge Assessment is also supporting OCR with a significant programme of research, which will provide evidence to support developments in qualifications and curricula while building and strengthening relationships with HE stakeholders. A series of projects have been planned for 2011–2012, the largest of which includes the use of a questionnaire which is being sent to 3,500 academics. The project will compare the views and experiences of lecturers and tutors of first year undergraduates on the preparedness of new undergraduates for study at this level. [Read more about our research in *Achieve's* 'interview with' on page 6.]

### OCR HE consultative forum:

- Some 242 representatives from learned societies, professional associations, schools and colleges, employers and education charities, of which 96 are HE representatives, are now attending the forums. Its purpose is to inform a strategic understanding of the requirements of qualifications designed to prepare young people for higher education.
- The exam board has already gathered a substantial range of views from HE about A levels as well as the 16-19 curriculum (and wider) which it will be testing out in a series of road shows aimed at those involved with first year undergraduates. Around 60 academics are attending the events which are being held across the country this month.

As a result of the programme, a number of common themes and issues associated with the transition of young people to HE have already emerged. For example, differentiation is increasingly difficult due to the sheer increase in number of entrants combined with the volume of students achieving high grades. Universities also say that the current pedagogy in schools means young people are not well prepared for university.

### OCR subject consultative forums:

These were set up to identify key requirements and issues relating to qualifications in the subject area and to share and discuss relevant information about emerging policy developments which may impact on the future design and purpose of qualifications and the curriculum:

- Business Studies – 32 members including 12 HE Institutions (HEI) reps
- Economics – 31 members including 14 HEI reps
- English – 33 members including 11 HEI reps
- History – 24 members including 7 HEI reps
- Mathematics – 40 members including 11 HEI reps
- Modern Foreign Languages – 43 members including 17 HEI reps
- Psychology – 39 members including 22 HEI reps
- Science – 34 members including 9 HEI reps
- Humanities – 9 members including 4 HEI reps (this forum is different to the other forums as focussed on a specific qualification development).

To join OCR's partnership with Higher Education, please email [sally.brown@ocr.org.uk](mailto:sally.brown@ocr.org.uk)

This is not the first time the organisation has undertaken this kind of engagement. Its international board, University of Cambridge International Examinations, undertook intensive HE consultation when creating Cambridge Pre-U. Additionally, both Cambridge International and OCR have created a joint Maths Council and will be forming a joint English Council to inform all their work in these key subjects.

## 99 and counting...

Cambridge ESOL is currently looking through its archives for student success stories in the run up to its 100 year anniversary next year. In 2013, the Cambridge-based exam board will be celebrating its centenary with a series of special events and publications.

The anniversary will mark the centenary of the first ever Cambridge English exam which was taken in 1913. Christine Nuttall, Director of Communications and Stakeholder Relations explains: "The reasons why people take English exams have changed a great deal over the last 100 years and we're finding some really interesting stories in our archives. Last year we reunited some former members of the Polish armed forces who took Cambridge English exams during the Second World War and we're finding lots of other inspiring stories."

English language exams from Cambridge have changed a great deal in the last century with the 1913 version of 'Cambridge English: Proficiency' being 12 hours long. Christine Nuttall explains: "We've constantly evolved and developed our exams so they now focus on the real-life communication skills that people need in everyday life."

## A "pioneering" computer science qualification

When UK Education Secretary Michael Gove described the current ICT curriculum as "flawed" at a major educational technology conference earlier this year, he called for pupils to be taught how computers work and praised UK exam board OCR's "pioneering work" in Computer Science qualifications. A few days later, the Royal Society's report, 'Shut down or restart? The way forward for computing in schools' called for the displacement of "routine ICT activity with more creative, rigorous and challenging Computer Science".

OCR is the only exam board to offer a GCSE in Computing. The qualification, which was formally launched in September 2011, gives pupils an in-depth understanding of how computer technology works and an opportunity to investigate computer programming, including algorithms. Simon Peyton-Jones, Chair of the Computing at School Working Group (CAS), commented: "OCR deserves considerable credit for taking the initiative in developing the first Computing GCSE."

The GCSE in Computing prepares learners for progression to OCR's A level in Computing. It is one of a number of OCR's ICT qualifications that include strong elements of programming, such as the new Cambridge Nationals in ICT and the ICT GCSE qualifications.

Feedback from schools has been very positive. Boys at the Royal Grammar School, High Wycombe, took part in the pilot for the GCSE in Computing. Darren Travi, Head of IT, said: "I think the course is a really



Karen Reid, Simon Banks and George Rouse.

positive development in the field. It is welcome that, at last, we have a course at KS4, which teaches the boys not just how to use computers, but also how they work. The course has the right blend of theory and practical application. I hope this develops further and encourages more pupils to take up Computing."

## Interview with...

### Research for A level reform

Dr Irenka Suto, a Senior Research Officer at Cambridge Assessment, explains how she and other researchers are collaborating with colleagues in its UK exam board OCR, to collect, analyse and report data from Higher Education (HE) representatives systematically.

#### The HE research programme

Over the past two decades, the design and content of qualifications has increasingly become the domain of government-funded bodies. One effect of this has been to disenfranchise university lecturers, tutors, and admissions staff. Recognising the need to reinvigorate links with universities and other HE institutions, our research programme is a means of increasing HE's role in the design, implementation and evaluation of A levels and other qualifications.

Our research projects have been designed to investigate systematically some of the views and concerns that HE representatives have expressed at OCR's Higher Education Consultative Forum and Subject Consultative Forums. Over the past year, many lecturers and tutors have made suggestions as to how curricula for 16 to 19 year olds could be improved in the future, and there is now a need to gauge the representativeness of the views expressed so far, to prioritise concerns, and to conduct some more detailed investigations. Overall, a mixed methods approach to data collection has been adopted. This should enable us to triangulate findings drawn from both quantitative and qualitative data.

#### Survey of lecturers' views on the preparedness of new undergraduates for degree level study

One of the first projects within the programme to get underway has been a survey of lecturers and tutors in HE. In November 2011, OCR's Higher Education Consultative Forum reviewed some draft questions relating to the strengths and weaknesses of typical new undergraduates, and to aspects of teaching and assessment in HE that pose transitional challenges. After further piloting work, the questions were finalised to create a short online questionnaire, for completion by HE teaching staff across multiple subjects. Data collection began in mid-January. Initially, we have been targeting biology, English and mathematics, but we are also keen to collect the



Dr Irenka Suto is a Senior Research Officer at Cambridge Assessment.

views of lecturers in a good mix of other subjects. To date, there have been over six hundred responses so we are looking forward to analysing a healthy dataset.

#### Focus groups on the design of A levels

In January 2012, we collected detailed data through a series of seven roadshows in four different regions of England. A total of 46 lecturers participated, from a range of disciplines and with varied teaching experience. Each session entailed two linked research activities. First, participants completed a written prioritisation task. They were presented with ten core academic areas and were asked to indicate: (i) the two areas in which new undergraduates were least prepared; and (ii) the two areas in which new undergraduates were most prepared. The responses were anonymised, analysed immediately, and reported back to the participants. This prioritisation data provided stimulus material for the second activity: a focus group. The discussion schedule comprised open-ended questions with related prompts and probes. One question considered by

the participants was that of how the responsibility for preparing students in particular domains of skills and knowledge should be divided between schools, awarding bodies, and universities. A thematic analysis of the data is currently underway.

#### Literature review of the pedagogical differences between Levels 3 and 4

We anticipated that within the existing academic literature in education, there is a reasonable body of work on the pedagogical approaches used in Levels 3 (A levels) and 4 (university) in England. A review of this literature is currently underway, the aim of which is to identify the key differences already reported and established within the academic community. The literature review will enable us to compare some of the findings from our own empirical work with what others have found, and where possible, to use pedagogical theory to contextualise them.

#### Additional projects

The HE research programme includes several other projects which have either begun recently, or will commence in the next few months. The Research Division is currently investigating assessors' interpretations of some of the vocabulary most commonly used in descriptive criteria for assessing student research projects. Words such as evaluate, analyse and synthesise are defined differently by assessors with differing subject backgrounds. The division is using the 'think aloud' method and Kelly's Repertory Grid technique to explore whether assessors with diverse backgrounds use the same assessment criteria differently (and how they do so) when applying them to project reports on diverse topics.

Our forthcoming research projects include a structural comparison of the questions used in examinations for 16 to 19 year olds and in university examinations; and a review of conceptualisations of generic research skills. An empirical study of whether context can be ignored when assessing skills is also planned. In line with Cambridge Assessment's wider research programme, the HE research programme is a 'rolling' one, and will continue over several years as new issues come to light and Government policy develops. We hope that our systematic approach to data collection and analysis will give credibility to the evidence used to develop the next generation of qualifications, and we look forward to involving as many HE representatives as possible.

## Language ability framework comes of age

"Europe's language ability framework has come a long way in the last 10 years and it is still evolving," says Cambridge ESOL's Dr Nick Saville at the launch of a new video to mark the 10th anniversary of the Council of Europe's Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).

The video, recorded in Cambridge last year, shows an interview with John Trim – one of the CEFR's authors – and Dr Nick Saville.

Dr Saville said: "John Trim's work has provided a greater understanding of the scope of the CEFR and how it should be used wisely." He also explains the importance of the CEFR which is one of the most widely used systems to describe language ability: "It plays an important role in setting language education policy but it's essential that it is fully understood and used in the correct way."

The video covers the historical developments of the common framework dating back to the 1970s and puts on record some of John Trim's thoughts on the CEFR as an evolving framework. Dr Saville's team in Cambridge is heavily involved in ongoing research into the CEFR in English.

To watch the video scan the QR code or visit:  
[www.youtube.com/cambridgeenglishtv](http://www.youtube.com/cambridgeenglishtv)



Dr Nick Saville with John Trim.

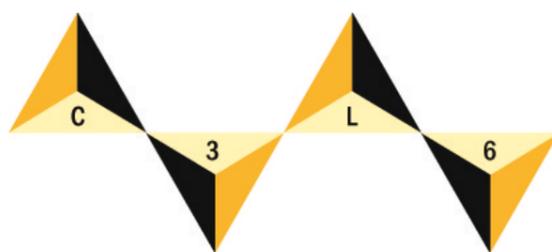
*"It plays an important role in setting language education policy but it's essential that it is fully understood and used in the correct way."*

## Finding future young scientists

A chemistry competition designed to push boundaries and stretch UK and international students' knowledge, is being supported by two Cambridge exam boards.

University of Cambridge International Examinations, together with its sister exam board OCR in the UK, worked in partnership with the University of Cambridge Department of Chemistry to bring to life the Cambridge Chemistry Challenge. Launched in January 2011, the monthly online competition – the brainchild of a chemist at the University of Cambridge, Dr Peter Wothers – is open to anyone of any age from anywhere in the world.

Five 'Google-proof' questions issued on the first of each month are set by an experienced team of teachers and university chemists. They are designed



**Cambridge Chemistry Challenge**  
[www.C3L6.com](http://www.C3L6.com)

to push boundaries, stretch students' knowledge and encourage them to think about science and use the internet to find scientific data. At the end of the 2011 online competition, the Cambridge Chemistry Challenge team set a written exam for Year 12 students at schools in the UK. It attracted entries from over 3,000 students in 250 schools across the country.

The Cambridge Chemistry Challenge has been endorsed by the Royal Society of Chemistry (RSC). Jim Iley, RSC's Director of Science and Education, said, "It is great to see a competition of this kind, which makes chemistry fun for students, stretches their science knowledge, forces them to think outside the box and helps us to identify our young scientists of the future."

The Cambridge Chemistry Challenge will continue into 2012 due to popular demand from students and teachers. The first challenge was posted online on Sunday 1 January 2012 at [www.C3L6.com](http://www.C3L6.com)

From left to right: Dr Julian Huppert MP for Cambridge, Dr Peter Wothers, Alexander Moore, a Cambridge Pre-U student at Winchester College, and Dr Andrew Wolters, Chemistry teacher, Winchester College, at the Cambridge Chemistry Challenge award ceremony.

## New direction at A level

The close co-operation between UK exam board OCR and Higher Education (HE) to help build the next generation of A levels is bearing fruit.

Feedback frequently heard from universities is that first-year students arrive ill-equipped in the crucial skills of independent working, research and essay writing. A new A level in Humanities, developed by OCR in collaboration with the University of Essex in particular fosters an interdisciplinary approach and the intellectual skills that universities need.

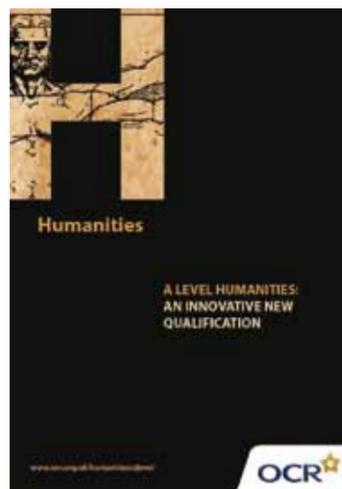
There are over 140 representatives from HE involved in a variety of OCR initiatives from specialist HE forums to specific subject-based consultations. It was through a forum that OCR got to work more closely with the Centre for Interdisciplinary Studies in the Humanities (CISH) at Essex University. Margaret Kerry, OCR's Manager for History and Social Science, takes up the story: "When we first visited CISH, we were able to talk to faculty members and students on the BA Humanities course. This was extremely fruitful as we were able to hear from people practising within the disciplines what their needs and aspirations were. This led to a member of the academic staff joining OCR's development team for a period – an innovative step forward which has resulted in some very interesting new content and direction for the qualification."

Margaret continued: "Designing a truly interdisciplinary qualification is a challenge, and the topics must be chosen carefully to allow a variety of approaches. The

philosophy of the new A level in Humanities is that many issues now are multi-faceted and complex, requiring analysis from a range of viewpoints – and subjects within the broad Humanities family are ideally suited to this."

The qualification, which will be launched in September 2012, has a strong emphasis on developing the ability to interrogate, interpret and evaluate a range of information to produce well-reasoned explanations supported by evidence. At AS, students are required to work with previously unseen sources to answer questions which bring into play the knowledge they have acquired across a range of humanities disciplines. For students who progress through to the A2, there is an independent research enquiry where they can demonstrate the independent learning, research and report writing skills which are highly valued by both HE and employers.

Peter Mandler, Professor of Modern Cultural History at Cambridge and Vice President of the Royal Historical Society,



## Examining speaking

It is generally accepted that the speaking of English is one of the most challenging skills to learn and often the most difficult to assess.

The latest thinking on the assessment of speaking was recently laid out by leading language experts in a recently published volume of the Studies in Language Testing (SiLT) – a series of academic volumes published jointly by University of Cambridge ESOL and Cambridge University Press.

SiLT 30 Examining Speaking is a helpful piece of research-based guidance can be used by teachers, trainers, policymakers and anyone else faced with the task of choosing an approach to assessing speaking.

Cambridge ESOL's Dr Evelina Galaczi said: "This volume provides an up-to-date review of the relevant literature on assessing speaking, an accessible and systematic description of the different proficiency levels in second language speaking and a comprehensive and coherent basis for validating tests of speaking.

"We show that if you're looking at testing real-life interactive speaking skills, then you need an approach which tests a broad range of skills. So in this case we would suggest a paired face-to-face test, which includes a range of examiner-led and candidate-led tasks, as the most suitable and fit for purpose.

"I expect this volume will be of considerable interest to other exam boards who wish to validate their own speaking tests in a systematic and coherent manner, as well as to academic researchers and graduate students in the field of language assessment more generally."

Volume 30 of SiLT follows Cambridge ESOL's socio-cognitive approach to test validation – a tool it uses to investigate a test's fitness for purpose. The book largely focuses on the exam board's General English speaking tests which use the paired face-to-face approach. It also touches on other approaches to assessing speaking, such as singleton face-to-face tests and computer-based tests – all essential parts of the assessment tool kit.

To find out more information on SiLT volumes, including how to order copies, please visit: [www.research.cambridgeesol.org/research-collaboration/silt](http://www.research.cambridgeesol.org/research-collaboration/silt)

commented: "The choice of topics in the three central units seems to me wise and shrewd, chosen with an eye to incorporating a wide range of disciplines (making the qualification suitable as preparation for a wide range of university courses) as well as staking a claim to 'relevance' in the world of today.

"Speaking personally, I would consider this qualification an excellent preparation for an undergraduate History degree – in many respects as good as or better than a conventional History A level, as it offers both an understanding of the distinctive practices of historians and exposure to the very wide range of disciplinary approaches from the social sciences on which academic historians now regularly draw."

## Can't speak, can't learn...

### ...what's the impact of non-native speakers in our schools?

The number of schoolchildren who do not speak English as their first language in the UK is increasing each year. Occasional media reports focus on the issue's negative influence on education. There are worries about the pressure it puts on teaching staff, that large concentrations of children with a poor grasp of English can lead to some schools being unfairly condemned by inspectors and that the pupils cannot access the benefits of their schooling.

What impact does this have on teachers and the education of more mainstream students? In short, how can we ensure every child can access the whole curriculum?

#### Join the debate.

To find out more scan the QR code or visit:

[www.cambridgeassessment.org.uk](http://www.cambridgeassessment.org.uk)



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### CAMBRIDGE ASSESSMENT

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## France adopts Cambridge language test

France's Ministry of the Interior is now using a test developed by Cambridge ESOL to confirm that applicants for citizenship can use French to the required standard.

Under the new 2012 rules, applicants in France can submit results from the French language version of the BULATS test to prove they have the minimum language skills needed for citizenship.

BULATS – the Business Language Testing Service – was developed by Cambridge ESOL in close collaboration with the Alliance Française which provides the French language version of the test.

The test is already widely recognised by organisations all over the world including the UK Border Agency and the authorities in several German States. It is widely used in France by organisations such as Air France, Airbus Industries, the Ministry of Defence, as well as the Council of Europe and OECD.

## Examining risk in examinations

The issue of risk in examinations is the theme of the 2012 biennial Cambridge Assessment Conference.

The conference, which will take place on Wednesday 10 October at Downing College, Cambridge, will address the issue of both obvious and hidden risk, ranging from those associated with the processing of tests and examinations, frequent structural change, regulation and the communication of risk itself.

Paul Newton, Director of the Cambridge Assessment Network, said: "The challenges of risk management in the context of national assessment systems should not be underestimated. This conference will provide an opportunity to reflect upon lessons from events of the past; to consider what might be learned from insights within other fields; and to reflect upon how best to confront the reality of risk in the future."

Drawing on experiences from the medical profession, keynote speaker Alastair Scotland, former Director and Medical Director of the National Clinical Assessment Service, will look at lessons learned from beyond the fields of assessment. The second keynote speaker, Ragnar Löfstedt, Director of the King's Centre for Risk Management, King's College London, will discuss the relationship between risk communication and regulation, and the challenges presented by new forms of regulation.

Details and to register for the event can be found at [www.canetwork.org.uk/conference2012](http://www.canetwork.org.uk/conference2012)

## Cambridge helps to prepare US students for college and career

Cambridge exams are central to a national pilot programme that seeks to make American high schools more globally competitive and more responsive to students' individual needs.

To date, schools in four US states are participating in the 'Excellence for All' programme – a voluntary pilot initiative developed by the National Center on Education and the Economy (NCEE). The programme is internationally benchmarked and designed to prepare students for success in college and careers. History, English, Maths, Science and Fine Arts syllabuses and exams from University of Cambridge International Examinations form part of the new curriculum for the majority of these schools.

College and career readiness is central to the US programme. Many high school students currently need remedial support upon starting college education and are ill prepared for the job market. This programme is designed to make them fully prepared.

The schools that joined the 'Excellence for All' initiative (formerly known as Board Examination Systems) can choose to offer programmes and qualifications from University of Cambridge International Examinations, one of the NCEE's certified providers of board examination systems.

Research by NCEE found that countries whose students typically outperform all others in international comparisons of academic achievement use some form of board exams systems which include high quality subject curricula, professional development for teachers, and assessments directly tied to the curriculum – and these are the principal reason for their success.