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INDIA DRIVE OF THE WORLD'S #1 TRANSNATIONAL SCHOOL EXAMS BOARD

Confidence levels are high and optimism is palpable in the high security headquarters of Cambridge International Examinations, UK, which is on an affiliations drive to win friends and influence in Indian primary-secondary education

Dilip Thakore

THE CAMBRIDGE (UK)-BASED Cambridge International Examinations board (CIE, estb.1858), which has 10,000 schools in 160 countries worldwide and 389 primary-secondaries in India affiliated with it, is on a major affiliations drive in the subcontinent, and India in particular. Schools signing up with the board are provided CIE's intensively-researched syllabuses and several associated services — including teacher training and development programmes — designed to stimulate the cognitive development and life skills of 5-19 year-olds, and prepare them for admission into top-ranked universities and life beyond academia, for an annual affiliation fee (Rs.4-10 lakh in India).

Curiously, although it is Britain's most well-known school-leaving (secondary and higher secondary) examinations board globally, CIE is not the UK's largest school examinations board. Currently, four exam boards offer secondary and higher secondary school-leaving certification in the UK with Pearson Education's Edexcel board testing and

certifying the largest number of school-leavers in Britain. Nevertheless, confidence levels are high and optimism is palpable in the modest but brisk and business-focused, high security headquarters of CIE sited at 1, Hills Road in the heritage town of Cambridge, which also hosts the eponymous 800-year-old university and parent organisation of CIE.

The optimism is warranted. In the board's academic year ended August 31, the number of global 'entries', i.e, number of subject papers written by students in CIE's high school-leaving International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE) crossed the 1-million milestone, lending substance to the CIE's claim that this examination board is "the world's largest provider of international education programmes and qualifications for 5-19 year-olds". Proof of the CIE management's intent to win friends and influence in India is provided by the board specially introducing its third series of Cambridge International AS and A level exams (hitherto offered in June and November worldwide) in March, to smooth the path of Indian students into this country's higher education institutions whose academic year begins in July/August. The Association of Indian Uni-



CIE chief executive Michael O'Sullivan (centre): winning friends and influence objective

versities and most varsities in India accept these higher secondary exams as equivalent to the class XII school-leaving exams of the indigenous CISCE, CBSE and state boards.

The introduction of CIE's third series of IGCSE (introduced in March 2015), and Cambridge International AS and A level exams this year specifically for India, is being widely interpreted as the precursor of a major schools affiliation drive by the UK-based school examinations board in a territory in which the Geneva-based International Baccalaureate Organisation (IBO) examination board, a relative newcomer on the Indian education scene — the first IBO-affiliated school was established in 1997 — also offers its primary, middle-years and higher secondary syllabuses, associated services and certification. Currently, IBO has 131 high-end, international schools countrywide affiliated with it.

Michael O'Sullivan, the highly qualified (Oxford, modern languages and Cambridge, linguistics), Chinese-fluent and hugely experienced international educator and former director of the British Council, China (2000-07), European Chamber of Commerce in China and the Cambridge Commonwealth, European and Overseas Trust (2008-13), who was appointed CEO of CIE in 2013, seems to relish the prospect of competition to win friends and influence

institutional affiliations in the Indian primary-secondary education market in which the prospering Indian middle class is becoming incrementally appreciative of the value of internationally acceptable K-12 education.

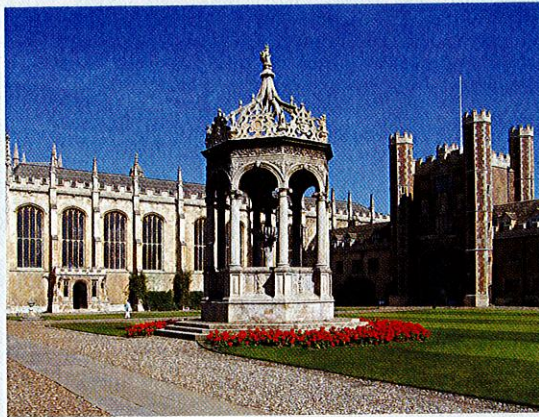
"There's huge and increasing demand for bilingual education including English — now the established language of business and diplomacy — from the rising middle class worldwide. With over 100 of our 600 employees continuously engaged in researching, designing and revising our syllabuses, our culture of consultation with the best minds in academia, business and industry to formulate syllabuses and curricula, our long tradition of endorsing high quality textbooks and strong links with the globally-respected University of Cambridge, Cambridge International Examinations provides the world's best syllabuses, curricula and a range of associated services to primary, secondary and higher secondary schools in the UK and abroad. This is why over 10,000 schools in 160 countries have signed up with us and the number of schools coming on board is growing by almost two per day," says O'Sullivan.

Evidently, the competition offered by IBO and other British exam boards — American school boards tend to be less outward looking — which are also aggressively marketing their syllabuses and services in newly emergent

CIE's Indian history

In 1858, the University of Cambridge (estb. 1209) promoted the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate (UCLES) to raise standards of school education in the UK by administering exams for people who were not members of the university. In that year, 370 school students in seven English cities wrote exams set by UCLES. In 1864 in the heyday of the British Empire, UCLES began examining students internationally, and 'public' (i.e private, exclusive) schools established in India by British administrators and missionaries such as the Lawrence Schools in Sanawar and Lovedale (Ooty), Bishop Cotton Shimla and Bangalore, St. Paul's, Darjeeling among others were quick to affiliate themselves with UCLES to write the board's Senior Cambridge high school exams.

After independence it took an epic struggle in the courts by the country's small Anglo-Indian community led by Frank Anthony, MP, to assert the right of religious and linguistic minorities to establish and administer schools of their choice, i.e, English medium schools governed by the Interstate Board for Anglo-Indian Education which later morphed into the Council for the Indian School Certificate Examinations (CISCE), which currently has 2,019 schools countrywide affiliated with it. In



Cambridge's Trinity College: *in loco parentis*

the mid-1990s after the liberalisation and deregulation of the Indian economy (1991), Cambridge International Examinations — the successor of UCLES — made a quiet re-entry into Indian school education. Since then, it has rapidly established itself as the country's most popular offshore international examinations board and has affiliated 389 schools which offer CIE's deeply-researched syllabuses and IGCSE (class X) and 'A' level (class XII) examinations. Some CIE facts and figures:

- CIE is the world's largest provider of international education programmes and qualifications for 5-19 year-olds
- Over 10,000 schools in more than 160 countries offer Cambridge programmes and qualifications.
- The Cambridge Primary Years Programme is taught in more than 1,200 schools in 100-plus countries
- Every year, CIE receives 620,000 subject entries (number of students multiplied by number of exam papers) for

its IGCSE (class X) exams

- Cambridge International AS and A Levels are written in 160 countries with more than 495,000 entries each year
- CIE runs over 1,000 teacher training programmes and events worldwide annually
- CIE sets 5.7 million exam question papers every year

countries, especially China and India in which rapidly multiplying middle class households are desperately looking for high quality contemporary education, doesn't unduly perturb O'Sullivan, who says that in the Indian subcontinent IBO and others have a "big gap to close". "It's Cambridge policy not to comment on the merits or demerits of other exam boards. However, we are not shy about highlighting our own strengths. The attraction of Cambridge affiliation and certification is that we offer over 55 subjects at the higher secondary 'A' level, with schools and students empowered to choose combinations of their choice. We don't enforce a blend as some other examination boards do. Moreover, we offer very clear syllabuses which are easy for teachers to comprehend

and follow, and are committed to continuously improving our internal research and assessment systems through widespread consultations with external institutions, including business and industry. We are focused on preparing children for the future and we enjoy the work," he says.

O'Sullivan's confidence in CIE being able to take on all competition in the UK and abroad is clearly rooted in the board's long history of designing school syllabuses and awarding certificates. Way back in 1858, Cambridge University (estb.1209) — for several centuries the most admired institution of higher education worldwide — promoted the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate (UCLES) to "raise standards in education by administering exams for

people who were not members of the University and inspecting schools". In that inaugural year, 370 school students in seven English cities wrote exams set by UCLES.

In 1864, the power and pittance of the British Empire was at its zenith, and the island nation's missionary educationists felt it incumbent upon themselves to discharge the white man's burden of civilising natives of the empire. Within the framework of imperial educationist Lord Macaulay's famous minute on Indian education (1835), they set about establishing an education system to create "a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern — a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect".

Vintage missionary schools in India such as Bishop Cotton (Shimla and Bangalore), Lawrence (Lovedale and Sanawar), St. Paul's and St. Joseph's, Darjeeling among a host of other high-end private schools were quick to sign affiliation agreements with UCLES. Even The Doon School, promoted in 1935 as a nationalist response to pre-independence India's Christian missionary schools, signed up for the Senior Cambridge syllabus and certification designed by UCLES for the colonies and outposts of the empire.

EVEN AFTER INDIA'S successful struggle for independence from British rule, which ended in 1947 but experienced the traumatic partition of the subcontinent into India and Pakistan, for almost two decades, the Senior Cambridge syllabus and certification was the clear first choice of India's most admired day and boarding schools. However in the early 1960s, Hindi language zealots of the cow-belt states of north India intent upon establishing Hindi as the sole national language, cast a shadow over the future of English-medium schools, particularly primary-secondaries affiliated with the imperialist, colonial etc UK-based UCLES.

It took an epic struggle in the Supreme Court by the country's small English-speaking Anglo-Indian community to assert the right of minorities to establish and administer education institutions of their choice decreed as a fundamental right under Article 30 (1) of the Constitution, to establish the Inter-State Board for Anglo-Indian Education. After a brief interregnum it transformed into the Council for the Indian School Certificate Examinations (CISCE, estb.1958), the successor school examination board of UCLES in India.

Currently, CISCE has 2,190 schools countrywide (including almost all former Senior Cambridge schools) affiliated with it. But even so, the right of religious and linguistic minorities to run English-medium schools in



Stobie: teacher development priority

free India would not have become a ground reality but for widespread anti-Hindi riots which broke out in the non-Hindi speaking states of south India in the mid-1960s. Meanwhile, UCLES/Senior Cambridge made a quiet exit from Indian education.

Since then, only after substantial liberalisation and deregulation of the Indian economy from Soviet-inspired licence-permit-quota raj and after the IBO-affiliated Mahindra United World College of India, Pune was established in 1997 following a 15-year struggle in the corridors of power in New Delhi, have greenfield schools affiliated with offshore examination boards been permitted to admit stu-

After anti-English zealots of the cow belt states cast a shadow over the future of English-medium schools in the 1960s, UCLES/Senior Cambridge made a quiet exit from India

dents in India.

Meanwhile back in the UK, in 1998, the schools examination board of Cambridge University was restructured. Three subsidiary exam boards were created within UCLES (subsequently renamed Cambridge Assessment in 2005) — CIE for international school examinations and certification; OCR, an examination and certification board for domestic schools and students, and Cambridge English Language Assessment which conducts the global IELTS (International English Language Testing System).

After liberalisation and particularly in the new millennium, CIE has made a quiet re-entry into India and within 15 years has signed up 389 primary-secondaries as affiliated institutions. An impressive achievement, but not as impressive as in neighbouring Pakistan which hosts 600 CIE-affiliated schools.

Clearly with its 158 years' experience of international syllabus formulation and design for primary-secondaries, its institutional memory and linkages in India, its close relationship with the Cambridge University Press (the highly respected textbooks publisher) and with the top-ranked Cambridge University, in the race for signing up high-end schools as affiliates in India, CIE has the inside track. And the affiliation fees (Rs.4 lakh for primaries and Rs.10 lakh for full school (classes V-XII) at current rates of exchange) demanded by CIE are substantially less than fees charged by the Geneva-based IBO (Rs.30 lakh).

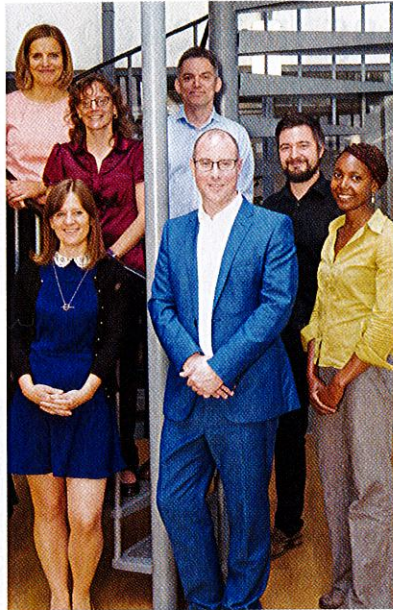
Schools signing up with CIE receive the board's deeply researched syllabuses, branding rights, standardised assessment services and supplementary resources including free-of-charge online teacher training (dedicated teacher training and workshop participation is chargeable), and opportunity to participate in teacher and student exchange programmes with CIE schools in 160 countries.

Although for managements of primary-secondaries intent upon delivering real as opposed to ritual learn-

ing outcomes to students, the prime attractions of CIE affiliation are the board's contemporary, innovative syllabuses, standardised assessment system and globally valued certification, the supplementary resources and services provided by this vintage school examinations board are perhaps equally valuable. Among them: teacher training and professional development, advising affiliated schools to formulate their institutional philosophy, and curriculum and pedagogy development aid and advice.

“**CONTINUOUS DELIVERY** of teacher training and professional development programmes to our schools is a high priority focus area for CIE. During the past year, we have held 1,300 teacher education and development events around the world and 60 face-to-face training workshops for affiliated schools in India. Over the next 12 months, we intend to establish more Professional Development Qualification centres in which our master trainers will provide training and professional development services not only to teachers of CIE schools, but to all teachers interested in enhancing their skills. This initiative is inspired by our belief that the CIE syllabus must be culturally enriched and taught differently in every country, and that teachers need to practice active learning which challenges students to strive to achieve their best,” says **Dr. Tristian Stobie**, the Cambridge-based director of education at CIE. An economics, political science and education alumnus of Edinburgh University, Stobie acquired a wealth of teaching and admin experience in New Zealand, Lesotho, and the UK and served with the Geneva-based IBO for 25 years prior to signing up with CIE in 2011.

Teacher training and development which is of vital importance to translate syllabuses into meaningful curriculums and classroom pedagogies, is only one of the services and resources the CIE management provides affiliated schools. According to **Guy**



Chapman (centre fore): services bouquet

Chapman, a Spanish and French graduate of Oxford University and former advertising professional who served with the British Council (2003-14) in Kazakhstan, Jordan, Lebanon and Iraq and is currently CIE's deputy director of marketing, communications and customer relationships, the board provides a wealth of support and resources for teachers in affiliated schools. The package includes online supplementary resources for teachers, aid and advice to schools to qualify for affiliation, guidance for the registration process, convening online discussion forums and offline workshops and a “unique consultation process” for syllabus development and examinations scheduling. The latter has resulted in the introduction of the March examination series in India for IGCSE exams last year and the A level exams in 2016.

“With the middle class growing in developing countries around the world, the demand for bilingual including English language education and well-designed syllabuses is rising exponentially. This year, the number of entries for CIE exams has risen by 10 percent worldwide and 15 percent in India, and we expect the number of entries worldwide to grow by 40 percent over the next five years. In CIE,

we are committed to supporting our schools. During the past year, our support personnel made hundreds of visits to affiliated schools for teacher development workshops, seminars and discussion forums,” says Chapman.

After the IMF/World Bank forced liberalisation of the Indian economy in 1991 when it became embarrassingly apparent that India's education system lagged way behind developed OECD countries, and was hopelessly trailing China and South-east Asia in terms of adult literacy and children's learning outcomes, the *neta-babu* brotherhood, which had driven Indian education into a dead-end, was compelled to loosen its chokehold on private initiatives in education. The subsequent promotion of a large and growing number of high-end private, including new genre capital-intensive international schools to cater to the demand from the post-liberalisation middle class, has prompted aspirational schools to roll out the red carpet for CIE, which has renewed its India association with vigour and enthusiasm by establishing a South Asia office in Mumbai to market its syllabuses and services in India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Nepal.

“CIE has always been serious about serving the large and growing market for high quality globally accepted K-12 education in India. The special third series of March IGCSE and A level exams we have introduced to synchronise our exams with college admissions for Indian students is proof of our commitment to help schools and students in India to raise teaching-learning standards to international levels. And the response of school managements and parent communities to Cambridge's well-researched and designed syllabuses and services has been very positive. In 2004, the number of Cambridge-affiliated schools in India was a mere 50. Since then, the number has risen to 250 in 2014 and 389 this year. The feedback from our schools is that they are very satisfied with our syllabuses, teacher development and other support ser-



CIE South Asia director Ruchira Ghosh (second left): third series proof

vices to enable them to develop excellent curriculums,” says **Ruchira Ghosh**, regional director (South Asia) who has assembled a ten-member team in Mumbai to market and provide aid and advice to over 500 primary-secondaries affiliated with CIE in South Asia.

The diligence with which the CIE management has developed the board’s well-structured syllabuses and a full suite of supplementary services, has impressed committed educators in India where education regulatory bodies (UGC, AICTE, CBSE etc) tend

to be headed by under-qualified political appointees whose priority is to satisfy brash politicians and overweening generalist bureaucrats, rather than educators and students.

“Mallya Aditi has been affiliated with CIE for over 20 years and we are very satisfied with this association. The board’s syllabuses, especially of social sciences and humanities subjects, are designed to stimulate application of concepts to real life situations, and develop the writing, analytical, discursive and creative skills of students,” says **Satish**

Jayarajan, principal (since 2003) of the Mallya Aditi International School, Bangalore (estb.1984), consistently ranked among the country’s Top 5 co-ed day schools in the annual EducationWorld India School Rankings (2016 rank: #2).

D R. VANDANA LULLA, principal of the Podar International School, Mumbai who has a Ph D in education from Columbia University, is also very pleased that Podar International – ranked #12 country-wide in the international day schools category in EWISR 2016 – was the first school in India’s commercial capital to sign up with CIE in 2003. “Their intelligently designed syllabuses – revised every six years – challenge the cognitive and critical thinking skills of students and enable them to apply knowledge. Moreover, their teacher training and support services are excellent and much more affordable than of other offshore examination boards,” says Lulla.

However, it’s not all petals and encomiums for CIE across the widely dispersed and heterogeneous Indian school education landscape. **Robbi Subba**, the knowledgeable founder-director of the Himali Boarding School, Kurseong (estb.1978), ranked #1 co-ed boarding school in West Bengal in EWISR 2016, which signed up

Mallya Aditi’s Jayarajan (right): satisfactory association



Dr. Vandana Lulla with Cambridge VC Sir Leszek Borysiewicz



with CIE almost a decade ago, is less than satisfied with the UK-based exam board's low-profile in the seven sister states of north-east India. "The overwhelming majority of parents in the north-east don't know anything about CIE, and their online support services don't work because of this region's poor internet connectivity. Even in Kolkata, CIE has a negligible number of affiliated schools. The board needs to step up its brand promotion and service delivery efforts in eastern India and the north-east in particular," says Subba, a certified CIE master trainer.

Be that as it may, there's no doubt that CIE's re-entry into India's primary-secondary education sector is a positive development. The poor scores recorded by sample batches of students selected from a cross-section of India's secondary schools in PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) 2010 (in which the first ever batch of 15-year-olds from India



Subba: brand promotion advice

was ranked 73rd among 74 national teams) and in the National Achievement Survey 2015 conducted by the National Council for Educational Research & Training (see *EW* June 2016 cover story), as also the *Annual Status of Education Reports* published

by Pratham, which routinely reports declining learning outcomes in rural primaries countrywide, are strong signals that root and branch reform is required in India's laggard K-12 education system, especially in the areas of syllabus formulation, design and teacher training and development.

Against this dismal backdrop, CIE's entry into this country's primary-secondary education space and particularly the intensifying competition between this UK-based exams board and the Geneva-based IBO is certain to prompt all 34 school examination boards countrywide, including the pan-India CISCE and CBSE, to repair if not overhaul their archaic syllabuses, prescribed curriculums and teacher training programmes. And the prime beneficiaries of this development will be the 230 million children in India's primary and secondary schools at the start of every academic year, struggling within a fast-obsolescing education system.

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“We revise our syllabuses every six years”

Dilip Thakore interviewed Michael O’Sullivan, CEO of Cambridge International Examinations, in Cambridge, UK. Excerpts:

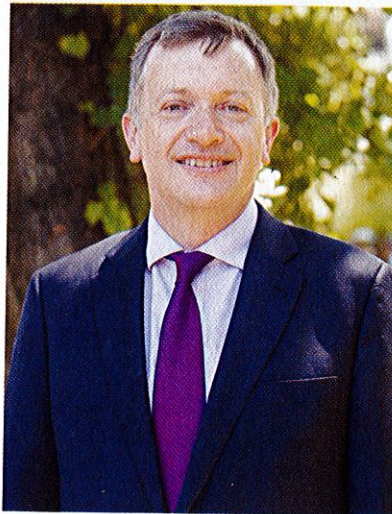
Although CIE is the largest provider of international education worldwide, it isn’t Britain’s largest provider of primary and secondary education in terms of the number of affiliated schools and students. How do you explain this seeming paradox?

There are five major school examination and certification boards in the UK — OCR, Edexcel, AQA and WJEC as well as Cambridge International Examinations. It’s quite normal for a school to be affiliated with one or more of them for different subjects.

For example, a school may choose to affiliate with OCR — itself also a part of Cambridge Assessment — for science subjects and Cambridge International Examinations for the social sciences and humanities, or vice versa, with the choice often left to departmental heads of schools. However, students of several top-ranked UK schools, including Eton, Winchester and Westminster, take our exams.

The International Baccalaureate Organisation, which also offers K–12 international education and qualifications, is reportedly closing the gap in terms of number of affiliated schools. What are the differentiating features of CIE syllabuses and administration?

We have a rule in Cambridge of not commenting upon the characteristics or performance of other examination boards. Therefore all I can say is that they have a big gap to close. The differentiating features of Cambridge syllabuses, curriculums and supplementary services provided to affiliated schools are that we offer students a wide choice of subjects, especially at the higher secondary A level, leaving it to schools and students to make their own blends. We don’t enforce a blend. Secondly we provide very clear syllabuses. This is important for teachers because it enables them to master teaching and the curriculum development process.



And thirdly, we are committed to continuous revision of our syllabuses and assessment processes. Our objective is to prepare children for the future, and we enjoy the work.

A rising complaint of parents and students is that school syllabuses tend to be out of sync with the requirements and needs of academia and industry. To what extent is this criticism applicable to CIE?

At Cambridge, we are aware of this criticism of exams in general. That’s why we revise our syllabuses every six years through a painstaking revision process with the involvement of universities, industry and business to ensure that students of affiliated schools are thoroughly prepared for university, and are equipped with strong foundational education for industry, business and the professions. The revision process has multiple strands and engages more than 100 of our employees. As part of this process, we work with a range of publishers to provide high-quality resources such as books, CD/DVDs and websites to help teachers plan and deliver Cambridge programmes.

One of CIE’s objectives is to work with governments abroad to customise their syllabuses. Is the board engaged with any government (Central or state) in India towards this end? To what extent are CIE syllabuses cus-

tomised for Indian conditions?

Cambridge personnel are currently working with governments in some 30 countries, including, among others, Singapore, Egypt, Kazakhstan, Malaysia and Mongolia, helping them refresh their syllabuses and exam assessment systems. Although a majority of our affiliated schools overseas are privately-promoted institutions, we have no hesitation about working with government and/or government schools.

What are the teacher education and development services that the board provides to affiliated schools around the world?

We offer three types of support. Firstly, face-to-face, syllabus-specific training, for which we send out experts from the UK to affiliated schools. Currently, we have 200 expert trainers, and the number will rise next year. Secondly, we provide in-service professional development programmes and certification to teachers through our Professional Development Qualification centres worldwide. The programme is accredited by the UCL Institute of Education. Thirdly, we offer on-line teacher training and exchange programmes as also resources such as workshops, events, global conferences and so on.

What are your growth plans for CIE in India and beyond?

Currently, 389 schools in India are affiliated with Cambridge International Examinations. Over the next five years, the number will rise to 500, as we expect 25 schools to sign up with us every year. Affiliating with Cambridge is not difficult, as we are flexible about helping and preparing schools for affiliation and our fee and levies are affordable. Nor do we expect schools to develop dazzling infrastructure. Except for requirements about the security of exams and the safety of labs, we are flexible about infrastructure norms. It’s a school’s capacity to offer quality education and desire to do better which matters most to us.