Course in the cloud helps asylum seekers

More than 1,600 people have signed up to a new free cloud-based course to help refugees and asylum seekers prepare to study at a UK university.

The ‘Aim Higher’ Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) is one of the projects to come out of a conference to explore digital solutions to some of the challenges facing refugees and asylum seekers in accessing English language education. The MOOC provides support in a range of areas including identifying English language requirements, offering tips for improving English and suggesting how to choose the right course and university. It also offers information on the UK admissions process, along with how to access legal, financial and student support services.

The course has been developed by Cambridge English Language Assessment and will sit on FutureLearn, a social learning platform. A number of organisations and individuals who attended the Techfugees conference (featured in the spring edition of Achieve) have had an input into the content of the course. Ahmad al-Rashid, Continued on page 3

Rassina Assad (left) and Ahmad al-Rashid (right) are fronting the Aim Higher MOOC.
New to classroom tech? Help is at hand

A new website has been launched to give language teachers the confidence and skills to bring technology into their teaching.

The Digital Teacher has been developed by Cambridge English Language Assessment in consultation with practising language teachers and trainers.

“We know that technology affords many benefits for language learning, but using it can be daunting,” said Andrew Nye from Cambridge English.

“The Digital Teacher can be used in the same way as a guidebook, to make sure teachers know where they are and where they are going, and to enable them to build their confidence using technology in the classroom.”

Find out more at www.thedigitalteacher.com

From Cyprus to the UK

A school in Cyprus has become the 750th school in Europe to join the Cambridge global community. Aspire Private British School in Paphos has been entering private candidates for Cambridge qualifications for a number of years but has now registered as a Cambridge Associate School.

Principal Sharon Hadjiyiakoumi said: “This will help us to extend the range of subjects available to our students. We are particularly interested in Cambridge IGCSE Global Perspectives, a ground-breaking and stimulating course that stretches across traditional subject boundaries and develops transferable skills.”

Bursary winner features in viral campaign

One of the winners of an OCR bursary to study at Cambridge has taken part in a campaign to encourage more black men to apply to the university.

Michael Samuelson-Butalah featured in a photograph of students at the University which went viral on social media and made headlines on the BBC. The Cambridge University African Caribbean Society, which was behind the shoot, said the purpose was to “remind young black individuals that Cambridge is for us”.

Michael, pictured bottom row first left, was awarded the OCR bursary in September 2016 towards his undergraduate studies at Cambridge. Originally from Worcester, he is currently studying medicine at St John’s College. OCR’s bursary scheme, which is now in its 14th year, arises from the exam board’s historical links with the West Midlands.

New Research Director appointed

Cambridge Assessment has announced the appointment of a new Research Director. Tom Bramley takes over from Sylvia Green, who has retired after 22 years at the international exams group, which has the largest research capability of its kind in the world.

Tom, who joined Cambridge Assessment in 1995 in what was then its Research and Evaluation Division, has been Assistant/ Deputy Director to Sylvia Green for the past 11 years, leading the Educational Measurement team.

He now takes over responsibility for a team of 27 which is dedicated both to validating, improving and developing assessments and services, and to influencing thinking and policy on educational assessment nationally and internationally.

Much of Tom’s research work has related to standards, especially exploring ways of involving expert judgement in the process of setting exam grade boundaries, and he is a member of the Standards Advisory Group at the England exam regulator Ofqual. A familiar face in the research world, his work is widely published and he has given numerous presentations on assessment topics including basic statistics, item and test development, reliability, validity, test equating, standard setting and maintaining, and Rasch measurement.

Tom said: “I’m delighted to take up this new role and am now looking forward to continuing the good work of the Research Division at a time of significant reform of qualifications and assessments in England.”

Tim Oates CBE, Group Director of Assessment Research and Development, said: “I have great pleasure in confirming Tom Bramley as the new Director. His accumulated expertise in assessment and his wide internal and external networks equip him strongly for the role.

“I welcome the opportunity of working with him in planning and delivering the wide-ranging research programme which provides essential underpinning to the domestic and international work of the Group.”

Talent team recognised

Cambridge Assessment’s Talent Development team has been endorsed by the Learning and Performance Institute, which recognises the best of workplace learning from across the globe.

Naomi Lockwood won gold in the Chief Learning Officer of the Year category, recognition of her achievements, as Head of Learning and Development, in building a culture of learning strategy at Cambridge Assessment.

“One of the challenges when I first came to Cambridge Assessment two-and-a-half years ago was how to build a culture of learning at an organisation whose mission is all about learning and education,” said Naomi, who was up against business heavyweight including Barclays and Dell in a record year for entries.

“Our strategy involved putting learning in people’s hands through enabling access to formal, informal, virtual and face-to-face learning. It has been just over a year since the launch of the strategy and the shift in the organisation and the thirst for learning can be seen across the Group.”

Liz Allan, Group Human Resources Director at Cambridge Assessment, said: “I am very proud of our Talent team – they are inspirational, values-led and their impact on the direction of learning and development within an international organisation like Cambridge Assessment is profound and a core enabler of our goal to be a Times 100 Best Company to Work For.”

Naomi Lockwood and Jo Byrne, from Cambridge Assessment’s Talent team, are pictured above with the TV presenter Claudia Winkleman – who hosted the event.
who delivered the keynote speech at the conference and Rassina Asaad, who took part, will be fronting the MOOC – both are refugees who have applied for courses at UK universities.

Chloe Shaw from Cambridge English said: “Applying to university in the UK can be a daunting task, especially if you are a non-native speaker of English. We developed this course out of a passion for increasing access to education for people from challenging situations. Our experts at Cambridge pooled their knowledge to create content that will be a helping hand to anyone wanting to find out what the English language requirements are and how they can get up to speed in this area.”

“We also worked with other experts to make sure students taking the course will also get accurate and up-to-date advice on a range of other areas needed for a positive study experience. It really is a one-stop shop for people on the road to higher education in the UK.”

The course launched last month, with further courses set to take place. To register for the November course, go to the FutureLearn website at www.futurelearn.com/courses/aim-higher

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**Governments and policy**

**A real change in language education**

There are two main goals of European educational policies: preparation for life as active citizens and personal development. Following on from the European Union Recommendation of December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning, supported by other European Commission documents and many Council of Europe tools, the Italian Ministry of Education has reshaped the organisation of the school system. Under two education reform laws, the Italian education system has been and is now focusing on key competences and learning outcomes; building student-centred curricula; identifying key features of quality systems; and setting the standards. In Italy, English is mandatory for 13 years of a child’s schooling; and two foreign languages are studied in lower secondary and upper secondary schools. While in some secondary schools where the main focus is on languages, as many as three are mandatory.

The Italian decision to implement a competence-based approach has offered the opportunity to redefine language education policies and to set strategic objectives, aimed at fostering quality teaching and innovative methodologies.

Regulations approved in 2010 reshaped our school curricula, defining students’ profiles and outcomes setting standards for all subjects, developing Foreign Language syllabuses on the basis of the Common European Framework of Reference, and making the teaching of a subject in a foreign language (CLIL – Content and Language Integrated Learning) mandatory in the last year of all upper secondary schools. At the same time, a new scheme for initial and in-service teacher training was developed and trainers’ and teachers’ profiles were defined.

The mainstreaming of CLIL is proving to be a real change agent in education since it helps break down barriers – whether educational, cognitive, cultural or geographical – enables integration in the curriculum, and benefits cross-section and cross-curricular dialogue. It requires a focus on key areas, including the identification of needs and resources; training and qualifications for teachers; the development of materials and classroom applications, and certification for students and teachers. The outcome so far has been new ways of planning, implementing and evaluating, and a focus on competences and skills which places the student at the centre of the learning process.

Above all, key criteria to be taken into consideration for ‘managing the change’ are: convergence, flexibility and sustainability.

Gisella Langé is Foreign Languages Inspector at the Italian Ministry of Education.
Education heavyweights to boost teacher training

Two education heavyweights have entered into a partnership to deliver professional development for teachers in Indonesia.

The Putera Sampoerna Foundation, which since 2003 has promoted a better quality of education for Indonesia through its Sampoerna Schools System and School Development Outreach, has joined up with Cambridge International Examinations. The partnership will give teachers in Indonesia an opportunity to improve their competence in the field of English-medium international education.

Indonesian teachers will also have the opportunity to become accredited as Cambridge teacher trainers themselves, which will enable them to train other teachers professionally at schools in the region that adopt the Cambridge curriculum. This marks the first time that Cambridge International Examinations is working with a third party in Indonesia to identify and recruit local professional trainers.

Gusman Yahya, Head of Putera Sampoerna Foundation – School Development Outreach (PSF SDO) said: “As part of our commitment to improve the quality of educators, PSF SDO actively engages with highly reputable international education institutions to continuously produce quality graduates who are able to compete in the global market and prepare them to be work ready and world ready by providing comprehensive educational experience. The partnership with Cambridge will create bigger opportunities, in terms of access and affordability, for schools and educators to have high-quality professional development.”

Teacher training proves popular in Pakistan

Dozens of teachers attended a series of training events in Pakistan to help them gain the skills and confidence they need to deliver lectures in English.

The sessions, held in Lahore, trained teachers from Punjab public colleges and universities, introducing them to internationally recognised qualifications and courses from Cambridge English Language Assessment. A number of attendees expressed an interest in enrolling themselves in these formal teaching qualifications.

One of the attendees, Atiqca Bano, who is from a Government college in Lahore, said the course had been a great experience and that “such training should be arranged frequently to enhance teachers’ capacities”. Another stated that the training was “informative, interactive and interesting”.

Ramiz Haddadin, Cambridge English Regional Commercial Head for the region, said:

“Ongoing teacher training is key to ensuring teachers and students have a positive experience in the classroom. In Pakistan there is a growing number of teachers delivering lectures in English and it’s essential that they have the skills they need to do this with confidence.”

The training was organised by Higher Education Department, Government of the Punjab and Institute of Career Development, and due to the success of the events, more were organised.

Lights, camera, action

It is a subject with an established academic history and now UK exam board OCR is offering it for the first time as a GCSE.

Film Studies forms part of the final wave of 30 new, reformed OCR qualifications that will be introduced into UK classrooms this September, bringing the total of new qualifications it has developed since 2015 for teaching to 100.

The new GCSE gives students the chance to learn about representation, narrative and genre – the structural elements of storytelling – through arguably the most accessible and engaging audiovisual medium of them all, film. Students will look at six films, from a 1930s Hollywood classic to contemporary non-English-language films. They will also apply their knowledge and understanding of how films are constructed by researching, planning, creating and evaluating their own film-based production.

OCR has also redeveloped its A Level in Film Studies, which pushes further, requiring the study of 12 set films over two years, along with the production of students’ own short films or screenplays. It also sees the introduction of critical debates and takes into account different modes of filmmaking.

Rachael Carlton, OCR’s Subject Specialist, said: “We’re really excited about these new qualifications. We’ve developed them to enrich the curriculum and enable learners to access a subject with a long, established academic history at Higher Education in both the UK and overseas.

“The ethos behind all our new Film developments has been to build upon all the great feedback we received in 2016 from surveys, teacher advisory groups and stakeholders.”
‘Volatility happens’, new research reveals

Volatility in UK schools’ GCSE exam results is normal, quantifiable and predictable, according to a report issued just before the major teaching union conferences in England.

Cambridge Assessment researchers Tom Benton and Cara Crawford said that fluctuations are to be expected and can be largely explained by a change in the students or even just simple chance. In some years pupils will perform better than expected, while in other years pupils will perform worse. For example, based on measurable changes in cohorts, one in five schools were expected to have large changes in their percentage of A*-C English Literature GCSE results between 2014 and 2015. Only slightly more than this actually did.

The researchers said the study, Volatility happens: Understanding variation in schools’ GCSE results, will enable schools in the UK to manage expectations and mean heads and governors can interpret changes in performance appropriately. The research builds on an earlier study that ruled out exam grade boundaries and marking as major components of volatility. The current research adds an understanding of just how much volatility can be accounted for by the routine changes in students between years and normal variations in individual students’ performance in a particular exam.

“It happens also because each year different students enter Year 11 at each school and therefore they are not identical to the group of students that sat for the previous year’s GCSEs at that school.”

You can read the full report on the Cambridge Assessment website at www.cambridgeassessment.org.uk/our-research

Hong Kong first

An international exam board has held one of its schools conferences in Hong Kong for the first time. Cambridge International Examinations welcomed more than 200 delegates to its Cambridge Schools Conference (CSC) the theme of which was ‘Leading Learning’.

Held at the University of Hong Kong in May, the event heard keynote speeches from Professor Yin Cheong Cheng from the Education University of Hong Kong, multi-award-winning author Nicola Morgan and Dr Mark Winterbottom, Senior Lecturer at the Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge.

The organisers say that demand for Cambridge international education is growing strongly in the region, and it was a great opportunity to bring schools together.

Work is already underway on planning the next series of CSCs, which will be on the theme of ‘Learning and Achievement for All’.

Multilingual meeting

Language experts from across Europe came together to discuss how to make connections between learning, teaching and assessment, at a major language conference in Italy.

The Association of Language Testers in Europe (ALTE) sixth international conference in Bologna brought together more than 500 delegates and over 200 speakers from 31 countries, including Ministries of Education.

Cambridge English Language Assessment is a founder member of ALTE, which has been working for more than 25 years to promote multilingualism across Europe and beyond by supporting institutions which produce examinations and certification for language learners.

There were a number of contributions from Cambridge English, ALTE partners and China’s National Education Examinations Authority. There has been some excellent feedback from the event, including a very positive letter from the European Commission.
Reflecting on reflective learning

Students who understand how they learn and teachers who understand how they teach are better able to improve their performance, according to education experts at an international conference.

More than 200 educators from almost 180 schools attended the Pakistan Schools Conference in Karachi, which was on the theme of ‘Reflective Learning’ and hosted by Cambridge International Examinations.

Principals discussed how to encourage reflective practice among both students and teachers, including techniques for managing and evaluating reflective learning and how to encourage an open and honest school culture where mistakes are viewed as opportunities to learn.

Speakers included Mark Winterbottom, Senior Lecturer, Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge, Dr Charles Wall, Principal, Karachi Grammar School, Michael O’Sullivan, Chief Executive, Cambridge International Examinations and Christopher Hunt, Director, Sindh and Balochistan, British Council Pakistan. A panel discussion also explored ideas for encouraging honesty when reflecting on teaching and learning.

Mr Simons, who worked under former Prime Ministers Gordon Brown and David Cameron, was until recently Head of Education at the think tank Policy Exchange. He has just been appointed Director at the not-for-profit Varkey Foundation.

In a seminar held by the Cambridge Assessment Network, Mr Simons gave an example of the complexity of the system – if a parent in England has a problem with their child’s school, who do they go to if the head teacher and governors are not able to help? He said the answer stretched to more than four paragraphs, including the local authority, the Department for Education and the Secretary of State, the inspectorate Ofsted, the Education Funding Agency and the relevant Regional School Commissioner.

The fact that parents don’t really understand what they have to do on a frankly very common occurrence shows that we have an issue,” he said.

He said that up until the Butler Act in 1944 – which ensured all children would have secondary education for the first time – central government in the UK had not legislated much on education. Since then, however, “having started late, it rushed ahead with the zeal of a convert”. He said this had created a system full of “hidden wires, junction boxes and additional cabling tacked on at different intervals, with no one person having a clear view of the whole structure”. This, he concluded, had led to a lack of parliamentary scrutiny, a lack of democratic legitimacy, perverse incentives and unforeseen consequences, but above all a lack of consent from schools and teachers.

Mr Simons expands upon his seminar in an essay that is to mark the start of the conference.

He concluded by saying the challenge for policymakers was to recognise the weaknesses of both the “historical hands-off approach” and the more recent top-down or contractual management approach.

“We need to work out when and where law can be used, and make it efficacious to do so,” he said.

Mr Simons expands upon his seminar in an essay that is part of a collection published by Policy Exchange. Nice aims, shame that the law’s a mess… also features an essay from Cambridge Assessment’s Group Director of Assessment Research and Development Tim Oates CBE, in which he calls for policy to be clearly and coherently reinforced by legislation.

“These essays are not an attack on policy but are designed to support policymakers,” Tim said. “Good housekeeping in respect of legislation is an important element of statecraft, and should not be neglected.”

Good housekeeping needed, says former government adviser

The education system in England has never been more fragmented or more difficult to manage and explain, a former UK government adviser told a Cambridge seminar.

Jonathan Simons said the growth of academy schools in England in particular meant that there was a pressing need for a new model of educational governance, a “suitable toolkit for a decentralised and complex education ecosystem”.

Michael O’Sullivan said: “The power of reflection in education is brought home to me every time I meet Cambridge learners who show awareness and understanding of their own learning processes. Such students are evidently more consistently motivated to learn, and more capable of learning.”

The Pakistan Schools Conference has become an annual event to help Cambridge schools share knowledge and ideas. A principal who attended the conference said it had been an excellent learning opportunity for participants: “We not only learn immensely from the keynote speakers, but from our colleagues too and take back home many points to reflect upon afterwards. Cambridge is striving to be an education system which does not prize test scores as the ultimate goal, but wants its teachers and learners to have a strong virtue of reflection as well.”
Who’s king of the castle?

Dozens of teachers have taken part in workshops to explore an integral part of the new, reformed History GCSEs in the UK – the study of the historic environment.

The built environment provides significant evidence about the lives and beliefs of people in the past and a stimulating context in which young people can study history. In order to support teachers and learners to engage with historic sites, UK exam board OCR’s History team has been working closely with a range of partners, from national organisations such as English Heritage and Historic Royal Palaces, to local ones like Norfolk Museums.

One of the most popular options for schools is ‘castles’. Working with English Heritage, OCR held events recently for history teachers at Dover and Kenilworth Castles. More than 50 teachers attended the events, which involved tours of the sites, workshops with historians and curators, as well as sessions with OCR’s subject advisers. At Dover Castle, Paul Pattison, English Heritage’s Senior Properties Historian, kicked off the day with a talk looking back at the history of the site, before teachers moved outside to look at the development of the castle and explore the rich history of the individual buildings. One of the largest castles in the UK, Dover was founded in the 11th century, though the site’s historic importance can be traced back to at least the Iron Age. More events to support the understanding of historic environments are planned, including one at Battle, site of the Norman Invasion in 1066.

Teachers enjoy a guided tour of the UK’s Supreme Court at a recent conference in London.

Teachers get their day in court

The event, staged by UK exam board OCR, heard from speakers including Professor William Twining, Quain Professor of Jurisprudence Emeritus at University College London, and David Allen Green, law and policy commentator at the Financial Times. It also heard from Vicky Bryant, Head of Law at Carmel College in Merseyside – who spoke about how to teach the new A Level in Law – while Robert Hiscocks, of BPP Law School in London, talked about helping students learn the law of tort.

Ewan Brady, Subject Advisor at OCR, also spoke to delegates about the exam board’s support for teachers, including resources and Continuing Professional Development.

The event, which drew people from as far and wide as Blackpool, Hereford and Bradford, was staged in conjunction with the Association of Law Teachers, which was involved in the development of the subject content for the new A Level in Law.

Saris, smiles and study

Delegates from Sri Lanka have just completed a bespoke training course on the principles and practice of high-stakes assessment.

The course came about after the Cambridge Assessment Network was approached by the Department of Examinations in Sri Lanka to run a tailor-made course. The two-week, residential programme covered assessment design and administration, and was delivered by experts from across the Cambridge Assessment Group. The programme also included a visit to its printing and despatch warehouse as well as a walking tour of the historic city and a formal dinner at Magdalene College, Cambridge University.

The emphasis throughout the two weeks was on interactive learning, and debate and discussion was encouraged between the 14 Sri Lankan participants and those delivering sessions on the course.

For more information on bespoke and tailored training courses go to: www.canetwork.org.uk/bespoke.
Premier League Maths

Over 800 teachers alone took part in a free week-long festival of maths held this summer.

The event, run by UK exam board OCR, culminated in a one-day conference held at London’s Emirates Stadium, the home of Arsenal Football Club.

Designed to help teachers prepare for teaching reformed A Level Maths qualifications from this September, the first four days of the festival saw a series of webinars hosted by OCR and colleagues from the maths field. The final day of the festival saw keynote presentations from Charlie Stripp, Chief Executive of the charity Mathematics in Education and Industry, and from the team at Underground Mathematics, a project which provides free web-based resources that support the teaching and learning of post-16 mathematics.

More than 300 teachers attended spring events run by OCR about the new qualifications, bringing the total engaging with its new Maths and Further Maths A Levels to over 1,000.

English learners battle it out on new mobile app

A new mobile app has been created which allows language learners around the world to go head-to-head in an English language quiz.

Quiz your English has been created by the same experts in Cambridge who produce the popular IELTS test taken by 2.9 million people each year. Players can challenge their friends, or people from around the world through social media, to ‘quiz it out’ to see who comes out on top for their vocabulary and grammar skills. They get feedback on their performance and are ranked on a global leaderboard, which has already clocked up thousands of players. The app also allows players to organise rematches at the click of a button.

Geoff Stead, Director of Digital and New Product Development from Cambridge English Language Assessment, said: “We thought we’d create a bit of healthy competition for the millions of English language learners looking for ways to build their skills. Quiz your English lets players battle it out with other learners around the world. Let’s face it, who doesn’t like a quiz? Gaming can really increase engagement and motivation and in this case it’s given us a perfect platform for helping learners practise and improve their English in a really fun way”.

Content is developed in line with Cambridge English’s globally recognised exams: First, First for Schools and IELTS. All content is at levels of B1–B2 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, which is an international standard in language ability.

This app is designed for both Android and iOS. It’s free to download and play, with in-app purchases to download additional content.