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*July 2019*



The latest news from Cambridge Assessment, the University's international exams group.  
[cambridgeassessment.org.uk](http://cambridgeassessment.org.uk)

## Relationships matter

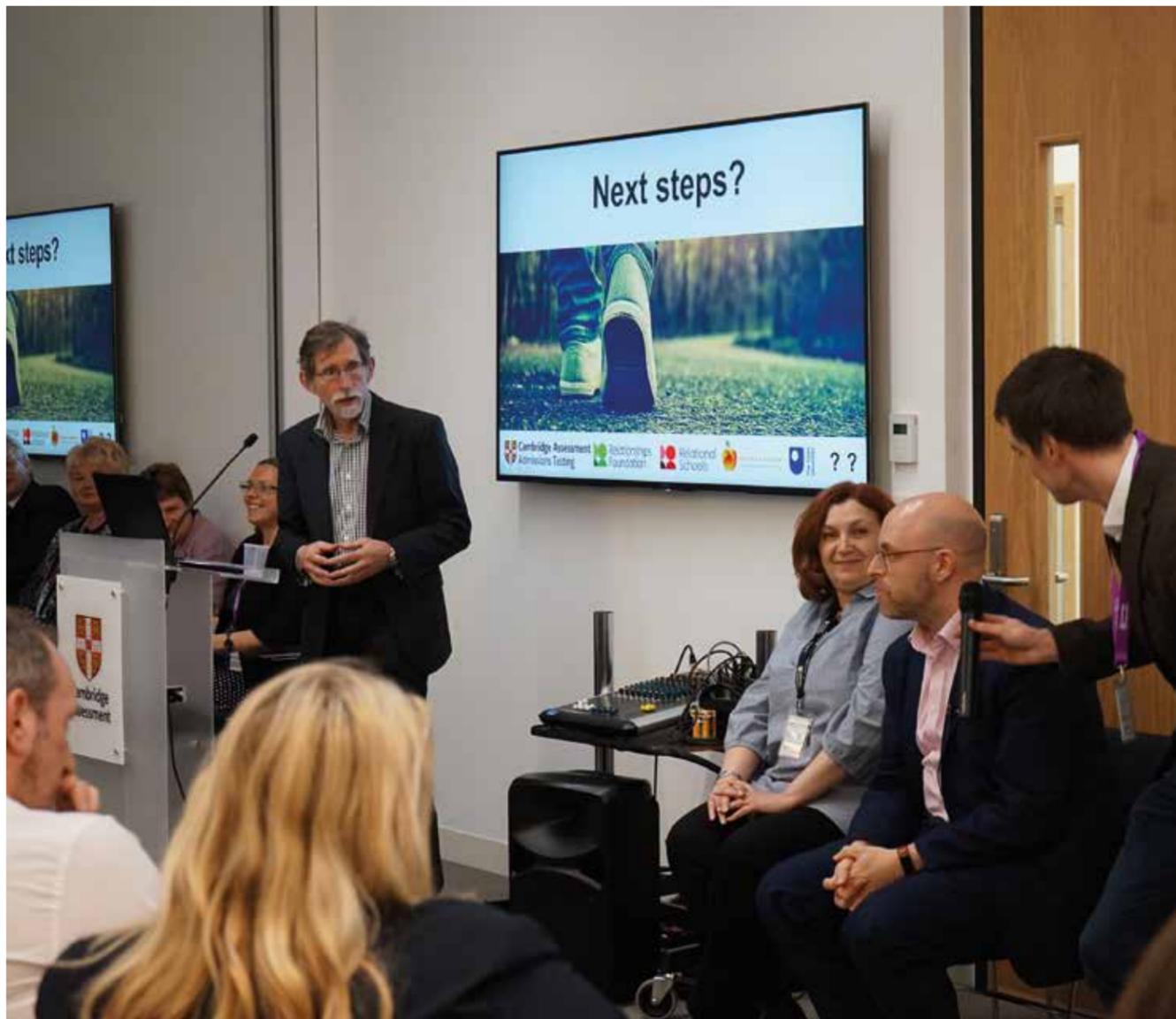
*Researchers have published the first findings of a five-year longitudinal study of the social and relational factors that affect trainee teachers' resilience and retention.*

Working with more than 100 trainees, researchers found that:

- the more relationships a trainee had, the less likely they were to drop out of the training programme;
- both personal and professional relationships enhance resilience but when one aspect is limited, the other can compensate;
- trainees with stronger and closer relationships with their personal tutors were not just more likely to complete the programme, but also to outperform their peers.

The hope is that training organisations can use the data to better understand how to support their trainees so that fewer leave during their training programme, and that schools can similarly come to understand the importance of relationships for career resilience, adapting their

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From left to right: Tim Oates CBE and Lyn Dale from Cambridge Assessment and Rob Loe from the Relationships Foundation.

# News in brief

## Top of the charts



Liz Eaton

The official Cambridge English Facebook page has been ranked number 1 on two leading social media benchmarking sites. The page has nearly six million likes and provides daily tips for a growing community of people learning English and preparing for internationally recognised Cambridge English Qualifications.

It has topped the charts in the education category on quintly and Socialbakers, two social media analytics companies that rank Facebook pages on the number of followers.

Liz Eaton, Social Media Manager at Cambridge Assessment English, said:

"At Cambridge Assessment English we help people learn English and prove their skills to the world. A big part of this is offering support to people who are learning English and preparing for Cambridge English Qualifications. Facebook has proved a great way of doing this and provides a growing community with daily tips and a chance to share their experiences of learning English."

## Indian first



Livingstone Foundation Higher Secondary School has become the first school in the Indian state of Nagaland to offer the Cambridge international curriculum.

The Livingstone Foundation Higher Secondary School in Dimapur, India has been approved to offer the Cambridge Pathway curriculum.

Ruchira Ghosh, Regional Director, South Asia, Cambridge International, attended a ceremony at the school to celebrate its new status. She said: "We are pleased to be associated with a progressive institution like the Livingstone Foundation Higher Secondary School. Together we share a common vision of helping students become confident, responsible, reflective, innovative and engaged, so that they are ready to thrive in our ever-changing world."

Dr Andrew Aphoto Sema, Principal, Livingstone Foundation Higher Secondary School, said: "It is a matter of great pride for our school to be associated with Cambridge International. We are committed to building a happy school and helping every child dream big and excel holistically."

Francesca Woodward  
is the new Chief  
Executive of Cambridge  
Assessment English



## New Chief Executive for Cambridge English

*Cambridge Assessment has announced the appointment of Francesca Woodward as the new Chief Executive of Cambridge Assessment English.*

Fran joined the organisation nearly two years ago as Director, Global Network at Cambridge English, leading a large team across multiple offices worldwide and working closely with Cambridge University Press. Before joining, Fran had a 16-year career at Pearson where she worked in a variety of commercial leadership roles across the company's products and regions.

Saul Nassé, Cambridge Assessment Group Chief Executive, said: "I am incredibly pleased that Francesca Woodward is the next Chief Executive of Cambridge Assessment English."

"Fran understands our customers and our business inside out, and has ambitious plans for how we can help more people than ever learn English and prove their skills to the world, working with our colleagues at Cambridge University Press. On top of that, she's a very

**"I'm proud that the organisation supports learners everywhere, helping them to achieve their ambitions, whether that's in higher education, the world of work or through cultural enrichment."**

motivating leader who will take her teams to the next level, particularly around our digital transformation."

Fran said: "I am delighted to be appointed as Chief Executive of Cambridge Assessment English. I'm proud that the organisation supports learners everywhere, helping them to achieve their ambitions, whether that's in higher education, the world of work or through cultural enrichment."

"I am looking forward to working with Cambridge University Press and other partners to continue to deliver the very best experience for learners and education professionals, as well as to build on the great new work we are doing in digital and educational technology."

Fran has a BA in Business from Staffordshire University and a Postgraduate Diploma from Manchester Metropolitan University.

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systems to help early stage teachers build and maintain their social networks.

Suffolk and Norfolk SCITT (School Centred Initial Teacher Training), one of the country's largest school-centred initial teacher training programmes, commissioned the Relationships Foundation to carry out the study, and to follow the 2018 cohort through to their fourth year of practice. It has already further developed its approach to recruitment and trainee support as a result of the findings, and is seeing positive results. Commenting, Anna Richards, Executive Leader, Suffolk and Norfolk SCITT, said: "We know at heart that relationships influence the ways in which people cope with stress, access support and advice, learn, collaborate, and find fulfilment in their work, but it's only by quantifying these things that we can properly manage them. We know now that certain relational factors make it more likely that some people will leave a course or the profession, and have begun to intervene earlier with the right support to empower trainees. As a result, we have already lost fewer trainees this year, and are confident that this is due to a more relational approach."

Much of the social network analysis was carried out on behalf of the Relationships Foundation by Dr Alison Fox, Senior Lecturer in Education at the Open University, whose pioneering work in this field helped focus the study. She said: "The mapping of trainee teachers' social networks provides a window onto the wealth of resources on which they draw. If this mapping takes place as part of professional conversations with tutors and mentors, potential vulnerabilities are revealed, enabling the trainee, ITT provider and school to reflect and respond. One of the key findings has been the importance of the 'unsung relational heroes' in an early career teacher's network. Even without

holding formal support roles, these vital links can provide the key emotional and professional support which keeps a trainee on track and a teacher in post. The SCITT tutors are now advising schools and trainees to look towards what has been termed mosaic mentoring, in which the skills, time and emotional generosity of those on placements are harnessed to support individual trainees to meet their needs."

The trainees also answered Cambridge Assessment's Cambridge Personal Styles Questionnaire (CPSQ), so that personality traits could be correlated with performance and retention. Commenting on this aspect of the research, Dr Rob Loe, CEO of the Relationships Foundation, said: "Thanks to Lyn Dale and her colleagues at Cambridge Assessment, we were not only able to show how training organisations and schools can support teachers with relational strategies, but also how certain traits predict performance, and might even help define the sort of relational support required at stressful times. For example, the CPSQ outcomes indicated that whilst trainees who scored well in terms of 'caring & compassion' and 'ability to cope with demands' were less likely to leave the training course, those whose responses indicated a relatively high degree of perfectionism were more likely to leave. Our partners at the Suffolk and Norfolk SCITT can now identify trainees with these traits and intervene, even before they commence their course, personalising both their programme and support package to help build their resilience."

The Relationships Foundation and its partners at the Open University and Cambridge Assessment are now looking to work with other teacher training providers to scale up the research and build a dataset that supports system-wide improvements in practice.

## Refugee teaching course wins top award

*A course that has helped thousands of people get the skills they need to teach English to refugees has won a prestigious award.*

Cambridge Assessment English won an award in the corporate social responsibility category at the Association of Strategic Alliance Professionals (ASAP) Excellence Awards 2019 for their online course Volunteering with Refugees. The Massive Open Online Course was

developed by experts in Cambridge in partnership with FutureLearn and Crisis Classroom.

The course was a huge success and so far has helped over 8,000 people to understand the linguistic and social needs of refugees and get ready to teach.

"We're delighted to be recognised in this way for something that has had a really positive social impact on the lives of so many people," said Chloe Shaw, Head of Alliance Management at Cambridge Assessment English. "The course has really taken off and this has largely been due to the expertise and passion of the people involved. It was a true collaborative effort and we worked closely with the charity Crisis Classroom and FutureLearn to deliver something that has really made a difference."

For more details about the Volunteering with Refugees course, go to [www.futurelearn.com/courses/volunteering-with-refugees](http://www.futurelearn.com/courses/volunteering-with-refugees).

## A view from...

*Helen Rees-Bidder*

### Why oracy matters



The term 'oracy' was coined in the 1960s by Andrew Wilkinson. His notion was that oracy should be given equal status to numeracy and literacy in school curriculums, yet over 50 years later that does not seem to be the case in the majority of schools.

In schools where students are educated in English, but another language is spoken at home, leading learning through oracy is even more important.

Language needs to be acquired naturally to build up natural fluency and rather than learning new vocabulary for use in written responses, students should be offered opportunities to build content vocabulary through discussion and oral presentations. If a student's spoken English improves, developments in their written English will follow.

As Head of a Performance Arts Faculty, I became aware of how many senior teaching staff disliked doing formal presentations. Often the greatest fear of a newly appointed Head of Year was taking assemblies.

I also noticed that in meetings colleagues often avoided opportunities to voice their opinions or make contributions, yet after the meetings would have plenty to say about what had been discussed as we walked back to our cars.

It seemed odd that people who had chosen a profession which is so reliant on effective speaking were so uncomfortable when using their oracy skills outside the safety zone of their own classrooms.

Confidently speaking in public, whether as a presenter or in a meeting, is something that I have always taken for granted, presumably linked to my love of acting as a school and university student.

It was really through extra-curricular drama provision that I learnt to use my voice effectively, work collaboratively and develop my confidence.

It was only when I began to teach Drama in a very academic school that I realised that parents often encouraged (or sometimes forced) their son or daughter to take Drama or Speech & Drama lessons to build up their confidence, presentational skills and articulation rather than because they enjoyed acting.

It then struck me that it shouldn't be dependent on a Drama department to teach and develop oracy skills, which are so crucial in all aspects of 21st-century life. Children need to be confident and effective communicators to become empowered young citizens.

In the world of work, how successfully we communicate is likely to be the primary judgement of our effectiveness, whatever field we are in.

Surely it is the job of every classroom teacher, whatever the subject, to develop oracy skills?

*Helen Rees-Bidder is an independent educational consultant, senior examiner and lead trainer for Cambridge Assessment International Education. She was a teacher of English and Drama for 27 years.*



## Ready for the world

*Dozens of school leaders from across Pakistan have met to debate the impact of a rapidly changing world on education.*



More than 220 school leaders from over 150 Cambridge schools met at the Pakistan Schools Conference in Karachi where Cambridge Assessment International Education's Chief Executive Christine Özden stressed that "achievement and wellbeing go hand in hand".

The theme for the conference was 'Ready for learning, ready for the world' and the focus was not only on what is taught, but also the learning environment and how it needs to adapt to meet the intellectual and psychological needs of students.

**"Cambridge schools across Pakistan work hard to help their students learn."**

Speaking to delegates, Christine said: "We all want our learners and teachers to achieve their full potential, however, achievement and wellbeing go hand in hand. To reach our professional and academic goals, we must nourish both body and mind." Over 600 schools offer Cambridge programmes and qualifications in Pakistan, including Cambridge O Level and Cambridge International AS & A Level.

Christine continued: "Cambridge schools across Pakistan work hard to help their students learn. They do this through careful curriculum design, inspiring extra-curricular activities, professional development of teachers and the creation of school environments conducive to learning."

Other speakers at the conference included Tristian Stobie, Education Director, Cambridge International, Dr Peeter Mehisto, a leading education consultant, and Rosemary Hilhorst, Country Director, Pakistan, British Council.

A panel discussion, moderated by Tristian, explored ideas around promoting student wellbeing and readiness for learning in Pakistani schools, and how to overcome the challenges. The panellists discussed practical examples that delegates could implement in their schools.

**Students singing the national anthem at this year's Pakistan Schools Conference in Karachi, Pakistan.**

## Research gives vote of confidence

*Preparing for internationally recognised Cambridge English Qualifications improves students' English, increases their motivation and gives them more confidence, according to a global survey of English language teachers.*

Cambridge Assessment English collected the opinions of 5,789 teachers and school leaders in 109 countries, looking in detail at their experience of Cambridge English Qualifications, a suite of English language exams specifically designed to help learners to develop effective communication skills.

The results of the survey clearly demonstrate the positive impact of these qualifications on teaching and learning, with 95 per cent of respondents agreeing that preparing for Cambridge English Qualifications improves their students' English.



At the same time, 86 per cent reported that preparation for Cambridge English Qualifications gives their students greater confidence, and 90 per cent agreed that it improves students' motivation. This finding is especially important as research shows that motivation is amongst the most important factors in successful language learning.

Guy Chapman, Head of Schools at Cambridge Assessment English, said: "Cambridge English

Qualifications are designed to help people learn English and prove their skills to the world, and this clear impact on learning is what sets us apart from other English tests. When they prepare for the qualifications, candidates are building the skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing that they need in the real world.

"The feedback we've had from more than 5,000 teachers and school leaders confirms that Cambridge English Qualifications really do help schools to improve their students' English and give them the language skills they are going to need throughout their education and working lives."

The survey also showed that Cambridge English Qualifications help schools to work more effectively. Most respondents agreed that they improve teaching standards and provide a clear curriculum to follow, with well-structured milestones and lots of support material for teachers.

Cambridge English Qualifications are a suite of exams covering every step of the learning journey, from young learners in primary education through to advanced users who need to use English in professional and academic life. They include world-famous qualifications such as B1 Preliminary, B2 First and C1 Advanced. The qualifications are linked to the Common European Framework of Reference and test the four language skills – listening, speaking, reading and writing.

## Assessment in a 'post-truth' world

*In 2005 Baroness Onora O'Neill – renowned for her BBC Reith Lectures – presented at the launch of the Cambridge Assessment Network on the key issue of trust in UK public institutions. Now, in 2019, in a 'post-truth' world, how are people expected to believe in the value of educational assessments?*

This is the area that Dr Mary Richardson set out to explore at a recent Cambridge Assessment Network seminar. An Associate Professor at UCL Institute of Education in London, Dr Richardson argued that in the UK, but also globally, we "face a significant challenge in understanding what is meant by truth and in establishing what counts as trustworthy in many aspects of public life". Such challenges are aligned with the dominance of so-called post-truth discourses.

Post-truth, named by Oxford Dictionaries as its Word of the Year in 2016, is defined as "relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential

in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief". She said it often meant expertise was mocked or derided, and this applied to expertise in education and assessment as much as any other arena.

"Essentially the discourses surrounding public issues have become polarised; many debates lack substantive truth in relation to the evidence presented and thus, public levels of mistrust and scepticism have flourished," she told the seminar in Cambridge.

She said a vicious circle often operated in which falsehoods, or 'fake news', perpetuated confusion and led to mistrust.

"It ramps up a level of confusion which builds really shaky arguments which feed back into very poor ideas which then perpetuate falsehood, and that continues to sustain this post-truth narrative that feeds back into the public discourse," she said.

Dr Richardson, who is writing a book about her findings, said there was a "significant lack of understanding" amongst the general public about what the practice, processes and outcomes of educational assessment were, and although it had improved in recent decades, there was still some way to go.

She said the "million dollar question" was how to debunk the myths that have built up around educational assessment. She said duality – where complicated



arguments were reduced to simple 'for and against' positions – had to be challenged.

"How do we establish ideas and truths and challenge some of the falsehoods?" she asked.

"I think the only way we can really establish trust in what it is that we do and really develop a sense of trustworthiness about assessment and education is to make sure that we have everybody engaged," she said.

She concluded that there are four main areas to focus on: a commitment to reframing terminology to improve understanding; improving communication with stakeholders and the public; transparency and a commitment to truth; and lastly engaging people, as it was a vital public endeavour.

The seminar was followed by a question and answer session in which a large audience in the room and an even larger global audience online discussed and debated the issues raised.

## We all have a relationship with assessment

*Simon Child, Head of Assessment Training for the Cambridge Assessment Network, was in the audience for Dr Richardson's seminar and explains how the concept of trust that she explored informs his work.*



For anyone that has worked in the world of educational assessment for a period of time, you may be familiar with being asked the question:

'So, exams are much easier now, aren't they?'

It is interesting whenever I am asked this question for two reasons. First, I am challenged with articulating subtleties around the concepts of assessment standards, rigour and validity in a way that is engaging enough so that the person who asked the question does not regret asking it! Secondly, I wonder where this particular view of the examinations system has emerged.

Dr Mary Richardson offered some insights on this issue as she spoke about the role of assessment in the 'post-truth' world. In her accessible and thought-provoking presentation, she argued that when it comes to assessment, there are particular discourses that permeate society. Mary also argued that trust in educational assessments can be fostered and maintained through increased transparency.

What I found particularly interesting about Mary's seminar was that she emphasised the role of evidence building and verification in the development of trust in assessment, and assessment systems more broadly. She argued that a key principle underpinning the development of trust was encouraging key actors, including educators, policy makers, students, families and assessment organisations, to have the space and opportunity to critically evaluate assessment practice.

This point chimed with me in my role as Head of Assessment Training at the Cambridge Assessment Network. In my day-to-day working life, I develop and deliver professional development that aims to build lasting expertise in assessment. Professional development in assessment is typically (and necessarily) principle led.

At The Network, we understand that effective professional development in assessment is underpinned by a deep understanding of concepts such as validity, reliability, standards and practicality. Furthermore, understanding the relations amongst these principles is essential, as practitioners who create and use assessments have to make multiple decisions that have implications for the quality of their assessments. It is always fascinating to observe how practitioners negotiate the tensions that inevitably emerge.

For example, the Postgraduate Certificate course that The Network runs in collaboration with the Faculty of Education at the University of Cambridge aims to foster a critical

approach to assessment theory and practice, which can have a deep and lasting impact on students' working lives. The fact that educational assessment has elements of art as well as science is a key outcome of such professional learning.

Practitioners also become aware that they themselves hold certain conceptions regarding assessment (truthful or not!). Practitioners bring with them their own 'assessment identity', which is a culmination of all of their previous interactions with educational measurement. The notion of 'assessment identities' has gained momentum in recent years, led by educational researchers such as Gavin Brown at the University of Auckland and Anne Looney at Dublin City University. It is based on the idea that practitioners hold particular schemas, beliefs and concepts regarding assessment which they use as a framework to make judgements in their context. Practitioners' identities will naturally guide decisions made in assessment-related scenarios, for example when designing an examination paper, or creating classroom questions for formative purposes. In this sense, we all have a personal 'relationship' with assessment that is constantly evolving as we learn more about its capabilities and limitations in our own context.

In her seminar, Mary argued that beliefs about assessment can be shaped by a variety of sources, including newspaper articles, social media and even literature for children. These beliefs can manifest in different ways, such as the example I gave at the beginning of this article. A key challenge of professional development in assessment is to reveal practitioners' previously held conceptions, so that they themselves can critique and challenge them. This analytical approach is important as it can contribute to a more transparent and honest discourse about the benefits and challenges of educational assessment.

For more details about the Postgraduate Certificate in Educational Assessment and Examinations go to [www.cambridgeassessment.org.uk/events/pgca](http://www.cambridgeassessment.org.uk/events/pgca).

# Research *feature*

## The unexpected benefit of taking AS Levels

*New research explores the qualifications landscape for 16 to 19 year olds in England.*

**Cambridge Assessment researchers Jo Williamson and Emma Walland, as well as Sylvia Vitello and Ellie Darlington, have been looking at the impact of A Level reform in England. Their work shines a light on the issue of curriculum breadth and extends the research published by other organisations in this area substantially. Using a mix of quantitative and qualitative research to explore qualifications alongside A Levels, in particular the AS Level, the Extended Project Qualification (EPQ) and Core Maths, has revealed some surprising results.**

### AS Levels

Face-to-face interviews conducted in summer 2018 with senior staff at 11 schools and colleges illustrated some of the negative perceptions about 'decoupled' AS Levels. Decoupling of AS and A Levels was a major plank of England qualification reforms, and means that AS results no longer count towards an A Level, in the way they did before.

Most of the 11 schools in this small but representative qualitative study provided AS Levels in special cases only, as a safety net if they believed a student was in danger of not passing an A Level at all for example. "We identify those students who are at risk... and we offer them the option of taking an AS Level so at least they leave with a qualification. It generates points for the centre."

Teachers also cited practical concerns about AS Levels; the variability of 'co-teachability' from subject to subject, insufficient funding and a squeeze on teaching time. Typical comments were: "ASs don't embed into the A Levels very well. We were always told they would and they just don't." "In English Literature, there is so much divergence between the AS and the A2". "As soon as they stopped counting towards the A Level, they lost all their value for us." And: "I would be surprised if ASs stuck around to be honest... I think most places are finding that they're pretty pointless."

The lowering of the UCAS (Universities and Colleges Admissions Service) tariff – used to allocate points to post-16 qualifications for university and college admissions – may have also contributed to the AS Level's unpopularity. However, schools still offering AS Levels pointed out their value as an 'early warning system' with students and parents because, "if you do a mock, they don't take it seriously".

This complements the findings of a 2018 survey of Heads of Department (HoDs) also conducted by Cambridge Assessment on AS Level trends, in which over 60 per cent identified 'exam practice' as the most common reason for students still taking the AS Level in their A Level subjects. The AS Level was no longer seen as the way to broaden their curriculum by most of the HoDs surveyed.

At a 16–19 Policy Forum held by OCR in 2018, stakeholders also expressed views that the demise of the AS seemed inevitable. However, there were some who still valued the AS for encouraging students from less advantaged backgrounds to embark on an A Level programme. Stakeholders voiced wider concerns about the pressure on students taking A Levels and the need to provide high-quality guidance for 16 year olds making informed decisions about their future.

Yet contrary to the perceived limitations of reformed AS Levels, new quantitative research based on the National Pupil Database published by Cambridge Assessment in November 2018 identified a positive: A Level grades for students in 2017 who had taken an AS Level in 2016 were slightly higher than for those students who had not taken the AS Level first. The largest differences were found in the science subjects. For the first time, Cambridge Assessment researchers analysed the National Pupil Database to look at the impact on A Level grades, taking account of the prior attainment of students and also of school type.

More detailed drilling down into four subjects in particular – Biology, English Literature, Art and Psychology – looked at the proportions of candidates reaching C, A and A\* grades at A Level. Students who took a reformed Biology AS Level in 2016 were significantly more likely to have achieved a grade C or above, and to have achieved a grade A or above, in their reformed A Level in 2017 than students who took the A Level alone. In Psychology, students who took the AS and A Level were also significantly more likely than those who took the A Level only to have achieved all three grade thresholds.

However, the researchers found no grade benefit for Fine Art or English Literature students who took an AS in 2016 before taking the A Level in 2017. (Previous research which has compared taking the AS and A Level with taking the A Level alone has not factored in student and school characteristics or has focused on the impact on students' marks for one exam board's students only.) Researchers suggest that non-exam assessment in Fine Art, and the less hierarchical structure of knowledge development in the English Literature course, may be responsible for minimising the performance benefit of taking the AS.

### The Extended Project Qualification (EPQ)

Feedback about the EPQ, especially from face-to-face interviews, is much more positive. According to the interviewers: "there was passion and excitement in participants' voices when speaking about the EPQ." Now just over 10 years old, the EPQ is valued by UCAS more highly than the reformed AS Level. Over 40,000 students a year nationally take EPQs, although the steady rise in popularity stalled in 2018. Previous studies



Jo Williamson



Emma Walland

by Cambridge Assessment identified that the EPQ could be beneficial to performance in other Key Stage 5 qualifications and that those going to university with an EPQ had a higher probability of gaining a good degree.

Unlike AS Levels, our face-to-face interviewees in 2018 perceived that the benefits of the EPQ in terms of teaching and learning outweighed any practical disadvantages, such as student workload. Some expressed concern that students, in their enthusiasm, prioritised their EPQs over their A Level subjects. Others noted the challenge of marking such a variety of work.

The benefits identified were mainly for the range of advanced, non-subject-specific skills the EPQ develops and the motivation for students choosing a topic they are passionate about.

The EPQ is perceived to equip students with time management, critical thinking and independent skills that are all relevant for higher education study. Typical of the comments from the senior staff interviewed was: "It feels like a mini-dissertation done three years early to me." Some face-to-face interviewees noted the tangible benefit to university applications: "Because universities look on it favourably, we have had students who have had their offers reduced if they've had an EPQ." These priorities are also supported by the findings of the HoDs surveyed in 2018. Only 14 per cent of those surveyed said taking an EPQ was school policy, however.

Other interviewees pointed out that teaching engaged EPQ students was enjoyable and believed it helped build good relationships between students and staff: "they actually start talking to different members of staff they wouldn't usually talk to". The EPQ could be a means to achieving a broader curriculum: "We used to offer Dance at A Level but just because of the financial pressures on schools now, we can't offer that as a course any more... What we were able to do was to have a student this year

who is doing his EPQ and he's done a dance composition and performance..."

One surprising finding was the use of EPQs for students who struggle to achieve an A Level. In contrast to some who see the EPQ as a qualification exclusively for high-performing students or more elite schools, it was viewed by some interviewees as a useful safety net: "If they are doing an A Level and really struggling with it, then they might replace it with an EPQ instead." This view was repeated at the OCR 2018 Policy Forum. And in the latest HoD survey, nearly 60 per cent of respondents agreed the EPQ was useful across the ability range.

### Core Maths

Lastly, research and engagement with stakeholders focused on Core Maths as a third potential option for schools and colleges alongside A Levels.

Core Maths has tariff points equivalent to an AS Level. Designed to increase the number of post-16 students in England studying Maths beyond GCSE, it was only introduced in 2014 and take-up is relatively modest – there were approximately 7,000 Core Maths students in England in 2018.

Nearly half the HoDs surveyed in 2018 about Core Maths had little knowledge of this new Maths qualification at all and over 60 per cent who answered said they would not advise their students to take it. Of those who identified a benefit, this was helping students with other A Level subjects.

This thinking is consistent with feedback from the face-to-face interviews; Core Maths is perceived to support other reformed A Level subjects with greater mathematical content.

A teacher commented: "There are so many A Level and vocational courses that have Maths content now." One school made it compulsory for those studying Science at A Level to study Core Maths as well, to be 'mathematically competent'. The interviewee continued: "The only caveat is I don't think Core Maths is written specifically to support science... We have added content in for those students to make it appropriate for them."

Alongside Science, the other subjects that interviewees perceived Core Maths to support were Psychology, Business and Geography. A disadvantage mentioned during the interviews was a lack of enthusiasm from students and some teachers about the subject.

For many teachers outside the Maths department, Core Maths is not yet on the radar. While additional funding for Core Maths was announced in 2017, our research reveals some doubt about how significant an incentive this is for schools, especially if the senior leadership team who make the final decision on provision of qualifications are not yet aware of it.

### Conclusion

Speaking about these findings, Jill Duffy, OCR Chief Executive, said: "At a time of transition in KS5 education, it's important for us to understand the opportunities and challenges for a variety of schools and colleges in providing a broad curriculum for their students. The finding that taking the AS may still support student attainment in some A Levels is of interest since it highlights the delicate balancing act that schools – and exam boards – face in helping students reach their full potential. We're not forgetting vocational qualifications either, which are the subject of more research. However, through engaging with policy stakeholders and on-going research carried out by Cambridge Assessment, we are better informed about the complex and moving picture that is the KS5 curriculum."

For the full research studies, go to:

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

## Creating the conditions for success

*Education leaders and experts from around the world have gathered in Cape Town, South Africa, to discuss the importance of creating a successful school environment.*

Hosted at Somerset College, the two-day Cambridge Schools Conference was based on the theme 'Creating the conditions for success' and was attended by more than 250 delegates from 132 Cambridge schools based all over the globe.

Through keynote speeches, workshops and discussion groups, delegates explored how school leaders and teachers can create the right conditions for success.

Speakers included Christine Özden, Chief Executive, Cambridge International, Professor Jonathan Glazzard, Professor of Teacher Education, Carnegie School of Education at Leeds Beckett University and Amy Burke, a UK-based educational consultant.

Topics covered during the conference included how teachers can create the right conditions in their classrooms, neurological and psychological learning factors and overcoming barriers to learning.



Left – speakers included Christine Özden, Chief Executive of Cambridge International (centre).

Below – delegates enjoyed a series of workshops and discussion groups.

Juan Visser, Cambridge International's Regional Director for Sub-Saharan Africa, said: "It has been a privilege to host the global Cambridge Schools Conference here in South Africa for the second time.

"I am extremely pleased to see so many school leaders attend from across Sub-Saharan Africa and around the world.

"It has been a great opportunity for those attending to learn from some inspirational academic leaders and they can confidently take this learning back to their schools to further enhance the great work they are doing there for their students and colleagues."



## The language of business

*Two leaders in the field of business language training and assessment have announced an agreement to offer co-branded English language-learning solutions to corporate users worldwide.*

The six-month courses allow organisations to use the Speexx learning platform to help their employees prepare for Linguaskill Business from Cambridge Assessment English, an online test that quickly and conveniently allows organisations to check the English levels of individuals and groups of job candidates. The online Linguaskill tests – for which Speexx is now a global partner, as part of this

cooperation between both organisations – are based on extensive research, using Artificial Intelligence to give employers a fast, accurate indicator of the level of English proficiency of individual test-takers or of an entire group with minimal effort. They cover speaking, listening, reading and writing skills, and provide detailed reports that help organisations optimise their training. The new course also offers test preparation for B1 Business Preliminary, B2 Business Vantage and C1 Business Higher, which are internationally recognised Cambridge English Qualifications.

"With more than 10 years of experience teaching and testing language skills, we are well aware of the need for flexible and mobile language assessments in the corporate world. However, until now, there have been no intelligent online solutions for the digital workplace to help corporate users around the world to get ready for those tests," said Armin Hopp, founder and President at Speexx. "This is why we are extremely proud to launch the Speexx preparation app series with Cambridge English, the biggest and best name in language assessment. Together, we've created the first high-quality online English test preparation resource for Cambridge tests on the corporate digital learning market."



Left to right – Fran Woodward, Chief Executive of Cambridge Assessment English and Armin Hopp, founder and President at Speexx.

"Cambridge Assessment English exists to help people to learn English and prove their skills to the world," said Sue Trory, Head of Adult & Higher Education at Cambridge Assessment English. "By teaming up with Speexx, we will be helping companies all over the world to improve their competitiveness by providing clear structures for learning and tangible proof of success."

For more details on Linguaskill go to [www.cambridgeenglish.org/exams-and-tests/linguaskill](http://www.cambridgeenglish.org/exams-and-tests/linguaskill).

## The 'nuts and bolts' of assessment practice

*A new online course that covers the practical aspects involved in the assessment cycle has been launched.*

Just over a year on from the successful launch of A101: Introducing the Principles of Assessment, the Cambridge Assessment Network team has created a second online course that covers the practical aspects involved in the assessment cycle: A102: Introducing Assessment Practice.

In its first year, 825 education and assessment professionals in 89 different countries studied A101: Introducing the Principles of Assessment, learning about validity, reliability, fairness, standards, comparability and the practicality and manageability of assessment. Now A102 is here to provide a guide to the design, delivery and implementation of assessments – and how each phase of the assessment cycle interlinks.

Tim Oates CBE, Group Director of Assessment Research and Development at Cambridge Assessment, said: "A102 provides practical insights into how the different stages of the assessment cycle fit together to create and deliver high-quality, trusted assessments. The course is designed to be definitive, accessible and interesting."

The course content has been developed with support from assessment experts across the organisation.

A mix of stakeholders from around the world took part in the A102 course pilot, including those working for exam boards and awarding organisations, teachers,



regulatory body staff, ministries, assessors and Cambridge Assessment staff.

One described the course as a "must-do for everyone working in assessment", while another said it was a "good foundation for teachers".

For more details go to [www.canetwork.org.uk/a102](http://www.canetwork.org.uk/a102).

## Leading the way



A unique senior leadership programme for international education specialists and executives is being held this September for the fifth year running.

Leadership in National Assessment, run by the Cambridge Assessment Network, has seen delegates join from Thailand, Vietnam, Malaysia, Pakistan, Nigeria, India, the United States, South Africa, Portugal, Indonesia, China, Spain, Bermuda and Oman.

It promises to give delegates the chance to hear from a range of experts about the role of large-scale assessment organisations and their place in the wider education context, the influence of evidence-based practice in informing policy and frameworks for managing this complexity.

For more information about the course, which is being held in Cambridge between 16 and 20 September, go to [www.cambridgeassessment.org.uk/the-network](http://www.cambridgeassessment.org.uk/the-network).

Watch this space

## Contact us

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