

Achieve

Spring 2010



CAMBRIDGE ASSESSMENT



Welcome to *Achieve*

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



Unearthing Winston

New A level history paper encourages students to look beyond Churchill's fat cigars and victory in Europe. see page 3



Boot up, log on, take off

Sharp rise in the number of centres offering computer-based Cambridge ESOL tests. see page 8

Scandinavian schools take Cambridge to their hearts

Sweden's fastest-growing network of schools says the future looks bright after linking up with Cambridge International Examinations (CIE).

Internationella Engelska Skolan (IES) – otherwise known as International English Schools – currently runs 14 centres in the country, and was set up to promote globally-minded education through bilingual teaching.

IES Head of Academics Damien Bruncker said: "Our recent partnership has enhanced this aspect immeasurably. Aligning Cambridge qualifications with the national Swedish curriculum was easier than anticipated.

"In 2011 changes in the curriculum, as well as a new seven-point grading system, mean that running more parallel courses with Cambridge IGCSEs could be possible."

While Cambridge IGCSE is already well established in Sweden, there is booming interest elsewhere in Scandinavia too – and CIE was specially invited to pitch its qualifications at a one-day seminar organised by an international schools network in Denmark.

continued on page 4



Cambridge IGCSE students from the Internationella Engelska Gymnasiet in Stockholm.



Lord Bew Crossbench, House of Lords.

Legislating for a new regulator

The last Parliamentary session saw the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Bill make its way through the Houses of Parliament. There was lengthy debate and discussion around the Bill, in particular one of its clauses – the then clause 138, colloquially known as the ‘dictator clause’. If enacted, it would have allowed the Secretary of State the power to intervene to change qualifications if he or she felt they were ‘wrong’.

The argument made by Parliamentarians was that there was a contradiction at the heart of the Bill. On the one hand, the Bill was proposing an independent regulator – Ofqual – to deal with issues of qualification standards. On the other hand, it was suggesting increased powers of intervention for the Secretary of State.

I also remained unconvinced by the argument that the Secretary of State could intervene to affect requirements of qualifications without at the same time this having implications for standards.

Nonetheless, following much debate, a compromise to the Bill was reached so that in the event that a Secretary of State did intervene, restrictions written into the Bill meant that frivolous and populist interventions would not occur.

These changes now mean that it’s only in the lonely hour of the last instance that we are likely to see Ministerial intervention.

Moving forward, the hope has to be that Ofqual will play the role now set out for it by the new legislation, and that politics has been sufficiently removed from this sphere.

It’s important that Ofqual is able to demonstrate that it is independent of the Department, regardless of which party is in power. It is in fact impossible to imagine that politics will completely leave the arena of standards – to reach such a situation would be a kind of utopia.

The issues surrounding standards, and education more generally, will continue to be important in the run up to and following the General Election. And precisely because this is true, we need to feel confident that we have an Ofqual that can deal with the issue of standards in an independent and objective way.

OCR building a school for the future

OCR has been digging in to help build a groundbreaking new learning experience – and it’ll be far from run-of-the-mill when it gets going this autumn.

The exam board was approached by Staffordshire-based JCB Academy to design a specialist business and engineering curriculum for their new school, which opens its doors in September.

Main sponsors are global construction equipment giants JCB, who started the process by donating a derelict mill – once a flagship of famed industrialist Richard Arkwright – for renovation and development.

It wasn’t long before academy staff got in touch with OCR for a bespoke curriculum, which is intended to redress a downturn in the number of UK engineering graduates and safeguard skills for the future. Students can join the academy at 14, when they will work towards core subject GCSEs alongside the Engineering and Business Diploma. Two years later they can opt for A levels or the Advanced Diploma.

The emphasis is squarely on the practical, and JCB Academy youngsters will enjoy extensive work

experience thanks to their school’s enviable network of professional contacts. And OCR has worked hard to ensure the schemes of work, classroom materials and teacher support are in keeping with the school’s bold way of thinking.

Head of Customer Support Services Charlotte Bosworth said: “We’re looking to bring education and assessment closer together, to understand the impact of assessment on teaching and learning.

“We also want to have a view on whole curriculum issues, and to speak out and lead thinking on education and qualifications. We need to be involved in opportunities that look at the whole curriculum and require greater involvement in earlier stages of learning. We need to challenge some of the current links between age and stage.

“The JCB Academy provides us with a perfect opportunity to start working on this vision.”



Saxon school success

Cambridge ESOL has secured an important new deal with ministers from the federal state of Saxony in eastern Germany.

Saxon schoolkids stand to benefit because the state’s cultural ministry has imported the exam board’s leading Preliminary English Test, a world-renowned benchmark of intermediate English and the perfect stepping stone to future fluency.

After a successful pilot scheme, ministers decided to expand the bilingual drive to 27 secondary schools

throughout their jurisdiction. Saxony culture minister Roland Wöller said: “This internationally recognised English qualification is highly regarded and enables access to attractive job opportunities. It’s a great opportunity for our students.”

Cambridge ESOL already works closely with other German states, including Berlin and Bavaria.

Satisfaction survey

Ninety-eight per cent of Cambridge International Examinations (CIE) centres would recommend the exam board to other schools, according to a 2009 customer satisfaction survey.

Every year CIE carries out a survey to check schools are happy with its performance and to identify areas for improvement. The most recent results yielded an impressive overall rating of 9 out of 10.

Satisfaction has improved across nearly all services, with customers particularly praising exam entry processes, results, provision of exam materials, and customer service.

Unearthing Winston

OCR is marshalling the troops to throw open the strongholds and reveal some surprising truths about Winston Churchill – and it's all in the name of good history teaching.



Photograph of Winston Churchill.

Qualification managers are working with the Churchill Archives Centre in Cambridge to give unprecedented access to the breathtaking collection, which spans young Winston's school reports, letters to international statesmen, and hastily-scribbled drafts for his epoch-defining speeches.

It's all in support of OCR's new A level history paper which focuses on the controversial career of Winston Churchill – proving there was more to the man than fat cigars and victory in Europe.

Students choosing the Churchill option in the *British History Enquiries* module must use a range of evidence to decide whether Churchill was himself a "riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma".

They will need to consider the General Strike and the Abdication Crisis, among other huge challenges which coloured the career of the man named the greatest ever Briton in a landslide UK poll victory last decade.

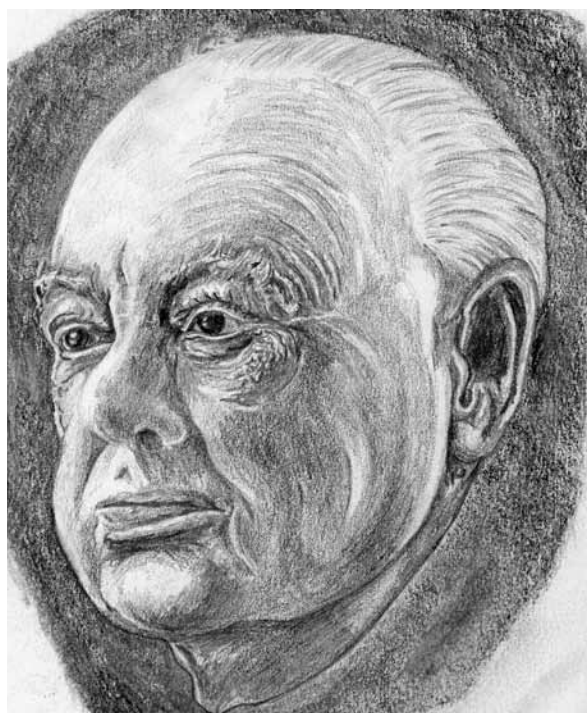
And the exam board's link-up with the archives centre has already sparked two events where teachers sampled highlights from the 3,000 boxes of Churchill

papers, listened to talks from top history dons and even re-enacted a tense parliamentary debate using the 1945 Hansard transcript.

History Qualifications Manager Mike Goddard said: "The Churchill paper has been a vibrant, relevant and necessary addition to the OCR A level history curriculum – and evidence from the first year's exams shows it has been successful.

"The Churchill Museum & Cabinet War Rooms in Westminster has begun a programme of teacher and student days designed for this unit too. We're hoping other support will follow and that the topic will continue growing in popularity. Whatever the opinion on Churchill, he deserves to be studied."

'riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma'



Portrait drawing of Winston Churchill.

Romanian students hit Cambridge milestone

Romanian school-leavers have a special part in the Cambridge ESOL story after their country's education ministry helped the exam board reach a massive milestone.

When the ministry agreed to recognise the English language qualifications officially within the Romanian system, it joined thousands of authorities around the world who set their store by Cambridge. In fact, the ministry have helped the number of recognising bodies reach 10,000.

Students can now substitute certain Cambridge certificates for their Romanian equivalents – so they could be exempt from sitting some final high school exams.

The qualifications are also accepted by the UK Border Agency, Australian and Canadian immigration services, the Greek civil service and leading global universities – including top Ivy League and Russell Group institutions – to name just a few.

That means more than three million candidates in 130 countries each year can use them as proof of English for immigration, entrance to higher education and enhanced career prospects.

Development Manager Dionysia Ioannou said: "This level of recognition in Romania is excellent news for everyone involved. These young students who have worked hard to gain a language qualification from Cambridge will see the benefits of their efforts from this year.

"It really will help school leavers in Romania to increase their global mobility."

For information on the full range of Cambridge ESOL qualifications please visit: <http://www.cambridgeesol.org/exams/index.html>

Critical Thinking critical, thinks CBI

Critical Thinking lives up to its name in more than one way – because without it Britain will wind up with under-prepared university students and a sub-par workforce, an industry expert told a Cambridge Assessment seminar.

Richard Wainer, education and skills head at the Confederation of British Industry, was addressing a 70-strong audience at *Critical Thinking: its role, value and impact upon driving attainment*.

His warning came on the back of Cambridge Assessment research which shows students taking Critical Thinking as a stand-alone AS level tend to do better in their other subjects.

Wainer said: "The ability to think, reason and make sound decisions is a vital skill for the workplace – and crucial for employees who want to do well and advance. Yet many firms have expressed concerns about the lack of problem-solving skills they are seeing in school leavers."

Critical Thinking has only existed as a separate subject since 2001 – but last summer around one in six schools entered candidates for the OCR exam.

Despite these numbers, there still exists a swirl of questions and disagreements around the discipline, and there was lively debate among parliamentarians, researchers and representatives from universities and schools at the event in London's British Academy.

Cambridge Assessment's Group Director of Assessment Research and Development Tim Oates argues the main flash-points are whether Critical Thinking is best studied as an independent subject or built into other disciplines – and whether it should be assessed as part of the formal curriculum.

Oates said: "Research shows the answer to the first question is, 'It should be reinforced through dedicated provision and then applied in all subjects.'

"The answer to the second is also clear: 'It doesn't matter, as long as it is based on a sound conception of Critical Thinking and delivered through robust pedagogy.'

"In developing these qualifications, Cambridge Assessment isn't asserting that this is the only way to enhance pupils' facility in Critical Thinking – but it is offering schools a supportive, clear structure for both learning provision and recognition of attainment."

Indian inspiration for Vice-Chancellor

Pupils and teachers at a leading Cambridge school in India were happy to show off their work at the start of the new year – particularly when a special guest dropped by.

Professor Alison Richard, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Cambridge, stopped in at Dhirubhai Ambani International School in Mumbai during her third official visit to the country.

After seeing lessons in action and meeting last year's Cambridge Outstanding Achiever award winners, she said: "Cambridge has a long-standing relationship with India at all levels, from undergraduate students to researchers and leaders of industry.

"Students at Dhirubhai Ambani achieve exceptional Cambridge IGCSE results every year, and progress to some of the best universities in India and worldwide."

The school is one of over 230 centres registered with Cambridge International Examinations (CIE) in India, where entries for the board's qualifications jumped 27 per cent last year.

Nita Ambani, chairperson of Dhirubhai Ambani, said: "We are proud to be associated with CIE in offering its world-class educational programmes. By providing educational opportunities that synthesize internationally acclaimed pedagogical practices and assessment models with India's rich educational heritage, our school has been able to develop children with the knowledge, skills and values which will shape them to be better human beings and the world a better place."



Vice-Chancellor Professor Alison Richard with Mrs Ambani.

Anniversary celebration for IELTS

Language and immigration experts gathered to reflect on two decades of a world-changing English language qualification – and the benefits were made crystal clear.

Leading linguist, author and broadcaster David Crystal was on hand to raise a glass at the 20th anniversary of the board's International English Language Testing System (IELTS).

The Bangor University professor, who is also patron of several language learning bodies, gave a special talk at the event in London's chic Millbank Tower.

He was joined by visitors from major global universities and diplomatic staff at the Australian and Canadian High Commissions.

And there was a toast for some of the system's original designers and developers, who also attended the party.

IELTS is joint-owned by Cambridge ESOL, the British Council and IDP: IELTS Australia – and is trusted by thousands of organisations around the world as a failsafe indicator of English language ability. That means more than 1 million learners each year use IELTS to open doors – changing jobs, studying abroad or migrating – which would otherwise stay shut.



Professor David Crystal speaking at IELTS 20th anniversary.

(Photo by David Lake Photography) 8526

Scandinavian schools...

continued from page 1

The opening address was given by Ebbe Forsberg, secretary of private school association Danmarks Privatskoleforening, and he predicted quick and rapid growth in international schools and bilingual learning.

That could mean exciting new links for the exam board, which already works with 11 Danish schools – and should continue the spreading success of Cambridge IGCSE, which is increasingly integrated alongside national curricula. There are well-established bilingual programmes in Spain, Germany, Italy and the Netherlands.

Pupils in heroic battle

There was a hard-fought dust-up between an ancient queen, a war poet and a chocolate expert in a room full of school children – and OCR was behind the whole thing.

That's because the exam board sponsored the UK Historical Association's annual debating competition, where 16 to 19-year-olds were invited to argue in favour of their local hero – a great historical figure from their town or region.

So Boudicca (East Anglia) – presumably for the first time – found herself pitted against Wilfred Owen (Shropshire) and George Cadbury (Midlands), plus many more icons from the annals.

George Eliot flew the flag for Nuneaton, while the late philanthropist and businesswoman Anita Roddick was a more modern hero, representing the south of England.

Also in the ring were north Welsh nursing legend Betsi Cadwaladr, Northampton-born code-breaking genius Alan Turing and Frank Pantridge, the Northern Irish doctor who invented the portable defibrillator.

Competitors were asked why their hero merited a place in history, and fought through early heats to face an expert panel of historian judges in the final at Clare College, Cambridge.

OCR Arts and Humanities Curriculum Manager Neil Cameron said: "We're proud to sponsor the debate because it gives students a chance to use their exploration and research skills, as well as developing presentation techniques.

"These are key attributes within their A level studies and will prove beneficial as they enter higher education and the world of work."

Controlling the curriculum: the next chapter

We need a slimmer National Curriculum and tighter links between schools, exam boards and universities to keep A levels at the top of their game.

That's the view of Cambridge Assessment Group Chief Executive Simon Lebus – and it's hot off the press, because he has just written a chapter for a book designed to shape how policymakers tackle education.

Liberating Learning, Widening Participation features a number of voices, including former UK schools minister Andrew Adonis, world-renowned historian Niall Ferguson and business guru Digby Jones. Naturally enough, the editors approached Lebus for the chapter entitled *Learning and control: towards an improved model for curriculum development*.

He argues the UK has lost faith in A levels despite massive hikes in education spending and a huge leap in the number of students scoring top grades in their exams. He writes: "Public exam results, in principle one of the clearest measures of achievement, have become a discredited currency as a result of anxieties about dumbing down."

Universities protest they are unable to distinguish top candidates because of so many high-achievers, and captains of industry complain that basic levels of competence have plummeted, Simon notes. He also records worrying evidence that the IQ score of an average 14-year-old has dropped two points in the last 30 years.

"Such findings are controversial. In trying to understand them Shayer and Flynn point to the effect of a visually-orientated youth culture, the culture of the video game and the text message. Shayer also refers to the impact on deep learning of teaching to the test, one of the consequences of the widespread use of exam and test results for accountability."

"...the UK has lost faith in A levels despite massive hikes in education spending and a huge leap in the number of students scoring top grades in their exams."

And it is precisely that – the turning of A levels to new ends, away from their original audience and purpose – which has changed the qualifications landscape so dramatically.

"In the context of A levels, an exam that started in 1951 as a selection test for admission to higher education (HE) has had to adapt as the proportion of 18-year-olds taking it has risen from 6.8 to 46.3 per cent, the result of promoting higher levels of participation in order to support the demands of a growing and more complex economy. A qualification designed for the top end of the ability range therefore has now to serve the needs of a much broader constituency."

As the numbers swelled, the pedagogic focus shifted on to skills as well as knowledge, and the number of



Simon Lebus,
Group Chief Executive,
Cambridge Assessment

A level subjects burgeoned from 32 to 69. Simon ties these developments to the history of the nationalised curriculum. It's a tale which over three decades takes in power-grabs at the William Tyndale School, foundation-laying speeches at Ruskin College, Oxford, and the rise of the modern quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisation operative.

Historically, ministers had shied away from strict control of schools and lessons. But the then-Prime Minister wanted to take tentative steps into what his adviser called the "secret garden" of education policy. It didn't take long for the secret garden to become a stomping ground.

In 1997, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) rose from the ashes of its predecessor regulatory bodies and definitively "wrested ownership of exam standards from the awarding bodies and was responsible for the National Curriculum". "The result," Simon continues, "was that the QCA gave primacy to the execution of policy initiatives such as Curriculum 2000 and Diplomas over and above its responsibility for the stewardship of standards. It also absorbed the culture of an institutionalised expectation of ever-rising standards that has been such a feature of education policy over the last decade."

The chapter does not pull punches, and its author reads the creation of independent exam regulator Ofqual as a Government admission that the qualification system has been "hopelessly compromised". He is equally clear on the chances of Ofqual restoring trust in the system and silencing the predictable dumbing-down debates each year: "It is unlikely so long as the Government continues to exercise control through ownership of the curriculum."

He observes that while key biological concepts such as photosynthesis and conservation of mass were axed

from the curriculum, the QCA instead felt obliged to slip in exhortations for pupils to be taken on jaunts to the countryside, and on to farms. "The National Curriculum has strayed from its original purpose and become at once both overblown and hollowed out. It is not the role of the National Curriculum to act as a vehicle for a constantly shifting menu of flavour-of-the-month concerns. What we need instead is a map setting out key concepts and a framework for progression, not a manifesto."

Although the National Curriculum loses jurisdiction at 16, central control governs the 18+ A levels too, through regulator-specified qualification and subject criteria. Lebus claims these reduce flexibility and restrict the scope for innovation, while inhibiting the alignment of curriculum, teaching and assessment that is desirable for the best educational results.

What, then, can be done? The Group Chief Executive believes closer collaboration between key players in drawing up A levels would be an attractive idea because it would permit HE, schools and awarding bodies to reconnect and re-establish ownership of the curriculum.

He calls for an urgent debate to move things forward.

Meanwhile, "a less ambitious National Curriculum" would grant similar freedom to "create interesting and challenging learning programmes on the ground; programmes, in other words, which incorporate a slimmed-down National Curriculum but go well beyond it."

Liberating Learning, Widening Participation is published this spring by Rugby School and the University of Buckingham Press. The editors have called for the book to be "agenda setting" – and Simon's contribution must surely help write the next chapter in the story.

Vamos, On y va, Andiamo, Los geht's – Let's go!

A pioneering European project set to change our understanding of how different people learn languages is now well under way.



National Research Co-ordinators from around Europe at a training event in Cambridge.

SurveyLang, commissioned by the European Commission, was set up to investigate how demographic, social, economic and educational situations affect linguistic proficiency.

The ambitious project will also provide unique data to compare foreign language skills and teaching methods across the Europe.

February saw the start of the SurveyLang Field Trial, with thousands of teenagers proving their competence in English, French, German, Italian and Spanish. First up were the Maltese – and they were soon joined by their peers across Europe.

Cambridge ESOL is responsible for co-ordinating the survey, which also involves prestigious bodies such as the Goethe-Institut, Centre International d'Etudes Pédagogiques, Universidad de Salamanca and Università per Stranieri di Perugia. Expert delegates from across Europe met in Cambridge at the start of the year for in-depth training from the SurveyLang's experts on how to use the tests and collate results.

Final statistics and analysis are due in 2012 (after the Main Study in 2011), when the SurveyLang database will be released – and the groundbreaking work starts to revolutionise understanding on how languages are taught and learnt throughout Europe.

The best is yet to come

You might think exam officials could afford to relax after their OCR Nationals qualifications needed just five years to take England by storm – but they're working harder than ever to make them better.

There were a staggering 300,000 entries last year – compared to 3,000 in the first cohort, in 2004–05.

And now OCR Nationals in ICT is officially the country's fourth most popular qualification, with only GCSE Maths and A levels in English and English Literature registering more students.

But experts aren't resting on their laurels because they have been working with teachers and other assessment professionals to ensure the courses remain as engaging and relevant as possible.

Their efforts will also ensure they fit into Government plans to streamline the range of options for 14 to 19-year-old learners.

Once regulators and ministers have approved the new-look OCR Nationals, schools can begin teaching them this September.

The board will publish the new specifications this spring and offer extensive training to help teachers use the full scope of the qualifications, which incorporate extensive work experience to motivate students and promote real-world personal skills.

They are expected to continue growing in popularity because they are proving such a hit with teachers and learners – as well as employers, who can look forward to hiring a well-qualified and savvy workforce of the future.

Chief Executive Greg Watson said: "They're motivating, very relevant and very clear in explaining what is expected and what they're trying to achieve.



"Schools' main driver should be to provide the right sort of qualification for each individual learner and the incredibly positive feedback we have shows teachers value OCR Nationals in that sense."

Alan Harris, head of ICT at The Holgate School in Nottinghamshire, said: "We're looking to produce students who can apply ICT to academic situations and workplace situations.

"With OCR Nationals, they'll have the skills once they get there to get ahead of the game. The course has really brought out their creative spark.

"A lot of the units have involved students assessing professional presentations, and finding out that sometimes the professionals might not do quite as good a job as they're going to do themselves, which is refreshing."

Record growth for the Cambridge IGCSE

The popularity of Cambridge International Examinations (CIE) qualifications is soaring worldwide after record growth in the November 2009 exam session.

More entries were received than in any previous November session and almost five million question papers were sent out around the world. When the board released the exam results on a secure website at midnight on 25 January, more than 100 schools worldwide accessed them within the first few minutes.

This builds on the success of the June 2009 session, which saw a 20 per cent rise in IGCSE entries on the previous year, and unprecedented overall entry growth of 15 per cent.

Cambridge IGCSE is increasingly adopted by schools in the UK and Europe, as well as countries including Egypt, India and Saudi Arabia – and CIE expects growth to continue this year.



School exams: have 'standards' really fallen?

Examination standards – and the perception of them – are of principal concern to society and dominate many educational and media debates.

But gross oversimplification in much of the media coverage each summer suggests important areas could benefit from wider discussion. Cambridge Assessment wants an open and frank discussion to clarify public understanding. Who 'owns' examination standards? Should they rest on links between schools, higher education, employers and awarding bodies – or be mediated through Government and its agents? Just how much information is required to maintain public confidence?

Cambridge Assessment is urging educationalists everywhere to join a large-scale project which could change how we talk about exams and standards for good. It aims to get people talking about the same thing at the same time – by organising a comprehensive and unbiased debate on the matter.

The campaign began early in the year with a parliamentary research seminar for leading academics and policymakers in London, to start tackling some of the trickiest questions. England's former Chief Inspector of Schools Baroness Perry led the event, which also featured talks from top university dons.

Proceedings soon went global when Cambridge Assessment took the debate online with an expert view from Group Assessment Research and Development Director Tim Oates to start things off. He began with first principles by posing a simple-looking yet devilishly tricky question – "what do we mean by 'standards'?" – and warned that a false step at this early stage makes it easy to commit gross errors of both logic and definition.

As such, people contend that if more pupils score top grades it must also reflect a slump in standards – that is, exams are getting easier. But if that same number decreases it must reflect a slump in standards – that is, pupils are attaining less.

Education experts wasted no time responding to Tim's paper and the debate was officially started.

Events will culminate with a formal debate on standards on 29 April at the RSA in London. To join the debate visit: www.examstandardsdebate.org.uk and for further information visit the standards Viewpoint at www.cambridgeassessment.org.uk

Plain gain in Spain

Cambridge ESOL proved it has Iberian inspiration after scoring a string of successes in Spain.

Just two months after bringing its 'Working with Languages in Europe' roadshow to Madrid, the exam board secured a top deal with a large group of prestigious schools in the capital.

The first visit brought together more than 100 language experts from across Spain to discuss how learners in the country have compared with their European peers in English proficiency over the years.

They also talked about how the language is used in schools and businesses – and reported that the country's increasing commitment to early-years English lessons is yielding serious improvement.

And just weeks later that commitment was cemented when UCETAM – a group of 82 leading schools in Madrid – signed up for a raft of Cambridge ESOL qualifications to bolster its bilingual programme.

Schools are even encouraging teachers to follow a specially designed Cambridge teaching course.

Spanish learners have progressed impressively in English during the last few years, and now rank favourably with their continental counterparts.

Cambridge ESOL has helped throughout the journey – and now supports networks of schools throughout the Madrid region, as well as Catalonia and the Basque Country.

Keeping it real

Cambridge ESOL is on top of the immigration agenda, encouraging ministers to ensure the English language requirements for this purpose are fair, effective and secure.



Delegates at the 'Language at the Border' event.

The Prime Minister ordered a review of the Tier 4 system used to regulate student immigration at the end of last year, and the exam board wasted no time organising an expert forum to pinpoint and dissect the complexities of the ever-controversial subject.

'Language at the Border: Assessing Language Ability for Study in the UK' was designed to explore where – and why – officials peg the baseline for English ability required of prospective students.

Delegates from key education and immigration bodies such as the British Council and Canadian High Commission also got to talk shop with a policymaker from the UK Border Agency at the London-based event.

Cambridge ESOL Chief Executive Dr Mike Milanovic said: "When it comes to language testing for student immigration, we must ensure fairness, security and fitness for purpose so that we are respecting the human rights of the individuals going through our immigration process and acting in the best interests of the UK".



Dr Nick Saville, Director of Cambridge ESOL's Research and Validation unit with Juliet Wilson, Assistant Director for Customer Services at Cambridge ESOL, at the event.

Reforming assessment: the challenges

Assessment is under reform all over the world. Some countries are embracing national testing, while others are abandoning it. Many countries are struggling to fully integrate Assessment for Learning within everyday classroom practice. The potential gains from reform are sizeable but the processes of change are complex and the consequences of getting it wrong can be severe.

The challenges of assessment reform will be addressed at the 5th Cambridge Assessment Conference on 21 October at Robinson College, Cambridge. What ensures its success? What undermines it? What lessons can we learn from reforms past and present?

This year speakers include Professor Jo-Anne Baird from the University of Bristol and Professor Frank Ventura from the University of Malta. Professor Paul Black from King's College London will open the conference with a keynote presentation on the effective integration of pedagogy, learning and assessment as the foundation for successful reform.

Further programme and booking details are available at:

www.assessnet.org.uk/conference2010

Contact us

Please feel free to phone, write or email at any time:

Bene't Steinberg or Rebecca Birkett-Smith
Public Affairs
1 Regent Street
Cambridge
CB2 1GG

Tel: +44 (0)1223 556018 (direct)
public.affairs@cambridgeassessment.org.uk



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CIE stars earn their stripes

University of Cambridge International Examinations (CIE) made a flying start to the year after sending a trio of top educationalists to America – and coming home with exciting new business.

Director of Education, Kevin Stannard, and Director of Assessment Services, Di Palmer, jetted to the University of Southern New Hampshire to pitch the popular Cambridge IGCSE and Advanced International Certificate of Education (AICE) syllabuses.



They faced a 100-strong audience including education commissioners and high school principals from eight states looking to boost standards. Connecticut, Kentucky, Maine, New Hampshire, New Mexico, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island and Vermont banded together to import top global qualifications – and Cambridge IGCSE and AICE were on the shopping list.

State leaders are looking to pilot the courses next year before rolling them out more widely. Stateside students already feel the benefit because more than

80 schools across the country have opted to teach Cambridge courses – and the number is growing fast.

Di and Kevin said: "Our brand is now much better known – and much better understood. This is an opportunity to develop exciting new links with education officers and school districts.

"Educationally, the Americans speak a different language from us. It was an education for both sides."

Fortunately, USA-born University of London education expert Tina Isaacs was on hand to help translate – and to shine light on CIE's qualifications, just as the exam board gears up for talks with even more American states this spring.

Sixteen IGCSE syllabuses have been approved for study in state schools in the UK – where they are known as Cambridge International Certificates – and nine non-core subjects currently receive Government funding.

Boot up, log on, take off

Language learners around the world are now even more switched-on after a sharp rise in the number of centres offering computer-based Cambridge ESOL tests.

That means students will be able to sit exams when they are ready because there are plenty more slots available. The technology also gives shorter registration times and a much faster turnaround when it comes to publishing results.

This time last year just 100 centres were on board, but the number more than doubled by the end of 2009.

Well over 250 have opted for the high-tech approach – and the number is set to rocket because Cambridge ESOL is expanding its computer systems even further. But Director of Business Development Sean Hayde stressed that opportunities to sit traditional-style exams are also on the increase.

He said: "We're not trying to replace pen-and-paper testing. We're simply offering an alternative to those



Students taking Cambridge ESOL tests at a computer-based test centre.

test-takers who are more comfortable in this testing environment.

"We realise that no single approach works for everyone, and that's at the heart of what we do. By offering these types of tests we can give candidates the flexibility they need in the modern world."



Bye-bye Badger, hello Hum

Cambridge Assessment is set for a masterful display when its current Syndicate Chairman steps down this autumn.

Sir Christopher Hum KCMG, Master of Gonville and Caius College, Syndicate Chairman from 1 October 2010.

His successor spent three years as British ambassador in Beijing and has worked all over the world in the diplomatic service.

That's because the incumbent Professor Tony Badger, Master of Clare College, Cambridge, is handing the reins to his Gonville and Caius counterpart, Sir Christopher Hum, in October.

The Syndics oversee the running and global activities of Cambridge Assessment, and the world-leading American historian has been in the hot seat for six years.

Group Chief Executive Simon Lebus praised Professor Badger's "high standard of governance". He said: "We're extremely grateful because he has taken a lively interest in our work, has been generous with his time and support and has made an important contribution.

"We now look forward to working with Sir Christopher, whose long knowledge and experience of China will be especially relevant for our international business."