

Achieve

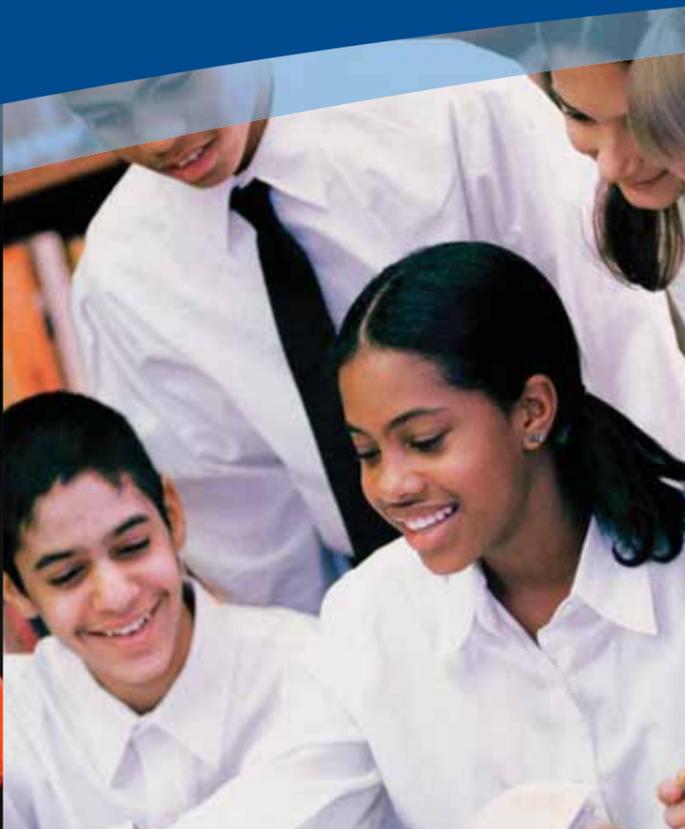
Autumn 2008



CAMBRIDGE ASSESSMENT



Welcome to *Achieve*, which brings you the latest news from Europe's largest assessment agency, Cambridge Assessment.



Cambridge IGCSE gains in global popularity

Worldwide entries have risen by 13 percent. More than 250 UK schools now include IGCSEs in their curriculum. see page 3 →



Government initiatives

Our fourth parliamentary research seminar sparks lively debate among education professionals and MPs. see page 6 →

Biggest global gathering of education experts

Almost 500 assessment and education experts from 58 countries gathered in Cambridge to exchange the latest research, ideas and experiences of their countries' education systems at the 34th International Association for Educational Assessment (IAEA) conference.



Hosted by Cambridge Assessment as part of its 150th anniversary celebrations, IAEA 2008 brought together internationally recognised education thinkers to present challenging views on the way assessment has changed and the directions it may take in the future. The conference theme – *'Re-interpreting Assessment: Society, Measurement and Meaning'* – prompted debate on technical measurement issues and on questions about the way assessment results are used in the wider world.

Professor Robert J Mislevy, of the University of Maryland, and Professor Dylan Wiliam, of the Institute of Education, London, were keynote speakers. Commissioner for

Multilingualism, Leonard Orban, also addressed the conference and praised Cambridge ESOL's work in creating a European language indicator to show the general level of foreign language knowledge of pupils in the Member States of the European Union.

More than 140 parallel paper and poster presentations ran alongside the main conference, which featured a total of 72 hours of presentations.

Cambridge Assessment's research division presented 14 papers on topics ranging from the reliability of on-screen essay marking, evaluating the rank-ordering method for



Sylvia Green, Director of Research at Cambridge Assessment introducing the panel – Yoav Cohen, President of the IAEA, Simon Lebus, Group Chief Executive at Cambridge Assessment and Leonard Orban, Commissioner for Multilingualism.

maintaining standards, to whether emotional and social abilities predict differences in attainment at secondary school.

Group Chief Executive of Cambridge Assessment, Simon Lebus, said: "We very much enjoyed welcoming participants to Cambridge by hosting this prestigious event. By sharing knowledge and experience in this way we are able to ensure that assessment continues to enrich lives, broaden horizons and shape futures throughout the world despite ever changing requirements."

Turn to pages 4 and 5 for more about IAEA 2008.



Ed Balls, Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families at the Department for Children, Schools and Families.

Independence: the key to public confidence in exams

This year, the Cambridge Assessment Group celebrates 150 years of raising education standards.

We all know that assessment and tests are vital tools for teachers if they are to help pupils of all ages do the best they can.

But independent exam boards are also vital to making sure that there is fair and accurate assessment and that all pupils work to common and comparable standards.

Over the past 150 years, Cambridge Assessment has been at the forefront of the world of educational assessment.

Back in 1858, 370 candidates in eight UK towns and cities were the first to take the forerunners of our modern exams.

Today, 15 million exam papers are dispatched by the group every year to schools and colleges in no fewer than 150 countries around the world.

And I know that Cambridge Assessment is committed to continuing to go from strength to strength – its work on e-assessment is just one way that it is preparing for the future.

So, many congratulations to everybody who has helped Cambridge Assessment reach this major milestone. With a new independent regulator in Ofqual, and the commitment of assessment agencies like Cambridge Assessment, we can protect and build on public confidence in standards and make sure pupils of all ages get the qualifications they need to achieve their ambitions.

MPs get the Cambridge Approach...

With the UK Government's legislative programme for 2009 certain to contain a Bill which will set the new English qualifications regulator – Ofqual – on an independent statutory footing, qualifications and assessment will come to the political fore. Cambridge Assessment took its message on the road this autumn – to Bournemouth, Manchester and Birmingham – venues for the main political parties' conferences.



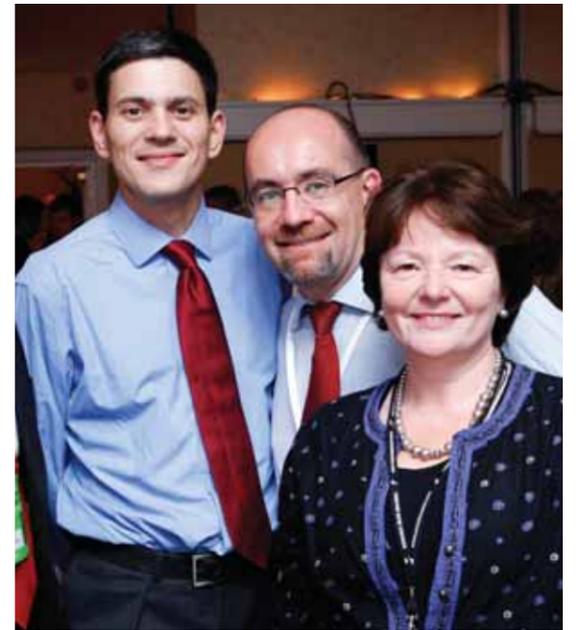
Left L-R: David Laws MP, the Liberal Democrats Spokesperson on Children, Schools and Families, with Lib-Dem party member Peter Downes and Greg Watson, Chief Executive of OCR.

Below: Ann Puntis, University of Cambridge International Examinations Chief Executive, met with Britain's Foreign Secretary David Miliband MP and British Education Minister, Jim Knight MP, after hearing the Prime Minister speak at the Labour Party Conference in Manchester. L-R: David Miliband MP, Jim Knight MP and Ann Puntis.

Cambridge Assessment welcomes the establishment of Ofqual. It looks forward to a system in which it is clear that there is independent oversight and in which there can be well-informed discussion on the nature of standards – something which the, relatively politicised, QCA has been unable or unwilling to foster.

When the legislation that set up the QCA was passed in 1997 there was little debate around standards. In fact, Parliament has not really addressed the issue directly since the establishment of the National Curriculum in the late 1980s.

It is clear that many in the education sector, share Cambridge Assessment's desire to ensure that there is a full discussion, both inside and outside Parliament, about how Ofqual is constituted and empowered. Fair assessment and secure standards demand nothing less.



Left L-R: Michael Gove MP Shadow Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families, Greg Watson, Chief Executive of OCR and Sam Freedman, Head of Education at the think tank Policy Exchange.

Below L-R: Nick Gibb, Conservative Spokesperson for Schools, Andrew Povey, Chairman of Conservative Education Society and Bene't Steinberg, Head of Group Public Affairs, Cambridge Assessment.



Cambridge IGCSE gains in global popularity

Worldwide entries for the June 2008 Cambridge IGCSE examination session have risen by 13 percent, confirming Cambridge IGCSE's status as the premier international qualification for secondary students.

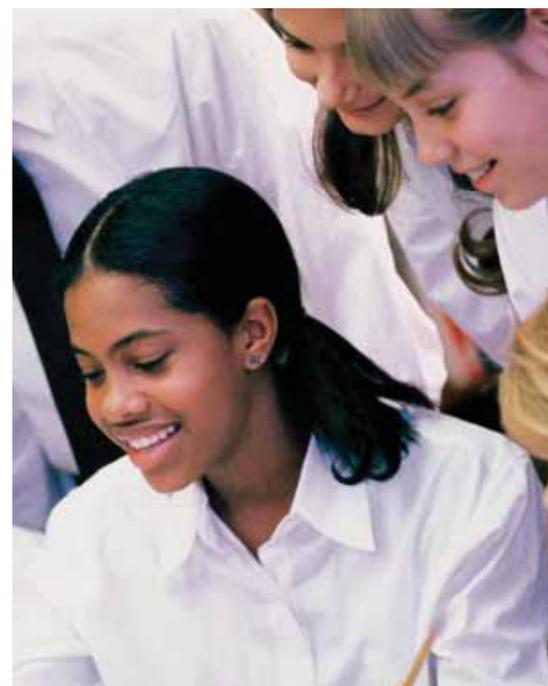
The increase is partly due to the rapid growth in the number of schools that offer the qualification. Another factor is that schools are taking advantage of the wide subject range by extending their IGCSE curriculum year on year and entering students for more subjects.

Cambridge IGCSE is designed to avoid cultural bias, making it accessible for students with good English skills but who are not native English speakers. The

entries in June 2008 show that schools that educate students bilingually are choosing IGCSE examinations to assess students.

The qualification is also growing in popularity in the UK. More than 250 UK schools now include IGCSEs in their curriculum. They find them to be a good preparation for A level and a means of increasing the level of choice offered to students.

Ann Puntis, CIE Chief Executive, said: "Cambridge IGCSEs are hugely popular with students for the simple reason that the syllabuses are interesting, relevant and challenging. They know that Cambridge IGCSEs are recognised and accepted around the world as proof of academic achievement."



Cambridge helps Palestinian teachers teach English

Three Palestinian universities have collaborated with the British Council to offer Cambridge ESOL's Teaching Knowledge Test (TKT) for the first time in the region. TKT is an ideal test for all current and potential teachers of English to speakers of other languages.

The course aims to boost teachers' confidence and enhance their job prospects by focusing on the core teaching knowledge needed by teachers of primary, secondary or adult learners worldwide.

After taking a 20 hour preparatory training course, which focused on the background to language teaching and learning, 17 English language lecturers from Al Quds Open, Bethlehem and Hebron Universities completed Module 1 of TKT. They are now looking forward to employing the techniques learned on the course when carrying out lectures to their students.

British Council is currently in discussion with the heads of the three university departments on how to deliver the remaining two modules to the lecturers in order for them to be awarded the Cambridge ESOL TKT certificate.



Palestinian teachers taking Cambridge ESOL's Teaching Knowledge Test.

It's all about relationships

The head of the new exams regulator for England, Ofqual, has called for greater openness in assessment matters.



Speaking at a recent Cambridge Assessment seminar, Kathleen Tattersall, Ofqual's Chair, presented an historical perspective on the relationship of examination boards with schools and colleges, and discussed whether the experience of the past could help provide a direction for the future.

Kathleen, who is also former CEO of the exam board AQA, raised the issue of trust and the importance of professional teacher engagement in the system. She said a number of radical changes had shaped the ways in which the exam boards and teachers interact. These included: the creation of the national curriculum; a reduction in the number of awarding bodies; a shift of responsibilities from local authorities to schools; greater central control from Government; and the arrival of national strategies and targets.

To underpin public confidence in the system, Kathleen called for:

- Openness and transparency from all those involved
- An engagement in the debate about standards
- A Professional Code of Conduct for awarding bodies and for assessors whether in schools or working externally, together with a Code of Ethics.

To watch the presentation in full or to download Kathleen's paper, visit www.cambridgeassessment.org.uk.

Cambridge Assessment seminars provide a rich resource for assessment professionals and for everyone with an interest in assessment issues. The seminars are presented by eminent figures in the world of education and their participative format encourages lively debate on key issues.

IAEA Conference

Lack of trust – standards at risk

The opening of IAEA 2008 attracted a flurry of media interest as comments from Group Chief Executive, Simon Lebus, resonated among the education community:

"Public qualifications depend on trust... This [political] interference is counterproductive. It harms public confidence, and means that people do not believe politicians' annual protestations that things are getting better since the claim is almost impossible to verify with the education and qualification system in a ferment of perpetual change. This is thoroughly unhelpful, and as the most international of the UK's exam boards... we are only too aware of the damage inflicted on the international standing of the UK's education system by this perception of drifting standards and political involvement. I am sure this is one of the reasons for the growing demand for international qualifications such as the IB, IGCSE and the new Cambridge Pre-U."

"Meddling ministers are damaging exams"

Daily Mail, 09/09/2008

"Whitehall meddling has harmed belief in exams"

Daily Mail (late edition), 09/09/2008

"Politics harming school standards"

The Daily Telegraph, 09/09/2008

"School standards 'undermined by politicians'"

Telegraph.co.uk, 09/09/2008

"Westminster meddlers destroying confidence in British education"

The Independent, 09/09/2008

"Political meddling has damaged exam system"

Evening Standard, 08/09/2008

"Political interference' under fire"

Press Association, 08/09/2008

"Political meddling damages credibility"

Times Educational Supplement, 12/09/08



Top: Delegates engrossed at IAEA 2008. Bottom left: Cambridge Assessment's Group Chief Executive, Simon Lebus, addressing the conference. Bottom right: Delegates enjoying the gala dinner at King's College, Cambridge.

About the International Association for Education Assessment (IAEA)

Founded in 1975, the IAEA is a not-for-profit, non-governmental association of measurement agencies around the world. The broad purpose of IAEA is to assist educational agencies in the development and appropriate application of educational assessment techniques to improve the quality of education. Its primary objectives are:

- To improve communication among organisations involved in educational assessment by sharing professional expertise through conferences and publications, and by providing a framework within which cooperative research, training, and projects involving educational assessment can be undertaken.
- To make expertise in assessment techniques more readily available for the solution of educational problems.
- To cooperate with other agencies having complementary interests.
- To engage in other activities for the improvement of assessment techniques and their appropriate use by educational agencies around the world.

IAEA has consultative status with United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation in the achievement of mutual goals.

For further information and to watch highlights from the IAEA 2008, visit:
www.iaea2008.cambridgeassessment.org.uk

The week that was...

Monday 8 September

- The conference is officially opened. Yoav Cohen, President of IAEA, says that this year's conference is an "apt reflection of the state of educational assessment today" and how we need to "weave measurement into the activity of learning".
- Leonard Orban, EU Commissioner for Multilingualism, trails EU multilingual strategy a week before it's published. He makes reference to Cambridge ESOL's work on Survey Lang – a European language indicator designed to show the general level of foreign language knowledge of pupils in the Member States of the European Union.
- In his keynote presentation, Professor Robert J Mislevy from the University of Maryland (USA), poses the question, "how can we tackle the assessment problems we face today?" He considers the exciting challenges and opportunities in a world of expanding technological capability and explores how we can develop better assessments.

Tuesday 9 September

- Researchers from AQA highlight the issue of public trust in high-stakes assessment and how to measure it. They conclude from a preliminary study that it is likely that public trust is a contributing factor in trends such as the increase in marking enquiries. However, they point out that other factors such as pressure on schools and colleges to perform are also an important factor.
- Single level tests hit the headlines following research presented by Chris Whetton from the National Foundation for Educational Research. He discusses the Government's progress so far in developing the new alternative assessment system to the National Curriculum testing system, outlining what has been achieved and the issues that remain to be resolved.
- Oxford University Centre for Educational Assessment debates whether or not 'standards' are rising or falling or whether it is simply changes resulting from the examination and reporting process.

Wednesday 10 September

- No papers are presented. Delegates get the chance to explore and enjoy some of the sights England has to offer!

Thursday 11 September

- Leading education experts from the UK discuss all things 'e' from the reliability of on-screen essay marking to whether marking images of essays on-screen retain marker confidence and reliability.
- Ofqual's Paul Newton, explores the idea of comparability between subjects. As the regulator for public examinations in England, Ofqual has a role in leading the national debate on standards between subjects. In his presentation, he identifies a range of different perspectives from which comparability can be understood, and a number of quite distinct definitions of comparability within these perspectives. He goes on to explain why there is no necessary relationship between methods for investigating comparability and definitions of comparability and, hence, why the same findings can be explained in different ways.

Friday 12 September

- The Vice-Chancellor of Cambridge University, Professor Alison Richard, officially closes the IAEA 2008 conference and reflects on the role of the world's great universities; their shared characteristics; and what makes Cambridge distinctive; looking at how the University's 800 year history has shaped how we think about teaching and learning.

Results analysis

Teachers will be able to review the exam performance of individual candidates or whole schools using a new and free analysis service from OCR.

Active Results, which is currently in pilot stage, has been developed by OCR with education software firm RM and data experts Forvus.

In a departure from similar systems, *Active Results* takes into account value added progress measures by including important candidate information such as background and prior achievement.

The reporting for *Active Results* is also breaking new ground, having been designed in close consultation with teachers. Data can be analysed using filters on several categories such as gender and other candidate information, as well as providing breakdowns of results by question and topic.

Greg Watson, OCR chief executive, said: "OCR wants to use developing technologies to deliver intelligent support for teachers, and that is what *Active Results* will be designed to do."

For more information, visit: www.ocr.org.uk

Indian students improve their English

Nearly 19,000 students from Anna University in India's Coimbatore region are improving their knowledge of English with Cambridge ESOL's Business Language Testing Service (BULATS) as part of their semester examinations.

The BULATS exams form part of a collaborative project between Anna University, EBEL Language Laboratories Pvt. Ltd and Cambridge ESOL.

Vice-Chancellor R Radhakrishnan said that outsourcing an entire subject made the project unique for the country: "When students enter colleges, the level of English knowledge they possess is not known. Also English is restricted to classrooms. Sometimes the subject itself is taught in Tamil [a Dravidian language spoken predominantly in India and the north-eastern region of Sri Lanka]. Teachers have to play an important role in doing away with this practice. The outsourced subject will involve a practical approach."

Students who successfully take the exams will receive a joint certificate from Anna University and the University of Cambridge.

The BULATS exams are the second phase of the project. The first phase involved the development of training programmes for the Faculty of English staff in the affiliated colleges of Anna University. The teachers involved received training for the new syllabus and the teaching methods required from the EBEL.

For more information, visit: www.cambridgeESOL.org

Pioneering pan-European test will boost language learning

Education journalist Mike Baker talks to Neil Jones, of Cambridge ESOL, about Europe's largest survey of language competence.

"Nothing like this has been done before". Neil Jones is excited about his involvement in *SurveyLang*, a Europe-wide survey of language learning for the European Commission.

It is ambitious. The aim: to establish the foreign language competency of pupils throughout the European Union. It will provide researchers with fascinating data and should help policy-makers answer vital questions. For example, we might learn which language learning methods work best, which languages are harder to master, and who is best at learning which languages.

The full name of the project is the European Survey on Language Competences. It emerged from the European Union's desire to promote multilingualism, and perhaps to make countries less dependent on English as the *lingua franca* of Europe.

Achieving a consensus on aims has taken quite some time – six years just to get to the announcement of the consortium of expert bodies, coordinated by Cambridge ESOL, which will undertake the project. Neil Jones is the project's Vice-Director.

Neil says it will be "very difficult to compare language learning achievements across different countries". At the heart of this task is the design of what he calls a "pan-European language test", covering reading, writing

and listening. Alongside questionnaires that will give background information, these tests will be targeted at around 1500 students, aged 15 to 16, in each of the member countries.

Each country will test students in two foreign languages most commonly taught, chosen from: English, French, German, Italian and Spanish. This limited range is "a compromise", according to Neil, between the wider list of European languages and what is actually feasible in this first round of the survey. Likewise, says Neil, "practical issues" have meant that oral skills will not be tested until the second round.

The assessment tool looks "exciting" and "sophisticated" according to Neil, for whom this is the culmination of a career that started with teaching English as a foreign language and moved on to statistical methodology. He says it will handle the authoring of a bank of test questions and their use as both paper and computer-based tests.

The results will be reported in terms of the Common European Framework of Reference for languages. There will be a score for each language in each country. So will there be football-style league tables of language competence – a sort of Champions League of language learning? Will Germany finish above France? Will England be relegated?



Neil Jones, Vice Project Director of Cambridge ESOL's Research and Validation department.

Neil acknowledges "there will be league tables, as we can't prevent others doing that, but it is not the point of the exercise". The purpose, he says, is to improve language teaching. "I hope it will lead to evidence-based policy-making in each of the member countries". But what about the role of the European Commission? Could this be the first step towards a single European language curriculum? Neil says the Commission has no "harmonisation" remit with respect to education, and having a common frame of reference certainly doesn't mean imposing the same aims of methodology on every learning context.

Meanwhile, he has eagerly grabbed the chance to work on this pioneering project, which "should move discussions forward at a European level about the proper link between learning, teaching and assessment. This is what I have been interested in all my professional life."

Why Government education initiatives work – or don't

There was a lively debate on government education policy at Cambridge Assessment's fourth Parliamentary research seminar at the House of Commons. The topic under discussion was 'what makes Government education initiatives succeed or fail'. The seminar was attended by 60 key senior education professionals and MPs.

The series of seminars is designed to bring together a wide range of professionals in education to look at 'big picture' topics and enable policy makers to access the knowledge of leading experts.

The event was chaired by Barry Sheerman, the Chair of the House of Commons Children, Schools and Families Select Committee. Speakers included Kathy Sylva, Sue Burroughs Lange and Philip Davies. They each gave their different perspectives on what makes Government initiatives succeed and take root in mainstream practice. They also discussed how the best cutting edge research coming out of institutions can be adopted by policy-makers and explored the reasons why some ideas that appear beneficial from a research perspective are not taken up by Government.



Big Ben and the Houses of Parliament.

Professor Kathy Sylva talked about models for how researchers and policy makers can work effectively together. She used the Effective Provision of Pre-School Education Project, commissioned in 1996 – and still ongoing – as a case study.

Dr Sue Burroughs Lange of the Institute of Education outlined her experiences in trying to encourage the uptake of the Reading Recovery programme.

Philip Davies of the American Institutes for Research, who served in the Strategy Unit at the Cabinet Office, gave a presentation based on his experiences of evidence based policy-making.

The seminar is available to listen to in full, including the Q&A session which followed the presentations, on Policy Review TV which can be accessed from www.cambridgeassessment.org.uk

Pakistan principals progress

University of Cambridge International Examinations (CIE) demonstrated its commitment to education in Pakistan when it hosted a symposium for principals from the country's leading schools during the summer.



Delegates and CIE staff outside the Møller Centre in Cambridge.

The interactive event in Cambridge enabled teachers to share their experiences of the Cambridge International Curriculum. Samina Rahman, Director of Lahore Grammar School, said: "The symposium has given me the opportunity to engage with other schools offering A and O-levels in Pakistan. CIE facilitates a sharing of ideas by bringing schools together."

The dedication of all the teachers who took part contributed to the success of the event. Dr David Gosling, Principal of Edwardes College, praised CIE for providing a forum for teachers to share their concerns about the future of education. "The

symposium reaffirms our commitment to education in a world that is increasingly trying to devalue it," he said.

CIE qualifications have been taught in South Asia for more than 90 years. William Bickerdike, CIE's Regional Manager for Middle East, North Africa and Pakistan, said: "CIE wants to ensure that students following the CIE curriculum receive the best opportunities to succeed in higher education and to develop skills for the modern world. Engaging with teachers directly and listening to their views plays a vital role in helping CIE achieve this aim."

World of work English gets accredited in the UK

QCA has formally accredited Cambridge ESOL's professional English exams from its World of Work range, as part of the UK's National Qualifications Framework.

Official accreditation in the UK of the multilingual Business Language Testing System (BULATS) opens the way to recognition in other countries for employment in the state sector. It will also make it easier for employers to understand the value of the test.

QCA is one of a growing number of commercial, professional and official organisations around the world that have recognised Cambridge ESOL's range of qualifications in professional English. Further information on recognition can be found at: www.cambridgeesol.org/recognition

BULATS choice for global language training strategy

A global leader in aerospace, defence and related services has integrated Cambridge ESOL's Business Language Testing Service (BULATS) into its worldwide strategy for language training.

EADS Defence and Security – which comprises high-profile companies such as Airbus, Eurocopter and MBDA – will use BULATS to assess the initial language level of its employees in English, German, Spanish and French before they begin language training courses. Initially, this new adoption involves EADS sites in France and Germany but could be extended to further units in other European sites.

The BULATS exam can be a real advantage to multinational companies as it tests key communication skills required in real-life business situations. Its multilingual platform will help the organisation to establish common standards of language proficiency across its entire workforce. The fast and accurate method of assessing language skills for recruitment, training, benchmarking and staff development has made BULATS an increasingly popular choice for companies.

BULATS was developed and is jointly run in more than 30 countries by Cambridge ESOL, the Alliance Française (France), Goethe-Institut (Germany) and the Universidad de Salamanca (Spain).

Assessment for learning

Classroom-based assessment continues to be in the spotlight with the recent publication of the Department for Children, Schools and Families' Assessment for Learning strategy (AfL).

The Cambridge Assessment Network has already run five conferences for teachers on AfL, featuring well-known names in the field. These have enabled teachers to reflect on the thinking behind AfL and to work on practical ways of implementing it in the classroom.

Previous keynote speakers at the conferences have included inspirational leaders in the field such as Professor Dylan Wiliam, from the Institute of Education, University of London, and Professor Paul Black, from the Department of Education, King's College London.

The most recent conference was led by Sue Swaffield, a lecturer in the Educational Leadership and School Improvement team in the Faculty of Education at Cambridge University. Her plenary presentation "Feedback: the central process in Assessment for Learning" provided an overview of AfL as an introduction to exploring the features of feedback and its effects on learning. During the day, delegates discussed how AfL could be sustained and developed in schools, in workshops led by experienced practitioners.

The Cambridge Assessment Network will again be offering an Assessment for Learning conference for teachers in March and November 2009, and further details of these will be available in the conferences section of our website, www.assessnet.org.uk

Comments from previous delegates:

- "A very valuable day and I would love to continue my work on assessment later in the year."
- "Good focus, good keynote speech and inspirational. Discussing with colleagues created a great opportunity for further thinking which can be taken back to my department and the whole school."
- "Best training day I have ever been on; real sense of academic rigour behind presentations – absolute trust instilled by presenters. Thank you!"

GCSE changes explained

OCR's free series of events to explain what's happening to GCSEs for first teaching in September 2009 have been hugely popular.

More than 1,500 people attended the events which were held in Newcastle, Coventry, Manchester and London. Visitors got to meet subject experts and take part in presentations covering all aspects of OCR's 93 newly accredited GCSE qualifications in 52 different subjects.

Visit www.gcsechanges.com to find out more about the revised GCSEs.

Watch this space...

Developing enterprise in Zambia

Cambridge Assessment Group is working in partnership with Judge Business School and Camfed, a leading charity in the field of girls' education in Africa, to launch a leadership and enterprise course in Zambia in December 2008.

Over 100 young women will participate in the course, which involves 250 hours of active learning, and two intensive residential courses. It will be accredited by University of Cambridge International Examinations (CIE).

The objective of the programme is to create entrepreneurial African women leaders with the capacity to transform their lives and those of their communities.

It is being sponsored by Goldman Sachs in the context of their *10,000 Women* initiative. Look out for more details in the next issue of *Achieve*.

Contact us

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

Bene't Steinberg or Paul O'Donnell
Public Affairs
1 Regent Street
Cambridge
CB2 1GG

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



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Photograph of Big Ben
Corbis

VQ Day celebrations

OCR supported VQ Day, which took place on 23 July, as a celebration of vocational success. On the day itself, students, colleges and employers across the country came together to celebrate the achievements of students who have studied hard to gain a vocational qualification.



Celebrity Alesha Dixon, who hosted VQ Day, with OCR's Chief Executive, Greg Watson.

Clara Kenyon, Director of Qualifications at OCR said: "In today's world, there is a greater range and variety of jobs than ever before. Accordingly, new and different skills are often needed. It would be foolish to think that 'one size fits all' when it comes to qualifications, and both vocational and general qualifications have a valued place in preparing individuals for their chosen career paths. OCR is pleased to be supporting VQ Day in recognising the worth of vocational qualifications, not just to the individual, but to society and the economy as a whole."

VQ Day was hailed a great success in raising the profile of vocational qualifications, with events across the country and a flagship event hosted in London by singer and Strictly Come Dancing winner, Alesha Dixon, whose practical qualification led to success in music and broadcasting.

VQ success story:

Student Lisa Wilson gained an OCR National in Health and Social Care. She said: "Because I knew I wanted to work in midwifery, I was looking for a course that provided me with plenty of practical hands-on experience. This was the appeal of OCR Nationals. I was able to undertake a number of work experience placements at a holiday camp for disabled people and at a nursery. This meant I got to grips with practical aspects of the course as well as the theory. This combination will stand me in great stead for my degree and future career."

First lessons get underway for Cambridge Pre-U

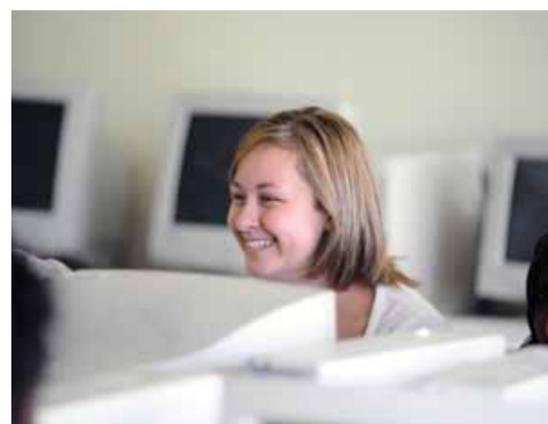
A radical alternative to A-levels and the International Baccalaureate has just been launched in 50 state and independent schools in the UK.

The first teaching of the new post-16 qualification, Cambridge Pre-U, began in September.

Developed by University of Cambridge International Examinations (CIE), Cambridge Pre-U is designed to equip students with the knowledge and independent study skills they need to make a success of their studies at university. An additional 100 schools are already planning to offer it within the next 2-3 years.

Schools are adopting Cambridge Pre-U in several ways. Some schools are teaching a large number of Cambridge Pre-U subjects, while others are starting with one or two subjects, mainly because they favour the content of the Cambridge Pre-U syllabuses.

A number of schools are offering GPR (Global Perspectives and Independent Research), the core component of the Cambridge Pre-U Diploma. Students can gain the Diploma by taking GPR and three Cambridge Pre-U Principal Subjects. They may also substitute up to two A Levels for Principal Subjects to achieve the Diploma.



A pupil at Coloma Convent Girls' School in Croydon, one of first state schools to offer Cambridge Pre-U.

Kevin Stannard, CIE Director, said: "We are working closely with the adopting schools to ensure that students embarking on these courses are fully supported. The aim of Cambridge Pre-U remains that of providing schools, teachers and, through them, students, with a framework within which they can become truly engaged and interested, stretched and challenged."