

# agenda

NEWS AND VIEWS FROM OCR – AUTUMN / WINTER 2019

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OF UNITED LEARNING, PRISON EDUCATION  
AND ‘SUPERHEAD’ FAME**

**CAMBRIDGE TECHNICALS**



**Many 100% internally assessed level 3 vocational qualifications lose their funding in 2020.  
Make the simple move to an externally assessed Cambridge Technicals qualification.**

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Welcome to our Autumn/Winter 2019 issue of **agenda**, which offers a snapshot of our latest news and views. I hope your term is going smoothly.

In this issue, there's a reminder on page 4 of all the support we provide, such as our examiners' reports and our new bite-sized 'Summer highlights', to help teachers and students learn from our exams. On pages 12-13, we take you behind the scenes to OCR's Customer Support Centre on day 22 of the Summer 2019 exam series. Whether it's nose bleeds during exams or students who use a pen with disappearing ink, the team is there to help.

As a keen supporter of women's education, I'm delighted to share the details of our next Science Forum which will look at gender issues, plus the news that the Luminary Bakery, which helps disadvantaged women to develop skills, qualifications and confidence, is going from strength to strength. I'd like to thank Dame Sally Coates, now Director of Secondary Education for the largest Academy Trust in the country, and one of the original 'superheads' who also led the Review of Prison Education, for sharing her thoughts on education and the challenges she faces (on pages 8 – 9). All this, plus why we kept it simple when we updated our GCSE Computer Science.

To get in touch about anything you read, email [agenda@ocr.org.uk](mailto:agenda@ocr.org.uk).

**Jill Duffy**

Chief Executive, OCR

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#### Cover Story: GCSE Computer Science

Students learning Computer Science at Vyners School in Uxbridge. On 1 October, we launched our updated GCSE in Computer Science. Teachers told us they wanted stability after a period of change so we have kept changes to a minimum and focused on providing lots of support. Read the details on pages 10-11.





## Celebrating women in STEM

On A Level results day in August, our CEO Jill Duffy celebrated the fact that the number of female students taking STEM A Levels had overtaken male students for the first time. This followed years of effort to get over some of the stereotypes girls might have had studying science. "As a proud mum of two daughters who are scientists," Jill said, "I think it's absolutely brilliant to see this increase in females choosing to take A Level Sciences."

At OCR's next Science Subject Forum on 14 November, crystallographer Dr Claire Murray will be sharing her research as part of a discussion about how to support gender equality in science. Dr Murray has taken part in the Royal Society of Chemistry's Breaking the Barriers Campaign.

Our Forums are opportunities to talk about our specifications, to hear policy updates and to debate specific issues. Teachers are welcome to attend the Science and other Forums that we run in a wide range of subjects every Autumn and every Spring at our offices in Cambridge, from 10.30am to 3pm. The list of our forums is on page 15.

To get in touch about any of the Forums still to come this November or in March 2020, please contact [Subject.Forums@ocr.org.uk](mailto:Subject.Forums@ocr.org.uk).

## Spotlight on Support

Our range of support designed to give teachers and students the assessment experience they want and results they deserve is growing. Here's a snapshot of the latest developments.



### Examiners' Reports

This year, we extended our new-style examiners' reports to virtually all our qualifications. They provide teachers with an overview of how students performed, a question by question analysis of responses, plus examples of good performance and where performance could be improved.

**Renata Paradowska**, who teaches our Cambridge National in Child Development at Furze Platt Senior School, Berkshire, commented: *"Thank you for producing such a detailed report. I am really happy with the depth of discussion and the fact that every exam question was commented on. I wished all exam boards were putting so much effort into producing those reports. Outstanding post-exam service."*

**Jo Payne**, Head of Geography at Okehampton College in Devon, also liked the content: *"The reports are really clear and I like the questions being included so the team*

*didn't have to flick back to the papers. The inclusion of candidates' answers has been helpful to demonstrate points made by the PE. I've used these in the first team meeting as we've explored students' results."*

### Summer Highlights

Building on the success of our reports, we are now releasing new 'Summer Highlights' for use with students. These are simple, clear and eye catching documents which can be used with students during lessons or as posters in the classroom. Available this Autumn for a selection of our qualifications initially, they are bite-size, top-level summaries of our examiners' reports. They highlight:

- Specific issues that tripped students up in an exam series
- General areas of concern or misconception, where teaching or reference to our resources might be worthwhile

- Simple exam tips
- Things that went well
- And data/results analysis in the form of infographics.

### Active Results

We've made updates to improve our free results analysis service this year, making it more user friendly and introducing new features such as the ability to switch between marks and percentages when viewing reports for example. Over 3,400 schools and colleges used the service to review this Summer's exam performance. At Lawrence Sheriff School in Rugby, **Luke Brown**, Head of Geography, said: *"Active Results provides us with the ability to improve our teachers. It allows us to identify our strengths and areas where we might need to improve to support our students."*

### Professional Development

Over 5,000 teachers received some sort of training from us in 2018/19 and we've recently improved our 'professional development' service. All

training can now be found on the OCR website, with relevant and upcoming events shown on each qualification page. Teachers can easily browse courses, find past course materials, and book on to events directly through those pages.

### Internal assessment online learning course

We're launching free online courses to support anyone delivering and marking internally assessed units. They cover Cambridge Nationals in Creative iMedia, Cambridge Technicals in Health and Social Care, A level Geography, A Level Media, and GCSE Art and Design. They are on demand and feature the best elements (as identified by teachers) of our online and face-to-face training courses. We're focussing on areas we know are challenging and included standardisation-style exercises. Designed to build confidence, teachers can return to the material again and again.



## The research behind our GCSE Science papers

In 2018, we used a research-based approach to look into the accessibility of our GCSE (9-1) Science exam papers and we made some improvements.

We reviewed the look and feel of our papers through text, tone, language, images and formatting to help improve the exam experience for your students. We also produced guides which are available on our website which explore our papers and assessment approach. These explain the design of our papers, from their structure and the assessment objectives used, to command words and assessment principles.

The expert researchers at Cambridge Assessment have followed up their original study by approaching Year 11 students for their views on accessibility of text,

tone, language, images and formatting. Over 50 students were asked to take and give feedback on two versions of a short GCSE Science paper featuring questions 'before' and 'after' our accessibility improvement work. The research found that students tended to prefer our new questions with simpler vocabulary and simpler grammatical structures.

Another finding from talking to students was that most of them found new questions with more concise contexts easier to understand. Our focus on the accessibility of our GCSE Science papers continues and we are also committed to asking schools for their views on our papers through our post-exam survey which we conducted again after the summer 2019 exams.

## Lost your exam certificate?

Whether it's for a job interview or for further study, many people contact us because they've lost their original exam certificate or statement of results. As well as current OCR qualifications, we hold records going back many years, covering old qualifications such as CSEs or results from smaller exam boards that no longer exist having joined the OCR family at one time.

One request recently came from an 85 year-old French customer who originally wrote to Cambridge University asking for her RSA English result, gained in the 1950s from 'somewhere in London'. Her letter eventually found its way to OCR so the team gave her a call, sent her a special paper application form, and then guided her through the application and payment

process. Et voila! Although her memory of the details was vague, with the extra help of the Cambridge Assessment Archives team, we supplied her with a replacement certificate for her original 1950s qualification.

The application system for replacement certificates is user-friendly and easily accessible via our website [www.ocr.org.uk/students/replacement-certificates](http://www.ocr.org.uk/students/replacement-certificates). To better support people needing evidence of their exam results, we launched a new 'fast track' service at the beginning of this summer. It is a priority service which turns round applications for certificates within five days (our usual delivery time is 20 days max.). In the first two months alone, we received over 600 applications.

## Top performers

Congratulations to over 50 schools and colleges whose students got the highest marks in the country in our GCSE or A Level exams this summer. We shared the good news with each school on results day. Well done to students and teachers for these impressive achievements and all the hard work involved.

## In brief

### Rapid priority review of marking for A Levels

Providing a rapid priority review of marking service for A Level students who want to query their result is important, especially when university places may be involved. While the number of requests to review A and AS Level marking this Summer was up on 2018, our average turnaround time remained a speedy 4 days.

### Research behind OCR's GCSE Geography

The enquiry-based learning (EBL) approach that we offer in our GCSE Geography B was the subject of a paper presented by Cambridge Assessment's research team this autumn at the British Educational Research Association's annual conference. The researchers probed teachers' views on EBL, many of whom reported the approach was better for student engagement.

### Wider choice of sports for GCSE and A Level PE

The Dfe has extended its list of approved activities that students taking GCSE, A or AS Level PE courses can take. Following a review, the DfE announced revised lists which included sports such as ice hockey, futsal and windsurfing for the first time. These new activities will be incorporated into all PE specifications for teaching from September 2020.

[www.ocr.org.uk/sport](http://www.ocr.org.uk/sport)

### Malpractice Commission finds 'system works well'

A new report looking at ways to reduce malpractice around general and academic qualifications was published in September. The 176-page report is the work of the Independent Commission on Examination Malpractice, headed up by Sir John Dunford. The report makes 78 recommendations including looking at the role of new technology to both cause and prevent malpractice. Nevertheless, the report concludes positively: "The exams system in the UK works well and there is a very low level of malpractice. The vast majority of the several hundred thousand people involved in the exams system act with integrity and professionalism." The JCQ, who commissioned the report, will respond next year highlighting progress on what's been implemented.



### Cambridge Technicals – Making the move from 2012 to 2016

Earlier this year, the DfE announced that specific Level 3 vocational qualifications which have no externally assessed units, such as our 2012 Cambridge Technicals, will be 'defunded'. The last date for new starts on these vocational qualifications that have no external assessment is 31 July 2020.

To support everyone teaching – or considering teaching – our 2012 or 2016 Cambridge Technicals, we're running free 'Assess your Options' events throughout November. Sessions include information about making the switch to 2016 Cambridge Technicals, (which have externally assessed units), the differences between non-examined and examined assessment, and a comparison of 2012 and 2016 content. If you aren't able to attend, we've put all our key support information in one place:

[teach.ocr.org.uk/move-to-cambridge-technicals](http://teach.ocr.org.uk/move-to-cambridge-technicals)



## Sweet success

Luminary Bakery, a social enterprise based in East London, provides a safe and professional environment for women who have experienced significant social and economic disadvantage and enables them to thrive and learn new employability and transferable life skills through baking.

The six-month course that Luminary offers each group of women covers baking skills, food hygiene and personal development and includes OCR's Life and Living Skills Introductory Award qualification. Our qualification supports Entry Level vocational learners and is also popular with SEND programmes wishing to offer learners a personalised programme. Luminary uses the qualification and resources to 'practically support a woman and help her grow, whilst working towards a certificate she can be proud of.'

OCR is committed to supporting vulnerable and disadvantaged learners and has developed a very strong relationship with Luminary Bakery over the past four years, as they go from strength to strength. Ruth Carter, OCR Stakeholder Relationships Manager, pictured here alongside Alice Williams, Luminary Bakery's founder and CEO (far left), visited Luminary this Summer as part of our on-going support of the project. Ruth also mentored one of the graduates herself. Luminary Bakery featured in the September 2019 edition of the fashion magazine *British Vogue*, guest edited by HRH the Duchess of Sussex.

## Moving Stories

### Our History competition for GCSE students re-launches

**We are delighted to be running our joint history competition for GCSE students with the national Migration Museum for a second time.**

The competition, which first ran from 2016 to 2018, is aimed to inspire students studying the topic of migration which features on both our History GCSEs. In 2018, a team from Aylesbury High School were the winners of the first joint 'Moving Stories' competition with an exhibition design using the idea of a series of train carriages to tell migration stories from different eras. The team of four students won a trip to New York and visited Ellis Island and the Tenement Museum.

The competition which was launched for a second time earlier this year again asks teams to plan an exhibition around the migration theme. This can be based on what they have studied in class or based on personal interest. The prize for the winning team (of up to four students) is an all-expenses trip to Paris or Dublin, both cities with fascinating histories of

migration to explore.

The deadline for submitting entries is March 2020 and teams with the best entries will be invited to present at a final event in London in April 2020. For more details, including a teachers' pack, visit [www.migrationmuseum.org/movingstories2019-20](http://www.migrationmuseum.org/movingstories2019-20).

When we were developing our new History GCSEs, we believed passionately that the topic of migration would be engaging for students in the classroom and provide a great vehicle for teaching historical concepts such as continuity and change. This is an optional topic on both our Explaining the Modern World (GCSE A) and our Schools History Project (GCSE B).

The enthusiasm that students have shown for the competition and for the migration topic on both our GCSEs (noted by our examiners) is evident. We



*The winning team of GCSE History students from Aylesbury High School  
Photo: Hugo de la Rosa Paulet*

are proud to offer a choice of History GCSEs to suit the differing needs of teachers and students. Our Schools History Project GCSE B for example has always looked to nurture student engagement, broaden their historical knowledge and sense of enquiry, and

celebrate a diverse curriculum, all of which complement the direction of the new Ofsted framework being introduced into schools this Autumn.

[www.ocr.org.uk/history](http://www.ocr.org.uk/history)



# Supporting the education of West Midlands students

**We've given bursaries to 13 of the West Midlands' most talented A Level students to support them with their studies at Cambridge University.**

The bursaries, which support students to the tune of £3000 p.a., help them make the most of their time at the University. On what is one of our favourite days of the year, we celebrated the students' achievements at our Coventry offices in September, with the help of their families and teachers from their schools.

Congratulating the students, Saul Nassé, chief executive of OCR's parent organisation, Cambridge Assessment, (pictured below presenting a certificate to student Fabianna Dennis) said: "They won places at Cambridge, so they are all academic high flyers but they have other talents too. Many have supported other students in their schools and carried out voluntary work in their local communities. There are also gifted musicians, performing artists, sportspeople, debaters and science and maths competition winners amongst them."



Now in its 16th year, the OCR bursary scheme has supported more than 100 students from the West Midlands at Cambridge University. The bursary fund arises from our historical association with the West Midlands Examinations Board.

Fabianna (pictured above with Saul), from Caludon Castle School in Coventry, now studying Psychological and Behavioural Sciences at Girton College said: "I feel grateful to have won the OCR bursary because I have worked so hard to get into Cambridge. Having the bursary just means that while completing my course I can focus on my studies rather than worry about my finances."

Fred Thompson, (pictured right) is one of two students from Kings Norton Girls' School and Sixth Form to have won an OCR bursary this year. His form tutor and physics teacher, Neil Todd, said, "Fred is an extremely gifted young man and one of the most able students I have ever taught. We were delighted when he gained a richly deserved place at Cambridge University. Fred is both an outstanding student and a thoroughly decent person."

## Congratulations to our 2019 bursary award winners:

**Anna Freeman** from Stratford Girls' Grammar School  
**Ayesha Rasool** from King Edward VI Camp Hill School for Girls  
**Becky Foster** from Bromsgrove School  
**Brody Wooding** from Shrewsbury Colleges Group  
**Cenk Balu** from John Willmott School  
**Dominika Janke** from St Augustine's Catholic High School  
**Fabianna Dennis** from Caludon Castle School  
**Fred Thompson** from Kings Norton Girls' School and Sixth Form  
**Heather Jones** from Denstone College  
**Irram Gheer** from Bordesley Green Girls' School  
**Nora Bennani-Kemmoun** from Kings Norton Girls' School and Sixth Form  
**Sehrish Mahmood** from Ormiston Forge Academy  
**Sunvir Sahota** from King Edward VI Aston School



Applications for our bursary scheme will open in Spring 2020.

[www.ocr.org.uk/bursaryscheme](http://www.ocr.org.uk/bursaryscheme)

**Dame Sally Coates** is Director of Secondary Education at United Learning, the biggest Academy Trust in England. She currently looks after 46 state secondary schools, and a further 12 which are independent. A 'superhead', she was responsible for transforming Burlington Danes Academy in West London from a school in special measures to one with an 'Outstanding' Ofsted rating. In 2016, she delivered the 'Coates' Review of Prison Education'. Author of 'Headstrong; 11 lessons of School Leadership', she also chaired the Independent Review of Teachers' Standards.

Here, Sally tells **agenda** about her own path into education and the challenges she faces in her role.

**What has been your path into your current role?**

Before my current job at United Learning, I was Head of Burlington Danes in White City, London and previously I was Head of Sacred Heart Catholic School in Camberwell. So United Learning is the next step really; in one school I might have had direct contact with 1200 children and 100 staff whereas my influence now is indirect but it's with far more people.

**What do you like about working in the field of education?**

I loved being a head. I loved being a teacher – I started as an English teacher originally. Young people are just the greatest people to work with. I enjoy the interaction with young minds; helping to shape their future, to make a difference. I also have lots of respect and admiration for the people I work with – I can really relate to my colleagues in this field. We want the same thing and we have lots of shared experiences.

**Who do you admire in your field?**

I admired Michael Gove as Secretary of State for Education. I didn't agree with everything he did but I did agree with his attempts to raise the bar. I admired him for his role within Justice too. He stuck to his principles even if it was unpopular. I have a huge amount of respect for headteachers. It is a job with so much responsibility for young people and so much accountability. You stand and fall by your results every year.

**Was your own experience of education a positive one and what lessons did you learn from it?**

From 7 to 16, I went to a little independent school in Maidstone. It was a girls' convent school. It was very positive, like a family and it was a safe and happy atmosphere where I learnt the value of caring for people. But in terms of academic achievement, I was never challenged or pushed. Girls were expected to become mothers and housewives. There was lots of going to church and praying, and things like school fetes were important. We were taught to curtsy and stuff like that – although when I became a Dame, that did stand me in good stead when I was presented to the Queen! I got my 'O' Levels but the teaching in general was quite poor. It was run by a French order of nuns and you always had to address the Mother Superior in French, so my spoken French wasn't bad. When I moved at 16 to a more academic school – Maidstone Girls' Grammar School – which was extremely competitive and academic, I floundered. I was out of my depth and so I didn't do very well at 'A' Level.

**What do you do when – if – you have time off?**

I have six grandchildren. They come round, with my children who live quite close by, most weekends. So my time off is with the family. I have four children and three stepchildren, so seven in total, and they all tend to meet up at our house. I am usually cooking a meal for 15 at weekends! I can't

remember the last time I even went to the cinema.

**If you weren't a teacher, what would you be?**

I would have liked to go into the law; it's an area I've always been interested in and still am. At one point when I had a young baby, I did the first year of a law degree but I didn't get further. I am still interested in the criminal justice system. I got involved in the Review of Prison Education because of my concerns over a young man who failed to do his GCSEs because he was in custody.

**What are the greatest challenges faced by schools such as your own over the next five years?**

Schools are a microcosm of society and have to deal with the bigger challenges that society is facing. They don't stop at our front door. Sometimes education itself is the least of our problems and schools have to grapple with wider issues like social mobility, broken homes, crime and mental health. These are not exclusive to the poorest either. There are independent schools in our Trust where there are also issues – such as broken homes or parents who don't have much time. Girls in particular are very anxious about exam stress. I think the issue of social mobility has certainly not gone away despite the money being put into pupil premium. My understanding is that the pupil premium gap has if anything got bigger over the last year, despite the money being put into it.






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*“Young people are just the greatest people to work with. I enjoy the interaction with young minds; helping to shape their future, to make a difference.”*

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### **As a headteacher, how do you know when you are doing a good job?**

There are the external things like exam results. I don't think you can diminish the importance of these. They open doors to the future; they are like a passport so a good set of exam results cheers me up. When you get a strong Ofsted inspection, that's another external measure. It's more difficult to measure other things which are equally important; like when people come in and walk round your school and feel it's inclusive or when you hear children talking positively about their school. So stakeholder feedback from parents and students is really important. I also like a thriving school, where other things are going on like a school production every year.

### **What achievement are you proudest of?**

This is really hard to answer. What I did during my six years at Burlington Danes, taking it from special measures to outstanding, that was special. And then I would also say I am proud of the Review of Prison Education. People in prison are the most vulnerable and it's vital to support them. The review was a step change.

### **If you were stuck in a lift with a government minister, what three things would you ask for on behalf of your school?**

First of all; more investment in early years. These first five years are arguably the most important of our entire lives. I say that as someone from a secondary

school perspective. So we should provide more support in the home for parents bringing up their children and more resources in early years. I've always wondered why 'parenting' isn't on the school curriculum. Bad parenting cascades down from generation to generation.

Second: Much better alternative provision. If you are excluded from school, it's a route to prison. Let's look at good practice and get that back on track.

Third; Think long term, think 10 years. Stop changing things. Schools spend too much time reacting to external forces. Education should be protected from these changes and should have more consistency and stability.



# KEEPING IT SIMPLE

We launched our updated GCSE in Computer Science on 1 October 2019. This is for first teaching from 2020 and first assessment in 2022.

We are pleased to confirm that our updated qualification meets Ofqual’s new requirement for practical programming skills to be assessed via an external examination.

## Engaging with teachers

To make sure we made the right decisions about updating our GCSE, we engaged extensively with teachers. Through 14 teacher meetings including special focus groups, our teacher panels and teacher-examiners, and 3 surveys, we’ve been able to hear the views of over 400 teachers.

Teachers told us they wanted stability after a period of change. So although Ofqual required changes to the assessment of programming, we have deliberately kept it simple. We’ve kept as many aspects of the current GCSE specification (J276) in our updated specification as possible. But to differentiate between the existing J276 specification and assessment (final assessment June 2021), we have given our updated qualification the new code of J277 (first teach 2020, first assessment 2022). We’ve kept it simple for teachers and for students by putting the assessment of practical programming skills into our paper two and by keeping our simple two-paper model. And we tested our sample assessment materials out on students too.

## Support

We will continue to support you. We are offering over 40 teacher networks as well as webinars this Autumn, so please sign up for those. We will also be offering free professional development until first teach in September 2020. We are updating our resources and working with publishers so their new textbooks reflect the updates we have made.

Practical programming is an important part of GCSE Computer Science and we’ve also produced a guide to our assessment approach. Our guide demonstrates how classroom practice relates to the questions your students will answer in the exam.

Based on teacher feedback however, we’ve also taken the opportunity to make a few improvements too, such as extra guidance.

Component	Marks	Duration	Weighting
<b>Component 1: Computer systems</b> This component focuses on the theoretical understanding of Computer Science.	80	1 hour 30 minutes	50%
<b>Component 2: Computational thinking, algorithms and programming</b> This component focuses on the practical application of Computer Science: program design, writing, testing and refinement.	80	1 hour 30 minutes	50%

*Simple question paper structure*



## What is staying the same?

### In general

- ✓ We've **kept our assessment model the same** and made **minimal changes** to our specification content.

### Assessment

- ✓ We've kept our assessment model of **2 papers**.
- ✓ Each paper is **still worth 80 marks** with a timing of 1 hour 30 minutes.
- ✓ Our component titles **continue to be**:  
Component 1: Computer systems  
Component 2: Computational thinking, algorithms and programming.
- ✓ **We are keeping a paper-based assessment.**
- ✓ We are committed to exploring the introduction of computer-based testing in GCSE Computer Science for future developments and will continue to talk with teachers.
- ✓ We **continue to offer a choice** of which programming language to use.

### Resources

- ✓ We **continue to offer a range of support resources.**
- ✓ We will be providing access to **new resources** to help you deliver practical programming in the classroom.

### Specification

- ✓ We've made **minimal changes** to our specification content.

## What is improving?

### Administration

- ✓ The CCS161 form will change. The need to submit a sample of work to OCR will no longer be required from 2022 onwards.

### Specification

- ✓ We have inserted a guidance column within our specification content table so the level of depth and breadth required is clearer. Following teacher testing, we have also divided the specification content into sub-sections.
- ✓ We have updated some content to make it current e.g. The Data Protection Act 1998 has been updated to 2018.
- ✓ We have added content that will enable us to assess programming skills in the external assessment, for example we know that trace tables were already being taught by many teachers.
- ✓ After review and feedback from teachers, we have removed some additional content.
- ✓ OCR pseudocode has been updated to OCR Exam Reference Language.
- ✓ We have changed the specification code to J277.

### Assessment

- ✓ We have introduced sections to our Component 2 paper so it is clear questions assessing the programming skills of design, write, test, and refine will be in Section B.
- ✓ Our Component 1 is now only assessing AO1 and AO2. Component 2 has some AO1 and AO2 and a greater emphasis on AO3 skills.

### What teachers told us about our updated GCSE

“ Just read through the spec. Not too many changes. Pretty pleased at first glance. Thanks OCR. I like the extra guidance too! And no compulsory project. Good job!

“ The minimal change will make it easier to continue teaching confidently.

### What teachers told us about the Summer 2019 exams

**Over 250 teachers took part in our post-exam survey. Here are some of the highlights:**

“ Students thought the exam was accessible – even the low ability students.

“ They felt that there were no surprises (in a good way). The questions were clear and if they didn't know an answer, it was because they had forgotten, not because it hadn't been covered/not on spec clearly.

“ The students felt positive after the exams because they had been taught well and had covered all content in the specification.

### Find out more

To find out more, visit [www.ocr.org.uk/computing](http://www.ocr.org.uk/computing)

# “HOW CAN WE HELP?”

It's June and week five of the busy Summer 2019 exam season for our team based in Coventry who support teachers, exams officers, students, examiners and many others. **agenda** goes behind the scenes with OCR's Customer Support Centre at exam time.

On this particular day, schools and colleges around the country are sitting OCR GCSEs in Citizenship Studies. It's a big day too for A Level Maths (OCR offers two A Levels in Maths), as well as for subjects like A Level Ancient History and Classical Civilisation. That's in addition to any exams that can be taken on demand throughout the year, such as Functional Skills. With an hour to go before the first exam at 9am, the team is ready to go.



**At 8am, Angela**, one of the most experienced members of the team who has worked at OCR for 22 years, takes her first call of the day. It's from

a school governor from an unnamed school who wants to know if it is still possible to withdraw a student from an exam that they are supposed to be taking at 9am. This might be because of ill health or the student has been entered for the wrong tier of an exam. “Yes, that's possible,” Angela confirms, and runs the representative from the school through the process. Angela's second caller shortly after is an exams officer. She wants to know how to make a claim for the grades of students taking OCR's Cambridge Technical qualifications whose grades have gone up from merit to distinction. The next call is from Jackie who is interested in becoming an examiner.

There are 27 team members in the Customer Support Centre (CSC). To respond effectively, they are divided by category of caller ringing in, whether that's a teacher, exams officer, a student (or parent), or another popular caller, an examiner. Staff are trained with the knowledge needed to respond as helpfully as possible. New technology which OCR introduced in Spring 2019 means calls get to the right member of the team more quickly (although once a customer is through, each call takes as long as it takes – there's no time limit).

Exams officers tend to get in touch the most as they deal with the complex logistics of thousands of students taking exams. Teachers are becoming more confident about the new generation of reformed qualifications. The number of students getting in touch with OCR directly – through calls, emails or tweets – is on the increase however.



**At 9.10am, Angela's** colleague Lee takes a call from a teacher about an A Level Law exam taken by his students the previous

day. He wants to share his thoughts about the paper and get some feedback about the content. Lee, who has worked in the CSC for more than 8 years and is specially trained to support teachers and heads of department, listens carefully and confirms the comments will be passed on. He immediately notifies OCR's subject advisor so they can discuss the paper with the teacher in more detail. “We don't tend to get calls from teachers when they are happy with exams!” Lee comments.

The phone rings again. This time it's a Biology teacher asking about a question on the heart on an A Level paper taken the previous week. Lee listens to the teacher's query about the topic and how students at the school tackled the question. He confirms the teacher's feedback will be passed through to the subject advisor and the issue will also be discussed at standardisation and at awarding meetings so that examiners are aware. Lee's next call is from an exams officer who wants help giving two students 25% more time for Functional Skills tests to be taken next week. Lee sorts out the 'access arrangements' to help these two students. These are applied in advance of an exam, for known conditions, such as visual impairment or dyslexia.

In a lull before the next incoming call, Lee sends a supportive email to a student who had got in touch with OCR about a panic attack they experienced during a recent exam. Lee suggests the student speaks to their school exams officer as they may be able to apply for 'special consideration'. This is when students who have been disadvantaged due to illness or circumstances beyond their control at the time of an exam, can apply for a small percentage (between 1 and 5%) to be added to their marks. The panic attack should also be included in the invigilator's report, Lee recommends.

The team at the CSC is using a new platform this Summer which keeps all customer contacts – in the form of emails, calls, tweets or letters – in one place. It shows all on-going conversations and background relevant information – or where to get hold of it – on any issue. The new platform means Lee can support his colleagues across the team more easily and pitch in on 'unresolved' issues in between answering calls or emails.



**Danielle is taking** calls from teachers and department heads. A relative newbie in the team, Danielle joined OCR from the travel industry

about a year and a half ago. She's used to handling customer calls but she finds the OCR experience more customer-focused and more challenging, which she likes. “There's no such thing as a typical call here. They can be on a really wide range of topics, from entries to modified papers to a student having a nose bleed during an exam. It's a real mix. There's not many times when I can give a 'standard' answer to a question. Our new technology has a great search facility but I admit that I also keep a folder filled with notes on my desk all the time. It's my bible.”

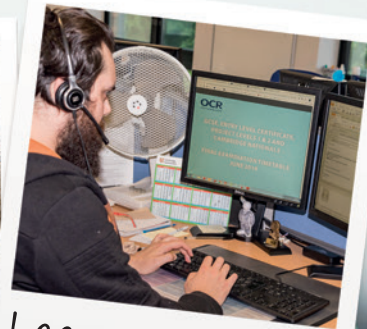




Angela



Rob



Lee

Her next call is a teacher asking when the mark scheme for an exam taken yesterday will be available. Danielle confirms that the final mark schemes are made available to teachers on results day, whereas each exam paper is available within 2 to 10 days of every exam. The phone rings again. This time, it's a school hoping to offer an OCR Cambridge National course in Creative iMedia from September. They need to know the basics; how long the course is and how many units are externally assessed and how many are moderated. For 25 minutes, Danielle talks the school through the process including getting approval, where to find entry codes and the exam windows in January and June.

By 10.30am, the first exams of the morning are coming to a close; things have gone smoothly. The CSC has received nearly a hundred calls; 60 from exams officers and a third again from teachers. Emails have come in on everything from Film Studies exams to submitting coursework for A Level History. Another email that Danielle looks at concerns gender. It's a query from an exams officer about a student who wants to change the gender data for the student's exam entry from 'F' to 'M'. Danielle confirms this can be done on our exam processing system. (A student's results certificate does not specify gender but if a student wanted to change the name on their certificate, this would require evidence of a legal amend, such as by deed poll.)



#### Team member Rob

receives a call from an exams officer asking about access arrangements for a student with Type 1 diabetes. The student is only in Year 7 but the school wants to understand what support will be available further down the line. Will the student be given special permission to take their mobile phone into the exam hall to check their

insulin levels for instance? Rob advises that the school could apply for access arrangements when the student is in Year 9 and closer to taking exams. We can then work with them so the student has everything they need to take exams safely.

Next, an exams officer rings about students taking tests for their Functional Skills qualifications. Rob points the exams officer to the on-screen test system for these qualifications. He tells them their school is not currently set up to use this system and advises the exams officer how to download it.

In the background, a school rings urgently requiring a downloadable exam paper for a student who was entered for the exam at the last minute. They need an extra paper for that afternoon's exam starting at 1pm.



#### Narelle has been

at OCR for 11 years. Some of the typical calls she has received already today are examiners waiting for exam papers to arrive from the schools. Her next call is a teacher from a school in Peterborough who is interested in teaching Cambridge Nationals in Sport. They want to know what resources are available. Narelle encourages the school to sign an online 'expression of interest' form on OCR's website which will generate information about the support and training a new school needs.

The next call is from an exams officer asking for emergency labels for an A Level Biology paper. Schools need labels to send all their students' exam papers to the correct place to be scanned so their papers can be marked on screen. Narelle orders them on their behalf.

The next call is from a teacher at a school in Yorkshire. They want to

move a student from a Cambridge Technical Business Certificate to the larger qualification, the Diploma. Narelle carefully explains how to do this on Interchange, our secure site for teachers. "Thanks very much for your help", the caller says.



#### The afternoon exams

are almost all finished, including one of the last ever in A Level General Studies. Marc, whose sister in law is a headteacher, is talking to an exams officer at a school in Northampton that wants to switch from BTEC to OCR's Cambridge Technicals.

As the afternoon draws to a close, he thinks back to some of the more unusual customer queries he has had to deal with this summer. "There have been lots of enquiries about Eid and whether students with henna tattoos are allowed into the exams." They are – as long as the invigilator in the exam hall checks they are genuine. "And there was that strange call about a student who had used a pen with disappearing ink in one of his Psychology exams!"



#### The phones finally stop

ringing at the end of Day 22 of the Summer 2019 exam season. On a typical day when exams are taking place, the CSC takes over 1000 calls. On GCSE and A Level results day, it's double that.

The team sends off any the last emails and updates notes on conversations with customers, so another member of the team facing the same issue in the future can use them. The good news is that the OCR exams taken at hundreds of schools, colleges and other centres around the country today have gone smoothly. In just over 12 hours, it starts all over again.



# TEN REASONS WHY APPLIED GENERALS WILL BE AROUND FOR A GOOD FEW YEARS YET

**PAUL STEER, OCR HEAD OF POLICY, ON THE IMPORTANCE OF THESE QUALIFICATIONS**



“

Following the publication of the DfE's review of post-16 qualifications at Level 3 and below, OCR's CEO, Jill Duffy, shared what schools and colleges are telling us about why Applied General Qualifications (AGQs) matter for their students at a Westminster Forum Event in June.

Applied Generals are Level 3 qualifications for 16-19 year olds which aim to give students a strong but broad understanding of an occupational sector and to allow entry to higher education courses. Notable examples include OCR's Level 3 Cambridge Technicals and some 'BTECs'.

Ofqual has also joined the chorus of voices warning against any thoughts of abolishing AGQs. We believe Ofqual is right to signal in its response to the DfE review that AGQs are an important option to those students who are not suited to either T Levels or an unleavened diet of A Levels.

In fact, there are lots of reasons why we think AGQs are going to be around for a good few years yet. Here are ten of them:

- 1 AGQs have a proven track record in providing access to higher education – one in four young people going to university holds at least one AGQ. The growth of the AGQ route into higher education is something highlighted in the Augar Post-18 Review of Education and Funding.
- 2 AGQs are distinct from A Levels because they include both examinations and practical, applied assessments that nurture exactly those skills valued by higher education.
- 3 AGQs can be taken alongside A Levels or other AGQs as part of a mixed programme which allows for breadth and the development of a full range of skills.
- 4 AGQs are more rigorous than they used to be. The 'reformed' versions include examined components,

and have more rigorous content. In 2018, 71% of Cambridge Technicals candidates achieved Distinction\*-Merit, compared to 78.4% A\*-C at A Level. As part of the government review of post-16 qualifications, where 'like for like' vocational qualifications existed, unreformed Level 3 vocational qualifications will be defunded from August 2020, but the reformed, more rigorous Level 3 AGQs will continue to be funded to support learners' post-16 study programmes.

- 5 AGQs aren't as numerous or confusing as you'd think: there are 138 AGQs but there are over 450 A Levels. 'Applied Generals' is fast becoming established as the umbrella term which brings together qualifications such as Cambridge Technicals and Level 3 BTECs into a single, recognised category.
- 6 According to DfE figures, retention rates for A Levels are falling – more students on linear, two-year A Level programmes are dropping out. At the same time, retention rates for AGQs are going up.
- 7 AGQs are a good route into employment and higher level training, including apprenticeships. Although designed primarily as preparation for undergraduate study, OCR has worked closely with employers to ensure they can also provide up to date and relevant preparation for industry. Employers we have worked with include: IBM, UK Athletics, Alton Towers, Jaguar Land Rover, Kings College Hospital, Siemens and Fujitsu.
- 8 AGQs play an important part in supporting social mobility and widening participation. People taking AGQs are more representative of the wider population than those taking A Levels, and AGQs are significant in providing a route into HE for disadvantaged students.

9 AGQs help 16 year olds to keep their options open. Unlike T Levels, an Applied General does not require a commitment to a career in a specific sector from the age of 16. Alison Wolf, in her Review of Vocational Education, pointed to a global trend of 'delaying specialisation' by encouraging people to study a broad curriculum up until the end of compulsory education.

10 Lastly, AGQs appeal to young people to fulfil their aspirations. The whole debate about the future direction of qualifications has to be about the real young people that take them and their real life aspirations. Here are just a few of them:

*'Jas' was convinced that she wanted to be a teacher when she started college. She kept her options open though and took a number of Applied General subjects at Level 3, and is now training to be a paramedic.*

*And then there's 'Tim'. Tim came to college with several C grade GCSEs. He was interested in nursing but not certain of his career route. His Level 3 study transformed his aspirations and he went on to graduate with a first in adult nursing, having made choices along the way based on his placements. He then undertook an MSC and has now qualified as a physician's associate.*

*And, for good measure, there's Ollie and Jake. In 2017, Ollie and Jake became the first two students to go to Cambridge University with OCR Cambridge Technicals. They achieved great results across a range of A Levels in Maths and Physics, combined with Cambridge Technicals in Engineering. The combination of good A Levels and a Cambridge Technical helped to make their applications to Cambridge distinctive with a balance of strong academic and more practical achievements.*

[Email your comments to agenda@ocr.org.uk](mailto:agenda@ocr.org.uk)



## JOIN OCR AT THESE EXHIBITIONS AND CONFERENCES AUTUMN/WINTER 2019

### NOVEMBER

## 19-20

#### AoC Annual Conference and Exhibition

ICC, Birmingham

We are looking forward to returning to this popular event which brings together some of the biggest names in further education, business, and government. Pay us a visit on stand 49 to find out about our post-16 English and Maths GCSEs and our new Functional Skills qualifications.

[www.aocannualconference.co.uk](http://www.aocannualconference.co.uk)

### DECEMBER

## 4

#### PiXL Science Conference

Central Hall, Westminster SW1

Visit us on our exhibition stand at this conference for science teachers. Meet our subject advisors and find out how our wide range of qualifications and our support can help your students achieve.

[www.pixl.org.uk/events](http://www.pixl.org.uk/events)

## 5

#### AoC Teaching, Learning and Assessment Conference

99 City Road Conference Centre, London EC1

This annual event will share the latest practice, thinking and research on teaching, learning and assessment. Come along and join innovative speakers and FE specialists at this conference. Visit our stand to find out how our Cambridge Technicals and Functional Skills offer can support your college's teaching and learning strategies.

[www.aoc-services.co.uk/events\\_and\\_training](http://www.aoc-services.co.uk/events_and_training)

### JANUARY

## 8-11

#### ASE Annual Conference

University of Reading

We will be exhibiting at the largest annual science CPD event for teachers. We will have great giveaways and lunchtime sessions, so please come to talk to our subject advisors on our exhibition stand to find out more about our wide range of science qualifications and our support.

[www.ase.org.uk/annual-conference](http://www.ase.org.uk/annual-conference)

### OCR Subject Forums

held at the Triangle Building, Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge CB2 8EA  
**Autumn 2019**

- 14 Nov**  
Science  
Health & Social Care
- 18 Nov**  
Sociology
- 19 Nov**  
History
- 25 Nov**  
English
- 26 Nov**  
PE & Sports

### Spring 2020

- 3 March**  
Business & Economics  
Religious Studies
- 4 March**  
Maths  
Psychology
- 5 March**  
Health & Social Care
- 11 March**  
IT & Computing
- 19 March**  
Science  
Creative Arts
- 24 March**  
Design, Technology and Engineering
- 25 March**  
History
- 26 March**  
English
- 27 March**  
Geography
- 30 March**  
Classics
- 31 March**  
PE & Sports

For further details contact:  
[Subject.Forums@ocr.org.uk](mailto:Subject.Forums@ocr.org.uk)

To find out about the wide range of online and face to face training events we are providing in 2019 and 2020 to support the teaching of OCR's qualifications, take a look at [www.ocr.org.uk/professionaldevelopment](http://www.ocr.org.uk/professionaldevelopment).

To join OCR at these events, visit [www.ocr.org.uk/events](http://www.ocr.org.uk/events) to find out more

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