

agenda

NEWS AND VIEWS FROM OCR / **SPRING 2013**

*Bringing the
curriculum
to life.*

IN THIS ISSUE:

OCR GOES COMPUTING CRAZY

MEET AELP'S GRAHAM HOYLE

FOCUS ON DEMENTIA CARE QUALIFICATIONS

EXAMINING THE EXAMINERS

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Welcome to the Spring 2013 issue of **agenda**.

Half way through the academic year is a useful moment to take stock. There are plenty of distractions to keep us busy – the rollercoaster ride of school exam reforms and changes in funding to name a few. Yet OCR is focused on delivering core assessment and qualification expertise, in support of programmes of study and to help teachers in all area of learning to realise the full potential of their students.

In this issue, we introduce you to the work of OCR's 'secret army' of examiners. Largely hidden from public view, examiners are crucial to OCR's activities so we share some of the mysteries of what an examiner does. Turn to page 12 to find out more.

On page 10, we've got an interview with Graham Hoyle, Chief Executive of AELP, which represents over 600 training and employment service organisations. We also profile our qualifications aimed at those involved in dementia care. All this, plus news of our CPD events that focus on knowledge rather than mark schemes, and resources to support learning in areas such as bookkeeping and accountancy, as well as the latest on exam reform – as we know it!

If you would like to get in touch about anything you read here, please email us at agenda@ocr.org.uk.

Mark Dawe

Chief Executive, OCR

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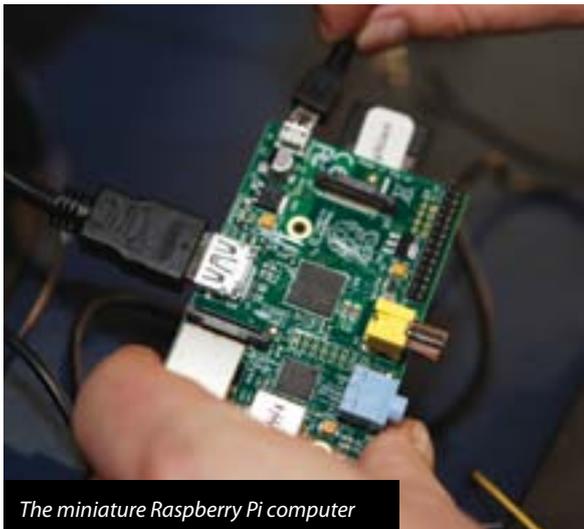
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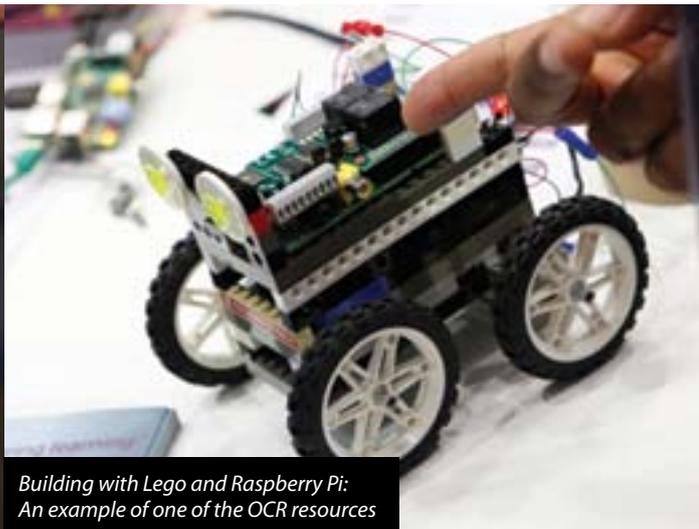
A troupe of robotic dancers provided extra entertainment as OCR went computing crazy at BETT 2013, showcasing our pioneering computing qualifications and support, along with partners Raspberry Pi and Computing At School. Read more about our trail-blazing work on page 4.



Blazing a trail in computer science



The miniature Raspberry Pi computer



Building with Lego and Raspberry Pi:
An example of one of the OCR resources

Google's free Raspberry Pi offer

2013 is shaping up to be an exciting year for computing. On the eve of BETT – the world's largest educational IT event – back in January, Google joined forces with OCR and five other partners to announce an initiative to hand out thousands of free Raspberry Pi computers to schools across the country.

Raspberry Pi is a cheap, credit-card sized, programmable computer which plugs into a monitor and a keyboard. It was developed to inspire a generation of learners to discover how computers are programmed and how they function.

OCR has developed a range of resources to help teachers and students get started with the Pi and to explore its potential. Each free Raspberry Pi that Google gives away will come with a learning support pack. It includes a 'Getting Started' tutorial booklet with an introduction to using the computer, plus links to a variety of OCR resources which map directly to the curriculum – such as classroom challenges and advanced tutorials – as well as links to useful resources on the internet, all on a pre-loaded SD card.

Liz Upton from Raspberry Pi said: "This is a brilliant way to find kids all over the country whose aptitude for computing can now be explored properly. We believe that access to tools is a fundamental necessity in finding out who you are and what you're good at. We want those tools to be within everybody's grasp."



Interested in a free Raspberry Pi?

Email us at general.qualifications@ocr.org.uk for more details.

GCSE Computing & the EBacc

Since the launch of OCR's pilot GCSE Computing qualification in 2010, we have been at the forefront of development in this area of the curriculum.

We welcomed Education Secretary Michael Gove's recent announcement that computer science will become an EBacc subject. OCR's GCSE in Computing is one of just two qualifications that will count towards the EBacc in performance tables.

Mark Dawe, OCR Chief Executive, said: "The inclusion of computer science in the EBacc will support the growth of this exciting and creative subject. Since we pioneered our GCSE in 2010, the number of entries has risen by over 3000%."

"We've led the way in developing qualifications in this subject, enabling an even greater range of learners to access computer science. Alongside our GCSE, we offer an A Level and a brand new Entry Level qualification, while programming is incorporated within our Cambridge Nationals in ICT and will be in Cambridge Technicals in IT from September."

Find out more about OCR's range of computing qualifications at www.ocr.org.uk/computing.



Partners in Computing (from left) Rob Bishop of Raspberry Pi, Bill Liao of CoderDojo and Mark Dorling of Computing At School share the stage with OCR at BETT.





Talking ICT with teachers at the OCR stand

BETT 2013

In an exciting programme of events at this year's BETT, OCR teamed up with a range of partners – including Raspberry Pi, Computing At School and CoderDojo – to support ICT teachers who wanted to start computing in their schools. OCR's new suite of Pi resources were also unveiled. Over 1000 people were welcomed to OCR's stand shared with parent organisation, Cambridge Assessment, and our sister exam boards in the group.

Some of our most important partners are the teachers such as Chris Swann, Director of ICT at The Stourport on Severn High School and Sixth Form Centre. Chris said: "Lots of teachers are concerned that they won't be able to deliver computing because they're worried about their own skill levels and expertise. OCR is supporting teachers by producing lots of simple ideas for lessons where you don't need lots of expensive resources – we've been using the Raspberry Pi extensively. Please don't feel that you can't do it. You can."

"OCR's GCSE Computing provides an holistic approach where students have to think and make their own decisions, including doing their own research."

"Several students have gone on to study A Level Computing and I expect this to be a growing trend."

David Pearce, Head of ICT at Brynteg School, Bridgend where the number of students choosing OCR's GCSE Computing course has doubled over the past two years.

"The use of Raspberry Pi brings fun and challenge and the ability to experiment back into the classroom."

Lorna Panesar who teaches OCR GCSE Computing at The Emmbrook School in Berkshire.

Listening to employers

To make sure that our qualifications enhance employability and focus on knowledge and skills that are relevant to the workplace, we have always involved a range of employers in qualification development.

That applies to updating existing qualifications as well as developing brand new ones. Many employers were involved in the development of OCR's Cambridge Technicals range. Nearly 50 employers sit on our forums – covering sectors such as IT, Business, and Health and Social Care – to ensure their expertise informs our work. We are looking to engage with more employers. If you are interested in sharing your own experience as an employer to help make qualifications relevant to the workplace, get in touch via partnerships@ocr.org.uk.

Start Up Weekend

Earlier in the year, OCR sponsored Startup Weekend Education London, a dynamic 54-hour event that brought together entrepreneurs and invited them to pitch their ideas for the next 'big thing' in education.

Startup Weekend is a global initiative, aimed at people who are interested in founding startup businesses. This event focused on education: attendees were predominantly made up of business developers and designers with a particular interest in educational technology, as well as teachers with ideas to make an impact in the classroom.

Simon Lebus, Chief Executive of OCR's parent body, Cambridge Assessment, sat on the expert judging panel while OCR's Chief Executive Mark Dawe delivered a closing speech to attendees.

Mark commented: "Experiencing such energy and innovation in educational delivery from a group of people who hadn't met before the weekend was both scary and exciting. Scary because they had ideas that could transform education and the way OCR works, yet exciting because of the potential benefits to learners and how OCR could be part of it."

Useedu (@useedu) emerged as winners with their solution for turning dead time into learning time with the use of digital wallpaper, whiteboards and projectors. Start Up Weekend plan to hold another education event in the UK later in 2013 so watch this space. www.startupweekend.org.



In brief**Raring to go with Sage**

OCR has teamed up with Sage, the leading bookkeeping and accounting software provider, to produce a range of learning materials.

In the UK, there are over 800,000 users of Sage, many of whom may not be using their software as efficiently as possible or receiving the maximum benefit from what's available.

Learners studying OCR's Bookkeeping and Accounting qualifications will now be able to access practice simulations, help sheets and an eBook – packed with interactive tutorials, videos and self-test activities – to enable them explore the full potential of Sage software.

Each learner can also obtain a copy of Sage 50 Accounts Professional V 2013. (Sage 50 is the most used software by employers in the UK). By being able to practise on the latest software, students will be better prepared when they progress into employment.

Ian Cox, Channel Education and Contracts Manager for Sage said: "Sage is pleased to work in partnership with OCR to give learners relevant and up-to-date workplace skills with the use of the latest accounting software and interactive learning materials."

Progress on core English and maths skills**Interested in filling the gap left by Basic and Key Skills?**

Entries can now be made for OCR's fully-accredited Cambridge Progression qualifications in English and maths. Find out more at www.ocr.org.uk/progression.

What's happening to GCSEs and A Levels?

Plans for major exam reform in England advanced at the beginning of 2013.

Education Secretary Michael Gove confirmed key aspects of his plans to reform A Levels in England in a letter to Ofqual on 22 January 2013. (Last November, Ofqual had announced the withdrawal of the January 2014 exam window for current AS/A Levels.) The key aspects of reformed A Levels announced at the end of January are:

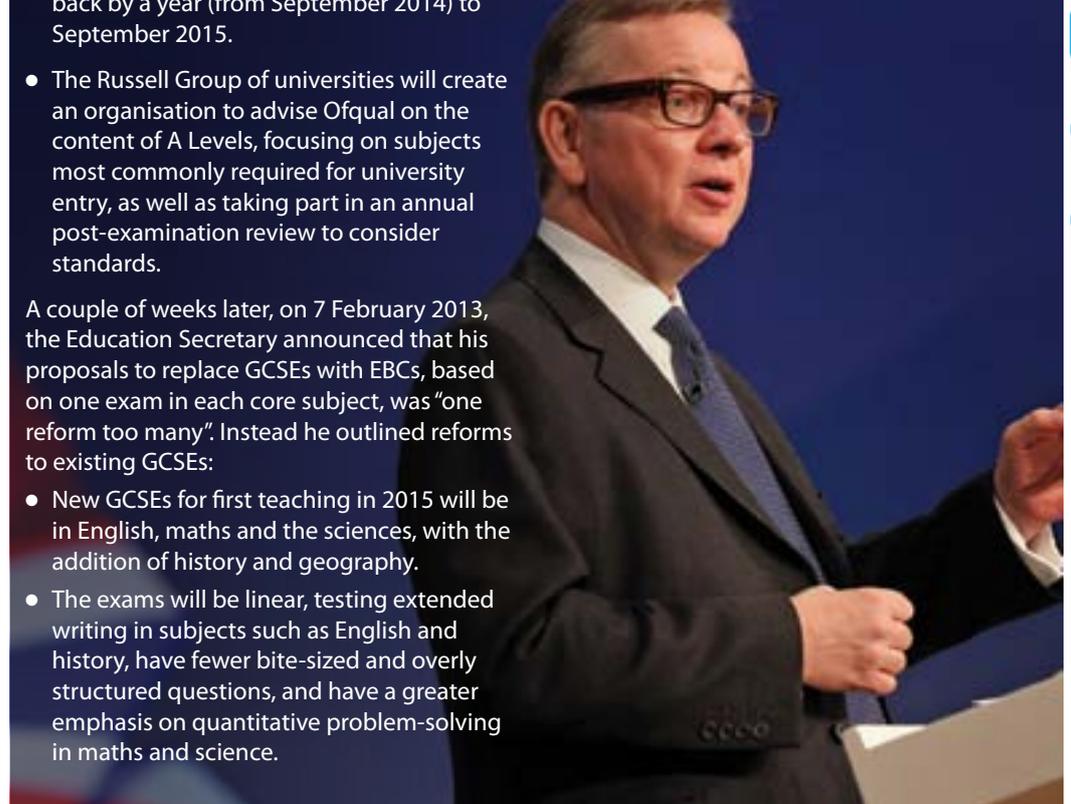
- A new standalone AS qualification covering half the content of an A Level which could be delivered over either one or two years.
- A fully linear A Level with assessment of students' knowledge and understanding "across the whole course" taking place at the end of two years.
- The date for first teaching of "the first new A Levels in facilitating subjects" has been put back by a year (from September 2014) to September 2015.
- The Russell Group of universities will create an organisation to advise Ofqual on the content of A Levels, focusing on subjects most commonly required for university entry, as well as taking part in an annual post-examination review to consider standards.

A couple of weeks later, on 7 February 2013, the Education Secretary announced that his proposals to replace GCSEs with EBCs, based on one exam in each core subject, was "one reform too many". Instead he outlined reforms to existing GCSEs:

- New GCSEs for first teaching in 2015 will be in English, maths and the sciences, with the addition of history and geography.
- The exams will be linear, testing extended writing in subjects such as English and history, have fewer bite-sized and overly structured questions, and have a greater emphasis on quantitative problem-solving in maths and science.

- Internal assessment and the use of exam aids will be kept to a minimum and used only where there is a compelling case to do so.
- New GCSEs will be universal qualifications. It is expected the same proportion of pupils will sit them as now.
- Reformed GCSEs will no longer set an 'artificial cap' on how much pupils can achieve. They will avoid the risk of pupils having to choose between higher and foundation tiers so reformed GCSEs will allow students to access any grade.
- The appropriate approach to assessment will vary between subjects and a range of solutions may come forward.

Keep an eye on OCR's website – www.ocr.org.uk – for further updates on A Level and GCSE reform.



Funding at your fingertips

OCR's funding workshops at the last AoC Conference were standing room only. In response to the obvious demand for clear information about funding,

OCR is starting a new service for customers. There will be policy updates on our website, timely communications via Twitter as well as an online reference

library of documents and links related to funding. You can sign up to get involved on the website – www.ocr.org.uk/updates.



OCR inspires historians



Above left: Exeter University's Richard Toye on Churchill's speeches

Above right: The inspiring location of the Churchill War Rooms in London

OCR's programme of CPD events gives teachers a chance to enhance knowledge and debate topical issues in their subject areas. A Level history teachers recently debated the question 'Is History Kind to Churchill?' at the Churchill War Rooms in London.

The varied programme included a lecture by Professor Richard Toye of Exeter University, author of *The Roar of the Lion: The Making of Churchill's World War II Speeches*, as well as an activity in the Churchill War Rooms and Museum, demonstrating how the museum can be used as an active resource for learners.

Other sessions included a discussion of source materials and a group exercise using archive material, of a critical War Cabinet discussion of 28 May 1940 – should Britain fight on or attempt to negotiate a peace?

The focus and location of OCR CPD events are popular with teachers. One teacher commented: "Great to attend a course that is subject focused and not just about mark schemes". Another highlighted "academic discussion – time to reflect" as a key attraction.

OCR will be illuminating aspects of Norman History at a forthcoming CPD event in May 2013 at another atmospheric and resource-rich location, the Tower of London. Historian and TV presenter, Marc Morris and Oxford University's Dr George Garnett, both authors on the Norman Conquest, will help get A Level history teachers' ideas flowing. See www.ocreventbooker.org.uk for details of this and other OCR CPD events.

BRINGING MATHS TO LIFE

It doesn't add up: what's wrong with the maths?

Cambridge Assessment, OCR's parent organisation, believes a sensible debate is needed to help construct a better maths curriculum for England.

With its expertise in assessment, Cambridge Assessment is also organising a conference in May in central London. The event will comprise three main sections, the central one being a debate entitled: 'Numeracy, arithmetic, maths – what age and at what stage?' Other elements include

discussions on how to make maths relevant and whether technology is changing maths for the better.

The event will bring together practitioners, researchers, policy makers and all those with an interest in the field. To request a free place, please contact James Garnham at Cambridge Assessment on +44 (0)1223 558370 or email: expertview@cambridgeassessment.org.uk.

Bridging the gap on maths

OCR held a 'pop up' maths event in Cambridge in February to find out the views of users of maths, not just mathematicians, on potential content and assessment approaches to maths. This has been a recurring point of interest at many of OCR's subject forums over the last two years. The pop up event was also an opportunity to develop greater understanding between the users of maths and maths specialists.

At the over-subscribed day, OCR sought views in particular about a post-16 Level 3 qualification in Quantitative Methods that is being developed with MEI for

students that have achieved GCSE Maths Grade C or above but don't want to embark on an A Level in the subject.

Alongside maths specialists, users of maths in psychology, business, IT, science, geography and economics contributed to the day.

Mary Brennan, OCR Partnerships Senior Manager said: "There was a phenomenal interest from teachers, HE, and subject associations in the discussions. We even had a waiting list. If you would like to find out more about how we are bridging the gap on maths, get in touch at partnerships@ocr.org.uk."



Update on exam reform in Wales and Northern Ireland

OCR operates as a not for profit exam board across England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

While the exam reform programme in England has generated much debate, these are interesting times too for Cardiff-based OCR Cymru and OCR Ireland, based in Belfast. The dynamics and timetable of exam reform are unique in each administration.

The Welsh government, whose action on exam reform is 6 months ahead of Northern Ireland's, confirmed in January 2013 that it would retain GCSEs and A Levels, alongside a 'revised, more rigorous' Welsh Baccalaureate. It backed the findings of a 2012 Qualifications Review which also recommended:

- the establishment of Qualifications Wales as an independent regulator which could, in time, award qualifications
- 14-16 vocational qualifications to have a maximum equivalence of 2 GCSEs
- programme-led funding is to be introduced post 16.

In Northern Ireland, the consultation started in November 2012 and the review is due to report to the Minister of Education in June 2013. The Minister is clear that he wants a suite of qualifications that are 'robust, fair and portable'.

They must be 'credible in the eyes of employers and other education providers, including universities' and ensure that the

interests of all learners across the North are protected.

It is therefore possible that the three countries will have parallel school qualifications, rather than the largely overlapping ones they do now.

Mark Dawe, OCR Chief Executive, said: "We support the Welsh move towards independent regulation, as in Northern Ireland, and will continue to support teachers and students in Wales and Northern Ireland who use our qualifications. The key is qualifications that people have confidence in so learners can move on in their learning and life, in their own countries and abroad."

www.cymru.ocr.org.uk
www.ocr.org.uk/ireland

OCR reaches higher

In recognition of the evolution of post 19 career pathways, OCR is exploring new options for people who want to combine work and study after leaving school. Due to challenging economic conditions and the rising cost of higher education, credible vocational alternatives to standard university courses are becoming increasingly attractive to students and their families.

At the end of last year, OCR launched the first Higher Professional Services Apprenticeships which offer a chance to specialise in audit, tax or management consultancy. This gives learners the opportunity to combine earning a living with securing relevant professional qualifications on their Apprenticeship journey. Similarly, OCR is extending the ladder of its Cambridge Technicals vocational range to meet the needs of post 19 year olds. The Technicals range was launched a year ago, originally for 16 to 19 year olds, in the core areas of IT, Business, and Health and Social Care.

The range has since expanded but from September 2013, OCR will roll out Level 4 Cambridge Technicals for post 19 learners which could either be studied full time or part time alongside work. These higher level qualifications in strong vocational areas could act as a bridge on to a vocational degree course or into employment. OCR is currently working in partnership with The Open University on routes into OU degree courses based on higher Cambridge Technicals.

www.cambridge-technicals.org.uk

OCR offers a helping hand to West Midlands students

OCR has launched its 2013 bursary scheme for students from the West Midlands who are going to study at University of Cambridge.



This will be the tenth successive year that OCR has awarded bursaries to some of the most talented students studying at schools and colleges in the West Midlands region. Recipients will receive £3,000 for each year of their undergraduate studies which they can use for living or tuition costs or a combination of both. The award fund, arising from OCR's historical association with the West Midlands Exam Board, helps talented students in the region make the most of their studies at the University of Cambridge.

Last year, ten students from schools and colleges in Birmingham, Coventry, Hereford, Lichfield, and Solihull, received a bursary award that enabled them to study and fulfil their potential without some of the financial worries.

Michael Sharrock, one of last year's recipients, had been affected by family illness. He said: "I'm having a wonderful time at Cambridge, and the OCR bursary has helped me greatly in my first year. In supplementing the payment of my termly college bills, the bursary has given me more freedom to pursue outside interests that I wouldn't have been able to otherwise, such as joining the university's archery novice squad. I am also secure in the knowledge that I can afford textbooks for each of my Natural Sciences modules, which will help with my learning and revision throughout the year. The bursary has effectively alleviated the financial pressure of funding my place at Cambridge for me and my parents, and I'm very grateful to OCR for providing it."

Up to ten bursaries are available and the deadline for applications is 7 June 2013. More information and an application form can be found on the OCR website.

Photo above: One of last year's bursary recipients, Michael Sharrock, who was presented with his bursary by OCR Chief Executive Mark Dawe.



Tried and tested: OCR's Dementia Care qualifications

"Training our staff who look after people with dementia is a high priority for us. This applies to staff working in residential care settings and in reablement care - when people are first discharged from hospital. With our partners in dementia services, we constantly review our training so that it is appropriate and has a real impact on practice. We started to use OCR's Level 2 Awareness in Dementia Award in 2012. Whether you have been a carer for twenty years or two years, it is great to have training in this area which is accredited. It is a commitment but the course uptake has been really good and it makes people feel proud to achieve a qualification."

Joanna Klimera

Health and Social Care Advisor, Social Services, Surrey County Council

Dementia is rarely out of the news.

According to the Alzheimer's Society charity, there are an estimated 800,000 people in the UK suffering from dementia. With an ageing population, the charity estimates this figure will steadily increase, reaching over a million people by 2021.

In recognition of the problem, the government announced £22 million funding towards research in December 2012. More recently, the Alzheimer's Society launched its 'Dementia Friends' initiative, which aims to improve public understanding of the condition by 2015, and is supported by the Department of Health and the Cabinet Office.

Two thirds of people with dementia live in the community; a third live in residential care homes. Regardless of location, caring for people with dementia is an enormous challenge and demand for carers with the relevant skills significantly outstrips supply. People with dementia occupy a quarter of all hospital beds in the UK and are among those most vulnerable to poor care.

Two years ago, OCR launched a range of Dementia Care qualifications to motivate healthcare workers new to looking after people with dementia and to accredit the knowledge and skills of those who are already working in the sector. The qualifications were developed with the input of the relevant Sector Skills Councils and subject experts (including the Alzheimer's Society), so they reflect current best practice and employer needs.

OCR Dementia Care qualifications could be taken by care assistants and supervisors working in a variety of settings – including residential and domiciliary care, day care, supported living projects and those employed directly by individuals at home. Recognising the need for flexibility there are plenty of optional units which reflect specialist interests or roles, a variety of sources can be used as evidence for assessment, and individuals can transfer credits between Dementia Care and other OCR qualifications. However, a strong and supportive verification system that OCR has put in place ensures high standards

are maintained – all important at a time when poor quality care makes media headlines.

The main qualifications are Level 2 and Level 3 Awards in Awareness of Dementia aimed at those who are new to the specialist world of dementia care and need to acquire knowledge, and Level 2 and Level 3 Certificates in Dementia Care which recognise the competency of those already working in the area. OCR's Dementia Care qualifications can also be funded through Skills for Care's Workforce Development Fund.

To find out more about these qualifications, visit www.ocr.org.uk/hsc.

DID YOU KNOW?

The UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES) 2012 report identified the importance of the health and social care sector to the economy but exhorted employers to reduce the skills gap in the caring occupations. 79% of people employed in this sector are female.



THE ASSOCIATION OF EMPLOYMENT AND LEARNING PROVIDERS (AELP) REPRESENTS OVER 600 PRIVATE, NOT-FOR-PROFIT AND VOLUNTARY SECTOR TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT SERVICES ORGANISATIONS. AELP MEMBERSHIP IS OPEN TO ANY PROVIDER COMMITTED TO QUALITY PROVISION AND INCLUDES OVER 50 FE COLLEGES INVOLVED IN WORK BASED LEARNING. MORE THAN 70% OF APPRENTICESHIPS IN ENGLAND ARE DELIVERED BY AELP MEMBERS.



GRAHAM HOYLE OBE, WHO BECAME AELP'S CHIEF EXECUTIVE IN 2002, UPDATES agenda ON HIS OWN CAREER PATHWAY AND OUTLINES THE CHALLENGES FACING HIS ORGANISATION.

What was your background before taking on your current role at AELP?

Most recently I was chief executive of the Gloucestershire TEC throughout the 1990s, which included the Business Link and the Enterprise Agency. Prior to that, 23 years as a civil servant, mainly in the Employment Service, though finally in the Training Agency.

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

In my view, this field is a key driver of both economic prosperity and social wellbeing. It enables individuals to attain a level of self fulfilment while contributing to society's economic success.

Who do you admire in your field?

Overall, the myriad of individuals – often not in the sector – who are prepared to enthusiastically share their skills and experience with both colleagues and the next generation. Individually, one of the great visionaries of our generation is Sir Geoffrey Holland, who understood the intrinsic link between the economic and social agendas – a path we are still exploring today.

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

It was positive up to the attainment of my O levels, after which I was only interested when the learned information/skills could inform/underpin a practical application. From the age of 17, all my education was 'on the job' – at work.

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

Ornithology gets me out and about into the world of nature. At the other end of the spectrum, I still enjoy the sulphurous aroma of steam engines! (Roll on retirement.)

What is the remit of the AELP?

To promote the importance of work based learning, or work located learning as I prefer to call it, as well as the importance of so-called 'employability' training and other preparation for the world of work including, and critically, impartial information, advice and guidance, and the role of independent providers (particularly those in the private and third sector).

How do you meet the needs of your members?

By listening to their opinions and perspectives – and problems – and presenting these in a clear, reasonable (if necessary forceful) way to officials and ministers, to ensure the infrastructure they work within is best designed and operated to meet the needs of the employers and individuals they serve.

What are the greatest challenges that your organisation and its members face over the next five years?

To fully deliver the bigger agenda that has at last been made available to them, especially our non-college members, who now have greater scope than ever to be major players in the learning and skills market.

What achievement are you proudest of as Chief Executive?

To have enhanced the position of work based learning and those who deliver it – especially independent providers – and in so doing, persuaded society that colleges of FE, important as they must remain, are not the only players in the 'FE system'. On a broader front, to have put doubts in society's mind that academic achievement is the sole route to personal success as is now being demonstrated by the fantastic and overdue effectiveness of the hugely successful apprenticeship programme.

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

A simple, comprehensive black box Traineeship programme and the opportunity for all providers capable of delivering it to be given the chance; output-related funding for schools regarding their pupils' achievement of English and maths; and a decision to position apprenticeships as the skill development tool for all of British industry and commerce, open to workers of all ages, at all levels, in all sectors. Come on, you know it makes sense!

For further information on AELP, visit www.aelp.org.uk.





EXAMINING THE EXAMINERS

In an era of high stakes public exams, exam marking has become a mainstream, potentially headline-grabbing, topic of debate.

Assessment of different subjects, the merits of multiple choice, subjectivity, ensuring standards across time and place, the role of new technology... all are hotly debated. Only the jargon – grade boundaries, norm-referencing, standardisation – tends to cool everyone down.

OCR works with about 14,000 examiners. Examining is at the heart of what OCR does, yet the fact that examiners go back to their day jobs and their work is confidential, means they are a largely secret army. Every summer, OCR examiners mark approximately 3 million GCSE and A Level exam scripts for example. The vast majority of OCR examiners or “assessors” – a term which encompasses the variety of tasks involved – are either teachers or those who have retired from teaching. Their work involves verifying, moderating, as well as marking, across a range of subjects and qualifications, both academic and vocational. And that’s not including the devising and writing of question papers which is conducted by another subset of the army of examiners.

46 year-old Chris Green is Head of English and Drama at the Perse School, an independent co-educational school in Cambridge. He has taught – in a variety of contexts – for over twenty years. For eighteen of those years, he has been an examiner for OCR’s A Level English Literature papers. He’s now a senior team leader (one down from the principal examiner) and, as well as marking, is responsible for supervising the work of two further tiers of examiners – team leaders and assistant examiners.

This January, Chris is examining ‘Unit F661’, in other words, OCR’s paper on Poetry and Prose, 1800 to 1945, (from Browning to Woolf, via Yeats and Shelley). It is one of two OCR A Level English Literature papers candidates take to gain their A Level. For Chris and many other OCR examiners, it’s the last year in which candidates sit any A Level or GCSE exams in January. From next academic year, all A Levels and GCSE exams will be taken in the summer. Although the summer exam window has remained the biggest, the rise of modular exams since Curriculum 2000 had changed the pattern of Chris’ year. The January 2013 paper is also a significant moment for Chris and OCR’s English examiners because it is the first time they have used new ‘Scoris’ technology which enables candidate papers to be scanned and then marked online. OCR is committed to 100% online marking of papers by summer 2014.

“Above all, I’d say I do this out of a sense of professional duty.”

A few days after the F661 exam is taken by candidates at schools and colleges around the country, Chris attends a ‘standardisation’ meeting at OCR’s offices in Cambridge. On the way, he explains what motivates him to be an examiner.

“Above all, I’d say I do this out of a sense of professional duty. Money is not my number one motivation, it’s more professional. I see this as CPD. I have always related teaching with examining and always taught OCR’s A Level English Literature. Maybe there is an

examining type – if so, I must be one of those. I love it. Others try it for a year and hate it. There’s quite a strong hierarchy in examining and you have to be able to accept that too.”

Chris explains how he and many other teachers are able to combine examining with the commitments of their main work. “Many schools are supportive. Teachers have more and more demands on their time nowadays anyway. My Head and Deputy Head at the Perse are very supportive and make it possible for me to combine teaching and examining at two stages in the year. Any examining I do for OCR also has a direct impact on my A Level teaching and on that of my departmental colleagues, as we are always up to date on the development and direction of assessment in English. Examining has a positive impact on the performance of my students – it certainly isn’t time wasted either for me or for the school. I live in Cambridge which also makes meetings more manageable.”

Chris’ examining for the January series covers a period of four to five weeks after an exam has taken place. ‘Standardisation’, the first vital step designed to ensure that teams of markers are all marking to the same standard, takes place a few days after the exam.

Chris has been a senior team leader for five years. At the four day standardisation meeting of the senior examining team held in OCR’s Cambridge offices and chaired by the Principal Examiner, Chris sees familiar faces. “The membership of the higher levels of examining is remarkably consistent.”





Alongside the mark scheme published for each paper which explains what knowledge and skills students need to show to achieve a mark in a particular band, a standardisation meeting agrees marks for real answers given by candidates in the exam. This creates a set of marked exam scripts which examiners across the country practise on, making sure they are in line with the senior team's marking, before completing their own standardisation process, and finally moving on to their own batches of unmarked scripts.

The standardisation meeting involves periods of intense silence as the team read candidate answers, followed by discussion of a mark which is initially put forward by the principal examiner. "Because we have experience, we have perspective and we do express our views," Chris comments. The consensus among the senior examining team – men, women, drawn from both the state and independent sector – is striking. Out of a possible total of 30 marks for a question on Yeats for example, the marks suggested vary only by one mark. Is it a 23 or 24 mark answer? They exchange comments about the balance of narrative versus literary style in the candidate's approach. The next answer relates to a question about Jane Eyre. More intense reading. They like the conversational tone but agree that the candidate has not addressed the question as clearly as they might have. "It's a 24," they all concur.

OCR English Qualifications Manager, Gemma Hewitt, constantly monitors the progress of the team. The intense work is also broken up by technical sessions on adapting to the new onscreen marking technology. The camaraderie of the team is striking. The discussion becomes more general about which questions are proving popular on this year's paper. Why is Henry James less popular? It's a chance to discuss their subject with those who share their passion.

After the standardisation phase, the army of examiners around the country can download the practice examination scripts, and the set of standardisation scripts. Chris now focuses on his own marking (he has about 65 scripts to mark at this time of year, more in the summer) and supervision of the pyramid of about 20 leaders and markers below him. He

does this early ("from about 7 to 7.30am each day") or after 5.30pm each day (not at the pub, as one educationalist suggested last year). This intense period of marking, lasting up to three weeks, involves working over weekends ("I find it easiest to work uninterrupted on Sundays") or, as was the case this year, at half term. "I don't book holidays till the exam timetables are confirmed as that comes first. Examining of January

papers has often cut into half term (which has helped to avoid clashes with school commitments) so I think the move back to linear assessment will suit me better."

Does Chris get to see the exam paper before his own A Level English Literature pupils take the exam? "Often I don't see the real paper until after candidates have sat it. Examining is based on professional behaviour and trust, and I can't reveal the contents to my own class but that's a code followed by anyone involved in exam administration. When I am marking, the scripts are totally anonymous; you can't have connections to any schools taking the exam."

Alongside the mark scheme, OCR examiners mark positively, giving candidates credit for what they have achieved. "Under marking is worse than over marking," Chris explains.

"I look forward to being led into a good answer, that is well written with supporting evidence. You are not thinking about a candidate's overall grade when you mark, it's the right mark for the individual question that's important."

Using the new technology on his laptop, Chris monitors the progress of his team on their practice scripts. Even when they have successfully completed the standardisation script stage, the consistency of markers continues to be checked through random 'seeded' scripts which have been pre-marked, included in each batch of candidate papers. "The markers are probably getting through about 130 scripts each over a three week period for January exams, more in the summer."

If an examiner is not able to mark consistently, and to the same standard as everyone else, they are asked to stop. "One problem with new examiners is poor judgement – an examiner applying their own standards to marking, rather than sticking to agreed criteria. There are the known dangers of subjectivity in marking English too but I really think this only applies to a minority, about 5 out of 100 people. Indecision is not a helpful characteristic in an examiner either. You have got to be prepared to come to a final decision. But on the whole, I am reassured that this system is sound. With all sorts of fail safes, and with the introduction of Scoris, I don't know of a better system."

The individual scripts on Chris' laptop are annotated with symbols – part of the markers' code system which relates to the assessment objectives or highlights a 'very good.' "It's much neater online than some examiners' handwritten scribbles". How has he adapted to the online system? "It's a big change. There is a help desk which I have rung and they slowly and methodically sort out my problems. Although I may not be the greatest IT wizard in the world, I can see this is going to be an improvement."

The third and crucial phase in Chris' examining cycle, awarding, takes place over a weekend in late February. The senior examining team for English gather to decide the grade boundaries – the minimum mark required to get a grade – after the raw marks from Chris' and other teams' marking have been collected. The mark required to get a particular grade may differ each year as papers may turn out to be more difficult for candidates than anticipated, mark schemes less generous, or the cohort very different for example. Using a mixture of years of experience and plenty of statistical evidence, Chris and his colleagues decide the marks for a grade for this year's paper that maintains the standard of previous years.

"By the time we get to awarding," Chris comments, "the process is nearly complete and it's time for a minor celebration. It's always good to recognise the achievements not only of the candidates but also of the teachers supporting them. This year, we were delighted to see how well a new batch of set texts has been embraced by school and colleges. It's so satisfying to see new generations of students acquiring the skills required for the successful study of literature."

Thanks to the specialist skills and hard work of Chris and the whole army of OCR examiners, results for the January exams can now be despatched to schools where pupils, teachers, and families anxiously await the results of all their hard work. This is part of a continuous cycle of assessment carried out by OCR, which is in turn part of the much bigger picture of teaching and learning.



Chris Green gets to grips with onscreen marking



COALITION EXAM REFORMS



JOHN PLUNKETT, OCR'S INTERIM DIRECTOR OF PARTNERSHIPS, OFFERS A HALF TERM REPORT

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Just short of three years into office and the Coalition vision for the future of secondary education is almost complete. The reform programme that started with the Academies Bill in 2010 – seeking to provide schools with greater independence – and the implementation of the Wolf Report reforms to vocational education, has now been joined in 2013 by major reforms to A Levels and GCSEs. Along the way, the performance measurement of secondary schools has remained at the top of the agenda – the creation of the DfE list of approved vocational qualifications will soon be joined by revised Key Stage 4 measures and OCR awaits the imminent arrival of the Key Stage 5 measure.

At the heart of the Key Stage 4 reforms has been a desire to see the balance moved to greater focus on core academic subject areas. The introduction of the EBacc measure in 2011 was a shortcut designed to redress the balance of curriculum offer within schools whilst the more significant qualification reform as evidenced by the EBC proposals was put in place.

Michael Gove's decision not to press ahead with EBCs does not provide any evidence of a change in policy. His reforms to the GCSE may in fact result in a qualification that closely reflects the step change he was seeking to achieve by introducing the EBC. The extent of the required changes will first be felt by awarding bodies as they seek to meet the 2015 deadline, but will inevitably entail even greater changes for schools and colleges across England.

These changes will most probably occur at the same time as the amended school accountability measures are implemented. The need to replace the existing 5 A*-C with measures that are broader in terms of subjects covered and range of performance reported on is long awaited. Whilst the exact detail is being resolved, a cautious welcome needs to be tempered with a concern that schools may

become ensnared in a range of conflicting measurements that create more heat than light.

In comparison, the Key Stage 5 reforms that have been announced and are already underway in respect of A Levels appear less dramatic. However the move to linear assessment, the creation of a stand-alone AS Level and the focus upon 'facilitating subjects' will inevitably lead to significant changes for all concerned, particularly in the range of subject choice available to learners and the impact it may have upon their ability to progress to the HE institution of their choice.

“Progression at all points throughout a learner's journey is the metric that will eventually be used to judge the impact of this ambitious end-to-end reform programme.”

The timeline for implementation of A Level reform is exceedingly tight and the need to clarify key elements of the proposal, such as the exact role of the Russell Group and the shape and detail of the required regulatory arrangements, becomes ever more pressing if awarding bodies are to be able to meet the deadlines that have been set.

Progression at all points throughout a learner's journey is the metric that will eventually be used to judge the impact of this ambitious end-to-end reform programme. Will the result be the desired larger numbers achieving core competencies in English and maths, progressing to further academic or vocational study, being able to achieve the revised GCSEs, A Levels and high-quality vocational qualifications to secure future employment or further study in a HEI of their choice?

Many remain concerned that the outcome may instead be higher rates of failure and greater disengagement, particularly for those within the bottom half of performance in any cohort. It is worth noting that we will have to await the outcomes of 2017/18 to be able to gain a complete picture on this issue – an example of how long it takes for evidence of impact to emerge in the education sector.

The proposed changes at both Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 5 require significant changes to current approaches to assessment. For example, the introduction of linear assessment will take place alongside a reduction in the amount of internal assessment; the use of more synoptic assessment will occur alongside greater use of extended answers; and there is a call for a revised grading and reporting system in respect of learner performance.

Indications suggest that the revised Key Stage 4 National Curriculum will be less prescriptive and provide awarding bodies with greater freedom to develop informed, coherent curriculum offers. With the distraction of a competitive tender removed, OCR can now concentrate upon its core work of building an integrated and coherent approach to curriculum and assessment. OCR will use the knowledge gained from HE engagement and the research undertaken in preparation for developing EBCs to develop a strong suite of GCSEs and A Levels that will sit alongside OCR's existing Cambridge Nationals and Cambridge Technicals. The breadth, diversity and quality of the resulting cross-curricular offer will need to provide schools and colleges with routes to progression, as we know for certain that a one-size-fits-all approach will not deliver the desired outcomes of either Mr Gove or his detractors.

Have your say.
Email your comments to agenda@ocr.org.uk.



JOIN OCR AT THESE EXHIBITIONS AND CONFERENCES SPRING/SUMMER 2013

MARCH

15/16

ASCL Annual Conference

Hilton London Metropole

OCR is exhibiting on Stands 25 and 26 at this year's Annual Conference of the Association of School and College Leaders.

www.ascl.org.uk

22/23

Language World 2013

Nottingham Conference Centre

Come and see us on Stand 28 at this essential event for language educators. Get the latest information on our language learning resources and support. OCR's qualification specialists will offer expert guidance on the language pathways to meet the needs of you and your learners.

www.ALL-languages.org.uk

APRIL

2-5

Association of Teachers of Mathematics Conference

Royal Victoria Hotel, Sheffield

The 2013 ATM Easter conference: 'Maths for Real' will take place in Sheffield. As always, there will be a wide range of sessions available, evening activities and, of course the ATM Workshop – all set within the hotel, which is a Grade-II listed building.

www.atm.org.uk/conference

3-5

Mathematics Association

Loughborough University

OCR will be exhibiting at this three day conference which offers professional development opportunities for maths teachers, and a great opportunity for delegates to review educational products available to support their teaching of maths.

The conference will include talks from respected maths professionals, Rachael Horsman, David Spiegelhalter and Art Benjamin, with Marcus du Sautoy delivering the Presidential Address.

www.m-a.org.uk

4-6

Geographical Association Annual Conference

University of Derby

OCR is one of the main sponsors at this popular event. Come and visit us on Stand 51 for expert advice and guidance on our geography qualifications. We will also be sponsoring a talk by Mark Thurstain-Goodwin, Managing Director of GIS specialist Geofutures, on the future of food security in Britain.

www.geography.org.uk

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AELP Functional Skills Special Interest Group

Manchester

We are proud to sponsor the AELP Special Interest Group meeting for Functional Skills which is taking place in Manchester in April. Come along to find out more about OCR's skills suite including our new Cambridge Progression qualifications.

www.aelp.org.uk

MAY

10/11

Historical Association Annual Conference

Park Inn Hotel, York

OCR will be exhibiting at this Annual Conference which is the main history event in the calendar. The event offers delegates the chance to find out more about our range of History GCSEs and A Levels.

www.history.org.uk

JUNE

28/30

National Association of Teachers of English Annual Conference

The Holiday Inn, Stratford Upon Avon

In NATE's 50th year, come and visit OCR who will be exhibiting at this annual event to be held in Shakespeare's home town.

www.nate.org.uk



To join OCR at these events, visit
www.ocr.org.uk/events

OCR offers Computing qualifications from Entry Level to A Level

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