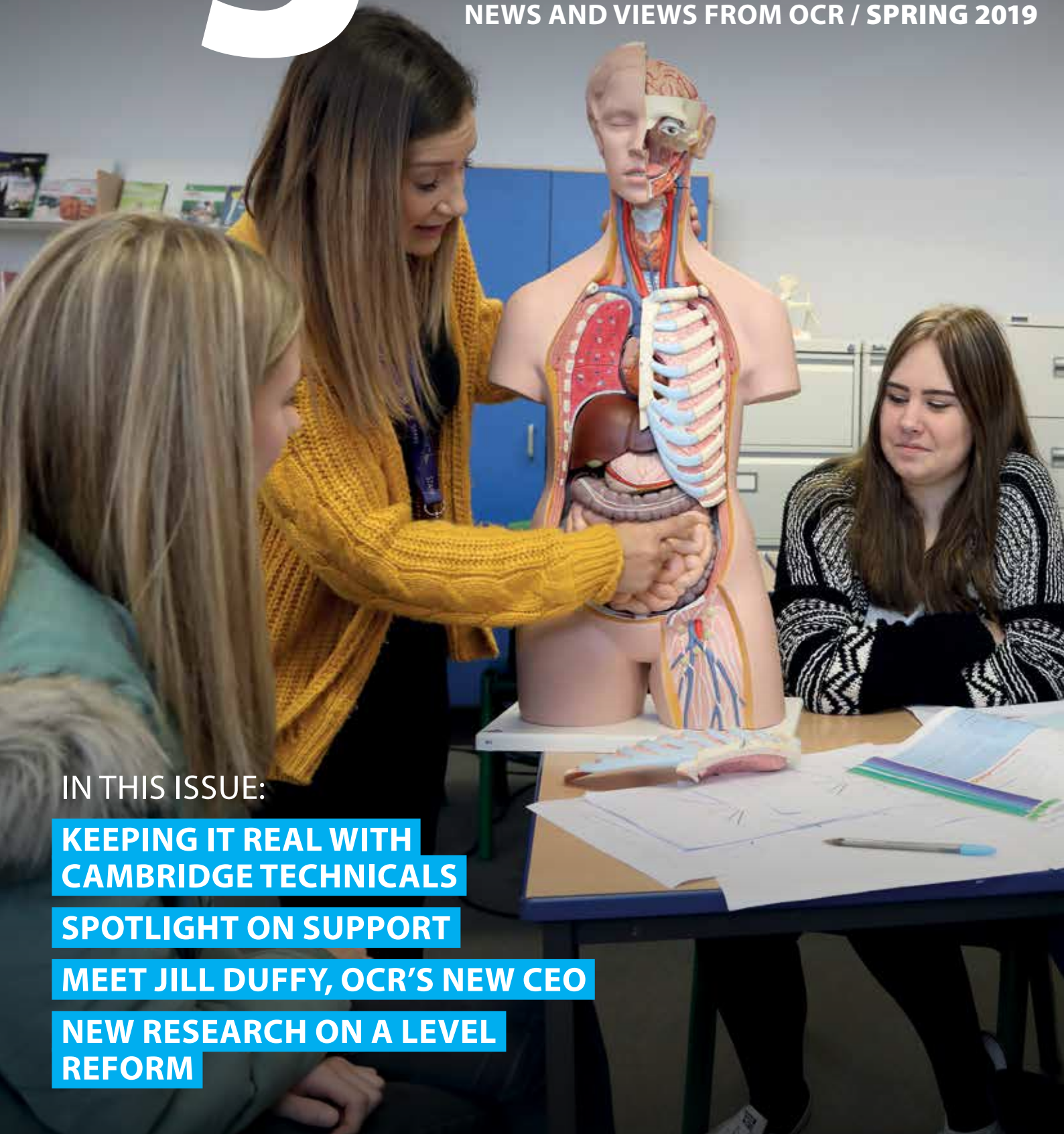


agenda

NEWS AND VIEWS FROM OCR / SPRING 2019



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**KEEPING IT REAL WITH
CAMBRIDGE TECHNICALS**

SPOTLIGHT ON SUPPORT

MEET JILL DUFFY, OCR'S NEW CEO

**NEW RESEARCH ON A LEVEL
REFORM**

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Welcome to the Spring 2019 issue of **agenda**, OCR's magazine offering a snapshot of our news and views.

This issue includes updates to the assessment support we offer you and your students in the run up to exams. Take ExamBuilder, for example, our free mock exam paper tool which allows you to create a paper with the right questions for your students. We've added lots more content to help you.

If you want to build your confidence in assessment, did you know about the short online courses available through Cambridge Assessment Network? We are also inviting teachers to come and see one of the key examining processes this summer – how we set grade boundaries.

Two schools using Cambridge Technicals have provided feedback on how they are getting on (read pages 8-9). We are also pleased to share the research that we've been doing on the impact of A Level reform. Thanks to our expert researchers at Cambridge Assessment, we've been exploring how schools and colleges are adapting to the changes in KS5 and, amongst other things, we found an unexpected benefit in some subjects of taking an AS Level.

All this, plus you can read my interview including why I like working in education and the challenges for our sector.

Please get in touch about anything you read here by emailing agenda@ocr.org.uk.

Jill Duffy

Chief Executive, OCR

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Cover Story: Developing health and social care skills

Students at Thurston Sixth in Suffolk learning about health and social care on our Cambridge Technicals course. You can read more in our case study feature on pages 8-9.



Summer 2019 exams – what's new?



It's the first exams this summer for OCR's reformed GCSEs in Ancient History, Business, Classical Civilisation, Design and Technology, Economics, Media Studies and Psychology.

Results for GCSEs in these subjects will be graded 9 to 1 for the first time. You can find information about the 9 to 1 grading system on our website: www.ocr.org.uk/gcsereform.

This summer also marks the first exams for OCR's reformed A Levels in Ancient History, Classical Civilisation, Design and Technology, Further Mathematics A, Further Mathematics B (MEI), Film Studies, Geology, Law, Mathematics A, Mathematics B (MEI), and Media Studies. (While some Maths students took exams in the new A Level Maths after one year in 2018, most Maths students will sit exams in the reformed A Level for the first time this summer.)

Like all exam boards, we set grade boundaries for exams in new GCSEs, AS and A Levels after we have marked students' exam papers – they are not created in advance.

GCSE Combined Science

For teachers with students taking our Combined Science GCSE, Ofqual has announced there will be no exceptional '3-3' grade to support students taking the higher tier GCSE this summer (unlike 2018). We've extended the time you have to change the tier entry without charge till 21 April. If you missed any of our training sessions, take a look at the factsheet on the qualification page on our website.



GCSE Computer Science

Ofqual's decision that programming skills for all GCSEs in Computer Science will be assessed exclusively by exam comes into force for all courses starting in autumn 2020. It will apply for the first time in summer 2022 when programming skills will be assessed 'during exams taken by all students at once'. The current Programming Project will stop after summer 2021.

Our priority is to support our GCSE Computer Science teachers so you can continue to deliver our GCSE successfully. We're talking to a range of teachers about how students can

Supporting assessment



ExamBuilder

This is our free mock exam paper tool that gives teachers the chance to create bespoke papers, with questions on topics to suit student needs. We've just added to the range of qualifications that ExamBuilder supports to include:

- Cambridge Nationals: Child Development, Creative iMedia, and Enterprise and Marketing
- Cambridge Technicals: Health and Social Care, IT, and Sport and Physical Activity
- Functional Skills: English and Maths
- A Level: English Language and English Literature
- GCSE: English Language, English Literature, Geography and History

Later this spring, we'll be adding more content to support Cambridge Nationals and Technicals. Sign up for this free service: www.ocr.org.uk/exambuilder.

Examiners' Reports

We introduced new-style reports in 2018 that gave teachers more constructive feedback on our exams. The new reports provide an overview of how students performed, and a detailed question by question analysis. They also highlight good performance and where performance could be improved, with examples of real student responses where appropriate. We are pleased to confirm that we will be offering new-style reports in 2019 for virtually all our qualifications.

Past Papers

We have a wide range of past papers on our website. The summer 2018 papers were made available quickly for teachers to use, on our secure website, Interchange. Please note these 2018 papers will be added to our public website in early May 2019, to help your students prepare for exams: www.ocr.org.uk/pastpapers.

Practice Papers

To support teachers, we have papers for use as mocks that are created by the same examiners as our live papers. These give students useful preparation for the real thing. In preparation for students taking the first exams in reformed qualifications this summer, look on our secure website Interchange for new practice papers in Business, Design and Technology, Classical Civilisation, Economics, Film Studies, Law, Media Studies and Psychology.

demonstrate their programming skills in an exam. We will keep you fully informed of any changes you need to make in plenty of time.

Just a reminder about the extra support we've provided to help schools and colleges on the Programming Project, such as new guidance for teachers and report templates for your students. Students have until 15 May to complete their work. We look forward to receiving a sample of your students' work and your authentication forms, once you receive our sample request.



OCR resources and training services on the road

In January and February, OCR's resources and CPD services team hosted a series of workshops up and down the country.

From Bristol to Newcastle, the sessions welcomed more than 70 teachers to discuss all things resources and training, and to help build an even more detailed picture of exactly what teachers need and when, to deliver our qualifications.

The busy and dynamic sessions involved teachers of all levels and of a variety of subjects, including GCSEs, A Levels and vocational qualifications. This diversity made for a thought-provoking and productive environment and we look forward to using the findings to support you better. Thanks to all the teachers who took part.

In the coming months and years, we'll be engaging with more and more teachers as we continue to develop our resources and training offering. If you would like to be involved in future research projects, please email: ocr.research@ocr.org.uk.

Hot off the resources press

Since the beginning of the new year, we have released more than 127 resources in a variety of formats, all designed to deepen your understanding of the assessment criteria and to help with teaching our qualifications.

In addition to examiners' reports from the November exam series and a raft of candidate exemplar materials across general and vocational qualifications, this number includes a **'Teacher Guide for A Level English Language and Literature'**, designed to foster understanding of the new anthology and what that means for teachers in the classroom.

We have also released a range of materials to help with your classroom delivery, including in-depth and innovative **'Topic Presentations for GCSE PE'**. Please let us know what you think of our new resources by taking this short survey: www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/ZL5Z53B.



Understanding of assessment practice is a click away

Following hot on the heels of 'A101: Introducing the Principles of Assessment', comes a new online course – 'A102: Introducing Assessment Practice', from the experts at Cambridge Assessment Network.

A102 introduces key stages of the assessment cycle. By the end of the 9 week course, learners will be able to demonstrate an understanding of the practicalities of producing and delivering assessment, and describe and explain important related issues.

A102 is open to everyone working day-to-day in the field of educational assessment and/or involved in developing qualifications, e.g. teachers, trainers, apprenticeship providers, examiners, assessment writers and awarding organisation staff.

The course will be open for bookings in late spring 2019. To register your interest now, go to www.canetwork.org.uk/a102.

In brief

Rising stars

Our Cambridge National and Cambridge Technical vocational qualifications continue to grow more popular each year. Between 2017 and 2018, the number of students taking Cambridge Nationals and Cambridge Technicals increased by 28% and 17% respectively.

We've kept the admin processes for Cambridge Nationals and Cambridge Technicals straightforward to free up more time for actual teaching. Feedback about the student experience is very positive too, particularly for the digital, media and sport qualifications, and teachers report lots of engagement with the practical content.

We're also pleased to confirm that our Cambridge National and Technical qualifications that are approved for inclusion in the 2020 performance tables are also included in the 2021 and 2022 tables, giving teachers stability in the years ahead.

To find out more about teaching these qualifications, and all the support on offer to help you get started, visit www.ocr.org.uk/cambridgenationals or www.ocr.org.uk/cambridgetechnicals.



Free Cambridge Nationals posters

If you have open days coming up and want to promote your subject, use our free downloadable Cambridge Nationals posters via ocr.org.uk/nationalsposters.

English Conference

Building on a successful annual conference last year, the OCR English team is keen to deliver even more for English teachers at this year's event, to be hosted at OCR's headquarters in Cambridge on 22 March.

The focus is on digging deeper into assessment and exploring proven strategies to develop key English skills and tackle assessment challenges.

Teachers can focus exclusively on GCSE or A Level or mix and match during the day. A combination of stimulating keynotes, workshops and open forums will make for a packed day of valuable subject-rich support and training. The line-up of speakers and workshop leads is equally diverse: practising teachers, HE subject specialists, established education research and training providers, and senior markers.

Helen Rees-Bidder, OCR senior examiner, said: "The conference will offer teachers the opportunity to consult senior examiners on assessment issues in a

supportive and reflective environment. The aim is for teachers to further their understanding of the more complex assessment issues such as the way that the assessment objectives are weighed up in a 'best-fit' approach to marking extended responses. I hope this will be useful intelligence to take back to the classroom and share with colleagues and to help inform marking of mocks and practice answers.

The 'Ask the assessment expert' Q&A panel session at this year's conference will be a new opportunity for teachers to engage with assessment issues highly relevant to their particular students and context."

Embracing the theme of digging deeper into assessment, we've invited a number of HE subject

specialists to contribute to the day. We want to offer a forum for teachers to engage with key subject research and discussion to help invigorate and inspire their own curricula and assessment practice.

Jess Mason of Sheffield Hallam University explained: "Research, especially in English, is not necessarily a matter of being told what the 'right', 'wrong', or the 'best' thing is for you to do. More often, research is about equipping and empowering teachers with the best knowledge available so that you can make informed decisions about what will work in your classroom, with your students.



Knowing about the latest research in your field is a powerful tool in helping you argue your case for the choices you make in your classrooms. This conference offers you insights on the newest findings and thinking on everything from reading for pleasure, text choices, and how to steer away from 'teaching to the test.'"

To find out more, visit ocr.org.uk/englishconf19.

What if... predicting the unpredictable

Every year, exams officers make plans to ensure exams run smoothly and students taking assessments get an equal chance to demonstrate their skills, knowledge and understanding. But what happens if a squirrel runs loose in a crowded exam hall?

Contingency planning is a major responsibility for any 'centres' offering exams. The Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) requires heads of all schools, colleges and other centres where exams take place to have in place a written contingency plan covering all aspects of exam administration. This plan should enable members of the senior leadership team to act immediately in the event of an emergency but other members of staff also need to be familiar with the centre's emergency planning.

Teachers and students should also be aware that exam boards have designated Wednesday 26 June 2019 as a 'contingency day' for examinations. In the highly unlikely event that there is national disruption to a day of examinations in summer 2019, the exam boards will liaise with the qualification regulators and the DfE to

agree the most appropriate option for managing the impact. As a last resort, the affected examinations will be rescheduled. Although every effort would be taken to keep the impact to a minimum, it is possible that there could be more than one timetable date affected following the disruption, up to and including the contingency day on 26 June 2019.

There's a lot for exams officers to consider and manage when planning and preparing for exams and contingency planning covers a wide range of situations. There are 'worst case scenario' events such as the absence of key staff (consider for a moment what an exam day would look like if your exams officer wasn't available), exam rooms being unavailable or IT systems failure. There are also events such as late arriving students, timetable clashes, student illness, malpractice and fire alarms which can happen regularly during an exam series. Check the JCQ website (www.jcq.org.uk) for the 'ICE'



Debating the future of vocational education

OCR held a symposium at the end of last year to discuss the future of vocational education. It was attended by representatives from organisations such as AELP, Ofqual and leaders from schools and colleges from around the UK.

Verity Cane, representing the 500 schools that form Whole Education, shared what she had learnt at OCR's event:

"The symposium proved to be a meaningful forum for discussion around the importance of high-quality vocational education and ensuring qualifications adequately prepare young people for their future. Whilst current vocational qualifications equip students with work-based skills, not all qualifications currently develop the behaviours needed for work adequately. Students require opportunities, both during lessons and when on work-experience placements, to practise their professional conduct.

The speed at which technology is developing means that many of the jobs that will be available for the

future workforce are not yet in existence. Vocational education therefore needs to ensure that young people have the necessary skill sets to thrive in the future world of work. In addition, a job for life is now a rarity and vocational education needs to support students to develop the resilience needed to move from industry to industry.

Through Cambridge Technicals, OCR is certainly addressing previous gaps in vocational education, and is successfully ensuring young people who choose the vocational route have the same quality of experience and opportunities as those who follow the A-Level route.

Representing the Harris Federation, Matthew Osborne, Vice Principal of Sixth Form, shared the significant impact that

Cambridge Technicals have had on Harris' learners, particularly the most disadvantaged. Harris has enjoyed an accelerated value added of +0.3 with their vocational offer and improved retention through Y11-13. Harris believes that the balanced, supported and proven approach of Cambridge Technicals ensures that students enter the world of work 'enriched, influenced and integrated'."

To find out more about OCR's range of vocational qualifications or if you would be interested in attending similar events in the future, email us at vocational.qualifications@ocr.org.uk.

In brief

Come and see how we set grade boundaries

Every summer, external organisations, such as teaching unions, are invited to observe the key examining processes involved in delivering results for students. If you, or a representative from your school or college, would like to see how we set grade boundaries, please get in touch by emailing us at agenda@ocr.org.uk.

An eggcellent performance

Congratulations to Jenna Morris and her teacher, Alexandra Wigg, at St Albans High School for Girls. Jenna won a national British Nutrition Foundation award at the end of last year for her outstanding performance in our Food Preparation and Nutrition GCSE last summer.

booklet (Instructions for conducting examinations) as this details the regulatory requirements for a range of situations and also includes a section on contingency planning. In addition, teams across OCR are on hand to give expert advice and guidance on all situations which arise. We have our own well established contingency plans in place to deal with disruptions so it's important to liaise with us directly.

Of course, not everything can be planned for and there are some events which happen that you simply couldn't predict. But by investing time for risk management and by training invigilators and staff, it means that if

the unpredictable happens, and there is a squirrel on the loose in the exam hall (true story), you'll be better prepared.

And finally, for any heads or senior leaders, why not take your centre's contingency plan for a test drive? Don't wait until your exams officer isn't there to put it into action because there's a lot more to running an exam day than putting a question paper on an exam desk! You might consider running an exam yourself (with your exams officer on hand to point you in the right direction).

With planning in place, we hope the summer exam series goes smoothly!

Apply for an OCR Bursary now!

Did you know that OCR offers West Midlands students going to Cambridge University a bursary worth £3000 a year? Our bursary scheme supports up to ten students from schools and colleges across the West Midlands for each year of their undergraduate studies at Cambridge. They can use the money towards tuition fees, living costs or a combination of both.

One student who is currently at the university, supported by the bursary, said: "The bursary has helped me not worry about finances, and allowed me to concentrate fully on getting everything I can out of this wonderful university. I would definitely recommend applying for it."

The deadline for applying for a bursary is 07/05/19. Bursary forms to be completed by both the student and the school can be found here: www.ocr.org.uk/bursaryscheme.





CAMBRIDGE TECHNICALS: TRIED AND TESTED

Students at Thurston Sixth on the Cambridge Technical Health and Social Care course, with teacher Nikita Catchpole (and above right)

Cambridge Technicals are level 2 and level 3 vocational qualifications which provide relevant and practically engaging courses for 16 to 18 year olds. Designed with the workplace in mind, they provide a high-quality alternative to A Levels with a great range of subjects to choose from, including business, digital media, engineering, health and social care, IT, and sport and physical activity.

Thanks to research from our parent organisation Cambridge Assessment, we also know that students with our level 3 Cambridge Technical qualifications are progressing successfully from school and colleges into higher education.

We visited two schools who teach some of our most popular Cambridge Technicals, in Health and Social Care and in Business, to get feedback from teachers and students.

CASE STUDY 1

Thurston Sixth (Beyton Campus), the sixth form of Thurston Community College, is located a few miles east of Bury St Edmunds in Suffolk. We asked teachers and students about their experiences with Cambridge Technicals in Health and Social Care.

Here's what Paul Potter, Vice Principal, Jean Wheeler, Head of Subject and Nikita Catchpole, Teacher of Social Sciences, say:

Benefits

"Offering Cambridge Technicals alongside A Levels and a more blended curriculum is what the students in our area really need. Most of the students are looking to go into careers in nursing or midwifery, or social care. We've got a couple who are going into paramedic science.

We involve a lot of the students going on work experience and interviewing professionals. They build up their interview skills, their one-to-one relationships with adults so that when they go for university interviews or apprenticeship interviews, they're ready to go, they're ready for the workplace, they're ready for university. When it comes to interviews, the students feel so much more prepared, and the quality of their answers is rich. The number of students who then go on to successful courses is really high."

Highlights for students

"They like the variety of tasks. They have the opportunity to develop their skills in terms of producing work in the form of leaflets, posters, as well as extended pieces of writing. The other aspect that they really enjoy is being able to tailor the course to their future career.

We have the most amazing students, they're highly motivated, they're very, very independent and utterly superb. True ambassadors for the college."

Support

"On occasions we have needed support from OCR and we have got a really quick response. They've been able to help us and support us so we know that what we are doing is the right thing. There's just so much information on the website that I didn't struggle at any point with knowing how I was going to deliver any of my units. For teaching new units, those delivery guides are really invaluable for creating powerpoints and resources within the classroom."

Results

"The examination results which have come back have been absolutely superb. Now what we're starting to do is to look at what they need to do to achieve on the final exam they're going to take, in order to secure the grade they're looking for."



"I have a student who has coupled the diploma with A Level in Dance. The student is not particularly strong in exams so without the need to sit as many exams, and with the ability to focus on coursework, that student has excelled."

"Seeing those results says, you know, I've done it right and they've succeeded because of that."

Here's what Thurston students say:

"With the course you can get on with it yourself, you have that independence."

"At the beginning, I wasn't very good at setting deadlines. Now it's just a lot easier to do that."

"We got to go away to a care home for the day which was really interesting. A lot of it is based in a classroom, so it was nice going somewhere and seeing it."

"One of the portfolio units we've done was building positive relationships so that's really helpful."

"I always think I've failed the tests, but then I come up with some really good grades like distinction distinction* which makes me really happy."*

CASE STUDY 2

Colston's is an independent school in Bristol. The sixth form has been teaching the **Cambridge Technical in Business** for 2 years.

Here's what **James Layland, Head of Business**, and **Julia Folland, Business Teacher**, say:

Benefits

"We offer the Cambridge Technical in Business alongside the standard A Level. It provides them with a lot more flexibility with how they learn. They get to choose the different types of units, how they're going to present their work, how they want to research it. So it's not just theory. They're really getting to learn about how a business works."

Highlights for students

"Students really enjoy the units about customers and communication, doing role-plays, and doing presentations. They love all the marketing aspects and it's really creative. The students get a chance to respond to the tasks in different ways, some of it can be written work, some of it can be a brochure or a leaflet. We can go on trips and they can interview people so there's a lot of variety for the students.

They have to do some research, and they have to manage their own time as well – the Cambridge Technicals really help the students to develop loads of skills."

Support

"I think working with OCR is really easy – they're really, really friendly, really helpful. They are only a phone call away so I often contact our visiting moderator. I went to one of the training sessions that was provided in Birmingham and they ran through all of the different units, and the way it was going to be structured. You could ask a lot of questions. There were different kind of group activities going on so we could talk to other teachers. When I came away, I felt really on fire for the whole qualification."

Results

"It really builds their confidence in themselves. In our first year, we had 100% distinction and higher, and I think that's really down to the way the qualification is structured. It gives students the chance to do an exam, and then to retake it and reflect and plan their own way through the qualification. That is really motivating for them."

And what Colston's students say:

"We've been working closely with the local company, Jaguar Land Rover. This helped me personally get greater depth and detail in my writing as we've had close interviews with people at that company."

"I think we were taught in a fun way. All of our classes seem to be interactive so it's easy for us to get involved with what we're learning."

"Over the course of the year you find out what works well for you and what doesn't work well, and you can be helped to improve yourself and your assignments."

"So currently I'm at the University of the West of England. I'm studying Business Management with Marketing and doing this course has really allowed me to bring more of an understanding into the business. Now it's just me developing my knowledge even further."

Jill Duffy became Chief Executive of OCR in November 2018, bringing over 25 years' experience in education to the role.

Before joining OCR, she led the UK Schools business, and its 450 staff, at education company Pearson. Prior to that, her career was in education publishing where she began as an editor at Oxford University Press and subsequently worked for publishers including Hodder & Stoughton, Harcourt, and Ginn. She also holds a Post Graduate Certificate in Education. Here Jill tells **agenda** about her own path into education and the challenges she faces in her role.

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

I have spent many years in the education sphere, working across both educational publishing and qualifications. My job before this one was running the UK Schools business for Pearson.

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

I really enjoy visiting schools and colleges, and seeing the impact of what we do on teachers and students in every part of the country. Coming from a family of teachers, I have the greatest respect for them, and know what a hard job they do and how dedicated they are to helping their students make progress.

Who do you admire in your field

I very much admire teachers as I know how difficult and demanding a teacher's job can be, and respect the dedication that they have to their students. It's always difficult to pick one person but I would say my English teachers at St John Rigby Sixth Form College made a big impression. You can read more about them below.

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

My school days were spent in Skelmersdale, Ormskirk and Wigan. I very much enjoyed my primary school days, although I learnt that having my mum as a teacher in the same school was a bit of a disadvantage, as there

was the danger that anything you did would be relayed back to her! I remember enjoying the wider breadth of subjects at secondary school, especially early lessons in languages. I really liked my time at sixth form college with the smaller classes and opportunity to focus on the subjects I enjoyed. It felt like a very grown up place, and prepared me well for university. I was very grateful to the three English teachers I had there, as they devoted a lot of time to preparing a small group of us for Oxford entrance tests, including taking us for a trip to Oxford to experience an Oxford college.

I think what I learned from my educational experience is that you need to get on with a lot of different people in life, and school days are your first lesson in this. They also made me realise that if you want something in life you need to be focussed, determined and work hard, but you also need to be kind to yourself and pick yourself up when things don't go according to plan. More than anything, they provide some of the friends who are there with you through life. I meet up a couple of times a year with friends from my sixth form college and really value this friendship. They knew me when I was young and have grown up with me.

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

First and foremost, I like to spend time with my family – my husband, two daughters and two stepsons. As we now all live in different cities and

countries, time all together is rare, but I try to see my daughters most weeks. I am quite sporty and run and play tennis. I play tennis for a local club so quite often play league matches at the weekend.

What are your first impressions of OCR?

My very first impression was how friendly and welcoming people are. It's definitely the friendliest place I have worked. I am also very impressed by the depth of assessment knowledge and experience both in OCR and in our parent organisation, Cambridge Assessment, generally. This comes with being an organisation focussed on assessment, and having the largest research group on assessment in Europe. Everyone working in OCR knows how important the work they do is and that their focus is very much to give teachers and students the assessment experience they want, and students the results they deserve.

What do you say to the criticism of OCR that it has a reputation as an academic awarding body?

Our focus at OCR is to meet the needs of all learners and to make sure that we cater for the full range of abilities and aptitudes in our assessments. We have a strong heritage both in academic qualifications and also in vocational qualifications and assessments. We have provided vocational qualifications for more than 20 years and over 1.5 million students achieved an OCR National,

"I very much admire teachers as I know how difficult and demanding a teacher's job can be, and respect the dedication that they have to their students."



one of our best known vocational qualifications. We have a depth of expertise in vocational education and work with employers and other stakeholders to really understand the skills that will be needed for the next generation. Facing an uncertain future, transferable skills and soft skills are increasingly important, as many people will have several career changes in their working lives.

What are the greatest challenges that your sector faces over the next five years?

I think we will need to review the last GCSE and GCE reforms to ensure that they are delivering what is needed, and we will need to see what comes from the vocational qualifications review, and the impact this might have on our vocational qualifications. As always, we need to predict what policy changes we are likely to see and prepare for these. More generally, technology change hasn't impacted the world of education

and of assessment as much as it has other sectors, and we need to be at the heart of how technology can enhance education and assessment, and make a positive difference to learning. One of the major challenges facing the education system is recruitment and retention of teachers, and we need to continually look at what we can do to save teachers' time and reduce their workload, especially if we want them to carry on examining for us too.

As CEO, how will you know you are doing a good job?

It's early days but I will be looking at the business metrics, as well as what teachers tell us about how we are supporting them. One of the most important areas for me is feedback from staff. I have around 400 colleagues at OCR and I'm keen to listen to them. We have an online 'Yammer' community for example which is full of feedback and ideas about how to improve. It's very important to me that the team at OCR is happy and engaged.

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

I think what most teachers would ask for would be a period of stability with minimal changes to the curriculum, Ofqual framework and performance tables, so that changes can be embedded and teachers can focus on their key task of teaching. The second thing would be to ensure that education receives adequate funding, so that schools can provide a quality education to all students, and don't have to make the very difficult choices many of them are making at the moment. Finally, I would ask that vocational education is treated with the same parity of esteem as academic education, so that we provide pathways that are appropriate for different learners from aged 16 onwards.

WHAT'S REALLY HAPPENING ALONGSIDE THE A LEVEL?

New research finds unexpected benefit of taking AS Levels

With the help of expert researchers at parent organisation Cambridge Assessment, we've been keeping the reformed qualification landscape for 16-to-19 year olds under close watch. Our investigations into the impact of A Level reform shine a light on the issue of curriculum breadth and extend the research published by other organisations in this area substantially. Using a mix of quantitative and qualitative research to explore qualifications alongside A Levels, in particular the AS Level, the Extended Project Qualification (EPQ) and Core Maths, has revealed some surprising results.

AS Levels

Face-to-face interviews conducted in summer 2018 with senior staff at 11 schools and colleges illustrated some of the negative perceptions about decoupled AS Levels.

Most of the 11 schools in this small but representative qualitative study¹ provided AS Levels in special cases only, as a safety net if they believed a student was in danger of not passing an A Level at all for example. "We identify those students who are at risk... and we offer them the option of taking an AS Level so at least they leave with a qualification. It generates points for the centre."

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

The lowering of the UCAS tariff may have also contributed to the AS Level's unpopularity, although schools still offering AS Levels pointed out their value as an 'early warning system' with students and parents because, "if you do a mock, they don't take it seriously".

This complements the findings of a 2018 survey of over 180 Heads of Department (HoDs)² also conducted by Cambridge Assessment on AS Level trends, in which over 60% identified 'exam practice' as the most common reason for students still taking the AS Level in their A Level subjects. The AS Level was no longer seen as the way to broaden their curriculum by most (i.e. over ¾ of) the HoDs surveyed.

At a 16-19 Policy Forum held by OCR in 2018, stakeholders also expressed views that the demise of the AS seemed inevitable. However, there were some who still valued the AS

for encouraging students from less advantaged backgrounds to embark on an A Level programme. Stakeholders voiced wider concerns about the pressure on students taking A Levels and the need to provide high quality guidance for 16 year olds making informed decisions about their future.

Yet contrary to the perceived limitations of reformed AS Levels, new quantitative research³ based on the National Pupil Database published by Cambridge Assessment in November 2018 identified a positive; A Level grades for students in 2017 who had taken an AS Level in 2016 were slightly higher than for those students who had not taken the AS Level first. The largest differences were found in the science subjects. For the first time, Cambridge Assessment researchers analysed the National Pupil Database to look at the impact on A Level grades, taking full account of the prior attainment of students and also of school type.

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

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

¹ Insights in trends in AS Levels, the EPQ and Core Maths: summary report. (<http://www.cambridgeassessment.org.uk/Images/527125-insights-on-trends-in-as-levels-the-epq-and-core-maths-summary-report.pdf>)

² AS Level trends 2018. (<http://www.cambridgeassessment.org.uk/Images/519907-as-level-trends-2018.pdf>)

³ Reformed A Level results: Do candidates who take the AS Level achieve better grades? (<http://www.cambridgeassessment.org.uk/Images/513414-reformed-a-level-results-do-candidates-who-take-the-as-level-achieve-better-grades-.pdf>)

Extended Project Qualification

Feedback about the EPQ, especially from face-to-face interviews, is much more positive.

According to our interviewers: 'there was passion and excitement in participants' voices when speaking about the EPQ.' Now just over 10 years old, the EPQ is valued by UCAS more highly than the reformed AS Level. Over 40,000 students a year nationally take EPQs, although the steady rise in popularity stalled in 2018. Previous studies by Cambridge Assessment identified that the EPQ could be beneficial to performance in other Key Stage 5 qualifications and that those going to university with an EPQ had a higher probability of gaining a good degree.

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

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

The EPQ is perceived to equip students with time management, critical thinking and independent skills that are all relevant for study at HE. Typical of the comments from the senior staff interviewed was: 'It feels like a mini-dissertation done three years early to me.' Some face-to-face interviewees noted the tangible benefit to university applications: "Because universities look on it favourably, we have had students who have had their offers reduced if they've had an EPQ." These priorities are also supported by the findings of the 188 HoDs surveyed in 2018. Only 14% of those surveyed said taking an EPQ was school policy, however.

Others interviewed pointed out that teaching engaged EPQ students was enjoyable and believed it helped build good relationships between students and staff: "they actually start talking to different members of staff they wouldn't usually talk to." The EPQ could be a means to achieving broader curriculum: "We used to offer dance at A Level but just because of the financial pressures on schools now, we can't offer that as a course anymore... What we were able to do was to have a student this year who is doing his EPQ and he's done a dance composition and performance..."

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

Core Maths

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

Core Maths has tariff points equivalent to an AS Level. Designed to increase the number of post-16 students in England studying maths beyond GCSE, it was only introduced in 2014 and take up is relatively modest – there were approximately 7000 Core Maths students in England in 2018.

Nearly half the 180+ HoDs surveyed in 2018 about Core Maths had little knowledge of this new Maths qualification at all and over 60% who answered said they would not advise their students to take it. Of those who identified a benefit, this was helping students with other A Level subjects.

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

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

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

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

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



A WELCOME SHIFT IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION?

PAUL STEER, OCR'S HEAD OF POLICY, ON OFSTED'S PROPOSED INSPECTION FRAMEWORK.

“

Ofsted's new draft inspection framework has been welcomed by many in the education community with positive comments about an apparent shift away from prioritising test and exam results towards a greater emphasis on the quality of a school's curriculum. Could this be the antidote to what many feel has become a high stakes, low trust accountability system?

This shift of emphasis is characterised by a number of things Ofsted says it wants to put a stop to, including:

- the burdensome collection of low value data on pupil performance
- teaching to the test (“the curriculum is not a pop quiz” as Amanda Spielman recently said)
- the tracking back of assessment objectives for GCSE as far as Year 7 with the consequence that pupils drop some other subjects aged 12 or 13
- the ‘off-rolling’ of low achieving pupils
- and gaming in which pupils are put in for qualifications against their best interest in order to rack up performance points for the school.

The new framework describes what it sees as the features of a good curriculum and how these will be judged during an inspection. At the same time, Ofsted is at pains to point out that it will not mandate curricular and pedagogical approaches – it is interested only in what works for a given school.

The headlines are that Ofsted expects a curriculum to be ambitious, to provide young people with ‘the knowledge and cultural capital they need to succeed in life’, and to be ‘coherently planned and sequenced towards cumulatively sufficient knowledge and skills’. A quality curriculum should enable pupils ‘to grow as active, healthy and engaged citizens’ and should provide equitable access to a wide range of subjects.

In its commentary, Ofsted denounces the long standing debate about whether a curriculum should be skills or knowledge based, arguing that it is never a matter of one or the other. Nevertheless, whilst it sets much store on acquisition of skills, there is an undeniable emphasis on knowledge. The curriculum should provide for the recall of ‘baked in’ knowledge, securing a memory of key concepts and building on those. Much of the emphasis is at subject level and there are future plans to develop subject level indicators so elements of the curriculum can be judged at subject level. Overall, the curriculum will be judged by its intent, implementation and impact.

This interest in subject-based knowledge is brought out in statements about the importance of the role of subject teachers. A key indicator looks at how schools manage ‘the alignment of continuing

Ofsted found that nine schools judged outstanding under the current framework were judged to have weak or poor curricula under the new.

professional development for teachers and staff with the curriculum, and the extent to which it develops teachers’ content knowledge over time’.

So will the new proposed framework succeed in its aims? Some have argued that plans to introduce the framework from September 2019, are rushed. Others have questioned whether, given resource and time constraints, Ofsted will have the capacity to judge schools effectively or frequently enough.

And whilst Ofsted argues that moving away from endless data collection can help reduce teacher workload, the framework is bound to bring with it additional work,

at least during the initial implementation. Are schools being asked to do even more with the same or diminishing resources? Developing, maintaining and evaluating a broad, inclusive and coherent curriculum is no mean feat and although many schools are already in that place, others will struggle to get there.

Ofsted admits that there will be a requirement for more CPD for teachers: “Too many teachers and leaders have not been trained to think deeply about what they want their pupils to learn and how they are going to teach it.” And during a pilot of the new framework, Ofsted found that nine schools judged outstanding under the current framework were judged to have weak or poor curricula under the new.

Perhaps the most crucial question is whether the framework can really create a meaningful shift away from a focus on outcomes. As Amanda Spielman said recently: “Try telling any teenager that their GCSEs don’t matter”. Nor are parents or politicians likely to give up the habit of judging by results. She went on to acknowledge that inspection reports will complement what is shown on performance tables and that pupil attainment and qualifications will always be important.

Through its consultation, Ofsted has called for an open and healthy debate, with a commitment to consult and listen. The volume of speeches, reports, blogs and events which have accompanied the consultation so far demonstrate its commitment to being a transparent and available body. This augurs well, but the new framework is intended to bring new challenges and opportunities and it will be interesting to see how this plays out.

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

JOIN OCR AT THESE EXHIBITIONS AND CONFERENCES SPRING/SUMMER 2019

APRIL

9-11

Geographical Association (GA) Annual Conference

University of Manchester

We are delighted to return to this key event as sponsors. Visit OCR (on stand 42-43) to find out more about our geography qualifications. OCR subject advisor, Shelley Monk, will be delivering two OCR workshops: 'Fieldwork to develop deeper geographical understanding' and 'Exploring higher order thinking skills in A Level geography'.

www.geography.org.uk

16-17

ATM/MA Joint Conference

Chesford Grange, Warwick

The Association of Teachers of Mathematics and The Mathematical Association are delighted to announce that there will be a jointly badged conference in 2019. Our maths subject advisors will be available on the OCR stand to guide you through our broad suite of maths qualifications.

www.atm.org.uk

MAY

17-18

Historical Association (HA) Annual Conference

Crowne Plaza, Chester

We look forward to joining this annual event of history and research-led CPD. Our team of subject experts will be available (on stand 8) to answer your questions.

www.history.org.uk

JUNE

21-22

National Association for the Teaching of English (NATE) Annual Conference

Crowne Plaza, Chester

We are exhibiting at this key CPD event in the English teaching calendar. Visit us on our exhibition stand to meet our team of helpful subject advisors. Find out how to improve student performance in extended writing at OCR's workshop: 'Get writing right at GCSE' delivered by our subject advisor, Kate Newton.

www.nate.org.uk

22

La Salle MathsConf 19

Sheffield

We are proud supporters of these maths events organised by La Salle Education. Join us and hundreds of maths teachers to network and learn at the next conference taking place in Sheffield.

<https://completemaths.com>

27-29

MEI Conference

University of Bath

We will join the next MEI Conference as sponsors where we look forward to introducing our new MEI Level 3 Core Maths qualification.

www.mei.org.uk

JULY

1

Just Maths 2019

Alton Towers Hotel

TV legend, Johnny Ball, will kick start this popular annual event for maths teachers. Our subject advisors will be presenting and exhibiting alongside other leading specialists, providing support and quality CPD for GCSE maths teachers.

<https://justmaths.co.uk>

2

PiXL Science Conference

Central Hall, Westminster, London SW1

We look forward to exhibiting at this conference aimed at heads of departments and science teachers in KS4 and KS5. Come and meet our science subject advisors to find out more about our qualifications and support.

www.pixl.org.uk

5-7

Schools History Project (SHP) Summer Conference

Leeds Trinity University, Horsforth

Our subject advisors will be exhibiting at this conference, organised by the Schools History Project. Visit our stand for advice and support with OCR's (B) SHP GCSE History qualification.

www.schoolshistoryproject.co.uk



To find out about the wide range of online and face to face CPD events we are providing in 2019 to support the teaching of OCR's qualifications, take a look at www.cpdhub.ocr.org.uk.

To join OCR at these events, visit www.ocr.org.uk/events to find out more

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