

# agenda

NEWS AND VIEWS FROM OCR / SPRING 2017

## *Preparing for exam success*

IN THIS ISSUE:

**THE LATEST ON REFORM**

**OCR'S NEW MOCK EXAM SERVICE**

**CASE STUDY ON A LEVEL SOCIOLOGY**

**MEET STEPHEN MUNDAY, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OF THE CAM ACADEMY TRUST**

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Welcome to the Spring 2017 issue of **agenda**, OCR's termly magazine which offers a snapshot of news and views from OCR.

In this issue, you can read about OCR's reformed qualifications coming your way for teaching in September. This includes two new A Level Maths suites, plus GCSEs and A Levels in Design and Technology and in Film Studies offering excellent progression for your students, to name but a few.

There's a lot of change with the first exams for new GCSEs and A Levels this summer. To help teachers prepare students, we are delighted to have launched ExamBuilder, a new mock exam service for teachers of computer science, maths and the sciences this spring. There's a step by step guide to the new service on pages 8-9.

On page 10, you can read about teaching stimulating new topics on our new Sociology A Level at the 2500-strong Brighton, Hove and Sussex Sixth Form College. And we are delighted to include an interview with Stephen Munday, Chief Executive of The Cam Academy Trust, about the challenges of heading up a flourishing group of eight schools and colleges in Cambridgeshire, and his involvement in improving Initial Teacher Training.

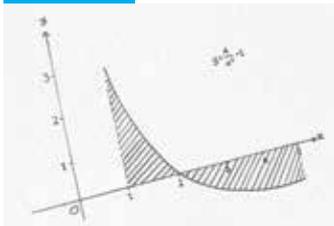
All this, plus relevant new resources, encouraging examining and university recognition for Cambridge Technicals.

Do get in touch about anything you read here, or if you would want an online copy instead, via [agenda@ocr.org.uk](mailto:agenda@ocr.org.uk)

**Leo Shapiro**  
Chief Executive, OCR

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### Cover Story: ExamBuilder

OCR launched ExamBuilder, a new free mock exam service this Spring. To help prepare their students for exams, teachers can create bespoke tests on key topics, tailored to student need. Find out more on pages 8-9.



# Reform update: The latest on new GCSEs and AS/A Levels

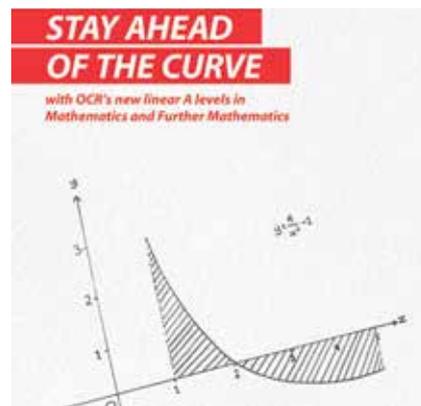
After successfully developing over 70 new OCR AS/A Levels and GCSEs for 2015 and 2016, OCR is working hard on the final phase of 30 reformed qualifications that will be introduced into classrooms in September.

This final wave of new qualifications covers a wide range of subjects; from additions to OCR's classics range such as ancient history and classical civilisation to design and technology; and from geology to law.

Among the highlights for schools in September are OCR's new Maths and Further Maths AS and A Levels. OCR is the only exam board to provide a choice of two new accredited Maths suites in what is now the most popular subject taken at A Level. In February and March, over 300 maths teachers attended our linear maths conferences to hear about the key reforms to these qualifications.

Alongside OCR's new AS/A Level Film Studies, OCR has also developed a new GCSE Film Studies for the first time, giving students the chance to learn about representation, narrative and genre – the structural

elements of storytelling – through arguably the most accessible and engaging audio-visual medium of them all. GCSE students will look at six films ranging from a 1930s Hollywood classic to contemporary non-



English language films. The introduction of the Film Studies GCSE provides teachers with a comprehensive package of OCR Media and Film qualifications which incorporates vocational qualifications too.

The new Design and Technology GCSE and AS/A Levels offer strong progression to support learning from Key Stage 3 through to A Level and beyond. At AS/A Level, OCR is the only exam board to offer design



engineering, fashion and textiles and product design; all valuable routes to develop problem-solving learners with a desire to enter the world of design, manufacture or engineering.

And last but not least, did you know that OCR's new Business GCSE includes career awareness? At a time when many schools struggle to provide careers advice, OCR's new GCSE has been designed to help students

to consider their career options and make more informed choices about their future based on knowledge of different qualifications and pathways.

## June festival for Geography teachers

OCR is delighted to work once again with the Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) to organise the Festival of Geography this summer.



Our Festival of Geography event on 23 June 2017 will be held in the beautiful RGS building in London. We have designed the programme to support AS/A

Level Geography teachers by exploring topics to develop a deeper understanding of content and case studies. With changes to the subject

content from September 2016, we want to engage with teachers and unpack some of the contemporary and 'new' topics that are less familiar and potentially daunting.

The day will be flexible and interactive, with workshops 'by teachers for teachers' investigating content, discussing teaching and learning resources and pedagogical approaches. All workshops will have lots of 'take away' materials to support both teachers and learners.

We are thrilled to have Mark Maslin, Professor of Climatology at University College London explaining the Anthropocene,

as our key note speaker. This contemporary global issue is pertinent to two of our AS/A Level topics: climate change and earth's life support systems.

This CPD opportunity was a resounding success in 2016 with positive feedback from teachers including 'an inspiring and highly engaging talk' and 'very helpful direction towards resources and up to date case studies discussed'.

Book your place via [www.cpdhub.ocr.org.uk](http://www.cpdhub.ocr.org.uk)  
[www.ocr.org.uk/geography](http://www.ocr.org.uk/geography)

# 9 to 1 grading for new GCSEs

**This August, students in England will receive results graded 9 to 1, (with 9 being the highest), for their performance in reformed English Literature, English Language and Maths GCSEs.**

The 9 to 1 system will then be applied to results for the other reformed GCSEs in 2018 and in 2019. Until then, students will receive their GCSE results in a mix of new 9 to 1 and A\* to G grades, depending on the subjects they study. There's more information about the new grading system on the OCR and Ofqual websites but to summarise:

- The bottom of grade 4 will be aligned to the bottom of

grade C, so approximately the same number of students who currently get a grade C or above will get a grade 4 or above.

- The top grade 9 will be awarded using a different method. 20% of students who achieve a mark at grade 7 or above will be awarded the grade 9.
- DfE policy (updated March 2017) distinguishes between grade 4 as a 'standard pass' and grade 5 as a 'strong pass'. Both grades will be reported in school performance tables.
- Grade boundaries will only be set after exams have taken place and on the basis of statistical predictions.

## What's happening in Wales and Northern Ireland?

The new 9 to 1 grading system applies to qualifications that have been reformed in England. In Wales, GCSEs will retain an A\* - G grading system. However Qualifications Wales has confirmed that reformed GCSEs (9-1) in smaller entry subjects will have designated status and can be taught in all schools in Wales (though not in the medium of Welsh). This includes OCR's reformed GCSEs such as Ancient History, Classical Civilisation, Economics, Film Studies and Psychology, as well as Latin and Classical Greek. Education policy in Northern Ireland means that all schools



and colleges can teach OCR's new reformed GCSEs, initially with the exception of GCSE English Language and GCSE Sciences, developed for England. This January, the Northern Ireland Education Minister confirmed that the reformed GCSE (9-1) Science specifications could also be taught in Northern Ireland from September 2017.

## New guide shines spotlight on the migration history of Cardiff's Butetown

As part of the new migration theme for GCSE History A (Explaining the Modern World), a spotlight is being shone on the fascinating and diverse history of Butetown in Cardiff. In the 1940s, some forty-five to fifty nations, and many more ethnic groups, were represented in Butetown's population of around 5000. The history of Butetown has previously received little attention, making its discovery all the more exciting. It also offers a perfect example of change, continuity, cause, consequence, similarity and difference in one place over time and will help OCR's GCSE students to gain a deeper understanding of migration history.

To support teaching of the new migration topic on OCR's GCSE, we have created a very comprehensive Butetown Teachers' Guide (pictured below). The guide answers the questions: who came, why and from where, what was their impact, what were their experiences and how were they received? It gives an overview of Butetown's migration history and key historical dates, as well as a walking tour, images and video clips to bring the topic to life. Considerable research was carried out in the development of the pack and some very insightful quotations and sound bites from the people of Butetown have been added. Each chapter includes

thinking points encouraging learners to examine the sources and compare their value, with reference to what can still be seen in the built environment. Practice questions have been created for most chapters.

Guide and migration textbook author Martin Spafford, said: "It was a real privilege to meet people who had played a part in the many rich interwoven histories of Butetown and generously gave of their time and expertise. Sad, though, to realise that, as the grand buildings are left to crumble, visitors to Cardiff Bay are now told more about Roald Dahl and Doctor Who than the coal docks that once powered Britain's

wealth, or the people who formed modern Britain's earliest and still thriving multicultural working-class community."

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



## In brief

As part of OCR's programme of activities to support exams officers, OCR Customer Support Manager Ali Leather (pictured) explained the implications of results for new linear GCSEs and A Levels, to hundreds of delegates at The Exams Office's January conference in London. One delegate commented afterwards: "it was definitely the most useful session of the day." OCR is also working with Exams Training (set up by the founders of The Exams Office) to provide face-to-face training to new exams officers around the country.

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





## A driving force behind Cambridge Nationals

Over 100 students taking OCR's Cambridge Nationals in Engineering Design at Scarborough UTC are following an F1 in Schools challenge this term to complement their learning. The competition, from not-for-profit organisation F1 in Schools, calls for students to design a 'better, faster, cooler F1 car' following the same processes as real F1 teams, from initial business plan through to the car design.

Taking part in the competition enthuses the students, according to Scarborough UTC's Director of Engineering, Natalie Griffiths: "OCR has mapped the F1 in Schools project to Cambridge Nationals so that we can teach it as part of the course. This makes it more fulfilling as we can go into the

engineering topics in greater depth." The newly-opened UTC is proposing to share the resources it creates for the course with other local schools. The winners of an in-house competition this summer will be chosen to represent the UTC at F1 in Schools' regional finals next January.

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



### In brief

#### Inspiring event for GCSE English teachers

After last year's successful event, we're hoping that this year's conference for GCSE English teachers at the Globe on 16 June will prove an equally big hit. Renowned poet and commentator Simon Armitage (pictured) will open proceedings, followed by a choice of practical workshops to stimulate and inspire classroom practice, including

Grappling with grammar at Key Stage 3-4 (with Theo Maniski), and Approaches to tackling unseen texts (with Peter Thomas). New this year and included in the ticket price, is a free standing ticket for the evening's performance of *Tristan and Yseult* at the Globe.

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



## Cambridge Technicals go from strength to strength

2017 is a milestone year for Cambridge Technicals. In January, and again this summer, the first exams for our reformed Level 3 Cambridge Technicals take place.

Good luck to all students. The reformed Level 3 suite covers Business, Digital Media, Engineering, Health and Social Care, IT, Performing Arts, Laboratory Skills, and Sport and Physical Activity. For many OCR customers, the 2012 suite in which there is no external assessment, remains a popular option. In September 2017, we will also be launching Level 2 Cambridge Technicals in five key subject areas – Business, Engineering, Health and Social Care, IT, and Sport and Physical Activity – offering progression up to Level 3.

### HE recognition

Summer 2017 will also see the first cohort of students who took Cambridge Technicals, OCR's vocational qualifications launched in 2012, graduate from university. According to UCAS, more than 25% of students now apply to university with Level 3 vocational qualifications. To help universities dealing with applications from students with Cambridge Technicals, Mara Bogdanovic, OCR's Head of Business Engagement, spoke to the Russell Group Qualifications Network in March.

A growing number of Russell Group universities have confirmed to students that 'they will consider Cambridge Technicals in the relevant subject areas either on their own or in combination with other Level 3 qualifications such as A Levels'. OCR launched the reformed suite of Level 3 Cambridge Technicals in 2016. Again attracting UCAS points, the suite was designed with input from schools, employers and HE to give students the skills to progress on to further study or straight into the workplace.

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

## New measures to encourage examining

OCR has played an important role in raising the industry-wide issue of examiner capacity in recent years. In January, a new working group, consisting of school and college heads' associations, including ASCL, NAHT and HMC, the Joint Council for Qualifications and the major exam boards, released a report into the challenge posed by increased demand for examiners in the summer due to linear assessment and teachers' demanding workloads.

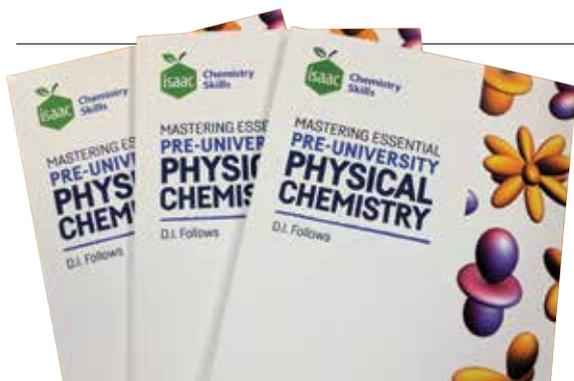
The working group announced two new measures to boost examining:

- A new award scheme, to be piloted this summer, to recognise exceptional

individual as well as school and college contributions to examining.

- A new 'Become an Examiner' website – [www.examining.jcq.org.uk](http://www.examining.jcq.org.uk) – for those interested in getting involved and sharing best practice.

Sylke Scheiner, OCR's Director of Assessment and working group representative, commented: "It's great that exam boards and school and college leaders' associations are now working closely together to identify solutions to an industry-wide issue. Examiners play a key role in the education system and we all need to play our part in building capacity for the future."



## Mastering Chemistry

In collaboration with OCR, the Isaac Project based at Cambridge University has produced 'Mastering Essential Pre-university Physical Chemistry', a sister publication to their very successful Physics book and Massive Open Online Course. To support teachers, OCR has sent a free copy to every English school teaching one of OCR's two Chemistry A Levels.

Dr David Paterson, OCR Subject Advisor for Chemistry, worked with the Isaac Project to formulate the structure and content of this valuable new book and associated online platform.

'Mastering Pre-university Physical Chemistry' is a low cost (£1) textbook of questions covering all of the mathematical sections of the new A Level Chemistry specifications. The

answers feature on a free interactive website which teachers and students can register on for feedback and for teachers to track their students' progress.

Dr Niki Kaiser, Chemistry teacher at Notre Dame High School, Norwich, said: "When I first came across this book, it seemed too good to be true: a set of really good practice questions in a very affordable book, but with marking/ feedback available online... I introduced it to my Y13s this week. Their immediate response was to ask where and when they could get hold of it!"

Learn more about IsaacChemistry: <https://isaacphysics.org/chemistry>  
[www.ocr.org.uk/chemistry](http://www.ocr.org.uk/chemistry)

## Supporting teaching

To help teachers of OCR's new GCSEs and AS/A Levels, we offer:

- An extensive range of free teaching and learning resources including delivery guides and schemes of work [www.ocr.org.uk/reformresources](http://www.ocr.org.uk/reformresources)
- Subject advisors to answer your questions, email [subject@ocr.org.uk](mailto:subject@ocr.org.uk) (eg [maths@ocr.org.uk](mailto:maths@ocr.org.uk))
- A range of CPD from online to face to face to suit your needs, see [www.cpdhub.ocr.org.uk](http://www.cpdhub.ocr.org.uk)
- Mark schemes, sample papers and now ExamBuilder to help teachers and students to prepare for exams.

## So what's changing about exams in Summer 2017?

- 1 First exams and results for new GCSEs (9-1) in English Language, English Literature and Maths
- 2 First exams and results for the new linear A Levels
- 3 There's no UMS for linear GCSEs and AS/A Levels, just an overall grade based on a total mark
- 4 Until all GCSEs are linear in 2019, results certificates will show a mix of grading systems
- 5 Results certificates for the new GCSE (9-1) English Language will show a separate grade for Spoken Language - distinction, merit, pass or not classified.

## Michelin-starred chef Heston Blumenthal shared his views on the importance of food and cooking with a full capacity crowd at BETT2017 in January.



Heston spoke about the importance of food in the curriculum; how it incorporates others subjects such as physics, maths, biology, art and chemistry; helps young people to learn from their mistakes; and encourages teamwork. Heston and his team at the Fat Duck have provided amazing support for OCR's new GCSE in Food Preparation and Nutrition. His scientific approach to the world of cooking naturally complements the new GCSE.

Students at Chelsea Academy in London started OCR's new Food GCSE in September.

Angela Sach, Curriculum Leader at Chelsea Academy, said: "The students are excited about developing their cooking skills; especially a wider range of dishes than we have previously

included in our curriculum. They love to be creative and try out new things as well as bringing ideas from home; our students come from a diverse range of backgrounds and predominantly have home cooked food. The new Food Preparation and Nutrition GCSE gives us more opportunity to draw on this background.

"In terms of scientific understanding, it fits well with the academy having a science specialism. The students like to know why they have to do things in a certain way and experiments to help them understand the science behind the cooking help them to 'get it right' and to know where they can be creative by breaking the rules or the recipe."

# YOUR STEP BY STEP GUIDE TO EXAMBUILDER

## OCR'S NEW MOCK EXAM SERVICE

**ExamBuilder is OCR's new free mock exam service for teachers of GCSE and AS/A Level Computer Science, Maths, and the Sciences.**

Developed in collaboration with teachers, ExamBuilder is an easy-to-use service which gives teachers the chance to create unique exam papers for their students. 'Mocks' form an essential element in preparing students to be more successful in a real exam, particularly at a time of rapid qualification reform.

ExamBuilder allows teachers to use questions from different papers to build bespoke tests on key topics, tailored to meet student need and build confidence. It is designed to provide mock exams for both old and new GCSEs and A Levels. The mark schemes, examiner reports and supplementary resources relevant to the questions are available for each test. When teachers have created a paper to suit their students' needs, they can give it a personalised cover to simulate real exam conditions.

**This is all free of charge.**

Over 2000 teachers have already signed up to ExamBuilder. Once one member of staff is signed up, there is no limit to the number of colleagues at one school or college who can access ExamBuilder. With more subjects, such as Physical Education, being added to ExamBuilder soon, why don't you sign up here:

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

*"The ability to select parts of questions and full questions from a bank of past exams is key to tracking progress on key topic areas."*

*Lee Knowles, Science teacher,  
Verulam School, St Albans*

*"I think that one of the best features is the dynamic cover page; it gives each exam paper a formal feel and also gives the students the opportunity to see what their exam paper will look like – a very worthwhile experience!"*

*Nadine Malcolm, Head of Chemistry,  
Comberton Village College, Cambridgeshire*

*"ExamBuilder manages to mix ease of use with rich functionality that will save any teacher a load of time. Being free is an amazing advantage as our budgets are being squeezed."*

*Stuart Maher, Head of  
Computing, Sir Christopher  
Hatton Academy,  
Wellingborough, Northants*

# BUILDING YOUR MOCK EXAM

## 1. CHOOSE YOUR SUBJECT

First select your subject at GCSE or A Level.

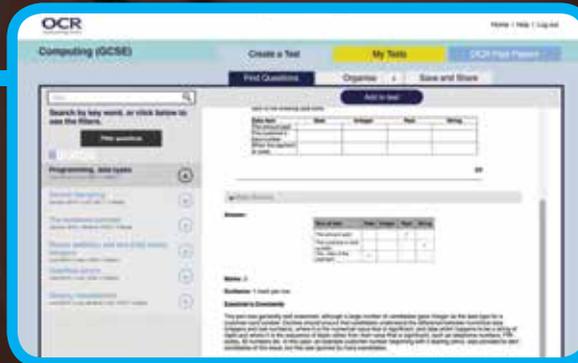


## 2. FIND YOUR QUESTIONS

You can search by year, topic, assessment objective or level of difficulty, or by a subject specific option, like calculator or non calculator for maths. You can also use search by key word or phrase.

## 3. ADD QUESTIONS TO YOUR TEST

To include a question (and the marks that go with it) in your test, click on 'add to test' or use a handy + button on the list on the left hand side. You can simply remove a question too. An 'organise' tab shows the numbers of questions and the total marks in your test.

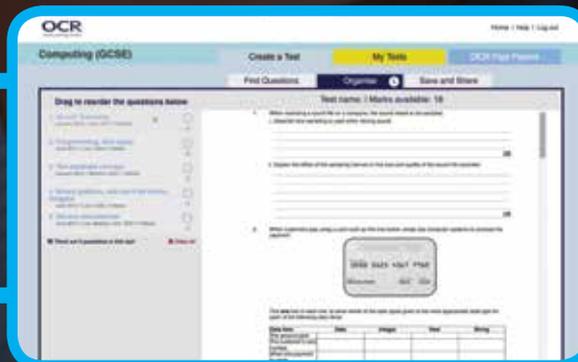


## 4. RELEVANT MARK SCHEMES AND EXAMINER REPORTS

The mark scheme and examiner report relevant to a question are also provided.

## 5. ORDER YOUR QUESTIONS

To change the order of your questions, drag an individual question up or down the list on the left hand side of the screen. Individual parts of questions that you have chosen but that originally appeared together on an exam paper will automatically be merged.

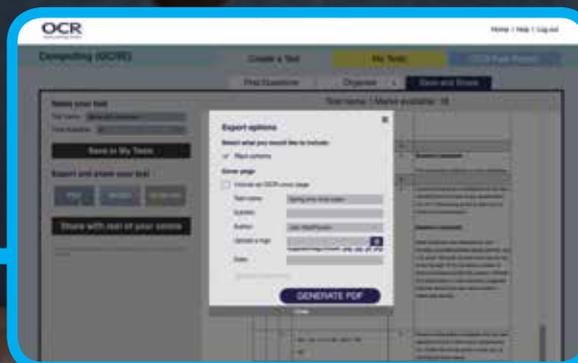


## 6. SAVE YOUR TEST

When you are ready to save your questions as a test, give it a name and a time limit, and click on the 'save and share' tab. Tests are saved in the 'My tests' area. It is easy for your colleagues to share the tests you have created.

## 7. EXPORT YOUR TEST FOR PRINTING

To print your new test – or to share it with your students – click on the 'export' to pdf or word format. You can print a test with the mark scheme on it as well.



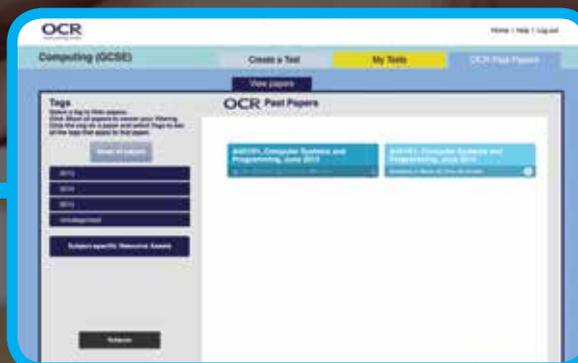
## 8. PRINT A BESPOKE COVER SHEET

You can print a personalised cover sheet to make your test look more like a real exam paper. You can add details such as the date and length of the test, and a school logo if you wish. In word format, you can also make further edits to your questions. You are then ready to 'generate' your new 'mock exam'.

## YOUR MOCK EXAM IS READY

## 9. READY TO USE PAST PAPER OPTION

If you prefer a ready to use a past paper, you can simply select one of the past papers on ExamBuilder, edit it, and save to My Tests.





# OCR'S NEW A LEVEL SOCIOLOGY TRIED AND TESTED



**Lesley Clark** is a sociology teacher at Brighton, Hove and Sussex Sixth Form College (BHASVIC). The College has over 2500 16-to-19-year-old students on roll and offers a wide variety of courses. Alongside A Levels, students are taking vocational and GCSE programmes. With a 98% pass rate for A Levels, BHASVIC's results are well above the national average and the College is rated outstanding by Ofsted.

The College chose to start teaching OCR's new A Level in September 2015 and approximately 130 students, taught in six groups, take sociology each year. And the numbers are growing.

In this case study, Lesley shares feedback on choosing to teach OCR's new Sociology A Level, and tips for other schools getting ready to teach the A Level in September.

## Why did you choose to teach OCR's new A Level Sociology in September 2015?

'We have been teaching OCR since 2000 but for this curriculum change, we did consider the AQA spec as well. We decided that we preferred the options OCR provides, especially the sociology of globalisation and the digital social world, which we felt was an exciting development. The AQA spec looked more traditional in comparison and we decided to take a leap towards contemporary issues which we thought our students would respond well to (and they have!).'

'We were looking forward to the flow we could create by teaching Component 1 (Socialisation, culture and identity), then onto Youth subcultures, and then Globalisation and the digital social world. We felt these would link nicely so that students could see overlap and connections. The students have responded well and we have seen high end students use complex synoptic links between the components already. As a college, we decided to teach just the 2 year linear A Level course and so we are not teaching the AS at all.'

'After the A Level, most of our students progress onto university where we have seen large numbers apply for

criminology, sociology, social policy and anthropology degrees.'

## What are the main issues you come across in teaching sociology?

'Teaching sociology is always very exciting because of the contemporary nature of the material. This year we have used the post-Brexit racist attacks to exemplify scapegoating, the VW scandal when discussing corporate crime and Kim Kardashian's bottom when discussing femininity! We like to find ways for sociology students to apply their theoretical knowledge to the real world, although this does mean that we have to work hard as teachers to keep up to date with contemporary trends.'

## Have there been any hurdles that you had to overcome with the new qualification?

'We chose to teach Globalisation and the digital social world in the first year because we see it linking well to Youth subcultures. This was problematic because the text book had not yet been released so we had to create all our resources from scratch. Our college librarians were fantastic in helping us source the recommended reading which we processed in order to deliver the course from March.'



Students at Brighton Hove and Sussex Sixth Form College

'We found marking our end of year exam difficult with so little to go on. Our process of standardising, marking and moderating was more torturous than usual since we were marking with little experience of certain question types (e.g. using sources) and we had problems trying to align our marks to a 3 year average since we had given an A Level paper to first year students. More marking practice, and more exemplar papers / mark schemes / marked work would be useful so we can see how marks will be applied.'

#### What aspects of OCR's new A Level have your students enjoyed most so far?

'Component 1 (Socialisation, culture and identity) is always popular and allows students to see essential themes, and build a portfolio of evidence and conceptual knowledge. Our students are also getting excited about an individual research project we have asked them to carry out over the summer in order to apply the knowledge they have learned about research methods to support the learning of Component 2. Students will be doing tiny pieces of research using quantitative and qualitative methods, which they will then compare to see the relative benefits of each.'

#### SUPPORT FROM OCR

'OCR's Subject Advisor Helen Hemmings has been very helpful in clarifying elements of the specification and delivery guide. We have also used the OCR Sociology forum, some lesson elements and we also used the practice paper (plus mark scheme) for our year one mock.'

#### Any advice for other schools that may be considering teaching OCR's A Level Sociology?

'Running linear courses, you can liberate yourself to teach things in an order which makes sense to you. We didn't want to split the teaching of social inequality across the summer so we decided to move things around until it suited us. Also, make sure you allocate teaching time according to the weighting of the units in the exam. For example Globalisation is worth 33% of the Component 3 marks so we have allocated more time to teaching the Crime and deviance option.'

'While OCR has an outline plan on the website, we spent a lot of time trying to work out how to create a scheme of work for the two years that would work for us. We decided to do it as follows:

#### AUTUMN

Component 1a – Socialisation, culture and identity

#### SPRING

Component 1b – Youth subcultures

#### SUMMER

Component 3a – Globalisation and the digital social world

Component 2a – Research methods (plus summer research project)

#### AUTUMN

Component 2b – Understanding social inequality

#### SPRING

Component 3b – Crime and deviance

#### SUMMER

Revision Exams

#### In your opinion, what are the top 3 aspects of the new specification?

- Globalisation and the digital social world
- The simplification of the component on social inequality
- Socialisation, culture and identity is an excellent introduction to sociology.

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

**Stephen Munday** is the Chief Executive of The Cam Academy Trust, a growing partnership of eight schools in Cambridgeshire, including both primary and secondary schools. He is also Executive Principal of one of the schools within the Trust, Comberton Village College, which has expanded to include a sixth form and was designated one of the first 'Teaching Schools' under his watch.

A National Leader in Education, member of the Teaching Schools Council and the Headteacher Board for the Eastern region, Stephen was awarded a CBE in recognition of his services to education in 2013. More recently, he chaired the independent expert group set up to write a Programme of Core Content for Initial Teacher Training (ITT) in England. This was published in July 2016.

Here, he tells **agenda** about his own path into education and the challenges he faces.

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

I went straight into a teacher training programme following my degree in Economics. Having reviewed some of the possible 'typical' career paths for someone with an Economics degree, I decided that I should try teaching. Just earning a lot of money was not something that I found immediately appealing.

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

I really like working in something that has real value and purpose. Back to my original decision to try out teaching, the intrinsic value of many forms of potential employment did not seem obvious. That is obviously not the case with working in education. Whatever the job involves, it has real intrinsic purpose. I also really like working with others who have chosen to work in the field of education because it interests them and they believe that it has value. That can lead to great teamwork, something that I value.

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

I admire people who are driven by real principle and are clear about that. If they then combine that with getting things of significance done and having a real, significant influence for good then that is what is really impressive. I think that people like Sue Campbell from the Youth Sport Trust (amongst others) and Steve Munby from the Education Development Trust (and formerly the National College) absolutely fit this description.

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

I was fortunate to enjoy all of my experiences of formal education. All my memories of both school and university are fundamentally positive. This has probably helped to frame my view that schools can and should be great experiences for all young people, whatever their background. I always loved my sport at school and this probably helped to keep me on board with all aspects of school, even if some parts were not as immediately motivating to me as my sport. This is probably a decent lesson

for at least some boys who might not immediately engage well with school. Sport can help. I was also fortunate to have several great teachers. For sure, this taught me that great teachers can have a profound and positive effect on the lives of young people.

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

I enjoy my sport. I used to play a lot of cricket. These days it is golf (usually every weekend). Every Wednesday evening, I run round the village and do circuits with a men's keep fit group. I enjoy watching films. I am a member of a local church in our village and am involved with activities there.

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

I don't really know now. I rejected the careers that many economists went into. The civil service was of interest, but I chose teaching. I can see that I might work for a charity at some point. Right now, there seems more than ever to do in education so I think I will stick to that at the moment.



*“The job has real intrinsic purpose. I like working with others who have chosen to work in the field of education because it interests them and they believe that it has value.”*



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

There are the obvious and very real issues we all face. The financial challenges of running a school are now really severe and there is no obvious sign of that improving. Ensuring high-quality staff are in place in all of our schools is close to a constant task. However, I want to suggest that the greatest challenge for all of us is to be really sure that we act in line with proper educational principles rather than other lesser motivations and drivers. We need to run our schools to secure great education for all of our pupils and not be swayed by anything else.

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

That's a good question. The answer has to be when the school is clearly providing an excellent education for all pupils enabling all of them to develop and progress really well. That has to be the ultimate judge and jury of any Headteacher. There is a sense in which you can judge within that that staff are

on board, committed and believing in what we are doing and pupils are clearly engaging and doing really well.

**What achievement are you proudest of?**

Confirmation that all pupils of all types are all doing really well is great. It has been really good to be able to build a school from an 11-16 secondary into an 11-18 truly all-inclusive educational establishment. Offering a Sixth Form of real quality to all our pupils in our local area is great. Developing a centre for autistic children so that they can access in a mainstream setting has been really gratifying. Ensuring flexible provision that has allowed all pupils to succeed is putting into practice core educational principles. Beyond that, establishing a Trust that has been able to open a successful new school in the local area and establish a partnership of local schools that works together to enable all to do better than on their own is making the new school-led system work in practice.

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

Some more funding really has to be asked for given where we now are. We really need to make the new National Funding Formula work for schools. That seems bound to mean needing additional funding. Beyond money, putting education genuinely at the top of priorities is badly needed. For any nation, it must surely be the greatest priority, so let's make it that and articulate it clearly. And finally, let's work together to confirm how in what we call a 'school-led system' there is real leadership of the system from professionals. It would be great to confirm territory that should be the preserve of expert educational professionals (curriculum and assessment?) that ministers acknowledge is not for them to seek to dictate what should happen. This approach has worked rather well for setting interest rates (I am an economist) and so why not for education?

# WHEN CONTEXT IS KING



## PAUL STEER, OCR'S HEAD OF POLICY, ON THE CHALLENGES OF REFORMING FUNCTIONAL SKILLS

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Some time ago, a researcher decided to transform a science exam question about germinating seedlings into one about incubating alligator eggs. Yet the knowledge and skills required to answer the question about alligator eggs and the original one about seedlings were no different. Those candidates faced with the familiar school science context of seedlings performed much better than those faced with the one about alligator eggs. Some were heard to mutter 'but we never studied alligators'. The moral is that we should stick with familiar contexts when setting exam questions. Context is king.

Functional Skills qualifications are based on the notion that real, practical contexts are important. Functional Skills, we are told, offer a chance to study maths and English by doing things that make them relevant. For maths, this could include things like learning ratio by mixing hair dye or gaining a practical understanding of area from the context of wallpapering a room. This is based on the view that some people grasp things better if they learn by doing. This approach also makes things more *relevant* by answering the question 'why are we learning this?', and makes things more concrete and therefore easier to grasp.

This is largely a matter of pedagogy – the Functional Skills tutor is expected to make things practical and relevant. This thinking is followed through in the assessments. At Level 1 and 2, the exams attempt to provide *realistic* contexts. These are presented as scenarios including such things as laying loft insulation, planning children's parties, or managing a baked potato stand. How real these scenarios are depends on your point of view and your life experiences to date. For many young people, the idea of laying loft insulation (let alone owning a house to lay it in) may seem very abstract.

This raises legitimate concerns about bias. What if some candidates are more familiar

with some scenarios than their peers – would that give them an advantage? This can be quite subtle. A children's party might be something we can all imagine

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*'One exam board developed a scenario around building a run for a guinea pig.'*

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but whether it is held at home, in a pub, a theme park or a church hall will have different resonances for different candidates. One common accusation is that the scenarios are often more relevant to the lives and experiences of those setting the exams than those taking them.

Sometimes the scenarios assume a level of knowledge that isn't always present. One exam board developed a scenario around building a run for a guinea pig. Unfortunately, some candidates didn't know what a guinea pig was. They thought it must be a kind of pig and that led them to worry about the scale drawing provided which suggested the run was too small to accommodate a pig.

Some have challenged the very notion of realism in exams. Exams may be a fact of life but they don't much imitate life. In life, if you are running out of time you can negotiate a new deadline, if you are stuck you can seek help from a colleague or Google. But not in an exam. Also, exam scenarios are inevitably simplified versions of reality – the numbers used have a convenient habit of being simple and divisible by each other, the data is provided and doesn't need to be collected, tasks have to be crystal clear – unlike in life where ambiguity and untidiness are the norm.

It is sometimes argued that contexts merely add an unwarranted and unnecessary complexity. One exam question asked candidates to calculate how many buses

were needed for a school trip. The real answer was 3 buses but a lot of candidates gave the answer of 2.75 buses. Is the candidate suffering from a common sense by-pass, or does this reveal something else? Maybe candidates are seeing through the fakery and pulling out the mathematical sum underneath. This dressing up of simple mathematics in complex scenarios is sometimes described as 'maths in search of a context'.

In her 2011 review of vocational education, Alison Wolf described Functional Skills as 'conceptually flawed'. She was concerned that, whilst the learning might take place in relevant contexts, when it came to the exam, generic contexts were used which were expected to work for everyone. But, if one of the things we want to assess through Functional Skills is the ability to apply maths and English to *any* problem, then relevance becomes less of an issue. After all, employers say they want young people who have the ability to adapt to whatever the workplace throws at them – even alligator eggs.

Meanwhile the Government has announced its decision to delay planned reforms to existing Functional Skills until some time in 2019. It no doubt has its own tricky issues to resolve about the purpose of Functional Skills qualifications and their relationship with GCSEs. Maybe now we have a little more time, we can dig a bit deeper into some of these questions. Whenever we roll out revised Functional Skills, let's make sure the exam boards and Ofqual are absolutely clear about what is being assessed and why.

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

## JOIN OCR AT THESE EXHIBITIONS AND CONFERENCES SPRING/SUMMER 2017

### MARCH

## 22

### OCR Linear A Level Maths Conference

#### Exeter Racecourse

Don't miss our final free event for teachers this spring on the new linear A Level Maths. Find out about the key reforms to A Level and Further Maths and how we will support you through the changes. OCR is the only exam board to provide schools and colleges with a choice of two new Maths suites in what is now the most popular A Level subject.

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

## 25

### Schools History Project (SHP) London Conference

#### Museum of London Docklands

Join us at the Museum of London Docklands for this opportunity to learn about the fascinating history of London. This one-day conference will include presentations on London and the slave trade, and London migrant communities in the nineteenth-century, and a range of workshops. Mike Goddard, from OCR's history team, will be there to answer your questions about OCR's new GCSE History qualifications.

[www.schoolshistoryproject.org.uk](http://www.schoolshistoryproject.org.uk)

### APRIL

## 7-9

### Mathematics Association (MA) Annual Conference

#### Royal Holloway, University of London, Egham, Surrey

The annual conference is an important platform for engaging and interacting with teachers and others involved with maths. OCR's Will Hornby will be delivering a session on large data sets for KS4 and KS5, and we are also partnering with MEI to offer sessions on OCR's AS/A Level Further Mathematics B (MEI) on 9 April.

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

## 10-13

### Association of Teachers of Mathematics (ATM) Annual Conference

#### Crowne Plaza, Stratford- upon-Avon

This annual conference is the highlight of ATM's CPD programme, bringing together anyone interested in the sector. We will be taking part in a Q&A session with Ofqual and DfE to answer your most pressing questions. The theme of this year's conference is 'Mathematical Learning Journeys'.

[www.atm.org.uk](http://www.atm.org.uk)

### APRIL

## 20-22

### Geographical Association Annual Conference

#### University of Surrey, Guildford

OCR is delighted to sponsor this major event in the Geography calendar. Representatives from our geography team will be on hand at stand no 10 and 11. Come and hear the OCR-sponsored session by Jo Ruxton, Plastic Oceans Co-Founder on 21 April and OCR's own Geography team on 'Breaking down geographical barriers' on 22 April.

[www.geography.org.uk](http://www.geography.org.uk)

### MAY

## 12/13

### Historical Association Annual Conference

#### Mercure Hotel, Manchester

The annual conference is a fantastic opportunity to meet other HA members, explore new ideas in history and history teaching and enjoy sessions, talks and visits.

Meet our history team and sign-up for the OCR session: 'Reforming GCSE History Assessment to Strengthen Learning and Attainment'.

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

### JUNE

## 23/24

### National Association for the Teaching of English Annual Conference

#### East Midlands Conference Centre and Orchard Hotel, University of Nottingham

OCR is delighted to return as sponsors of the NATE conference, a key event for all educators of English. This year's event is themed: 'Forming Notts: Bringing English Together'. Our English team look forward to engaging with teachers. Come and hear our workshop on 23 April entitled 'Past lessons and future practice – exploiting the opportunities of a linear world'.

[www.nate.org.uk](http://www.nate.org.uk)

## 26/27

### AELP National Conference

#### Novotel London West, Hammersmith

We are patron sponsors of AELP and will be exhibiting at this premier two day event in the skills and employment calendar. The national conference offers a full programme of plenary sessions, workshops and networking opportunities to share and debate the latest policies affecting the skills sector.

[www.aelp.org.uk](http://www.aelp.org.uk)



To find out what CPD events we are providing in 2017 to support the teaching of OCR's qualifications, take a look at [www.cpdhub.ocr.org.uk](http://www.cpdhub.ocr.org.uk)

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



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