

agenda

NEWS AND VIEWS FROM OCR / AUTUMN 2012

Supporting learning

IN THIS ISSUE:

FROM GCSE TO EBC

IMPROVING EMPLOYABILITY

PUTTING EXAM REFORM IN CONTEXT

MEET DAVID IGOE – STANDING UP FOR SIXTH FORM COLLEGES



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OCR 



Welcome to this Autumn 2012 issue of **agenda**. May I wish all our readers a successful year ahead.

The two years since I joined OCR have been busy but fulfilling, and I was glad to have the chance recently to take a broader look at our school exam system in a lecture at Bromley College. I believe that the learning going on in the classroom is the most important thing in education, not the exams. Above all, OCR works to support and enhance learning. You can read more about this on page 8.

In this issue, we profile two approaches to improving employability. There's also an interview with David Igoe, Chief Executive of the Sixth Form Colleges' Forum. All this, plus a snapshot of OCR's news including free OCR online training, support for computing, new initiatives with apprenticeships and plans for the new English Baccalaureate Certificate.

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

We look forward to reading your comments.

Mark Dawe

Chief Executive, OCR

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Cover Story: Supporting learning
The miniature computer, Raspberry Pi, is successfully bringing computer science to life for a new generation of school children. Find out how OCR is working in partnership to help teachers in the classroom get the best out of the computer on page 6.



LSIS Apprentice, Jade Hibbert

OCR's Clara Kenyon introduced OCR's portfolio of Apprenticeship qualifications in Birmingham

Reaching new audiences with Apprenticeships

Over 90 representatives from businesses across the West Midlands came along to find out more about the benefits of Apprenticeships in the summer at an event organised by OCR, in conjunction with the National Apprenticeship Service (NAS) and Birmingham Chamber of Commerce.

It was the first in a series of regional events targeted at employers to de-bunk some of the myths surrounding Apprenticeships. One of the most common is that Apprenticeships only exist in manual trades yet OCR provides Apprenticeship programmes in areas such as Business and Administration, Customer Service, Health and Social Care, IT, Management and Retail. OCR also helps companies such as IBM, the BBC, and Channel 4 to create bespoke Apprenticeship schemes.

The Learning Skills and Improvement Service (LSIS), based in the West Midlands, is positive about the benefits of employing Apprentices, taking them on in a range of areas including Business and Administration, HR, IT and Finance. LSIS PR and Press Manager Nicola Jones, commented: "We see Apprentices as an asset and they develop as valued members of the team." Approximately one in ten LSIS staff is an Apprentice. 18-year-old Jade Hibbert joined the Communications team at LSIS earlier this year. At the end

of her two-year Apprenticeship, Jade will have plenty of hands-on experience, as well as an OCR Level 3 NVQ in Business and Administration. "There are many benefits to employing Apprentices," Nicola continued. "They can provide a different perspective to our work practices. And, like Jade, many of the young people we employ use technology very intuitively, which has obvious benefits."

OCR is also reaching new audiences for Apprenticeships as the first awarding body to develop key components for the new Higher Apprenticeship in Professional Services. Funding for Apprenticeships in Professional Services, a sector seen as critical for UK economic success, was announced in December 2011. Mark Dawe, OCR CEO, said: "We've seized the initiative by developing the new Level 4 Apprenticeship in Professional Services which we hope will help to open up a new generation of career routes."

The new Level 4 Apprenticeship, which offers a choice of three pathways in audit, tax or consulting, allows people to follow a vocational route and still come out with a qualification equivalent to a Foundation degree. It was developed with the input of more than 40 employers to ensure content is relevant to industry needs.

www.ocr.org.uk/apprenticeships

Functional Skills at your fingertips



On-screen, on-demand assessments are now available giving teachers and students using OCR's Functional Skills in English and maths a choice of assessment formats.

The accessible new on-screen format, which kicked off in October, retains the same real-life scenarios and the opportunities to apply problem-solving skills flexibly that have proved popular on the paper-based assessments. The assessments are available for English and maths qualifications at both Levels 1 and 2. Subject to Ofqual accreditation, on-screen assessments for ICT will be on offer shortly.

The on-screen tests for English and maths are available on-demand, 24/7, with a fast turnaround of results, to fit around busy timetables. Find out more, including how to get started and what free training is available, at www.ocr.org.uk/fs.

The growth of Cambridge Technicals



OCR is enhancing the Cambridge Technicals in IT qualifications with the addition of optional units, as part of a planned expansion of the range.

The new units are available at both Level 2 and Level 3, and cover animation techniques, computer game design, database systems and web server scripting, to name but a few.

The new Level 3 options for IT also include two units from the Cambridge Technicals in Business, giving learners the opportunity for cross-curricular work.

In addition to the growing choice of units, OCR has also introduced three pathway options for the IT qualification; Business User, Creative and Technical. These give learners the opportunity to specialise in their chosen career path by taking a combination of selected units. Recognition of the specialism will be shown on learners' certificates. Full details of the new pathways can be found in our centre handbooks.

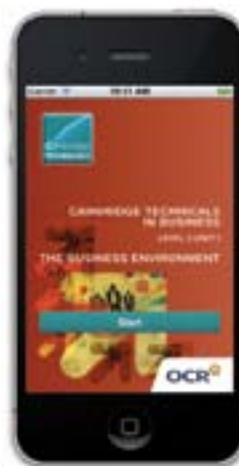
OCR is planning to expand the Cambridge Technicals range by developing further units and resources that are relevant to your needs. If you are interested in working with us to achieve this, please get in touch via OCRStrategyTeam@ocr.org.uk.

As well as IT, the Cambridge Technicals range currently offers qualifications in Art and Design, Business, Health and Social Care, Media, and Sport, with more to follow. Developed in partnership with employers, industry specialists and teachers, success in Cambridge Technicals give learners the experience and skills to progress into employment or higher education.

We've developed over 100 free resources to help teachers and students get the best out of Cambridge Technicals, including

a new mobile app for the Business qualifications.

For more information about Cambridge Technicals, visit www.cambridgetechnical.org.uk or come and talk to OCR's experts at the AoC Annual Conference in Birmingham from 20 to 22 November 2012.



In brief

Learning in Singapore

OCR's parent organisation, Cambridge Assessment, has established a new base in Singapore to provide a space for debate on the key educational issues facing policy makers and educators in the region.

Cambridge Assessment Singapore was launched officially by Sir Leszek Borysiewicz, the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Cambridge, on Friday 9 November 2012.

The Cambridge Assessment group has a long record of involvement in Asia Pacific countries, within curriculum development and in the development, design and operation of examinations. Students in almost 2,000 schools in Asia Pacific take Cambridge qualifications and the exams group works in partnership with ministries of education in several Asian countries, including Singapore.

Bursting with talent

A group of talented students from the West Midlands who won bursaries from OCR towards the costs of their studies at Cambridge University were congratulated by Mark Dawe, OCR CEO, during a presentation at OCR's offices in Coventry this Autumn. The students came from schools and colleges in Birmingham, Coventry, Hereford, Lichfield, Solihull and Stourbridge.

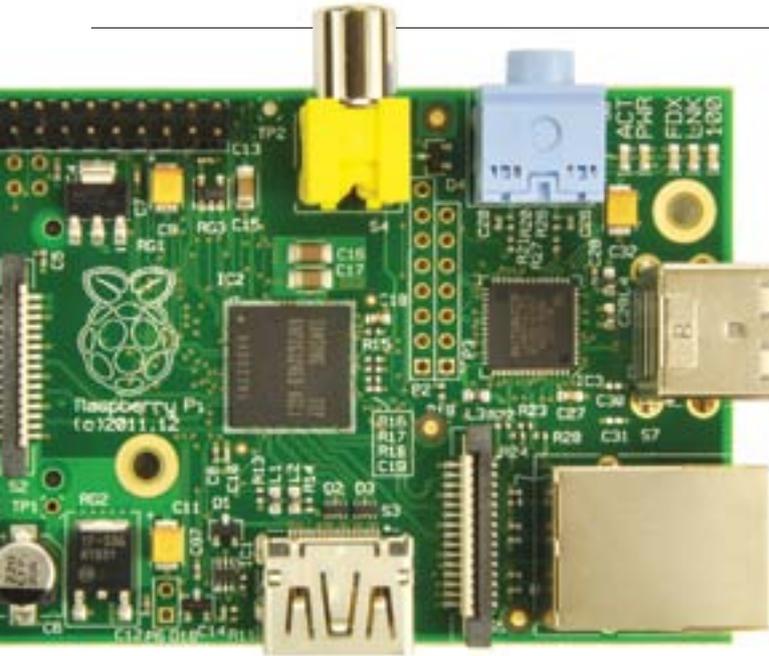
The OCR Bursary Scheme supports pupils from the West Midlands for the lifetime of their undergraduate degrees at Cambridge University. The fund arises from OCR's historical association with the West Midlands Examinations Board. The financial support – now £3,000 per year – can be used either towards tuition or maintenance costs and helps students to make the most of their time at university.

Of the ten awards made this year, one went to Paige Phelps who is the first female student from Stoke Park School in Coventry to have achieved a place at Cambridge since 1975. Paige (pictured right with Mark Dawe), said: "I am very grateful to have been awarded an OCR bursary as it will be an excellent financial help to me. I am looking forward to immersing myself in my history course and drama at Cambridge. I can also continue with my volunteer work at The Herbert Art Gallery and Museum during the holidays, and work hard during my time at Cambridge without worrying about financial hardship."

Another bursary was awarded to Abdalla Abdalla from Cadbury Sixth Form College in Birmingham, who moved to the UK from war-torn Somalia just over ten years ago with no formal education.

www.ocr.org.uk/aboutus/bursary_scheme





OCR partnerships support computing in schools

COMPUTING AT SCHOOL
EDUCATE · ENGAGE · ENCOURAGE
In collaboration with BCS, The Chartered Institute for IT

A joint initiative between OCR and the team behind Raspberry Pi – the new credit card-sized computer for schools – aims to drive forward computer science in schools with the development of new resources to support teaching.

The organisations, both not-for-profit and part of the University of Cambridge, share a mission to reinvigorate the computing curriculum. Raspberry Pi gives young people invaluable hands-on experience of how computers work and has already sold over 400,000 units. It was launched in Spring 2012, just weeks after Education Secretary Michael Gove called for computer science to play a larger part in young people's learning and for the existing ICT curriculum to be abandoned.

OCR launched its own GCSE in Computing – the first exam board to do so – just over a year ago. Since the highly successful pilot of the Computing GCSE, the number of candidates taking OCR's qualification has risen by 3000%.

The suite of teaching and learning resources which OCR is currently developing 'maps' Raspberry Pi to the curriculum, helping teachers to get the best use out of the computer in the classroom. The new resources will be on display for the first time at BETT, the major IT education exhibition, in January 2013.

Computing at School (CAS) is another key player in the teaching of computer science in England and Wales, with whom OCR is working. CAS backed the development of OCR's GCSE qualification. This academic year, OCR has sponsored ICT and computer science teacher Mark Dorling, from Langley Grammar School, to be CAS' national CPD coordinator for the network of teaching excellence in computer science. Mark has been working alongside Simon Humphreys and Dr Tom Crick to develop CPD provision across all education sectors through the CAS Master Teacher and CAS Online Academy initiatives. This valuable work is supporting the growing numbers of enthusiastic computer science teachers in England.

Experts from OCR, Raspberry Pi and CAS will be on Stand B420 at BETT 2013.



Easy steps to A Level reform

OCR's preparation for the reform of A Levels with greater involvement from universities, set out by Michael Gove last April, is well advanced.

The original timescale for reform anticipated the teaching of new A Levels in key subjects from September 2014.

Like all awarding bodies, OCR is waiting for the exam regulator's report following a three month consultation over the summer. Unlike others, OCR is part of a university (Cambridge) and uniquely placed to engage with the higher education sector. Over 140 representatives from universities have joined OCR subject and sector forums over the last 18 months which have proved fertile ground for the

discussion of new approaches. The expertise of Cambridge Assessment's Research Division, the largest of its kind in Europe, also provides OCR with a firm evidence base for qualification development.

OCR continues to engage with a wide range of stakeholders to inform our development of new A Levels. We were delighted that over 800 teachers shared their views on reform via an online survey we set up with TES over the summer. The views expressed fed into Ofqual's consultation.

Based on what our stakeholders have told us, OCR told Ofqual:

- *The primary, though not exclusive, purpose of A Levels is to prepare people for undergraduate study*
- *A Levels do not require drastic reform*
- *Little appetite for changes to the grading structure*
- *January re-sit opportunity should be removed*
- *AS Level should be retained – allowing greater breadth of study, a safety net for those who don't study for two years, to encourage social mobility and as a useful predictor of future performance for HE*
- *Universities should not only have a major interest in influencing A Level design and content but be committed to involvement after qualifications go 'live'.*

We will keep all our stakeholders informed of further developments.

From GCSE to EBC

Despite making changes to GCSEs – such as the introduction of linear assessment and marks for SPaG – from 2012, Education Secretary Michael Gove went further in mid-September and announced dramatic reforms to KS4 qualifications in England.



He proposed a new suite of qualifications provisionally called English Baccalaureate Certificates (EBCs) to replace GCSEs, initially in the five subject areas of the English Baccalaureate – maths, English, science, the humanities (history and geography) and languages.

The proposals aim to 'restore rigour and confidence to our examination system at 16'. One awarding body will be responsible for 'the best single suite of qualifications' in each of the five subject areas, following a competitive selection process in which the DfE chooses the winner. While the DfE intends to set some broad parameters around the key subject content

in each EBC area, it will be up to the awarding bodies 'to propose truly world class syllabuses' based upon their work with universities, learned societies and the international comparison work they have undertaken.

Simon Lebus, Chief Executive of OCR's parent Cambridge Assessment, said: "We believe that our experience of developing and delivering educational assessment both in the UK and in 160 countries worldwide can help to deliver these reforms.

"This is what has enabled the Group to create so many innovative qualifications – such as GCSE Computing, Cambridge

Technicals, Cambridge IGCSEs and the Cambridge Pre-U – in close collaboration with schools, higher education, governments and employers."

Qualifications for English, maths and sciences will be developed first, with history, geography and languages to follow. The exam regulator Ofqual has been tasked to consider how to expand the EBC to other subjects currently offered at GCSE.

Among the proposals is that the grading of the EBCs will differ from the A* to G system used for GCSEs and that there should be no tiering.

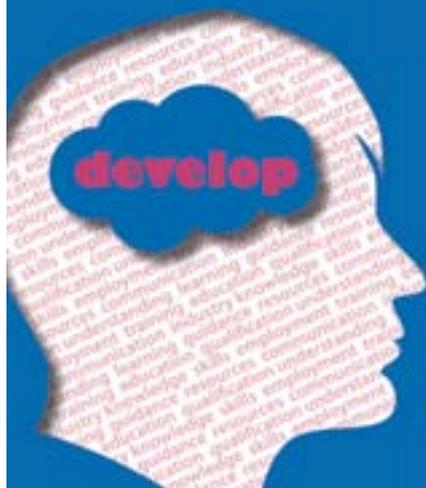
There are three years before first teaching; pupils starting

secondary school this year will start the new English, maths and science courses in 2015 and be the first to sit the new exams in 2017. Current English, maths and science GCSE qualifications will continue till 2016.

Both Wales and Northern Ireland have separate reviews about the future of GCSEs. Existing GCSEs will continue to be available until 2016.

Many of the details on KS4 reform are not finalised and we will keep you posted with further developments in the coming months. For more information and to contribute to the government's consultation on KS4 qualification reform, visit www.education.gov.uk.

Need training on OCR qualifications? Go online



From September 2012, professional development for teachers on specific OCR qualifications switched online – and it's free! Web-based training is the most accessible option for the greatest numbers of teachers, and offers flexibility, consistency and a reduction in training costs.

Over 4,000 teachers have registered and viewed what's available on OCR's new online training website since it launched. As well as accessing free professional development for OCR's qualifications via the site, there are lots of free resources to view and download.

Alongside online training, OCR's popular programme of high quality and innovative CPD events – such as last summer's Physics Conference which featured the Naked Scientists – is in full swing. OCR has reduced the cost of these 'premier' events by 35%. Face-to-face training for GCSE controlled assessment and A Level coursework in relevant subjects is still available, at cost only prices.

To take advantage of OCR's free online training and resources covering a wide range of qualifications, visit www.ocronlinetraining.org.uk.

BACK TO THE FUTURE

Mark Dawe, OCR Chief Executive, went back to his home town of Bromley in October to give the inaugural Landmark Lecture at Bromley College. In his lecture, entitled 'Back to the Future', Mark looked at the place of exams within our education system.



"I do worry about levels of trust in examinations. Trust has been eroded on various issues – trust in the teachers who do the marking, trust in headteachers to investigate malpractice, and trust in the grades students receive. Have we really reached a potential crisis point?

I want to put this in some sort of perspective. Our examinations are not seen as 'in crisis' around the world. In fact, the English examination system is respected across the globe and looked to for support and advice. And if we worry that there are problems with our system, listen to this American hand-wringing. In 1983, America's National Commission on Excellence in Education's 'Nation at Risk' report stated: 'If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war'.

An examiner's report from 1924 in pure and applied maths puts it very succinctly: 'The only point that calls for a report is the general weakness of a large proportion of the candidates'. (A modern examiner's report can run to twelve pages).

Here's a quote revealing employers' views: 'It has been said, for instance, that accuracy in the manipulation of figures does not reach the standard which was reached 20 years ago. Some employers express surprise and concern at the inability of young persons to perform simple numerical operations.' You may be interested to know it comes from 1876.

Last year, Michael Gove stated that the English exam system had been discredited. Yet we can go back to the very beginnings of exams – back to 1858 – when exams were taken by less than 100 students to find similar comments about school leavers who demonstrated 'little indication of an acquaintance with how elementary mathematics works'.

There are many more historical examples like this. And as the CEO of one of the major UK exam boards, I am responsible for driving forward improvements in what we do, but perhaps we should accept that there will always be background noise from

people complaining about educational standards and harking back to some sort of golden age that probably never existed.

And the burden placed on the exams system nowadays is enormous. This was emphasised during the recent Select Committee inquiry into examinations. Here's what Professor Alison Wolf said: "I think we expect too much of exams, in the sense that we expect every exam to do everything."

Every year, when young people get their GCSE and A Level results, the newspapers are full of stories about the dumbing down of standards. But if more people achieve top grades, does it necessarily mean that standards have fallen? Take the analogy of more people climbing Everest. In 1953, two people got to the top of Everest for the first time. In 1996, 39 people were at the top of Everest on the same day. Does that mean that the mountain has shrunk? No, things like maps, training, equipment and guides have helped more climbers to reach the top. The same applies to Olympic records which improve over time. These improvements have occurred over time, not because of talent, but because people are practising longer, harder and smarter – there's better equipment, nutrition, and sports science. It is the quality and quantity of practice, not genes, that is mainly driving progress.

"But if more people achieve top grades, does it necessarily mean that standards have fallen?"

Agreeing what we mean by 'standards' is vital for determining the function of exams. It is interesting that the government has determined that international comparisons are the key 'standard' involved. Take maths, for example. The recently published review of the National Curriculum plans: 'to raise standards so that England is on a par with the highest performing jurisdictions in the world'. But is the government right to build on such a narrow definition of 'standards'? There are others: standards of demand, content standards, standards of attainment, standards over time, standards between specifications, standards between subjects, standards between qualification types, and teaching standards.

"I believe that the most important thing in education is the learning. The exams – the assessments – are secondary."



For me, what is a key criteria for any qualification is what it leads to, the progression value. A qualification in itself has no value, it's what it leads to that gives value. I believe that the most important thing in education is the learning. The exams – the assessments – are secondary. They can help, or hinder, the learning process. The most successful schools and colleges get this. They understand that the enrichment – the sport, the arts, the volunteering – is valued as much as the formal qualifications, by students and by parents. When we read about the latest plans for an 'A-Bacc', this is what good schools, both state and private, are already doing.

There is the 'holy trinity' of curriculum, funding and exams. Too often funding and exams are used as levers to influence the curriculum and therefore teaching. This is certainly how it feels at the moment. It is of course easier and quicker to fiddle with funding and exams in the short term but it does not get the right long term, sustained results. We must focus on getting the curriculum and teaching right first, and then determine how the funding and assessment can facilitate this.

The key purpose of assessment is to validate the skills, knowledge and understanding that a student has acquired in their course, programme or curriculum. Yet, nowadays, exams are multi purpose, assessing the student, the teacher, the head of the department, the whole school, local authorities, the government, the country, influencing curriculum, as well as being entry criteria for further learning, employment or training.

The exams system has steadily grown more complex, in response to a variety of social and educational pressures. This is well illustrated in research conducted by Cambridge Assessment that reveals that there were 21,672 possible combinations of texts in one of the English Literature specifications replaced by the new English GCSE this summer, making it theoretically possible for every candidate to follow their own unique specification. This creates major administrative, technical and marking challenges and the question has to be asked whether the educational benefit justifies offering quite such extreme levels of choice, or whether we are just designing risk into the system.

Helped by Cambridge Assessment research to inform our approach, OCR is currently bringing all its expertise into the latest proposed changes in exams – reforming GCSEs, A Levels, as well as vocational qualifications, with all the questions and risks involved.

One of the potential risks relates to marking. There is clearly a trade off between the range of choice we offer and the assessment model. In the assessment world, there is a constant battle between reliability and validity. Do we want reliable electronically-marked multiple choice exams or long essay answers which demonstrate skill and understanding but which are necessarily subjective and require more experienced examining?

As an exam board with a long history, OCR has faced many of these challenges before. And drawing on my own experience as an ex-college principal, I agree with educationalist John Abbott that you can 'over school' but 'under educate' teenagers if you don't have faith in them or build your system on an outdated design brief." So the answers must be in a twenty-first century context. In a mass education system, failure has major consequences for thousands of students.

We should never forget that education and politics are intricately entwined, whether we want them to be or not. The Chief Executive of Cambridge Assessment summarised it rather well at a recent conference on risk in the exam system. The high stakes nature of assessment makes schools and colleges risk averse and encourages them (and parents and pupils) to stick to what they know. A consequence has been that we have a highly predictable exam system, with disincentives for schools and colleges to experiment. Paradoxically, the perception of this inertia has provided politicians with a greater incentive for radical reform. And the cycle in which ambitious reforms get watered down to make them more manageable ironically leads to an unhealthy combination of disruptive and incremental change. This invariably leaves the exam system more complex and risky than before. We must be careful what we wish for."

Selected excerpts from the Back to the Future lecture at Bromley College 18 October 2012.

Standing up for Sixth Form Colleges

Over 90 colleges are represented by the Sixth Form Colleges' Forum (SFCF). Here, its first Chief Executive, David Igoe, tells **agenda** about his route into education and how his organisation acquired a stronger voice to represent the distinctive needs of the sector.



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

- Principal at Cadbury Sixth Form College Birmingham 1996-2009
- Chair of the Sixth Form Colleges' Forum 2003-2008
- Vice-Principal, St Brendan's SFC, Bristol 1985-96
- Teacher of theology and music in various schools around the country (Leamington Spa, Littlehampton, Bristol) 1975-1984

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

Knowing that you can make a difference to people's lives. This is particularly rewarding with the 16-19 age group. When you work with a boy or girl with low self esteem and little ambition and see them coming alive, really engaging with their subjects and moving on to university or employment, it's great. Even though I do not now have direct dealing with students, it's still very gratifying to know that the work I do makes it possible for teachers and support staff in our colleges to continue to transform young people's lives in this way.

Who do you admire in your field?

I never cease to be impressed by the dedication of teachers in our colleges. I was at an awards ceremony a few weeks ago and the citations given by teachers to their

students just spoke volumes for the quality of the support they give. If I had to single out an individual, I would choose the head teacher at the first school I taught in (Peter Hastings – Trinity School, Leamington Spa). A remarkable man with a singular vision for what really matters in education. I began teaching at Trinity in 1975. It was a grammar school but had no uniform, everyone on first name terms, students referred to the head as Peter. Creativity was positively encouraged (students decorated their own classrooms and the corridors) and the ethos was entirely student centred. Results were great and there were few discipline issues. Peter (who died earlier this year) wrote a book about his education philosophy – 'Educating the Elephant's Child'.

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

Fairly normal primary education in Coventry except for the year my Dad was the class teacher! I think I resolved at that point never to become a teacher!

Secondary education was at a junior seminary (I made the mistake at age nine of saying I wanted to be a priest when I grew up). I cannot say I had a great time at school which was characterised by harsh discipline (flogging!), grim food and lots of hard physical games (rugby and cross country runs). My escape was music (I

was the college organist) and drama (two major productions a year – a comedy/farce and Shakespeare). I can still recite much of Twelfth Night from memory (I played Malvolio). John Cornwell describes my own secondary schooling with disturbing accuracy in his book, 'Seminary Boy'. We were at the same school but he left the year I started.

My tertiary education was somewhat eclectic. After two years at Oscott, the senior seminary in Birmingham studying philosophy and theology, I left not at all sure what I wanted to do. First stab was Architecture at Aston University. It took me eighteen months to realise that I was not going to have a career designing cathedrals, rather drains and kitchen extensions, so I left that too. I eventually succumbed to what I had been trying to avoid and realised that I would be best suited to teaching. I got a place at St Mary's College, Twickenham (then part of London Institute of Education) and trained as a teacher of music and religious studies.

I think the lesson from my own experience is that education is a process of people-making. I went down many cul-de-sacs but they all taught me very valuable things about myself which formed the person I have become. Education is still valuable even when it has no directly positive outcomes.



"I think the lesson from my own experience is that education is a process of people-making."

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

Play golf (badly). Play piano (less badly). Quite like city breaks (Rome is all time favourite).

What is the remit of the SFCF?

SFCF works to lead and support a thriving and sustainable Sixth Form College sector by being an effective advocate, adviser and information provider for members and a reliable and authoritative source of insight, data and expertise for policy-makers and opinion-formers

How do you meet the needs of your membership?

The SFCF has been representing the interests of the sector since Sixth Form Colleges became independent corporations in 1993. Since that time, the role of the SFCF has evolved considerably. While the main role of the Forum is still to negotiate national pay and conditions with the trade unions that represent teaching and support staff, the organisation has three other key functions:

Representing Sixth Form Colleges: particularly in discussions and negotiations with officials from government departments and agencies.

Promoting Sixth Form Colleges: to a wide range of stakeholders, including the media, politicians and potential students.

Supporting Sixth Form Colleges: on a range of issues (including HR, funding and industrial relations) through the provision of research, guidance and one to one advice.

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

It feels like survival! Current government policy promotes academies, free schools and other hybrids like UTCs and studio schools. It is sometimes difficult to see where we fit in, especially as there is a strong mantra in current policy around sixth forms being important in driving school improvement. This has encouraged all 11-16 schools to consider setting up a sixth form and this can be in direct competition with existing high quality Sixth Form College provision.

There are also very considerable challenges in funding. The CSR cuts and planned changes to the funding methodology and curriculum mean that Sixth Form Colleges will have to do a lot more for a lot less! This seriously threatens the financial stability of the sector and is also challenging the basis of the curriculum offer which underpins our success.

What achievement are you proudest of as Chief Executive?

I think it has to be establishing the Sixth Form College sector as a distinct legal entity. We had been lobbying hard over many years for recognition as a discrete sector and the ASCL Act of 2010 set out the legal framework for designated Sixth Form Colleges. We are a strong brand with many admirers (and imitators!) and we now have some legal protection for our members.

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

Funnily enough, I was stuck in a room with Michael Gove only yesterday! I asked him for three things too! They were to give Sixth Form Colleges the same VAT rebate enjoyed by academies and free schools; to give us the same free school meal arrangements as schools; and to give SFCs access to improvement support, equivalent to that given to FE Colleges through LSIS or to schools through the National College. Time will tell how we get on.

For further information on SFCF, visit www.sfcforum.org.uk.

New routes to employability

According to the Office of National Statistics, there are currently around 2.5 million unemployed people in the UK. The UK jobless rate is just under 8% – Spain has the highest unemployment rate in the EU of just over 25% while Austria has the lowest at around 4%. The jobless rate among young people in the UK is about 20.5% however, with nearly one million 16 to 24-year-olds out of work.

Whilst there are many jobs that are highly specific and require specialist training, employers often talk about the need for 'employability skills'. These are the general skills and abilities that enable people to get, keep, and do well in any job, alongside any academic or vocational qualifications they may have.

For many people who have never been employed, or who have taken a career break, skills and confidence may be poor. Here are two case studies of different ways in which colleges and training providers, working with OCR, are finding innovative ways of encouraging employability.

Case Study 1

Welsh initiative is good practice for employment

Welsh college Coleg Morgannwg is spearheading the concept of 'practice' firms, an initiative which aims to prepare young people for the world of work.

Coleg Morgannwg holds the UK franchise of a worldwide practice firm network, EGNi (Experiences Generating New Innovation). It is an approach to tackling unemployment which is increasingly popular in Europe and in other parts of the world: there are now over 7,500 practice firms in over 42 countries.

The practice firm idea aims to deliver skills, training and work experience in a realistic working environment whilst encouraging entrepreneurship and developing employability skills. According to the EGNi website, the practice or virtual firm allows trainees or employees to work in 'shadow' companies, using all the documentation, systems and protocols needed to run a business. It enables trainees to learn different aspects of business processes such as sales, personnel, accounts, stock control and administrative systems.

Each practice business is set up like a real enterprise, with directors of specific departments such as marketing, finance, and personnel. The practice firm selects

a particular trade and starts to market products or services to other practice or virtual firms within the national and even worldwide network. There are currently 25 practice firms in the UK. A successful virtual trade fair was held at Swansea Waterfront Museum early in 2012, abuzz with firms of trainees – unemployed people – from across Wales and Europe learning how to sell goods.

OCR Cymru has been working with Coleg Morgannwg which offers a range of OCR qualifications to build a programme of learning that supports this exciting initiative. OCR's Curriculum Leader for Business, Adrian Murray is also enthusiastic: "This is a good way of engaging students on courses such as business, accounting and general office practices. I would recommend this concept to other FE colleges, especially where there may be limited work placement opportunities."

Coleg Morgannwg Lecturer, Debbie Morgan, explained: "The emphasis in education nowadays, including qualifications such as NVQs and Employability Skills, is about preparing people for the workplace. The concept allows a realistic workplace to be set up and

gives students the opportunity to gain the necessary experience needed to function in the real world of work."

Coleg Morgannwg student Dennis, 42, left school with no qualifications but decided to return to education when he found himself unemployed in 2008. Beginning on a CLAiT course, he then achieved Levels 1, 2 and 3 of OCR's NVQ in Business and Administration. During his NVQ, he was an employee of Coleg Morgannwg's own practice firm, called Clean Sweep, first as team leader and then as supervisor. Dennis added: "I took part in five trade fairs and the experience took me out of my comfort zone as I had to interact with customers face-to-face, instead of on the phone or email. It was nerve-racking at first but I gradually got used to the selling aspect and supervising others. I feel much more confident and would definitely recommend this programme."

Combined with his studies, the experience gave Dennis the skills he needed to find employment and he now works in the college's admissions department.

For more information contact OCR Cymru at ocr-cymru@ocr.org.uk.

OCR's Employability Skills qualifications have been designed to help people of all ages to get into or to return to work. Accessible and flexible, they help build skills and confidence. Available at three levels (Entry Level 3, Levels 1 and 2), these qualifications focus on the skills, knowledge and understanding required for successful selection, recruitment, and development in the workplace. Schools, FE Colleges, training providers and prisons are increasingly taking advantage of the range of qualifications available.

www.ocr.org.uk/employabilityskills



Case Study 2

Successful model for delivering Employability Skills

Another successful approach to upskilling unemployed adults is the provision of intensive 'employability' courses which focus on developing skills based on real-life scenarios from the world of work.

Training Associates is a medium-sized training organisation which specialises in employability courses and apprenticeships across London and the South East.

Neil Doyle, Training Associates' Sales Director, explains the problem. "Many people think that London and the South East are not experiencing the effects of recession. But even prestigious areas like Kensington and Chelsea have unemployment. Unemployment is a huge problem – the Work Programme is testament to that – and the demand for the training we provide in the region is enormous."

Over the last 18 months, Neil and his company have developed an expertise in the delivery of short, intensive courses focusing on employability and customer services, across London and the South East.

The programme has evolved over time to have the greatest impact on people who are out of work and need to sharpen their work skills, with the sole aim to increase their employability. The age range of the unemployed people taking

Training Associates courses varies but the majority are in their mid 20s to late 30s. Neil continued: "We have developed a model based on intensive five-day courses which are based on real-life scenarios: our curriculum is built on genuine work challenges. For example, our learners work on job applications for real vacancies that have been advertised the same week. We find that this real-life approach, coupled with short intervention, has more impact on people preparing for employment."

The outcome of the Training Associates approach is rigorously monitored and quality assured by the Skills Funding Agency.

"We started using OCR's Employability Skills qualifications nearly 18 months ago. There is relevant content and flexibility within the qualification range so we can cover a lot of ground in our five-day employability courses.

"OCR qualifications complement how we do things and the biggest reason for this is the external moderation process. We really need a fast turnaround of results – preferably 24 or 48 hours – to re-inforce our intensive approach. **The strength of OCR has been in responding to our needs so they have evolved a system which is fast, accessible and very knowledgeable.** It's a very personal level of service."





REFORMING KEY STAGE 4 QUALIFICATIONS

**PAUL STEER, OCR'S DIRECTOR OF PROGRAMMES,
TAKES A LOOK AT THE CHALLENGES AHEAD**

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The proposals for reforming GCSEs and the introduction of new qualifications – English Baccalaureate Certificates (EBCs) – to replace GCSEs in key subjects, are ambitious and far-reaching. This effectively sets out the plan to completely redevelop the National Curriculum at Key Stage 4, starting with English, English Literature, maths and the three sciences, with history, geography and languages to follow. Introducing new assessments, which are intended to be taken by the vast majority of young people but which introduce more demand and assess greater breadth, in line with the curriculums taught by the best performing international jurisdictions, is not only bold but technically very challenging. The timescales are tight too – something that Glenys Stacey, Ofqual's Chief Executive, expressed concern about at the Headmasters' and Headmistresses' Conference (HMC) of leading independent schools in October.

Some argue that with the increase in the minimum age up until which young people must continue in education or training, assessment at the age of 16 is not quite the critical moment it once was. However 16 is still, structurally, the point in a young person's education that determines where they progress to next. As such, the EBCs will be very high stakes qualifications. They are also likely to be absolutely key to the way school performance is measured in future years which will also make them subject to the highest levels of scrutiny. The intention is that an EBC candidate will be working beyond the minimum levels currently required to achieve a 'C' grade at GCSE but

EBCs will still be taken by over 80% of the cohort. The Department will incentivise take-up by revising accountability measures. Schools and colleges will be measured on the percentages who enter, as well as the achievements of their students. High expectations for all!

“The new EBCs will be absolutely key to the way school performance is measured in future years.”

The government's decision to hold a 'competition' amongst awarding bodies, with the intention that only one awarding body should offer exams in each of the EBacc subject areas, represents a further massive change to the way the examination system operates. This is a huge opportunity for OCR in terms of increasing our impact on teaching and learning, which is part of our charitable aims, though not, of course, without its inherent risks.

And OCR, as part of Cambridge Assessment, is well placed to respond to the challenges. However, like any other awarding body thinking of entering this competition, and with the fallout of the recent concerns surrounding GCSE English still impacting across England, Wales and Northern Ireland, we must keep sight of the huge responsibility to get this right for young people.

The recent HMC report on perceived shortcomings in the current exam system has further heightened concerns and

there is much in the report that needs our careful consideration and reflection. We will continue to work with HMC, teacher bodies, our subject committees and others to explore the best ways of recruiting, retaining and supporting quality examiners. The 15,000 examiners that we employ to work on the design and marking of questions, as well as on the setting of grade boundaries are, after all, mostly drawn from the ranks of the teaching community. OCR has already done much good work in this area, informed by extensive Cambridge Assessment research, but it seems to be the right time to hold a strategic conversation with the education community about how we secure greater confidence in the quality of marking.

Securing consistency in marking will most certainly be an issue that comes into play as we seek to address quite different issues coming out of A Level reform. Our dialogue with higher education tells us they would like to see an opportunity for less formulaic, less structured responses to exam questions. University academics would like exam questions which reward critical thinking and greater breadth of knowledge and understanding of a subject and its context. The paradox is that such questions may well encourage and reward a higher order of skills and knowledge from candidates but they are also notoriously difficult to mark consistently and for examiners to agree on.

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

JOIN OCR AT THESE EXHIBITIONS AND CONFERENCES AUTUMN/WINTER 2012-13

NOVEMBER

13/14

The Care Show

NEC Birmingham

OCR will be exhibiting at this key event which showcases education, products and services for those owning or running any organisation responsible for the care of older people. Visit us on stand C46 to speak with our specialists about our Health and Social Care qualifications.

www.careshow.co.uk/birmingham

20/22

AoC Annual Conference

International Convention Centre, Birmingham

OCR will return as one of the main sponsors at the AoC Annual conference. This is a major conference which brings together over 1,700 professionals from the Further Education sector. Visit us on stand 35 to find out more about Cambridge Technicals and new English and Maths qualifications, and for a chance to talk to our staff about how we work with FE Colleges.

We're sponsoring two breakout sessions on making the most of new funding flexibility in 16-19 study programmes and in skills and employability programmes.

www.aocannualconference.co.uk

DECEMBER

4

157 Group Annual Reception

Church House, Westminster

OCR proudly sponsors this year's 157 Group Annual Reception. The 157 Group is a membership organisation that represents 27 large, successful and regionally influential Further Education colleges in England. Members are key strategic leaders in their locality and committed to achieving success for the sector.

www.157group.co.uk/events

JAN/FEB 2013

2/5 Jan

ASE Annual Conference

University of Reading

We are the headline sponsors of this major international science education conference which attracts over 3,000 delegates. ASE are celebrating their 50th Anniversary in 2013 and this conference will kick start the celebrations. This event is a must for science educators, so join in the celebrations and take advantage of the wide variety of talks, workshops, seminars and courses that the conference has to offer. Visit us on stands D31 and DS62 to find out about our range of science qualifications, including Entry Level, GCSEs, Cambridge Nationals, A Levels and Cambridge Technicals.

www.ase.org.uk/conferences/annual-conference

30 Jan/ 2 Feb

BETT 2013

ExCeL, London

OCR will once again be exhibiting as part of the Cambridge Assessment Group exhibition stand at this popular event. BETT is a major international conference showcasing the latest technology in learning, teaching and training, attracting over 30,000 visitors. Visit us on stand B240 and speak with one of our specialists to find out about the enormous range of exciting qualifications we have to offer within IT.

www.bettshow.com

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



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