A LEVEL

CHEMISTRY A

Case Study

OCR
Oxford Cambridge and RSA

Simon Langton Girls' Grammar School

Moving to the reformed A Level Chemistry specification

The School

With origins dating back to the Middle Ages, Simon Langton Girls' Grammar School in Canterbury, Kent, is a single-sex voluntary controlled grammar school that is co-educational in the Sixth Form and accepts a maximum of 200 pupils in year 12. In 2015, Year 13 students achieved the highest percentage of A*, A*-B and A*-C grades in the whole Canterbury area.
The Science Department is large, with over 100 science A levels being taken in the sixth form.

The Challenge

As they were already happily using OCR for A Level Chemistry, the school was approaching the reform to A level with some trepidation. Jo Gaisford, Head of Science, Chemistry & Biology, said, *"The current system was embedded and working well and we had all of our systems and assessment in place."* They liked the OCR Chemistry A specification they were teaching, so when the new one came out, they hoped it would not be too different. As a department, they were also concerned about the requirements for the Common Practical Assessment Criteria (CPAC) and how much recording and marking would be required.

The Benefits

Commenting on the move to the reformed A level, Jo said, *"I am delighted to say that OCR has made the process as pain free as possible... I can hand on heart say that they have been the most on the ball, helpful and informative."*

Jo said, *"As a Head of a very large Science department I am delighted with the choice we made to remain with OCR for our A Level Chemistry. The course is well organised, the resources useful … and the support fantastic. The OCR subject specialists are in the real world with us and understand our needs as well as being very approachable… I'm hoping to convert another subject or two to OCR. Thank you for all your support."*

Read more about our new A Level Chemistry A specification.

The Solution

They decided to stay with OCR for the reformed A Level Chemistry; the main reason being that they were very happy with the content. They also enjoy a range of other benefits with the new OCR specification, including the following:

- **The new Practical Activity Groups (PAGs)**
  OCR's model for the Practical Endorsement maps out 12 activities into different categories. The availability of three experiments per PAG has allowed the team to select the experiments they see as most suitable for their students and they have not felt the need to add their own. Jo said, *"The students easily adapted to recording all practical work in the same way in a practical book, whether it is a PAG or not."*
  OCR also produces a PAG tracker, which Jo said, *"…is brilliant!"* They find that it answers most of the questions that the monitor has, if used effectively. Jo added, *"It provides all of the information I have ever needed and more. I wouldn't change it at all."*

> *"…OCR has made the process as pain free as possible"*
>
> Jo Gaisford, Head of Science, Chemistry & Biology, Simon Langton Girls' Grammar School

- **Support**
  Jo commented that the support from OCR has been *"superb"*. She said, *"OCR have led the way, particularly with the CPAC lead teacher training."*
  They found this training both simple to complete and very informative, allowing them to feel confident that they had understood the CPAC guidance correctly.
- **Monitor Visit**
  Any concerns they had about quite what to expect from the monitor visit were soon diminished as their monitor was an experienced teacher who related well to the department and students.
- **Local network meetings**
  OCR runs a number of regional teacher network meetings – a great opportunity for teachers to meet with its own subject leaders and other teachers. Attending these in her area, Jo noted that, as well as there being a theme to each event and a main speaker, much of each session was given over to informal conversations and Q&A sessions – which she found really helpful and informative.

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