

Update for schools

Cambridge Pre-U is an exciting post-16 qualification preparing learners for university

Students mind the gap

With undergraduate tuition fees reaching £9,000 a year, it's all the more important that sixth formers' investment will pay dividends leading to success at university. How prepared do first-year undergraduates feel when they arrive at university?

As a department of the University of Cambridge, we take seriously our role in using research to understand the needs of learners – not least university entrants. We are also looking at examples of validation of the Cambridge Pre-U approach.

We recently carried out research with over 1,000 undergraduates in March 2011, into their attitudes to the transition from secondary education to university.

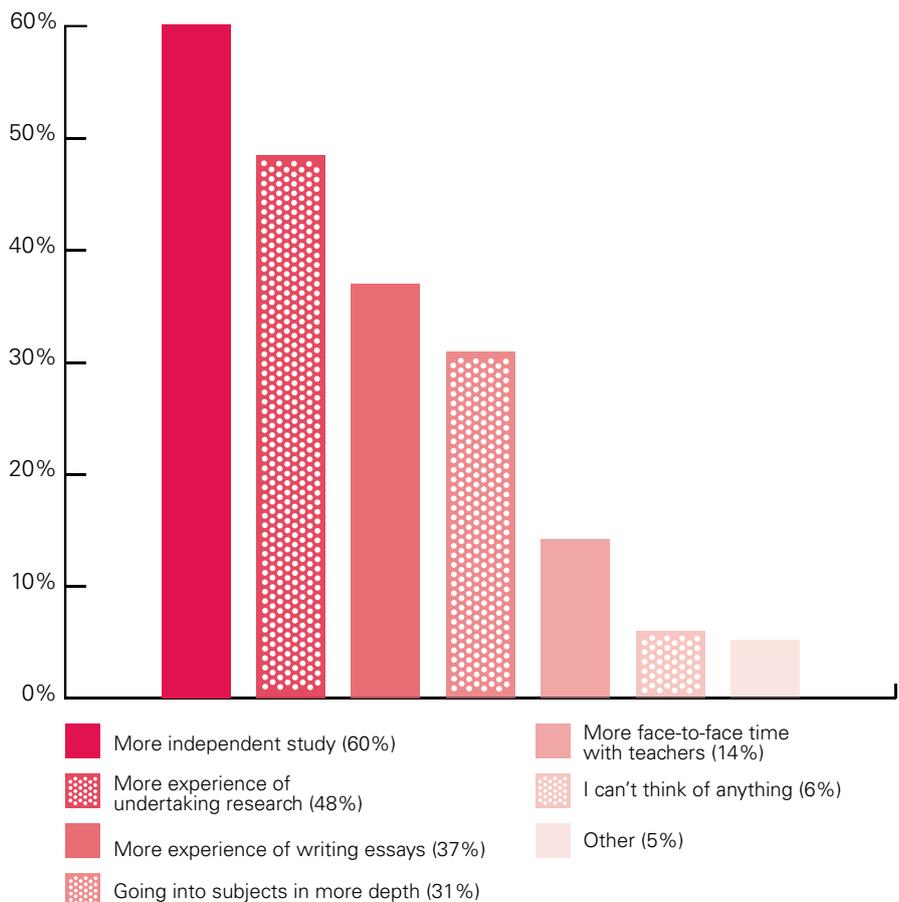
We found that nearly all (94%) current first-year students feel their secondary education could have prepared them better for the academic rigour of university.

Once they get over the transition from sixth-form to university study and develop confidence, students can still identify abilities they believe they should have developed at school.

Half of current first-year undergraduates said they lacked the necessary independent study and research skills when they arrived at university.

Did their sixth form provide them with adequate essay writing skills? Over a third (37%) said no. Just under a third (31%) said they would have benefited from more in-depth study of a subject earlier on in their education.

What could have prepared you better while you were at school?



How did students compare the level of work in their first term at university with school? Half of the students said university was a big jump from school; 20 per cent of students found their university studies completely different to their experience at school, but another 20 per cent felt it was the same; while 12 per cent reported not feeling out of their depth managing their university workload.

Increasing recognition of the benefits of developing independent study skills and in-depth subject knowledge is leading to increasing demand for Cambridge Pre-U amongst UK students. A total of 120 state and independent schools across the country now offer the qualification and students at around 90 schools will sit Cambridge Pre-U examinations this year – a 50% increase on 2010. Another 300 schools have registered interest.

Christy Rusha, a former Cambridge Pre-U student, now studying Law at university, said:

“Having studied Cambridge Pre-U, I had an extra edge in getting to grips with the level of independent study required of us on my law course. The Pre-U course’s rigour meant that I have entered university with in-depth study skills, intellectual curiosity, and self-directed learning skills that are proving invaluable to my success here.”

Jack Bradley, a former A Level student who is studying history, said:

“Although the subjects I took for A Level were ones that I’ve always been interested in, the structure of the course limited, rather than encouraged, my own enthusiasms and lines of thought. Right from the start, I was studying more exam technique than history or literature.

“I would have appreciated a course that gave me the freedom to think and research more independently; as opposed to the quality of my work being assessed on my ability to follow a formulaic marking scheme. This type of study is totally unrealistic preparation for university, and is the reason that university tutors have to spend the first few months of a course ‘acclimatising’ students to a new way of learning.”

Commenting on the findings, Ann Puntis, Chief Executive, University of Cambridge International Examinations, said:

“With so much speculation about how best to prepare students for the rigour of university study, it is telling



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that, when asked directly, young people admit to not having mastered these critically important study skills during their school years.

“We consulted closely with schools and universities on how the curriculum could help develop these skills. The outcome is Cambridge Pre-U. This research shows that we were right to develop a curriculum that supports schools in helping students prepare for university. Universities often tell me that the students who get the most from their studies are the ones who’ve developed independent learning, thinking and writing skills in the sixth form.”

Cambridge Pre-U facts and figures

Number of schools teaching Cambridge Pre-U:
142

State maintained:

45%

Independent:

55%

Number of schools that have made entries for June 2011:

92

Entries up **34%** on last year.

Most popular subjects are

1. Literature in English
2. History
3. Mathematics
4. Global Perspectives and Independent Research

Putting the 'global' in Global Perspectives and Independent Research

Before they had even seen the outcome of the first examination series, international schools were expressing interest in offering Cambridge Pre-U. One of the subjects that really excites teachers is Global Perspectives and Independent Research (GPR), which helps students to carry out their first piece of independent research within a structured learning framework.

In June 2010, we had entries from schools in countries as diverse as the USA, New Zealand, India, Kenya, Malaysia and Pakistan.

Programmes and Progression Manager, Val Sismey, said: "Interest in Cambridge Pre-U Global Perspectives and Research in the US is particularly strong. Significantly, some of this interest is coming from Higher Education. A consortia of US schools is already piloting GPR in classrooms and educators visited us in April to discuss the role that GPR could play in US education."

Eastchester High School, in Westchester Country, New York State, is teaching Cambridge Pre-U GPR. Eastchester High School is a USA Department of Education Blue

Ribbon School of Excellence, where over 90 per cent of students go on to Further or Higher Education.

GPR is unique – there is no alternative available that offers the same blend of seminar-based learning as a prelude to carrying out a research project by following a critical path of skills development. As one GPR teacher commented: "The whole [GPR] course extends students – in a sense the sky is the limit... Our students are genuinely looking forward to and are really excited by the prospect of being able to undertake an in-depth study next year, and see it as more of an undergraduate year than an A2 equivalent year."



Feedback from another school offered the following comment: "The GPR course improves independent study skills by allowing students to think in a more cross-curricular fashion. The students see links between subjects now that would otherwise have passed them by."



Supporting the direction of post-16 qualifications

Is it possible that the UK's national education system will become more international? As an international awarding body, we take a keen interest and an active role in many of the developments that are significantly altering the post-16 education landscape worldwide.

For many years, we have worked in partnership with governments around the world on curriculum development and assessment. Many of them have told us how impressed they have been with the educational principles underpinning Cambridge Pre-U, and some are even planning to adopt a similar qualification for their own students who are destined for university study.

This trend in international education has not gone unnoticed by policy makers in the office of the UK Secretary of State for Education, who are analysing the national education systems of other countries



and comparing them with UK outcomes. Cambridge Pre-U also has a great deal to offer governments involved in education reform. It provides experience and evidence of skills, such as critical thinking, missing in students where they have not had the benefit of a student-centred education.

Jill Johnson, Interim Director of Education, said: "Cambridge, and more particularly, Cambridge Pre-U, is plugged into educational thinking beyond the 2015 review. There is interest in Global Perspectives and Independent Research in the UK and internationally, because it is seen to have direct relevance to HE study and developing the kind of high level skills missing in some current entrants to HE. We are sharing information with Ofqual for their international review and are pleased to provide information that shapes thinking on preparation for university to ministries of education."

Work with us to help develop Cambridge Pre-U

In March, the Cambridge Pre-U Advisory Committee looked at two significant proposals: to decouple Global Perspectives from the Independent Research Report and to allow November re-sits as an option. We are also consulting with schools on a Short Course in English Literature. These are exciting areas of development, and we invite schools to comment on the proposals.

Sam Freedman, Senior Policy Advisor and Dominic Cummings, Special Advisor to Michael Gove, also attended the meeting – to provide an overview of the Department for Education's latest research and listen to feedback on Cambridge Pre-U, which has featured strongly in government thinking about post-16 education.

Our new Director of Education, Dr Tristian Stobie, who will join us in July 2011, took the chance to join the Advisory Committee. Dr Stobie will lead our educational strategies for schools, supporting teachers and pupils and working with education reformers.

The Advisory Committee was formed to provide an educational forum to influence our future strategy at the post-16 stage and includes Directors of Studies from Cambridge Pre-U schools as well as those with an interest in educational matters and policy.

We are very interested in your views, so please email us at international@cie.org.uk with Cambridge Pre-U development in the subject line.



Working for the long-term future of Cambridge Pre-U

We have found it hugely encouraging to see the growth in the number of Cambridge Pre-U schools, students gaining good university places and university recognition in other countries. And also to hear teachers tell their own success stories – of introducing Cambridge Pre-U in their subject and seeing real benefits for their students. But these

are not the only signs of long-term success. In February 2011, Ofqual, the government's exams regulator, accredited Cambridge Pre-U qualifications until 2015. This means schools can plan for a Cambridge Pre-U future to the same timescales as A Levels, and be confident they can draw down government funding. We have synchronised our rolling

syllabus review programme with the Ofqual accreditation cycle. We believe we have an even stronger set of syllabuses than before.

Get in touch with one of our subject experts if you want to know more.

Email international@cie.org.uk or telephone **01223 553554**.

New subject accredited

Cambridge Pre-U Pure Mathematics Short Course

New subjects awaiting Ofqual accreditation

Cambridge Pre-U Drama and Theatre
Cambridge Pre-U Further Mathematics Short Course



Getting started, getting ahead

Are you planning to introduce Cambridge Pre-U into your school? Or add new subjects? Contact us now for assistance with parents' evenings and staff briefings. We can also connect you to staff at teaching schools to give you an insight into teaching Cambridge Pre-U subjects.

Getting in touch with Cambridge is easy.

Email international@cie.org.uk or telephone **01223 553554**.

In the spotlight

Do you want to highlight your school's successes with Cambridge Pre-U? We receive many enquiries from the media, especially in August, and we are always keen to hear from heads, heads of department and teachers who would be willing to share their experiences with other schools and with the media.

Learn more – contact our press office at gavine.c@cie.org.uk

Follow us on Twitter!



For the latest news and educational debate follow us @[cambridgepreu](https://twitter.com/cambridgepreu)

Cambridge Pre-U community and INSET calendar

We have a growing programme of events reaching out to schools taking or interested in Cambridge Pre-U

Learn More about Cambridge Pre-U!

Find out all you need to know about how to offer Cambridge Pre-U at your school or college at this half-day seminar.

9 June

66 Portland Place, London

14 June

The Studio, Manchester

Learn more about:

- benefits of the linear approach for students and teachers
- new syllabus developments
- resources provided for teachers

This seminar is free of charge to attend will cover key questions on Cambridge Pre-U:

- feedback from the first set of examinations
- university recognition and offers
- models of adoption in schools and colleges

To reserve a place in advance for yourself or a colleague, please contact our Events Team.

Email: cieeventsteam@cie.org.uk

Tel: 01223 553243

Fax: 01223 553558



Free subject-specific INSET

Subject-specific training is now being arranged for October and November 2011 in the following subjects:

October 2011

Biology	History
Chemistry	Literature in English
Economics	Modern Foreign Languages
Global Perspectives	Philosophy and Theology
Geography	Physics

November 2011

Art and Design	Greek and Latin
Art History	Mandarin Chinese
Business and Management	Music
Classical Heritage	Sports Science

We will publish dates and venues as soon as they are confirmed at www.cie.org.uk/cambridgepreu

To register for training workshops or to learn more, visit the Events page of our website at www.cie.org.uk/events. To request training in other subjects, please email us at international@cie.org.uk

Forthcoming conferences and events

Date	Event
8–9 June	EBEA (Economics and Business Education Association) Annual Conference
9 June	Learn more! Cambridge Pre-U
14 June	Learn more! Cambridge Pre-U
25 June	Sunday Times Festival of Education
29 June – 1 July	Sixth Form Colleges Forum Summer Conference
1–3 July	SHP (Schools' History Project) Conference
7–9 July	ALL (Association for Language Learning) Annual Conference
8–10 July	ATP (Association for the Teaching of Psychology) Conference
13–14 July	SSAT (Specialist Schools and Academies Trust) Maths and Computing Conference
14–15 July	SSAT (Specialist Schools and Academies Trust) Science Conference

Learn more! Contact us via our website at www.cie.org.uk/cambridgepreu, email at international@cie.org.uk or call us on 01223 553554. Find our stand at conferences, or attend our free INSET.



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