

# Cambridge Pre-U update

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



Pupils at Charterhouse

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## 10 years of Cambridge Pre-U

In 2007, Cambridge International Examinations (as it was then known) unveiled its plans for a new qualification, developed after one of the biggest consultations ever launched with teachers in the UK and overseas.

The result was Cambridge Pre-U, with syllabuses designed to ignite a real passion for studying and teaching and to encourage students to experience the joy of studying a subject in depth. The return to a linear format was seen as an innovative approach, welcomed by many schools who wanted a qualification which gave students more time to engage with and reflect on their studies.

Ten years later Cambridge Pre-U continues to flourish, its two-year syllabus no longer such an unusual

concept. We speak to three schools which have supported Cambridge Pre-U since its launch, to hear their views on how the qualification continues to meet

their needs – and we also speak to a recent adopter to discover why Cambridge Pre-U remains relevant in a changing educational landscape.

“ Cambridge Pre-U is a key part of our offer to schools in the UK. It provides an attractive alternative to A Level – an opportunity for broad learning, based on rigorous content – and is designed to develop the more specific skills students need to flourish in higher education. We are proud of Cambridge Pre-U’s distinct qualities, and happy that entries in Principal Subjects continue to grow – up by 47 per cent in 2017. Following 10 years of successful operation and growth, former students now form a growing community of Cambridge Pre-U alumni. ”

**Michael O’Sullivan, Chief Executive**

# 10 years of Cambridge Pre-U continued

## Charterhouse – took part in the initial consultation to develop Cambridge Pre-U

### James Kazi, Deputy Headmaster

Our support for the concept of Cambridge Pre-U was born out of our concern that existing sixth-form qualifications were declining in quality. But we also wanted to make a very positive contribution to the development of something new. Cambridge Pre-U was a unique opportunity – a tabula rasa. It gave us the chance to create a more holistic qualification, one with an interesting approach to teaching and assessment, and with a commitment to excellent support and accurate marking. We wanted to place independent

research at the centre of the curriculum, as this was definitely lacking in other qualifications. This certainly resonated with colleagues who consider sixth form a stepping-stone to higher education, and therefore an opportunity to develop these more specialist skills. It also allowed the development of a more innovative assessment scheme, with the D1 grade creating a clear marker of excellence for the brightest pupils.

Cambridge Pre-U has remained a very popular qualification at Charterhouse – pupils are engaged with the syllabuses, and enjoy the freedom to

explore a subject, develop independent skills and grow intellectually. Pupils are never bored, and they enjoy the innovation that underpins the syllabus, and that encourages both creative and analytical skills. Furthermore, teachers enjoy Cambridge Pre-U for all the same reasons. Even though A Levels have returned to a linear format we continue to be struck by Cambridge Pre-U's guiding philosophy of personal growth through exploration, and of lifelong learning – all of which gives the qualification its strength.

## Westminster School – took part in the initial consultation to develop Cambridge Pre-U

### Rodney Harris, Deputy Head (Academic)

Following the curriculum reforms of 2000 we allowed individual departments to choose whether to go modular or to remain linear. This was especially true in the arts and humanities where linearity was seen as offering time for reflection, resulting in a more mature approach to the subject being studied which would be reflected in the essays being produced. It was therefore an easy decision for eight subjects to adopt Cambridge Pre-U when it was launched in 2008. The qualification also addressed our concern at the lack of extended writing or research at A Level, which we saw as contributing to less than ideal preparation for university.

From the outset, teachers and students both enjoyed the linear format: teachers were able to adopt a more exciting approach, and students benefited hugely from the opportunity for independent research and enquiry. We reviewed our sixth-form curriculum when A Levels were reformed again in 2016, but despite the return to the

two-year A Level course, we decided to maintain our 'mixed economy' approach as we felt it could be adapted more accurately to students' needs. For example, all our core science students take Cambridge Pre-U qualifications because of the assessed practicals, which we see as a great advantage. Those studying science as a non-core

subject take the A Level course. We find that our Cambridge Pre-U qualifications give students both breadth of study and the opportunity to specialise, and work well when combined with other sixth-form qualifications meaning that Cambridge Pre-U will continue to be an integral part of our sixth-form curriculum.



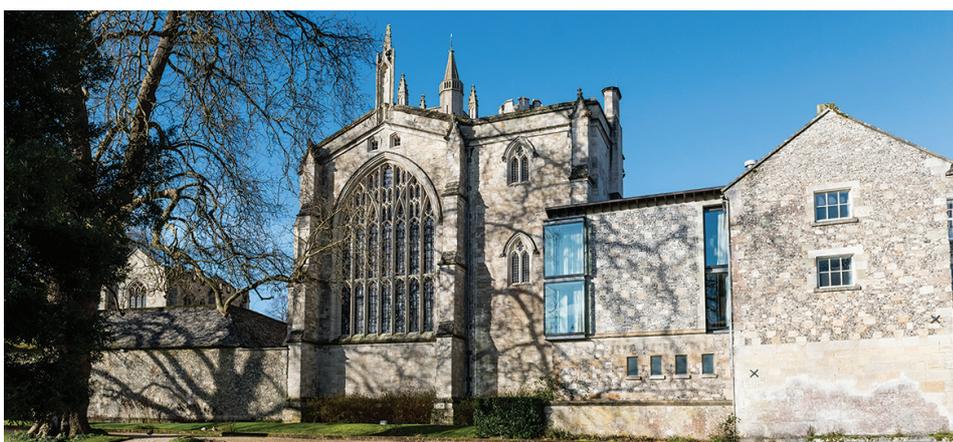
Pupils at Westminster School

## Winchester College – took part in the initial consultation to develop Cambridge Pre-U

### Patrick Herring, Deputy Head (Academic)

In 2000, we were concerned curriculum reforms meant that A Level syllabuses were being 'dumbed down', and we were also worried by the phenomenon of grade inflation. As a result we began to look at alternative qualifications and concluded that Cambridge Pre-U would serve our students well – it provided greater depth of study, more challenge, more rigour, and no interruptions to learning until the final exams. We also felt it would better prepare students for university, which has proved to be the case. We remain very keen supporters of Cambridge Pre-U – it gives students and teachers great flexibility, is less prescriptive in terms of content, fosters responsibility and independence, and provides better differentiation at the top of the range. As our teachers say:

- 'Pupils think outside the box, rather than regurgitate... The emphasis on practical work (and the way it is assessed) are strengths.' **Chemistry**



Winchester College

- 'There is as much emphasis on mastering technical aspects of the language as manipulating it fluently, stylishly and confidently at a high level – [Cambridge Pre-U] also fosters a strong understanding of the cultural, historical and literary landscape.' **Modern Languages**
- 'The Art & Design syllabus (excuse the pun) is a blank canvas, being 100 per

cent coursework – it can take in any artistic or design disciplines and all the pupils' work is seen by an examiner.'

#### **Art & Design**

- '[Cambridge Pre-U] provides the most appropriately challenging conclusion to sixth-form study available, and the resulting grade distribution is in line with expectations.' **Mathematics**

## Bristol Grammar School – started teaching Cambridge Pre-U in 2015

### Daniel Stone, Deputy Head

Prior to 2016, we had been considering the Cambridge Pre-U qualification for a number of years. We saw the linear structure as an advantage, and as a way of encouraging learning by making the exam part of the process, not the driving force. Our Subject Leaders were given the opportunity to review and choose what they considered to be the best qualification in their subject and as a result, we opted to switch to Cambridge Pre-U in English and Philosophy & Theology. We had to inform parents about Cambridge Pre-U, with grade maps to explain how assessment worked, but everyone welcomed the introduction of a qualification which accurately recognised student ability, and which enabled the very top students to get the very top grade. We also particularly liked the Personal Investigation, which teachers found liberating and students empowering.

We are delighted with the results of our first set of exams. The cohort performed exactly as their teachers expected and we felt that the style of questions allowed students to gain recognition for subject flair, as examiners were not constrained by a rigid mark scheme. The fact that some of our students achieved D1 grades also says a lot about us as a school, and has proved to be a very positive message for parents. Now that A Levels are once more linear, the two qualifications become immediately more comparable and easier to run side by side. A key advantage of the Cambridge Pre-U, however, is that it comes with 10 years of high-quality, reliable resources. As a result, we will certainly continue to offer the Cambridge Pre-U qualification, and may even expand provision going forward.



Pupils at Bristol Grammar School

## Alumni stories

Over the years we have featured a number of Cambridge Pre-U students who progressed to university – here's a quick reminder of some stories:

“ Probably the most important skill I developed [with Cambridge Pre-U] was the ability to write up experiments coherently, interpret my data and account for errors. ”

**Ed Barnard, undergraduate, University of Oxford**

“ In my opinion, the Cambridge Pre-U course gave me a head start at university, developing concepts, skills and a work ethic that have benefitted me in the long term. ”

**Callum Street, former Cambridge Pre-U student**

“ The Cambridge Pre-U courses definitely helped my achievement at school and especially in getting a place at Cambridge. Cambridge Pre-U required independent study and research, which helped me develop a genuine interest in my subjects; this in turn translated into better academic performance. ”

**Naema Hafesji, formerly of The Petchey Academy, Hackney, London, student at Churchill College, University of Cambridge**

“ I really have the Cambridge Pre-U course to thank for helping my transition into university. The focus on independent study and practical scientific investigation provided a stepping-stone to the life of an undergraduate physicist. ”

**Alasdair McNab, formerly of Hampton School, Middlesex, recent Natural Sciences graduate, University of Cambridge**

“ I found that having studied Cambridge Pre-U I had a much greater understanding of geography as a subject, as Cambridge Pre-U had given me the opportunity to study the subject in more breadth and depth than perhaps other qualifications. Cambridge Pre-U encourages the writing of essays, and I found this gave me an advantage at university as I had already learnt to develop my own writing style suitable for assessments, and this potentially helped me to achieve 85 per cent in my dissertation. ”

**Marissa Nash, formerly of Charterhouse, Surrey, recent Geography graduate, Royal Holloway, University of London**

# Spotlight on Literature in English

**Literature in English is one of the most popular subjects in the Cambridge Pre-U curriculum.**

Cambridge Pre-U Literature in English deliberately balances set texts with independent reading driven by interests and enthusiasms. As set out in the syllabus, the course 'encourages learners to read both closely and widely, to enjoy their reading and to... develop a critical and informed response to it.'

With domestic A Levels returning to a linear format, many schools may now be considering whether to add Cambridge Pre-U Literature in English to their sixth-form options. We talk to Matthew Edwards, Head of English at James Allen's Girls' School, about his experience of teaching the qualification.

**When did you first offer Cambridge Pre-U Literature in English, and why?**

We started teaching the qualification in 2010 – we decided to switch because we preferred the linear approach and the structure of the curriculum, which moved away from the unnatural 'three book' format. Students responded very positively to the change, as we had hoped, and continue to do so – around 30 per cent of our Year 13 cohort take Literature in English and they consistently deliver excellent feedback, especially when giving options advice to Year 11 students and parents.

**What are the key benefits of the Literature in English syllabus?**

We enjoy the range and depth of the syllabus, and the opportunity it gives students to broaden their knowledge and skills, and therefore their confidence. Our students really respond to the flexibility and freedom of the syllabus, many improving their performance by up to three grades by the end of the course. That we can look at any text from 1500 to the present day gives our students a sound knowledge of chronology: they develop an understanding of literary context and the skill of making connections between periods.



### What does the Personal Investigation (PI) bring to the course?

The PI is one of our students' favourite parts of the course. They enjoy the challenge of building an argument independently, and this gives them a genuine sense of achievement. The PI is an opportunity to develop both clarity of argument and lexical density, and therefore to develop the skills required for literary analysis and for extended essay writing – how to research and present findings, develop arguments, how to write concisely and also how to add footnotes and references.

### As a school, how do you manage the PI process?

The PI gives students the flexibility to follow their interests, and as teachers we are there to give support and guidance as required – we do not need to be experts on every topic chosen. Given the freedom of the PI, we find it helpful to give students the opportunity to choose their topic completely independently, but we can also offer guidance and help less confident students find a topic that they have the skills to explore. The PI is of real benefit to students planning to continue their English studies at university, but we have also been very impressed by the value it gives those students for whom English is not a main subject. For example, one of our core music students looked at how the arts were presented in two novels for her PI, while a core economics student considered the presentation of wealth in selected texts.

### How does the course prepare students for university?

Students acquire a wealth of relevant skills which prove invaluable at university. English is a popular degree option for our students, and when they start their undergraduate studies they benefit from their experience of analysis and close reading and, as I said earlier, their appreciation of a much wider literary canon in terms of author, subject and chronology. But we have also found that the course has a very positive impact beyond English. A former student who went on to read history, for example, reported that she was the only one on her course with experience of commenting on unseen texts. A medic, who had taken Literature in English alongside three sciences, also found that her essay-writing skills proved surprisingly useful on a course which stressed the importance of communication and analysis, as well as scientific knowledge. In fact, the emphasis on essay writing also develops excellent time-management skills, again vital for university-level study.

### Do you plan to continue offering the Cambridge Pre-U qualification?

We do review our sixth-form options, especially in the context of recent changes, and have decided to stay with Cambridge Pre-U. We like the simple, four-paper structure with each element weighted equally, and we also like the focus on essay-writing skills across the syllabus, and the chance to extend these skills in the PI. The syllabus also gives clear instructions for performance analysis, enabling teachers to identify how best to help an individual student raise their standard and improve their final grade.

### What advice would you give schools considering switching to Cambridge Pre-U?

If you switch to Cambridge Pre-U Literature in English, you will have to change your teaching approach, but in a good way. The course is not focused on exams right from the start, which gives students the freedom to read, talk and write about non-exam texts. This approach is enjoyable for both students and teachers, and encourages the wider reading which benefits final exam performance, and future study at university.



James Allen's Girls' School

# Expanding language choice with Cambridge Pre-U

Curriculum breadth in languages has always been a strength of Cambridge Pre-U.

Six modern languages are available as Principal Subjects, with Classical Greek and Latin also on offer. We ask **Philip Chadwick**, Head of Russian at **North London Collegiate School (NLCS)**, about his experience of teaching Cambridge Pre-U, and the benefits it gives his students.

## Why did NLCS decide to offer Cambridge Pre-U Russian?

Russian is a long-established subject choice at NLCS, and the Cambridge Pre-U qualification fits well with our ethos of 'stretching and challenging' students, and preparing them for academic courses at top UK universities. We also welcomed the rigorous approach to grammar (especially Paper 3), and the discrete literature component (Paper 4), which supports language learning while expanding cultural knowledge and developing skills in literary analysis.

## What do your students enjoy about the course?

Some study because they love Russian culture in its broadest sense, while others are attracted by an 'exotic' language, and the opportunity to do something different. Students usually start learning the language at GCSE, building on a firm foundation of French, German and Latin studies. By the end of Year 13 they have a real sense of achievement as they have progressed



from knowing nothing in Year 10 to reading and analysing Russian literature in the original. They also enjoy the complexities of Russian grammar, and having weekly meetings with a native Russian conversation teacher – this improves oral proficiency and provides a non-Western perspective on issues discussed in class.

## What teaching resources have you found most useful?

I tend to use contemporary sources, articles from BBC Russia for example, and texts such as Sandra Rosengrant's *Russia in Use* (Yale University Press) because the vocabulary lists often correspond with the Cambridge Pre-U syllabus. *Colloquial Russian 2* (Routledge) is also filled with accessible texts, idiomatic vocabulary and a systematic presentation of grammar. As well as canonical literary study, I like to teach some lesser-known works such as the memoirs of Sofia Kovalevskaya; in addition, stories by Zoshchenko and films by Aleksandrov and Medvedkin give students an insight into daily life in the Soviet Union.

## How does Cambridge Pre-U prepare students for university?

It certainly provides a good 'taster' for university study, and the cultural element is particularly valuable. It does encourage some students to continue with their Russian, and in fact all of our current Year 13 cohort plan to study Russian at university. That you cannot divorce the study of language from the study of culture is something we instil in our girls right from the start – a lesson that students learn very quickly when they start their undergraduate studies.

### What's available

French  
German  
Italian  
Mandarin Chinese  
Russian  
Spanish  
Classical Greek  
Latin

# Join the Cambridge Pre-U training team



As Cambridge Pre-U continues to expand, we are very keen to hear from current or recently retired Cambridge Pre-U teachers who would like to join our training team. Ashley Hern, a Manchester Grammar School history teacher, recently became a Cambridge Pre-U trainer – he tells us about his experience:

## Why did you decide to become a Cambridge Pre-U trainer?

I'd been a Cambridge marker and then a question writer, and as a result Cambridge International asked if I was interested in becoming a trainer. I thought it could be interesting, and an opportunity to reflect on my own teaching practice while helping others to improve theirs, and so I accepted the invitation to a selection event.

## What happened at the selection event?

Ahead of the event I had to submit an application which asked for my reflections on different aspects of training. On the day I had to give a 15-minute training 'showcase' (taken from a two-hour session I had prepared in advance) to demonstrate my training ability rather than subject knowledge. I found the event very interesting and enjoyable – it certainly didn't feel like an interview, and if I hadn't been selected it still would have been a very positive experience.

## What happened next?

I first completed a Cambridge-designed online course which proved a very convenient way to train, especially as I am a full-time teacher with a busy schedule. The course covered the Cambridge approach to education and topics such as pedagogical theory, and included a video of a training session for review and assessment. I also joined an online forum where prospective trainers from around the world could debate best practice and discuss training issues. I found the whole process very effective

and informative, and enjoyed hearing from fellow teaching professionals with very different experiences. The course also encouraged new thinking and a greater awareness of more practical issues, such as room layout.

## How did you prepare for your first training session, and how did it go?

I was assigned a mentor early in the process, and she provided guidance on how to write the materials for my first training session. I wrote all the materials myself, basing their structure on existing resources, and aimed to create an effective, engaging and useful session with a sense of purpose. It went well and I received very positive feedback from delegates; my mentor also observed the session and

gave me good advice designed to build my confidence in my training skills. Cambridge staff attended the session so I felt fully supported throughout – if I didn't know the answer to a question there was always someone to provide a response.

## Overall, what do you think are the key benefits of being a trainer?

For me, the experience has been very positive, and my mentor has also helped me understand how best to translate ideas into training activities – a process equally relevant to the classroom. Being a trainer has also encouraged a wider conversation with my colleagues, and I can feed their thoughts and comments back to Cambridge International to inform future training sessions.



Find more information on how to become a Cambridge Pre-U trainer.  
Visit: [www.cambridgeinternational.org/trainers](http://www.cambridgeinternational.org/trainers)





# Training and events

We regularly hold Cambridge Pre-U training courses and exhibit at events across the UK. Here are details of our plans over the next few months. Details at [www.cambridgeinternational.org/events](http://www.cambridgeinternational.org/events)

## Cambridge Pre-U Literature in English (9765)

Extension Training – London  
June 2018 – Face-to-face training\*

## Cambridge Pre-U Spanish (9781)

Introductory Training – London  
June 2018 – Face-to-face training\*

## Cambridge Pre-U History (9769)

Extension Training – London  
June 2018 – Face-to-face training\*

## Cambridge Pre-U Philosophy & Theology (9774)

Extension Training – London  
June 2018 – Face-to-face training\*

## Cambridge Pre-U Mandarin Chinese (9778)

Introductory Training – London  
June 2018 – Face-to-face training\*

\*Date and venue to be confirmed



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Go to: [www.cambridgeinternational.org/newsletters](http://www.cambridgeinternational.org/newsletters)

### Learn more!

Find us at [www.cambridgeinternational.org/cambridgepreu](http://www.cambridgeinternational.org/cambridgepreu) or contact us at [info@cambridgeinternational.org](mailto:info@cambridgeinternational.org) or on 01223 553554. Find our stand at conferences, or attend one of our free INSET days.

## What's available

Here's a list of subjects for examination in 2018 and beyond:

Mathematics  
Further Mathematics

Literature in English

Biology  
Chemistry  
Physics

French  
German  
Italian  
Mandarin Chinese  
Russian  
Spanish

Art History  
Classical Greek  
Geography  
History  
Latin  
Philosophy & Theology  
Psychology

Business & Management  
Economics

Art & Design  
Drama & Theatre  
Music

Global Perspectives & Research (a two-year extended project qualification).  
A Global Perspectives Short Course is also available.

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