



Cambridge Pre-U update

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



The Lancaster Royal Grammar School.

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Cambridge Pre-U in a 'mixed economy' curriculum

Now A Levels have returned to a linear format, it's even easier to add Cambridge Pre-U to the sixth-form curriculum. Lancaster Royal Grammar School (LRGS) has offered A Level and Cambridge Pre-U courses side by side for many years. We talk to Mark Chambers, LRGS Director of Studies, for his views on a 'mixed economy' curriculum.

'We first considered Cambridge Pre-U courses when they were launched,' says Mark. 'At LRGS, every department has the autonomy to choose what they consider to be the best course, and our Business and Economics Department decided to switch to Cambridge Pre-U Business & Management. They liked the two-year

course, thought that it was better preparation for university, and that the more in-depth approach would be motivating and challenging. Their expectations were more than satisfied,' Mark adds. 'Students found the course so engaging that the first set of grades

were the best LRGS had ever had in this subject. This opportunity to improve student performance in specific subjects by offering a more rigorous course is the reason why we continue to include Cambridge Pre-U in our sixth-form options.'

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Mark Chambers, LRGS Director of Studies

Cambridge Pre-U in a 'mixed economy' curriculum continued

LRGS offers Cambridge Pre-U qualifications in Business & Management, English Literature, Philosophy & Theology and – most recently – Geography. 'As with the other subjects, our Geography Department opted to switch because they regarded the syllabus as more interesting and therefore more engaging, especially the range of case study and research topics. The department had to work hard to prepare for Cambridge Pre-U teaching, with our first cohort examined in 2018. Other departments watched closely to see the impact on results, and it was pleasing indeed to see that more than half of our geography students achieved Distinction grades.'

The mixed curriculum is 'no longer an issue' for students and parents, says Mark: 'At first, they were unsure about the different grading system, and what this meant for university

admissions, but understanding and awareness has greatly improved. For example, university admissions criteria often lead with A Level but we consistently see Cambridge Pre-U grades included in university offers.' Mark also says that, from the school's perspective, the return to the linear A Level has made a 'mixed economy' curriculum 'massively easier' to administer.

Cambridge Pre-U is also highly regarded by teachers, Mark adds: 'Only teachers can compare syllabus content, year on year, and those who have opted to switch to Cambridge Pre-U say that they enjoy teaching the course, and seeing the positive response of their students. Not all LRGS departments feel the need to switch from A Levels, but this mix of qualifications has certainly proved a successful strategy for LRGS.'

Alumni interview: Global Perspectives & Research



Sasha Arridge studied Cambridge Pre-U Global Perspectives & Research (GPR), together with four A Levels, at Shrewsbury School before reading Politics, Philosophy and Economics (PPE) at Oxford University. He tells us about the benefits of the Cambridge Pre-U GPR course, and how it prepared him for university study.

Why did you decide to study for the Cambridge Pre-U GPR qualification alongside your A Level courses?

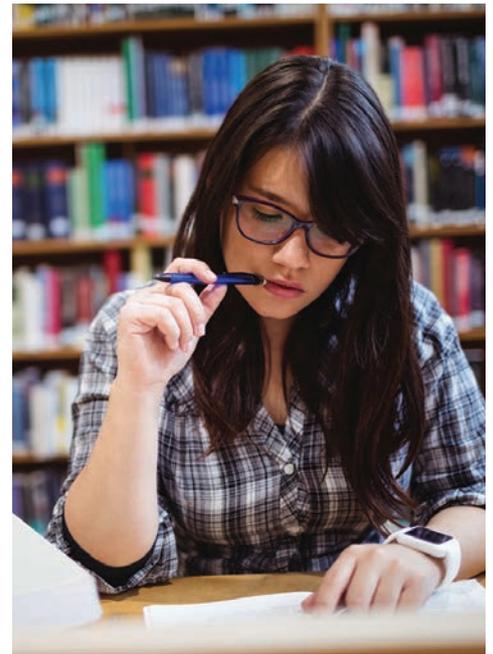
At Shrewsbury, all sixth-form students have the option to study either Cambridge Pre-U GPR, for one year or two, or take the one-year extended project qualification (EPQ). The two-year Cambridge Pre-U GPR course was perceived as being more demanding, which is why I decided to take it. The course gave me the same freedom as EPQ to explore and research a topic in depth, but also – in the first year – taught me the skills I needed to research effectively. I studied maths, further maths, English, and philosophy & theology at A Level. Alongside English, Cambridge Pre-U GPR proved to be my favourite sixth-form course.

Cambridge Pre-U courses aim to prepare students for university study – has this proved to be true?

Yes it has. Firstly, the Cambridge Pre-U GPR course taught me many useful research and critical thinking skills,

especially how to read critically a 'proper' academic paper. The course also improved the clarity and concision of my writing, the importance of which only really became apparent at university. The assessment format is also very relevant – the final exam asks you to critique material presented to you, and the independent research report (IRR) and presentation are useful introductions to the world of academic research, an area I want to go into after my degree.

Now that I'm an undergraduate, I also know that university study involves a lot of independent learning, especially in the humanities. Cambridge Pre-U GPR teaches you how to find the most relevant research sources and how to digest information. Much of my university work follows a similar process to researching and writing the IRR, so having a 'taster' of this process at school definitely made the transition to university much smoother, and I'm still using these skills as I work on my undergraduate dissertation.



Tell us more about your Independent Research Report (IRR)

For me, this was when the fun really started – a chance to use all the skills I had developed so far, and my first real opportunity to study a subject I really enjoyed, in depth and in an academic context. The subject of my IRR was: 'Will the ISDS (Investor-State Dispute Settlement) provisions in the TTIP (Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership) agreement undermine democracy in EU member states?' TTIP was being negotiated at the time I was deciding on my IRR topic, and the ISDS (whereby a company could sue a government if its policies had reduced the company's profits) was not widely publicised, despite its potentially profound impact in the EU and US. I'm very interested in democratic theory and practice, which made the implications of ISDS fascinating and important, and the lack of publicity around this issue motivated me to find out more.

What advice do you have for current students planning their IRR?

It's important to spend time thinking about the subject of your IRR, and to follow up a few ideas, to make sure you write about something you actually enjoy researching. After I settled on my topic I started reading around the subject, noting ideas and connections as I went along, and taking time to decide on the 'question' which has to form the title of the IRR. Making a very detailed plan, after completing the reading, is also very useful; if the plan is detailed enough then drafting the final essay shouldn't take long. Although my IRR turned out very well, I did waste time at the start of the process and should have made a better plan – this proved quite stressful but made me understand

the value of proper time management, something I'm still working on today. However, I was very proud of my IRR when it was finished, and I'm still proud of it today.

Do you think that the Cambridge Pre-U GPR course helped your university application?

The course helps prepare you for university interviews by teaching you how to approach new material analytically – an indispensable interview skill – and gives you the ability to get to grips with new information very quickly. Above all, however, Cambridge Pre-U GPR gives you the independent study skills that universities want – it's evidence of your aptitude for the type of learning demanded by universities, and can really set your application apart.



Watch the video

Sasha was recently featured in a video about Cambridge Pre-U Global Perspectives & Research – watch it at <http://bit.ly/SachaArridge>

A practical advantage?

The examined practical is often cited as a key advantage of Cambridge Pre-U science qualifications. We provide answers to some common questions about the practical assessment, and some advice for schools considering switching to a Cambridge Pre-U science subject.

Q&A with Mike Thompson, Head of Science at Rugby School, which offers Cambridge Pre-U Chemistry and Physics.

In your view, what are the main advantages of an assessed practical?

In the Cambridge Pre-U Chemistry course, the practical paper – Paper 4 – is very well written and helps reduce the stress of the other exams as students feel they can score very highly on a component worth 15 per cent of the total mark. About 20 per cent of Rugby science courses are devoted to practical work – we consider it excellent preparation for university and our students find it fun to be tested in this way.

How does a practical exam compare to ongoing practical assessment?

Preparation for a practical exam (as opposed to completing required practicals throughout the academic year) allows us to go beyond the course and discuss topics typically covered at university. For example, in addition to core experiments we add in extras such as how to identify functional groups using wet tests. Students enjoy the silver mirror test to identify the aldehyde group in glucose, and this opens up further discussion on chain and ring structures.

How do you prepare students for the practical assessment?

We focus on lab work recorded in lab books, with regular practicals held over a double lesson and greatly enjoyed by both teachers and students. During the course, our Year 12 students spend a day in the chemistry labs at Warwick University and we've also worked with Leicester University on the 'RSC

Spectroscopy in a Suitcase' initiative from the Royal Society of Chemistry. Our students practise using practical papers from the last four years, taking two of these as mock exams. This allows them to hone techniques in quantitative chemistry using mass balances and titrations, and to use equipment such as burettes and pipettes accurately. A few weeks before the practical exam,

I hold a double lesson to demonstrate all the qualitative tests in the syllabus data booklet. This refresher is greatly appreciated by students, who are encouraged to know where to find the tests in the data booklet as preparation for the exam.

Do you need any additional resources for the practical assessment?

Chemistry is a popular sixth-form subject at Rugby and we have just converted a basement room into a



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new science lab, primarily for chemistry, with dedicated glassware for practical exams. Burettes with numbers in white, for example, are essential for KMnO_4 titrations. We are also fortunate to be able to run all our practical exams simultaneously in two large labs.

Do universities welcome students with proven practical science experience, and can it enhance their academic progress?

Warwick University tells us that our students often operate at the level of second-year undergraduates. Our alumni also say that they were better prepared for practical work than some of their peers – they start their undergraduate studies already familiar with a Büchner filtration, for example, reflux, distillation, taking a melting point, and running an infra-red spectrum on a sample they have prepared. Every year Rugby students go on to study chemistry at university, and some go into research because they have developed a love of practical work.



Science at Rugby School.

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Assessed science practicals – Ray Lee, Group Manager, Science (Chemistry and Biology) at Cambridge International explains our approach.

At Cambridge International, we consider the regular exposure to practicals an essential part of the teaching and learning of scientific subjects. We firmly believe that students are disadvantaged if they do not receive constant hands-on lessons.

We encourage schools to expose students to a wide range of practical activities during a Cambridge Pre-U science course, and collaborations with universities – such as those between Rugby and the universities of Warwick and Leicester – are a very good idea. Students are often inspired by seeing a real lab, and understanding that real,

working scientists are making discoveries all the time.

Due to the emphasis on practical assessment, we ask any school that is considering switching to a Cambridge Pre-U science subject to meet our requirements in terms of access to a suitable lab, and to the chemicals and apparatus required for the experiments listed in the syllabus. However, we are always available to provide both general and specific advice on science practicals, and can provide strategies on how to make the management of practical examinations easier, particularly for larger schools.

When we write practical examinations, we endeavour to set new and novel contexts but we also consider the cost and availability of chemicals and apparatus, and limit apparatus to the list published in the syllabus. We also keep the amount of chemicals used to a minimum to reduce both costs and environmental impact. We are always happy to receive feedback from schools on our science qualifications, which is always reviewed by the manager of the syllabus and used to inform the setting of future examinations. We set reliable, valid and accessible assessments and so welcome the views of active teachers.

Subject spotlight: history



Jonathan White, Head of History at Latymer Upper School, shares his thoughts on the Cambridge Pre-U History course. It is studied by around 70 students (almost equally boys and girls) at Latymer, making it one of the school's most popular subjects after English and maths.

Why did Latymer decide to offer Cambridge Pre-U History?

We made the decision to change to the Cambridge Pre-U History syllabus seven years ago. We felt that the A Level structure at that time tested core skills separately, such as asking for either a synoptic essay, an interpretation or an explanation. We felt this was artificial, since historians naturally do all three simultaneously. Our Cambridge Pre-U students now take a flexible approach to what makes a good history essay, which we think is helpful to their individual development. The consistency of the Cambridge Pre-U mark scheme, even for the Personal Investigation (PI), also means we can focus on teaching history rather than teaching to the test because essays are essentially evaluated in the same way across the different papers.

What benefits does the Cambridge Pre-U curriculum offer?

There are a number of benefits in both design and content. Firstly, the linear format makes it easier to design courses that are coherent, and which have inter-connections and common resonances. For example, you can design a course that covers a century of both



Latymer Upper School.

British and European history, with connections and links to be discovered by students or made explicit in teaching. Embedding the PI into the curriculum is useful because it allows students to study a subject in depth. We have also had colleagues wanting to offer Chinese and Japanese history, which is possible with Cambridge Pre-U.

In addition, the grading system deliberately introduces more levels,

particularly at the higher end, allowing high-attaining students to achieve levels above A*, which they find motivating. Less able students can still do well, and we have had B grade GCSE students achieve D2 at Cambridge Pre-U.

What do your Cambridge Pre-U History students typically go on to do next?

Most probably study humanities, with the great majority attending Russell Group universities. Historians coming back from their first year at university tell us that Cambridge Pre-U was excellent preparation, as it gave them the extensive reading and critical thinking skills essential for the study of history at undergraduate level. I think university is less of a shock once they have been immersed in Cambridge Pre-U for two years.

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As the PI is such an important part of the qualification, what is your teaching strategy?

The guidelines explicitly state that the PI is an independent piece of work which cannot be marked or given editorial feedback, so the best teaching strategy – right from the start – is to encourage independent skills in studying, reading, note-taking and referencing. If the History Outline papers are taught well, with students' essay-writing skills developing early on, and primary source material is integrated into lessons, then students are more than halfway there.

The strategy is to make sure they don't see the PI as a daunting task. Many will have written 1500 words or so for a prepared essay, but they can find it hard to sustain their answers over a longer piece of work, as this presents structural challenges not encountered in the History Outline papers. Some students can struggle to find the primary sources they need to progress their arguments, so we offer a steer on what to read, and on what to read next. The ability to sequence and magnify reading is also critical. Students can get lost in really long and detailed accounts, so it's better to start with something structured and simple as this will allow students to see critical developments for themselves, which they can then research and evaluate on their own terms.

Could you give some recent examples of PIs from Latymer?

Modern political themes predominate, although we have had PIs on medieval topics such as the Crusades. Recent PIs include 'Does religion best explain the Iranian Revolution of 1979?', an analysis of Wilhelm II's personal responsibility for Germany's war policy, and 'To what extent was Mary I's policy of the re-Catholicisation of England doomed?' One of the best asked why Britain did



Students at Latymer Upper School.

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not have a revolution in 1848, and generated a very clever piece of historical reasoning.

Do certain topic types lend themselves more to the PI, or does it depend on individual students' interests and abilities?

This is difficult to answer – some students opt for a 'conservative' topic but don't do as well as those who try something more 'out there'. We tend to advise less confident students to choose a topic related to what they have been taught. More able students, however, can be drawn to cultural history, but we warn them that they are not ready for this level of analysis – the impact of music or a novel on social change is very hard to write about, and a lot of academics only attempt it at the end of their careers!

Training

We will be holding introductory and extension level face-to-face Cambridge Pre-U training sessions in 2019:

February

- History (Introductory)
- Art & Design (Introductory)
- Philosophy & Theology (Extension)
- Spanish (Extension)
- Chemistry (Extension)

June

- Literature in English (Extension)
- Global Perspectives & Research (Extension)

Register your interest at cambridgeinternational.org/events

Trainers and examiners wanted!

Find out about opportunities to become a Cambridge Pre-U examiner or trainer at cambridgeinternational.org/about-us/careers



Students celebrate exam results!

In August, Cambridge Pre-U schools across the UK celebrated another year of impressive results – here are just a few of their tweets and comments:



City of London School: '... Particular congratulations to Matthew Emmett, Boris Fonikov and Leon Scott Engell who gained top distinction grades in Pre-U Geography. Better than A*.'

Marlborough College: '... the outgoing Upper Sixth are celebrating record breaking results, achieving the strongest A level, Pre-U and EPQ grades seen in recent years ... in the Pre-U exams,

a record-setting number of the elusive D1 grades were awarded, 19 across nine subjects.'

Leweston School: 'Huge congratulations ... across the entire year group 41% achieved A*–A grades & 16% of all exams were passed at A* or Pre-U equivalent, an increase on last year and twice the national average!'



To receive the latest news from Cambridge International, sign up for our eNewsletter – *Cambridge Outlook eNews*. It includes updates on new qualifications and services, training, textbooks and more.

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