



# Cambridge Pre-U update

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



The King's School, Canterbury.

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## Presenting Cambridge Pre-U to students and parents

### Providing the right guidance about what it has to offer

Many students and parents will ask questions about Cambridge Pre-U at sixth-form open evenings coming up over the next few months. The King's School, Canterbury has offered Cambridge Pre-U subjects for a number of years so we decided to talk to Luke Bartlett, Deputy Head (Academic), for his thoughts on how to present Cambridge Pre-U options.

The King's School, Canterbury offers six Cambridge Pre-U subjects alongside a range of A Levels and Cambridge International A Levels.

'Our prospective sixth-form students choose a combination of three to five subjects going into Year 12, and subject choice is always more important than qualification type,' says Luke.

'Cambridge Pre-U options sit unobtrusively in the list of subjects on offer. When the qualification was first launched at King's it did need more of an introduction but now it's an accepted part of our provision. We explain to students and parents that Cambridge Pre-U is well established and recognised by universities all over the world.

'As some of the more competitive universities have said to us, when taking students from nearly 100 different countries they are used to over 50 different entry qualifications, and the Cambridge Pre-U is now well known among these. Universities have enough data now to understand the rigour of the Cambridge Pre-U course and the value of the D3, D2, and D1 grades in particular.'

## Presenting Cambridge Pre-U to students and parents continued

The 'mixed economy' sixth-form approach of offering more than one qualification type is also not an issue, says Luke: 'We emphasise the fact that each of our departments has made a considered choice about the qualification it offers, choosing between Cambridge Pre-U, A Level and, in two cases, Cambridge International A Level, and our students trust our choice.'

Parents and students also ask about Cambridge Pre-U coursework, comparative levels of work and the style of exam questions. Given the reputation of Cambridge Pre-U as being more academic, Luke also reassures those students who are concerned they may not be up to the standard required.

'Although we cannot undertake a direct comparison with the equivalent A Level course, we usually find that students across the ability range perform just as well as expected – and sometimes better – when studying a Cambridge Pre-U subject, when compared with the hypothetical A Level alternative,' he says.

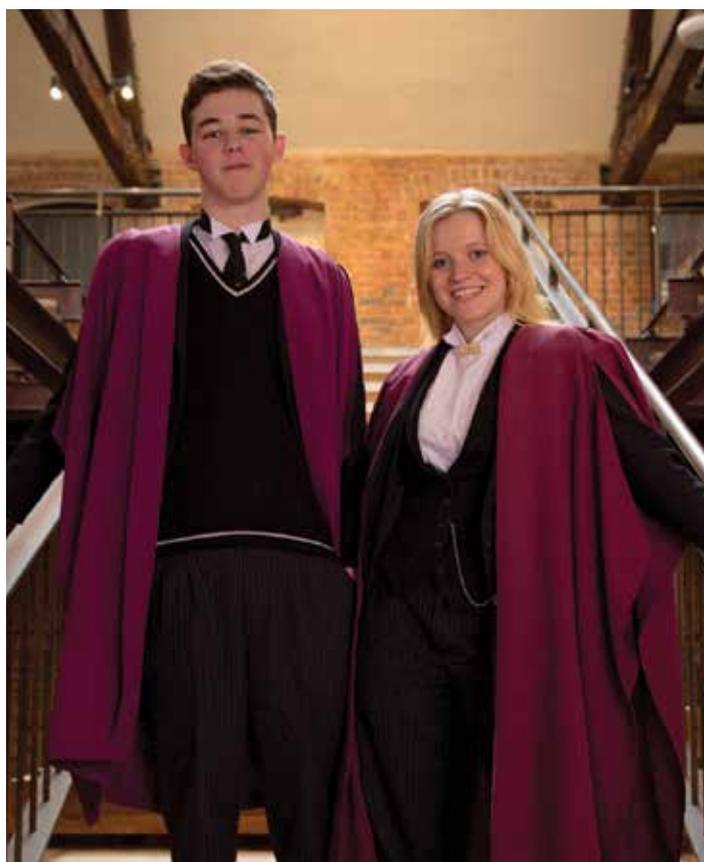
'We do tell students to be prepared for higher standards, and for possibly lower marks for their work during the course – although this does not necessarily mean a lower final grade, as steady improvement is expected towards the exams.'

Another common question concerns the parity of Cambridge Pre-U and A Level grades.

'The more academic students often ask about the comparative difficulty of achieving a D2 grade compared to an A\*, and about the number of D1s obtained by previous cohorts,' he says. 'We always refer students and parents to our results table which shows just how well our students have performed across all subjects, including Cambridge Pre-U with D1s at the top end.'

“ Although we cannot undertake a direct comparison with the equivalent A Level course, we usually find that students across the ability range perform just as well as expected – and sometimes better – when studying a Cambridge Pre-U subject. ”

Luke Bartlett,  
Deputy Head (Academic) at King's School, Canterbury



Students at The King's School, Canterbury.

## Marketing resources for schools

Our Communications Toolkit offers a wide range of materials designed to help your school explain the benefits of Cambridge qualifications, including Cambridge Pre-U. Resources include presentations, posters and factsheets, together with ready-to-use logos, photos and videos. You can find everything at [www.cambridgeinternational.org/toolkit](http://www.cambridgeinternational.org/toolkit)

Many schools also find the Cambridge Pre-U newsletter a valuable communications tool – back copies can be downloaded from [www.cambridgeinternational.org/news](http://www.cambridgeinternational.org/news)



# Building undergraduate skills with the Independent Research Report

At The Petchey Academy, in North London, all sixth-form students on the academic pathway – and many taking vocational routes – complete the Independent Research Report (IRR) in Year 13. We ask Sonia Green, Director of Sixth Form, to tell us more.

**Why did you opt to make the IRR a core part of the Year 13 curriculum – what are the key benefits for your students?**

The IRR encourages the development of skills which are ideal preparation for university-level study, irrespective of degree subject. For example, students learn the analytical and evaluative skills which are essential when reviewing source materials. They also have to present their findings in a written report and as a formal presentation, which builds their communication skills. Former students tell us that the IRR really prepared them to begin their undergraduate studies and – perhaps most importantly – to do well as their studies progressed.

**Selecting an IRR topic can be daunting for some students – how do you help them find an inspiring subject to investigate?**

Many of our students choose an IRR topic which is directly related to their target degree course; former



Students at The Petchey Academy.

students hoping to study medicine, for example, presented IRRs on issues such as 'privatisation and the NHS', or euthanasia.

For other students, when we teach the Cambridge Pre-U Global Perspectives syllabus in Year 12 we try to find issues which might spark an idea for further research. Last year we started the course

by examining Brexit but our students actually found this demotivating so instead we looked at the topic of migration – a subject many students could relate to on a personal level and so found more inspiring.

**How do you support students in the delivery of their IRR?**

As teachers, we know we cannot be experts in every IRR subject chosen by our students so we encourage them to make contact with university researchers working in the area they plan to explore. Students ask for advice and guidance on their approach to the IRR and gain expert insights into their research topic.

We are also conscious that our students must develop the skills required to write a long report, and we find that our younger members of staff have very relevant experience in this area gained from their recent time at university. From a staff development perspective, this also makes the IRR a good way to



Sonia Green and a student at The Petchey Academy.

## Building undergraduate skills with the Independent Research Report continued

get younger teachers involved in sixth-form teaching. It gives them experience of tutoring research projects, helping students develop the analytical skills they need to critically review different sources and then to write a report based on their research findings.

We also encourage students to take advantage of the flexibility that IRR offers. For example, we support students who decide to complete their IRR in the first term of Year 13, giving them more time to concentrate on their remaining studies ahead of their final exams in the summer.

### How does the IRR support university applications?

This is where – in my opinion – the IRR offers a real advantage. Many Petchey Academy students study Cambridge Pre-U Global Perspectives & Research (GPR) as an 'extra' course in addition to their three 'core' subjects. However, if their core performance falters for any reason – perhaps they no longer enjoy a subject, or don't do as well as expected – then a successful IRR



Students at The Petchey Academy.

means they gain a full Cambridge Pre-U GPR qualification. This will be accepted for admission to a degree-level course (not always the case for other project-based qualifications), and if it includes an IRR directly relevant to their chosen course of study it will support their

application even further. This has proved to be an important advantage for more than one student here at The Petchey Academy and makes the two-year Cambridge Pre-U GPR course an even more compelling option for our sixth form.

### What is the Independent Research Report?

The Independent Research Report (IRR) is part of the Cambridge Pre-U Global Perspectives & Research (GPR) curriculum. Students can study Global Perspectives as a one-year short course and gain a Cambridge Pre-U certificate, but to gain the full qualification they must deliver the IRR in Year 13, producing an essay or report of up to 5000 words, based on independent research, plus a presentation.

### The value of project-based qualifications

Cambridge Assessment has long championed project-based qualifications such as the IRR, also offering an Extended Project Qualification (through OCR) and the recently launched Cambridge International Project Qualification (or Cambridge IPQ). Recent findings by Cambridge Assessment researcher Tim Gill show that 'the skills learnt in undertaking a significant project over a long period of time (eg planning, research, analysis) may prepare students better for university than subject-based courses only'.

Read our blogpost for more on this topic – *A project-based qualification designed to give students the skills to succeed at university* (December 2018) – at [www.cambridgeinternational.org/blog](http://www.cambridgeinternational.org/blog)



# How Global Perspectives & Research gave me the skills for success at university

**Edward Tranter achieved the highest score in the UK when he took Cambridge Pre-U Global Perspectives & Research (GPR) at Spalding Grammar School in June 2018, along with A Levels in Law, Ethics & Philosophy, and History. He is now reading Philosophy at Swarthmore College, Pennsylvania, US, after winning a place on a scholarship thanks to help from The Sutton Trust. The Sutton Trust helps young people from low and middle income backgrounds increase their chances of accessing top universities and professions.**

'Studying Cambridge Pre-U Global Perspectives & Research was an obvious choice for me.

At school I always took subjects I was most interested in as a future profession, but I found the syllabuses didn't allow many opportunities for independent research and creativity.

Global Perspectives & Research enabled me to explore more than any of my other subjects and also helped me learn critical skills necessary for success at university. I was able to go beyond the high school education level and pursue what interested me at the time – philosophy.

Writing the Independent Research Report was a new challenge for me. I had never been faced with writing a 4000-word essay before; for the first time since I started school, I had total

control over what I could write about. I found it difficult at first – applying what I had learnt during the first year of the course took some getting used to.

Global Perspectives & Research enabled me to produce assignments in the subjects I loved that I was actually proud of. It was really enjoyable to develop critical thinking techniques and then refine them so that I could write an informative essay that friends and family could read.

I was ecstatic to receive the award for achieving the highest national score. Global Perspectives & Research was my favourite qualification by far. Being rewarded for challenging myself was brilliant.

## Studying in the US

I wanted to get the most experience out of my time at university, and so wanted to study in a foreign country. I'd been fascinated by the United States for many years so going to study there was a natural choice. I relished the academic freedom that Global Perspectives & Research had given me and didn't want to settle on a specific subject (the normal practice of UK universities).

Swarthmore College in Pennsylvania is a brilliant fit for me as I don't have to finalise my degree subject until the end of my second year. That means I can explore subjects that had not been offered to me during high school.



Edward Tranter

I would recommend every secondary school student in the UK to consider stepping out of their comfort zone. Studying in a foreign country has provided me with invaluable skills. I returned home for Christmas, and friends said that my character has changed significantly and that I'm a lot more confident.

I would encourage students to research foreign education systems and see if the different styles would suit their interests, and then look for the school of that type that would challenge them the most.

I'm immensely glad I got the opportunity to cement my research skills, as I was able to hit the ground running at university and be successful with my first assignments.

I transitioned to the higher level of research necessary for university projects far quicker than a lot of my friends did. I didn't have to worry about my assignments as much and was also able to avoid the kind of imposter syndrome that is common among first-year students. It's extremely likely that if I hadn't taken Global Perspectives & Research I would not have been proud of my first semester grades.'

“ I'm immensely glad I got the opportunity to cement my research skills, as I was able to hit the ground running at university and be successful with my first assignments. ”

Edward Tranter, student at Swarthmore College in Pennsylvania, USA.

# Spotlight on Cambridge Pre-U Music

Cambridge Pre-U Music offers a flexible and broad course of study. Andrew Williams, Head of Academic Music at The Purcell School, and Anna Newson, Director of Music at Chesham Grammar, explain why it is ideal for their sixth-form students.

## The Purcell School, Hertfordshire

### Q&A with Andrew Williams, Head of Academic Music.

#### Why did you decide to offer Cambridge Pre-U Music?

**AW:** All Purcell students study music in the sixth form, and we were delighted to find a qualification clearly designed for students who aspired to study music at either university or conservatoire.

The Cambridge Pre-U course has provided new and exciting opportunities to bring together key aspects of our musical and academic provision. Furthermore, it provides a framework for several aspects of our specialist programme, such as composition, chamber music, harmony and aural.

There is a useful emphasis on developing high-level skills, and the options in all components lead to many routes through the course so we can tailor even more of our sixth-form programme to reflect individual musical ambitions.



Students at The Purcell School.

#### Your students are already highly accomplished musicians – does the course stretch them?

Our students enjoy the variety of musical study on offer in the course, and the option to specialise, in Paper 4, in areas such as performance, dissertation or composition.

This is particularly valuable and seen by students as an important step towards undergraduate study. We particularly like teaching the Listening, Analysis and Historical Study component as it provides opportunities for focussed, in-depth study of a range of styles. In addition, it is pleasing to find exam questions that reward students' wider musical knowledge and which reference their own musical experiences.

Although some students find this type of academic work challenging, they all recognise its relevance to their musical development and make better progress overall as a result.

#### How does the performance component benefit your students?

Purcell students are talented musicians who enjoy performing regularly and the requirements to demonstrate two or three different performance skills, such as solo recital, chamber music or improvisation, and to play an extended recital, are of particular benefit.

This also reflects the flexible approach to performance that young musicians need if they are to be successful in the profession. Students who opt for the Further Performing component can focus on aspects of performance practice by comparing professional recordings and reflecting on their own interpretive choices, which has inspired highly valuable conversations between students and teachers.

#### What additional skills do your students gain from the course?

The qualification encourages and rewards independent research and study. Paper 4, in particular, develops independent study skills as each student is required to take responsibility for key aspects of their personal project. In Paper 3, students must also learn to organise their time carefully, meeting a series of deadlines in order to prepare a large coursework submission formed of several contrasting components.

## Spotlight on Cambridge Pre-U Music continued

Chesham Grammar School, Buckinghamshire

Q&A with Anna Newson, Director of Music.

### Why did you decide to offer Cambridge Pre-U Music?

**AN:** We wanted a linear course to give our musicians two years to flourish without the interruption of Year 12 examinations.

As a grammar school, our students are often both academically inclined and accomplished performers, and we felt they could stretch to D2 and D1 grades if given this time. We were also impressed by the flexibility of the course, which we could tailor to suit the strengths of the individual student, whether composition, performance or analysis.

We realised that up to 47.5 per cent of the qualification could be devoted to an area in which the student could excel. Finally, the very sensible focus on classical symphony and romantic orchestral, or vocal music, was very attractive as was the wide choice of set works each with an emphasis on historical context. The majority of our music students go on to study music at university or conservatoire, so this grounding in core music history is a great foundation.

### What do your students enjoy most about the course?

They appreciate the chance to immerse themselves in the history and analysis topics, and have shown great enthusiasm for the 20th century works (Bartók and Gershwin) we have chosen so far. They also greatly enjoy the fact that 25 per cent of the course is devoted to Personal Study, giving them the freedom to choose their own pathway and to be more independent.

### The examination includes a performance component – how do your students respond?

It depends on the cohort, but this year all our students consider performance as their specialism and so are enjoying the opportunity to use their practical skills in nearly half the course.

Last year, we had an enthusiastic composer and two students who relished the chance to complete a dissertation in place of extra performing.

We also found that the performance day – when the Cambridge Pre-U examiner visits the school – was a positive and reassuring experience for students and also greatly reduced the amount of paperwork and staff time previously spent on the performance exam.

### What additional skills do you hope your students will gain from the course?

Independent study is valuable but the coursework also prepares students realistically for tertiary-level study.

For example, the harmony portfolio is a genuine chance for students to show their progress over the duration of the course, whilst the personal study is both broad in scope but ensures students work to a word limit and strict deadline.

Overall, we feel Cambridge Pre-U Music is a pragmatic musicians' course and rewards students who can show what they can hear in performance, analysis and composition.



Students at Chesham Grammar School.

## New Chief Executive



Christine Özden became the new Chief Executive of Cambridge International in January, taking over from Michael O'Sullivan. Christine has a wealth of senior leadership experience in the design, development and delivery of educational products and services. In her most recent role before joining Cambridge International, she was responsible for launching upper secondary level qualifications in the Middle East and Asia. Commenting on her appointment, Christine said: 'It is an honour to be chosen to work with the Cambridge team, whose commitment to educators, students and their communities I share.'

## Perse hosts Cambridge Schools Conference – 14–15 September 2019

The Perse School in Cambridge, a long-standing Cambridge Pre-U supporter, is hosting our Cambridge Schools Conference in September. The first conference in our 2019/20 series, it's an opportunity for teachers and school leaders from around the world to come together, share knowledge and discuss common challenges. Register your interest for this event at [www.cambridgeinternational.org/conference](http://www.cambridgeinternational.org/conference)

## Easy access to Cambridge resources via the School Support Hub

The School Support Hub – our secure online teacher support site – brings instant access to over 30 000 high-quality resources, including schemes of work, Example Candidate Responses, past papers and learner guides. For full instructions on how to access the site, go to [www.cambridgeinternational.org/teachers](http://www.cambridgeinternational.org/teachers) and click on School Support Hub.

## Training in June

We have three Cambridge Pre-U extension training sessions coming up in June for Literature in English, Greek, and Global Perspectives (components 1, 2 and 3). All three take place in London. For more details go to [www.cambridgeinternational.org/events](http://www.cambridgeinternational.org/events)

### 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 2019 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  
Music

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

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