



Cambridge Professional Development Qualifications Insights from across the programme

Ulink College of Shanghai is a thriving international school with more than 200 teachers and 2000 students. With an 11 year history of delivering the Cambridge Certificate in Teaching and Learning, the school offers a well-established Professional Development Qualification (PDQ) that provides staff a structured and practical route to professional growth.

About Cambridge Professional Development Qualifications

Cambridge PDQs are designed to support school-based professional development. The qualifications are based on the latest research and best practice in teaching, learning and leadership and combine innovative and reflective practice with critical engagement.

Schools work with Cambridge to design their Cambridge PDQ programme to suit the context and needs of their candidates.

The Cambridge PDQ Programme Leader

The Programme Leader is key to the success of a Cambridge PDQ course. Their main roles are to oversee programme design and delivery, co-ordinate mentors and monitor progress. They are usually a senior member of staff at a school.

To become accredited, a Programme Leader must successfully complete an online course, delivered by Cambridge.

We spoke to:

Andrew Jones
Cambridge PDQ programme leader at Ulink College

David Edwards
Deputy head of department of humanities and PDQ mentor at Ulink College

Shi Chen
Maths teacher and PDQ candidate at Ulink College

CANDIDATE PERSPECTIVE: SHI CHEN



Shi Chen, a teacher and PDQ candidate at Ulink College, previously taught in the United States. She joined the programme to deepen her understanding of British pedagogies and enhance her classroom practice.

Why did you choose to take part in the Cambridge PDQ?

I wanted to improve my teaching and build confidence. The PDQ helped me integrate new strategies into my lesson planning, which made the course feel highly practical and part of my daily teaching. My students responded positively, showing greater engagement and curiosity in their math lessons and developing a stronger interest in the subject.

How did you work with your mentor and gather evidence?

I met with my mentor weekly to review the session's learning outcomes and discuss that week's lessons. We also held meetings before and after observed lessons, which was very helpful in recognising my strengths and areas for improvement.

For my portfolio, I gathered evidence through essays reflecting my understanding of the sessions, observed lessons, lesson plans, unit plans, and samples of students' classwork.



Exterior view of Ulink College of Shanghai.

Cambridge Professional Development Qualifications: Insights from across the programme

What has been the biggest impact on your classroom practice?

The most significant impact has been a noticeable increase in student engagement. My students have become more curious and active in exploring new concepts. They are now less intimidated by challenging questions and instead feel excited to solve problems independently. Most importantly, they have begun to truly enjoy learning math and are more willing to ask 'why' to understand the underlying logic.

What has been the biggest challenge you have encountered?

The biggest challenge was scheduling conflicts with my mentor. I overcame this by booking observed lesson slots well in advance and planning flexible lessons that could be adjusted as needed.

What advice would you give to a teacher or school leader thinking about starting a PDQ programme?

I would recommend scheduling the sessions within working hours whenever possible. This helps ensure that participants can fully engage with the programme without adding to their existing workload.

What do you think you will do with your professional development next?

I intend to pursue a leadership program next. My goal is to move beyond the classroom and contribute to broader areas like teacher mentoring.

PROGRAMME LEADER PERSPECTIVE: ANDREW JONES



Andrew Jones, programme leader at Ulink College of Shanghai, brings extensive international experience to the role. After training and working in the UK education system, he joined Ulink Shanghai over ten years ago.

Why did you decide to become a programme leader for PDQs?

I was a mentor on the programme for ten years before becoming programme leader. I enjoyed the mentor role, and when the opportunity came, I took on the responsibility because I believed it was important that my colleagues had access to meaningful development opportunities.

What does a PDQ training session involve for your centre?

I have a team of 4–6 mentors helping me each year to administer the course. We lead weekly after-school workshops that train candidates in the academic requirements while modelling best practices so that candidates can see planning, reflection, assessment, effective questioning and feedback in action.

The workshops demonstrate practical applications of a wide range of teaching skills, which candidates then attempt in their future practice. Through lesson observations, we determine how well they are applying these new teaching strategies.

Throughout the course, we develop candidates' reflective practice so they can take greater control of their learning and have the freedom to try a wider variety of planning, teaching and assessment strategies.

How do you select candidates for your PDQ programme?

Around 20 staff apply to be a candidate each year. The management team and I select candidates based on experience, leadership potential, and their ability to promote PDQ across departments. Some have over 10 years of teaching experience but are new to formal qualifications. PDQ gives them a chance to grow.

What is the biggest impact that the PDQ course has had on teaching and learning at your school?

The biggest impact has been that PDQ has allowed local staff access to a different methodology. It has started the conversation about what it means to be a good teacher, and how can we try and blend the best of western education philosophy within a Chinese system.

What is the best piece of advice you would give to a new Programme Leader?

Understand the confines you are working within and define what success looks like. As a programme leader you have the flexibility to deliver the course in a way that's most appropriate for your candidates. Use that wisely.

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What have been the most important benefits of delivering the Cambridge PDQ programme?

For me personally it has been a powerful learning experience. Working with such a huge range of teachers and managers, who have such a wide spread of abilities, has helped me realise how much I have had to adapt to communicate effectively. It has also helped me recognise the importance of patience and acknowledging small improvements. For the school, PDQ has helped to develop our staff.

MENTOR PERSPECTIVE: DAVID EDWARDS



David Edwards joined Ulink in 2023 and quickly became a valued PDQ mentor. With experience in UK teacher training, David brings a coaching mindset and strong cultural awareness.

What motivated you to become a PDQ mentor?

I previously worked on teacher training programmes in the UK, so I was excited to take the opportunity to support colleagues. I enjoy helping teachers develop their practice, and the chance to work with both Chinese and international colleagues was particularly appealing. It's also a valuable opportunity to better understand my Chinese colleagues, whose training backgrounds can be very different.

Have you had any prior mentoring experience? If so, how has this been useful as a PDQ mentor?

I worked as both a lecturer and mentor. This experience gave me strong coaching and mentoring skills, which have been invaluable in supporting candidates' development in the classroom. It has also been very interesting to observe the different ways candidates respond to feedback.

What does your role as a PDQ mentor involve?

I hold weekly one-to-one meetings with candidates to build on the learning from the main group sessions. These meetings focus on the candidate's understanding of different teaching concepts, and it's always interesting to explore non-Western perspectives. A key part of my role is ensuring that mentees reflect on their practice and apply pedagogical principles effectively.

In addition to these sessions, I offer drop-ins during my lessons and formative observations before the main assessments. My approach involves adapting between mentoring and coaching techniques depending on the candidate's level of understanding and stage in their teaching practice.

What transferable skills have you gained by being a PDQ Mentor?

Mentoring has strengthened my cultural awareness and adaptability, particularly in understanding the perspectives of Chinese colleagues with different pedagogical backgrounds. It has also prompted me to reflect on my own teaching practice and deepen my understanding of the Chinese education system.

What is the biggest success you have had with a mentee?

One of my biggest successes has been seeing candidates deliver highly effective lessons after initial observations showed limited impact. The improvement confirmed that the reflections and strategies discussed in our one-to-one sessions were being applied and making a real difference to student learnings and outcomes.

What is the biggest challenge of being a mentor?

The greatest challenge I've found is bridging cultural differences. Encouraging mentees to recognise that effective pedagogy is key to learning, rather than relying solely on subject expertise, can be difficult in more technical subjects.

What is the best piece of advice you would give to a new PDQ Mentor?

Take time to understand the key challenges your mentee faces and tailor your advice accordingly. A personalised approach makes all the difference.

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For more details about Cambridge Professional Development Qualifications go to: cambridgeinternational.org/pdq