

## **Towards A Cambridge Pre-University Qualification – A Consultation Paper**

The general response to the proposals in the consultation paper from the Admissions Tutors in the Colleges of the University of Cambridge was positive. However, there was a view that such a qualification should not go forward as a way to “patch up” the weaknesses of current AS and A level teaching by providing another qualification. This could create a bigger divide between different areas of the educational landscape, that is, for those that can offer the new qualifications and those that cannot. To ensure continuing widening participation in higher education from those with the necessary academic achievements and potential, whatever their background, if the qualification was to go ahead, it should be something available to all. It should not just be available to those schools and colleges that can afford to pay for it, and it should not be available just for international students outside the UK.

### **Consultation questions:**

**1. Views are invited on the constitution of the Steering Committee as described in paragraphs 8 and 9, the appointment of subject advisers and the collaborative approach outlined above.**

Higher education in the UK is not homogeneous, and indeed is perhaps becoming even more disparate. For this reason we believe that more than two HE representatives might be appropriate; perhaps one from a Russell Group University, one from a CMU institution and one from one the universities outside these two groups. The inclusion of at least one representative of employers’ organisations from the start would be desirable. Overall the proposed approach would appear to be a sensible way forward.

**2. Views are invited on the appropriateness and completeness of the educational values (of a new qualification) described in paragraph 12.**

The proposed educational values have our strong support.

**3. Views are invited on the proposal to introduce a new pre-university Group Award qualification with a structure as described in option (b) and on the proposals for its name as described in paragraph 16.**

We would support for the idea of a Group Award qualification, and have a slight preference for option (b). The Cambridge Baccalaureate would be preferred to emphasise distinctiveness and avoid confusion with existing qualifications.

We are aware that this could possibly be seen as an updated version of the highly regarded International Baccalaureate and would not wish to undermine the hard work of the IBO in developing this style of course.

**4. Views are invited on a structure which offers a free choice of subjects to students, and which provides for a pattern of main and subsidiary qualifications with Advanced Plus provision available for the most able.**

We would support the idea of free choice but would also see benefit in the development of subsidiary qualifications that complement the main subjects of study.

For instance, an AS in Statistical Analysis of Data for those studying History or Social Sciences rather than simply offering an AS in Mathematics, or an AS in the History and Philosophy of Science for those studying Sciences rather than simply offering an AS in

History. However, we also feel that there is something to be said for the study of subjects such as Mathematics in their own right, and we wonder whether this proposal may lead to specialisation that might be somewhat narrow at such an early stage of a student's career. There might be the danger of closing off other options if students find that they have opted for the wrong related subsidiary subjects. We would also have concerns about a potential proliferation of marginally different subjects

We would strongly support Advanced Plus provision, but feel that the depth of the higher level papers must be adequate to test the most able and recognise that there may be a lower cut off at which an overall diploma would not be awarded.

**5. Views are invited on the approach to curriculum extension described above. In particular:**

- **On preferences for the inclusion of either the extended essay/independent investigation or Critical Thinking or the Core Paper.**
- **On schools' consideration of the amount of teaching time which can be given to cross curriculum programmes in school timetables.**
- **On the approaches to assessment described in paragraphs 26, 29 and 33.**

We strongly agree that Critical Thinking skills should be developed and assessed as part of AS, Advanced and Advanced Plus subject study. However, there should be no separate assessment in Critical Thinking. Provision of this implies inadequacies in the nature of the subject assessments,

If such skills are to be assessed, then the Theory of Knowledge option of the International Baccalaureate provides a good model. The Theory of Knowledge element is assessed through two essay projects, which usefully complements the research, referencing and writing skills acquired in the Extended Essay exercise (see just below). In terms of school and college provision, it might be interesting to look at a two-term programme (summer of Year 12, autumn of Year 13), as is the case with the Theory of Knowledge.

The inclusion of an extended essay/independent investigation (EE/II) is strongly supported from an educational viewpoint. This would help develop skills needed for study in HE. However, because of the difficulty of proofing this against undue external input and support, it should not be subject to a high-stakes assessment. A pass/fail grading with a pass being necessary to obtain the Group Award would be sufficient we believe. If the EE/II was completed in the first term of Year 13 it could provide a topic for discussion at interview, but this is only a minor consideration, and the timetable for the EE/II should be dictated by considerations of what is best to maximise its educational benefit.

Overall, we support the inclusion of the proposed Core Paper.

**6. Views are invited on the proposal to establish entry level thresholds for a new Group Award qualification.**

In some respects we would support this proposal as it aligns with the matriculation requirements of the University of Cambridge. On the other hand, it would be unfortunate to prevent students from accessing a qualification as good as the "Cambridge Bac" promises to be because, for instance, they were unable to take a GCSE in a foreign language at their 14-16 school. The importance of modern languages in today's world is such that the study of them should be supported. One might investigate other ways of allowing students to make up for their potential lack of a foreign language GCSE, through short courses for example.

**7. Views are invited on the approach to grading outlined.**

We have some concern about the proposals in paragraph 40 because of comments above relating to assessment of the EE/II. However, we would support for the proposals in

paragraph 41 and the conclusion in paragraph 42. We would want the highest grade(s) in the Group Award to require achievement at Advanced Plus.