

Update  
March 2010

## Cambridge Pre-U university offers 2010

The first cohort of Cambridge Pre-U students began to make their university applications through UCAS last term. The main deadline for applications was 15 January, although Oxbridge and medical school applications had to be in by early October.

Before the cycle began, university admissions departments had been thoroughly briefed by the CIE Recognition Team with newsletters, factsheets, visits and seminars. Many universities stated their admissions requirements and published 'typical' offers well ahead of the application cycle. However, it was to be expected that some admissions tutors or others involved in the admissions process would need more information once applications started coming in, so CIE staff were (and are) on hand to assist schools should any issues arise.

With few exceptions, universities have made offers in line with their published policies, and in line with the equivalences that form the basis of the UCAS tariff, equating D2 with A\*, D3 with A and M2 with B. Some universities have, following the UCAS tariff values, equated M1 with

A grade, thus showing awareness of the challenge involved in taking an examination in a linear way. In other cases, universities that make offers on the basis of three A Levels and one

AS have dropped the fourth subject requirement for Cambridge Pre-U applicants.

*Continued on page 2.*



## Cambridge Pre-U university offers 2010 *continued*

Given that Cambridge Pre-U is a new qualification, the first application cycle has been remarkably smooth, with the main issues arising from an initial unfamiliarity with the grading scale. In almost all such cases, contact with the admissions office led to a revision of the initial offer.

Oxford University made it clear well in advance that it would not be using A\*, and indeed most offers have been based on three As or D3s.

Cambridge offers have been much more mixed, reflecting the decision to use a mixture of A\* and A at A Level, which has translated into a mixture of D2 and D3 at Cambridge Pre-U. In some cases, offers including two A\*s or two D2s have been made. In these cases, it is important to stress that the college concerned fully expects the applicants concerned to meet the offer – the bar isn't being set prohibitively high.

The examples of offers made for History reflect that subject's popularity in the selecting universities, but also show the very straightforward way in which the Cambridge Pre-U grading scale has been accommodated in offers.

### Sample offers from selective universities

University	Course	Standard A Level Offer	Cambridge Pre-U offer 2010
Birmingham	Geography	A/B/B	D3 / M2 / B
Bristol	Social Policy	A/B/C - B/B/B	A/B/M3 – B/B/M2
Cambridge	Natural Science	A*/A/A	A*/D3/D3
Leeds	Music	A/B/B	D3/B/B
Liverpool	Environment and Planning	B/B/C	B/B/M3
Manchester	Philosophy and Politics	A/A/B	D3/A/B
Newcastle	Economics	A/A/B	A/A/M2
Nottingham	Geography	A/A/B	D3/A/B
Oxford	Medicine	A/A/A	A/A/D3
Sheffield	Law	A/A/A	D3/D3/A
Warwick	Chemistry	A/B/B	D3/M2/B

### Sample offers from History Departments

University	Standard A Level Offer	Cambridge Pre-U offer 2010
Cambridge	A*/A/A	A*/A/D3 or D2/A/A
Manchester	Grades A/A/A – A/A/B	A/A/D3
Oxford	A/A/A	A/D3/D3
Southampton	A/A/B	D3/A/B
UCL	A*/A/A – A/A/A	D3/A/A
Warwick	A/A/B + AS level C	D3/A/B
Durham	A/A/A	D3/A/A
York	A/A/A	D3/A/A

## Developing a Cambridge Pre-U Mathematics Short Course

Many schools have asked us to add a Mathematics Short Course to the suite of subjects available at Cambridge Pre-U. The course will be particularly beneficial for students who wish to study subjects that have a mathematical or statistical component at university, including Economics and Psychology, but who do not want to take Cambridge Pre-U or A Level Pure Mathematics.

During 2009 we consulted with schools, universities and the Mathematics Association, about the development of the new short course. We received a great deal of very helpful feedback, which has been invaluable during the development process.

CIE Mathematics specialist, Eleanor Pippard, said: 'The consultation process has now been completed. Draft syllabuses and

specimen papers have been sent out, and they will shortly be submitted to QCDA for accreditation. We are also producing mapping documents to show how the content compares with the current AS/A2 Mathematics units.

“ This is a good preparation for the mathematical and statistical aspects of degrees in Biology/ Zoology/ Genetics etc. ”

*University of Nottingham.*

'Once the Short Course has received accreditation, we will publish the syllabus and specimen papers and produce teaching resources to aid teachers with the delivery of the statistics section in particular.'

Schools have indicated that the Cambridge Pre-U Short Course in

Mathematics would be taught over one or two years. Teaching the course over two years will enable learners who wish to transfer out of Pure Mathematics at the end of Year 1 to complete the statistics paper in Year 2 and receive the Short Course award.

The Cambridge Pre-U Mathematics Short Course will be available for teaching in 2011, with the first examination in 2012.

The very successful Cambridge Pre-U Short Courses in Modern Languages including Spanish and Mandarin Chinese, are also available for students who do not wish to take a two-year language course.

For more information, please contact us at

**international@cie.org.uk** or telephone +44 1223 553554.



## North American recognition increasing rapidly

In the last 12 months, we've added 260 new entries to our online recognition database for Cambridge international qualifications – more than half of these are for Cambridge Pre-U.

Recognition has grown very quickly in the USA and Canada, with top universities opening their doors to Cambridge Pre-U students; many are also offering advanced standing.

Harvard will consider applications from students with Cambridge Pre-U examination results according to their merits and is in the process of reviewing what academic credit might be awarded for particular Cambridge Pre-U grades.

On the basis of high scores in selected Principal Subjects, Yale University may enrol Cambridge Pre-U students in advanced courses in the freshman year.

At the University of Michigan, Cambridge Pre-U Principal Subjects with grades of Distinction 1, 2, 3, Merit 1, 2, 3 and Pass 1 will be considered for advanced standing credit in appropriate courses except for engineering applicants, who would be required to present grades of Merit 1 to Distinction 3.

Duke University accepts Cambridge Pre-U for entry to undergraduate courses. A student presenting with grades of Merit 3 or higher in acceptable subjects would

be eligible to receive International Placement Credit (IPC), up to the defined limit of two such IPC credits.

Rice University will award transfer credits to Cambridge Pre-U students who earn a grade of Merit or better in appropriate Principal Subjects.

Similar recognition has been gained from Canadian universities. At the University of Toronto, Cambridge Pre-U students who have completed Principal Subjects may be eligible

for transfer credit if admitted to arts, science or business programmes.

At McGill University, a grade of Merit 3 will be the minimum required for admissions and advanced standing consideration, subject to faculty policy. The actual competitive admission standard for most McGill programs is higher.

Find out more about our online recognition database at [www.cie.org.uk/recognition](http://www.cie.org.uk/recognition).



## Countdown to Summer 2010: Securing the Cambridge Pre-U standard

We have enjoyed hearing success stories from teachers and learners who are discovering the benefits of Cambridge Pre-U during the first teaching cycle.

Cambridge Pre-U is an exciting and stimulating qualification. Teachers frequently tell us how much learners welcome the opportunity to study a course in depth and enjoy making connections between topics. We believe that the linear nature of the course is central to this enjoyment and that assessment at the end of the course gives an accurate assessment of students' achievement over two years.

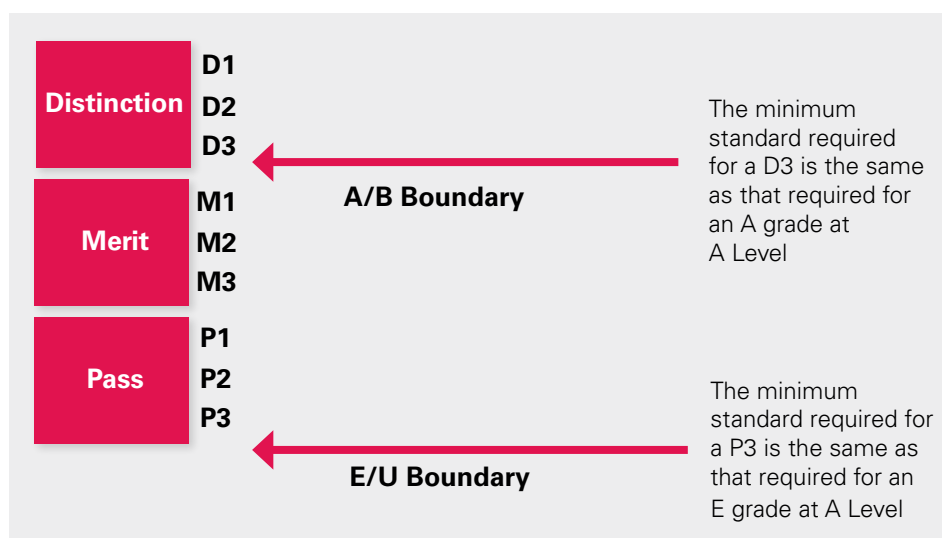
### Setting the standard

During the development of Cambridge Pre-U, we have worked with the regulator (QCA, now Ofqual), schools and universities around the country to define and exemplify the Cambridge Pre-U standard, subject by subject. This work has been underpinned by two key guiding principles: that Cambridge Pre-U exists in a defined relationship to A Level, and that it is accessible to all who currently achieve a pass at A Level.

Cambridge Pre-U syllabuses and examinations are designed, evaluated and independently vetted by people who know the A Level standard,

to assess the full range of student ability across two years of study. Cambridge Pre-U is benchmarked to A Level at the A/B boundary and the

E/U boundary; but also sets a new standard at Distinction 1 (the highest Distinction grade), which recognises performance above A\* at A Level.



“Students are not limited by restricted short answer questions.

One of our big success stories has been those students who are not natural high flyers. They have enjoyed being able to study a subject and grow into it gradually.

Now I don't rely on teachers as much to tell me what poems are about... because I can work it out for myself.”

### Exemplifying the standard

CIE Director of Education, Dr Kevin Stannard, has been instrumental in the development of Cambridge Pre-U. He said: 'One of the most exciting parts of the development of Cambridge Pre-U has been working with schools and universities to build a shared understanding of the Cambridge Pre-U standard – of what constitutes Distinction, Merit and Pass.'

The process of exemplifying the standard has been consultative and inclusive. After creating grade descriptors for each subject, we published and trialled specimen papers and mark schemes to enable teachers to develop their own understanding of the standard required to achieve a specific grade. This work has been supported by INSET for Cambridge Pre-U teachers.

Most schools took the opportunity to use interim assessments to measure their own understanding of the Cambridge Pre-U standard. Question papers, originally made available in 2009, were offered across the range of subjects as a way of monitoring students at the half-way point before the first live examination in June 2010. The results were moderated by CIE as a further check that all concerned had a good 'feel' for the standard set.

Examiner reports on the interim assessments were created for each school that took part. The reports commented on:

- The main characteristics of students' performance
- the marking criteria
- the rank ordering of students as submitted by teachers

Evidence obtained from the 2009 Cambridge Pre-U Short Course results demonstrated that teachers involved in these early days of Cambridge

Pre-U are definitely on the right track in terms of developing appropriate knowledge, motivation and skills in students who wish to go to university. The grade distribution confirmed that the methods used in calibrating to A Level had been successful, while the quality of work at the very top clearly indicated that the examination had stretched the most able.

### Preparing for the first examinations

The build-up to the first assessments for Cambridge Pre-U Principal Subjects has been a busy period. We follow the same pre-examination procedures for all Cambridge international qualifications, including Cambridge IGCSE and International A Level.

Cambridge Pre-U question papers for the June 2010 examinations have been developed, evaluated and vetted by examiners who understand the UK A Level standard.

We have designed the mark schemes to maintain accessibility across the ability range, as well as building in stretch at the top end.

Briefing meetings for Principal Examiners are scheduled in late April and early May, to ensure that everyone involved with marking and grading these first examinations is familiar with the approach to be used in setting the standard across all Cambridge Pre-U subjects.

We are confident that students will have ample opportunity to perform to the best of their abilities in the June 2010 examination session, and that the results will accurately and reliably reflect those abilities.

### Marking and awarding grades

Cambridge Pre-U schools, teachers and students have been working for two years towards the first Cambridge Pre-U Principal Subject examinations in summer 2010. Many more schools are ready to offer Cambridge Pre-U and are awaiting the results with keen interest.

We aim to ensure that all schools are well informed about what happens once the exams are finished and students' work is sent to us to be marked.



CIE follows rigorous processes that enable us to maintain internationally benchmarked standards for a wide range of qualifications in 160 countries. We take pride in the fact that the quality of our assessments is trusted worldwide and has been for more than 150 years. Not only do we produce our own examinations, but we also benchmark and validate the national examination systems of several other countries.

There are three stages to the process for marking and awarding of grades:

- standardisation and marking
- awarding of grades
- review.

#### *Standardisation and marking*

Marking is carried out by examiners who are teachers and subject experts with substantial experience of UK A Level standards. The examiners are trained before any marking begins: a standardisation meeting is held for each examination paper and participation is compulsory for all examiners.

The purpose of the meeting is to ensure that the mark scheme for the paper is clear and fully appropriate, and that all the examiners share the same understanding of it. Before the meeting the Principal Examiner will have selected a range of the candidates' answer scripts. These are copied for examiners to read in preparation for the meeting. The Principal Examiner leads the standardisation meeting, where each of the sample scripts considered by the examiners are discussed in detail and the marks agreed. At the end of the meeting, the mark scheme will be updated in light of the discussions.

After the meeting, examiners will send the first few scripts they mark to the Principal Examiner so that he or she can check and confirm that they are applying the agreed mark scheme correctly.

The Principal Examiner leads the marking of each paper and maintains quality assurance of the work of the whole marking team throughout the process.

#### *Awarding of grades*

Decisions about awarding grades are made by an Awarding Committee for each subject.

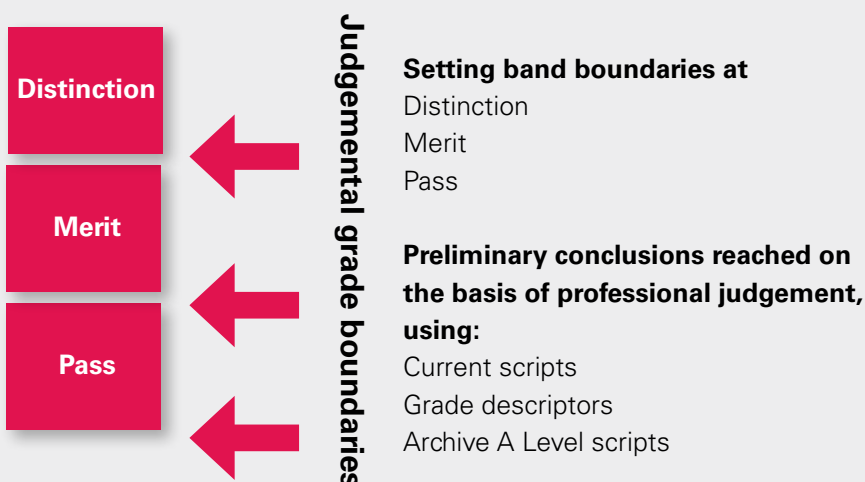
The first step in the awarding of grades for Principal Subjects is to make provisional decisions about the boundaries between the Distinction, Merit and Pass bands at the level of each of the papers that make up the whole subject examination.

These boundaries represent preliminary conclusions reached on the basis of evidence from the students' examination papers, the published grade descriptors for the subject and A Level examination scripts in the same subject that were archived in 2009.

For example, when setting the Pass 3 boundary, the Awarding Committee will look at the Cambridge Pre-U answer scripts and archived A Level scripts that were judged to be just good enough to be awarded an E grade, and through discussion, will reach a consensus about the mark needed in the Cambridge Pre-U paper to demonstrate a similar standard. This requires professional judgement and is a painstaking process. The same process happens for Merit 3 (compared with C grade scripts) and Distinction 3 (compared with A grade scripts).

These preliminary conclusions are put together and carried forward to grading at syllabus level, when the band boundaries set earlier between Distinction, Merit and Pass are checked. The remaining grade boundaries are then set arithmetically. The resulting grade distribution is then 'sense-checked' against the outcomes that might have been predicted, using data about the candidates who have taken these examinations.

## Grading Principal Subject 1: Components (individual papers)



These data will include:

- forecast grades
- past performance (e.g. in GCSE examinations)
- performance in other Cambridge Pre-U Principal Subjects
- the subject grade distribution of the schools themselves in GCE A Levels in previous years.

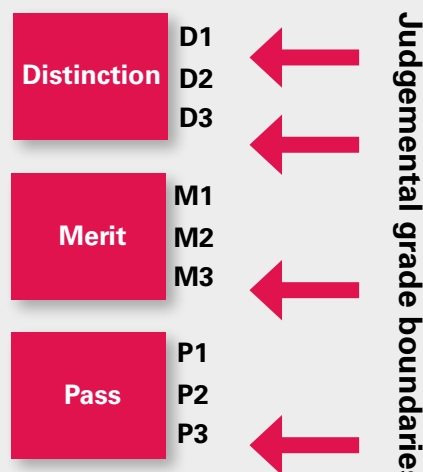
We use the judgement and experience of the Awarding Committee, guided by the Principal Examiner and backed by contextual data, to benchmark Cambridge Pre-U grades to UK A Level grades. It is an iterative process: if questions arise at the syllabus grading stage, the committee returns to review the work done by candidates in individual papers, since this is the most important evidence to be considered.

When the grade thresholds have been agreed for all grades from Distinction 2 to Pass 3, the committee examines the work of students with marks above Distinction 2, to decide on the Distinction 1 threshold. Distinction 1 will be awarded only to candidates whose examination scripts show evidence of outstanding performance.

#### Review

If a student has a mark very close to a grade boundary, and there is a possibility that they might be awarded the wrong grade, the marking of their scripts will be reviewed to make sure that the grade is accurate.

## Grading Principal Subject 2: Syllabus



Component band boundaries are weighted, added and carried forward.

Judgemental check on band boundaries - checking the fairness of the outcome against scripts, contextual evidence and the A Level standard.

Once judgemental grade boundaries are set, other grade boundaries are arrived at arithmetically.

Distinction 1 set on the basis of outstanding performance.

#### Publication of results

Cambridge Pre-U Principal Subject results will be published at the same time as UK A Level results. Schools will receive the results as bands (Distinction, Merit, Pass) for each paper or component. Candidates will receive their results as grades (Distinction 1, Distinction 2 etc) for each subject, and will be issued with a statement of results and a certificate. Diploma candidates will be issued with their Diploma certificate once results (including those from other awarding bodies) have been confirmed.

Where a candidate misses a conditional offer by a grade, information will be made available

to universities on request, so that the university can see how close the candidate came to achieving the required grade. A priority review of marking service will be available to those whose university places are at stake, in exactly the same way as for A Levels.

Kevin Stannard said: 'For us, the summer exam season will be culmination of several years' hard work to develop, launch and secure Cambridge Pre-U – the award in 2010 will be the end of the first cycle, but just the beginning for this exciting new qualification – one that is designed to develop thinking, motivated students who will be successful at university.'