

## CIE - Fact or Fiction

From time to time, statements are made publicly by people who seek to discredit CIE. These are usually based on inadequate knowledge of CIE or on cases of individual students. This Information Sheet addresses some of the common misconceptions made.

### 1. CIE are 'UK qualifications' and are thus inappropriate for NZ students!

Like IB, CIE is an international examination. One has its headquarters in the UK, the other in Switzerland. Both are intended for use worldwide rather than the country in which they are domiciled. Hence the location of the headquarters is not a specific influence.

A common misconception is that the CIE and the UK systems are 'the same'. In fact, they are significantly different in many respects. Comments in the UK media such as '*A Levels are becoming too easy*' do not apply to CIE. Indeed, CIE is generally accepted as a more rigorous qualification and this has recently led to an increasing number of UK schools preferring to offer CIE. The following extract about IGCSE is from Dulwich College's web site: '*It is an examination which IS ...recognized by every university in the world, is often more exacting than the British standard and is being taken by an increasing number of schools which find the current standard not demanding enough for their pupils.*'

Both UK and CIE A Levels consist of AS and A2 courses. However, in the UK each of these levels is made up of several modules (equating to the papers involved). UK students may resit modules instead of a full set of AS or A2 papers (as required by CIE). CIE courses usually have a wider course content at AS level than their UK equivalent, with greater 'in depth' work at A2 level.

### 2. NZ students should be studying courses written for NZ students!

CIE syllabi are designed for the international market, not the UK. There are, of course, some subjects that are essentially 'international' and course content varies little, irrespective of the country or the qualification system. Subjects such as Mathematics and Physics fall into this category.

In a subject such as English, many of the literary works studied have long been accepted as part of the heritage of the English-speaking world and, as such, are worthy of such study in any country. There is also now a desire to include indigenous literature in such study. CIE has responded to this by the inclusion of NZ works. Katherine Mansfield's work is already included, while a recently published CIE anthology includes the works of four NZ poets.

Subjects such as Geography and Art provide opportunities for using of local examples and works as part of the course.

CIE also permits courses to be developed specially to meet NZ requirements. NZ History is an AS course that can be taken alongside other course options in History. Such courses are developed, examined and marked in NZ while course approval and moderation is carried out by CIE.

### 3. CIE is a norm-referenced qualification - standards-based qualifications are now more appropriate!

CIE is **not** norm-referenced - it is in fact a standards-based qualification. At AS and A level it is based on a six grade system (A-E and Ungraded), as against NCEA which has four grades (IGCSE has nine grades). Standards are maintained by the use of experienced examining panels while statistical processes ensure comparative standards are maintained in grades set, both between subjects and within a subject.

#### **4. CIE is a 'third world' qualification!**

The University of Cambridge has offered international examinations for more than 150 years. Originally these were in response to the needs of those from the UK who were living and working in other parts of the world, particularly as the British Empire spread across Asia and Africa. As the government in many of these countries shifted to the local people, it was not surprising that many countries preferred to adopt an established system rather than set up their own. To suggest that it is a 'third world qualification' is selective and ignores the fact that there are many progressive countries that use CIE. In some cases, such as Singapore, the Ministry of Education has adopted CIE as the country's national qualifications system.

#### **5. CIE is 'pushing' to get into the NZ market to boost its funds!**

CIE has a policy of not advertising or promoting its examinations. It is also a 'not for profit' organization. The number of students taking CIE qualifications in NZ has led CIE to appoint a local representative to provide support. His work is to support existing CIE schools and to provide information to schools seeking a possible relationship. Recruitment of new schools is not undertaken.

#### **6. CIE schools are concerned about league tables and promoting themselves and hence prefer (old-fashioned) examinations rather than on-going assessment!**

Judgements about league tables and schools promoting themselves are not confined to any group of schools. Regular news about NCEA successes testifies to the fact that all schools are concerned about how their students perform (and should be performing). Results also provide a source of comparative feedback to schools - not just between schools but also from year to year within a school.

To suggest that schools have taken up CIE for snobbish reasons is both demeaning and incorrect. The primary focus for any school should be on the needs of its students and on improving their achievement. CIE schools are no different to others in this respect - they have simply made a different decision about the qualification they believe is most appropriate for their students. Many CIE schools report higher levels of motivation and improved work attitudes.

#### **7. CIE is only about external written examinations!**

While 'end of course, written, external examinations' are standard in most CIE subjects, they are not the only form of assessment. Practical examinations are common in science subjects, while internally assessed work is also included in some. Other forms of assessment include portfolios (assessed externally), while speaking and oral tests are standard in foreign language assessment. CIE has a strong commitment to electronic support of teachers and students and it is currently looking at forms of electronic marking and examining. It continues to put considerable resources towards the use of technology in improving the delivery and assessment of its courses.

#### **8. CIE qualifications are not recognized overseas!**

CIE qualifications are accepted worldwide on the same basis as UK ones. The Universities and Colleges Admission Service (UCAS) in the UK has ruled that CIE qualifications should be accepted on an equal basis with UK qualifications. Similar standards apply in other countries, including Australia.

In New Zealand, university entrance standards have been set for CIE. While some initial problems occurred, these were related to a new and unfamiliar qualification and have now been resolved.

*These notes are published by the Association of Cambridge Schools in New Zealand (Inc). The ACSNZ web site [www.acsnz.org.nz](http://www.acsnz.org.nz) provides further information about CIE in New Zealand.*