

# Ready to take on the world

## *A research perspective*

Cambridge programmes are an excellent foundation for university study, as some recent research confirms

**C**ambridge's priority is to ensure that our programmes prepare students well for future study. So we regularly conduct research to check that they do just that.

One recent study, carried out by researchers Stuart Shaw and Magda Werno, delved into the experiences of students at Florida State University (FSU) in the USA\*. All of the students in the study had completed Cambridge qualifications, and were at various points in their university journey. Broadly speaking, the research found that the students believed that their Cambridge education had helped them to develop a range of skills and learning attitudes that were useful for university. But how had it done that, and what else did the research find?

### **The study**

The participants were 104 FSU students with Cambridge programme credits. They were aged between 17 and 22, and came from a range of degree courses and year groups. A senior member of the FSU admissions team sent potential participants an online questionnaire, which provided a framework for evaluating the impact of the Cambridge high school programme on university readiness.

### **The findings**

Most of the participants (83 per cent) said they had had a choice in opting for a Cambridge programme at school. The most prominent reasons for their choices related to the rigorous and challenging nature of the curriculum; flexibility of the Cambridge programme and the broad range of subjects offered; gaining college credits; and obtaining qualifications recognised by universities in the USA and beyond.

The students said they had developed a number of important skills throughout their Cambridge programmes which are useful for university study:

- writing skills and critical thinking, analysis, and evaluation skills
- time management and note-taking skills and the ability to study independently
- perseverance and the ability to work under pressure.

### **Academic rigour**

Cambridge regularly conducts research to ensure programmes prepare students for university



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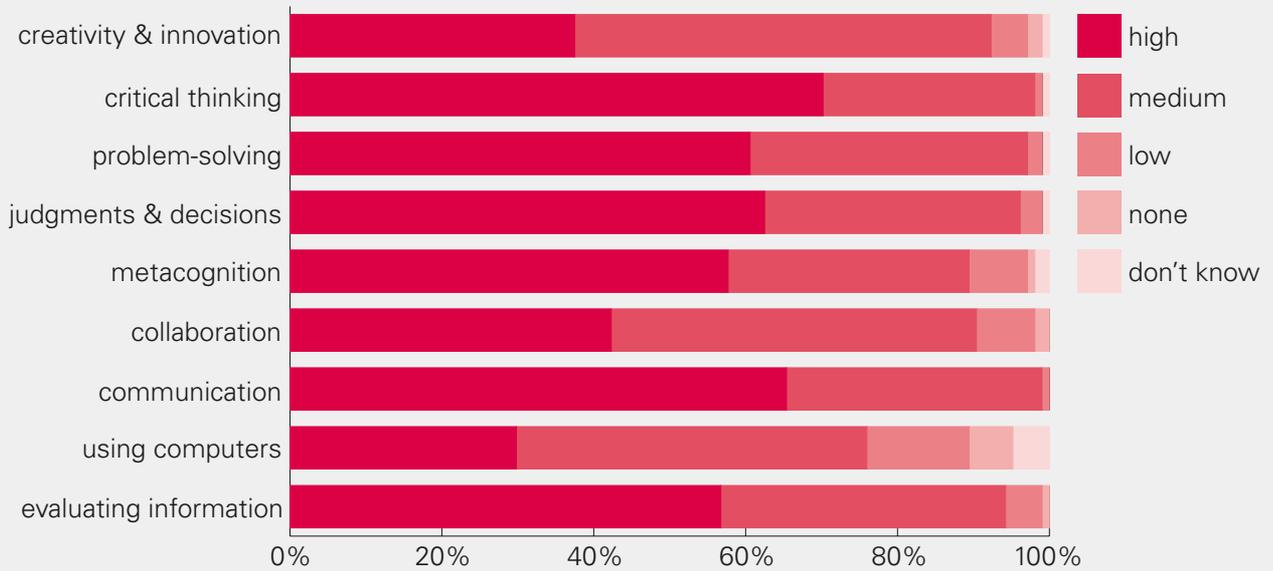
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\*For full details of this study please refer to Shaw, S. D. & Werno, M. (2016). Preparing for College Success: exploring the impact of the high school Cambridge acceleration program on US university students. *College & University: Educating the Modern Higher Education Administration Professional* Vol. 91, No. 3 (Fall 2016)

### Skills gained at school

How students in the study rated their skill levels after completing Cambridge programmes



We wanted to gain a better understanding of the students' perceived areas of strength and weakness at the point of entering university. So we asked them to rate their skills upon completion of their Cambridge programmes (see graph, above).

Students appeared very confident in critical thinking, communicating clearly and logically, making judgments and decisions, problem solving, and evaluating different sources of information.

Students were also asked to reflect on the main differences between the Cambridge programme and university. In particular, we asked them to compare expectations in school and university regarding workload, subject knowledge and understanding, tutor expectations, lesson format, and ways of learning. The greatest differences related to tutor expectations and lesson format.

Finally, we asked the students to tell us how interesting, challenging, and stimulating the Cambridge programme was. Overall, more than 90 students in each category said that the programme was 'very' or 'quite'



Students appeared very confident in critical thinking, communicating clearly, making decisions, problem solving and evaluating information

### My university journey

**Name:** Sara Janssens

**Age:** 17

**From:** South Africa

**Studying:** Cambridge International AS Levels at International School of Cape Town, South Africa



**I would like** my career to take me somewhere in the health or medical industry – ideally a researcher somewhere in the field of neurobiology. So after I complete my Cambridge International A Levels, I would like to study medicine or neurobiology.

I have my heart set on the University of St Andrews in the UK. This summer I was there for their International Summer Programme, where I did science. I love the feel of the university and all the lectures so far have been incredible.

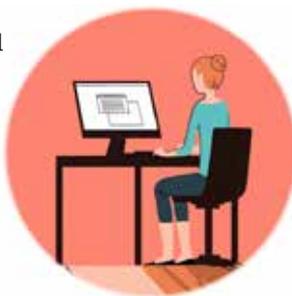
I think going to university, especially overseas, requires a great emotional as well as academic maturity. On the academic side I feel well prepared, as I am used to doing my own research if I do not understand something and know that hard work is required to reach any goal. Emotionally, I think the only way to prepare is to actually go and experience it for yourself.

interesting, challenging and stimulating (see graphic, below).

In terms of the Cambridge examinations themselves, again an overwhelming majority of students considered the Cambridge programme to be either 'very' or 'quite' effective

- in equipping them with the knowledge needed for the Cambridge exams
- in teaching them the skills they required for their Cambridge exams
- in preparing them for Cambridge exams.

Students reported that teaching quality was an important factor in influencing their attitudes towards particular subjects. A number of students commented on the very high level of teaching on the Cambridge programme, and singled out important contributions made by specific teachers.



### Conclusions

The Cambridge programme allows students to develop a range of skills and learning attitudes that help them adjust to many of the demands of university.

Most of the participants in our study said they found at least some aspects of the transition from school to university difficult. These included increased coursework, limited support from college tutors, the need to study independently, and problems with concentration and motivation.

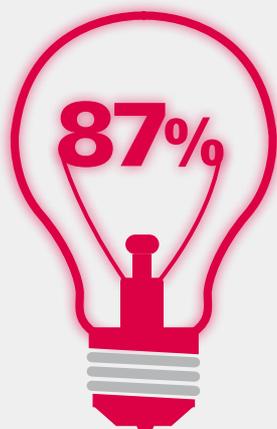
The findings of this study provide important insights into the impact of the Cambridge programme on students' transition to higher education. According to the perceptions, opinions and experiences of students who participated in this study, the Cambridge programme is good preparation for college study, helping students develop academic skills and attitudes that are important to succeed in subsequent stages of education. ▀



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### What students thought of Cambridge programmes

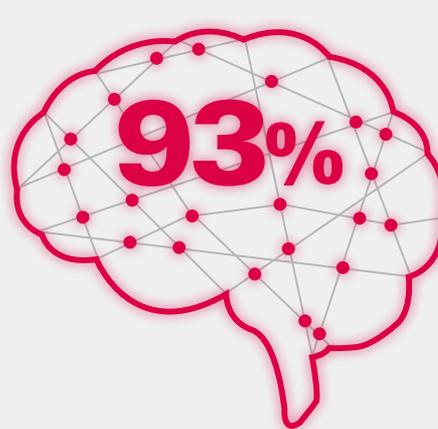
Percentage of students in the study who said that they found Cambridge programmes 'very' or 'quite' interesting, challenging and stimulating



Interesting



Challenging



Stimulating