Disruption to school examinations in our past

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In the 162-year history of Cambridge Assessment, the examination cancellations of 2020 were unprecedented. However, disruption of some kind to school examinations is not a new phenomenon, and many of the challenges brought by COVID-19 echo those we have faced in the past. By exploring and analysing historical events, as we have done on previous occasions (Cooke, 2020; Elliott, 2011; Newton, 2011) we can review lessons learned and shed light on perspectives to current issues.

Here, through a study of Cambridge Assessment Archives, we consider five events in our history which have affected our organisation. The two World Wars clearly loom particularly large, but our operations were also affected by partition in India in 1947 and the strikes in the United Kingdom (UK) of the 1970s. The fifth has possibly the most resonance with events of 2020—the flu pandemic of 1918.

Cambridge Assessment was set up as the "Local Examinations Syndicate" (henceforth Cambridge Syndicate), an outreach department of the University of Cambridge. At a time when children's education was neither compulsory nor widespread, the introduction of the Cambridge "Local Examinations" represented a specific move in England to meet demands from aspiring professionals seeking a benchmark for end-of-school attainment levels. The exams were managed by an executive committee of Syndicates, and they quickly expanded to include candidates from overseas. During the 20th century, these modest end-of-school assessments grew to become a mainstay of society, with a global reach into all areas of educational assessment. Further details are available in Raban (2008).

By 1914, end-of-school examinations had become more widespread and the Cambridge Syndicate was one of several UK exam boards. Despite its name, the "Cambridge Locals" were offered to candidates at centres in the UK and overseas. The centres were the locations (usually schools) which were approved to hold the examinations, and those held overseas were beginning to attract candidates other than those with a UK connection.

We shall begin by providing short descriptions of these events in relation to our organisation and outline the resources we have drawn on from the corporate archives. In the second part of this article, we look thematically across the events and explore the decisions and actions taken. Finally, we conclude by examining whether we can apply any lessons from these previous events to the current situation.

It should be borne in mind that we have resisted speculating too far beyond the information presented. Realistically, what was noted in the historical documents cited cannot be the full picture of any event; there will have been other actions and viewpoints either unrecorded or recorded elsewhere. In the same way, we could use multiple additional historical sources to attempt to contextualise each nugget of information, but this is clearly beyond the scope of this piece. We have intentionally targeted our inspection of documents to those concerning times of significant disruption and we intend that, by doing so, we will provide a certain amount of historical perspective to the current

situation from the viewpoint of one organisation.

The events

First World War

By 1914, the Cambridge Syndicate was an established organisation with annual candidate entries of around 24,000 and examinations were held at around 350 "local" centres worldwide. The main examinations session was in December and the most immediate impact of the war was the loss of staff, as many rushed to join the armed forces in autumn 1914, some of whom did not return. Other disruptions followed swiftly when bombardments from the sea at West Hartlepool, Scarborough and Whitby interrupted the examinations that December and, the following year, examination documentation bound for Jamaica was lost when the aptly named steamer *The Candidate* was torpedoed. The Annual Reports record long delays in the awarding process but, despite earlier events, the only direct loss of candidates' work was a batch of Higher Examination scripts which were on a ship lost off the Indian coast in June 1917.

Flu pandemic

The flu pandemic was a global catastrophe whose impact is often overshadowed by the First World War. Between March 1918 and March 1920, it claimed more than 50 million lives worldwide—over 200,000 in the UK, and most of them young. There was no governmental or co-ordinated national response in Britain and no National Health Service to treat patients, many of whom died just hours after becoming ill. Coming as it did, at the end of the First World War, the pandemic added to mounting exhaustion and financial distress, and the Cambridge Syndicate minutes reflect this, recording a heated discussion about the management of two centres which had been forced to close. In the end, four centres closed completely and overall candidate numbers dropped by 10 per cent.

Second World War

The impact of the Second World War on the lives of civilians was unprecedented and this is the most documented of all the disruptions faced by the organisation. War measures were introduced straightaway from 1940: the July overseas examinations were discontinued, and the "Junior Exams" withdrawn from the UK. Significantly, the Cambridge Syndicate also moved swiftly to continue its operations with reduced staffing. The legacy of the Cambridge Syndicate from this period comes from two areas, although the second of these only came to light after the war had ended. At home, "Special Circumstances" forms record examinations held during civilian bombing raids, while overseas, specially drafted examination regulations tell of unscheduled examinations held during hostilities for prisoners of war in internment camps.

Partition of India

Following the Indian Independence Act of 1947, the British Raj governance structure dissolved, and the former British India was separated into the two dominion states of India and Pakistan. The Cambridge Syndicate served candidates within and across the

two states. Partition was accompanied by a huge amount of local violence and the displacement of students along religious lines, so the Cambridge Syndicate had to make rapid changes to practical arrangements such as the despatch, transport and marking of scripts, and adjust the governance structure of the examinations to take account of the changing political landscape. Candidates who had been displaced were traced, new centres established and new Local Secretaries (responsible for groups of centres) were appointed where needed.

Strikes of the 1970s

By 1971, the total number of entries to the Cambridge Syndicate's examinations was over 430,000, over half of whom were candidates in East Africa, India, Malaysia and the Caribbean who mostly took examinations in November. That year, there was a national postal strike in the UK for seven weeks from January to March and the awarding process of the examinations under these conditions presented a major challenge. From 1972 to 1974, waves of power cuts affected the UK and inflation became a dominating concern. Devaluation of the pound in 1973 caused costs to spiral and the organisation battled to keep afloat, suffering six years of deficit in one decade.

Impacts of the events and historical context

In the following section, we look across the events and explore the decisions and actions taken, under five separate themes:

1. Organisational adaptability: Business as usual versus emergency measures.
2. Financial impacts: Costs, cost-cutting and unforeseen expenses.
3. Principles: The quest to uphold standards.
4. Support for candidates and staff.
5. Business practice: Short-term measures, aftermath and long-term changes.

The need to carry on as before was an overriding philosophy which had particular resonance during wartime. To bow to disruption caused by an enemy of the state would have demonstrated weakness so, as a result, a stoic attitude to all walks of life, including the running of school examinations, prevailed and became normalised throughout much of this period. By the standards of today, the confrontations and pursuit of examinations among the death and horror of the pandemic and Indian partition appear callous, but the attitudes of the time were set by war. Support for candidates, staff and examiners at these times appears to be similarly thin. By comparison, the strike and utility disruptions of the 1970s had none of the human tragedy but nevertheless elicited a sympathetic response from the Cambridge Syndicate, indicative of changing times.

The need for both to remain solvent and to uphold examination standards are more recognisable to readers today. Quite simply, without reference to standards, the examinations would have lost value and it is noteworthy that the "lesser" disruption of the 1970s includes the most reference to costs.

Although the examinations have survived since 1858, there have been many changes since then and it would be naïve to attribute expansion overseas and increasing nationalisation

of UK examinations to tumultuous events in history. The fact is, however, that whatever the impact of these events, they did not stall progress and development, and may even have acted as a stimulant.

1. Panic actions and business as usual

In spring 1917, the Cambridge Syndicate voted to accept a single German candidate entry for the Certificate of Proficiency Exam and "to carry on as before". This "business as usual" approach was demonstrated a few weeks later when a conference of Head Masters discussed curriculum changes, including the re-introduction of Domestic Science to the curriculum, "useful for girls who wished to be teachers", and whether novels were "good enough as subjects for examination" for boys.

War measures were, nevertheless, introduced; the Cambridge Syndicate appealed to retain staff in 1916 and began to waive late entry fees and consider the practicalities of making carbon copies of candidates' scripts in 1917. Reflecting the stoicism that was popular at the time, the Annual Reports indicate little disruption—the 1917 Annual Report declared that "during the War the number of candidates entered for the Local Examinations has been well maintained". Less so the following year, when exams had to be abandoned in some centres in Asia and Africa. Delays were common and expected; most notable were the December 1915 scripts from Lagos and the Gold Coast which took 22 months to reach Cambridge, via the USA!

Before the Armistice in 1918, the pandemic had begun, but it is not referenced in the Cambridge Syndicate minutes until it peaked in October, where the second of the two long references, entitled "Influenza over again" suggests it was a topic exhausted in conversation. The initial entry is emotive: "Whole centres shut down. Return fees en bloc. This is a precedent". The minute secretary noted "sharply contrasted views" and, below the second entry, took the unusual step of scribbling "Temper of meeting most unsatisfactory". This was clearly not business as usual, yet the December exams session did go ahead with 90 per cent of candidates in attendance.

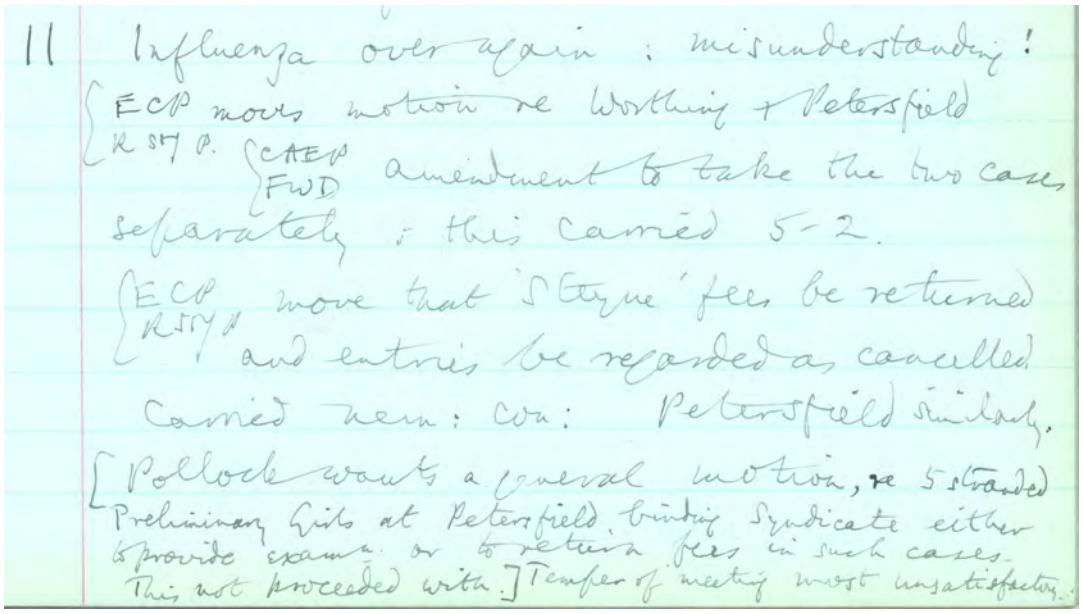

11 Influenza over again : misunderstanding!
ECP moves motion re Worthing + Petersfield
R STY P. CAEP FWD amendment to take the two cases
separately : this carried 5-2.
ECP move that 'Steyne' fees be returned
R STY P and entries be regarded as cancelled
Carried nem: con: Petersfield similarly.
Pollock wants a general motion, re 5 stranded
Preliminary Girls at Petersfield, binding Syndicate either
to provide exams or to return fees in such cases.
This not proceeded with.] Temper of meeting most unsatisfactory.

Figure 1: C/CB 1/2 Syndicate minutes 30 October 1918.

The early months of the Second World War are often referred to as the Phony War, characterised by uncertainty and a lack of military action. The abundance of documentation for this period includes a typescript memo entitled "Possible Emergency Arrangements" which outlines arrangements for evacuated schools in the event of an "international crisis". The Cambridge Syndicate sought to reassure centres and, the day following the outbreak of war, it wrote of its intention "to carry on … work in order to cause the minimum of disturbance to schools whether at home or overseas". With an acknowledgement to a previous era, the notice concludes with: "the situation will show whether it would be advisable to make duplicates of the December scripts before despatching them, as is believed to have been done in 1914–18". Over the following two years the Cambridge Syndicate discussed special regulations, special fees, emergency considerations and the appointment of fire watchers.

Centres affected directly by hostilities were encouraged to submit Special Circumstances reports to highlight candidates for special consideration and some of these still survive; they show that candidates whose homes were demolished, whose grandparents were killed, and who were fire-fighting all night, turned up to take exams the following morning and "showed a marked reluctance to single themselves out as undergoing special hardships" (Wintringham Secondary School, Grimsby). The examinations carried on as directed by the timetable; indeed, candidates at St James' Central School in Burnt Oak, Middlesex took their 1944 exams in an air raid shelter, with only four candidates singled out for special consideration, while candidates at Watford Central school "disregarded siren warnings" during exams and took shelter only when "danger imminent" signals were received.

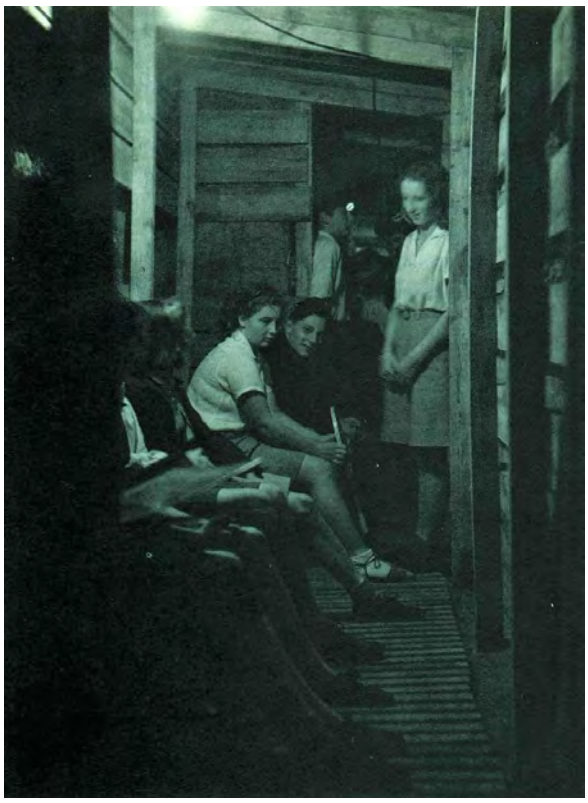


Figure 2: Bedales School air-raid shelter 1940. (Reproduced with kind permission of Bedales Archive.)

As with the previous war, the principal difficulties were transport delays, highlighted in the Annual Reports, which in 1942 record several overseas centres for which candidate scripts had not been received. 1946 marks a return to completed Annual Reports with a full breakdown of entries; it also includes a notification of the withdrawal of special allowances relating to war difficulties.

In similar vein, partition in India brought problems of transporting scripts, including frenzied efforts to secure alternative marking venues and the associated movement of the scripts to the new location. Difficulties were also noted about providing copies of texts, not least in tracking down the whereabouts of displaced publishers.

The Cambridge Syndicate minutes of January 1971 report that the impact of the strike in the UK was felt by over 4,000 examiners involved in post-examination work. Regional depots were set up in the UK, including one at the University of London Senate House, for examiners to deposit scripts for collection and transportation to Cambridge, and staff worked exceptional hours of overtime. The Cambridge Syndicate acknowledged the "arduous" task faced by its staff and examiners and noted with pride "the issue of the December exam results before Easter in spite of difficulties arising from circumstances beyond the Syndicate's control".

2. Costs and cost-cutting

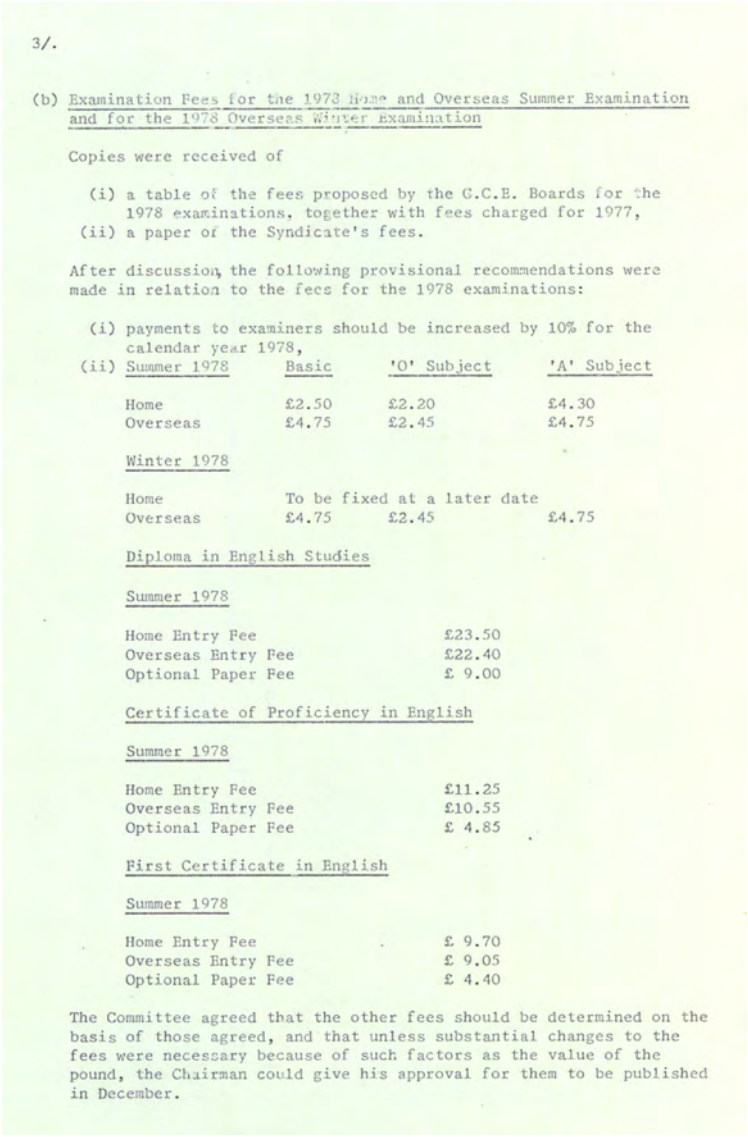
Crises are generally expensive and these disruptions to the examinations were no exception. In October 1915, the Cambridge Syndicate cited "disturbed financial conditions" to refuse a payment to a College, but cost-cutting measures were taken at

administrative level too; in 1917 it took a decision not to publish the examiners' reports, discussed sourcing cheaper envelopes, and began recording minutes on both sides of each page.

The issue of vouchers (which could be used to pay future examination fees) to centres where examinations had not taken place was normal practice, so references to refunds indicate unusual times; Asian and African centres received refunds due to the war in 1917, but the offer of refunds was clearly a contentious issue and sparked a furore when considered for UK centres affected by the flu pandemic. In the end, centres at Worthing and Petersfield received refunds while the centres at St Martin's in Scarborough and Barnard Castle were issued with vouchers, with the caveat that the Cambridge Syndicate was "open to more generous terms if [the] school [was] in difficulty".

The Cambridge Syndicate discussed issuing vouchers in lieu of examination fees for evacuees in May 1940, for use against the full amount for entry in December. For all their planning measures, it was still a period of great uncertainty, and the decision not to go ahead would have undoubtedly caused relief as the war dragged on.

It is a commonly held view that the early 1970s were lean times for the Cambridge Syndicate; Dr Frank Wild became Secretary in 1972 and at his first General Purposes Meeting, he introduced extensive cost-cutting measures, including accounting procedures and sales control, while a capital expenditure budget was also established under his watch. How much of this may have been influenced by raging inflation is unclear, but records for this period are testament to the rising costs; examination fees for UK and overseas candidates rose six times between 1973 and 1977, and in 1978 minutes show that fees paid to examiners were to be increased by 15 per cent from the following year.



3/.

(b) Examination Fees for the 1978 Home and Overseas Summer Examination and for the 1978 Overseas Winter Examination

Copies were received of

(i) a table of the fees proposed by the G.C.E. Boards for the 1978 examinations, together with fees charged for 1977,
(ii) a paper of the Syndicate's fees.

After discussion, the following provisional recommendations were made in relation to the fees for the 1978 examinations:

(i) payments to examiners should be increased by 10% for the calendar year 1978,

(ii)

Summer 1978	Basic	'O' Subject	'A' Subject
Home	£2.50	£2.20	£4.30
Overseas	£4.75	£2.45	£4.75
Winter 1978			
Home	To be fixed at a later date		
Overseas	£4.75	£2.45	£4.75

Diploma in English Studies

Summer 1978

Home Entry Fee	£23.50
Overseas Entry Fee	£22.40
Optional Paper Fee	£ 9.00

Certificate of Proficiency in English

Summer 1978

Home Entry Fee	£11.25
Overseas Entry Fee	£10.55
Optional Paper Fee	£ 4.85

First Certificate in English

Summer 1978

Home Entry Fee	£ 9.70
Overseas Entry Fee	£ 9.05
Optional Paper Fee	£ 4.40

The Committee agreed that the other fees should be determined on the basis of those agreed, and that unless substantial changes to the fees were necessary because of such factors as the value of the pound, the Chairman could give his approval for them to be published in December.

Figure 3: C/FGP/2/8 Finance and General Purposes Committee minute book 1974–1980.

3. Standards

Pressure to keep the exams running was matched by pressure to maintain examination standards. To alleviate difficulties schools experienced in obtaining suitable books, "alternative syllabus" arrangements were introduced in 1916, allowing centres to submit their own choices of syllabuses and set books of "suitable and of equivalent length and difficulty" for consideration by the Cambridge Syndicate. There is evidence too that the Cambridge Syndicate reached out to support schools in 1945 when the English syllabus was adapted to include texts that schools were more easily able to obtain.

In a more co-ordinated response "to minimise the effects of hardships", a notice was issued to schools in December 1939, outlining plans to create simpler and shorter question papers, with fewer compulsory questions, all with the aim of giving candidates a wider choice of questions. Schools were invited to submit reports before the examinations, outlining conditions of work during the year and indicating subjects in which candidates might be expected to reach a certain standard. It promised that the standard adopted by the Awarding Committee would "take full account of the standard in

a normal year and … pay attention to previous results of individual schools".

In October 1945, the Cambridge Syndicate received a bundle of documents from the Colonial Office. In it were marked candidate scripts, question papers, exam regulations and candidate results compiled by Harold Cheeseman, Examinations officer, relating to the examinations held in Sime Road Internment camp, Singapore, earlier that year. "It will mean a great deal to the candidates to get this recognition", wrote Cheeseman, adding in his accompanying letter that "it will mitigate the loss involved by the war and I have used the possibility of this recognition as an incentive not only to them but to the whole school. It has not been easy to keep up interest and effort".

Cheeseman, a pre-war Examinations officer, had set up a school at Sime Road camp, recruiting teachers and examiners. The arrangements for the examinations included details of the syllabus, centres and panel of examiners. "It was decided", explained Cheeseman, "to set and mark papers strictly in accordance with what were regarded as the normal requirements of the Syndicate". The first batch of scripts, for examinations set in January 1945, had unfortunately been destroyed, but the second, set in August, had survived and were sent to the Cambridge Syndicate for inspection. Despite obvious pressure, not least from Cheeseman and the intervention of the Colonial Office, the Cambridge Syndicate decided not to issue full certificates. Instead, based on inspection of the scripts available, it decided to issue special certificates to the candidates which stated the circumstances and standards reached "in those subjects for which it had been possible to classify results".

Outside of the context of war, an appeal from the Executive Office of Head Mistresses in November 1918 to recognise "the difficulty of schools with influenza during the present school year" persuaded the Cambridge Syndicate to allow the Secretary to "shew a slight degree of leniency [in the forthcoming examinations] with regard to the bare pass". However, a subsequent dip in standards seems to have been temporary; analysing the December 1918 examination session, the Cambridge Syndicate recorded a "general falling off of standards", but the standard of examinations the following summer session was considered "not unsatisfactory".

Standards were discussed in 1948, with regard to examinations in India, and a decision was made to raise the standard of examination in Indian languages from 1950, for both ordinary and higher level examinations. Ultimately, it was suggested, the standards would be aligned to the local matriculation or school leaving examination of the regions concerned. It was also noted that, for matriculation purposes, the standard in English Literature and Mathematics of the Cambridge Examinations was lower than the average local Indian Matriculation Examination. It was proposed that Indian universities would be consulted before any action was taken.

The postal strike of 1971 coincided with a major breach of security in the previous December examinations in East Africa, involving several groups of people in the region, as well as at the Cambridge Syndicate. This combination of difficulties would, according to the Annual Report, have "far reaching repercussions on the processing of results" and subsequent power cuts caused understandable concern for potential disruption to data processing work.

4. Supporting candidates and staff

War required not only cost-cutting exercises, but financial support, and several references to a "war bonus" during the First World War hint at a reliance people placed on it; it was raised twice in 1917 with warnings from the General Purposes Committee to "spend it wisely". A similarly stern approach was taken with appeals during the pandemic, all reflecting an era when the continuation of the exams was the primary concern, above practical logistics or the impact on individuals involved.

At the outset of the Second World War, staff welfare was addressed through the issue of an air raid precaution notice instructing staff to learn to use fire extinguishers, carry gas masks and keep office windows open so that they may hear the siren.

During the emergency in India, the Advisory Committee for Overseas Examinations' India and Pakistan sub-committee introduced measures designed to assist students. Fees for transferring centres were waived for the December 1947 session, and arrangements were approved to accept a new centre for Hindu and Sikh students on the same terms as the established college from which those students had been forced to leave. Also, as a consequence of events around Indian partition, the Cambridge Syndicate considered whether an extra session would need to be held in July 1948 to accommodate those students who had been unable to take examinations the previous December. Alongside the decision that this would not be necessary, is the note that one of the Committees would "approach the authorities in India with a view to securing that there should be no consequent hardship for University entrants".

Inflation in the 1970s caused sharp rises in candidate entry fees both in the UK and overseas throughout the decade, but there were also increases in examiner fees. The examiners who transported scripts to collection centres during the postal strike were granted double expenses, and, after the devaluation of the pound, additional payments were made to examiners in the UK. Staff and examiners who worked "exceptional hours" were warmly thanked in the 1971 Annual Report, and an acknowledgment was made to staff who worked "unusual hours" to dodge the power cuts in February 1972. The Cambridge Syndicate was clearly keen to express gratitude to staff at this time of financial hardship. By 1978, finances were stabilising; not enough to allow extra recruitment, but sufficient to drop the staff tea and coffee charges from 20 pence to "a nominal sum"!

5. Aftermath and long-term / radical changes

The shortage of suitable men to run the examinations after the First World War had a direct impact on the role of women. Not only did the regulations swiftly change to allow boys and girls to be examined in the same room, but an unprecedented motion to appoint a female presiding examiner was passed at a centre in 1916.

The most significant post-war change was the introduction of the first national examinations in 1917, when the School Certificate and Higher School Certificate replaced the old Cambridge Locals. The exams were similar in format to the Junior and Senior Locals, as certificate-based exams requiring candidates to take a range of subjects, but the introduction of these new Board of Education examinations marked the first step towards regulation of all UK school examinations.

Lack of references to the flu pandemic in the Annual Reports or Regulations could be because of its proximity to the First World War, but also due to its creeping prevalence; it was just too obvious to mention at the time. Certainly, although the impact on the exams was significant, it was relatively brief; contemporary references to "broken work" indicate an expectation of short-term disruption which, in the context of the First World War, seems not unreasonable. The records that do exist expose disunity in the Cambridge Syndicate, but the ensuing delay and inaction paid off and "normal" exam operations resumed in 1919.

At a meeting on 4 May 1944, the Cambridge Syndicate issued a statement to the President of the Board of Education: "The Syndicate consider that, before any proposal is adopted for the eventual abolition of the system of external examinations, further inquiry should be conducted into the need for so great a change". In the event, external exams were not abolished, but entered a new phase, with the introduction of the first single subject General Certificate of Education qualification six years after the end of the Second World War. But such a radical consideration, during a period of extreme upheaval, must have been deeply unsettling.

The 1941 Memorandum of Understanding with the British Council is largely credited with allowing the Cambridge Syndicate's English examinations to continue to be held at British Council premises throughout the Second World War. In 1939, there were 31 centres in Europe offering Cambridge English Exams and by 1946, despite the war, this had increased to 39. The Certificate of Proficiency in English was joined by the Lower Certificate in 1939 and the Diploma in English Studies in 1945 and candidate numbers swelled, thanks largely to entries from allied forces, including Italian and Polish prisoners of war. From just 199 candidates in 1938, the Cambridge Syndicate registered 11,258 candidates for Cambridge English Examinations in 1948.

The First Meeting of the Awarding Committee for Overseas Examinations was held on 26 February 1946; by then, Cambridge Local Examinations had been set for candidates overseas for 83 years and the first meetings dealt with several applications relating to examinations which had been held in internment camps during the war. But this newly constituted committee represented a formal move towards managing overseas examinations differently. Within 10 years it had become the Overseas Awarding Committee, from which the Council for International Examinations emerged, before the creation of an entirely separate business unit, what was to become Cambridge Assessment International Education, in 1998. This body oversaw the emergence of Local Regional Committees in the 1950s, localisation programmes in the 1960s, the development of regional departments in the 1980s and 1990s, and the establishment of Regional Offices in the 21st century.

The 1970s were testing times for the organisation—the Annual Report of 1976 references 57 theoretical studies of syllabuses and schemes of examination for proposed new examinations in "the fever for change". There is no doubt that the organisation was affected by the strikes and inflation, but it is unclear how much impact the hardships of the 1970s had on the radical transformation of school examinations in the 1980s; the rationalisation of examination boards to form regional groups to deliver the new GCSE led, ultimately, to the loss of around 19 of the examination boards which had operated in the 1970s.

Summary and discussion

Investigation of the records around the events and emergencies detailed in our archives collections reveals 10 key areas where, as an organisation, we have previous experience of similar issues and concerns to those we have seen during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic.

1. Interruption to the practical arrangements for traditional examinations.
2. Closure of centres.
3. Missed examinations.
4. Financial disruption.
5. Loss or delay to materials.
6. New measures brought in at short notice.
7. Retuning of corporate principles or standards.
8. Loss of staff from the offices.
9. General exhaustion and distress among our staff and those we work with.
10. Stoicism under duress.

Looking at these through the lens of 2020, and broadly following the chronology of events as they unfolded in 2020, it is possible to see that our actions now are frequently in line with our actions in previous times. The examples show that in the long term, disruption to exams was no bar to significant progress in education or to achievements of the individuals affected.

History has not judged our organisation badly—we have thrived through good times and endured through bad. The crucial question of 2021, however, is not how individual organisations will fare under the current climate but how individual students may be supported to progress through further education and employment in the enforced absence and adaptation of traditional high-stakes assessments.

The sudden and immediate threat posed in March 2020 to the normal procedures and processes of the education system, and in our case especially the assessment industry, mirrors the effects seen during both World Wars and Indian Partition. Within a few weeks, the usual arrangements for assessment in centres were in sudden disarray, with practical issues such as co-ordination of pupils and the running of assessments in centres made very problematic. While centre buildings were not being physically destroyed, their partial closure had a similar effect on the viability of assessments. With the decision to move to Centre Assessed Grades, the financial costs to the organisation became apparent, in the same way as they did during the flu pandemic.

At the same time, in March 2020, closure of office buildings worldwide presented a challenge from a different angle. Processes had to be adjusted in order to work from home offices or, where that was totally impossible, safely within the office spaces. As happened during the Second World War, staff adjusted quickly and efficiently to new measures imposed to heighten their safety. Perhaps there is not that much difference between the obligatory wearing of face masks and the carrying of gas masks.

As the effects of lockdown and school disruptions continued throughout the summer of 2020, thoughts turned to the thorny issue of standards and how to apply them in such

different circumstances. Fairness to candidates has always been an underlying principle observed by the organisation, and the measures under consideration mirror very closely those that have been documented in the past—alternative syllabuses, accessible texts, simpler and shorter question papers, even the awarding of extra marks (rather appealingly called a "war bonus for exams" in Malaya in 1945) is recorded, offering wider choice of questions and leniency in applying the usual standard with regard to key boundaries. These are all very familiar areas of debate and concern in 2020 and 2021.

It has been reassuring to see that ill-tempered or discordant discussions are probably entirely normal in unusual situations when many of the protagonists are stressed across different areas of their lives. An anxiety to promote a particular view of the best solution to a problem during a pressured situation can play havoc with social niceties, as evidenced by minutes and notes from the past. While it is tempting to suggest that the sheer numbers of competing voices might have been smaller in the past, the size of committees (for example, those dealing with Indian Partition) are similar to the size of committees today.

It is interesting to contrast the approach to long- and short-term stress for both staff members and key stakeholders such as students and teachers, with the past. Endurance seems to have been the watchword for previous generations and has, certainly, been a feature of the present situation. However, in the 21st century there is positive encouragement to voice anxieties and a great deal more effort is taken to protect, as best it can be, the mental health of all concerned. Previous generations' stoicism (carrying on regardless, even when under extreme duress) has been replaced by a more understanding approach.

The other key contrast we can see with past events is the benefit of modern technology, which has allowed us to solve problems in ways that were simply not available to our predecessors. However, there are similarities with the fact that changes have been implemented that may prove enduring.

At the time of writing, the COVID-19 pandemic is far from over and new disruptions may be ahead; these extracts from the archives are not exhaustive and, in some cases, there is a frustrating lack of detail to draw on, but they highlight some of the difficulties, some of the measures put in place to deal with them, and some of the outcomes. Although our study has been limited to a few key historical events, it has become apparent that almost all of the measures discussed in 2020 have been considered, or implemented, in the past.

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C/FGP 2/8; Finance and General Purposes Committee 1974–1980.

EX/S 1/11; Syndicate Minutes October 1939, January 1941 & October 1945.

EX/S 1/16; Syndicate Minutes, January 1971; General Purposes Minutes February 1972.

EX/S 1/17; Syndicate Minutes, November 1973.

M/REG; Scrapbook of Regulations, June, September & December 1939.

O/COE 2/1; Council for Overseas Exams, November 1945.

O/IPAC 2/1; India and Pakistan Regional Advisory Committee, 1947–1962.

O/MAC 2/1; Malaya Advisory Committee, February 1946.