CPSQ for higher education
Supporting selection and personal development in higher education
What is CPSQ?

The Cambridge Personal Styles Questionnaire® (CPSQ) is an online, non-cognitive assessment that provides insight into a student’s attitudes and behaviours – their personal styles.

Success at university requires more than academic ability: students’ personal styles of behaviour also contribute to their education progress. Factors such as conscientiousness, motivation and resilience all influence on-course success, student retention rates and graduate employment prospects.

Why use CPSQ for higher education?

Understand hidden barriers to achievement

Provide students with an insight into factors that may affect their academic performance to encourage self-reflection.

Focus and tailor student support and mentoring programmes

By understanding your students’ specific development requirements, you can make the most efficient use of limited resources for student support.

Motivate student interest in personal development

Support your students to understand more about their own strengths and weaknesses and help them engage in their own action planning.

Identify students in need of extra support

Gain insight into behaviours that could negatively affect student wellbeing, particularly following recent disruptions to education.

Approach conversations with a shared language

Share reports with students as a way to open up development conversations and start setting personal goals.

Build up a broad picture of your applicants

Apply a holistic view of student potential by using CPSQ alongside school grades and other information in the application.

*The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) is an international standard for describing language ability. It describes language ability on a six-point scale, from A1 for beginners, up to C2 for those who have mastered a language. This makes it easy for anyone involved in language teaching and testing, such as teachers or learners, to see the level of different qualifications. It also means that employers and educational institutions can easily compare our qualifications to other exams in their country.
CPSQ's student competency framework

To understand how learners' personal styles of behaving might influence their participation in education, their questionnaire responses are interpreted against five student competencies:

- **Thinking**: Intellectual curiosity and open thinking. These are the building blocks for critical thinking and problem solving.

- **Study**: Motivation to achieve and self-management; skills that support academic success and independent learning.

- **Coping**: Resilience and adaptability to demands; skills that students will need in life and in particular during and after lockdown.

- **Communication**: Social confidence and communication style.

- **Collaboration**: Working with others.
Responses to Thinking, Study and Coping produce a score on a one to five scale. The higher a score, the more likely it is that current behaviours are effective and support progress.

Within each competency, learners may have stronger and weaker areas, which are signposted in three possible feedback categories: Positive, Neutral and Improvement points.

Below is an example of the report for the Study competency:

**Study**  
Motivation to achieve and self-management  

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**Positive Points**

- Describe yourself as ambitious and as someone who wants to achieve high standards.
- Have a clear idea of what you want to do and usually set yourself challenging goals to reach.

**Neutral Points**

- Usually get on with your work but occasionally you might put off starting some routine or boring tasks.
- Similar to most students in your capacity to focus on your work and persevere until it is finished.

**Points to improve**

- Rarely plan and prioritise your activities.
- Typically like to work in an unstructured way and at times can be disorganised.
Communication and Collaboration are two competencies that establish and maintain relationships. These competency areas are not scored because all interpersonal styles have strengths and downsides, and therefore a higher score would not necessarily indicate better behaviour.

The benefits of developing one interpersonal style over another will depend on educational context and future career interests (e.g. team working or independent freelance careers).

The report provides personal feedback using pairs of bullet points balanced for the advantages and disadvantages of each behaviour.

Below is an example of the report for the Communication competency:

**Communication**
Your responses suggest your potential strengths and areas for improvement...

- You often start conversations with new people and tend to be talkative.
- You tend to be uncomfortable with silence and might talk before others have had time to think.
- You typically take the lead in discussions and like to persuade others round to your point of view. You usually enjoy delivering presentations.
- You might sometimes dominate group discussions and interrupt others.
- You show a balance between functional task-focused and warm relationship communication styles.
- In times of stress, you may find it challenging to maintain a balance and communicate in an empathetic and supportive way.

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**Using the CPSQ results**

All learners can develop their behaviours to be more effective. We provide universities with CPSQ resources that give further support and advice on how to use the results. This includes activities and possible interventions for students.
CPSQ’s online platform

The questionnaire can be taken online and at any location (e.g. at home or at your institution). It is quick and easy to set up and share with individuals participating in CPSQ.

Organise your own assessments

- access the CPSQ platform on computer, tablet or mobile at any time
- invite, manage and monitor the progress of individuals with ease
- customise the individual experience with editable email templates

Use the reports

- make quick decisions with instant access to completed reports
- control who is able to view the reports
- access individual and group reports for analysis
- share and discuss the results with individuals using on-screen reports

CPSQ research

Developed by assessment experts in Cambridge, CPSQ was part of a four-year research and development process and was trialled with educational institutions.
Using CPSQ to support student self-reflection

Mechanical Engineering undergraduates at Imperial College London complete CPSQ alongside their Professional Engineering Skills 1 Module. Up to 200 first year students take CPSQ in January after their December progress tests.

‘While our students have excellent A Level results their first year performance can be very variable,’ says Dr Julie Varley, Director of Student Experience and Principal Teaching Fellow in the Department of Mechanical Engineering. ‘CPSQ helps students to think about their study approach and reflect on how their behaviour might be affecting their performance.’

‘We want students to use CPSQ for independent self-reflection,’ explains Dr Varley: ‘Our December progress tests might be the first time a student hasn’t done as well as expected. We invite students to use CPSQ to help them set their own “smart” goals for improvement.’

Dr Linda Stringer, Undergraduate Admissions Tutor and Senior Teaching Fellow carried out analysis on previous CPSQ cohorts which suggests a significant and consistent correlation between study skills and on-course performance: ‘Overall, CPSQ results show that conscientious students with high scores for the study competency tend to do better on the course. This indicates that these traits can be just as important as previous academic achievement – if not more so – when predicting on-course performance. The fact that these results are so clear is one reason why we continue to use CPSQ,’ she adds.

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Read the full case study: admissiontesting.org/case-study-imperial-college-london
We are part of the University of Cambridge and have been working with UK and worldwide educational institutions, governments and employers for more than 15 years.

Our admissions and personal development assessments are a global mark of excellence that set the quality standard.