



- 1 **Foreword** : Tim Oates
- 1 **Editorial** : Sylvia Green
- 2 **International assessment through the medium of English: analysing the language skills required** : Stuart Shaw
- 11 **An investigation into the number of special consideration enhancements and their impact on examination grades** : Carmen L. Vidal Rodeiro
- 18 **The effect of manipulating features of examinees' scripts on their perceived quality** : Tom Bramley
- 27 **Starting them young: Research and project management opportunities for 16 to 19 year olds** : Irenka Suto and Rita Nádas
- 31 **An investigation into the impact of screen design on computer-based assessments** : Matt Haigh
- 38 **Making the most of our assessment data: Cambridge Assessment's Information Services Platform** : Nicholas Raikes
- 40 **Statistical Reports** : The Research Division
- 41 **Research News**
- 42 **A to Z of Critical Thinking** : Beth Black (editor)

If you would like to comment on any of the articles in this issue, please contact Sylvia Green.

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# Research Matters : 13

A CAMBRIDGE ASSESSMENT PUBLICATION

## Foreword

Innovation, creativity, learning to learn, critical thinking, 21st Century Skills. These are mentioned in many of the policy statements on education and training, in many nations – not just England. One of the contributions that an assessment organisation can make to the discussions of these ideas is that of clarity. Not pedantic over-analysis, but clarity. Validity in assessment is vital. We need to understand what we are assessing and design our assessments to apprehend it in a reliable way.

It is therefore sensible to ask whether something such as 'creativity' exists and in what way does it exist? Some individuals appear more creative than others. In what way do they vary from people who appear not to be creative? Is creativity limited to certain areas of human endeavour, or can it exist in any subject discipline? If you are creative in one context are there limits on whether it can be 'transferred' to other contexts? These are only the opening set of questions. And they count, since in most assessments we are making a claim about the skills, knowledge and understanding of individuals and, in many cases, using the assessment to make inferences around the future performance of an individual.

As with others listed above, 'Critical Thinking' is a domain which remains in need of clarification, both in respect of learning and assessment. There is a growing international literature into which the Research Division has tapped, and results so far suggest that deliberately focussing on critical thinking as part of curriculum planning, delivery and assessment can elevate attainment. From this we are beginning to understand the approaches which work. But there is evidence of approaches which do not. As a result of this discrepancy, Beth Black has undertaken to clarify and better structure 'Critical Thinking' through her editorship of the *A to Z of Critical Thinking*, which we hope will be a major contribution to the field.

**Tim Oates** *Group Director, Assessment Research and Development*

## Editorial

The themes addressed in this issue reflect the diversity of research carried out at Cambridge Assessment.

In the first article Shaw discusses an assessment approach where a curricular subject is taught through the medium of language other than that which is normally used and considers the linguistic, educational and cognitive challenges across a number of subjects. His research has already informed practice and his proposals for future work in this area highlight future needs.

The work from Vidal Rodeiro on special consideration enhancements was presented at the annual British Educational Research Association (BERA) conference in September. This focussed on patterns of special consideration applications over time, for different qualifications, by school type and by outcomes. Little research has been conducted in this field and Vidal Rodeiro's work is a welcome addition to the literature.

Considerable research has been carried out at Cambridge Assessment over many years on the challenges of judging the quality of scripts. This is a fundamental part of our assessment process and Bramley adds to the debate by reporting on the features of examinees' scripts that influence judgements of quality. Although Bramley identified some problems with the method, his approach provided a new way of investigating a difficult problem and he suggests further research to improve validity in this area.

Suto and Nádas discuss the importance of research and project work for 16 to 19 year olds, outlining the diversity among research routes and the breadth of skills that are enhanced through such study. They also highlight some of the challenges inherent in assessing such achievements and identify important curricular and assessment issues that need to be considered as qualifications for the future are developed.

Haigh also presented his work on item design in computer-based assessments at the BERA conference. He highlights the importance of fairness for students undertaking assessments and the need for us to be aware of any unintended consequences of moving from paper-based to computer-based testing.

The final article reports on Cambridge Assessment's Information Services Platform and the innovative strategy it represents. Raikes explains how the platform development allows us to harness the data we now have available to enhance quality assurance processes.

**Sylvia Green** *Director of Research*