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

researchprogrammes@cambridgeassessment.org.uk

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Foreword

This *Research Matters* is published at a time of considerable change. Alison Wolf has completed her review of 14–19 vocational education and training. Dame Clare Tickell's review of the Early Years and Foundation Stage (EYFS) has reported. Reviews of the National Curriculum and National Assessment at KS2 are underway, the first overseen by an Expert Panel chaired by myself, and the latter chaired by Lord Bew. Inspection is being reviewed, and major changes in the governance of schools are being implemented. None of the articles in *Research Matters* appear to engage with these changes. But this is deceptive. The assessment community needs to remain focused on fundamental concerns relating to the purposes and uses, and technical characteristics of assessment – the research included here highlights continued attention to these 'bedrock' issues. The work on Diplomas – despite policy moves away from these – causes us to reflect on that key introductory phase of new qualifications – a perennial rather than a passing matter. But two articles link straight to the issue of change. The matter of what certification we require at the age of 16 is again a focus of debate – reflecting on how this issue was examined a century ago is salutary. The issue of how we compare and maintain qualifications in a changing and diverse system raises issues which are technical – how do we do it – and cultural – the maintenance of public confidence. In periods of change, it is vital not to lose sight of those things to which we constantly should attend.

Tim Oates *Group Director, Assessment Research and Development*

Editorial

This issue takes us from matters related to examinations that were topical in 1911 through to today's processes and techniques and the development of new research methods. In the first article Elliott discusses a report on secondary school examinations from 1911 and discovers that many of the concerns expressed at that time resonate with current issues. This historical perspective from one hundred years ago is interesting and informative highlighting the fact that we can learn from the past and should do so. Shiell and Raikes move us to present day processes in the context of on screen marking and the analyses of item level data (ILD). The availability of ILD has enabled the routine production of reports on marking and grading and this article reports the results of a questionnaire survey that was conducted to evaluate how the reports were used by examiners. Crisp and Green then report on the evaluation of a new qualification and the practicalities of its implementation. Qualitative data were gathered in the first year of the 14–19 Diploma with research focusing on the Principle Learning part of the Diploma and providing insights from students and teachers about their perceptions across a range of themes. Although some problems were identified, the overall picture was positive and the findings highlight some important lessons to be learned for future developments of this kind.

Bramley and Dhawan's article is based on part of a report commissioned by Ofqual (the exams regulator in England). They investigated the challenging area of assessment reliability and explored what the impact of slightly different decisions at unit/component level would be on the grade distributions at whole assessment level. With the work of Shaw and Bailey we move to the complex area of predictive validity. In their article they emphasise how important it is to demonstrate predictive validity for tests that are used for university selection purposes. Establishing predictive validity poses a range of practical problems which must be overcome and the case study approach reported in this article serves to enhance understanding of future work in this field.

The first of two articles on research methods is by Johnson and Mehta. They review issues related to the comparison of demand and evaluate the CRAS framework (Complexity-Resources-Abstractness-and-Strategy). The authors discuss the use of the framework for individual items and the potential difficulty of using it at a holistic paper level. In the second article Greatorex, Mehta, Rushton, Hopkin and Shiell describe the process of developing a research instrument to compare diverse qualifications and subjects. This tool is particularly useful for comparability studies where it is difficult to use candidates' performance and assessment tasks, such as for new and vocational qualifications.

Sylvia Green *Director of Research*