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Research Matters : 5

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Foreword

This issue of *Research Matters* is testimony to the diversity of the education system in England – not 'social diversity', but diversity in assessment and qualifications. Andy Green, in his seminal book *Education and State Formation* (1990) compared England, Germany, France and the USA as a means of understanding why the English education is so diverse in its form and content. The influence of diverse lobby groups has been historically strong and remains so; freedoms for local systems and policies to condition provision have been sustained despite increasing centralised control over curriculum and related assessment; discontinuities in phases of education remain; and continued failure to establish credible vocational options has led to unclear messages to young people about routes through education and training. The 'melting pot' characteristic of the system, combined with constant 'pendulum swing' changes, has meant the emergence of highly diverse assessment practice and the failure of any one paradigm to dominate. Extracting clear messages about the direction in which we should take both assessment policy and technical development is thus a complex business. Understanding the history of assessment, drilling down into different types of assessment and measurement models, and understanding the outcomes data, all play a role; the articles in this issue take a look at all of these themes.

Tim Oates *Group Director, Assessment Research and Development*

Editorial

The first article is a presentation given by Andrew Watts as part of the programme for the 2007 Annual Alumni Weekend of the University of Cambridge. He describes how public examinations were first introduced in England for secondary age students and charts the development of the system.

A main theme of this issue is the psychology of assessment and the way that judgements are made. Suto, Crisp and Greatorex have worked on a number of linked research studies considering the marking process from a range of perspectives related to human judgement and decision making. In their article they provide an overview of their research in the context of GCSEs and A-levels. Nádas and Suto continue the theme in their article on self-confidence and insight into marking accuracy among GCSE maths and physics markers. Novaković discusses assessment judgements made in Angoff awarding meetings and the impact that the provision of performance data has on decision making.

Victoria Crisp reviews research literature related to coursework at GCSE and also outlines potential changes to the way coursework may be included in future examinations. Johnson and Burdett continue the discussion in the context of school-based assessment in international practice. They consider when and why school-based assessment should or should not be implemented and how potential problems could be addressed. Two articles focus on examinations research, one in relation to classification consistency and the other to the patterns of GCSE and A-level uptake. Gill and Bramley report on the use of simulated data to model the effect of inter-rater correlation on classification consistency. Although this research is based on simulated data, it does add to the current debate on the need for education about measurement error. The second article highlights two new statistical reports available on the Cambridge Assessment web-site.

The final article is from Elizabeth Gray of OCR's operational research team. It provides an overview of the kind of work carried out by the team and some of the issues that they need to address in the context of quality and standards.

Sylvia Green *Director of Research*