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An approach to validation: Developing and applying an approach for the validation of general qualifications

Stuart Shaw and Victoria Crisp

A CAMBRIDGE ASSESSMENT PUBLICATION

Foreword

Twenty one years ago, in his seminal *Assessment and Testing*, Robert Wood observed:

The examining boards have been lucky not to have been engaged in validity argument. Unlike reliability, validity does not lend itself to sensational reporting.... Validation work is unglamorous and needs to be painstaking but has to be done. As long as examination boards make claims that they are assessing this or that ability or skill, they are vulnerable to challenge from disgruntled individuals. (1991, pp.151–2)

This relative lack of interest in validity in the UK can be contrasted with the long US tradition of debate about the scope and content of validity studies, which has generated the theory which is now the basis of most international work. This may, in part, be the consequence of a more litigious US culture (it has many more 'disgruntled individuals') which means that test developers have had to defend the validity of their products. However, even in the US, there is the recognition that while the theory has been carefully developed, practice has often lagged behind, for example, Kane (2009) observed that "validity is conceptually simple, but can be complicated in practice" (p.40).

This makes this Special Issue of *Research Matters* an important landmark since it provides the most detailed validation study of a public examination in England that we have seen. It offers both the theoretical basis for the study and then a detailed investigation of what this means in practice when applied to a complex examination. What the authors have provided us with is a full-scale validation study which provides a model for what is required. It is a Rolls-Royce study which shows a 'painstaking' comprehensiveness, and, as the authors acknowledge, could not be done routinely in many subjects. However, it provides the framework from which smaller-scale and more routine studies can be developed. Stuart Shaw and Victoria Crisp have done the assessment community an important service in developing such a framework.

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