



# Research Matters

A CAMBRIDGE ASSESSMENT PUBLICATION

## Introduction

*Research Matters* is a biannual publication from Cambridge Assessment and this selection of articles highlights some of the areas of research carried out across the organisation. Cambridge Assessment is the largest assessment agency of its kind in Europe and has a key role to play in influencing thinking on assessment. *Research Matters* reports on the detailed and varied research carried out by Cambridge Assessment and shares it with colleagues in the wider assessment community both nationally and internationally. We investigate prominent research issues and report on a range of areas in testing and assessment. From time to time we produce special issues of *Research Matters* which report on particular research that requires a longer, more detailed publication. *Research Matters* is one of a family of publications from Cambridge Assessment, which includes a quarterly publication, produced by Cambridge ESOL, part of the Cambridge Assessment Group. *Research Notes* covers the extensive programme of research, test development and validation work on language assessment carried out within Cambridge ESOL.

In the first article the Evaluation and Psychometrics team marked Cambridge Assessment's 150th anniversary by looking back at question papers over the years. They describe some of the educational and social changes that have affected students over time and illustrate them through changes in question papers from seven subjects. Elliott continues the historical theme in her article on the examination of cookery from 1937 to 2007. Her work provides insights into how the subject has evolved over the years.

In her article on critical thinking Black takes us to a more 'modern' area of study. She engages with a challenging area of assessment in the context of a subject that has proved difficult to define and to measure. She discusses the construct of critical thinking and engages with some of the debates over the last forty years during which interest in this area has increased.

Shiell *et al.*'s article reports on research into modern processes and the influence of marking mode on outcomes and processes. Developments in technology have led to changes in marking processes with examiners marking digitally scanned copies of examination scripts on screen rather than the original paper documents. This research investigates some of the consequences of this shift and is important in answering fundamental questions about onscreen marking in the context of extended writing.

An influential research review is reported in the article on the effect of birthdate on performance. The review from Oates, Sykes, Emery, Bell and Vidal Rodeiro provides robust evidence from around the world that, on average, the youngest children in their year group at school perform at a lower level than their classmates. The review detailed in this article was released to the press in February 2009. It was widely reported in England and received attention in other countries, including China. At the same time it was submitted as evidence to the Rose review of primary education which, as part of its interim report, had recommended that all children should start formal schooling at the age of four (rather than five, as is currently the case). The final article from Elliott and Johnson reports on research into the nature of spelling errors and whether certain spelling errors were particularly common and how they related to spelling conventions, as taught in schools. In their work they discuss the implications of their findings for teaching and literacy policy.

At Cambridge Assessment our research covers a wide range of subjects and in *Research Matters* we report on many technical areas of assessment and measurement. The six articles selected for this issue focus on assessment in more general educational contexts rather than the more technical measurement areas that are also covered in our regular publications.

**Sylvia Green** *Director of Research*

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

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