

Cambridge Assessment Qualitative Research Methods Reading Group

Martin Johnson Research Division

In 2007 an invitational research seminar was convened by the Research Division to consider how qualitative research methods could inform researchers' views of assessment. That well-received seminar, which included contributions from Professors Harry Torrance and Helen Colley from the Education and Social Research Institute at Manchester Metropolitan University, suggested a broad interest in this area of thinking, and a desire to explore the issues of the use of qualitative research methods in an assessment context¹.

Since 2011 a series of Research Division-based reading groups have been organised. The remit of the group was initially to bring together researchers from across the Cambridge Assessment group to look at a variety of different qualitative research methods. The initiative was considered to be a useful way of sharing expertise amongst colleagues as well as being an important opportunity to raise awareness of the ways of using qualitative research methods in Cambridge Assessment's own research.

In its first year the reading group consisted of 17 people, and was mainly composed of researchers working in the Research Division. Since then the group has grown to 29 members and includes colleagues (both

researchers and non-researchers) from across the three different parts of the Cambridge Assessment organisation (Oxford, Cambridge and RSA Examinations, Cambridge International Examinations, and Cambridge English), as well as colleagues from other departments of the University of Cambridge (e.g. The Faculty of Education and the Judge Business Institute).

One of the main priorities of the reading group has been for its members to identify different qualitative methodologies which they feel they would like to explore further. As a result, the group has looked at the use of vignettes, focus groups, discourse analysis, stimulated recall, cognitive interviewing, mixed methods, elicitation techniques with young people, working with qualitative internet data, and is planning to look at social network analysis, and interviewing techniques.

A key objective of the reading group is to facilitate the ongoing development of its members' understanding of a diverse set of qualitative research methods. In so doing, the reading group's activity also enhances the capacity for knowledge building across Cambridge Assessment as members use newly acquired methods to gain insights into assessment.

1. More information on the ideas that were discussed at this seminar can be found in Johnson, M. (2008) '3 Rs' of assessment research: *Respect, Relationships and Responsibility* – what do they have to do with research methods? *Research Matters: A Cambridge Assessment Publication*, 6, 2–4.

Statistical Reports

The Research Division

The ongoing 'Statistics Reports Series' provides statistical summaries of various aspects of the English examination system such as trends in pupil uptake and attainment, qualifications choice, subject combinations and subject provision at school. These reports, produced using national-level examination data, are available on the Cambridge Assessment website: http://www.cambridgeassessment.org.uk/ca/Our_Services/Research/Statistical_Reports.

The most recent additions to this series are:

- Statistics Report Series No.39: Provision of level 2 science qualifications in 2011.
- Statistics Report Series No.40: Uptake of ICT and computing qualifications in schools in England 2010–2011.
- Statistics Report Series No.41: Provision of GCE A level subjects 2011.
- Statistics Report Series No.42: Uptake of GCE A level subjects 2011.

- Statistics Report Series No.43: Provision of GCSE subjects 2011.
- Statistics Report Series No.44: Uptake of GCSE subjects 2011.
- Statistics Report Series No.45: Age distribution of GCSE candidates in England 2011.
- Statistics Report Series No.46: Candidates awarded the A* grade at A level in 2011.

Additionally the following reports have been revised, to better reflect the true levels of uptake and provision of GCSEs and A levels in England:

- Statistics Report Series No.28 – revised: Uptake of GCE A level subjects in 2010.
- Statistics Report Series No.34 – revised: Provision of GCSE subjects in 2010.
- Statistics Report Series No.35 – revised: Uptake of GCSE subjects in 2010.