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# Research Matters : 6

A CAMBRIDGE ASSESSMENT PUBLICATION

## Foreword

A week in politics is a long time. In the light of this, one hundred and fifty years in assessment and qualifications is an eternity. With this timeframe, and with the book 'Examining the world' charting the profound changes in circumstances and structure which Cambridge Assessment has been through, it is perhaps important for current researchers in the organisation to see themselves not as individual investigators but as both the inheritors of a long tradition of enquiry and as custodians and contributors to a continuing bequest to future generations of learners and assessment professionals. Commentators on educational research have bemoaned 'paradigm wars' which have wracked the field, this coupled to concerns over the low levels of genuine accumulation of knowledge – in comparison with other areas of scientific enquiry. By contrast, the analyses of method and the empirical studies described in this edition of *Research Matters* are explicitly designed to add to knowledge accumulation on assessment and qualifications – to build on an established body of operational and research work. The studies place great emphasis on the design of enquiry, and on careful adoption of appropriate method. It builds foundations, we hope, for the next 150 years of robust and useful research.

**Tim Oates** *Group Director, Assessment Research and Development*

## Editorial

In the first article Johnson explores the relationships between, and the importance of, respect, relationships and responsibility in the context of assessment related research. He shares practitioner knowledge and draws from the work of eminent researchers, particularly in the vocational field.

The next four articles focus on the judgements made by examiners and the factors that influence their decisions. Crisp's work draws on a study of the processes involved in marking and grading and investigates which features of student work examiners and teachers attend to and whether these are always appropriate. In his article on marking essays on screen Shaw considers how on screen essay marking affects assessment and marking reliability. His research is carried out in the context of Cambridge International Examinations' (CIE) Checkpoint English Examination. Johnson moves the focus of human judgement into the vocational arena in his article on holistic judgement of portfolios. He considers how assessors integrate and combine different aspects of an holistic performance into a final judgement. Johnson and Shaw discuss another aspect of decision making in their article on annotation, considering the way that assessors build an understanding of textual responses using annotation when marking. They review various themes and models of reading comprehension before considering both the formal and informal influences of the annotation process.

Elliott's article on the examination of cookery from 1937 to 2007 provides interesting information on the way the subject has changed. This is a very topical theme as calls for a return to 'traditional' home cooking has become the subject of much debate. Elliott looks to the past and the present to see how the subject has evolved over the years. Black's article on Critical Thinking looks forward to a growing area of learning and assessment. A number of new Critical Thinking products are in development and Black's work provides coherent guidelines in the form of a definition and taxonomy upon which new developments can be based. Oates looks to the future in his article and considers what lies ahead in the next 150 years. He considers trends in assessment and discusses some of the key issues and challenges facing assessment systems in the years ahead. Roberts highlights some of the activities surrounding Cambridge Assessment's 150th anniversary and provides information about the 34th International Association for Educational Assessment (IAEA) Annual Conference to be hosted in Cambridge in September 2008.

**Sylvia Green** *Director of Research*