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If you would like to comment on any of the articles in this issue, please contact Tom Bramley, Director, Research Division. Email: ResearchDivision@cambridgeassessment.org.uk

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A CAMBRIDGE ASSESSMENT PUBLICATION

Foreword

Anyone reading this copy of *Research Matters* in the future might do well to look at the publication date. At the time of compilation, the Covid-19 pandemic remained a disruptive force in education. The offices of Cambridge Assessment were sparsely populated, and with the suspension of public examinations domestically and internationally, the researchers of the organisation were fully deployed on directly supporting the alternative arrangements which were put in place. Urgently assembled models became controversial and problematic in their implementation, and researchers from Cambridge Assessment worked hard to understand and mitigate the limitations of both the models and the awarding strategy which superseded them. This comprised a massive programme of work, full of novel tasks, to an exacting schedule. But amongst this urgent and vital contingent work, we felt it important to continue to do some of the things which we would have done, such as publish this edition. Although changes in life and education have been effected by the pandemic—and some of them may remain permanent—we must not forget the things which we worried about before it hit, including the curriculum and assessment matters covered in the articles here. For sure things will change, but measurement accuracy, high-quality learning and a sense of our past—witness the extraordinary and excellent article on the 1938 Archive holdings—all will determine the quality of our post-Covid education arrangements.

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

Editorial

It is perhaps helpful to put into perspective the current disruption to high-stakes school examinations in the UK by considering past turmoils. The first article by our group archivist Gillian Cooke is a departure from the usual assessment research we publish in *Research Matters*, but gives a fascinating historical glimpse of exam board activity in 1938 in the months leading up to the start of the Second World War. Although the article was drafted before the current pandemic took hold, her description of the collection of papers as revealing “hopes, fears, ignorance, frustration, compassion, misplaced faith in authorities and a steely defence of examination standards” may give us pause for reflection!

In the second article, Jo Ireland and Melissa Mouthaan describe some of the metaphors used to understand curriculum design (spirals, networks, webs), and some of the arguments about which are most useful in different fields of knowledge.

Staying with the theme of curricula, the third article by Sinéad Fitzsimons and colleagues describes the high-level principles that should be considered when developing curricula for learners in emergency situations where normal educational provision is disrupted by (for example) war or natural disasters.

While much research has considered the differences between on-screen and paper assessment from the point of view of the test taker, less has considered the question writers. The fourth article by Vicki Crisp and Stuart Shaw gives an account of a detailed investigation of the experiences of question writers in writing and reviewing questions in an on-screen environment.

The final article by Irenka Suto and colleagues shows how different taxonomies of skills and knowledge developed for general academic contexts can be evaluated and deployed in more applied contexts. They argue that taxonomies are an underused tool that could help improve validity in curriculum and assessment design.

Tom Bramley *Director, Research Division*