



CAMBRIDGE ASSESSMENT

Exploring the role of human judgement in examination marking: findings from some empirical studies

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Abstract

A major theme of our recent research has been the nature and use of human judgement in the marking of school examinations. In an era of innovation and rapid development, it is important to have an understanding of these psychological processes, which have the potential to impact upon modernisation. In this paper, we present an overview of our studies in this area.

Working within a popular cognitive psychological paradigm, we explored examiners' judgements when marking mainly shorter answer questions in a number of contexts. Examinations in a variety of subjects were marked, which were targeted at students living in England and/or overseas. Examination types included General Certification in Secondary Education (GCSE), International GCSE (including in English as a Second Language), and A-level. Both paper-based and computer-based marking formats were investigated. Both experienced and newer examiners participated in the research, in which several methods were utilised, including 'think aloud', self-report questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and question pre-coding.

We identified five distinct cognitive marking strategies, which were found to be used in all of the contexts considered. Subsequently, quantitative analyses of strategy usage in the traditional paper format and its relationship with marking accuracy were conducted; some interesting relationships were identified. We will conclude this paper with a discussion of the potential implications of this research for future examination marking.



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