



CAMBRIDGE ASSESSMENT

## The judgement processes involved in the assessment of project work by teachers

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### Abstract

In the context of continuing debate over the validity of assessment by teachers, the judgement processes involved in the assessment of GCSE coursework (an example of summative, high-stakes assessment by teachers) were investigated. Coursework usually takes the form of a project conducted in the classroom over a number of weeks thus providing **opportunities to learn** through the assessment process. Coursework is marked by teachers, standardised (or 'moderated') between teachers within a school, and externally moderated by awarding body moderators. Limited previous research has explored the human judgement processes underpinning teacher marking.

Thirteen teachers across three subjects were asked to 'think aloud' whilst marking coursework examples and, where appropriate, to conduct an internal moderation exercise. Nine moderators across the same three subjects 'thought aloud' whilst moderating a set of coursework pieces.

Analyses of the resulting verbal protocols provided insights into the reading processes involved in assessment, emotional and social elements of assessment, and the nature of the evaluations. These could be related to key theories, such as holistic versus analytical models of judgement, the role of criteria, and the importance of comparisons. The sequences of behaviours involved in coursework assessment are outlined and a model of the judgement processes involved is proposed. The findings also provide evidence that supports the involvement of teachers in student assessment. An improved understanding of the processes involved in teacher marking is important to evaluating the validity of such assessments and may have implications for training and for policy decisions. Findings are likely to be relevant to 'controlled assessments' which are replacing coursework in GCSEs and to other contexts involving internally-assessed project work.



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