



CAMBRIDGE ASSESSMENT



CAMBRIDGE ASSESSMENT RESEARCH
BERA Annual Conference | 2013



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We are a not-for-profit organisation developing and delivering educational assessment to eight million candidates in 170 countries every year.

Our three exam boards – OCR, Cambridge English Language Assessment and Cambridge International Examinations – offer qualifications that are valued and recognised by universities, employers, governments, immigration authorities, professional bodies and education providers around the world.

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Introduction

Cambridge Assessment has supported the BERA annual conference for many years and during that time our researchers have presented papers and posters regularly. Like BERA, we believe that educational research plays a vital role in the continuous improvement of educational and assessment policies and practices. Each year the BERA conference provides a valuable opportunity for researchers to come together, to share their work and to discuss and debate across many educational themes. One of the strengths of the conference is that it brings together people from many disciplines.

Educational assessment continues to attract a great deal of attention and coverage. At Cambridge Assessment we work to inform assessment debates and to influence thinking in many educational contexts. Our aim is to ensure quality through rigorous research so that users can have confidence in our assessments. Our research teams contribute to the comprehensive conference programme with their

presentations that cover a variety of assessment issues. This year the presentations from Cambridge Assessment focus on a range of themes from the impact of tiered examinations on the aspirations of young people to an exploration of universities' assessment practices and additional support lessons. We look forward to seeing you either at one of our presentations or at our exhibition stand.



Sylvia Green, Director – Research Division

Cambridge Assessment Research at the BERA Annual Conference 2013

This booklet features information about the Cambridge Assessment research that is being presented at this year's BERA conference.

At Cambridge Assessment, the reliability of our assessments stems from evidence-based and research-led approaches to all products, services and new developments. We have the largest research capability of its kind in Europe with more than 80 researchers across the group.

Our researchers conduct and publish authoritative research in order to validate, improve and develop our assessments and services, and to influence thinking and policy on educational assessment nationally and internationally. The results of our research are widely published in well-respected major refereed journals such as *Review of Educational Research* and *Assessment in Education*, as well as being presented at seminars and conferences. We also have our own publications, *Research Matters* and *Research Notes*.



We also host a programme of events such as the biennial Cambridge Assessment conference – the next one takes place in October 2014. This brings together researchers, thought leaders, academics, policy makers and assessment professionals to debate big education topics that impact assessment around the globe.

Presentations

Addressing the needs of non-native speakers entering English education at the secondary stage

Magda Werno

Tuesday 3 September, 11:50 to 13:05
Session: ECR Parallel Session 2



Magda Werno, *presenter*

It is estimated that 17.5 per cent of pupils in primary schools and 12.9 per cent in secondary schools do not speak English as their first language (DfE, 2012). Limited ability to communicate in English along with other transitional challenges can place an individual in a position of particular disadvantage. Considering the growing number of non-native speakers in English education, it is essential to provide appropriate support to students for whom English is an additional language (EAL) in order to create inclusive environments that foster learning and achievement for all young people regardless of their linguistic background.

The purpose of this study was to explore the transitional experiences associated with starting education in England as a non-native speaker at the secondary stage, as well as identifying the ways in which the support needs of these EAL learners are being addressed. The project involved conducting a case study in one secondary school in England where the percentage of EAL students was above the national average. In order to explore the perceptions of both students and teachers, the data collection methods included semi-structured paired interviews with EAL students and qualitative questionnaires for teaching staff.

As data collection of the teaching staff questionnaires is still ongoing, this paper reports preliminary findings in relation to the transitional experiences associated with entering the English educational context as perceived by the EAL students who took part in this study. This paper also provides an insight into the students’ perceptions of support which they received upon starting their secondary education in England.

Examining the impact of tiered examinations on the aspirations of young people

Tom Benton

Wednesday 4 September 14:30 to 16:00
Session: Main Conference Parallel Session 3



Tom Benton, *presenter*

Tiered assessments are commonly employed within GCSE examinations in the UK. They are intended to ensure that the difficulties of exam papers are correctly tailored to the ability of the candidates taking them; this should ensure more accurate measurements and also a better experience for candidates as they do not spend time addressing questions that are either too easy or too difficult given their level of skill. However, tiered examinations have also been criticised for potentially damaging the aspirations of young people entered for lower tier examinations by placing a limit on the grades they can achieve. This paper explores the extent of the link between GCSE entry tier and aspirations and also investigates the extent to which this link can be explained by differences in achievement and background characteristics of pupils.

The research makes use of data available from the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England (LSYPE) linked to information available from the National Pupil Database (NPD) regarding the qualifications achieved by pupils and also their entry tier at GCSE. A variety of statistical methods, including multilevel modelling and propensity score matching, were used to evaluate the association between entry tier and the length of time pupils intend to stay in education whilst taking account of the impact of various background characteristics as well as the educational aspirations of young people prior to beginning their GCSEs.

How can major research findings about returns to qualifications illuminate the comparability of qualifications?

Jackie Greatorex

Wednesday 4 September 14:30 to 16:00
Session: Main Conference Parallel Session 3



Jackie Greatorex, *presenter*

This review investigated how major research findings about returns to qualifications illuminate the comparability of qualifications.

Returns to qualifications measure how much more is earned by people with a particular qualification compared to people with similar characteristics who do not have the qualification. If a statistical analysis shows the returns to qualifications are similar then the qualifications are of comparable economic value.

The review identified that returns to qualifications varied by subject, for instance, science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) gained higher returns than non-STEM subjects. This might be due to several factors including the labour market demand for the subject, the supply of qualified workers and differences in the perception of content and standards between subjects.

Own brand qualifications delivered higher returns than qualifications from Government initiatives. This suggests that Non-Governmental organisations are better placed than Government to develop qualifications which meet educational and economic needs and are trusted by employers and learners.

This study suggests that there are two recommended ways of researching returns to qualifications for comparability purposes:

1. synthesising major research findings as per this review
2. obtaining data and running bespoke analyses.

Beyond freshers’ week: An exploration of universities’ assessment practices and additional support lessons

Simon Child, Sanjana Mehta, Frances Wilson, Irenka Suto and Sally Brown

Wednesday 4 September 16:30 to 18:00
Session: Main Conference Parallel Session 4



Sanjana Mehta, *presenter*

Simon Child, *presenter*

New undergraduates can encounter multifaceted transitional challenges in their progression from A Level to degree. This paper presents two studies exploring transitional issues for students of English, within the context of Government proposals for A Level reform. Three questions were addressed:

1. What is taught in additional support lessons for new undergraduates?
2. What are lecturers’, undergraduates’, and A Level teachers’ views of the lessons?
3. What are the main similarities and differences in assessment practice at A Level and at university?

Case studies of additional support lessons were conducted at English departments in three contrasting universities. Data collection comprised: lecturer and student interviews; lesson observations by researchers and an A Level teacher; and facilitated discussions between the teacher and lecturers. The data was transcribed, coded and analysed thematically.

The second study was a desk-based comparison of assessment-related documentation. Assessment materials were obtained for an A Level English literature course, and for first-year English degree courses at nine universities. A coding framework was developed and applied to the materials for each English course, which facilitated analyses of several factors (e.g. assessment variety and re-sit opportunities).

There were several commonalities in the content and skills covered in the universities’ additional support lessons, including emphasis on the development of critical thinking and academic writing.

In the assessment comparison study, it was found that new undergraduates must adapt to reduced re-sit opportunities and to earlier summative assessment. Implications for A Level re-developments, and for ensuring that English teaching and learning methods are consistent over time, are discussed.

Controlled Assessment and Modern Foreign Language (MFL) speaking and listening: using a mixed methods approach to evaluate the effects of assessment arrangements

Sanjana Mehta, Martin Johnson, Nicky Rushton and Simon Child

Wednesday 4 September 16:30 to 18:00
Session: Main Conference Parallel Session 4



Sanjana Mehta, *presenter*

Research suggests that since the introduction of controlled assessment there have been concerns about its impact on MFL teaching and learning. These concerns relate to different aspects of validity: contextual, cognitive, and scoring. This study used mixed methods to obtain a comprehensive picture of the implementation of controlled assessment of speaking in GCSE MFL and its impact on validity.

There were four questions:

1. How do teachers prepare for controlled assessment of speaking in MFL?
2. What is the impact of controlled assessment of speaking on teachers and students?
3. What strategies do teachers adopt to address the challenges associated with controlled assessment of speaking?
4. What support can be provided to the teachers as they implement controlled assessment?

The study was conducted in three phases. Firstly, focus groups were facilitated to collect qualitative data in relation to the research questions. Secondly, case studies were conducted in different school departments where the application of controlled assessment appeared to be relatively successful. Finally, questionnaires were sent to teachers to corroborate the findings from the previous phases.

The focus groups suggested that teachers perceive the changes brought on by controlled assessment to have had a largely negative impact on their MFL teaching and assessing experience, albeit with some limited positive reflections. The case studies revealed some common practices among teachers (e.g. in relation to marking) which facilitated their implementation of controlled assessment. These findings which related to the current experience of controlled assessment can inform the development of future models for assessing speaking and listening.

Poster presentations

Evaluating the reliability of complex qualifications

Tom Benton



Poster presented by Tom Benton

The reliability of a qualification is defined as the extent to which the result achieved by any pupil would be repeated if the assessment exercise were replicated. This paper explores calculating reliability via the traditional method of split halves; that is, dividing questions within an examination into two halves and examining the relationship between the total scores on each of them. Furthermore, it extends this approach to estimate the overall reliability of complex qualifications comprising several distinct examination papers and multiple options for the way in which the qualification can be taken.

This paper presents a practical example of how overall reliability might be evaluated for a complex qualification; namely A Level mathematics. For each of the (possibly optional) examination papers comprising the qualification, an algorithm was applied to identify the most appropriate way to partition the questions within that paper into two subsets such that each of the subsets (the halves) were as similar as possible. Summing the scores on these halves across each of the examination papers produced two alternative scores measuring the overall ability of each student across the entire curriculum of A Level mathematics. By comparing students' performance on the two alternative scores it was possible to calculate the overall reliability of the qualification.

The suggested method makes far fewer assumptions than many of the methods that have been employed to assess the reliability of such qualifications in the past. Furthermore, the results illustrate that existing methods may underestimate the true reliability of complex qualifications.

Changing times, changing qualifications

Nicky Rushton



Poster presented by Nicky Rushton

During recent years there have been many changes in education and assessment. Since 2000, curricula have been updated, particular skills have been valued then removed from assessment, new qualifications for students in English secondary schools have been added to the Register of Regulated Qualifications and other qualifications have been withdrawn. When so many changes occur in a short space of time it is difficult to keep track of them all.

The focus of the enquiry was to find the key dates associated with the introduction and removal of qualifications accredited for secondary school students. The year 2000 was chosen as the starting year for the analysis because it coincided with the first teaching of a new version of the National Curriculum in England. Internet searches were carried out to find information about the qualifications and, where possible, to discover the reasons for qualifications' introduction and withdrawal.

A timeline was produced to show the dates when qualifications were introduced and withdrawn from accreditation. Summaries were produced of the main events associated with each qualification and key references were identified for this information.

It is hoped that this poster will provide a useful overview of the changes that have occurred to accredited qualifications in the past twelve years. Where possible, the references refer to published documents and publications, which should enable researchers to use them as a reference for the key dates. This poster should also provide a useful starting point for researchers wishing to investigate further details about these qualifications.

Do the questions from A and AS Level economics exam papers elicit responses that reflect the intended construct?

Jackie Greateorex, Stuart Shaw, Phineas Hodson and Jo Ireland



Poster presented by Jackie Greateorex

Providing evidence of the validity of examinations is important. Such evidence includes whether the examination questions elicit responses that reflect the intended construct.

Cambridge International A and AS Level economics qualifications are taken by students around the world. The November 2011 examination papers included multiple choice, data response and essay questions. The syllabus set out five assessment objectives which were assumed to represent the intended construct.

The research aimed to shed light on whether questions from A and AS Level economics in November 2011 elicit responses that reflected the intended construct.

In the research six experts in international pre-university economics qualifications:

- considered each question along with the assessment objectives
- rated the extent to which each question elicited responses that reflected each assessment objective where 0 is 'not assessed at all' and 5 is 'strongly assessed'.

In total there were 71 questions and 2130 ratings. The ratings reflected the weightings of assessment objectives in the syllabus. All three question types (multiple choice, data response and essay) reflected the construct(s) described in the syllabus, according to the distribution of the ratings. The results provided evidence for the validity of the examinations, that is they suggested that the examinations elicited the responses that reflected the intended construct. Furthermore these findings contribute to providing teachers, students and higher education with evidence for validity of Cambridge International A and AS Level economics.