



CAMBRIDGE ASSESSMENT

‘Question quality’: The concept of quality in the context of exam questions

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Abstract

Having good quality questions in exam papers is important to ensuring that the intended knowledge, understanding and skills are assessed. Previous studies have considered how the features of exam questions affect their difficulty and fairness. The current research sought the views of question writers in order to explore the notion of 'quality' in the context of exam questions and those features thought to contribute to question quality.

Seven examination question writers from four different subjects were shown some example exam questions. Participants were asked to comment on the quality of the question, reflect on performance data, rate question quality and to comment more broadly on their conception of question quality.

Three conceptions of question quality emerged. Good quality questions:

- Test the intended knowledge, understanding and skills and are clear around what is required. This means that students understand the task, allowing them to perform as well as they can.
- Differentiate between better and weaker students.
- Go beyond simple recall and understanding.

The discussions also identified question features thought to affect quality, including: logical flow; clarity; appropriate layout and spacing; clear resources; and appropriate mark allocation. These are similar to features identified as affecting difficulty and fairness by previous research.