Research Matters : 14
A CAMBRIDGE ASSESSMENT PUBLICATION

Foreword

One of the major problems in educational research is the time lag involved in evaluation. An innovation is conceived, design work is completed, implementation is undertaken, and evaluation starts. But evaluation takes time. It is important to follow a cohort completely through the programme and the assessments linked to a new qualification. This typically will take two years (GCSE and full A level) – with additional time for analysis and writing up. This raises significant ethical issues and pressure for wide implementation of new qualifications can be in tension with the need for ethnically-based piloting. Alongside this, policy changes at national level occur with increasing frequency, often before the evaluation of the previous form of the qualification has reported. Despite the increasing problem of evaluations reporting after the point at which the qualification to which they relate has been significantly changed or superseded, Cambridge Assessment believes that we should continue to have an ethically-based commitment to timely and incisive evaluation, and that we should work to reduce the frequency of unnecessary fundamental change to the form and content of qualifications. Time lag means that good judgement needs to be exercised in commissioning evaluations – they need to be planned and put in place in full recognition that evaluation and reporting takes time. Hence in this issue, a key article is Vidal Rodeiro’s examination of the impact of GCSE modularisation. The rush towards widespread modularisation of GCSE has been replaced by rapid reversal towards linear GCSEs, but it is vital to understand, in detail, the impact of that drive to modularisation. Modularisation has not been free of problems in the past – witness the so-called crisis of 2002 – and it is essential to understand fully both emergent and deeper problems and to examine critically the balance of benefits and unintended consequences. If such evaluations decline, genuine scientific accumulation of knowledge regarding assessment and qualifications comes under threat, and uninforming pendulum swings in policy are likely to increase in frequency and intensity.

Tim Oates Group Director, Assessment Research and Development

Editorial

Most of the articles in this issue address matters relating to comparability covering a range of contexts from methodology to modularisation and highlighting challenges posed in this contentious field. In the first article Yim reports on research carried out to investigate a rank ordering method using pseudo candidates’ scripts and real candidates’ scripts in a rank-ordering exercise at syllabus level: Louis Yim

In their article on bilingualism Imam and Shaw add their voices to a complex debate. They discuss the area of demands analysis in the context of comparability involving general and vocational qualifications. Creatorex and Shell report on a pilot study of a method for use in comparability research which was designed to ascertain whether the demands instrument used was appropriate as a tool in research studies and to explore how judges made decisions in this context. Creatorex and Shaw’s article reports on research into validity in the context of teacher assessed Independent Research Reports that contribute to the Cambridge Pre-U Global Perspectives and Research. This study forms part of a wider programme of research into the IRR.

In their article on bilingualism Imam and Shaw add their voices to a complex debate. They discuss the educational context within which students prepare for Cambridge International Examinations assessments and they address a number of key issues.

In the final contribution Emery, Gill, Grayson and Vidal outline highlights from the Cambridge Assessment Statistics Reports Series. These reports cover various aspects of the examinations system and are produced each year based on the latest national examinations data.

Sylvia Green Director of Research