

Research News

Cambridge Assessment Network

4th Cambridge Assessment Conference

On 19 October 2009 around 150 education and assessment professionals gathered at Robinson College for the 4th Cambridge Assessment Conference. Taking the theme '*Issues of control and innovation: the role of the state in assessment systems*', the conference encouraged debate on key issues at a significant time. Major changes to regulation, the shape of agencies, and to the allocation and form of responsibilities are underway, and mapping the consequences and implications of these changes is a vital process.

The conference featured keynote speeches from Professor Robin Alexander, Director of the Cambridge Primary Review, and Professor Alison Wolf, King's College London. In addition delegates were able to attend three from a selection of nine discussion seminars, given by renowned experts such as Professor Mary James (University of Cambridge), Isabel Nisbet (Ofqual), and Dr John Allan (SQA). During the seminar sessions delegates had the opportunity to comment on and debate the issues, and ask questions of the speakers.

A drinks reception was held at the close of the conference giving delegates further opportunity to network and discuss the issues with like-minded professionals.

Paul Newton, Director of the Cambridge Assessment Network commented: "Looking back over the years, the number of changes to education and assessment policy made by the state is overwhelming. With the establishment of Ofqual, continued crises within the UK assessment system and the ongoing discussion of standards, Cambridge Assessment is pleased to have provided a platform for debating the crucial issue of how far the state should be controlling educational assessment, with a conference programme that included such prestigious speakers."

Presentations and audio clips from the conference can be found at <http://www.cambridgeassessment.org.uk/ca/Viewpoints/Viewpoint?id=131163>.

Forthcoming Network Events

Assessing Citizenship in schools. Are we measuring the unmeasurable?

On 11 March Dr Mary Richardson from the Centre for Beliefs, Rights and Values in Education, Roehampton University, will be coming to talk about assessing Citizenship in schools. The seminar discusses the problems of assessing Citizenship, a subject which is perceived by many teachers as unconventional, and by some, as unassessable. The value of assessing Citizenship will be considered in the context of the findings from an empirical study conducted in secondary schools across England. The challenge for Citizenship educators is the need for meaningful assessments that relate to the beliefs and values under discussion in lessons.

When is an exam not really an exam?

On 17 March Dr Sue Horner will be presenting one of the Network's Forum seminars. The effectiveness of techniques to assess learner progress and performance is related to the purposes for which assessment is undertaken. The roles of different techniques in formal and informal assessment need further exploration. When roles and purposes have high stakes associated with them this impacts the selection of techniques. Public confidence is often cited as a reason for resisting a range of styles of assessment. Are there ways forward for teacher assessment, tests and qualifications?

For further details of these events, or to receive a monthly update of forthcoming events, or a copy of the Network's Programme for 2010, please contact the Network Team at: thenetwork@cambridgeassessment.org.uk.

Full details of our events programme are available at: www.assessnet.org.uk.

Conferences and seminars

British Educational Research Association

The BERA Annual conference was held from 2–5 September 2009 at the University of Manchester. Colleagues from the Research Division and CIE presented the following papers:

Victoria Crisp: *Objective questions in GCSE science: Exploring question difficulty, item functioning and the effect of reading difficulties.*

Milja Curcin, Beth Black and Tom Bramley: *Standard-maintaining by expert judgement: Using the rank-ordering method for determining the pass mark on multiple-choice tests.*

Tim Gill, Carmen Vidal Rodeiro and John F. Bell: *Aspects of AS and A-level Physics uptake.*

Jackie Greatorex: *How are archive scripts used in judgements about maintaining grading standards?*

Martin Johnson, Rita Nádas and Hannah Shiell: *An investigation into marker reliability and other qualitative aspects of on-screen marking.*

Stuart Shaw and Victoria Crisp: *What was this student doing? Evidencing validity in A-level assessments.*

Nicholas Raikes, Jane Fidler and Tim Gill: *Must examiners meet in order to standardise their markings? An experiment with new and experienced examiners of GCE AS Psychology.*

Full details of the papers can be found on the Cambridge Assessment website http://www.cambridgeassessment.org.uk/ca/Our_Services/Research/Conference_Papers

European Association for Research on Learning and Instruction

In August Rita Nádas attended the EARLI conference in Amsterdam and presented research on: *Markers' metacognition: Does metacognitive*

intervention enhance marking performance and cognitive marking strategy usage?

International Association of Educational Assessment

The 35th Annual IAEA conference took place in Brisbane, Australia from 13–18 September. The theme of the conference was 'Assessment for a Creative World'. Colleagues from Cambridge Assessment presented the following papers:

Newman Burdett and Martin Johnson: *Intention, interpretation and implementation: Some paradoxes of assessment for learning across educational contexts.*

Stuart Shaw and Martin Johnson: *Annotating essays on screen: The influence of reading environment on annotative practice and assessor comprehension building.*

Martin Johnson, Rita Nádas and Sylvia Green: *Marking essays on screen: an investigation into the reliability of marking extended subjective texts.*

European Conference on Educational Research

In September Irenka Suto attended the ECER conference in Vienna and presented a paper on: *How should grade boundaries be determined in examinations? An exploration of the script features that influence expert judgements.*

Association for Educational Assessment – Europe

The theme of the 10th Annual Conference of AEA-Europe, which took place in Malta from 5–7 November, was: 'Innovation in Assessment to meet changing needs'. Papers by the following researchers were presented:

Martin Johnson, Rita Nádas and Sylvia Green: *Marking essays on screen: an investigation into the reliability of marking extended subjective texts.*

Tom Bramley: *The effect of manipulating features of examinees' scripts on their perceived quality.*

Beth Black: *Introducing a new subject and its assessment in schools: The challenges of introducing Critical Thinking AS/A level in the UK.*

Stuart Shaw, Victoria Crisp and Nat Johnson: *A proposed framework for evidencing assessment validity in large-scale, high-stakes international examinations.*

Tim Oates and Jill Grimshaw: *How can we help teachers respond to national assessment strategies? The position in England.*

Four colleagues have received professional recognition from the Association – Paul Newton and Newman Burdett as Fellows, and Jill Grimshaw and Steve Murray as Practitioners.

Irenka Suto, Stuart Shaw and Jo Ireland won the best poster prize for their poster on *Creating research programmes to support the development and validation of qualifications: What are the key assessment issues and what are the key research methods?*

Publications

The following articles have been published since Issue 8 of *Research Matters*:

Crisp, V. & Novaković, N. (2009). Is this year's exam as demanding as last year's? Using a pilot method to evaluate the consistency of examination demands over time. *Evaluation and Research in Education*, **22**, 1, 3–15.

Emery, J.L. & Bell, J.F. (2009). The predictive validity of the BioMedical Admissions Test for pre-clinical examination performance. *Medical Education*, **43**, 6, 557–564.

Green, S. & Oates, T. (2009). Considering alternatives to national assessments in England: possibilities and opportunities. In: C. Whetton (Ed.), *National Curriculum Assessment in England: how well has it worked? Perspectives from the UK, Europe and beyond. Educational Research Journal, Special Issue*, **51**, 2, 229–245.

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