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If you would like to comment on any of the articles in this issue, please contact Sylvia Green.

Email: [researchprogrammes@cambridgeassessment.org.uk](mailto:researchprogrammes@cambridgeassessment.org.uk)

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# Research Matters : 7

A CAMBRIDGE ASSESSMENT PUBLICATION

## Foreword

While the contributions in this issue each provide insights into diverse matters in assessment one article in particular warrants special attention. Gray's and Shaw's contribution on 'de-mystification' of the Uniform Mark Scheme (UMS) is a valuable example of researchers 'drawing breath and taking stock' of processes and concepts located deeply within procedures for administering contemporary public examinations. Both authors benefit from being immersed in the day-to-day processes of administering examinations as well as contributing to the sometimes fraught and always pressured processes of developing new ones. In Robert Wood's 1991 book for UCLES, *Assessment and testing – a survey of research*, he drew attention to the serious implications of the significant gap between public understanding of examinations and the actual characteristics and technical processes of assessment. Interestingly, increasing public understanding of assessment was a feature of the School Council's work in the 1970s, but despite intense pressure from a few lone voices, this was not supported as a key mission of its successor bodies – even to the present day. Surely, as assessment professionals, we are more accountable to candidates and the users of assessment data than this taciturn position suggests. The UMS is central to Advanced level qualifications in England in particular, yet it is widely misunderstood and the artefacts of its use even less understood. The article included here is thus crucial not only in opening up technical discussion, but is a vital contribution to increasing transparency and openness.

**Tim Oates** *Group Director, Assessment Research and Development*

## Editorial

Most of the articles in this issue report on research that was presented at the British Educational Research Association (BERA) and/or the International Association for Educational Assessment (IAEA) conferences during the autumn of 2008. In the first article Sylvia Green summarises the two keynote presentations from the IAEA 2008 conference. In different ways they look to the future of assessment. Professor Robert Mislevy focussed on the implications of expertise research in the context of computer based testing and task design while Professor Dylan Wiliam explored the meanings of educational assessment and the challenges faced in the design of future systems.

The second article from Raikes, Scorey and Shiell explores a method to enable a greater range and number of educational professionals to contribute to decisions on grade boundaries. The research reported by Greatorex and Nádas considered whether using 'think aloud' methods to investigate assessment judgements compromises the authenticity of the thought processes involved. This is a methodological concern that has been expressed and debated widely and their work adds to this field of knowledge with encouraging results. The aim of the research on emotional intelligence by Vidal Rodeiro, Bell and Emery was to investigate whether relationships exist between the affective domain and progress in school. The Evaluation and Psychometrics team marked Cambridge Assessment's 150th anniversary by looking back at question papers over the years. The project is summarised in 'Assessment instruments over time'. Elliott and Johnson's article provides a detailed analysis of the nature of the spelling errors identified in the 'Aspects of writing' project. The aim was to establish whether certain spelling errors were particularly common and how they related to spelling conventions, as taught in schools.

In the first of the articles from OCR and Cambridge International Examinations (CIE) Gray and Shaw attempt to demystify the UMS employed in the examination system. They discuss some of the practical challenges posed by the calculation of grades for unities specifications. The second article, from Shaw, outlines the CIE research agenda from routine operational procedures to more full-scale experimental investigations.

Statistical reports are listed for information and are based on the annual national – level examination databases for pupils in England.

**Sylvia Green** *Director of Research*