

Editorial

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Welcome to the November 2025 issue of *Research Matters*. We are switching from using seasonal issue labels to using months to be more inclusive of our readers in the southern hemisphere and reduce any risk of confusion. We are aiming to continue with two issues a year at around the same times of year to usual.

We begin this issue with two articles relating to the study of literary texts written in the English language. Firstly, Jude Brady, Dominika Majewska and Jackie Greatorex report research which explored teachers' views on the literary canon. The authors analysed teachers' definitions of "literary canon", and teachers' ratings of 22 prose texts for how canonical they were and for their aesthetic quality. Secondly, Emma Walland describes research comparing exams where students do or do not have access to a literary text they have studied. In the context of essays about drama texts, she explored variations in the way that students in open- and closed-book exams used references to the text in their essays, gathered assessors' perspectives, and analysed whether students' marks appeared to be affected by taking open- or closed-book exams.

Given the considerable impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on students' education, it is important to continue to evaluate the effect on students' progression. Our third article, by Carmen Vidal Rodeiro and Carmen Lim, summarises findings from research about the June 2020 student cohorts who were unable to take exams. The analyses compared the progression outcomes of these students (e.g., uptake of qualifications and performance in the next stage of education, drop-out rates, institution types attended) to those for a pre-pandemic cohort of students.

In our fourth article, Frank Morley and Emma Walland consider the issues around the potential use of automarkers based on Large Language Models (LLMs). They take three imagined scenarios relating to the use of LLM-based automarking in high-stakes exam contexts and use these to discuss three key ethical issues: whether the decisions made by such an automarker can be understood; risks of bias in automarking decisions; and risks around whether students or others could unfairly manipulate the marks given.

Developing higher-order thinking skills (along with a range of other skills, plus attitudes, values and key types of knowledge) is considered important for students to be "future-ready". In our final article, Irenka Suto, Sarah Nelson, Judith Roberts, Aman Sidhu and Lesley Spence describe analysis of the thinking skills assessed in exam papers for several Cambridge International A Level subjects, with a particular focus on the higher-order skills of problem-solving, metacognition and systems thinking.