



- 1 **Foreword** : Tim Oates
- 1 **Editorial** : Sylvia Green
- 2 **An intra-board comparison of the effect of using pseudo candidates' scripts and real candidates' scripts in a rank-ordering exercise at syllabus level** : Louis Yim
- 10 **The effect of scripts' profiles upon comparability judgements** : Nicky Rushton
- 18 **Monitoring the difficulty of tiered GCSE components using threshold marks for grade C** : Vikas Dhawan
- 21 **An investigation on the impact of GCSE modularisation on A level uptake and performance** : Carmen L. Vidal Rodeiro
- 29 **Piloting a method for comparing the demand of vocational qualifications with general qualifications** : Jackie Greatorex and Hannah Shiell
- 38 **The validity of teacher assessed Independent Research Reports contributing to Cambridge Pre-U Global Perspectives and Research** : Jackie Greatorex and Stuart Shaw
- 42 **The Cambridge International Examinations bilingual research agenda** : Helen Imam and Stuart Shaw
- 45 **Cambridge Assessment Statistics Reports: Recent highlights** : Joanne Emery, Tim Gill, Rebecca Grayson and Carmen L. Vidal Rodeiro
- 51 **Research News**

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)

The full issue and previous issues are available on our website:  
[www.cambridgeassessment.org.uk/ca/Our\\_Services/Research](http://www.cambridgeassessment.org.uk/ca/Our_Services/Research)

# 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 ethically-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 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 wholesale 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 uninformed 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. The aim was to explore, qualitatively and quantitatively, the impact of comparing different script types, particularly in relation to different response styles. Rushton focuses on holistic judgements where candidates' performances are uneven to investigate whether uneven profiles make the judge's task more difficult. Both of these articles add to the methodological debate about how best to design and conduct comparability studies which involve human judgement.

Dhawan reports on his work on comparable grade boundaries across tiered examination papers. His research investigated a fundamental question where teachers allocate candidates to two different versions of a test based on their ability. The findings from this study were encouraging and potential methods for future routine analyses were outlined. In her work on the impact of modularisation Rodeiro has investigated a range of issues and in this article she focuses on whether different assessment routes (linear vs modular) equip students equally for further study.

The next comparability challenge addressed in this issue is, perhaps, the most complex. It combines the area of demands analysis in the context of comparisons involving general and vocational qualifications. Greatorex and Shiell 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. Greatorex 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*