

Research News

Cambridge Assessment Network

5th Cambridge Assessment Conference: Challenges of Assessment Reform

21 October 2010, Robinson College, Cambridge

Assessment is under reform all over the world. Some countries are embracing national testing, while others are abandoning it. Many countries are struggling to understand how best to integrate Assessment for Learning within everyday classroom practice.

The potential gains from reform may be high but the processes of change are complex and the consequences of getting it wrong can be severe. In the past decade alone, England has witnessed numerous crises of assessment reform; from the introduction of Curriculum 2000 A levels and the grading furore of 2002, to the appointment of a new contractor for marking national curriculum tests and the marking furore of 2008. Current reforms include the introduction of stretch and challenge at A level, diploma qualifications, revised arrangements for national testing, functional skills testing, controlled assessments, project qualifications, and more.

The 5th Cambridge Assessment Conference will address the challenges of assessment reform. What ensures its success? What undermines it? What lessons can we learn from reforms past and present?

Cambridge Assessment is pleased to announce that Professor Paul Black, King's College London, will be opening the conference with a keynote presentation on the effective integration of pedagogy, learning and assessment, as the foundation for successful assessment reform. The conference will include a panel discussion chaired by Mike Baker, former BBC Education Editor, and featuring Dr Mary Bousted from the Association of Teachers and Lecturers, Kathleen Tattersall from Ofqual, and others. Our speakers include Professor Jo-Anne Baird from the University of Bristol, Professor Frank Ventura from the University of Malta, Professor Peter Tymms from the University of Durham, as well as additional speakers yet to be confirmed.

Further details of the conference, including details of the programme and how to book your place, will be found on www.assessnet.org.uk/conference2010 as they become available.

To join the mailing list for conference updates, please email us at thenetwork@cambridgeassessment.org.uk, with 'Conference updates' in the subject line.

Seminars

Critical Thinking – skills for life

On 11 February over 60 teachers, industry representatives and leading academics came together at a Cambridge Assessment seminar to discuss the issue of Critical Thinking and whether it should be treated as a specialist, stand-alone subject or 'embedded'.

The seminar took place at the British Academy and was held to highlight how an explicit focus on Critical Thinking can enhance the attainment of pupils of all backgrounds and abilities, following recent research undertaken by Cambridge Assessment Senior Research Officer, Beth Black. Importantly, the research showed that pupils who study Critical Thinking as a discrete subject at AS level tend to do better in their other A level subjects, whether they are taking sciences, languages or humanities.

Although the debate was wide ranging, there was widespread agreement about the benefits of thinking skills in education and employment and a consensus that, whether delivered separately or embedded, it is important that the teaching of Critical Thinking be explicit.

Further details can be found at: <http://www.cambridgeassessment.org.uk/ca/Spotlight/Detail?tag=Critical>

For a personal response to the seminar see Joe Chislett's article on p.9.

Publications

The following articles have been published since Issue 9 of *Research Matters*:

- Crisp, V. (2010). Towards a model of the judgement processes involved in examination marking. *Oxford Review of Education*, **26**, 1, 1–21.
- Crisp, V. (2010). Judging the grade: exploring the judgement processes involved in examination grading decisions. *Evaluation and Research in Education*, **23**, 1, 19–35.
- Johnson, M. and Crisp, V. (2010). A case of positive washback: an exploration of the effect of pre-release examination materials on classroom practice in the UK. *Research in Education*, **82**, 47–50.
- Johnson, M. and Nádas, R. (2009). Marginalised behaviour: digital annotations, spatial encoding and the implications for reading comprehension. *Learning, Media and Technology*, **34**, 4, 323–336.
- Johnson, M., Nádas, R. and Green, S. (2010). Marking essays on screen and on paper. *Education Journal*, **121**, 39–41.
- Nádas, R. and Suto, I. (2010). Speed isn't everything: a study of examination marking. *Educational Studies*, **36**, 1, 115–118.
- Suto, I. and Shiell, H. (2009). What influences moderation and standards maintenance in school-based summative assessment? *Education Journal*, **119**, 41–43.

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