

Editorial

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Welcome to the autumn issue of *Research Matters*. With Nadhim Zahawi's announcement in April of a new GCSE in Natural History, to be delivered by OCR in 2025, this is a good time to consider the place of natural history in the school curriculum. In our first article Gillian Cooke traces its role via the record of assessments in natural history and related subjects (e.g., Botany, Zoology, Environmental Science) from the Cambridge University Press & Assessment archives.

Our second article, by Carmen Vidal Rodeiro and Joanna Williamson, explores the effect of the reforms to GCSE Mathematics in England on progression to, and achievement in, post-16 mathematics.

A theme of several *Research Matters* articles in recent years has been the nature of error in assessment materials (and how to avoid it). In our third article Sylvia Vitello, Victoria Crisp and Jo Ireland now report on the practical application of that work in terms of redesigned checklists used in OCR for different professional roles in the question paper production process.

Our fourth article, by Tim Gill, looks at the relationship between the Cambridge Checkpoint tests taken at the end of lower secondary (around age 14) in some international schools, and subsequent performance on the Cambridge IGCSE (taken at around age 16). These kinds of analyses can be used to indicate the predictive value of the earlier qualification and be one factor for schools to consider when deciding whether to adopt the Checkpoint programme.

It has become increasingly clear that the lockdowns imposed in many countries around the world as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic had a particularly harmful effect on young people. School closures and the subsequent partial re-openings required school teachers to cope with the demands of giving lessons to classes where some pupils were physically present while others were attending online. Our fifth article, by Filio Constantinou, presents an analysis of the challenges of this “synchronous hybrid teaching” based on in-depth interviews with 12 teachers from six different European countries.