

Setting the standard

A celebration of research conducted by AQA and predecessor bodies, on the 40th anniversary of the AQA Research Committee



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Centre for Education Research
and Practice (CERP)



Welcome

Thank you for joining us as we celebrate the research conducted by AQA and its predecessor bodies, on the 40th anniversary of the Research Committee.

Many of you will recall when AQA (formerly known as the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance) was launched as a joint venture between the AEB (Associated Examining Board) and the NEAB (Northern Examinations and Assessment Board) in April 1998, becoming a single merged organisation in April 2000. Both the AEB and the NEAB had amassed an impressive body of assessment research; this provided a sound basis for work subsequently carried out by AQA, in the department now known as the Centre for Education Research and Practice (CERP).

Setting and maintaining standards has historically played an important role in our research output. Although it continues to be an integral research topic, our attention has turned to marking, validity and assessment design. We are also investigating the impact assessment has on students and stakeholders, and how to ensure that non-examination assessment is fair.

Technological advancement – particularly in relation to how we harvest and analyse data – has had a profound impact on the face of assessment research. CERP now uses sophisticated software for its data analysis, and tasks that would have been considered mammoth just a few years ago are now completed at the touch of a button.

Electronic marking has moved from the periphery into the mainstream – with significant operational impact. Themes such as the effect of examiner specialism on marking reliability are gaining interest. Crucially, our interpretation of judgement is changing: recent work has investigated the use of comparative judgement in assessment.

This is an exciting and challenging time to work in assessment, with research conducted against a backdrop of lively debate. There is much work to be done; but as tonight's discussions illustrate, we have come a long way.

May I take this opportunity to thank our researchers – past and present – for their significant contributions to both the Research Committee

and AQA. It is also important to acknowledge the work of our supporting staff: particularly Debbie Miles, who has organised the Research Committee meetings for nearly 34 years.

I extend my sincere thanks to Professor Paul Newton and Professor Jannette Elwood for their contributions this evening, and to our current Research Committee members, who are detailed on pp5-11.

Alex Scharaschkin

Director of the Centre for Education Research and Practice

KEYNOTE

PROFESSOR PAUL NEWTON

Ripping off the cloak of secrecy

We don't just want our examination systems to be fair: we want them to be translucently fair. And that's entirely understandable. Public examinations play a huge role in structuring the society that we live in; so we need to be able to understand their mechanisms and we need to be able to see that they are just.

However, England's public examination systems have been repeatedly criticised for their lack of transparency. Paul's presentation will acknowledge this criticism, suggest possible reasons why this might have been a particular problem during the first half of the 20th century, and consider the role of exam board research in ripping off the cloak of secrecy.

Respondent

ALEX SCHARASCHKIN

Chair

PROFESSOR JANNETTE ELWOOD

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The Research Committee

Our work is reviewed by a prestigious committee of national and international researchers, chaired by **Jannette Elwood**



Jannette Elwood

Jannette chairs CERP's advisory group and is Professor of Education at

Queen's University Belfast. She is also an AQA trustee, serving on several committees. Jannette has worked in educational research, teaching and policy in a variety of organisations. Before moving to Queen's, she worked for the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA), where she was responsible for the management and development of Key Stage 3 national curriculum tests for 14-year-olds in England. Prior to joining QCA, she was Lecturer in Curriculum and Assessment at the Institute of Education, University of London. She is an executive editor of the international journal *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice*, and an elected Fellow of the Association of Educational Assessment – Europe.



Ayesha Ahmed

Ayesha is a research and teaching associate at the Faculty of Education, University

of Cambridge. She has worked in educational assessment since 1997. After nine years at Cambridge Assessment, she became a freelance research consultant, carrying out projects for exam boards and Ofqual – including training question writers in the UK and internationally. More recently, Ayesha has been researching spoken language assessment at the University of Cambridge. She teaches on the Education Tripos and on the Masters PPD course in assessment. She is a Fellow of the Association for Educational Assessment – Europe, an executive editor of *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice*, and a senior member of Hughes Hall, Cambridge.



Jo-Anne Baird

Jo-Anne is the Pearson Professor of Educational Assessment and Director of

the Oxford University Centre for Educational Assessment. Prior to this, she was Professor of Education and Coordinator of the Centre for Assessment and Learning Studies at the University of Bristol. She has also held the position of Head of Research at AQA. Jo-Anne was formerly lead editor of *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice*, and is now an executive editor. She was President of the Association for Educational Assessment – Europe from 2013 to 2015. Jo-Anne co-edited the book *Techniques for monitoring the comparability of examinations*, commissioned by QCA, and is actively involved in the development of many assessment policies and practices.



Robert Coe

Robert is Professor in the School of Education and Director of the Centre for Evaluation

and Monitoring (CEM) at Durham University. Robert's research interests include evaluation methodology; evidence-based education and the involvement of practitioners in research; school effectiveness and improvement; the use and effects of feedback, especially in performance monitoring information systems; and the statistical comparability of examinations in different subjects and over time. Robert also has experience as a maths teacher in a range of secondary schools and colleges.



Prue Huddleston

Prue is Emeritus Professor, and formerly Director of the Centre for Education

and Industry, at the University of Warwick. She has a particular interest in the 14-19 curriculum; her focus is on vocational education and qualifications, and work-related learning, and she has published widely on vocational learning and applied pedagogy. Prue has worked within the further education sector, as a teacher and manager, and also within community and outreach education. She has been involved in postgraduate teacher training for over 20 years. Her recent work includes a review of adult vocational teaching and learning practice across five sectors (for the Commission on Adult Vocational Teaching and Learning), and research on European policies and practices in designing and delivering outcome-orientated curricula in vocational education and training (for Cedefop).



Tina Isaacs

Tina is Programme Director for the MA in Educational Assessment at the Institute of

Education, and formerly a Director at the Institute's Centre for Post-14 Research and Innovation. She was recently Principal Investigator on a project exploring international instructional systems. Tina began her career teaching university-level history after completing her PhD in 18th Century British history at the University of Rochester (New York). She moved to England and joined the National Council for Vocational Qualifications: a predecessor of QCA. She was involved in the reviews that QCA produced on Curriculum 2000, and she led the Arts and Humanities, the Assessment Development and Secondary Curriculum (Key Stage 3 Review), Curriculum Standards, and 14-19 Policy teams. Tina went on to join Ofqual as Head of 14-19 Regulation.



John Johnson

John was head teacher of The Champion School in Havering, London, for 18 years. He

is a long-standing AQA committee member, and is currently Vice Chair of the Curriculum and Assessment Quality Committee and the Irregularities and Appeals Committee. He has been an AQA trustee since 2010. Previously, John was a principal examiner involved in A-level awarding and also worked for the Secondary Examinations Council. He directed the National Oracy Project and chaired the National Association for the Teaching of English; he has also been a local authority senior adviser. John is now an educational consultant specialising in school leadership, English and literacy, and assessment.



Sue Moore

Sue has been Head at Queen Elizabeth II High School on the Isle of Man since 1998, having

previously held deputy headships at Holland Park School and the Heathland School in London. She has been secretary of the Isle of Man branch of the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) since 2001. Sue has also been on the ASCL Council since 2004: she has chaired the Professional Committee, and been Honorary Secretary and Membership and Communications Officer. In 2009, she was awarded an HSBC Farmington Fellowship to study school leadership issues at Harris Manchester College for a term. Sue is an AQA trustee and a member of the Curriculum and Assessment Quality Committee.



Paul Newton

Paul is Research Chair at Ofqual. His research focuses primarily upon issues related to the

evaluation of large-scale educational assessment systems; and he has a particular interest in theories of validity for educational and psychological measurement. Paul has published on a range of assessment topics, and has been a researcher within a number of assessment agencies – including the Associated Examining Board, the National Foundation for Educational Research, the QCA, and Cambridge Assessment. Prior to joining Ofqual, Paul was Professor of Educational Assessment at the Institute of Education, University of London (now UCL). He is a member of the editorial board of *Assessment in Education: Policy, Principles & Practice*, and has served on a variety of national and international committees.



Alastair Pollitt

Alastair is an applied psychologist and linguist, specialising in educational assessment and

research methodologies. Alastair graduated from the University of Aberdeen with degrees in Chemistry, Education and Psychology. He ran the Godfrey Thomson Unit in Edinburgh University, co-directed a national project to monitor standards in English language among Scotland's school children, and published a book entitled *What Makes Exam Questions Difficult?* In 1990, he moved to Cambridge University's new Research Centre for English and Applied Linguistics, before being appointed Director of Research in UCLES (now Cambridge Assessment). Alastair became an independent consultant in 2004; in 2007, he re-introduced comparative judgement as an alternative way of scoring exam papers, and set up CamExam, which offers research and training on formal assessment.



Nadine Powrie

Nadine Powrie started her second headship in September 2015 at the John Roan

School. Prior to this, she was head teacher at Fareham Academy for five years. She is a member of ASCL council. From 2012 to 2014, Nadine was a member of the Public and Parliamentary Committee and Vice Chair for the International Committee. She was elected Vice Chair of the Curriculum and Assessment Committee for 2014-15. Nadine has visited many schools overseas to develop her vision for inclusiveness and the benefits of a multicultural education. She worked on a Making Good Progress DFE pilot for English and maths, with oversight of 35 primary and secondary schools. She is passionate about creativity and innovation.



Sheena Wright

Sheena was a teacher for many years, most recently as Head of Science at the

City of Portsmouth Girls' School. Her particular interest was in raising STEM awareness in the science curriculum and encouraging girls into STEM subjects. She has been involved with examination procedures for various exam boards, including as an assistant principal examiner for GCSE Physics at AQA. Sheena retired from teaching in August 2013 but continues with exam board work. She has involvement with the NUT's national education work as Vice Chair of the Secondary Advisory Committee. Sheena is a representative on the AQA Standing Joint Committee and a member of the AQA Curriculum, Assessment and Qualification Committee, IAC Panel and the AQA Appeals Committee.



Alex Scharaschkin

Alex became Director of CERP in 2014, having been a member of

AQA's Research Committee for four years. He was previously Director for Regulation, Consumers and Competition at the National Audit Office (NAO) in London, where he led the NAO's work examining the government's use of markets in the private and public sectors. Alex has a background in assessment research: he was Principal Officer for Statistical Analysis at the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, and held research posts at the Associated Examining Board and at London University's Institute of Education.

About CERP

AQA's Centre for Education Research and Practice (CERP) provides robust evidence that informs both organisational direction and wider educational debate.

CERP is a multi-disciplinary research facility with sites in Manchester, Guildford and London. We have a record of high-calibre research that stretches back 40 years through our predecessor bodies. While we maintain exacting standards of academic rigour, current research is grounded in the practical realities of assessment and qualifications.

Our team comprises statisticians, psychologists, educationalists and scientists. These varied backgrounds allow us to employ a range of qualitative and quantitative methodologies, which ensures our findings are credible and valid.

We are passionate about education, particularly high-stakes qualifications, and we share our work with a wide audience that includes the academic community, policy makers, teachers and specialist media. We regularly publish research papers, blogs and longer articles via our website: cerp.org.uk.

Find out more at:

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