

Annual Report

OXFORD UNIVERSITY CENTRE FOR EDUCATIONAL ASSESSMENT



Opening of the Centre - 23rd June 2008

Left-Right: Professor John Furlong (Director of the Department of Education), Dr John Hood (Vice-Chancellor), Dame Marjorie Scardino (CEO Pearson plc), Professor Gordon Stanley (Pearson Professor of Educational Assessment)

UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

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INTRODUCTION

The Oxford University Centre for Educational Assessment focuses on one of the most important public policy issues facing societies across the world – the reliability of standards of educational attainment in a global market of education. The Centre brings together two of the most renowned educational reputations in the world, the University of Oxford and Pearson. It is a place where academic and professional perspectives can come together and ensures that the most rigorous standards of academic research can be applied to the education sector worldwide.

The Centre has been extremely fortunate in attracting as its founding Director, Professor Gordon Stanley who has already in his first year laid the foundations for a sustained research programme, created an international academic network, and admitted its first research students. He is supported by an Advisory Committee that represents the global perspective of the Centre. The challenge for the Centre in the year ahead is to build up its resources to match the energy of its ideas.

Tim Gardam.

Tim Gardam
Chairman, Joint Advisory Board
Principal, St Anne's College, University of Oxford



DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Arriving at Oxford in April 2008, my first task was to establish a plan of activity for the Centre and to recruit research students. During this period, I had discussions and visits to the QCA, NAA, OfQual, PRA, and the Qualifications and Curriculum Group of the Welsh Assembly Government.

The Centre was officially launched at a ceremony held in the Department of Education, University of Oxford, by the Vice-Chancellor (Dr John Hood) and the Chief Executive Officer of Pearson plc (Dame Marjorie Scardino) on the 23rd June 2008.

On the same day, a roundtable meeting brought together some 16 UK academics and researchers from statutory bodies involved with educational assessment. Another roundtable on the 'Future of National Testing in the UK' was held in November. It was attended by 25 participants. The roundtable discussions were held under *Chatham House Rules* and records of the major issues discussed can be found on the Centre's webpage.

Both occasions provided an opportunity for assessment professionals and researchers to see the Centre as a place where important issues in educational assessment can be discussed and researched. It seems that colleagues welcome an opportunity to discuss policy and practice in a context of free discussion. For me they have been invaluable opportunities to connect with the significant issues that characterise the UK education systems.

Another early task for me was to initiate our graduate research activities. Manzil Maqsood and Rose Li have accepted Pearson Studentships in the Centre and are working on their DPhil plans as is Malcolm Hayes who is enrolled on a part time basis. Victoria Elliott who is on an ESRC scholarship has decided to work on her DPhil project within the Centre. Shan Huang an overseas student from China has also chosen to work towards a postgraduate degree within the Centre. With these students a 'Centre culture' is evolving and we are establishing a climate of supportive dialogue as we discuss and research key issues in assessment.

Two students, Laura Reynolds and Imogen Wild from Bath University arrived on placement at the Centre for the academic year 2008-09. They provided administrative support and engaged as research assistants as they also developed plans for their own projects. They have re-designed the webpage and have established a Facebook link for the Centre.

Our temporary administrative officer, Petrona Winton, was replaced by a permanent officer, Dr Vicky Hayman in November 2008. During the early days of the Centre, Petrona made sure that the Centre established a welcoming ambience. Vicky arrived at the point where we engaged in our first commissioned contract and ably assisted us through the administrative processes involved in the contractual arrangements. Her varied professional background in both research and administration has been much appreciated as we plan the development of the Centre. She works in the Centre five mornings a week.



In early October, an Executive Seminar for education system officials on the 'Standards Agenda' was organised by the Centre. Thirteen officials attended the seminar and delegates came from Hong Kong, Jordan, Malaysia, South Africa and the United Arab Emirates. Another Seminar for education system officials was held in conjunction with the Hong Kong Examinations Authority in April 2009. Ten officials from Hong Kong, Macao, Thailand and Singapore attended the seminar which was held in Hong Kong. These seminars provided an excellent opportunity for networking and comparison of systems undergoing similar pressures for change and adoption of more effective assessment regimes.

At the Centre we are keen to explore collaborative research opportunities and welcome visiting researchers working on related research. Dr Robert MacCann accepted an appointment as a Visiting Research Fellow for five months in 2009. He is a psychometrician with many years practical experience and he will use his time at the Centre to complete some collaborative work commenced with me some time ago as well as contributing to our conceptual work on reliability.

We also welcomed Professor John Gardner from Queens' University, Belfast, as a Visiting Professor. John's involvement in the Centre adds an important link with UK national policy and he will spend several weeks each year in Oxford working on joint projects and research activities.

While the first year has been an active one, plans to generate further research activity sufficient to generate enough income to appoint additional academic researchers will be a major priority for the next year.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'Gordon Stanley'.

Gordon Stanley
Director
Pearson Professor of Educational Assessment



BACKGROUND

For many years, Pearson plc has been a highly valued supporter of the University of Oxford. During the 1990s Pearson generously funded the Bodleian Library with gifts totalling £1 million. This partnership was strengthened by the establishment of the Oxford University Centre for Educational Assessment in 2007. The Centre's mission is to undertake research and international development work in educational assessment. The inaugural Director of the Centre and Pearson Professor of Educational Assessment is Gordon Stanley who took up appointment in April 2008. The University of Oxford is most grateful for the generous pledge of almost £2.5 million over 10 years, provided by Pearson plc to establish the Centre for Educational Assessment.

Research in the Centre focuses on new approaches to educational assessment and the challenge presented by the increasing requirement for global qualifications and standards. The work programme covers general schools-based learning, as well as vocational, professional and higher education. It also supports Priorities in Educational Assessment, the move to lifelong learning, the needs of multinational employers and an increasingly global workforce.

In addition, the Centre independently and collaboratively runs conferences and events for international education leaders. It provides a forum for policy debate as well as a platform for promoting commissioned research and evaluation by international governments and educational agencies.

RESEARCH THEMES

The following research themes form the focus of activities within the Centre:

- Developing and enhancing theories and models of educational assessment to help better understand different types of learning processes, resource use and outcomes in various educational systems and international contexts.
- Understanding how educational assessment is perceived and utilised by the various stakeholders within different educational systems. How perceptions vary and how they are changing overtime.
- Building a systematic appreciation of how assessment has shaped, or is shaped by, policy and practice in the various educational sectors, subject domains and international contexts.
- Evaluating how different types and modes of assessment influence the effectiveness of learning processes and systems – the relevance and functional impact of different forms of assessment in supporting learning. Factors shaping the uptake of different types of assessment and how assessment might better respond to learning objectives, curriculum design and different qualification regimes.



- Educational Measurement and Informatics and the contribution of enhanced information to validity, reliability and the functionality of assessment systems. The impact and opportunities of information to enhancing formative and summative assessment in different educational settings.
- Notions of validity, reliability and 'standards' in different types of educational assessment and the link between the nature of assessment and standing and reputation of qualifications.
- Impacts and opportunities offered by new assessment technologies in test design, test distribution, administration and results delivery. The impact and opportunities of e-learning and e-assessment in different educational settings.
- How the use and application of psychometrics is changing the face of educational and work-based assessment and its impact on life-long learning and personal development.

KEY ACTIVITIES 2008-09

June 2008

The Centre was officially launched on the 23rd June by Dame Marjorie Scardino, CEO of Pearson plc, and Dr John Hood, Vice-Chancellor, University of Oxford. On the same day, an invitational roundtable meeting brought together UK academics and researchers involved with educational assessment. The discussion focused on *Priorities in Educational Assessment*.

October 2008

The Centre hosted an executive seminar on the 6th and 7th of October for education system officials on *Measuring Performance- The Standards Agenda*. Officials from a number of countries attended.

November 2008

The Centre hosted a second invitational roundtable in Oxford to discuss *The Future of National Testing in the UK*. Over twenty educational professionals and researchers attended.

December 2008

The Centre successfully bid for a three-month contract from QCA : *Review of Teacher Assessment: Evidence of What Works Best and Issues for Development*.

February 2009

Dr Bob MacCann arrived from Australia for five months to work on research at the Centre as a Visiting Fellow.



March 2009

Professor John Gardner from Queen's University, Belfast, was appointed Visiting Professor at the Centre for an initial period of two years.

April 2009

An Executive Seminar for Education System Officials was organised with the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority and held in Hong Kong on 27th and 28th April 2009. The main theme was *Recognising a Wider Range of Achievement - Alternative Assessment Procedures*. The seminar was designed to enable education system officials to consider the implications of universal education on the provision of diversified examination services.

The first meeting of the Centre's *Joint Advisory Board* was held in November 2008. This Board aims to oversee the overall performance of the Centre in respect of its broad objectives, and is chaired by Tim Gardam (Principal, St Anne's College, University of Oxford). Other members are Professor John Furlong (Department of Education), John Fallon and Jim Tognolini (Pearson plc), Dr Francis Cheung (Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority) and Professor Gordon Stanley.

In addition, a *Management Group* has been established to take responsibility for the day to day running of the Centre. Members of this Group are Professor Gordon Stanley, Professor John Furlong, Eve Rodgers (Departmental Administrator), Dr Victoria Hayman (Centre Administrator).

RESEARCH STUDENTS

A key aspect of the Centre is that it offers the opportunity for students to develop an understanding of contemporary psychometric approaches to testing and to interact with agencies involved in testing and assessment programmes in both national and international contexts.

The generous grant from Pearson has allowed two graduate students, Manzil Maqsood and Yanhong Li, to start three-year programmes of study for DPhil degrees at the Centre. Manzil is working on *The Case for Formative E-assessment in Primary Classrooms of Pakistan* whilst Yanhong is focusing on *Grade Inflation in Higher Education in the UK*. In addition, Malcolm Hayes is being funded directly by Pearson to carry out research part-time on *Methods of Optimizing of Equating Models for Complex Testing Design* and Victoria Elliott has secured an ESRC grant to support her graduate work on *The Decision Making Process of Examiners* within the Centre.

Two other, independently-funded, students, Hongqin Fang and Shan Huang, have been working on their own research projects in educational assessment with guidance from the Centre and two undergraduate psychology students from the University of Bath, Imogen Wild and Laura Reynolds, have completed their placement year at the Centre helping with a wide-range of research activities.



FUTURE ACTIVITIES

Professor David Andrich from the University of Western Australia will be visiting in October 2009. Arrangements have been made with the Oxford Department of Continuing Education for David and Jim Tognolini to run introductory and advanced training courses on the theory and application of Rasch Measurement. These courses will be held during the week beginning 19th October 2009 and more details can be found at <http://cpd.conted.ox.ac.uk/Rasch>.

A further seminar for education system officials is being planned for 2010 in association with the HKEA. This seminar will target assessment authorities in mainland China and will build on the network already established.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES 2010-11

1. To identify funding opportunities to develop further research and evaluation work on:

- teacher assessment at system level
- standards-setting and standards-based reporting
- technologically based assessment
- public understanding of assessment and reporting systems
- the interplay of policy and implementation of assessment regimes
- ranking systems in higher education and the development of new assessment and reporting systems.

2. To build on the network of education system officials and continue to provide workshops to:

- enable assessment capacity building for developing education systems
- explore commonalities and cultural contexts
- disseminate technological perspectives

3. To explore the development of a master level professional degree programme in association with the Department of Continuing Education in the field of quality assurance and assessment in tertiary education.

4. To create some additional research positions from research and evaluation projects.

PROFILES

Researchers

The Centre has a Director and a part-time Administrator as well as four DPhil students and a number of research staff associated with the programme.

Collaborations and consultations are also pursued with academic staff based within the Oxford University Department of Education, many of whom have research interests in aspects of educational assessment.



Professor Gordon Stanley, Director of the Centre and Pearson Professor of Educational Assessment, was President of the Board of Studies in New South Wales in Australia from 1998–2008. In this role he was responsible for curriculum and assessment for schools K–12, the registration and accreditation of non-government schools and for overseeing the development of standards-referenced reporting in public examinations. As a member of the NSW Vocational Education and Training Accreditation Board 1998–2008 and as an overseas member of the Hong Kong Council for Academic Accreditation he has considerable experience of and interest in assessment and accreditation issues in higher and vocational education. Over his career he has published a large number of papers in education and psychology. He was awarded the 2008 Meritorious Award for Service to Public Education and Training at a ceremony in Sydney.



Professor Jim Tognolini is Senior Research Fellow at the Centre. He is Director of Pearson Research and Assessment, Professorial Fellow at Wollongong University in New South Wales and Adjunct Professor of Education at the University of Western Australia. In his current position he is responsible for the design, implementation and on-going management of assessment systems and learning processes. He is in residence at the Centre for part of each year and is an active participant in the programme of workshops coordinated by the Centre.



Professor John Gardner, Queen's University, Belfast, has been appointed to the Centre as a Visiting Professor for two years from April 2009. Professor Gardner is a leading researcher who has published widely in the area of assessment for learning and teacher assessment. These subjects are issues at the heart of current policy discussions in education system reform and the relationship between models of teacher assessment and testing regimes is a significant element of the work the Centre is engaged with as it pursues work on education standards and standards-referenced reporting systems.



Dr Robert MacCann was head of Measurement and Research Services at the Board of Studies, New South Wales for fourteen years until 2008 where he directed the research programme and operational activities in areas such as standards-based reporting, computer-based testing, school assessment and improving the psychometric properties of tests. Bob is working at the Centre for five months from February 2009 collaborating on research on models of standards-setting in high stakes assessments and comparing performance standards in international contexts.

Research students



Victoria Elliott taught English in secondary schools for three years before moving to Oxford to study for a DPhil in Educational Research Methodology. Her research interests lie in the making of judgements in assessment contexts, primarily by examiners, and computer assisted assessment systems. Five years of experience as an English examiner at a variety of levels supports her understanding of contexts.



Malcolm Hayes' main interest is the application of Rasch and IRT models in the analysis of test data, particularly Mathematics and English tests aimed at Key stages 2 and 3 of the National Curriculum. Within this area there are several test designs that are or have been in operation and it is a considerable challenge to ensure that such tests are fair, valid and reliable. Malcolm's research project is to look at methods of optimising of equating models for such complex testing designs



Yanhong Li joined the centre as DPhil student in October 2008. Prior this post, she has worked at Oxford Brookes University, Middlesex University and Portsmouth University researching and publishing on issues surrounding performance measurement and assessment in both the public and business sectors. Her previous research includes: Assessment and making practices in Higher Education, Service quality in Higher Education and International students learning experiences.



Manzil Maqsood completed degrees in Computer Science and Software Project Management in Pakistan. Whilst teaching at university, Manzil developed an interest in the field of education and achieved an MPhil in Education Research from the University of Cambridge before joining the Centre. Manzil's research interests include the use of ICT in the education systems of developing countries, the planning and development of e-assessment systems for education systems in developing countries and the comparative analysis of educational assessment systems around the world.



Shan Huang achieved a MEd on Educational Leadership, Policy and Development from Bristol University in 2007 and is currently studying for an MSc/DPhil in Education Research Methodology in Oxford. Shan's previous work focused on analysing the criteria of national evaluation systems at an institutional level to uncover the underlying tension between the diversity and convergence of development of higher education institutions. Currently, her research is on the critical analysis of the international ranking of universities.



Hongqin Fang is working on her doctorate in educational evaluation at East China Normal University and is currently a visiting scholar at the University of Oxford. Hongqin has worked as a researcher for the Higher Education Evaluation Center of the Ministry of Education since September 2005. At present she is researching quality assurance within Higher Education Institutions and Quality Audit.

University of Oxford faculty associates



interventions.

Professor Herb Marsh is the author of internationally recognised psychological tests that measure self-concept, motivation and university students' evaluations of teaching effectiveness. He has published widely and co-edits the International Advances in Self Research monograph series. His major research/scholarly interests include self-concept and motivational constructs; evaluations of teaching effectiveness; developmental psychology, quantitative analysis; sports psychology; the peer review process; gender differences; peer support and anti-bullying



and the economy. Qualification design and assessment are central to all of these.

Dr Geoff Hayward is the Associate Director of the ESRC Research Centre on Skills, Knowledge and Organisational Performance, a director of the Nuffield 14-19 Review, co-director of the Oxford Centre for Socio-cultural and Activity Theory and co-convenor of the Higher Education and Professional Learning research group. His research interests include the economics of education and training, youth transitions into the labour market and higher education, the design of national qualification frameworks, and the relationship between Higher Education



Placement students

The research Centre also has undergraduate opportunities to work as part of the team in assisting in ongoing research as well as initiating and completing their own projects.

This year, the Centre has taken on two undergraduate Psychology students from the University of Bath in conjunction with their placement year degree programme. **Imogen Wild** and **Laura Reynolds** were based in the centre working full-time for the academic year 2008-09.



Their responsibilities include providing research assistance to Gordon Stanley; the four DPhil students, in addition to general daily tasks to ensure the smooth-running of the centre. Imogen and Laura also generated individual research ideas furthering the progression of the Centre's work in the future of educational assessment. Having studied Psychology for two years, Imogen and Laura have developed interests in different areas which they hope to implement in their final year of research.

Administrator



Dr Victoria Hayman joined the Centre as a part-time administrator in November 2008. Having gained her DPhil in Atmospheric Chemistry from the University of York, Victoria worked for the UK Government commissioning and assessing research on climate change and stratospheric ozone depletion to help inform national and international policy in these areas. Following a career break, Victoria returned to work for the Church Commissioners running the Bishop of Ebbsfleet's office before joining the Centre last year.

DISSEMINATION

Presentations

Professor Gordon Stanley has given the following presentations during 2008-09:

August 2008: Australian College of Educators, *'An Outsider's First Impression of the British Education System'*.

September 2008: Cambridge IAEA conference, *'Performance with Respect to Standards in Public Examinations'*, with Professor Jim Tognolini

October 2008: Colloquium paper at Durham University, *'When we Move from Norm-referenced to Standards-referenced Educational Assessment'*.

March 2009: Cambridge Assessment Forum at Cambridge University, *'Giving Meaning to Marks A Case Study in Establishing Reporting Standards in High Stakes Tests'*

March 2009: Twilight Seminar , Western Australian College of Teaching, *'The Politics of Curriculum Today: Who is in Charge and Does it Matter?'*

May 2009: OfQual Lecture, *'Reliability- A Practitioner's Perspective.'*

June 2009: Public seminar at the University of Oxford, *'Why Primary Maths must go beyond Basics: Evidence from Two Reviews of Research'* with other Department of Education lecturers.

Publications and Reports

During the year a number of papers have been produced and several are under academic review. As they are published and released they are posted on the Centre's website: www.education.ox.ac.uk/assessment/

Most are downloadable from the site in PDF format.



CONTACT DETAILS

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