

Foreword

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With 2024 as the third year in which exams were taken in lower and upper secondary, there is a pervasive sense of “getting back to pre-pandemic arrangements”. But with COVID-19 impact still moving up through the system, a new UK government, and reflection on how the nation managed interrupted education, questions continue to be asked about international comparisons, the amount of formal assessment, and the resilience of systems. Whether the questions are old and familiar or new and challenging, we all benefit from evidence-based answers to them. The articles in this edition of *Research Matters* are central to further development of assessment and learning. Within existing examination approaches can we reduce the assessment duration whilst preserving the integrity of measurement? How can post-16 qualifications support those who, at the end of lower secondary, fall below national expectations in national exams in maths? What impacts are arising from the general societal switch from handwriting to typed script? And with concerns about individual welfare and wellbeing amplified during the pandemic, can we learn from the experience of emergency? Proposals for change are coming thick and fast – some stimulated by the impact of COVID-19 and some nascent in the system from before the pandemic. I can’t think of a more far-reaching natural experiment than pulling almost all children out of school on a punctuated and erratic schedule. The assessment research community continues to run hot trying to run national exams, understand what has happened over the past five years, and service calls for changed arrangements. Let’s all work to keep both the profession and policy makers serviced with high-quality evidence which relates to the questions that matter most.