

Editorial

This issue forms a special collection on Computer Assisted Assessment (CAA) and has been produced in conjunction with the International Computer Assisted Assessment Conference (www.caaconference.com offers a free downloadable archive of all previous CAA Conference papers. It includes selected papers from the CAA Conference, along with other CAA papers from across further and higher education. The variety of different papers, and the issues they explore, illustrates that CAA is now an active and established research area, which is testing both the technical and pedagogical challenges associated with developing and delivering assessment online.

This special issue is dedicated to a colleague and good friend, Dr Joanna Bull, who sadly passed away in June this year. Her death has come as a great shock to us all. Jo was a leading light in the field of CAA, being well known and respected by the community. She directed the highly successful TLTP-funded National CAA Centre, and through this co-authored the Blueprint for CAA which is still widely cited and used. Jo produced a wealth of publications, material, and most recently had set up an independent consultancy through her own business 'Eduology'. She will be very, very sadly missed, but not forgotten.

The issue consists of six papers: five focus specifically on CAA, and one more broadly on the pedagogies of e-learning.

The first article by Sclater, describes an ambitious cross-sector initiative in Scotland which is developing a large bank of assessment items for units across the Scottish further education sector. The paper highlights the issues involved with the initiative such as decisions about appropriate item types and subject areas, the need for training and guidelines for authors, the nature of the peer-review and quality assurance processes and associated metadata and interoperability issues.

The second article by Sim *et al.* provides a review of the literature on CAA and a critique of associated issues, such as interoperability, security, test construction and testing higher cognitive skills.

The third article by McAlpine reports on the development of an evaluation framework to facilitate the translation of paper-based to computer-based assessments and in particular the framework aims to assess and enhance the practicability of large-scale CAA migration for existing items and assessments.

The fourth article by Clarke *et al.* provides an insightful case study to evaluate the use of online MCQs in humanities as a means of reinforcing and extending student learning at Oxford University. In particular the research focused on a series of themes,

reinforcement of learning, cementing students' understanding, deepening students' knowledge and framing educational expectations. However they conclude that 'there is still much work to do if there is to be a shift in our assessment paradigms ... and the benefits of formative assessment can be realized and integrated into the rigid study structures posed by many higher education systems'.

The fifth article by Davies provides a different kind of case study that evaluated the validity of assessing students via a computerized peer-marking process. The study concluded that the higher performing students achieve a greater improvement in their overall marks.

The sixth article by Mehanna on the pedagogies of e-learning explores the different pedagogic techniques employed to establish effective e-learning practice. She carried out a detailed study of a computer mediated conference over a year, and derived nine clusters of pedagogies consisting of 29 pedagogic behaviours, and concludes that blending different learning theories and pedagogies is not only possible but beneficial.

We continue our Discussion series and in this issue Boyle and Cook provide an insightful commentary on Conole and Dykes' affordances of ICT paper published in the last issue, along with a response from the authors. The notion of affordances in relation to e-learning is a hotly contested one and we hope that these responses provide a useful starting point for a more detailed discussion on this topic.

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