



Institute is a step forward for assessors

I have been working within the teaching profession for over 25 years and am pleased to hear that an Institute for Educational Assessors has been set up.

Although I have since retired from the profession, I would like to know what member benefits are available for secondary school teachers to enable them to improve their assessment skills?

I can see the benefits to examiners working for awarding bodies (as I have done myself for a number of years). However, I hoped you could explain what benefits you offer to individuals "working at the coal-face"?

Linda West, Retired teacher, North-east Lincolnshire

Richard Gott, IEA membership manager, replies:

Thank you for your response and I am pleased to hear you welcome the development of an Institute for Educational Assessors. I should start by mentioning that membership of the Institute is open to all individuals with an



interest in educational assessment including parents, PGCE students, primary/secondary schoolteachers, lecturers, vocational assessors, markers, moderators and examiners.

The Institute firmly believes that everyone with an interest in educational assessment should be able to join the Institute and enjoy the associated benefits of membership. An overview of all the member benefits can be found on page 33 of this issue of *Make the Grade* and details of these benefits can be found on our website, www.ioea.org.uk.

We are constantly striving to increase and improve our benefits package, so if you have any suggestions please do not hesitate to contact me.

The writer of the star letter wins a £25 Waterstones voucher, courtesy of Endsleigh Insurance

Make the Grade welcomes letters. Please include your address, job title and telephone number. We regret that we are unable to print letters from sources we cannot verify.

By post:
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Competition time!

Would you like to have your tax return completed at no cost? IEA Partner Organisation Tax Watchdog offers a low-cost fixed-fee tax return and accountancy service to all members. To celebrate the first issue of IEAMail Tax Watchdog has kindly agreed to complete one lucky member's tax return completely free!

For your chance to win this great prize (worth almost £200) simply read the following paragraph and answer the related question.

If you receive payment for work done that has not had both tax and National Insurance deducted, you must register with the Inland Revenue as self-employed within six weeks of starting the work. Failure to do so can result in a fine of up to £100. You will also be required to submit a set of accounts and a tax return by 31 January each year, together with any tax you owe. Again failure to do so will render you liable for penalties and interest charges, which can be as much as £60/day.

Question: What does 'IR' stand for?

a) Interim Regulator b) Inland Revenue c) Irregular Routine

Email your answer plus your name and membership number to competition@ioea.org.uk.

Please note that this competition is only open to IEA Members. The prizewinner will be announced in the next issue of *Make the Grade*.

For further information on the low cost, fixed-fee Tax Return and Accountancy services offered through the IEA, go to www.ioea.org.uk/tax

Head to head

David Butler



Parental guidance will win support

Parents are likely to be receptive to a shift in educational assessment, argues David Butler, if they are kept informed

If you stand outside your local primary or secondary school talking to parents few of them, if any, would be able to tell you the difference between "formative" and "summative" assessment that Robert Coe, a director of the University of Durham's Curriculum Evaluation and Management Centre, discusses on page 18. Parents should not be blamed for this gap in their knowledge – they haven't been made aware of the distinction.

The focus on SATs and league tables by the media means that any public discussion of assessment never gets to what it means to the children. The role that assessment has to play in driving up attainment is not being recognised.

Until it is, parents are unlikely to understand the role assessment can play in their own child's learning.

It is crucial that parents are involved in this debate if assessment for learning is to become embedded. Research, mainly in the US but now being replicated in the UK, shows that parents have a profound effect on the attitude of children to learning. Parents can make up to an 80 per cent difference on attainment, compared with schools, which only make up to a 20 per cent difference. Parents are crucial to achieving a cultural shift in attitudes towards a role for assessment in learning because they have such a fundamental role to play in determining the attitude of their children to assessment.

The role of assessment in learning is likely to be well-received by parents. Evidence both from parent surveys for the National Confederation of Parent Teacher Associations (NCPTA) and research conducted by the General Teaching Council (GTC) show that parents are not entirely opposed to national testing and monitoring and that they do make some limited use of league tables. However, parents have

a strong preference for information that is personalised and specific. An assessment regime that meets this expectation is likely to receive the support of parents.

However, it would be wrong to assume that the role of parents is confined to changing the cultural perception of assessment and as recipients of information resulting from assessment for learning.

It needs to be accepted that parents have a key role to play in using assessment for learning to inform their own support for learning in the home.

"Information should be shared with parents as a matter of routine and not only at key points during the year."

Classroom practice needs to develop so that information is shared routinely with parents and not just at key points in the year. This would give parents a much better opportunity to focus the support they provide at home.

However, this is also dependent on getting many more parents actively involved in supporting their child's education. Work needs to be done to engage hard-to-reach parents. The NCPTA is providing its own support for parental involvement by funding and evaluating 10 projects, which seek to increase parental involvement, over the next academic year.

Whilst parents may not yet be aware of what formative and summative assessment are, the outlook is a positive one. Educators are likely to find parents a receptive audience willing to lend their support to educational assessment in all of its forms.

This needs to be used to help achieve a cultural change in the role of assessment, so that assessment for learning can truly be realised.

About the author

David Butler is chief executive of the National Confederation of Parent Teacher Associations. He is also a former member of the General Teaching Council for England and a past governor of a secondary school in Kent.

Barry Sheerman



Measures need clarity

The Education and Skills Select Committee sees assessment as central to the workings and success of our education system, says Barry Sheerman

As a select committee, our core responsibility is scrutiny of the work of the Department for Education and Skills and the value for money it gets from taxpayers' money. We can choose particular areas of policy for major inquiries, such as the recent reports on special education needs and public expenditure into education and skills. In among this we hold to account a multitude of quangos, ranging from Ofsted, the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, to the Teacher Development Agency and many more.

We aim to respond intelligently and independently and hope to build a reputation for this. As a Labour MP I am of course in one sense partisan, but our select committee is independent and I always aim to take a measured view based on the evidence we hear.

We always remember that we want the best of all possible worlds – an education department that is innovative and entrepreneurial, but also one that doesn't make mistakes.

Assessment is central to the workings and success of our education system and so is an area the committee continues to take a strong interest in. Without effective assessments of students' work it is impossible to judge how well an individual or an institution is doing. A student can only be effectively guided about their progress if assessment is fair and accurate. This is also at the heart of much of the discussion about qualifications.

The concerns recently expressed about plagiarism in GCSE coursework arise to a large extent from worries about how effective learning can be spotted and rewarded and how plagiarism and unoriginal work can be discounted. Much of the discussion

surrounding the proposals from the Tomlinson group on 14-19 reform centred on the proposed specialised diploma and transcript of achievement and how well different levels of achievement could be recognised. Many of those issues will arise again with the 14-19 vocational diplomas.

We recently held a private navigational seminar on testing and assessment. These initial sessions gave the committee a chance to discuss and become familiar with the various issues involved in a particular area of education policy. We heard from academics, teachers, representatives of the General Teaching Council, and the Fischer Family Trust, a group that promotes the effective use of assessment data.

"The reliability of assessment practices and the implications of using assessment results for league tables, schools and individual students were also important issues for those we met."

The select committee discussed a range of issues around testing and assessment, including the need for practices to be transparent and open to scrutiny, as well as possibilities for teachers' professional judgment being used to better effect in the assessment system. The reliability of assessment practices and the implications of using assessment results for league tables, schools and individual students were also important issues for those we met.

These are issues that we hope to return to in more detail in the new session of Parliament, and we look forward to seeing how the work of the Institute of Educational Assessors progresses on these matters.

About the author

Barry Sheerman has been the MP for Huddersfield since 1983, and was the MP for Huddersfield East between 1979 and 1983. He is chair of the Education and Skills Select Committee.