

# Lead assessor support programme

**The role of statutory assessment in education has long been a controversial topic. The obsession of successive governments with testing and measuring pupils' academic outcomes in a multitude of ways has been the source of debate and frustration for decades. *Leadership Focus* journalist Nic Paton takes a closer look.**

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his is an issue that has affected all phases of education, and the government's approach to GCSEs and A levels has brought matters into sharp focus for our secondary members over the last few summers.

Nevertheless, the debate about the role and value of assessment within schools and school improvement – essentially the 'why' of assessment, as well as the 'how' – remains intense.



**JAMES BOWEN,  
NAHT DIRECTOR OF POLICY**

As James Bowen, NAHT director of policy, explains to *Leadership Focus*: "As any school leader will tell you, teachers are assessing every day, every lesson, where they're

asking themselves, 'have the pupils understood that? Do I need to adjust it for some, or recap it for others?'

This is about saying, let's remember what effective assessment is really about, which is informing teaching and learning, helping pupils move on in their learning."

'This' in this context is the call by NAHT, discussed at Annual Conference last year, for the government to put its hands into its pockets and stump up funding to enable all head teachers to put in place an independently trained and accredited lead assessor in their school.

As the unanimously passed 2021 conference motion put it: "Years of unnecessarily high-stakes external tests and exams have narrowed curriculum delivery and opportunities for children and young people. Alongside this, there have been limited professional development opportunities for teachers to enhance their skills in assessment and collaborate with others." >





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◀ The answer, NAHT delegates agreed, was for the government to be lobbied “to provide support and resources for the development of independently-accredited training for lead assessors in every school”.

Furthermore, conference agreed that NAHT’s national executive should work with the Chartered Institute of Educational Assessors (CIEA) “to encourage every school to have a lead assessor and ensure members, and the appropriate staff in their schools, can access the training provided by the CIEA”.

What, then, is lead assessor training, what specifically is the course provided by the CIEA and, most importantly, given that most head teachers have a hundred-and-one other pressing priorities on their to-do list every day, why is this something NAHT is asking members to add to their workload?

“This is our response to the growing feeling among many in the profession that assessment has become increasingly de-professionalised,” says NAHT senior policy advisor Sarah Hannafin to *Leadership Focus*.

“There is not enough focus on assessment within teacher training. There is not enough budget for ongoing continuing professional development, yet assessment is so fundamental for teaching and learning. And the pandemic brought that to the fore.

“So, it is about refocusing assessment on what is important, which, of course, is learning. Rather than government SATs being the focus, assessment needs to impact learning and help pupils make progress – really supporting them through their school ‘journey’, and with the end of key stage one SATs next year, there is a real opportunity for this,” Sarah adds.

There is also a wider discussion here – and one regularly articulated in the pages of *Leadership Focus* – that of professional agency.

In other words, the need – and ongoing battle – for school improvement and ‘progress’ (in all its meanings) to be something led and driven by professionals rather than politicians.

As James says: “This is, partly, us as a profession wrestling back control of assessment. Assessment shouldn’t just be about measuring how high you can jump; it is about informing good teaching.”

So, the CIEA. What is it, and what does this lead assessor training involve?

For those unfamiliar with the CIEA, it is a professional membership organisation that works to improve standards in educational assessment, including training people to become chartered educational assessors. Its members encompass



**SARAH HANNAFIN, NAHT  
SENIOR POLICY ADVISOR**

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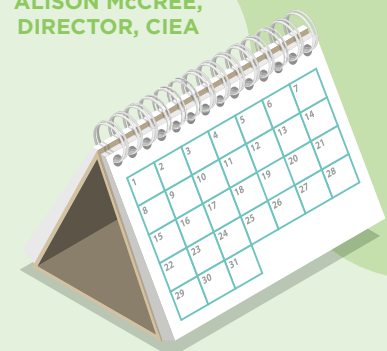
teachers, examiners, school and college leaders and academics, among others.

“We developed the lead assessor programme because we recognised there was a demand for better assessment expertise in schools. We have long realised that there have been limited opportunities for professional development in educational assessment,” explains Alison McCree, director at the CIEA.

“Often, trainee teachers will get some insight into assessment, but this is all too often limited in scope, and once they’ve finished their initial training, there is very limited opportunity to develop those skills in assessment. Ultimately, the skill of an assessment lead is to better the outcomes for pupils and schools through improved teaching and learning.



**ALISON MCCREE,  
DIRECTOR, CIEA**



**“ULTIMATELY, THE SKILL OF AN ASSESSMENT LEAD IS TO BETTER THE OUTCOMES FOR PUPILS AND SCHOOLS THROUGH IMPROVED TEACHING AND LEARNING,” SAYS ALISON.**

“It is also about building the professional trust of the educational environment, whether primary or secondary; anywhere that educational assessment happens. Building trust that what teachers actually produce – the outcome of assessment – is reliable and valid,” Alison adds.

Recognising the post-pandemic ‘hybrid’ world we all now live and work in and the fact teachers and school leaders tend to be extremely busy people, the course is all online and accessible to participants in their own time. A course leader is assigned to each cohort, who is available to support participants over a 10-week period. After that, the course is still available, but the course leader will no longer monitor and respond to the discussion boards.

“For those 10 weeks, you have a dedicated course leader who is an expert in assessment, with experience in either the primary or secondary phase of education, because we have a primary and secondary version of the course,” explains Alison.

Drilling down into the detail, the first fortnight is essentially registration, launch, becoming familiar with the core site, carrying out preliminary reading and being introduced to the course leaders and contributors.

“People can access as much or as little reading as they want. I know everyone is super busy and that reading an article on educational assessment might not be top of the priority list. So, we have all the links there, should people want to access them, and if they want to come back to it in, say, six weeks, they can,” says Alison.

“We do appreciate that there is a lot to reflect on. So, the course is available for a year; people can go back and dip into all of the presentations. The only thing that will be different is that there won’t be somebody at the end of a line to answer any questions after the initial 10 weeks.”

The ‘meat’ of the course is based on four modules, each of which takes about three hours and includes a theory session, which is normally delivered by the course leader. Although the content is all online, all modules have a live launch and other live sessions that you can participate in should you wish to do so, especially as these can be an opportunity to engage with other participants.

The CIEA’s chartered educational assessors pass on their insight and expertise, with a focus on how to apply the learning to your school, and there are activities for you to take away and work through, again normally linked to whatever is happening in your school or department.

“We try as much as possible to get the theory into practice immediately. We want it to be relevant and useful. People do have to engage with the materials to get the best out of the course. It is about trying to get this into practice and make it part of your everyday skillset,” says Alison.

“We recommend that more than one person from a school or multi-academy trust (MAT) does the training. Previous participants have really emphasised the benefit of taking the course with a colleague from the same school. That allows you to do the course but then to go back to school and have somebody to go over things with – to share ideas or discuss how what you have covered in a module might be applied to your context. For example, using the course materials to reflect on current practice and question or support our approach, such as, ‘have we thought about doing it this way?’ And really being able to bounce ideas off each other,” Alison explains. ➤





◀ The course is available at a specially discounted rate of £320 per person for NAHT members (normally £395). There is also a reduced rate for block bookings, normally for five or 10 people, although delegates must be from the same school or MAT to benefit from this.

However, of course, the point is that if NAHT wins this argument with the government, this sort of training could become centrally funded and accessible on a much wider scale.



**AMANDA HULME, HEAD TEACHER AT CLAYPOOL PRIMARY SCHOOL**

As Amanda Hulme, head teacher at Claypool Primary School in Bolton and chair of NAHT's assessment and accountability group, emphasises: "The government doesn't always listen to us as a profession, especially when it comes to assessment. In the past, it has even questioned our ability to assess accurately.

"So, we feel the best way to prove to them that we are the experts is to ensure every school has a lead assessor in place. If the government truly believes

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**TIM SHERRIFF, VICE-CHAIR AT THE CIEA**

that assessment is the key to success for all of our children, if it believes it is an important aspect for children to succeed, then it should be funded appropriately. And it should be funded well enough so that we can all access that training," she adds.

"I have always maintained that there is a correlation between outstanding assessment and 'outstanding' schools. Because it is so important to be able to see exactly where a particular pupil is up to," agrees Tim Sherriff, vice-chair at the CIEA, a member of NAHT's assessment and accountability group and, until this summer, head teacher and head of centre at Westfield Community School and Start Well Family Centre in Wigan.

"For progress to be made, the starting point needs to be accurate. Otherwise, your whole system is built on sand. This is not something that should be seen as increasing workload. Some people think that, particularly around writing, teacher assessment can be seen to be a burden," Tim emphasises.

"But it is the way it is done, the way it is managed, that is important. It needn't be a burden. Fundamentally, what we want to do is involve teachers in assessment, rather than being reliant on a test," he adds.

The value of having this sort of training embedded in your school is further highlighted by the fact that key stage one SATs are on course to be scrapped from 2023/24, Tim points out.

"The question then will be, how do schools monitor the progress of pupils from reception until they leave in year six? What's going to happen? So, there are many reasons why schools should do this programme.

"Schools have got to be able to demonstrate that what they're doing, and the information they're sharing with parents and governors, is reliable and valid. Therefore, to have a member of staff who is a qualified lead in assessment, to me, would be valuable and worthwhile," Tim adds.



#### **FIND OUT MORE**

To learn more about the NAHT lead assessor support programme, including how to register for a discounted place, go to [www.naht.org.uk/lead-assessor-support-programme](http://www.naht.org.uk/lead-assessor-support-programme)



## NAHT PODCAST

NAHT's regular 'School leadership' podcast series recently looked at the lead assessor programme.

NAHT director of policy James Bowen spoke to Amanda Hulme and two other NAHT members who have already been through the programme: David Merriman, head teacher at Gaddesden Row JMI School in Hemel Hempstead and Hannah Smith, deputy head teacher at the same school.

On the podcast, Hannah explains that, as a CIEA chartered educational assessor, she had been the driving force to embed lead assessor training in the school, including persuading David to join her on the course.

"It is about developing your knowledge of the theory behind assessment. Not just how you do it but why you do it. And how you come to create assessments," she says.

"Certainly, as teachers, we don't necessarily think a lot about the stage

before we conduct assessments. I think this course helps you see that first initial stage and how other people, who you may be buying assessments from, propose and create their assessments.

"It really does make you look at what you are doing from an assessment point of view. How you assess, why you assess and what different processes and procedures you use. And it just sort of gives you a different perspective on them.

"You dive straight in, and you're doing this 'because we have to do assessments every term, and that's what we do'. But this made you really look and think about how you're doing it and why you're doing it. And how you can improve what you're doing to make it a more beneficial process. It is just giving you that time to force you to reflect. I think that was really helpful," Hannah adds.

"What was nice too was that, because you had over the week to do it,

you could work around your workload and pressures of everyday teaching and leading. We all had different days and times that we could access it, and it was really nice to be able to have that freedom to do it over a window, knowing that it would be responded to and that you would get a lot out of it," agrees David.

"That it is not just a tick in the box that you do every term to send data to stakeholders and everything. It's actually saying, 'well, I've done this, this is what I'm going to do with the information, this is what I'm going to do with the results, and this is how I'm going to feed back to everybody.' That was really useful; to actually be a 'critical friend' towards yourself as well.

"Leadership and assessment can be lonely, can't it sometimes? And to have people to share that with was very beneficial," David adds.



You can listen to the full podcast at [www.naht.org.uk/podcasts](http://www.naht.org.uk/podcasts)