

Lead Assessor programme

We have all known since last December that there will be no written examinations and other external assessments for GCSE, A Levels and vocational and technical qualifications this year. That applies in all four home countries. Instead, teachers and lecturers will be required to assess their students' performance to determine the grades to be awarded this summer.

It is essential that this year's processes command widespread support from teachers, students, parents and the wider public. And with the prospect of appeals, having robust internal assessment arrangements in place to build confidence in the fairness and consistency of teachers' assessments becomes even more pressing.

In each home country, the relevant authorities, including the awarding bodies, are issuing advice and guidance on what is expected. The Ofqual/DFE requirements were published on 25th February, with final details only becoming available from awarding bodies by the end of March. However, it is already clear that awarding bodies will 'sample' to check that schools and colleges assessments are appropriate.

So time is tight for schools and colleges to put in place effective systems for carrying out and quality assuring the internal assessments. The CIEA's 'Lead Assessor' programme is specifically designed to help staff tackle the challenges of the next few months. We are already running this programme. In Northern Ireland, it operates in partnership with the awarding body CCEA. Each school or college can enrol two members of its staff. Offered directly, we have one cohort underway and another due to start in mid-April.

The programme consists of four modules, all offered online with expert tutorial support.

- **Validity:** introduces relevant aspects of validity that we believe anyone designing or carrying out assessments ought to be familiar with - construct relevance, authenticity, manageability, fairness, bias, comparability and reliability. By using relevant examples, we encourage participants to think about how to apply the theoretical principles in their own assessment context, and what that means in relation to the evidence being assessed for 2021.
- **Standardisation and moderation:** understand the importance of planning and implementing good procedures to set and maintain standards – within departments/courses as well as across a school or college. Getting this right is an essential part of ensuring fairness to all candidates.
- **Data:** how to understand, interpret and make best use of the various forms of data associated with assessments is the third area covered. When assessing students work, or standardising staff to ensure consistency or moderating to ensure appropriate standards are applied, some data will be produced. Making appropriate use of it is essential.
- **Managing people:** getting all staff on board is the key to implementing effective quality assurance arrangements across a school or college. The final module focuses on the skills related to effective people management and, crucially, successful change management. The crux is on developing and fostering good communication skills, behaviours and attitudes.

For CCEA, we've included a module that focuses on what is expected by the awarding body this year, in terms of assessments, authentication and quality assurance arrangements. This means participants get to discuss in detail exactly what they need to do and how they can apply what was covered in the other modules to this summer's requirements.

By offering the programme online and in a flexible format, we hope it will be valuable for anyone working in a school or college who has a role in assessing students' work for this summer's qualifications.

Getting things right this year is vital for students and their parents, but it is equally important in terms of proving the credibility and trustworthiness of teachers' assessments. Being 'trusted' to assess their own students is a big responsibility. If things go well, there will be widespread support for a better-balanced assessment system in future, combining internal and external assessments for the benefit of students. If they don't, those arguing that 'exams are the only fair assessment' will feel justified in returning things to 'normal' as soon as possible. For many of us, that's the one result we don't want to come out of summer 2021.