

The important role CIEA membership plays in the professionalisation of assessment practices.

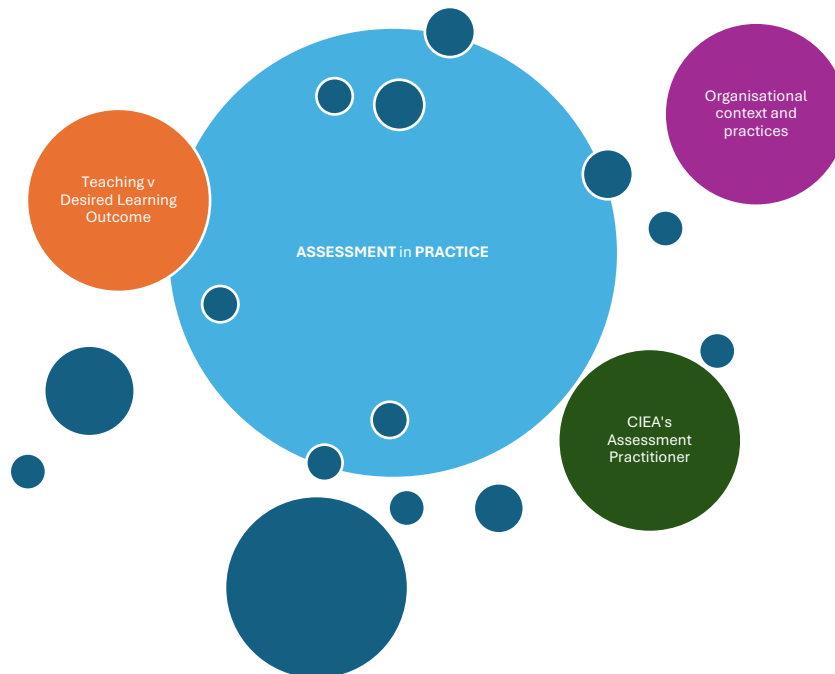
Memberwise defines a Professional Body as “an organisation with members (mostly individuals) practicing a profession or occupation. These organisations usually have oversight on knowledge, skills, support, conduct and practice of the respective profession/occupation”. Nevertheless, this statement provides a very limited definition of a Professional Body. A more positive and precise definition will include the role that a Professional Body has in setting the standards for professionals and related practitioners and providing training, guidance and advice in respect of professional practice.ⁱ Identification of the role of a Professional Body highlights the service provision as a public good. A Professional Body may also act as a lobbyist for the profession engaging with government and their agencies, such as regulators, as well as promotional engagements with relevant organisations.ⁱⁱ

The Chartered Institute of Educational Assessors (CIEA) aims to provide appropriate, current and relevant training, guidance and advice for assessment professionals at a range of levels: the pinnacle of a practitioner’s recognition by CIEA is Chartered status awarded as a Chartered Educational Assessor. The use of postnominals helps individual practitioners to establish their public profile as professional assessors. Chartered assessors exemplify the highest standards of professionalism for members of the Institute, both in terms of their technical abilities and their behaviours; CIEA’s code clearly describes these expectations. As importantly, being a member of the Institute further establishes the identity of members as professional assessors: “understanding how professionals think about themselves has been the focus of many past research studies (e.g. Ashforth et al., 2007; Kreiner et al., 2006a; Kreiner et al., 2006b; Ibarra, 1999; Pratt et al., 2006)”.ⁱⁱⁱ The extensive literature on the subject identifies the importance of expressive factors, as well as the instrumental benefits (access to conferences, journals etc), as key to decisions to become a member of a Professional Body.^{iv} The sense of personal identity and identification as a professional with peers and members of a Professional Body through networking events and over social media platforms is a significant driver toward membership.

The profile and identify of the Institute’s members, what this looks like and how this is characterised in terms of the Institute’s own public profile, is key to the reputation and

recognition of the CIEA as the premier professional membership organisation for assessors worldwide. The role of the CIEA is indelibly tied to the membership: particularly Fellows of the Institute and the CEAs. The work of members within their own institutions, as educational and vocational consultants and advisors, within awarding organisations, in educational and vocational leadership, and in the conduct of assessments and their quality assurance, deepen the significant role that CIEA plays within assessment ecosystems.

Marianne Talbot's PhD research on CIEA membership will, undoubtedly, become a central plank of efforts to establish and embed Institutional membership, both corporate and individual, as an essential element for relevant career progression. The approach to assessment highlighted here, is described as a cultural practice mediated and operating in three principal dimensions. That is, between teaching or training delivery and desired learning outcome in one plane, while also acknowledging that formal and informal assessment practices are mediated within and by an organisation. The third plane is the identity and role of the CIEA assessment practitioner.



While multiple factors impose their influence on assessment practices, interventions in all three dimensions will greatly impact the quality of assessment, engagements and relationships directly with learners, both in terms of their broader perspective on assessment

and on those carrying out assessments. Law and regulations cannot be ignored, but the three dimensions are primary to the local response. Leslie Allport's viewpoint on mediation and cultural change are relevant to the challenges faced by assessment practitioners and organisations. She observes that "Culture change also requires the corporate commitment of the wider system (whether that be the workplace, the court system, a school, a local community or society at large)".^v

Acknowledging the value of assessment as a mechanism to promote cognitive development of knowledge, skills and appropriate behaviours, remains an ambiguous principle for many. Antagonism toward assessment is an impediment toward achieving the sense that it is an intrinsic activity, rather than a necessary evil, within education and training. The sense that assessments are a ritual to be undergone, a test or examination of personal worth, to generate proof that learning has been completed or concluded, presents them as a necessary rite of passage rather than central to the development of learners capabilities. Allport's astute observation on cultural change and peer mediation is equally applicable to the role of assessment practitioners:

These are not values that can be imposed but are arrived at through clear information, choice, inter-agency co-operation and the demarcation of professional roles. Peer mediation in schools provides an excellent example of how this can realistically be achieved. When a school provides peer mediation it requires a commitment at every level from headteacher and staff, to pupils, to other support staff, all of whom are part of the running of the school.^{vi}

While information around summative assessments has generally become clearer over time for high-stakes assessments, such as GCSEs, this has not quelled the annual tide of complaints each August. Displays of the worth of individuals and institutions (league tables being one example), does not present the true value of assessments and may distort individual perspectives about what achievement actually looks like. Changing the culture around assessment is not a challenge unique to practitioners in the UK, but CIEA and its members are in a unique position to take this challenge up and deliver change. Lead assessor and assessor programmes provide the basis for reorienting perspectives on assessment: assessment of and for learning are competencies in their own right and not an adjunct to subject matter expertise and skills as a teacher or lecturer. From this perspective, a qualified leader or CEA becomes a

trusted advisor, coach, mentor and consultant, who helps institutions navigate the dimensions of assessment developing the culture of assessment as a change maker.

The positive argument for professional membership of CIEA would appear to be unanswerable. Nonetheless, like many Professional Bodies globally, the number of members has fallen in recent years.^{vii} The factors involved in the decline of membership numbers goes hand in hand with the transformation of professional status:

The world of professions is... changing, with the ongoing pursuit of professionalisation by many occupations, challenges to the traditional expectations and privileges of the established professions, and increasing adoption of “professional” as an adjective to describe many jobs.^{viii}

Diffusion of notions about the concept of professional, professionalism and professionalisation, have tended to level the field of occupations to the extent that the terminology, often debated and disputed in its strictest formulations, is relegated to a generic notion that employment means working to professional standards. For Professional Bodies, finding a narrative that ascribes enhanced value personalised to individual members becomes a lexical conundrum.

How does CIEA generate a narrative and language that is accessible but also exclusive, in shaping the role of the many parties involved in assessment? How does the Institute communicate an identity for itself and its members that facilitates a decision to become a member? Lastly, how does it shape the assessment landscape so that membership of CIEA appears to be an inevitable consequence of being an assessment practitioner establishing that the Institute enriches the discussion on assessment in a way that supports learner progression? Thackeray et al. (2005) observe that:

...recognition, advocacy, service, and shaping the future direction of the field; subscription to professional journals; access to job banks; and reduced registration fees at conferences. Individual membership in a professional association may be considered one indicator of commitment to the profession.^{ix}

While recognition is undeniably important, and commitment to the profession remains a central tenet for any Professional Body, things have moved on considerably since 2005. Digitalisation and use of AI in assessment is having a profound impact on the generation of learning models that will see profound changes to many well-established professions:

accountancy, stockbroking and some parts of the legal profession, may be among the first casualties. This does not mean an end to the roles but will mean that fundamentals of these roles will become automated. Assessment is also not immune to the challenges offered by technological advancements.

It is my view that the three-dimensional model referred to earlier, will prove to be resilient and exploring the need to humanise the inherent characteristics of assessment practices, rationales and purpose, will make the role of practitioners more vital and more demanding. This means that the narrative and lexicon surrounding and promoted by CIEA must encourage and manage the evolution of the discipline itself, the status of the wide range of practitioners operating in diverse sectors, the characteristics and value offered by and for members of the Institute, as well as enhancing the presence and standing of the CIEA as a Professional Body.

ⁱ Sam Matthews, "Why do professional bodies matter?" *Springpod*: <https://insight.springpod.com/blog/game-changing-professional-bodies> (9) accessed 12.02.2026

ⁱⁱ Rosemary Thackeray et al.. "Certified Health Education Specialists' Participation in Professional Associations: Implications for Marketing and Membership", *American Journal of Health Education*, vol.36.6 (November/December 2005): 337

ⁱⁱⁱ Caza, Brianna Barker, and Stephanie Creary. "The construction of professional identity." *Perspectives on contemporary professional work*. Edward Elgar Publishing, 2016. 259-285.

^{iv} Anne Walsh and Kara Daddario, "The Dynamic Nature of Professional Associations: Factors Shaping Membership Decisions", *Journal of Applied Business and Economics*, vol. 17(3) (2015): 117.

^v Lesley A. Allport, "Mediation and Cultural Change", *Amicus Curiae*, Series 2, vol. 4.2 (2023): 382.

^{vi} *ibid.*

^{vii} Jenkins Lumpkin, "#Why Membership? Professional Associations in the Millennial Age: A Call to Action through Mentorship", *OLAQ*, vol. 21.3 (January 2016): 5.

^{viii} Thackeray: 388.

^{ix} Thackeray: 388.