

Report to NZAI: IEAN (International Educational Assessment Network) Conference, Slovenia

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Introduction

Attendance at IEAN is by invitation only. IEAN is a network of 12 small nations or states, committed to assessment for learning. Except for the host nation, all countries typically have one researcher and one policy representative. The rationale is that when research and policy collaborate, positive change is more likely to happen. IEAN members meet regularly online, and in-person every 18 months (except in 2021, the COVID pandemic resulted in a virtual conference).

Slovenian conference

The agenda comprised four items: 1) time for each country to report on recent assessment changes or challenges, 2) discussion on the emerging issues across nations, 3) reports from the three sub-groups, 4) planning sub-group priorities for the next 18 months.

1. Summary of Country reports

- a) Ireland – revamping senior cycle curriculum. Interestingly during the pandemic there were no examinations, and the usual achievement inequities were ‘levelled out’ – students not traditionally qualifying for tertiary study did and are faring well.
- b) Switzerland – lots of projects on assessment for learning (AFL)
- c) Iceland – period of transition with AFL
- d) Norway – new curriculum. Gradeless research project – effects on teachers, parents, schools when examinations are removed from upper secondary school qualifications; research on 1st and 2nd generation AI on young people (using it for formative feedback and to foster critical thinking). Tension between teacher judgement and external examinations having greater weight in grade allocation.
- e) Singapore – considering alternatives to examinations and alternative qualifications – what do people in industry seek and what would be acceptable to them?

- f) Wales – considerable change – process curriculum, progression – pedagogical focus, reforming qualification, assessments, teacher education. New qualifications start in 2025. Striving to be independent of England. Extensive collaboration and consultation across the sector; action research has been integral to the development that seeks to change teacher beliefs and develop a more coherent curriculum. Govt been centrally involved and part of group discussions to grapple with education concepts – helped them understand the effects of, and links between, policy and practice. Worried about effects GCSE might have on the Wales qualification. Six areas of learning in the curriculum until age 16. Seems to be widespread commitment to ensuring the changes work.
- g) Scotland – awaiting Cabinet Secretary decision on report submitted by Hayward et al for major reform of Scottish school qualifications.
- h) NZ – curriculum refresh underway – major changes relate to embedding of te ao Māori, common practice model. The MOE Assessment Position Paper is being revised. Recent changes to literacy and numeracy standards in NCEA L1, have caused some controversies due to the lower-than-expected percentage of students performing at the required standard, a few elite schools opting to either develop their own school qualification, despite risks of QA and portability, or electing for students to sit Cambridge or IB qualifications.
- i) Slovenia – Focusing on the positives learned during the pandemic – considering continuing alternative ways (other than tests) to assess students. Currently in the middle of curriculum reform. Invited two teachers and young people to talk about experience of assessment without grades.
- j) British Columbia – unable to attend.
- k) Queensland – unable to attend.

2) Current educational assessment issues coalesced into the mismatch between assessment for learning policies and practices with the requirements of senior secondary school national qualifications. At this juncture, across most jurisdictions (not Norway or Switzerland), the demands of high stakes examinations undermined assessment for learning principles and practices. Interesting was the number of nations currently undergoing significant curriculum reform. Concerns were expressed in two nations about commercial interests influencing the composition of examinations.

3) Sub-group reports/discussions

a) Learner voice - Voice is not enough – audience and influence are more challenging for all of us. The link between policy and what happens in the classroom needs to be strengthened. Teachers need to be more authentic in truly listening and responding to student voice. Most important is

learner involvement in decision-making about their learning (inside and outside of school). Central is teacher confidence and security in their knowledge, pedagogical beliefs, classroom management capabilities and assessment capabilities in listening to and using student voice. Influences include the classroom experience, age and stage of learners and the public context. Rights come with responsibilities – learners might need to take responsibility so that voice does not become an entitlement. Cultural considerations are important for eliciting student voice, for example, the appropriateness of students questioning and speaking up in class varies across cultural groups, as well as SES. Some of these groups need considerable support, confidence building, and varied opportunities, to be heard. Various pedagogical approaches can enhance the sharing and influence of student voice, such as smaller group activities and peer or group assessment tasks. Regardless of format, feedback from students can be powerful PLD for teachers.

b) *Qualifications* - how might new digital systems give us better assessment information?

Fundamental knowledge and skills are important for students' futures – we use assessment to find students who need more support and to guarantee human rights – that won't be found if we abandon standardized assessments.

a) In Wales 1/3rd of students fail due to NRM system. Consulting at moment on new qualification framework

b) Switzerland – students 'sorted' at age 12 for vocational vs university pathway.

c) Norway – new curriculum introduced in 2020. Gradually moving to include teacher assessments; trialed portfolio system; vocational option of two years in school and two years' work-based learning.

d) Ireland rethinking higher school qualifications. Some discussions about potential modular and vocational options.

A qualification challenge for many nations is balancing the need to assure that school leavers have sufficient knowledge and skills for the next step in their pathway (either work or tertiary study), while also representing the unique combination of interests and broader life capabilities of each student. How might the demands of standardized assessments be balanced with individualized approaches to respect the diverse cultural, family and life experiences of young people?

c) *Equity, Inclusion, Diversity and Indigeneity* - Educational inequities pertain not only to access to education, but also provision of and opportunities to engage in educational experiences, as well as achievement outcomes. Inequities may be revealed through analysis of patterns associated with geographical location and student characteristics such as gender, ethnic identity, migrant status,

family socio-economic status, and ability levels. Awareness raising about inequities in education has resulted in commitment by United Nations members to “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” (United Nations, SDG 4, 2018). Because assessment is integral to learning and achievement – wherein it can enhance learning – or gatekeep and prevent learners from progressing, countering inequitable practice is an ethical responsibility of assessors.

Several considerations are needed for students who have experienced issues with equity, inclusion, and diversity: educators listening to, and learning to know and understand their students’ and their backgrounds; building respectful, reciprocal relationships; clear, engaging dialogue so students believe teachers want to help them progress; questioning and re-thinking assessment assumptions. Digital forms of assessing can increase access for students of diverse need, through augmented realities, voice and motion sensor equipment, wearable devices, while also providing a wealth of information on learning analytics, prompt and individualized feedback to students. The OECD (2021) also recommend cross-curricular opportunities, for interdisciplinarity and authentic real-world assessment tasks requiring capabilities like problem-solving and critical thinking. These assessment tasks are thought to contribute to student agency. But there are challenges with teacher preparedness, workload, misalignment with national/international certification requirements, the impact of artificial intelligence, and public perceptions, that need considerable renegotiation.

How might we abandon the ‘factory model’ that influenced assessment design in terms of mass efficiency, standardization of process and output, apparent objectivity – for a potential model of responsiveness to individual strengths and circumstances? What are the implications for what we assess – could/should we move away from an emphasis on knowledge accumulation to assessing users/appliers/creators of knowledge across disciplines to solve more complex issues, with capabilities in systems thinking, interpersonal and intercultural skills?

Over the next 12-18 months IEAN will progress work on academic papers and educational policy in four areas: empowering learner voice in assessment; improving links between assessment for learning and assessment for qualifications; building more equitable, diverse, and culturally inclusive forms of assessment; utilizing artificial intelligence to build assessment and learning capabilities.

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