

Introduction to the workshop materials

The workshop approach

The materials are described as workshop materials because of the approach to teaching and learning which they use and convey. A workshop approach is the term used for learning experiences in which the learner creates meaning and understanding through his or her own mental and physical activity in collaboration with others. What is provided as a stimulus for this activity can be objects or materials to investigate or to use, problems to solve, or evidence to examine and discuss. The outcome may be an artefact, a solution to a problem, a plan, a critique or the recognition of new relationships between ideas or things. Perhaps the most important product, however, is a greater understanding of the ideas involved. In the present case this means understanding of the roles of assessment in teaching and learning.

To apply a workshop approach in the context of assessment, requires that workshop participants engage with issues and problems of assessment and use evidence in arriving at solutions that make sense to them. Materials such as case studies, examples of tests, assessment procedures and recording methods are provided for discussion and tasks are defined so that the work is systematic and purposeful. The overall aim is to bring about changes in attitudes to, and understanding of, the ways in which assessment can be a means of improving education; this requires more than the knowledge of new techniques.

The materials in use

The materials are intended for use in courses of professional development led by a workshop leader. They are suitable for use with a wide range of participants: teacher educators, teachers, inspectors, curriculum developers, examination board staff and ministry officials.

In order for the use of the materials to achieve its aims, it is essential for the workshop leader to read and follow the Notes for Workshop Leaders on page 3.

The modular structure of the materials

There are many facets of assessment and they do not need to be tackled in any particular sequence, apart from beginning with general principles. Priorities and needs will vary from time to time. To allow maximum flexibility in the use of the workshop materials it was decided to adopt a modular structure. This provides free-standing modules from which courses tailored to specific needs can be created.

The amount of time required for each module will depend to a large extent on the discussion generated within the group using it, but it is expected to be about 3 to 4 hours. This means that each module is long enough to cover a particular aspect in some depth, thus counteracting one of the disadvantages of a modular structure, that it can cause fragmentation in learning.

The first module is introductory, so any course should begin with this and then move to the priority focus for the participant group. This may be formative (ongoing) assessment or the creation of formal, summative tests, or the keeping of records, or management of assessment, etc.