

Editorial

The Covid-19 pandemic and its aftermath have prompted a lot of debate about the purpose of education and the role of assessment. All the articles in this issue touch more or less directly on these big themes.

In our first article Irenka Suto presents a conceptual framework for thinking about what “educational success” looks like and how teachers and school leaders might use different kinds of assessments to gain insights about the complete educational profile of their students. A particular focus for educational reform in many countries in recent times has been on how to assess various kinds of “competence”. Our second article, by Stuart Shaw and Simon Child, suggests a systematic general approach to defining and validating competence frameworks, based on clarifying claims and establishing evidence and arguments to support them.

For many years assessment organisations have provided ways for students with specific needs to access their assessments. Much research has focused on whether these access arrangements succeed in creating a “level playing field”. Less research has been carried out on what schools and students think of access arrangements, and how they use them. Our third article, by Carmen Vidal Rodeiro and Sylwia Macinska, fills this gap by reporting results from an international survey of schools taking Cambridge qualifications.

Our fourth article, by Pia Kreijkes and Martin Johnson, uses a detailed comparison of the four devolved national education systems in the UK as a basis for reflecting on issues of autonomy and control, in particular the role of the “middle tier”: organisations occupying the space between the central government and individual schools.

In the last year or so, educationalists and think tanks have been falling over themselves to pronounce on what the future of education is or should be. In our final article Tony Leech compares and contrasts seven different published reports about this desired or anticipated future in England, focusing on four areas of particular interest: high stakes assessment at age 16; how many subjects should be studied (and at what ages); the use of digital assessments; and the relationship between academic and vocational study.

Tom Bramley Director, Research Division