

Key concepts and principles of assessment

This handout will cover:

- Why should assessment take place?
- The key concepts of assessment
- Principles of assessment
- VARCS & SMART
- Role and responsibilities of an assessor
- Regulations & legislation relating to assessment
- Policies and procedures
- Reading list
- Website list

Why should assessment take place?

Assessment should take place to ascertain if learning has occurred, for example: the skills, competence, knowledge, understanding, behaviours and/or attitudes needed at a given point by a learner. If you didn't assess your learners, you wouldn't know whether they had learnt anything. Assessment can be towards a formal qualification, a set of standards or something else such as a job specification.

Assessment should focus on improving and reinforcing learning as well as measuring achievements. It should help your learners realise how they are progressing and what they need to do to improve and/or progress further.

Assessment is a regular process; it might not always be formalised, but you will be observing what your learners are doing, asking them questions, and reviewing their progress whenever you are in contact with them. If you also teach or train, your learners will be demonstrating their knowledge and skills regularly, for example through activities, discussions and regular tasks. You are therefore constantly making judgments about each learner's progress and how they could improve. You should also be aware of the impact that your comments and grades can have on your learner's confidence when you give them feedback. Comments which specifically focus on the activity or work produced, rather than the individual, will be more helpful and motivating to your learners.

Assessment should not be confused with evaluation, assessment is of the *learner*, evaluation is of the *programme* that the learner is taking. Assessment is specific towards learners' achievements and how they can improve. Evaluation is a quality assurance monitoring tool. It includes obtaining feedback from your learners and others, for example, employers, line managers and quality assurers to help you improve the overall learner experience as well as that of your own practice.

Concepts and principles of assessment

Concepts

Concepts are the aspects involved throughout the assessment process, whereas principles are how they are put into practice. For example:

- accountability
- achievement
- assessment strategies
- benchmarking
- evaluation
- internally or externally devised assessment methods (formal and informal)
- progression
- transparency
- types of assessment e.g. initial (at the beginning), formative (ongoing) or summative (at the end)

You need to be *accountable* to your learners and your organisation to ensure you are carrying out your role as an assessor correctly. Your learners should know why they are being assessed and what they have to do to meet the assessment criteria. You will also be accountable to the awarding organisation if you assess their accredited qualifications. You might be accountable to employers if you are assessing their staff in the work environment.

You may be required to analyse *achievement* data and compare this to national or organisational targets. The funding your organisation receives might also be related to your learners' achievements. It's always a useful evaluation method to keep a record of how many learners you have, how many successfully complete their programme and in what timescale.

Following the *assessment strategy* for your subject will ensure you are carrying out your role correctly and holding or working towards the required assessor qualifications.

Benchmarking involves comparing what is the accepted standard for a particular subject area against the current position of your own learners' performance. Using benchmarking data can help inform target setting for individuals or groups. If learners don't achieve the benchmark, an evaluation will need to take place and improvements be implemented. Benchmarking can also be used to compare organisations which provide a similar service, or used within the same organisation to compare performance in different locations.

Evaluation of the assessment process should always take place to inform current and future practice. All aspects of the assessment cycle should be evaluated on an ongoing basis and feedback obtained from all involved.

Internally devised assessments might be produced by you or other staff at your organisation such as: assignments, projects or questions which will also be marked by you. *Externally devised assessments* are usually produced by an awarding organisation, for example, an examination. *Formal* assessments usually count towards achievement of a qualification, whereas *informal* assessments are used to monitor ongoing progress and development.

Progression should be taken into account when assessing learners, i.e. what they are going to do next. It could be another unit of the current qualification, or a different level of qualification, either at your organisation, in the work environment or elsewhere. Progression opportunities should always be discussed with your learner to ensure they are on the right route and that they are capable of achieving.

To assist *transparency*, you need to ensure that everyone who is involved in the assessment process clearly understands what is expected and can see there is nothing untoward taking place. That includes your own interpretation and understanding of the assessment requirements as well as that of your learners. You should be honest with your learners and not let them feel they have achieved more than they are capable of. Auditable records must always be maintained throughout the assessment process.

Types of assessment include initial, formative, and summative as well as diagnostic tests which ascertain a learner's current knowledge and experience. Some types of diagnostic tests can also identify learners with dyslexia, dyspraxia, dysgraphia, dyscalculia, etc. Initial assessment is carried out prior to or at the beginning of a programme to identify your learner's starting point and level. Formative assessment is ongoing, and summative assessment is at the end.

Principles

Principles are *how* the assessment process is put into practice, for example, being:

- ethical: the methods used are right and proper for what is being assessed and the context of assessment. The learner's welfare, health, safety and security are not compromised.
- safe: the learner's work can be confirmed as valid and authentic. There should be little chance of plagiarism, confidentiality of information should be taken into account and learning and assessment should not be compromised in any way,

nor the learner's experience or potential to achieve. (Safe in this context does not relate to health and safety but to whether the assessment methods are sufficiently robust to make a reliable decision.)

- fair: the methods used are appropriate to all learners at the required level, taking into account any particular needs. All learners should have an equal chance of an accurate assessment decision.

Two important principles are known as VARCS and SMART.

VARCS

- **Valid** – the work is relevant to what has been assessed and is at the right level.
- **Authentic** – the work has been produced solely by the learner.
- **Reliable** – the work is consistent over time.
- **Current** – the work is still relevant at the time of assessment.
- **Sufficient** – the work covers all of the requirements at the time.

Following VARCS will help ensure assessment is carried out correctly.

SMART

Specific – the activity relates only to what is being assessed and is clearly stated.

Measurable – the activity can be measured against the assessment requirements, allowing any gaps to be identified.

Achievable – the activity can be achieved at the right level.

Relevant – the activity is suitable and realistic, relates to what is being assessed and will give consistent results.

Time bound – target dates and times are agreed.

Planning SMART assessment activities will ensure all the assessment requirements will be met by learners, providing they have acquired the necessary skills and knowledge beforehand.

Roles and responsibilities of an assessor

Your main roles will be to:

- Carry out assessments according to the qualification requirements, or those of the programme or job specification being assessed
- Follow all internal and external organisational requirements

Your responsibilities may include:

- attending meetings
- negotiating and agreeing assessment plans
- making best use of different assessment types and methods
- reviewing learner progress
- standardising practice with other assessors
- completing and maintaining records
- giving constructive and developmental feedback to learners
- identifying and dealing with any barriers to fair assessment
- making judgments and decisions based on the assessment requirements
- maintaining continuing professional development (CPD)
- supporting learners with special assessment requirements and dealing with sensitive issues in a supportive manner.

Your role as an assessor will also be to inspire and motivate your learners. If you are enthusiastic and passionate about your subject, this will help to encourage and challenge your learners.

Your learners may already be motivated for personal reasons and be enthusiastic and *want* to perform well. This is known as *intrinsic* motivation. They may be motivated by a *need* to learn, for example to gain a qualification, promotion or pay rise at work, known as *extrinsic* motivation. If you can recognise the difference between your learners' wants and needs, you can appreciate why they are motivated and ensure you make their experience meaningful and relevant. Whatever type of motivation your learners have will be transformed, for better or worse, by what happens during their assessment experience.

Regulations & legislation relating to assessment

You will need to find out about and follow certain regulations, for example:

- Regulatory bodies such as Ofqual and Ofsted
- Awarding organisations who accredit the qualifications
- Legal aspects such as Data Protection, Health and Safety, Safeguarding, Equality, Counter-Terrorism and Security (Prevent Duty).

Ofqual is the regulator of qualifications, examinations and assessments in England and vocational qualifications in Northern Ireland. They are responsible for maintaining standards, improving confidence in the system and distributing information about qualifications. Ofqual give formal recognition to awarding organisations and bodies that deliver and award qualifications. They also monitor their qualifications and activities, including the fees charged.

Ofsted inspects and regulates services in England which care for children and young people, and those providing education and skills for learners of all ages. They were originally established to inspect schools, however, they now inspect all provision in the Education, Children's Services and Skills sector.

If you are assessing a qualification accredited by an awarding organisation, they will provide you with a qualification specification. This will contain an assessment strategy which you will need to follow. They will also have quality arrangements in place which you must adhere to.

You may need to have a DBS check to work with learners. This stands for the Disclosure and Barring Service and looks into criminal records.

Policies and procedures

You will need to follow your organisation's policies and procedures. Think of the policy as a statement of intent, and the procedure as how it will be carried out. These should include:

- access and fair assessment
- appeals and complaints
- confidentiality of information
- copyright and data protection
- equality and diversity
- health, safety and welfare
- internal quality assurance

There may also be codes of practice such as:

- behaviour
- bilingualism
- dress
- environment
- acceptable use of ICT equipment
- management of information
- record keeping.

Reading list

Gravells A (2016) [*Principles and Practices of Assessment*](#) London Learning Matters
SAGE

Greer et al (2019) [*The Vocational Assessor Handbook*](#) (7th Edn) London Kogan Page

Ofqual (2009) [*Authenticity – a guide for teachers*](#) Coventry: Ofqual

Read H (2016) [*The Best Assessor's Guide*](#) Bideford Read On Publications Ltd

Wilson (2012) [*Practical Teaching: A Guide to Assessment and Quality Assurance*](#)
Hampshire Cengage Learning

Website list

Disclosure and Barring Service - <https://www.gov.uk/disclosure-barring-service-check/overview>

Government legislation - www.legislation.gov.uk

Ofqual - www.ofqual.gov.uk

Ofsted – www.ofsted.gov.uk

Prevent Duty and Safeguarding resources: www.preventforfeandtraining.org.uk