Work-based assessment principles and practice

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Contents

Introduction

This guide introduces key principles relating to work-based assessment and describes their implications for assessment practice.

The guide was originally developed for the TRAVORS2 project (Training for Vocational Rehabilitation Services), to support the introduction of a workplace-based European practitioner certificate.

The main part of the document takes each of five key principles in turn, describes the basic principle, then outlines implications for assessment design and for assessment practice. Assessment design is fixed to some extent by the assessment specification for the qualification, but there are areas where the training or assessment organisation will need to design assessment processes. In terms of assessment practice, the assessment organisation will need to ensure that its assessors understand what is needed and apply the principles competently and consistently.

There is little comparative research about what works most effectively in work-based assessment; most of the studies that are available publicly are case-studies of particular programmes or assessment methods, plus critiques of (particularly) the British NVQ/SVQ system. There is however a vast amount of experience of work-based assessment at all levels, which is expressed largely in the form of guidance documents and awarding organisations' literature. This guide draws on practice from a wide range of sources including competence-based vocational qualifications, work-based higher education, and professional bodies' assessments for granting licence-to-practise or fully qualified status.

A companion guide, *Developing assessable professional standards*, is in preparation to support the development of standards and competence frameworks for work-based assessment. Check the publications section of www.devmts.co.uk for further information.

Assessment concepts and terminology

Work-based assessment

Work-based assessment refers to any assessment that draws on work activity. It can be carried out in the workplace (e.g. through discussion, observation, and examination of work products) or away from the workplace (e.g. through examining work products, recordings, reports, records, logs, written accounts etc., as well as discussion).

Organisations and people involved in assessment

Work-based assessment can be organised in various ways, the most common being:

A. An organisation carries out the training and assessment, and provides certification (the usual model for universities)

B. One organisation carries out the training and assessment with the approval of another, which provides or authorises the certification (the external validation model)

C. One organisation carries out the assessment and provides certification, while others provide training (a model used by some professional bodies).

In this document the emphasis is on the organisation that carries out the assessment (the 'assessment organisation'), whichever of these models (or variants on them) are used. The following terms are used for the people involved in assessment:

The *candidate* is the person being assessed for a unit or qualification. Candidates may be enrolled on a course or they may be assessed on their existing level of competence.

The *assessor* is the person who carries out the assessment, whether by direct observation and questioning, examination of work *in situ*, or by examining written or recorded material produced by the candidate. Assessors can also be (but do not need to be) trainers, tutors or mentors; in some systems there is a requirement that candidates are assessed by different people from those who train or supervise them, in others the opposite is the norm.

The *verifier or moderator* is the person responsible for monitoring the quality of assessments. In model B above there are often two levels of monitoring, one by the assessment organisation and one by the certificating body.

The *co-ordinator* is the person in the assessment organisation (which could be for instance a training organisation, educational institution or professional body) responsible for the overall operation of the qualification.

Criterion referencing

Work-based assessment is usually criterion-referenced. This means that there are explicit criteria for passing the assessment or achieving a given grade. This can be contrasted with the norm-referenced assessment sometimes used for percentage-marked examinations, where marks are analysed statistically and the pass level adjusted according to a norm (or, occasionally, to deliberately manipulate the number who pass).

Criterion-referenced assessment requires the material that is to be assessed to be written in the form of criteria (as opposed, for instance, to a list of tasks or topics as in a traditional syllabus): these are sometimes referred to as competence standards, learning objectives or learning outcomes.

Standards and criteria

The terms 'standards' and 'criteria' are sometimes used interchangeably. They are statements of what a candidate must achieve in order to be awarded a unit or qualification. They need to be written in a way that is assessable; as an example, while a learning objective can be that the candidate understands something, the corresponding assessment criterion would state how they need to show that understanding, using a verb like 'explain,' 'describe,' 'evaluate' etc.

Strictly speaking an assessment standard should not simply be a description of an activity, but should describe the threshold level needed for the assessment to be passed. In practice this is often done through a description of level that applies to the whole unit or qualification (such as a point on the novice-to-expert model).

Evidence

'Evidence' is the activity or material that is examined in order to make an assessment judgement. Evidence can be tangible (e.g. a product of work, computer file, report, photograph, video or audio recording) or the result of assessor observation or questioning. Evidence is usually the candidate's work, although it can be in the form of feedback or statements from others (sometimes referred to as 'witness statements' or 'third-party testimony').

Where the assessment relates to a specific work task or activity it can be useful to distinguish between 'direct evidence' (products of work, recordings, or assessor observations) and 'indirect evidence' (explanations or reflection by the candidate as well as testimony from others). Direct evidence is usually more reliable for assessing task competence, but appropriate indirect evidence can provide more confidence that the candidate has the understanding and reasoning needed to be effective in a range of situations.

Competence

The term 'competence' or 'competency' is sometimes used to mean 'skill' or 'practical ability,' but a more precise way of looking at it is as the ability to *use* relevant skills and knowledge to produce a desired result. A model developed in the 1980s for UK government-sponsored training programmes described competence as involving:

- the ability to complete tasks
- the ability to manage tasks (e.g. decide which action/s is or are appropriate for the situation)
- the ability to cope with unexpected situations and things that don't go to plan
- the ability to manage the overall work role in which the task sits (e.g. to work effectively with other people, to prioritise and fit in with schedules).

(ref Mansfield, B. & Mathews, D. (1985) *Job Competence: A Model for Use in Vocational. Education and Training* Blagdon: Further Education Staff College).

Note that 'competent' is the middle level in the Dreyfus skills acquisition model (see Appendix 4). The Dreyfus model is often interpreted so that 'competent' is the minimum level needed to do a job effectively: see 'level' below.

Level

Level is used in assessment in two ways: (a) the level of the qualification or task that the assessment relates to (e.g. from basic to advanced), and (b) the level of achievement within the qualification or task (e.g. from poor to excellent).

Qualification levels are increasingly becoming defined through national and international systems such as the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and the Framework of the European Higher Education Area (the 'Bologna framework'). It is usual for the qualification level in an assessment to be set in advance: excellent achievement at one level doesn't normally mean that the candidate will be given a qualification at the level above.

Within any criterion-referenced qualification or assessment task there is normally an achievement level defined as the threshold or pass point. In work-based assessment a useful aid to deciding what this should be is the novice-to-expert scale, based on the Dreyfus model of skills acquisition. The scale consists of five levels: novice, advanced beginner, competent, proficient and expert (see Appendix 4). To be meaningful to employers or service-users, work-based assessment generally needs to be set at the competent or proficient level.

In work-based assessment it is not usual to give grades (e.g. pass/merit/distinction or A/B/C). If grades are used they should be based on clear criteria using for instance the novice-to-expert or a similar scale.

Credit

Credit refers to the 'size' of a qualification or unit, typically described in terms of the time that an average learner would take to complete it, or the proportion of a full-time academic year that it represents. In Europe the ECTS and ECVET standard is that one credit point equals approximately 20 hours of learning; the UK uses one credit point for 10 hours. Note that the time used to calculate credit is not the same as teaching or training time: it includes (as relevant) time in independent study, practice at work, and preparing for and undertaking assessments.

Principles of assessment

Validity (p 8)

Validity is concerned with whether the assessment is fit for purpose, i.e. whether the methods used are those best suited to assessing what is to be assessed.

Robustness (p 10)

Robustness is concerned with whether the results of the assessment actually reflect what the candidate is able to do. This implies rigour and thoroughness in assessing to the criteria of the unit or qualification.

Consistency (p 12)

Consistency means that the same standards are applied to candidates by different assessors, across different assessment organisations and certificating bodies, and where relevant internationally. Consistency across a wide system requires effective monitoring and quality assurance.

Traditionally it is usual to talk about the reliability of assessment, a term that can be taken to imply statistical reliability when assessments have a percentage mark or graded component. Although the term is sometimes used in relation to work-based assessment, it is more appropriate to consider consistency and robustness as separate principles.

Authenticity (p 14)

Authenticity concerns whether the assessment judges the abilities of the candidate (as opposed for instance to those of colleagues, outside assistance, or the organisation or context that the candidate is working in).

Fairness and accessibility (p 15)

Fairness involves treating candidates equally, consistently and ensuring that they do not face any barriers to passing the assessment that are not directly justified by what is being assessed. Accessibility involves extending these principles so that individuals and groups are not disadvantaged by the approach taken to assessment, with reasonable adjustments being made where appropriate.

The principles are described in more detail on the pages indicated.

Validity

Validity is concerned with whether assessment processes and methods are appropriate for the 'content' (i.e. the skills, knowledge or areas of activity) that is being assessed. Validity is fundamental to good-quality assessment, as using assessment methods that are not fit for purpose can make the assessment worthless. While it is possible to operate invalid assessments consistently, other principles of good assessment – robustness, fairness and accessibility – depend at least partly on the assessment process being valid.

Validity is sometimes divided into 'surface validity' – concerned with the fitness for purpose of assessment methods – and 'deep validity,' concerned with whether what is being assessed is appropriate to the overall purpose of the assessment. Deep validity is usually the concern of the qualification specification, but the third point below about assessing knowledge touches on deep validity.

Implications for assessment design

Ensuring that assessment methods are appropriate to what is being assessed is fundamental to achieving validity. Some assessment methods may be clearly valid (e.g. observation for a manual skill, or setting a written examination to test recall of factual knowledge) while others may have slightly less validity but be the most practicable that are available. Some examples of achieving validity are given below.

- Where it is desired to assess interpersonal skills, some form of live observation is likely to be needed. If this is not possible (e.g. because having an assessor present may affect the interaction), other methods such as video recordings can be reasonably valid. Having participants describe what happened is considerably less valid unless there is a good level of agreement between different people reporting the same event.

- To assess activities that take place over time, validity may need to be achieved through a combination of assessment methods. These could include examining the outputs of the work; asking the candidate (verbally or through a written account) what s/he did and the reasoning behind it; and observing critical parts of the process. Any one of these methods used alone may not be sufficiently valid.

- Assessing factual knowledge (e.g. through an exam or through quiz-style questioning) is not usually appropriate to assess whether a person has the practical understanding needed for competence in activities and tasks. Assessment methods need to enable the candidate to explain or demonstrate his or her 'knowledge-in-use,' so a more interactive discussion or narrative explanation will be more valid.

Implications for assessment practice

Assessors need to:

- Follow the assessment criteria and guidance in the specification. Problems occur when assessors add requirements that aren't part of the specification, or ignore parts of it: typically, 'I do it like this, so that's how I expect the candidate to do it.'

- Use the assessment methods in an appropriate way. Verbal questioning is a particular area where assessors have a lot of discretion, and the way that questions are asked can make the difference between a valid and an invalid assessment. Generally, a discussion-type approach is better than closed or point-by-point interrogation, provided the assessor doesn't become sidetracked by information not directly relevant to the assessment. See Appendix 1 on questioning technique for more information.

Robustness

Robustness means ensuring that the results of an assessment actually reflect what the candidate is able to do. A robust assessment will give confidence that the person who has passed can actually do the task or job that the assessment refers to, something that also requires the assessment to be valid.

Robustness requires rigour: the assessment needs to ensure that all the relevant criteria are addressed and appropriate judgements are made about each of them. It implies thoroughness and truthfulness. It does not mean that assessment has to be 'hard' or 'difficult' – robustness should support rather than conflict with other principles such as validity and fairness.

Implications for assessment design

Assessment methods need to be designed so that they can capture enough relevant evidence and enable the assessor to scrutinise it thoroughly to decide whether the assessment criteria have been met. Where necessary the assessment design should allow for 'triangulation,' i.e. using evidence from more than one source to give confidence that the candidate has met the criteria.

Sufficiency of evidence is important to ensuring robustness. This means that the assessment needs to be designed so that enough evidence can be observed, or sufficient questions asked, to give confidence in the candidate's abilities. What is sufficient may vary between candidates: for instance, for a practical task a confident and competent candidate may need to be observed only once, while a more hesitant or borderline (or overconfident) candidate may need several observations before the assessor can be confident that s/he can perform the task consistently.

On the other hand assessment needs to be workable and efficient, and the assessment design should avoid being over-exhaustive. This point also applies to assessment criteria and checklists; there is some evidence to indicate that overspecified assessment actually reduces both robustness and consistency, as assessors tend to adopt mechanistic approaches to ticking off micro-criteria rather than developing a more holistic approach to making assessment judgements.

Implications for assessment practice

Assessors need to:

- Ensure that sufficient evidence has been seen, examined or heard to make an accurate judgement about all the criteria being assessed; avoid assuming things just because the candidate is confident or appears broadly competent.

- Probe for evidence and understanding where necessary: ask questions, ask for more evidence, and if necessary ask for corroboration such as witness statements.

- Be aware of the effects of tiredness, boredom and distraction, making sure that none of the necessary points have been missed.

- At the same time, avoid being unnecessarily pedantic: if there is enough evidence to confirm competence and understanding, there is no need to look for more (or ask additional questions).

Consistency

Consistency means that the same standards are applied to all candidates taking an assessment or qualification, so that a level pass standard is applied to all. This requires:

- assessors to apply the same standards to all the candidates they assess, including over time
- assessment organisations to ensure that their assessors are all applying standards consistently
- certificating or validating bodies to ensure that all the assessment organisations they endorse operate assessment consistently
- where there is multiple validation the central standards-setting body needs to ensure that each certificating or validating body is operating to the same standard.

Consistency in work-based assessment can be problematic particularly in complex systems, because there is often no final 'product' (like an exam script, dissertation or artefact) that can be sampled and compared. In practice this means that an acceptable rather than an absolute level of consistency is sought, and there is an emphasis on quality of processes (such as clear assessment specifications and good assessor training, updating and monitoring) rather than relying on checking results.

Poor consistency can lead to a loss in confidence in the robustness of the assessment, as well as a high level of complaints and appeals. However an excessive concern with consistency can lead to assessment methods being adopted that, while making for ease of comparability, may lack validity and robustness.

Implications for assessment design and management

At the level of design, consistency is aided by:
- clear specifications and criteria
- clear guidance on what is required for the candidate to pass – with the same guidance provided to assessors and to candidates
- enough detail to avoid large variations in interpretation
- not so much detail that assessors are distracted by micro-tasks and trivia at the expense of making holistic judgements about what is important.

The management of assessment is central to consistency. The assessment organisation will need to:
- make sure that assessors are sufficiently competent in the area they will be assessing
- provide adequate training for assessors in work-based assessment and in the interpretation of the qualification they will be assessing
- ensure that new assessors are given adequate support and monitoring; this might be helped for instance by appointing a mentor, or pairing new and experienced assessors
- ensure that assessors' interpretations of the qualification standards come together rather than diverge, through methods such as:

- o regular monitoring and feedback;
- o assessors working in rotating pairs; and
- o regular events to provide updating, ensure common understanding of standards, and resolve problems in interpreting standards and making assessment judgements.

A robust system is needed to monitor standards between assessors and where necessary make adjustments to final results. Certificating bodies may have specific requirements for the way that monitoring is carried out, or they may simply want to see that the assessment organisation has an effective monitoring system. Monitoring can be carried out by a separate 'tier' of moderators or verifiers, or by the same people who act as assessors, provided they are not involved in moderating their own assessments. Experience from professional and NVQ assessment indicates:

- Systems where both assessors and moderators work in pairs or groups appear to be more consistent than those where they work individually, provided that assessors do not work in the same pairs all the time.

- Using the same people to assess and moderate produces quicker learning and greater responsibility, and avoids barriers of understanding between the two roles, but:

- Having a single person acting as co-ordinator increases consistency and helps ensure that difficult and borderline cases are dealt with quickly and fairly.

Implications for assessment practice

Assessors need to:

- Apply the same standards to every candidate. This is easy in theory, more difficult in practice particularly where candidates are working in different situations and have their own styles and approaches.

- Avoid comparing and ranking candidates – instead compare the way that the assessor's judgement is made about each criterion in different situations.

- Be aware of any personal likes and dislikes that could get in the way of consistent judgement, such as preference for particular ways of doing things or even factors such as personal presentation, dress, accent etc.

- Actively find out how standards are being applied by other assessors, and how they are interpreted across the assessment organisation.

Authenticity

Authenticity is about making sure that the assessment makes decisions about the ability of the candidate. Generally this is done by ensuring that the work put forward is that of the candidate.

Ensuring that evidence is the candidate's work is important when the assessor is unable to observe the candidate or question him or her verbally. Particular issues for authenticity include:

- Work where the candidate is part of a team: what is the candidate's personal contribution, and how much does s/he understand about the overall work being put forward?

- Written assignments and projects. Has the candidate completed the assignment personally, copied from other sources without acknowledging them (plagiarism), or got other people to contribute without saying what they contributed (cheating)?

- Portfolio-type evidence. Is the work being presented actually that of the candidate – or if not (e.g. if examples of systems, procedures or documents are given) how does it relate to what the candidate does?

Implications for assessment design

In general, methods such as observing the candidate working, along with examining and discussing products of work, are the most successful at ensuring authenticity. Where these are not appropriate 'triangulation' can be used to give greater confidence in the authenticity of evidence. This means using more than one source of evidence: for instance, a written report or portfolio signed by a competent witness, and backed by a verbal discussion with the candidate.

Implications for assessment practice

Where assessors suspect that evidence is not authentic they should carry out some basic checks. Normally this will involve nothing more than questioning the candidate to check that his or her understanding corresponds with the evidence put forward. Occasionally it can involve getting other people to support the candidate – e.g. asking the candidate to obtain a witness statement, or asking the candidate's manager or other relevant person verbally.

Assessors should not normally approach other people without the candidate's permission, unless a discussion with the candidate's manager, client etc. is normally built into the assessment process.

Fairness and accessibility

Fairness involves treating candidates equally, consistently and ensuring that they do not face any barriers to passing the assessment that are not directly justified by what is being assessed. These points are largely covered in the principles of validity and consistency, but fairness might go beyond that to ensure that rules relating to assessment are not applied pedantically, and checks are made to ensure that practices don't disadvantage particular individuals or groups.

Accessibility of assessment is closely related to fairness. Some additional points need to be considered particularly for candidates who may have particular needs to gain access to assessment.

The line between making assessments more accessible and undermining their robustness and consistency needs to be clear. It is not acceptable to alter the assessment criteria or the threshold standard in order to allow a candidate to pass, but it may be appropriate to adjust how and where the assessment is carried out so that the candidate is not faced with barriers that don't relate to what's being assessed. This can include allowing candidates more time to complete assessment tasks, provided that this does not undermine the assessment standard (e.g. if it requires work to be completed at a commercially acceptable speed).

Implications for assessment design

In designing assessment, think about the barriers that are being put in the way of candidates that are **not** related to the ability being assessed. The following provides some examples which may or may not be relevant in any given assessment situation:

Assessment practice	Issues
Computer-based or computer-mediated (e.g. e-portfolios)	Requires computer literacy, access to computer / internet; may require a fast internet connection that is not available in all locations
Written assignments or evidence	Ability to write coherently (in language of assessment)
Assessment in a specific location / at a specific time	Ability to attend: may be a problem for candidates who are physically disabled, distant / lack transport, are busy
Panel interview	Confidence in interview situation, one-to-many communication skills
Portfolios	Time to assemble portfolios of work, suitability of portfolios for non-written activities (also a validity issue), possibly technology to make adequate audio or video recordings
Witness statements, references	Access to people who will provide good statements or references

Good assessment design can ensure that most potential candidates are not faced with unnecessary barriers, but it may also be necessary to make exceptions or guide assessors about dealing with candidates who may be disadvantaged by certain kinds of assessment practice.

Implications for assessment practice

The points mentioned under validity and consistency are relevant to fairness and accessibility. Common accessibility issues may have been addressed before the assessor comes into contact with the candidate, but assessors do need to be aware of barriers that can occur at the point of assessment.

- Avoid penalising candidates for matters that are beyond their control, such as the procedures, record-keeping or workplace conditions in the candidate's organisation. This should not however extend to excusing bad practice *by the candidate* because it is the norm in their workplace.

- Notice if the candidate is having difficulties with the assessment, or with presenting evidence, that are not caused by a lack of understanding or competence relating to the criteria. The assessor may be able to respond directly to remove or lessen the barrier, or may need to refer the situation to someone else (e.g. the moderator/verifier or co-ordinator, or possibly the candidate's manager).

- Assessors need to be aware of their own prejudices and where these can influence assessment judgement. Where the assessor forms an initial positive or negative impression of a candidate, it is easy to look for evidence to confirm this impression and ignore any that contradicts it. Awareness of this kind of prejudgement helps the assessor take a more balanced view and focus on the assessment criteria.

- Assessors should also be aware of their own effect on the candidate, particularly through things such as the tone of questioning, body language, and the way feedback is given.

Appendix 1: Questioning

The following is adapted from the UK Institute of Conservation's assessment guidance, developed over twelve years of trialling and carrying out professional observation and interview assessments.

General points

- Aim to put the candidate at ease. Remember that the assessment is not a test: the aim is to find out whether the candidate meets the standards, not catch him or her out. Good interview technique is essential to conducting this kind of assessment. In a sense you are a researcher going in to find out about the candidate's competence and professionalism, not an examiner setting a test.

- Listen carefully and record comments as you go along, while keeping your attention on the candidate. Summarise the candidate's answers aloud when you need to clarify points and show that you understand.

- Use a mixture of prompts to ask the candidate to explain, and more probing questions to get specific answers. Be prepared to ask the question in a different way if the candidate doesn't appear to understand. Avoid multiple, leading or trick questions (see 'types of questions' below).

- Don't talk too much. Listening is far more important. The candidate should be talking for most of the time; irrelevant questioning and chat could distract the candidate from their train of thought.

- Do not be afraid of silence. Give the candidate plenty of time to think, and do not try to fill the gaps by talking.

- Use supportive and encouraging verbal and body language e.g. nodding and smiles, "mm" or "yes". Use pauses to put gentle pressure on the candidate to answer. Do not show verbal or non-verbal disapproval.

- For talkative candidates, do not lose control of the assessment. Use more closed questions to get a 'yes' or 'no' answer. Use body language like leaning forward as though you are going to speak to interrupt the flow.

- Be aware that you will form subconscious impressions and judgements in the first few minutes of the discussion: keep an open mind and listen to the rest of what the candidate is saying without trying to find evidence that justifies your first impressions.

- Stay neutral. If you disagree with a candidate you may find that you stop listening and you become absorbed in building up your own argument. Most people need to work quite hard to suppress this.

Types of questions

There are several types of questions you can use:

- **Prompts for discussion:** Invite the candidate to talk broadly about a subject, e.g. "Tell me about the type of work you do…"   This type of question is good at the start of an assessment as it

helps to build a rapport with the candidate and helps the assessor identify the candidate's communication style and vice versa.

- **Open questions:** These usually begin with the words how, what, which, when, who or why. Be careful when asking 'why' questions as they can appear interrogatory (and do not always lead to helpful answers – consider for instance possible answers to 'Why did you give this advice?'). Open questions focus on an area but allow the candidate to expand on a subject in the way they choose, e.g. "Tell me about the most challenging case you have been involved in."

- **Closed questions:** These often use the words can, did, would, will or what. Closed questions invite brief or yes/no answers, e.g. "Did you work on this project on your own?" or "what organisation did you refer your client to?" This type of questioning is useful for gaining very specific information or when you want to stop someone waffling too much. If used too frequently the assessment can become stilted and end up being conducted like a quiz; you will also fail to gain much feel for the candidate's depth of understanding.

- **Follow up/probing questions:** These ask for more detail and test the depth of the candidate's knowledge, e.g. "What are your feelings now about how you worked with the client?," "What principles were guiding your decisions in this case?" or "In hindsight, would you have done anything differently?"

There are also question types that should **never** be used in an assessment:

- **Multiple questions:** These are several questions joined together. **Never** use this type of question as it is impossible to answer and is confusing to the candidate, e.g. "Tell me about the range of interventions you could use here and the ethical issues raised by working in such a difficult situation?"

- **Catch questions**: These are questions where the way you phrase the question creates a trap for the candidate, particularly if s/he hasn't understood fully. **Never** use this type of question - and be on your guard for unintentional catch questions, e.g. "Would you ever advise a client to do X?"

- **Tag and leading questions**: A tag question is followed by something like 'isn't it' or 'doesn't it' that really turns the question into a statement that you want the candidate to agree to. A leading question is really an answer phrased as a question, e.g. 'tell me if you would use this approach [detailed description] to…'.

Some barriers to effective assessment

Verbal barriers:
- interrupting the candidate
- getting bogged down over trivial points of fact or interpretation
- becoming distracted (e.g. by writing your notes) while the candidate is in mid flow
- letting arguments and emotive responses get in the way
- asking too many closed questions
- asking questions about subjects outside the assessment

- changing the subject without warning.

Non-verbal barriers
- avoiding eye contact, yawning
- fiddling, fidgeting and constantly changing seating position
- clock watching
- inattention, looking elsewhere, being distracted by your notes (or by the other assessor / moderator if working in pairs).

Bad listening techniques
- becoming engrossed in one particular aspect
- getting emotionally involved and defensive
- being distracted by trivia e.g. the candidate's accent or repetitive use of words
- switching off because you do not understand what the candidate is saying
- listening only for facts or ideas that you agree/disagree with.

Adapted from: Institute of Conservation (2010) *PACR Assessor Guide* London, Icon http://www.icon.org.uk/images/stories/pacr_assessors_guide_v_221210.doc (accessed February 2011)

Appendix 2: Observation

The following guidance refers to observations of activities where it is not appropriate to question the candidate at the same time: for instance observation of teaching sessions, assessments, meetings, counselling, advice or interviews.

- Plan the observation carefully. Make sure that the candidate agrees to the observation in advance and knows how it will be arranged – particularly if you can't attend the whole session. Check what the candidate will be covering, so that you know what you are able to assess. Make sure that your presence is appropriate for the particular session you want to observe – there may for instance be sensitivities with the candidate's trainee, client or colleague that need to be respected.

- If the session is to be recorded, plan how this will be done with the candidate. Make sure (through the candidate) that the other person involved consents to this happening.

- Prepare for the observation. Make sure you have the relevant assessment criteria, checklists, recording sheets etc. ready to use. If you need background information about what the candidate will be doing, ask for this well before the observation. Agree with the candidate where you will sit and who will introduce you.

- At the start of the assessment, make sure the other person or people know why you are there and that you will not be contributing to the session in any way. You may need to put them at ease, as well as the candidate. Make sure you do not get in the candidate's way or distract the attention of the candidate or their trainee, client or colleague.

- Be quiet and unobtrusive during the observation. Take notes or complete your checklist as relevant; if there is anything you are unclear about, make a note to ask the candidate afterwards.

- Normally you should not get involved in the session. The only reason for you to intervene is if there is something seriously wrong and it would be unethical not to (for instance if the session has become abusive or threatening). Occasionally it may be appropriate to become involved at the candidate's request towards the end, when your observation is complete, but only do so if you are completely comfortable – if you do this and then the candidate objects to any negative comments in your assessment, you could be accused of acting improperly.

- In most cases you will probably want to discuss the observation with the candidate soon afterwards. This will allow you to ask any questions you may have, if necessary draw out the candidate's understanding, and also get the candidate's assessment of his or her own performance. Depending on the requirements for the scheme that you are assessing, you may need to go through your comments with the candidate and get him or her to sign them, and give feedback.

- If you are giving feedback to the candidate, make sure this is within the rules of the scheme that you are assessing (e.g. don't tell the candidate that s/he has 'passed' if it isn't within your power to decide at that moment).

- Be clear that any feedback is your own. Encourage the candidate to 'own' the feedback, i.e. to see the reasons for it and agree with it. Avoid harsh negative feedback – point out things that could be improved rather than things that were 'wrong,' although if you saw poor practice be clear about it. A technique that is often recommended is to start with the positive things, move on to more critical feedback and areas for improvement, and finish on a positive note (with a plan for improvement if appropriate).

- Finally, check that your paperwork is in order, including any notes about your discussion with the candidate afterwards. Make sure you include all the information that is required, as (unless the session is recorded) your records are the only tangible evidence from the observation.

Appendix 3: Appeals

The purpose of an appeals process is essentially to provide a safeguard against occasions when the assessment has not been conducted in a way that is fair, valid, consistent and accessible. It should not be seen as a 'second chance' for candidates who fail to pass, as this usually leads to abuse (and is expensive).

Good assessment design and practice should reduce the need for appeals. This includes ensuring that assessments are conducted fairly, and allowing candidates a reasonable opportunity to re-present work or be assessed again before being deemed to have 'failed.' In many work-based assessment systems there is no point of 'failure,' but for commercial reasons there is usually a point where a candidate who is unsuccessful after a certain amount of time has to re-register and pay another fee.

The appeals process should be prompt, fair and efficient. Some appeals processes have two stages, where the first stage involves a simple check of the assessor's records and decisions and a discussion with the assessor, and the second stage (if needed) some form of re-assessment. This means that the initial response to the appeal can be very prompt and many appeals can be resolved quickly.

Because appeals can be regarded as a legal process, it is important that the assessment organisation has clear written procedures for appeals. These should be made available to candidates when they register. Points that are normally included are:

- Acceptance that the decision of the assessment organisation (or the certificating body if appropriate) on appeal is final. This can be important to stop the matter being taken further through the courts. It doesn't guarantee that there can't be a legal challenge, but should prevent a challenge about the assessment decision (it can still be possible to challenge on the grounds that the assessment organisation or certificating body didn't follow its own procedures).

- The grounds on which a candidate can make an appeal. It is usual to ask candidates to explain why they believe the assessment was unfair or reached the wrong conclusions; if this doesn't match with the grounds for appeal, the appeal can be dismissed.

- Whether there is a fee for an appeal. Some assessment organisations charge a fee for a reassessment, which is refunded if the appeal is successful. If a fee is charged it should be proportionate to the work involved.

- The procedure to be followed on appeal by both the candidate and the assessment organisation. This should also state when the candidate will hear the results.

When an appeal involves making a formal reassessment, this is normally done by someone other than the original assessor(s), overseen by the co-ordinator or a moderator/verifier.

Appendix 4: Novice to Expert

The Novice to Expert model was developed by Stuart & Hubert Dreyfus in the early 1980s from studies of how people in different occupations acquire their skills (see references below). The essential characteristics of each stage can be described as:

Novice Has an incomplete understanding, approaches tasks mechanistically and needs supervision to complete them.

Advanced Beginner Has a working understanding, tends to see actions as a series of steps, can complete simpler tasks without supervision.

Competent Has a good working and background understanding, sees actions at least partly in context, able to complete work independently to a standard that is acceptable though it may lack refinement.

Proficient Has a deep understanding, sees actions holistically, can achieve a high standard routinely.

Expert Has an authoritative or deep holistic understanding, deals with routine matters intuitively, able to go beyond existing interpretations, achieves excellence with ease.

When applied to work-based assessment, the competent and proficient stages are usually the most relevant. Depending on the complexity of the work being considered, the expert level may take ten or more years of practice to reach.

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Further reading:

Lester, S (2005) "Novice to Expert: the Dreyfus model of skill acquisition," resource paper at http://www.sld.demon.co.uk/dreyfus.pdf, gives two adapted versions of the model.

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