Harness Racing Training Centre

Reference Material for Planning, Conducting and Reviewing Competency Based Assessments

Guidelines for conducting assessments

National assessment principles

State, Territory and Commonwealth Ministers, responsible for vocational education and training, have endorsed a set of National Assessment Principles. The principles provide the basis for the ongoing development of assessment systems and practices in vocational education and training. The principles are summarised below.

Principle 1   Endorsed industry/enterprise standards form the basis of qualifications in the vocational education and training sector, where they exist.

Principle 2   Endorsed industry/enterprise standards are the benchmarks for assessment, where they exist.

Principle 3   Assessment conducted for the purposes of a national recognition should lead to a part or full qualification under the Australian Qualifications Framework.

Principle 4   Assessment should be undertaken by or quality endorsed by a Registered Training Organisation.

Principle 5   Assessment for national recognition purposes shall be conducted within a quality assurance framework.

Principle 6   Responsibility for assessment resides with the body that issues the qualification under the Australian Qualifications Framework.

Principle 7   Assessment process shall be valid, reliable, flexible and fair.

Principle 8   Assessment systems must incorporate mechanisms for recording, storing and accessing assessment outcomes.

Principle 9   Assessment reporting systems should indicate the units of competence that the individual has attained.

Principle 10   Assessment should incorporate ongoing monitoring and review processes.

Principle 11   Assessment processes shall provide for the recognition of current competencies regardless of where these have been acquired.

Technical principles for assessment

The Assessment and Workplace Training Competency Standards are critical to the implementation of the National Assessment Principles, particularly Principle 7. This principle is elaborated below.

Competency based assessment is the process of collecting evidence and making judgements on whether or not competency has been achieved.

All assessment systems and registered training organisations are required to demonstrate compliance with the four technical principles of assessment.

- Validity

- Reliability

- Flexibility

- Fairness

These technical principles of assessment must be addressed in the conduct of an assessment, in the development of assessment tools, and in the design, establishment and management of the assessment system.

The technical assessment principles are elaborated below in the application of the Assessment and Workplace Training Competency Standards.

Validity

A valid assessment assesses what it claims to assess; evidence collected is relevant to the activity and demonstrates that the performance criteria have been met.

The principles of assessment therefore must take into account several factors when applied to the Assessment and Workplace Training Competency Standards.

- Assessment against the units of competency contained in the Assessment and Workplace Training Competency Standards must cover the broad range of skills and knowledge.

- Assessment of the competencies in the Standards should integrate knowledge and skill with their practical application.

- Judgement made about competency against any of the units must be based on sufficient evidence. Evidence should be gathered on a number of occasions and in a range of contexts and using different assessment methods.

The validity of assessments can be enhanced when some or all of the factors below are applied>

- The assessment focuses on the appropriate areas of competence and skills.

- A sufficient range of the performance of the person being assessed is sampled.

- The assessment tasks resemble those encountered in the workplace.

- Evidence of performance is obtained after the assessment to support predictive validity.

- Evidence is gathered of transfer to new situations other than that used for assessment.

- The assessment procedure documents the links to workplace performance.

- Multiple approaches to assessment are used.

- The assessor can demonstrate how evidence of competency discriminates between unlike competencies and reinforces like competencies.

Reliability

Reliability refers to the consistency of the interpretation of evidence and the assessment outcome. To make reliable assessments assessors must be competent in terms of their own assessor competencies, have the relevant technical competencies or have access to a subject matter expert who can advise the assessor on the relevant vocational competencies at least to the level being assessed.

Some or all of the following can enhance evidence of reliability.

- The criteria for the judgement of competence must be stated clearly and adhered to.
- Assessment practices in the assessment and training of persons with assessment responsibilities needs to be monitored and reviewed to ensure consistency of judgement.
- As a minimum requirement people assessing against the Assessment and Workplace Training Competency Standards must meet the qualifications for assessors as outlined in these Assessment Guidelines.

Applying the following practices enhances reliability.

- Comparing the results of two or more assessors (moderation).
- Collecting evidence via a number of different assessment methods.
- Collecting evidence across different locations and times.
- Providing clear and careful instruction when an employee is requested to monitor his/her own or other's behaviour (documentation).
- Specifying clearly competencies to be attained (documentation).
- Detailing clearly items on self/peer/supervisor assessment (documentation).
- Taking care in the construction of assessment tools (systematic procedures).
- Reviewing the training of assessors (systematic procedures).

Evidence of consistency can be obtained by assessing on multiple occasions, using a number of methods of evidence gathering and in a range of contexts.

Flexibility

Flexibility in assessment allows for assessment either on or off the job and at mutually convenient times and situations.

- Assessment procedures should cover both on and off the job components of the Assessment and Workplace Training Competency Standards.
- There should be a process for people to seek recognition of their current competency in one or more of the units of competency in the Assessment and Workplace Training Competency Standards without having to participate in a training program.

To be flexible assessments should:

- cover both on and off the job components of training where applicable.
- provide for the recognition of competencies no matter how, where or when they have been acquired

- draw on a range of methods and be appropriate to the context, task and person

- be made accessible to the person/s being assessed so that they can proceed readily from one competency standard to another.

Flexibility applies to the process – not the standard. Adjusting the standard beyond 'reasonable adjustment' can affect the validity of the assessment.

Fairness

A fair assessment will not disadvantage any person and will take into account the characteristics of the person being assessed. To maintain fairness:

- reasonable adjustments are made to assessment procedures depending on the characteristics of the person being assessed

- assessment procedures and the evidence (whether product or process) must be made clear

- a consultative approach to assessment of competency against one or all of the units in the Standards is recommended

- persons being assessed against the Assessment and Workplace Training Competency Standards must have the opportunity for a review and an appeal of assessment decisions.

To be fair, an assessment should:

- help the person being assessed understand clearly what is expected and what form the assessment will take

- ensure that the assessment procedure supports the identification of training needs

- be equitable to all groups of people being assessed (make reasonable adjustments to the methods used for collecting evidence depending on the characteristics of the person/s being assessed)

- have criteria for judging performance that are made clear to all those seeking assessment

- involve a participatory approach to assessment that is agreed to by the assessor and the person being assessed

- provide opportunities that allow the person/s being assessed to challenge assessments and with provision for reassessment.

Conflict of interest sometimes arises for assessors. Under these circumstances, the conflict should always be declared. Potential forms of conflict of interest in the assessment process and/or outcome may include:

- a pre-established, personal relationship between the assessor and the person being assessed

- financial implications for the assessor

- employment opportunities for the assessor

- power opportunities for the assessor.

Referrals for opinions can help to establish fair practice. Referrals may be to other internal assessor/s or to an external assessor/s.

The referrals may involve informal verbal consideration, a formalised written document, or a combination of the two.

Care must be taken to ensure assessment practices do not perpetrate possible workplace discriminatory practices. As well assessors must not use the assessment to coerce personal or professional favours or to gain economic advantage from the person/s being assessed or potential client groups.

Personal or interpersonal factors (biases) not related to the assessment decision or process may include the characteristics of the person being assessed and/or the assessor. For example, race, gender, language background, religious background, political affiliation, sexual orientation, physical disabilities, physical appearances, martial status, age, skin colour, social class and/or ethnic background.

Fairness applies to the assessment process – not the standard. Adjusting the standard beyond what is 'reasonable adjustment' can affect the validity of the assessment.

Code of practice for assessors

Assessment specialists have developed an international code of ethics and practice [The National Council for Measurement in Education (NCME)]. The code of practice detailed below is based on the international standards.

- The differing needs and requirements of the person being assessed, the local enterprise and/or industry are identified and handled with sensitivity.

- Potential forms of conflict of interest in the assessment process and/or outcomes are identified and appropriate referrals are made, if necessary.

- All forms of harassment are avoided throughout the planning, conduct, reviewing and reporting of the assessment outcomes.

- The rights of the candidate are protected during and after the assessment.

- Personal or interpersonal factors that are not relevant to the assessment of competency must not influence the assessment outcomes.

- The candidate is made aware of rights and processes of appeal.

- Evidence that is gathered during the assessment is verified for validity, reliability, authenticity, sufficiency and currency.

- Assessment decisions are based on available evidence that can be produced and verified by another assessor.

- Assessments are conducted within the boundaries of the assessment system policies and procedures.

- Formal agreement is obtained from both the candidate and the assessor that the assessment was carried out in accordance with agreed procedures.

- Assessment tools, systems, and procedures are consistent with equal opportunity legislation.

- The candidate is informed of all assessment reporting processes prior to the assessment.

- The candidate is informed of all know potential consequences of decisions arising from an assessment, prior to the assessment.

- Confidentiality is maintained regarding assessment results.

- Results are only released with the written permission of the candidate/s.
- The assessment results are used consistently with the purposes explained to the candidate.
- Self-assessments are periodically conducted to ensure current competencies against the Assessment and Workplace Training Competency Standards.
- Professional development opportunities are identified and sought.
- Opportunities for networking amongst assessors are created and maintained.
- Opportunities are created for technical assistance in planning, conducting and reviewing assessment procedures and outcomes.

Collecting evidence of competency

- Assessment of competency should involve demonstration of competence in all dimensions of competency (task skills, task management skills, contingency management skills, job role/environment skills and transferability). Evidence should involve a range of evidence types, which demonstrate that the assessment and training aligns with relevant units in the Assessment and Workplace Training Competency Standards.
- In assessing against the Assessment and Workplace Training Competency Standards, at least one form of direct evidence should be considered to make a judgement on the practical performance component of the competencies, for example, observation of actual workplace activities.
- Supplementary and indirect forms of evidence should be used as well as direct evidence to:
    - extend on direct forms of evidence, for example, a range of situations, with different types of persons being assessed, or in conflict situations
    - ensure transferability of competencies to new situations and contexts
    - assess underpinning or required knowledge and understanding
    - provide information on possible performance in rarely occurring but critical situations, for example, crash, breakdown, industrial conflict.
- Third party reports are used only to verify and support evidence obtained using other methods, unless the third party is a qualified assessor and is familiar with the Assessment and Workplace Training Competency Standards.
- Self-assessment against the competency standards can make the person being assessed aware of the standards they are expected to achieve, prepare them for formal assessment and/or contribute towards final assessment particularly as part of a recognition of current competencies.

Rules of evidence

Evidence of competence must be:
- Valid
- Sufficient
- Current
- Authentic

Valid evidence

Evidence of competence must cover the broad range of knowledge, skills and the application of such knowledge and skills specified in the Assessment and Workplace Training Competency Standards. When assessing against the Assessment and Workplace Training Competency Standards, assessors need to ensure that the evidence collected focuses on the appropriate knowledge and skills specified in the Performance Criteria and Evidence Guides.

Sufficient evidence

This relates to the amount of evidence. Assessors must collect enough evidence to satisfy that the person being assessed is competent across all elements according to the performance criteria, taking into account the Range of Variables. To ensure enough evidence of competence is collected, it may be necessary or desirable to use a supplementary source of evidence such as oral or written questioning, case studies or third party reports.

Current evidence

An assessor needs to determine the recency of the evidence of competence. The focus is on whether the person being assessed has current competencies in assessment and/or training. The issue of currency of evidence is of particular concern when assessing for the purposes of recognition of current competencies.

Authentic evidence

Evidence needs to be checked for authenticity – that is, it actually relates to the performance of the person being assessed, and not that of another person. To determine authenticity, validation of the evidence by a third party may be necessary.

Recognition of current competencies/recognition of prior learning

Recognition of Current Competencies (RCC) or Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is an example of the different purposes of assessment. They are a means of recognising competencies, through previous informal and formal learning, or through work and life experience.

Assessment for RCC/RPL purposes rely on the same process for conducting assessments as other forms of assessment, but there is a greater reliance on indirect or supplementary forms of evidence for example, portfolio of evidence of previous achievements, qualifications and references from people who are familiar with the person/s being assessed. The assessor must be guided by the Assessment and Workplace Training Competency Standards. In the case of RCC/RPL assessments, it is important that the assessor builds in the assessment verification procedures to ensure that the evidence collected and presented is authentic and current.