Ensuring Consistency of Assessment across Centres

This resource may be useful for those wishing to consider some methods of ensuring consistency in assessment across centres within a multi-centre provider.

The resource has been prepared with reference to a number of resources/documents including the following:

- Quality Assuring Assessment - Guidelines for Providers, 2013, Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI)
- Strategies for Ensuring Consistency in Assessment, Australian National Training Authority, 2001
- Review of Teacher Assessment: Evidence of What Works Best and Issues for Development, 2009, UK Qualifications and Curriculum Authority
- Ensuring Consistency in Teacher Assessment: Guidance for Key Stages 2 and 3, 2008, Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills, Welsh Assembly Government
- Show us the Learning: Assessment – An Institution-Wide Process to Improve and Support Student Learning, 2000, College of DuPage, Glen Ellyn, IL
- Designing Assessment Tools for Quality Outcomes in VET, Department of Education and Training, Government of Western Australia

What is consistency of assessment?

"Consistency in assessment involves the achievement of comparable outcomes. For example, an assessment process would be considered to deliver consistent outcomes if assessors assessing candidates against the same unit of competency in different contexts made comparable assessment decisions." Department of Education, Training & Youth Affairs, Australia (Training Package Assessment Materials Project - Guide 8: Strategies for ensuring consistency in Assessment)

Achieving consistency starts with understanding

- what is being assessed
- what evidence is needed
- how the assessment decision will be made

Consistency can only be achieved when assessors share a common understanding of the unit(s) of competency which is being assessed. While having a shared understanding is critical to the achievement of consistent outcomes, this does not imply that assessment arrangements and processes must be uniform. Learners and settings vary. Assessors must be able to employ assessment approaches that suit the learner and the assessment context.

Consistency in assessment – Why?

- For the sake of fairness - No individual wishes to be disadvantaged in relation to another person undertaking a comparable assessment
    - Consistency in assessment helps to ensure that, when judgements about individual learners are made against the national standards set in the award specification/s, there is fairness for learners across classes and centres.
- The need to generate and retain **confidence** in the education & training system
    - It gives management, teachers, learners and other stakeholders confidence in the validity of judgements reached in colleges/schools
    - Providers should be confident
        - that their assessment processes deliver comparable outcomes from assessments carried out by different assessors.
        - that the outcomes of assessments conducted by assessors within their own organisation are comparable with assessments conducted by assessors in other providers
    - Without consistent assessment outcomes, national mutual recognition, the portability of qualifications, and credit transfer and articulation arrangements may be undermined

QQI assessment principles

- Validity – does it measure what it is supposed to measure?
- Reliability – is it accurate? A reliable assessment consistently gives the same result under similar conditions
- Fair – does it provide for equity of opportunity for learners?
- Quality – are there effective quality assured systems in place?
- Transparency – is there clarity and understanding by all stakeholders?
- Complementarity – acknowledges the distinct roles and responsibilities of QQI and the Provider in relation to assessment

Factors that impact on the achievement of consistency in assessment outcomes

- Quality of the competency standards (award specifications) that provide the benchmarks for assessment
- Quality of the assessment guidelines and criteria
- Quality of the provider's assessment policy and procedures

- Participation of key stakeholders, such as employers
- Regulatory environment

The 5 P's to ensure consistency in assessment

Department of Education, Training & Youth Affairs, Australia (Training Package Assessment Materials Project - Guide 8: Strategies for ensuring consistency in assessment)

- People – learners, assessors, managers, and other staff associated with the assessment process (qualifications, CPD, networks, etc.)

- Process – how assessments are planned, conducted and reviewed (roles, documentation, resources, management & monitoring)

- Products - items used in planning, conducting and reviewing assessments (learner information, assessor manuals, assessment tools, assessment guides, CPD resources, piloting resources, etc.)

- Perspective - ensures that the assessment process addresses the requirements and expectations of industry, employers and learners

- Policy - the stated intention about how the assessment process will be managed and implemented (purpose, address needs of stakeholders, key people, structures, procedures and products)

Some Models to ensure Consistency

Department of Education, Training & Youth Affairs, Australia (Training Package Assessment Materials Project - Guide 8: Strategies for ensuring consistency in assessment)

- **Assessment panel** - may include industry representatives and regulators in addition to assessors and administrators drawn from within an organisation or across organisations. This model works best if it is formally constituted and structured with agreed terms of reference.

    o **Suggested functions of the assessment panel**
        ✓ reviewing assessment outcomes
        ✓ interpreting and promoting a common understanding of learning outcomes and programme requirements
        ✓ determining reasonable adjustment
        ✓ critiquing and signing-off assessment tools

- ✓ developing benchmark or assessment exemplars
- ✓ overseeing professional development for assessors
- ✓ providing a network of mentors and coaches for assessors

- **Lead assessor** - appointed by a provider, group of providers, industry group or other organisation seeking to develop a consistent approach to assessment

  - o **Suggested functions of the lead assessor**
    - ✓ ensuring the provider's compliance with quality assurance requirements
    - ✓ ensuring the assignment of appropriately skilled and experienced assessors to undertake particular assessment activities
    - ✓ developing information about programme implementation for sharing with assessors
    - ✓ acting as reference point when there is uncertainty in the interpretation of learning outcomes or assessment requirements
    - ✓ building strong communication between assessors to facilitate consistency
    - ✓ developing assessment tools
    - ✓ reviewing assessment outcomes
    - ✓ supporting the appeals process
    - ✓ acting as a critical friend to assessors

- **Independent validator** - reviews and validates the assessments which are performed within or across providers. Ideally the validator should have high level assessment and technical skills, subject/industry knowledge and experience of conducting assessments within the relevant field area. This is similar to the role of the external authenticator used for the QQI certification process.

  - o **Suggested functions of the independent validator**
    - ✓ Operate within guidelines set by the provider
    - ✓ Select a sample of assessments and validate the outcomes by reviewing the adequacy of the evidence
    - ✓ Review the assessment process at agreed intervals
    - ✓ Act as a point of referral for contested or problematic assessments
    - ✓ Reports formally on the assessment process to the provider

- **Moderation group** - process which involves assessors in discussing and reaching agreement about assessment processes and outcomes in a particular field area. In doing so, assessors develop a shared understanding of the requirements of specific award specifications and related programmes, including learning outcomes, assessment guidelines and criteria, the nature of evidence, how evidence is collected and the basis on which assessment decisions are made. These meetings may take place within centres, across centres and/or across providers.

  - **Suggested functions of the moderation group**
    - ✓ Moderation of assessment processes and procedures
    - ✓ Moderation for verification of assessment outcomes (ratifying assessment decisions made by different assessors)

Model	Some issues to consider
Assessment Panel	- having clear terms of reference - securing appropriate membership - accessing adequate resources including time and money - ensuring the relevance of the work of the panel and its linkage to the provider's assessment practices - ensuring the commitment of staff.
Lead Assessor	- ensuring that there is a clear definition of the role and functions of the lead assessor - securing an appropriately skilled and qualified person to undertake the role - accessing appropriate resources including time and money - establishing appropriate administrative structures to support the model - building the support of the provider's staff.
Independent Validator	- cost and funding responsibility - clarity of the role and tasks to be undertaken - appropriate administrative structures to support the model and the achievement of consistency - encouraging and negotiating collaboration between the assessors and the independent validator - maintaining confidentiality for learners

Moderation Meetings	• the cost and funding of the moderation process • ensuring that moderation meetings are purposeful and focused on the objectives of the moderation process • induction of assessors into the moderation process • management of the moderation process, including overall coordination, identification of people to lead the process, establishment of goals and evaluation of the effectiveness of the process • responsibility for coordination of the moderation meetings • appropriate administrative structures to support the moderation process • maintaining assessor involvement in the moderation process • gaining stakeholder support for the moderation process, including enterprise, industry and other providers

Techniques to support the models

- Assessor networks – a forum to develop a shared understanding of the standard, assessment guidelines, share best practice, development assessment tools, develop exemplars, etc.

- Quality endorsement of assessment tools – requires the existence of an authority or organisation to endorse the tools

- Assessment record-keeping – track the outcomes of the assessment process

- Assessment tool bank - collection of evidence gathering tools and techniques that are developed and shared among a group of assessors and/or providers. This could include a set of procedures and guidelines as well as assessment materials that could be used by assessors

- Bank of assessment exemplars and benchmarks e.g. standardised portfolios

- Guidelines to interpret the standard (Learning Outcomes)

- Guidelines on the collection and judgement of evidence

- Validation of assessment tools - formal process designed to ensure that assessment tools reflect the requirements of the relevant programme

- Sampling - reviewing a random selection of assessments conducted in an organisation to ensure that the planning and preparation, the conduct, the record keeping and reporting, and the review and evaluation of the assessments were undertaken in line with the policy of the organisation, the requirements of the relevant programme and the needs of the learner

- Learner Satisfaction Survey

- Guidelines for conducting assessments

- Assessment sign-off sheet - formal statement that is completed by all parties to an assessment which indicates their views on the assessment process and outcomes

- Mentoring of Assessors

- Specialist Assessor

Determining your Strategy

- Exploring the environment

    - Type and size of organisation (number of sites, number of assessors, volume of assessments)
    - Geographic coverage
    - Scope of delivery (number and type of programmes, modes of delivery and assessment)
    - Learners'/other stakeholder's needs and expectations

- Understanding the organisation's motivation

- Examining the potential model/s and techniques

- Selecting the appropriate model/s and techniques

    For example:

    - skill based assessments may require that the exercise takes place on-site

- a large centre may include a peer group of assessors verifying a sample of each others work and discussing issues in groups
- small centres with few learners may use a system whereby one assessor verifies all of another assessor's evidence

"From the … research literature, it would appear that assessment guidelines and standards files are not sufficient to obtain satisfactory levels of comparability – some form of moderation is usually necessary." Review of Teacher Assessment: Evidence of What Works Best and Issues for Development, 2009, UK Qualifications and Curriculum Authority

Ensuring Consistency

- strong Communication between teachers within and across schools/colleges

  - for each module/subject area a clear focus on agreeing a shared understanding of the national standard

- college-based systems and procedures to ensure the accuracy and consistency of assessment

  - to include regular opportunities for teachers to engage in internal standardisation and moderation
  - external moderation

- determining ways of teachers working together on learning, teaching, and assessment

- using the programme(s) of study to agree objectives for learning, teaching, and assessment

- developing common activities focused on agreed objectives

- discussing and assessing work to develop shared expectations of performance, including in-school and cluster-based standardisation sessions

- moderating a range of work of individual learners to enable more secure and consistent judgements at in-school and cluster based meetings

- comparing the performance of learners from different classes on common activities.

- Developing Standardised Portfolios

  - These may include:

- samples of learners' work with brief commentaries and annotations, showing how they reflect national standards

- evidence, such as photographs, audio-visual and teacher written records, particularly for activities that do not result in written outcomes

o Benefits of Standardised Portfolios

- Can serve as a reference point for all teachers both during programme delivery and when assessment judgements are made

- Removes the pressure on individual teachers to build up their own collection of work to support their judgements.

- Be used as a suitable vehicle to discuss and exemplify standards for new teachers and for visitors, monitors and other schools

Checklist for the development of a Standardised Portfolio

Ensuring consistency in teacher assessment: Guidance for Key Stages 2 and 3 available from www.wales.gov.uk

Staff Involvement	Who will lead?
	Who will be involved in the development of the sample evidence?
	How to ensure the sample reflects the agreed understanding of the teachers?

Coverage	What subjects will be included?
	Which learner groups?
	What levels?
Timescale	What is the agreed timescale?
	How and how often will the material be updated
Range and nature of material	How much material will be used?
	Sample learner evidence?
	Selection from a range of tasks?
	What types of material?
Type and extent of commentary	How much?
	What kind?
Other supporting information	What other items might be included?

Practical steps that could be taken to ensure consistency of assessment

- make sure assessors have access to the current version of the programme/programme module, including the QQI component specifications (LOs, assessment techniques), the validated programme information (learning strategies, indicative content, assessment guidelines and criteria) and other support materials

- establish a formalised process for the development and maintenance of assessment tools/instruments

- monitor the assessment process to ensure completeness and appropriateness to the task

- provide professional support for assessors which promotes critical self-reflection on practice, assists in identifying strengths and weaknesses, offers up-to-date information on assessment approaches and materials and provides assistance in dealing with difficult or problematic assessments

- provide sound and defensible reporting and tracking processes to monitor assessments

- seek feedback from stakeholders about the assessment process.

- monitor assessment outcomes to check for quality and consistency

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- provide sound and defensible reporting and tracking processes to monitor assessments

- seek feedback from stakeholders about the assessment process.

Useful Links

http://learning.wales.gov.uk/docs/learningwales/publications/140626-ensuring-consistency-in-teacher-assessment-key-stages-2-3-en.pdf

http://www.documentingexcellence.com/examples/AssessmentBook.pdf

http://www.det.act.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0011/456374/Guide-8.pdf

http://www.milesmorgan.com.au/assets/Downloads/Designing-assessment-tools-for-quality-outcomes-in-VET.pdf

http://www.qqi.ie/Pages/Quality-Assuring-Assessment---Guidelines-for-Providers,-Revised-2013.aspx

http://oucea.education.ox.ac.uk/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/2009_03-Review_of_teacher_assessment-QCA.pdf