Department of Employment, Education and Training

Assessment Practical Guide

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Purpose of Guide

This "Practical Guide to Assessment" has been designed to enable a wide range of readers to use it for a number of practical purposes in both training institutions and workplaces. The Guide focuses on the purposes and practical conduct of assessment in a range of contexts. It is illustrated throughout by several practical case studies.

In a world which tends to base recognition and progression on the formal recognition of achievement, assessment now plays a major role in progression through education, on-job training and careers in the workplace. This Guide is designed to help persons involved in the assessment of vocational learning and especially the formal assessment of achievement.

This Guide is not intended to be a theoretical text. Rather, it is a practical document which provides a basic understanding of how to prepare for, conduct and review assessment processes in a competency-based system. It offers you simple advice on what to assess, ways of gathering evidence, ways of judging evidence and how to manage the process.

The Guide is complemented by a companion publication: "Assessment - Technical Manual". The Technical Manual is intended to provide more detailed information on the principles of assessment. Cues are provided throughout the Guide to related references in the Technical Manual. This is intended to assist those who may require a more in-depth understanding of the relevant principles and techniques.

The Guide can be read in sequence or consulted separately, as appropriate. It has been designed to enable easy reference. No acronyms are used throughout the text and the Guide attempts to avoid the use of jargon.

Boxes are used throughout the text to indicate to the reader where more detailed information can be obtained on specific topics. These sources are for those wishing to pursue topics in greater detail. They are not necessary for those requiring only a general understanding of assessment.

The Guide has been divided into eight parts which address:

1. assessment in a competency-based vocational education training system
2. uses of assessment
3. types of assessment
4. methods of assessing
5. principles of assessment
6. making assessment work
7. recording and reviewing assessment
8. a set of seven case studies illustrating how various organisations have gone about assessment.
2 Assessment in a Competency-Based Vocational Education and Training System

2.1 What is Assessment?

Assessment is a feature of the day-to-day life of everyone.

All of us have a need to assess our daily activities, or those of others. We will check and decide whether these activities, or the outcomes of these activities, meet the requirements of a set of criteria.

Assessment occurs in the home, in our social life, at work, or wherever we participate in activities.

In all cases, we collect some information or evidence about our activities and/or their outcomes and compare them to the relevant requirements or criteria to see whether our activity is being carried out correctly. A judgement is made and a decision reached as to whether the criteria have been met or not.

Diagram 1

The Weighing of Evidence Against Criteria

[Diagram of a balance scale with 'Judgement' in the middle, 'Criteria' on one side, and 'Evidence' on the other side]

EXAMPLE

An example of assessment from our everyday lives is the purchase of a new car.

Before setting out to purchase our new car we usually establish our requirements. These will relate to such things as price, range, size, petrol consumption, style, comfort features, colour, warranty, trade-in price, etc.

These are our criteria for the purchase. As we visit the various car dealers, we will gather some evidence from the salespersons. We will also examine the cars and take them for a test drive to gather further evidence about their performance and their match to our comfort requirements. Our final choice may allow for some compromise if we cannot find a car which exactly meets all of our requirements. In other words, we will make a decision based on our judgement of the best match of requirements and evidence.
This straightforward commonsense way of looking at assessment is the basis of all assessment processes. This Guide seeks to show how it can be applied in the new system of competency-based education and training being introduced across Australia.

What is portrayed is good practice in any effective organisation or training institution.

Where the recommended approaches are not yet in place, organisations and institutions are able introduce them progressively, usually with an inbuilt review process to gradually refine and improve their effectiveness and efficiency.

2.2 Competency-Based Training and Vocational Education and Training Reform

The reforms in vocational education and training in Australia are aimed at the achievement of four major goals:

- raising the quality and quantity of training
- improving the relevance of training to the needs of industries and enterprises
- enabling learners to achieve broad-based skills and knowledge as a basis for lifelong learning
- increasing national consistency, cohesion and cooperation across public, private and industry based training systems.

Competency-based training forms a key element of the strategy for the achievement of these goals. It is an approach to learning which:

- places primary emphasis on what the learner can actually do
- is focused on outcomes
- is concerned with the attainment and application of knowledge and skills to a specified level of competency
- is concerned with achieving flexibility in the use of competency standards at both the national and enterprise level.

Effective assessment is a vital tool in the successful implementation of competency-based training and consequently the reform of the Australian system of vocational education and training.

It is used as a means of providing vital feedback to students within the day-to-day processes of teaching and learning.

It is the means for determining that the competency-based learning outcomes of a training program or course have been achieved.

It is used to check competence in the performance of workplace tasks.

It is the means for checking peoples' prior learning to confirm their eligibility for entry to training or for credit for some part of it.

It is the tool for identifying the training needs of workers and students.
In short, an understanding of assessment is an important pre-requisite for anyone seeking to understand, or be part of, the changes being made to the Australian system of vocational education and training. It is equally important for workers, supervisors and others in workplace settings involved in the assessment of competence to perform workplace functions.

For further more detailed information on the role of assessment within the new National System of Vocational Education and training, refer to:


Available from the Training Reform Section, Vocational Education and Training Division, DEET, GPO Box 9880, Braddon, ACT, 2600.

2.3 How does Assessment in a Competency-Based System Differ from Other Assessment?

The main way the approach to assessment in a competency-based system differs from other approaches is its focus on "competency". This comprises the specification of knowledge and skill, and the application of that knowledge and skill to the standards of performance required in employment. The concept of competency includes all aspects of work performance. It includes:

- performance at an acceptable level of skill
- organising one's tasks
- responding and reacting appropriately when things go wrong
- fulfilling a role in the scheme of things at work
- transfer of skills and knowledge to new situations.

"Assessment in a competency-based system is the process of collecting evidence and making judgements on the nature and extent of progress towards the performance requirements set out in a standard, or a learning outcome, and, at an appropriate point, making the judgement as to whether competency has been achieved."

In institutional settings, the outcomes of vocational courses may not be the achievement of full workplace competency. However, in such cases, the learning outcomes will still be intended to lead, with further training and/or experience, to eventual workplace competency. The intended learning outcomes are usually based upon the relevant competency standards or equivalent.
The concept of assessing "performance outcomes" is not new. Indeed, it is the basis of many existing assessment techniques.

The reason that it has now become an issue is that in a large number of industries, competency standards have now been established. They provide a benchmark against which the achievement of competency can be assessed.

This development has led to a rethinking of the current ways in which skills are developed and assessed - where, how and by whom. As a result, a range of innovative new approaches to training and assessment have developed, usually involving co-operative arrangements between training providers and workplaces and between assessors and their candidates.

While a new focus has been given to assessment, the process still remains one of collecting evidence and comparing this evidence with specified formal or informal criteria.

Judgements and decisions are made about whether the performance of the persons being assessed meet these criteria. However, within a competency-based system of work and training, the criteria are always directly linked to competency standards or competency-based learning outcomes.

These concepts are expanded upon in the sections that follow.

2.4 Criteria

Assessment in a competency-based system is the judgement of performance against national industry, or enterprise-based, competency standards, or in the case of training institutions, learning outcomes based on the standards.

In most, if not all cases, competency standards will not be used for competency-based assessment in their "raw form". They need to be interpreted and "translated" to the context in which the assessment will take place.

This may require, for example:

- identification and consideration of what workplace procedures apply in the assessment situation
- identification of relevant equipment and manufacturer’s instructions for its use and/or maintenance
- identification of particular occupational health and safety policies and requirements
- identification of specific knowledge and understanding that applies in the workplace(s) concerned.

In the case of workplace-based assessment, the assessment context will be dictated by the interpretation of the competency standards to the situation in that workplace.
In a cross-enterprise context, the assessment will need to be able to accommodate multiple workplace contexts. In such cases, consideration will need to be given to typical workplace procedures, ranges of equipment in use, the range of occupational health and safety requirements and so on.

In an institutional context where the assessment criteria are prescribed learning outcomes based on competency standards, the assessment will need to be able to accommodate the range of assessment conditions prescribed in the learning outcomes.

In a number of the case studies examined, competency standards had not yet been developed or endorsed. The organisations concerned had identified "interim benchmarks" of skills and knowledge for use pending the finalisation and endorsement of standards.

These interim benchmarks must still however be outcomes focused. In the case studies considered, existing job descriptions or statements of performance requirements had been looked at by consultative committees. These had been rephrased in a competency format and were then used as the basis of their "competency-based assessment" process. It is the intent of these companies to update these "interim" assessment arrangements when the relevant competency standards are eventually endorsed and come “on-line”.

**EXAMPLES**

1. **Tourism Training Australia** manages an industry wide approach to skills assessment and recognition in the Hospitality Industry called "ACCESS". The assessment criteria for the ACCESS scheme are directly based upon the endorsed national competency standards in food and beverages, guest services and kitchen areas.

2. **In BHP Coal**, enterprise competency standards have been developed as an interim measure pending the development and endorsement of standards for the coal industry as a whole. In developing the enterprise standards, BHP Coal applied the guidelines of the National Training Board. This has ensured an outcomes focus to its assessment processes and will facilitate an easy transfer to national standards once they come on line.

3. **In many TAFE colleges around Australia**, courses to prepare people for work in the Hospitality Industry have learning outcomes directly linked to the competency standards developed by Tourism Training Australia. Students undertaking these courses are assessed against these learning outcomes.

**2.5 Evidence**

Evidence can comprise a wide range of measurable aspects of performance. These include:

- measurements of products made or services delivered
- observations of processes carried out
- measurement of knowledge and understanding
- observation of attitudes demonstrated.
Examples of the different aspects of competency on which evidence can be collected are shown in Table 1. They represent a small sample of the range of evidence that can be used. Some evidence will be more applicable and easier to gather in a work setting. Other evidence will be easier to gather in an off-line or institutional setting.

Evidence can be collected in many different ways. Some evidence will be obtained through physical measurement of products. Other evidence will be gained using checklists or rating scales. It can be gained through written or verbal responses to questions. An important source of evidence is often a review of previous achievements. This may involve such techniques as an interview, an evaluation of a portfolio of previous work, contact with referees, or an assessment of formal qualifications.

Evidence can be:
- direct,
- indirect or alternative; or
- supplementary.

**Direct evidence** is observation of the actual performance of a candidate carrying out normal work tasks, special work-based projects or tasks.

**Indirect or alternative evidence** of performance is used in situations where the assessment of the performance of a candidate carrying out actual workplace tasks either is not possible or is undesirable. It may also involve an evaluation of the work pieces, products or services produced or delivered by the candidate in the course of their daily work. For example, in the automotive industry, assessment of the performance of a candidate in rectifying a major breakdown is necessary. However, major breakdowns don’t occur frequently and when they do, it is often not at a convenient time for assessment. In such cases it is necessary to create alternative ways of judging performance. Examples of ways of collecting indirect or alternative evidence of performance include projects, simulation, and proficiency tests.

**Supplementary evidence** of performance may be necessary to check that a candidate can perform competently in various environments, unusual circumstances or in situations that only occur rarely and are difficult to simulate. It may also be required when it is necessary to check underpinning knowledge and understanding necessary to perform competently and to transfer their competence to new situations. Supplementary evidence is often gained by written or oral questioning, through reports from third parties such as supervisors, referees or clients, or by tests done in a classroom or in an off-line workplace setting.

In practice, a cost-effective combination of direct, indirect and supplementary forms of evidence is used when making an assessment. Together they will usually give a sufficiently balanced picture of the candidate’s capability and overall level of competence.
## Examples of Different Aspects of Competency on which Evidence can be Collected

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Product</th>
<th>Process</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Workpiece is to specification</td>
<td>Correct procedures are followed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finish is to specification</td>
<td>Safe work methods are used</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sale is made</td>
<td>Required service is provided</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer is satisfied</td>
<td>Demonstrates commitment to safety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unit is functional</td>
<td>Shows initiative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Product matches specifications</td>
<td>Correct sequence is followed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repaired plant works correctly</td>
<td>Works as a member of a team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Budget is achieved</td>
<td>Demonstrates perseverance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Targets are achieved</td>
<td>Correct waste control measures are applied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Document is correct and to customer requirements</td>
<td>Demonstrates cleanliness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fault is found and rectified</td>
<td>Good communications are maintained</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equipment is correctly set up</td>
<td>Correct cost control measures are carried out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rate of production is maintained</td>
<td>Records are correctly maintained</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patient recovers</td>
<td>Shows sensitivity to others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goods are delivered on time and in good condition</td>
<td>Goods are correctly transferred</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation achieves required purpose</td>
<td>Shows diligence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work is completed on time</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Underpinning Knowledge and Understanding

(Knowledge and understanding are demonstrated of:)

- Work procedures
- Typical fault modes and remedies
- Workplace hazards
- Record keeping procedures
- Training techniques
- Safety first
- Statutory requirements
- O H & S requirements
- Quality management techniques
- Safety precautions
- Waste disposal procedures
- Assessment techniques
- Emergency procedures
- Equal opportunity principles

### EXAMPLES

1. At Meadow Lea Foods, an assessment process is conducted to assess the competence of production operators on the packaging lines during and at the end of an on-the-job training program. The assessment approach uses a combination of different types of evidence:
   - records of observations of performance in the workplace
   - assessment sheet of responses to oral questions on the production processes, and
   - checks of practical assignments against set criteria.
2. In TAFE NSW, students in the Advanced Certificate in Nursing (Enrolled Nurse) Program are assessed using a combination of evidence which includes:
- results of observation of performance in simulated or real workplace settings
- outcomes of verbal questioning and review of knowledge and understanding
- results of written tests of underpinning knowledge and understanding, and
- outcomes of structured peer assessment.

Whatever the forms of evidence being used in an assessment process, it should be judged against four key questions:

- Is the evidence valid?
- Is the evidence reliable?
- Is the evidence authentic?
- Is the evidence sufficient?

These measures of quality are discussed more fully in Chapter 6 of this Guide.

Readers wishing to understand the issue of evidence in more detail are encouraged to refer to Chapter 5 in the companion volume "Assessment - Technical Manual".

2.6 Judgement

Judgement is the process of comparing sufficient evidence of a candidate's achievements with the required performance criteria and making a decision as to whether the necessary competence has been demonstrated or not.

Judgements should be kept as objective as possible by detailing the type and form of the evidence to be used, the criteria to be applied and the rules by which decisions will be made. However, all assessment is inevitably dependent upon a degree of informed subjective judgement. This is as true for a teacher marking a written assignment as it is for a workplace supervisor checking the performance of a worker. It is important that all persons carrying out assessment tasks and making judgements on the outcomes of those assessments are well prepared for their task. They should have sufficient background and knowledge to be able to make the necessary informed judgements. They should also be well briefed on the way the evidence is to be collected and considered and the criteria that are to be used.
EXAMPLE

At BHP Coal, considerable effort is expended in training all staff conducting assessments. Careful attention is paid to ensure they have the necessary understanding of competency-based training, the required assessment techniques and the technical skills and knowledge to make informed judgements in the area of competence they are assessing. Each assessor is provided with the relevant enterprise based competency standards as well as the assessment techniques that will be used to gather the necessary evidence for the assessment to be made. Procedures have been structured to reduce the variability of assessment outcomes as much as possible. However, the company recognises that the success of the assessment processes is ultimately dependent upon the assessor being able to make informed judgements and seeks to enhance the skills and knowledge of the assessors in both the assessment techniques to be used and the technical field being assessed.

As a safeguard in the event of errors being made in the judgement processes, it is important that all assessment processes have an avenue for appeal in situations in which candidates feel that an error has been made or that they have been unfairly assessed.

Readers wishing to understand the issue of judgement in more detail are encouraged to refer to Chapter 6 in the companion volume “Assessment - Technical Manual”.

3 Uses of Assessment

Assessment is used for a wide range of purposes both within a competency-based training system and many related applications spanning both the workplace and training institutions. It is often a co-operative activity between training institutions and the training and supervisory staff in workplaces. In many assessment arrangements, persons carrying out assessment work in close cooperation with the persons being assessed.

Usually an assessment scheme will serve a number of purposes and generally requires a package of techniques or methods in order to effectively achieve these purposes.

Prior to selecting or developing a competency-based assessment scheme, it is vital that the purpose(s) of the assessment is clearly identified and confirmed before any planning is carried out or decisions are made about how the proposed assessment will be conducted. A clear understanding of the purpose(s) of the assessment by all involved will ensure a better basis for selecting and developing the assessment procedures and instruments to be used.

Typical purposes or applications of assessment include:
- formative assessment during training
- summative assessment of performance at the completion of training
- recognition of prior learning and/or experience
• statutory certification requirements
• diagnostic assessment to determine training needs
• personal feedback on performance
• industrial classification
• formal performance appraisal
• skills audits
• as part of an incentive scheme
• identification of suitability to perform particular tasks or roles
• for promotion.

EXAMPLES
Some typical uses for assessment are shown in the case studies summarised in Section 9.3 of this Guide:

• summative assessment of persons being trained as assessors at BHP Coal
• assessment of clerical/administrative skills within enterprises (cross-industry assessment scheme developed by the National Office Skills Formation Advisory Board)
• assessment of the workplace application of competence for classification as a manufacturing maintenance tradesperson at Ford Australia
• recognition of competencies in the Hospitality Industry, which can be used for industrial award purposes, issue of qualifications and credit for further training
• assessment of competence of production operators during and at the end of an on-the-job training program at Meadow Lea Foods
• assessment and confirmation of the proficiency of soldiers in the Australian Defence Forces in rifle shooting before moving onto more advanced training and operations
• formative and summative assessment of the competence of trainees enrolled in the Advanced Certificate in Nursing (Enrolled Nurse) program in NSW TAFE.

Assessment can also be used to recognise various levels of performance. The recognition of higher achievement can be useful in:

• providing greater motivation to learners
• assisting employers in the selection of candidates; or
• assisting institutions in determining the allocation of limited places.

The grading of learners may not be inconsistent with competency-based approach to assessment providing that the learner's performance is assessed against criteria and not against other learners' performance.

Refer to Technical Manual

Readers wishing to understand the issue of graded assessment in more detail are encouraged to refer to Chapter 8 in the companion volume “Assessment - Technical Manual”. 

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4 Types of Assessment

4.1 Overview

Within a competency-based system, a number of different types of assessment can be used. These can be grouped under various headings:

- Holistic Assessment
- Summative Assessment
- Formative Assessment
- Diagnostic Assessment; and
- Recognition of Prior Learning and/or Experience.

It should be noted that these terms are not mutually exclusive.

For example, holistic techniques can be used in all of the other types i.e. summative, formative and diagnostic assessment and recognition of prior learning and/or experience.

In some contexts, formative assessment can be used as part of summative assessment. In such applications, it is important that the workers or students are aware of how the outcomes of the formative assessment will be used in the later summative assessment. Many trainers and assessors prefer not to combine the two forms of assessment to ensure that learners can feel free to learn without being concerned that mistakes made in the learning process may be recorded and reported.

Recognition of prior learning and/or experience can also be used as an integral part of summative assessment.

Each of these five types of assessment are described below.

4.2 What is Holistic Assessment?

Holistic assessment is important in a competency system because holistic assessment techniques check the way a range of skills and knowledge and understanding are combined together to successfully complete practical workplace tasks. In other words they check many aspects of a large "chunk" of skills and knowledge.

Assessment is said to be holistic when it covers, in an integrated way, multiple elements and/or units from relevant competency standards. The integrated approach seeks to combine knowledge, understanding, problem solving, technical skills, attitudes and ethics into assessment tasks.

Holistic assessment usually involves:
- actual practice and workplace tasks
- tasks that require the integration of a range of competencies and associated underpinning knowledge and understanding
- the use of analytical abilities to solve problems associated with the task(s)
- a combination of theory and practice.
Holistic assessment can be used in both workplace and institutional contexts. It is required where the learning outcomes of a course or training program require the demonstrated integration of a number of separate competencies and their application in a real or simulated setting.

4.3 What is Formative Assessment?

Formative assessment is an important part of training and learning processes in both institutional and industry settings. It is used to provide information to students or trainees on their progress towards the achievement of the required performance. It is called “formative” assessment since it helps students form the knowledge, skills and understanding that will eventually be needed to demonstrate the required competence. In many ways, it is similar to the “continuous cycle of improvement” central to the approach adopted by companies and other organisations to manage the quality of their processes, products and services.

The feedback provided by formative assessment is used by students and trainers or teachers during training to fix up any problems that may be occurring in the learning of the required competencies.

Formal recording of results and issuing of certificates is usually not necessary in formative assessment. However, records of progress may be kept for use by the trainer or teacher and the student. In some instances, records of the outcomes of formative assessment are used as part of the evidence for summative assessment. However, as indicated above, trainers and assessors usually prefer not to combine the two forms of assessment to ensure that learners can feel free to learn without being concerned that mistakes made in the learning process may be recorded and reported.

**EXAMPLES**

1. In the training of production operators at Meadow Lea Foods, formative assessment is used during on-the-job training. It involves a combination of observation of workplace activities and structured oral questioning. Special assignments are also used to develop and check specific skills and knowledge. The assessment is used formatively to identify and correct deficiencies in skills and/or knowledge during training. The collected evidence is also used within the summative assessment at the completion of training.

2. In the enrolled nurse training program at NSW TAFE, evidence collected for formative assessment during training is also used in the overall summative assessment at the completion of training. Records are kept of formative assessments, on-the-job assessments of skills and knowledge and peer assessment results. These records are considered in the holistic assessment of competence at the completion of the course.

3. In typical on-the-job training situations, comments by a trainer on a trainee’s performance are good examples of formative assessment. The feedback provided in this assessment may be simple remarks such as “that’s right”; “keep going”; “shift your hand”; “move it higher”; and “aim further to the left”.

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4.4 What is Diagnostic Assessment?

Assessment is said to be diagnostic when it is used by training providers, workplace supervisors and/or trainers to help learners determine their education and training needs. It is used to establish what types of training opportunities will be required to enable individual students or workers to achieve their educational and workplace ambitions. It establishes the performance gap between where the person is and where they want to be.

**EXAMPLE**

At BHP Coal, assessors are trained to carry out diagnostic assessment of staff in the workplace to determine the types of training needed. It is also used to establish the extent to which they already possess the required competence for particular functions enabling due credit to be given in any training undertaken.

4.5 What is Summative Assessment?

Assessment is said to be summative when it is reported at the end of a program of training, a course or a period of work experience. Summative assessment can be used in institutional settings, in the workplace and often combinations of both.

Its purpose is to check that students or trainees have fulfilled all of the competency requirements for the course or program of training.

Summative assessment requires the collection of sufficient, suitable evidence to make a judgement. Evidence may include:

- samples of work
- observation of performance on specific tasks in a real or simulated work situation
- results of practical or written tests
- corroborated information on previous demonstrations of the competence.

The set of evidence, as a whole, is compared with the prescribed performance criteria and a judgement made as to whether the competence requirements have been met.

**EXAMPLE**

At Ford Australia a summative assessment is made to check that a production maintenance worker is competent at a particular trade level. The evidence for the assessment is recorded on a "Technical Assessment Certification Sheet". It includes evidence that the worker:

- has successfully fulfilled the assessment criteria for the required off-the-job training modules or has had suitable previous learning and experience recognised
- has completed a number of workplace tasks and satisfied the performance requirements for those tasks. The tasks have been carefully selected by the training committee to ensure they test the competencies needed to be classified at the trade level concerned. (This evidence includes details provided by the assessor of observations of performance or evaluations of work products)
- has demonstrated the required performance over a range of general competence requirements such as occupational health and safety procedures, communications, working in a team.

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4.6 What is Recognition of Prior Learning?

Recognition of prior learning or experience is a form of assessment used to determine whether a person has achieved, through informal and formal learning and experience, the required competence for entry and/or credit in a recognised course or training program. In some cases, recognition of prior learning may be used to provide recognition that full competence has been achieved, leading to the relevant qualification being awarded.

A range of evidence is usually used including examples of previous work, documentary evidence of previous achievements, references from persons familiar with the candidate's achievements and in some cases demonstration of performance by means of specially designed practical tests.

**EXAMPLE**

The ACCESS skills assessment and recognition program in the Hospitality Industry is designed to enable the recognition of persons' previous learning and experience that would enable them to work in the industry. The process includes a review of a candidate's qualifications and work history, verbal or written questions to confirm underpinning knowledge and understanding and observation of performance in a real or simulated setting.

Readers wishing to understand issues related to types of assessment methods in more detail are encouraged to refer to Chapter 4 in the companion volume, "Assessment - Technical Manual".

5 Methods of Assessing

There are no hard and fast rules about how much evidence is required to make an effective assessment of competence or what methods should be used to gather that evidence.

Clearly, only one observation of an activity, or one example of a piece of work, could easily be a once off chance event - "a piece of good luck". To judge that someone is competent on only one piece of evidence would be very risky indeed and certainly undesirable.

However, dozens of observations or examples, while probably being more convincing would probably be unnecessary and a needless expense.

In practice, a balance needs to be reached. Usually, a small number of pieces of evidence are usually needed to confirm each performance requirement. The exact number may need to be adjusted based on practical experience.
EXAMPLE

In Meadow Lea, the number of times a worker needs to be observed starting up a packing line in order to demonstrate competence has been determined through a close monitoring by the consultative committee of the assessment process. Based on how workers eventually perform in their day-to-day operations, the number of observations required to confirm competence has been adjusted to the minimum which still reasonably predicts future success in starting up the line.

The pieces of evidence that are gathered and used for the assessment may include multiple samples of the same type of evidence, as well as different forms of evidence of the same competence.

For example, evidence of competence in operating a computer to produce standard letters could include:
- multiple observations by the assessor of the candidate carrying out all of the required activities in the production of letters in day-to-day work
- assessment of the technical qualities and accuracy of examples of letters produced by the candidate
- written test to measure the required underpinning knowledge and understanding to produce letters using the computer across the range of potential contexts (eg different types of letters, merging, different styles, different forms of original information, etc.)
- oral questioning of the candidate on the processes involved in producing the letters using the computer
- demonstrations by the candidate to the assessor of specific activities which must be carried out to produce letters on the computer.

The required assessment package may involve a range of different combinations of the above methods including multiple assessments using the same technique. Each possible combination could be as effective as the other. However, the use of multiple pieces of evidence is highly desirable. As far as possible, the assessment package should assess all aspects of the competence in a practical setting (ie a “holistic” assessment of the competence).

A checklist of possible methods and techniques that can be used for assessment is provided in Table 2. This checklist can be used as a tool when considering the combination of methods that might be used for a particular competency-based assessment application.

Refer to Technical Manual

Readers wishing to understand methods of assessment in more detail are encouraged to refer to Chapter 4 in the companion volume “Assessment - Technical Manual”.

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## Checklist of Assessment Methods or Techniques

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OBSERVATION</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Check of product</td>
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<tr>
<td>Check of process</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SKILLS TEST</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Check of prescribed task</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Evaluation of practical project</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SIMULATION</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Check of simulated product</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Check of simulated process</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Checks using computer simulation</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EVALUATION OF PRIOR LEARNING</th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation of qualifications</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation of portfolio of previous work</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation of referees' reports</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation of work history</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>QUESTIONING</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oral or verbal questioning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written questioning - short answer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Written questioning - essay</td>
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<tr>
<td>Written questioning - multiple choice</td>
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<tr>
<td>Written questioning - true/false</td>
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<td>Written questioning - completion</td>
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<tr>
<td>Written questioning - matching</td>
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<tr>
<td>Computer managed questioning</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### 6 Principles of Assessment

#### 6.1 Overview

There are four basic principles of assessment which are important when selecting, designing, implementing and/or evaluating assessment in a competency-based system of education and training. They are:

- validity
- reliability
- fairness
- flexibility.

These are the key measures of quality of an assessment process. They are described below primarily in terms of their meaning.
Information is also provided on the practical things that can be done to achieve the required levels of validity, reliability, fairness, and flexibility.

Readers wishing to understand the principles of assessment in more detail are encouraged to refer to Chapter 1 in the companion volume, "Assessment - Technical Manual".

6.2 What is Validity and How is it Improved?

Assessments are valid when "they assess what they claim to assess."

Validity of assessment is achieved when:
- assessors are fully aware of what is to be assessed, as indicated by the units of competency, learning outcomes and clearly defined performance criteria
- evidence is collected from activities and tasks that can be clearly related to the unit of competency or learning outcomes specified for the course or training program
- evidence demonstrates that the performance criteria have been met
- evidence is sufficient.

EXAMPLE

At Ford Australia, a number of measures are taken to ensure that the process for assessing the competence of production maintenance tradespersons is valid and reliable:
- detailed and easy-to-follow guidelines and criteria are used
- persons conducting the assessments are specially trained for the task
- the training committee and the training department at the site concerned regularly review the assessment processes to check if they are consistently measuring what they are supposed to
- the training department consults with supervisors to check that follow-up performance in the workplace is consistent with assessment results
- workers and supervisors are actively involved in the development and review of assessment tasks and assessment criteria.

6.3 What is Reliability and How is it Improved?

Reliable assessment uses methods and procedures which engender confidence that competency standards or learning outcomes are interpreted and applied consistently from learner to learner and context to context. Without reliable assessments there can be no comparability of credentials. High quality competency standards or learning outcomes and well-documented, unambiguous and easy to use procedures are fundamental to reliability.

To ensure that assessment produces consistent outcomes, it is important that:
- there are clear, unambiguous, well-documented assessment procedures
- there are clear, unambiguous assessment criteria
- assessors are well-trained and are consistently briefed for their task
- multiple assessors or panels are used, [where feasible], and
- multiple parallel forms of evidence (i.e. evidence from different assessment events) are used to measure the same competencies, [where possible and cost-effective].

Example Illustrating Validity and Reliability

Diagram 3 shows an example which illustrates the principles of validity and reliability.

In the diagram, there are three targets.

Target one shows a shooter consistently hitting roughly the same area in the centre of the target. The shooting is consistent or reliable. The shots are also landing in the area they are supposed to - the bulls eye. The shooting is both reliable and valid.

Target two shows a shooter who has fired consistently (all of the shots have landed in the same area). However, they have landed in the wrong area of the target. The shooter for target two is shooting reliably but invalidly.

Target three shows a shooter who is neither landing the shots in the same area nor landing them in the area they are supposed to. The shooter is shooting both unreliably and invalidly. Good assessment is like the performance of the shooter for target one. It "consistently measures what it is supposed to".

EXAMPLE

In the Australian Defence Forces, a number of precautions are taken to maximise the reliability of the assessment of rifle shooting of members of the Forces:
- clear, unambiguous procedures ensure a consistent process
- electronic scoring ensures objective and consistent scoring
- training of assessors ensures a consistent approach
- multiple repeated assessments
- group performance is statistically analysed to identify systemic inconsistencies or errors due to equipment, etc.
This approach provides an interesting combination of techniques including computerised electronic analysis of scores, attention to documentation, repeated measurements, and careful training of assessors.

6.4 What is Flexibility and How is it Improved?

Assessment practices are flexible if they can accommodate the scope of knowledge and skills encompassed by the assessment criteria, the variations in contexts in which assessment may be conducted and the range of needs and personal situations of potential candidates.

There is no one best single approach or set of approaches to the assessment of performance in a competency-based system of vocational education and training. As far as possible within the resources available and cost constraints, sufficient choice should be available to candidates to enable them to be provided with the form of assessment that matches their particular personal situation.

Clearly, the degree of flexibility must be tempered by cost considerations. However, the benefits of building in some flexibility will usually justify the added cost involved. These benefits lie in the fact that reasonable flexibility in assessment approaches enables some persons to be assessed who might otherwise not be able to be assessed, or who would be unfairly or at least invalidly assessed.

For example, some candidates in a workplace may demonstrate their competence by being observed doing their job in the workplace. Others, because they are not working in the section concerned at the time or are perhaps working in remote locations, may need to have the same skills assessed by demonstrating the same competencies through a series of practical projects or through performance in a simulated situation.

In another example, some students may be able to demonstrate their underpinning knowledge and understanding through written tests while others may need to be interviewed because of their level of literacy.

EXAMPLE

The kit developed by the National Office Skills Formation Advisory Body to assess clerical/administrative skills provides a range of assessment options which can be tailored to meet the needs of individual enterprises and candidates. These include:

- self assessment by candidates
- peer assessment of candidates
- confirmation of assessments by supervisors/assessors through observation of performance, reviews of work output & oral/written/computerised tests or questioning.
6.5 Fairness

Assessment is fair if it does not disadvantage particular persons.

Assessment should be available to all eligible persons regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, disability, language barriers, and geographic location. Persons being assessed should understand clearly what is expected of them and what form assessment will take. As far as possible, assessment should place all persons on equal terms. In training situations, the assessment procedures should support the learning process.

Precautions should also be taken to ensure that, in the course of the assessment, persons are not disadvantaged for any reason. To achieve this, it is important that:

- the processes and criteria for assessment are "transparent" to all persons being assessed. In other words, easy-to-understand information on the assessment processes and criteria is freely available to persons being assessed and others with an interest in the assessment outcomes. The processes and criteria themselves should be as simple and understandable as possible. The "black box" approach to assessment requiring blind faith in the processes and the way evidence is collected and judgements are made is to be avoided at all costs. It is the first step to poor transparency and creates situations in which unfairness can easily occur.

- the characteristics and situation of all potential assessment candidates are identified, as far as possible. This may require, for example, the use of a survey or other means to identify the distribution of potential candidates in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, disability, language barriers, and geographic location.

- in the selection and/or development of the assessment scheme consideration is given to whether the chosen assessment approach(es) could disadvantage some of the candidates and why. It may be necessary to consult with some of the potential candidates in the various situations to gain a first hand understanding of potential disadvantages.

- once potential disadvantages are identified, strategies should be developed to counter them. In most cases, this will not be simple and will usually require a process of trialling and improvement.

- processes for the review of assessment arrangements should systematically examine any problems that may have been experienced by persons being assessed that may indicate unfairness. This examination, as far as possible, should extend to persons who for one reason or another might have been unfairly prevented from accessing the assessment opportunities available. The reasons for any potential unfairness should be identified and suitable ways developed to overcome them.
EXAMPLES

1. In institutional settings such as TAFE, transparency is achieved by documenting assessment processes, reporting and recording arrangements and any associated appeal mechanisms in simple, readily-understood language. The information is made available to students in advance of the assessments and any required preparation or related training. In most institutions, opportunities are also available for candidates with potential disadvantages to seek special consideration or assessment arrangements that suitably accommodate the potential disadvantage. As with the assessment processes themselves, information on these opportunities and special arrangements is made freely available in forms and in ways that make them "transparent" to all who may need to access them.

2. An example which shows how employers and unions work together to try to overcome disadvantage in an industrial setting comes from the textile, clothing and footwear industry. In this industry, the union and the employers' council have co-operatively identified the language difficulties of a substantial number of non-English speaking workers in the industry. As a result, they jointly developed a multilingual information kit to assist in the assessment of the competencies of workers in the industry. The purpose of the assessment was to translate the workers from the old to the new classifications as part of award restructuring in the industry.

This initiative has not totally solved the problem by any means. However, it has made a significant contribution to overcoming a major disadvantage for many workers being assessed for re-classification in the industry. Meanwhile, the industry parties are still searching for other ways of further reducing the disadvantage.

7 Making Assessment Work

7.1 The Role and Responsibilities of Assessors

The primary role of the assessor is to judge the available evidence against the standards.

Assessors must, therefore, have a knowledge of the areas in which they are assessing and the judgmental role may be combined with the collection of evidence. The assessor is required to:

- interpret the criteria
- use expertise to make judgements
- ensure that standards have been met
- ensure that evidence of competency is sufficient.

Some desirable components of assessor preparation and selection include:

- being highly skilled in the aspects of competence they wish to assess
- having acknowledged competency in assessment and relevant technical areas
- having an adequate level of literacy in written and spoken English
- having completed appropriate assessor training
- being endorsed by the relevant industrial parties.
Assessor training should involve components such as: ethics, assessor duties and responsibilities, gathering evidence, interpreting and using industry standards, selecting and using forms and methods of assessment, grading and recording results.

Assessors should be aware of the importance for assessments being unbiased, fair and flexible. There are strict ethical practices in educational and occupational assessment that should be observed to maintain the credibility and authority of the assessor. Table 3 below is reproduced from the Technical Manual and summarises some important ethical principles, personal rights and practices.

Table 3

Critical Principles, Rights and Desirable Practices in Assessment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principle</th>
<th>Rights</th>
<th>Desirable Practices</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Free Consent</td>
<td>People have the right not to be pressured in any way to be assessed</td>
<td>- obtain free and informed consent;</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- advise in advance that a training program or course will have an assessment;</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- provide people with an outline of the assessments that are planned and their</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>weighting or importance;</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- explain the purpose of the assessment;</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- in the workplace situation, obtain consent forms for minors; and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- either obtain consent forms for assessments where there is the possibility of</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>harm or injury and/or ask people to undertake a task which they normally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>perform and with which they feel comfortable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidentiality</td>
<td>People expect assessors to limit access and to maintain the security of</td>
<td>- limit access to information;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>information about themselves</td>
<td>- maintain security of identifiable information;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- return information to candidates, where possible; and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>People may have the right to withhold results about which they feel</td>
<td>- use numbers rather than names to further ensure anonymity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>uncomfortable</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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7.2 The Skills of Assessors

The competence of persons carrying out assessment is a critical factor in ensuring that competency-based assessment is effective and meets the required quality criteria.

Persons carrying out the role of assessor can include supervisors, workplace trainers, workplace assessors, TAFE and private teachers and specialist consultants. Particularly where formal recognition is involved (i.e. a certificate or statement of attainment that is to be formally recognised), the persons conducting the summative assessment must have demonstrated competence in assessment skills and knowledge. Desirably, this should be in accordance with the national competency standards for assessors or equivalent.

For persons wishing to be recognised assessors, a number of 3 to 5 day courses are available based on the national assessor competency standards.

A national training package for assessors developed under the auspices of the Australian Committee on Training Curriculum is scheduled to be delivered by a number of providers by mid-1994.

Training in assessment skills can occur in-house though enterprise-based assessor training programs such as those at Email in Sydney or BHP Coal in Brisbane.

Training is also available from institutions such as the University of Technology, Sydney, Canberra Institute of Technology, Hawthorn Institute of Education, Australian Trade Union Training Authority and Deakin University.

The competency standards for assessors are summarised in Table 4. They are published in a more complete form by the Competency Standards Body - Assessors and Workplace Trainers. Assessor training programs should be checked to ensure that they are based on the most current endorsed assessor competency standards.

EXAMPLE

At BHP Coal, a comprehensive training module for persons carrying out assessment in the company has been developed based on the national competency standards for assessors. All staff carrying out assessment in the Company are required to have completed the training module. The module includes as part of the summative assessment the holistic observation and evaluation of the person's competence to apply the assessment skills in the workplace.
### Table 4

**Assessor Competency Standards**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competency Unit</th>
<th>Competency Elements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Plan assessment                  | • Identify assessment context.  
                                 | • Establish evidence required.  
                                 | • Select and explain the assessment procedure.                                    |
| Carry out assessment             | • Gather evidence.  
                                 | • Make the assessment decision.  
                                 | • Provide feedback during assessment.                                             |
| Record assessment results and    | • Record assessment results.  
                                 | • Provide feedback to person being assessed.                                       |
| review the procedure             | • Review the procedure.                                                             |

---

1. For information on Assessor Training Programs, contact the Executive Officer, Competency Standards Body - Assessors and Workplace Trainers, 99 Erlunda Circuit, HAWKER, ACT 2614 Tel. (06) 254 3500.

2. The publication, Assessor Competency Standards, is available from Carlton/Fitzroy Skillshare, 235 Napier St Fitzroy, Victoria, 3065.

### 7.3 Involvement of Candidates

Candidates should be actively involved in their assessment. This will ensure that:
- candidates can develop a better understanding of the assessment process  
- candidates can take better advantage of the outcomes of the assessment  
- candidates can prepare more effectively for their assessment  
- candidates can have more confidence in the assessment processes  
- there are likely to be less appeals.

The involvement of candidates can be achieved in a variety of ways. The appropriate form of involvement will depend on the context of the assessment and the types of assessment instruments being used.
The following is a list of desirable ways candidates can be involved:

- by advising them of the assessment processes that are to be used and the performance criteria to be applied
- by giving them the opportunity to select the time and place of the assessment
- by providing choice within a flexible system of assessment comprising a number of options
- by providing an opportunity to choose their assessor from a pool of assessors
- by counselling them on the outcomes of an assessment in terms of what may need to be done to achieve the required levels of performance or on what the outcomes of the assessment might mean for further training or career opportunities
- by advising them of grievance and appeal processes that are available to them, and
- by involving them in follow up review and evaluation activities aimed at improving the assessment process.

Some of these suggestions are more suitable in some contexts than others depending on the nature and resources of the organisation. For example, in a TAFE College it may not be feasible to provide much choice within the assessment process. The provision of choice is often possible, however, in small institutions or workplace settings.

**EXAMPLE**

At Meadow Lea Foods, the workers undergoing training and assessment as production operators are heavily involved in the training and assessment process. Prior to training, the trainees are briefed on what will happen during their training and assessment. Their trainers/assessors also meet with them regularly to discuss their progress and any action that needs to be taken. Trainees are also consulted periodically during reviews of the training and assessment processes.

7.4 Feedback

Candidates can be provided with feedback in competency-based assessment in a variety of ways. The appropriate form of involvement will depend on the context and purpose of the assessment and the types of assessment instruments being used.

**Feedback within Formative Assessment**

In this type of assessment, the feedback should be as immediate as possible to enable the candidate or trainee to correct any problems and progress towards their learning or practice goals. The trainer or assessor will discuss the outcomes of the assessment with
the candidate either at the time of assessment or as soon as a judgement is made on progress towards the competency objectives. The feedback should not only provide information on the assessed performance but should also provide an indication of how the candidate might rectify any deficiencies.

Feedback within Summative Assessment

The form of feedback to be used in summative assessment will depend on the nature of the assessment approach being used. In some situations, progressive and immediate feedback will need to be given (for example in an observation of performance in the workplace where an error may cause danger to others or damage to equipment or product or services).

In most summative assessment situations, feedback on results may only be able to be given after all of the evidence has been considered and a judgement made on competence.

As far as is practicable, it is important that the outcomes of the assessment are discussed with the candidate, particularly if the decision has been reached that the candidate has not yet achieved competence. This is particularly true in a workplace setting. In training institutions where very large numbers of candidates may be involved, opportunities to discuss assessment outcomes are usually restricted to exceptional results or marginal results. General counselling on progress and performance in assessment is usually provided in these institutions by class teachers or professional counsellors.

The nature of the advice about the outcome of an assessment and discussion of the implications of the results will depend on the context of the purpose of the assessment.

For example:
- feedback on assessment within a course will focus on what further learning is required
- feedback on assessment for the issuing of a qualification will focus on the competency requirements for the qualification and whether or not the criteria have been met by the candidate. Where the criteria have not been met, possible options for further training and assessment will need to be discussed
- feedback on assessment for career planning purposes will focus on the career options indicated by the assessment results, as well as any further training required to pursue a particular career ambition.

EXAMPLES

1. In the assessor training program at BHP Coal, the importance of feedback as a diagnostic tool is emphasised as well as its importance for maintaining motivation and morale of workers for further training and development.

2. In the rifle shooting example of the Australian Defence Forces, extensive effort is made using electronic and personal feedback techniques to enable soldiers to identify and correct deficiencies in their rifle shooting accuracy and procedures.
7.5 Preparation and Planning

The importance of planning and preparation cannot be underestimated in assessment.

This preparation has a number of important steps:

- the purpose of the assessment is confirmed and discussed with the candidate(s)
- the assessment criteria are confirmed and discussed with the candidate(s)
- any special enterprise or institutional policy requirements related to the assessment are identified and discussed with the candidate(s)
- type(s) and amount of evidence to be collected are determined and confirmed as being sufficient for a valid judgement of competence to be made
- the type(s) of evidence to be used are discussed with the candidate(s)
- assessment techniques are chosen to gather the required evidence are selected in accordance with the purpose and context of the assessment
- assessment procedures and appeal arrangements are discussed with the candidate(s)
- where applicable, date(s) of assessment are discussed and set with the candidate(s)
- assessment arrangements are made including informing the relevant people, organisation of resources and facilities and checking that the assessor(s) have the necessary competence
- arrangements are made for the gathering of any data and feedback to be used in the review of the assessment process.

EXAMPLE

At Ford Australia, detailed procedures ensure that all training and assessment is carefully prepared and planned. Trainers and assessors practice the process of planning and preparation in their trainer training. Ford recognises that planning and preparation are vital ingredients to achieving the required levels of reliability, validity and fairness.

8 Recording and Reviewing Assessment

8.1 Recording Results

There are several types of information which might need to be recorded in assessment:

- results of the assessments are kept in accordance with organisational and any statutory requirements
- candidates results are entered into any record book, progress record or equivalents held by candidates
- information on the assessment processes used including the criteria, the assessment techniques, the rules for making judgements and assessment decisions, appeals processes, the ways results are to be recorded and the way the candidate is to be involved in the process
- any details of review processes and the results and details of action taken as a consequence of such reviews
- any required administrative details such a records of equipment or facility use, estimated costs, etc.

When considering what records should be kept on assessment and how they should be kept it is important to take into account:
- the needs of candidates, assessors, the company or institution and statutory or regulatory requirements of certification agencies, work safety bodies, etc.
- how easily the records are able to be accessed, by whom and when
- privacy issues
- the possible use of the records within reviews of assessment procedures;
- costs
- storage arrangements including the period over which the records will be maintained.

EXAMPLE

At BHP Coal, three main types of assessment records are maintained
- assessors keep records of all assessments conducted
- company maintains records for national certification purposes, and
- learners keep own file of assessment results.

Guidelines are provided to assessors and learners on how to maintain their records of assessment.
The company has established procedures for keeping the official company records.

Assessors are advised that their records may be reviewed from time to time for the purpose of quality audits of the company’s assessment processes.

8.2 Reviewing the Assessment Process

It is important that assessment processes are regularly reviewed. This will enable any deficiencies to be identified and a cycle of ongoing improvement to be achieved. The important questions that should be asked in such reviews are shown in Diagram 2.
A very important first step in a review is to establish why the assessment is being conducted. The answer to this question establishes the benchmark for many of the other checks that will be carried out in the review.

The second step is to establish what criteria are being used in the assessment. In most cases the ultimate criteria will be endorsed competency standards. However, these will have been interpreted to the specific context within which the assessment is being conducted. Hence, it will be necessary to:
- establish the relevant competency standards or equivalent
- establish the actual assessment criteria that have derived from the standards
- consider the process used to develop the assessment criteria.

The third step is to examine how the evidence for the assessment is being gathered. This will include the procedures being used, the assessment tools being used and the way the evidence is documented.

The final step in the review process is to ask the question "are the assessment processes good enough". This requires a critical evaluation of the assessment processes against the required quality criteria. The main checks will be for:
- validity
- reliability
- flexibility, and
- fairness.
Other measures that should be checked in the review process include:
- simplicity
- cost-effectiveness
- extent and effectiveness of feedback and counselling processes
- adequacy of appeal processes
- the value or usefulness of the assessment outcomes to the candidates, trainers and/or employers.

A critical criterion in any review of an assessment system is "cost". Any assessment system must be affordable by the organisation responsible for it. This requires careful consideration of the design of the system as well as acceptable compromises in the complexity, flexibility, choices and other controls to ensure validity, reliability and fairness within the assessment processes. No organisation can afford an open-ended approach to assessment. The realities of cost must be addressed along with the desirable requirements. Once the assessment processes have been reviewed and strengths and weaknesses identified, action should be initiated to bring the assessment process into line within requirements acceptable to all relevant parties.

Refer to Technical Manual

Readers wishing to understand the review of assessment processes in more detail are encouraged to refer to Chapter 9 in the companion volume, "Assessment - Technical Manual".

EXAMPLES

1. In the enrolled nurse training and assessment program at NSW TAFE, a comprehensive ongoing review is conducted of the program involving:
   - professional nursing bodies
   - teachers of the enrolled nurse education program
   - registering authorities; and
   - quality assurance committees established by the central co-ordination unit.

2. At Tourism Training Australia, the review process for the Hospitality Industry’s skills assessment and recognition process (ACCESS) involves:
   - formal review of ACCESS after 18 mths
   - on-going review twice yearly
   - surveys of assessors to update manuals; and
   - feedback from participants’ evaluations of assessor training workshops.

9 Case Study Summaries

9.1 Overview

Seven case studies are provided in Section 9.3 to show the way in which various organisations have gone about setting up assessment in their competency-based training
context. The case studies are summarised in a consistent way to enable comparisons of the differences in the approaches taken, as well as their similarities. A small glossary of terms is provided below to help in the interpretation of the case study information.

9.2 Definitions Of Terms Used In The Case Study Summaries

Authenticity (of Evidence)
refers to the confidence that an assessor has that the evidence presented in an assessment represents the candidate’s own performance.

Cost-Effectiveness (of Assessment)
refers to a balance between the costs of developing and conducting an assessment process relative to the effectiveness of the assessment process and the value of the assessment outcomes to the assessor and candidate.

Currency (of Assessment Criteria)
refers to whether or not the assessment criteria are based on the latest version of specified endorsed competency standards or approved learning outcomes.

Fairness (of Assessment)
refers to the controls in place to ensure that assessment is available to all eligible persons regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, disability, language barriers, and geographic location and that, in the course of assessment, persons are not disadvantaged for any reason. These controls include: making the assessment "transparent" (i.e. the assessment processes and standards or other assessment criteria are accessible and understandable); ensuring assessment methods are equitable; advising persons being assessed on the purpose, methods and procedures for assessment; providing effective feedback during and after assessment; and providing suitable opportunities for challenges and appeals and re-assessment, when necessary.

Reliability (of Assessment)
refers to the extent in which consistent outcomes are achieved in assessment regardless of who does the assessment, when it is conducted and in whatever context it is conducted. This usually is achieved by ensuring clear and sufficiently detailed procedures, clear and unambiguous assessment criteria, measures to ensure consistent interpretation of evidence and sufficient, suitable training for assessors.

Simplicity (of Assessment)
refers to the extent to which assessment procedures are straight-forward and easy-to-understand and implement.

Sufficiency (of Evidence)
refers to the requirement that there is enough suitable evidence to enable an acceptable judgement about whether competence has been demonstrated.

Transparency (of Assessment Processes and Criteria)
refers to the extent to which all aspects of an assessment system (criteria, processes, recording arrangements, etc.) are open and clear to anyone who takes the time to look
at, or through it. It is the measure of the clarity of an assessment system to all involved.

**Value/Usefulness (of Assessment)**
refers to usefulness and value of the outcomes of a competency-based assessment process to the users (candidate, employers, training providers, etc.).

**Validity (of Assessment)**
refers to the extent to which the assessment measures what it is claims to measure.
Measures to improve validity include:
- assessors have sufficient competence in both the necessary assessment techniques, as well as the technical aspects of the competence being assessed
- assessors are fully aware of what is to be assessed, as indicated by the relevant units of competence, learning outcomes and clearly-defined performance criteria
- evidence is collected from activities and tasks that are clearly related to the relevant unit(s) of competency (or learning outcomes specified for a competency-based course or training program)
- sufficient evidence is collected
- evidence is appropriately compared with the relevant performance criteria.

9.3 Case Study Summaries

The seven case studies have been drawn from the following organisations:

- **BHP Coal**
- **National Office Skills Formation Advisory Body**
- **Ford Australia**
- **Tourism Training Australia**
- **Meadow Lea Foods**
- **Australian Defence Forces**
- **NSW TAFE (Nursing)**
1. BHP Coal

Overview of Organisation
BHP Coal - a major company in coal industry with an extensive commitment to nationally-recognised in-house competency-based training and assessment.

Description of Assessment Example
Assessment of persons undertaking accredited on-the-job training programs.

Assessment Purpose(s)
To conduct formative and summative assessment of the competence of staff undertaking on-the-job training at coal mines and other company sites.

Assessment Types/Methods
- formative assessment during training
- oral and written questioning
- observation of workplace performance

Type of Evidence
- records of interim/formative assessments
- assessment sheet of results of oral and written tests
- check of assignments against set criteria

Recording Arrangements
- assessors keep records of all assessments conducted
- company maintains records for national certification purposes
- learners keep own file of assessment results

Assessment Criteria
- enterprise competency standards developed in accordance with National Training Board format (pending the development of industry standards)

Assessors
- trained in-house using national assessor standards as criteria

Review Process
- undertaken by training manager and learning coordinators

Strategies to Ensure the Quality of the Assessment

Validity
- clear unambiguous guidelines, objectives and criteria
- well-trained assessors
- follow up checks of performance on-the-job
Reliability
- clear well-documented procedures ensure repeatable training/assessment
- training manager regularly checks on assessment processes
- routine reviews and audits of assessment are conducted

Fairness
- trainees /candidates are provided with detailed information
- fairness emphasised in preparation of assessors
- use of a panel of assessors
- assessors encouraged to be closely involved with trainees

Authenticity of Evidence
- trainees are identified by name, position and location and this can be verified against company records

Transparency of Processes and Criteria
- comprehensive well-documented information on training and assessment is made available to all involved
- close consultation is maintained between assessors and trainees

Currency of Criteria
- training manager updates materials and criteria when changes occur

Sufficiency of Evidence
- sufficiency of evidence in assessment is reviewed by the training manager and is raised as a critical requirement during assessor training

Simplicity
- both the training and assessment processes are kept as simple and as straightforward as possible with examples drawn from the workplace

Cost-Effectiveness
- the training and assessment arrangements are regularly monitored to ensure that they are both effective and affordable

Value / Usefulness
- value and usefulness of training and assessment are seen as critical requirements and are checked regularly with staff throughout the company. Results of reviews are used as a basis for improving the training/assessment programs
2. National Office Skills Formation Advisory Body

Overview of Organisation
The National Office Skills Formation Advisory Body is a peak Industry Training Advisory Body established to develop competency standards for the clerical and administrative workers across industries and to promote the use of these standards in competency-based training and assessment of clerical and administrative skills across industries.

Description of Assessment Example
Kit for use by office supervisors involved in the assessment of clerical/administrative skills within enterprises.

Assessment Purpose(s)
To facilitate the consistent assessment of competencies of clerical and administrative staff in workplaces.

Assessment Types/Methods
- self assessment by candidates
- peer assessment of candidates
- confirmation of assessments by supervisor/assessor through observation of performance, reviews of work output & oral/written/computerised tests or questioning

Type of Evidence
- results of self and/or peer assessment in candidate’s record book
- results of observations of performance, review of work, and tests/questions

Recording Arrangements
- candidate’s record book
- employer’s records of assessment outcomes

Assessment Criteria
- national competency standards for clerical/administrative staff

Assessors
- workplace supervisors who work co-operatively with the candidates themselves and their peers in the assessment process. Assessor competence is achieved through comprehensive assessors’ manual. Assessors are encouraged to complete an assessor training program

Review Process
- verification process to ensure quality assurance of procedures

Strategies to Ensure the Quality of the Assessment

Validity
- manual and record book provide clear and unambiguous information on process and link to standards
• assessors are encouraged to pay careful attention to what they are assessing and the sufficiency of evidence

Reliability
• manual & record book promote consistent process and criteria
• assessor competence encouraged through training to national standards

Fairness
• the manual stresses the importance of fairness and the need to have sufficient flexibility to accommodate individual differences and needs

Authenticity of Evidence
• this is not addressed directly in the manual. However, the closeness of the recommended involvement between the assessor, candidate and peers implies there would be no confusion of identity in the processes

Transparency of Processes and Criteria
• the manual stresses the importance of the candidate and others involved in the process being made fully aware of the assessment processes and criteria being used

Currency of Criteria
• assessors are encouraged to use the latest endorsed clerical/administrative staff competency standards and to relate them to the candidate’s workplace context

Sufficiency of Evidence
• the requirement for sufficient evidence to be gathered for the assessment is discussed and stressed throughout the manual

Simplicity
• the assessment techniques recommended in the manual are simple and relatively easy to apply

Cost-Effectiveness
• the need for an appropriate balance between cost and the assessment “achieving what it is supposed to” is emphasised in the manual

Value / Usefulness
• the importance of ensuring that the outcomes of the assessment have a practical usefulness to candidates and their employers is fully discussed in the manual
Overview of Organisation
Ford Australia - a major automotive manufacturing company

Description of Assessment Example
On-the-job assessment of the workplace application of the competencies required for classification as a tradesperson in the manufacturing maintenance areas of the company.

Assessment Purpose(s)
To confirm that the candidate has successfully completed both the required on and off-the-job training and has successfully applied the resulting competence to a number of typical workplace tasks for the occupational level concerned

Assessment Types/Methods
- observation of performance on specified tasks
- written and verbal questioning on underpinning knowledge and understanding

Type of Evidence
- checklist of observations, results and skills on the designated tasks in the form of a "Assessment Sheet"

Recording Arrangements
- training record (hard copy)
- assessment sheet (hard copy)
- computer record of training and assessment

Assessment Criteria
- performance criteria are developed by the training committee for the section concerned within the competence framework for tradespersons as established by the company and the automotive industry

Assessors
- nominated shop floor personnel, who are prepared for the task, carry out assessment with concurrence of the supervisor and training facilitator

Review Process
- the assessment process is closely monitored and regularly reviewed by the training committee of the Company in association with the training department

Strategies to Ensure the Quality of the Assessment

Validity
- detailed and easy-to-follow guidelines and criteria
- training of persons conducting the assessment
- checks by training committee and training department
- follow up observation of performance in the workplace
- involvement of workers/supervisors in the development of the training assessment tasks and performance criteria

**Reliability**
- clear guidelines and procedures ensure a consistent approach
- training of assessment yields high level of consistency of assessment process and judgements
- multiple checks and tasks enable early identification of errors and inconsistencies

**Fairness**
- clear documentation and briefings ensure that workers, assessors and management all have a clear understanding of the process
- fairness is emphasised in the preparation of assessors

**Authenticity of Evidence**
- each employee has a unique identification code which can be confirmed at the time of assessment
- each candidate is usually personally known to the assessor/supervisor
- candidates have access to an appeal process

**Transparency of Processes and Criteria**
- clear documentation and briefings ensure that workers, assessors and management all have a clear understanding of the assessment process

**Currency**
- the assessment process is designed to be consistent with current industry competency requirements, company needs and the specific application of competencies in production maintenance work areas

**Sufficiency of Evidence**
- the sufficiency of the combination of assessment tasks used in the assessment process is reviewed by the training department, the area concerned and the training committee

**Simplicity**
- the processes, documentation and criteria have been collaboratively designed by the training department, workers, supervisors and management to be easy to understand and use

**Cost-Effectiveness**
- the cost-effectiveness and the design of the "Training Application Certification" process is monitored in the course of the ongoing review by the training committee and the training department

**Value/Usefulness**
- company training committee and staff of the manufacturing maintenance regularly review the assessment process
- the value to the workers and management of the assessment process is the primary consideration in its ongoing review and development
Overview of Organisation
Tourism Training Australia the peak national Industry Training Advisory Body for the Hospitality and Tourism Industry.

Description of Assessment Example
ACCESS, the Hospitality Industry's skills assessment and recognition program, is an industry-wide program administered for industry by Tourism Training Australia and its State offices. Assessors undergo structured training, are licensed and are issued with a manual containing "competency profiles" - the instrument used in the assessment.

Assessment Purpose(s)
Recognition of competencies which can be used for industrial award purposes; issue of qualifications; and credit for further training.

Assessment Types/Methods
- observation of performance by assessor in real or simulated environment
- verbal/written questioning

Type of Evidence
- results of observation of performance in real or simulated environment
- responses to verbal or written questions

Recording Arrangements
- successful outcomes recorded on a triplicate form (copies to candidate, assessor and State office)
- permanent record on State databases co-ordinated by Tourism Training Australia

Assessment Criteria
- national competency standards in food and beverage, guest services and kitchen areas

Assessors
- assessors licensed after 2 day training program and demonstrated competence
- assessors must have train-the-trainer qualifications, be supervisor or above, and have relevant technical competence

Review Process
- formal review of ACCESS after 18 mths
- on-going review twice yearly
- surveys of assessors to update manuals
- feedback from participants' evaluations of assessor training workshops

Strategies to Ensure the Quality of the Assessment

Validity
- comprehensive manuals ensure clear understanding of assessment purposes and objectives
• training of assessors ensures assessment measures what it is supposed to
• competency profiles are developed from endorsed national competency standards
• competency profiles clearly define competencies and performance standards

Reliability
• assessor training includes extensive role playing and simulations to ensure consistency of process
• performance of assessors is regularly monitored and checked
• comprehensive manuals and profiles ensure consistent processes

Fairness
• assessment process is flexible (eg assessment of knowledge can be written or verbal) ensuring provision for individual differences such as literacy problems
• appeals process is available to all candidates

Authenticity of Evidence
• if candidate is not known to assessor, they must produce identification

Transparency of Processes and Criteria
• comprehensive manual pamphlets and briefing materials ensure clear understanding of the assessment process

Currency
• assessors are issued with up-to-date versions of national profile
• monitoring process ensures double-check that correct profiles are used

Sufficiency of Evidence
• sufficiency of evidence is comprehensively dealt with in assessor training

Simplicity
• assessment techniques, profiles and paperwork kept as simple and straightforward as possible

Cost-Effectiveness
• costs are borne by the employers and employees (ie system operates on cost recovery basis)
• system is designed to be as efficient as possible

Value / Usefulness
• value is checked via regular reviews and promoted through case studies and articles
5. Meadow Lea Foods

Overview of Organisation

Description of Assessment Example
On-the-job training and assessment program for operators of a production line (highly participative).

Assessment Purpose(s)
To assess competence of workers during and at the end of an on the job training program.

Assessment Types/Methods
- workplace observation
- oral questioning
- practical assignments

Type of Evidence
- records of observations
- assessment sheet of responses to oral questions
- check of assignments against set criteria

Recording Arrangements
- assessment sheet and details of all assessments held by company for at least 10 years
- employee given certificate on achieving the competency requirements of the training program

Assessment Criteria
- currently company performance requirements (however, consistent with draft industry competency standards currently before the NTB awaiting endorsement)

Assessors
- panel of assessors used with necessary technical background (peers and supervisors)
- assessors are prepared for their role by briefing and detailed manual

Review Process
- currently there is an informal review (however, a more formal review process is proposed for the future)

Strategies to Ensure the Quality of the Assessment

Validity
- clear guidelines, objectives and criteria
- follow up checks of performance in workplace by peers, supervisors
- double checks built into process
Reliability
- clear guidelines, objectives and criteria
- use of an assessment panel (multiple assessors)
- multiple checks

Fairness
- monitoring process (multiple checks)
- fairness emphasised in preparation of assessors
- use of a panel of assessors
- high level of involvement of assessee
- appeal process to training committee

Authenticity of Evidence
- close personal involvement of assessors with assessee ensures positive identification of assessee

Transparency of Processes and Criteria
- training manual describes assessment process
- briefings are given to assessee prior to training
- processes developed by training committee
- close involvement of assessors with assessee

Currency
- ongoing process of review and update
- changes in training/assessment automatically triggered by changes in the workplace
- amendment sheet details changes

Sufficiency of Evidence
- panel of experts used to check that evidence is sufficient

Simplicity
- priority given to simple language and processes
- training/assessment procedures checked on shop floor for ease of use and understanding
- feedback obtained on technical accuracy and simplicity

Cost-Effectiveness
- training committee monitors costs/time of assessment

Value / Usefulness
- training committee monitors effect on morale, and improvements of competence in the workplace
6. Australian Defence Forces

Overview of Organisation
Defence force of 100,000 members that builds its reputation for effectiveness on the excellence of its training

Description of Assessment Example
Practical assessment of competence in rifle shooting

Assessment Purpose(s)
To prove the proficiency of soldiers in rifle shooting before moving on to more advanced training and operations

Assessment Types/Methods
- observation of compliance with required procedures and safety precautions

Type of Evidence
- computerised recordings of hits on simulated targets
- records of observations of compliance with required procedures

Recording Arrangements
- printout of scoresheets showing distribution of hits on each target
- summary of observations
- personal records of performance retained by Australian Defence Forces

Assessment Criteria
- 60% of bullets fired must hit a target and 60% of targets must be hit
- checklist of required competencies and procedures in the handling and use of weapons

Assessors
- assessors are trained to carry out the assessment and to provide feedback to soldiers

Review Process
- regular reviews undertaken based on feedback of performance of soldiers in the field
- processes compared with overseas standards. Continuous improvement in processes is pursued

Strategies to Ensure the Quality of the Assessment

Validity
- procedures and criteria are clear and well documented
- electronic scoring system ensures scores are accurate
- assessors are well prepared
- assessments are statistically compared with performance in the field
- regular reviews of assessment process by expert panel

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Reliability
- clear, unambiguous procedures ensure consistent process
- electronic scoring ensures objective and consistent scoring
- training of assessors ensures consistent approach
- multiple repeated assessments
- group performance is statistically analysed to identify systemic inconsistencies or errors due to equipment, etc.

Fairness
- oral explanations support comprehensive written documentation
- regular reviews of assessment process by expert panel
- electronic scoring ensures objective and impartial results

Authenticity of Evidence
- all soldiers have unique identification code
- all soldiers are visually identified

Transparency of Processes and Criteria
- oral explanations support written documentation provided to all candidates
- commanders in the field (users of skills) are provided with documentation on the assessment process

Currency
- procedures and criteria are systematically revised for each new weapon
- currency of criteria and procedures are evaluated in regular reviews of assessment process by expert panel

Sufficiency of Evidence
- sufficiency of evidence is considered by review panel
- feedback is provided by commanders in the field
- local procedures are compared with international practice

Simplicity
- procedures are straightforward and easy to facilitate
- a systems approach ensures an easy to understand repeatable process
- specially designed facilities streamline process

Cost-Effectiveness
- cost-effectiveness is under constant evaluation by review panel
- innovations to reduce cost without reducing effectiveness regularly examined (eg assessment without live ammunition)
- measurement of costs of engagement of targets with live ammunition

Value / Usefulness
- feedback is provided by commanders in the field
- regular reviews of assessment process by expert panel
Overview of Organisation
NSW Technical and Further Education Commission (TAFE)

Description of Assessment Example
Assessment of nursing skills of people enrolled in the Advanced Certificate in Nursing (Enrolled Nurse) Program

Assessment Purpose(s)
To assess the competence in the performance of a range of nursing skills

Assessment Types/Methods
- formative assessment of skills
- on-the-job assessment of skills
- observation of performance in conjunction with verbal review and assessor/student discussion

Type of Evidence
- results of observation of performance
- documented evaluation of performance against validated criteria
- documented review of work, written assessment of knowledge and peer assessment

Recording Arrangements
- assessor's worksheets
- official TAFE students' records
- students' result sheets

Assessment Criteria
- competency standards developed in line with national competencies for nursing (Australian Nursing Council Inc)

Assessors
- teachers of nursing in TAFE (Nurses registered with the Nurses Registration Board and having teaching qualifications and training in assessment techniques

Review Process
- regular review by:
  - professional nursing bodies
  - teachers of the Enrolled Nurse Education Program
  - registering authorities
  - quality assurance committees established by the central co-ordination unit
Strategies to Ensure the Quality of the Assessment

Validity
- clear, unambiguous criteria for assessment
- ongoing education and training for assessors
- professional validation of competencies

Reliability
- measurement and evaluation of inter-rater reliability
- evaluation over time to assess assessment instrument consistency of assessment results

Fairness
- students and teachers provided with up-to-date, standardised information re assessment procedures, timing, weighting and marking criteria

Authenticity of Evidence
- assured through one-to-one regular interaction between students and teacher

Transparency of Processes and Criteria
- students and teachers provided with up-to-date, standardised information on the assessment processes

Currency of Criteria
- regular in-service training for assessors ensures up-to-date awareness of current competency criteria
- regular review of assessment instruments
- ongoing liaison, advice and information from professional bodies
- regular review of competency standards

Sufficiency of Evidence
- comprehensive competence checklists and assessor information regularly reviewed for sufficiency

Simplicity
- language and logical progression of instruments designed to be well within literacy and numeracy expectations of target group

Cost-Effectiveness
- while costs of assessment are relatively high, this is justified by the proven effectiveness and usefulness of the assessment processes and outcomes

Value/Usefulness
- the assessment outcomes of the assessments are regularly checked for their value and usefulness to students, employers and teachers
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