

Making assessment decisions and providing feedback

This handout will cover:

- How to make a decision
- Factors influencing decisions
- Appeals and complaints
- What is feedback?
- Different feedback methods
- How to provide feedback
- Feedback hints
- Reading list
- Website list

How to make a decision

When making a decision, you will need to base it on everything you have assessed. If you are observing a learner's skills, you could follow this up by asking questions to check their knowledge and understanding. If your learner did not perform according to the requirements or answered questions incorrectly, they might be able to have another attempt (if it's acceptable). It could be that your learner does know the correct response but your question was vague or ambiguous. You might need to rephrase your instructions or questions, or enable your learner to partake in further training before being reassessed.

Factors influencing decisions

When making a decision, you will need to ensure that all assessed work is VARCS:

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

If the above are not ensured, you might make an incorrect judgement and a learner might appeal against your decision.

Decisions should always be fair, safe and ethical:

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

- **Safe:** the learner's work can be confirmed as valid and authentic. There should be little chance of plagiarism, confidentiality of information should be taken into account and learning and assessment should not be compromised in any way, nor the learner's experience or potential to achieve. (Safe in this context does not relate to health and safety but to whether the assessment methods are sufficiently robust to make a reliable decision.)
- **Ethical:** the methods used are right and proper for what is being assessed and the context of assessment. The learner's welfare, health, safety and security are not compromised.

Ensuring you choose the right method of assessment to carry out with your learners, and making a decision which is ethical, safe and fair will help support your learners towards their achievement.

It is important to keep records of assessment planning, decisions and feedback. This will provide an audit trail of what has taken place, and prove what progress and achievement your learners have made. You will also need to satisfy any company, quality assurance, awarding organisation, funding bodies' or regulatory authorities' audit requirements.

Records will usually need to be kept for a set period, for example, three years. They should be the original records (if hard copies are used), not photocopies or carbon copies. It is fine to give copies to your learners, as it is harder to forge a copy than an original. Unfortunately, there are some learners who might do this; therefore keeping the originals will ensure your records are authentic.

The following are factors to consider when making a decision.

Assessment requirements – have both you and your learner interpreted these in the same way?

Cheating – have any learners colluded together, cheated in any way or copied someone else's work?

Consistency – are you being fair to all your learners or are you biased towards some learners more than others?

Methods of assessment – have you used appropriate or alternative methods, for example, asking oral questions rather than issuing written questions for a learner who has dyslexia?

Plagiarism – have any learners copied work from others or the internet, or not referenced their research adequately? You could type a sentence of their work into a search engine to see if it already exists elsewhere.

Pressure – do you feel under pressure to pass learners who are borderline, perhaps due to funding measures, targets, inspectors or employer expectations?

Risk assessments – are any of your learners likely to leave, or do they need extra support for any reason? Don't feel obliged to give too much support, to the extent that your learner's work becomes your own.

Trends – is there a pattern, i.e. are most learners making the same mistakes? If so, it could be that they have misinterpreted something or you have misinformed them or been vague or ambiguous. If this is the case, you could summarise the trends and discuss them with your learners, you could also discuss aspects of good practice to further their development.

Type of assessment – i.e. formal or informal assessments – you might be more lenient with informal assessments to encourage them. However, you do need to be fair and ethical with all your methods and decisions, for example, regarding safety and confidentiality.

When making a decision, you should try to:

- ensure all the relevant aspects or criteria have been met
- take into account any naturally occurring activities which weren't planned for
- ensure you are accurate and consistent
- point out any errors in spelling, grammar and punctuation to help your learner's literacy skills

Decisions should only be based on the requirements being assessed i.e. the standards or qualification criteria. Objectivity is the key when making a decision. If your learner is allowed to have another attempt, you could refer them at first. Then you could set another date for re-assessment to take place when they are ready.

If you assess a programme which requires grades to be given to learners, you will need to analyse the data regarding their achievements. The grades could be expressed as:

A, B, C, D, E

Achieved/not achieved

competent/not yet competent

distinction, credit, pass, refer, fail

percentages, e.g. 80%

Analysing the results will help you see not only how well your learners have done, but whether there were any trends. For example, if all your learners received an average of C, but another assessor's group achieved an average of B, is there a fault on your part?

Appeals and complaints

Learners are entitled to make an appeal against a decision you have made, if they feel this is justifiable. There will be an appeals procedure at your organisation to follow. If a learner has made an appeal about a decision you have made, you should not feel you must pass them for other assessments if they have not met the requirements. Make sure you follow your organisation's procedures and keep records of your decisions.

Learners can also complain if they are not happy with an aspect of the assessment process e.g. they feel you have not been fair to everyone. If a learner has made a complaint about a particular assessment method or the way you have treated them, you must remain objective and not take anything personally. You should not let this influence any future decisions, however, you could ask if another assessor could take on this learner if you feel uncomfortable with the situation.

What is feedback?

Feedback is information regarding progress and achievement. All learners need to know how they are progressing, and what they have achieved. Feedback regarding their progress and achievements will hopefully help to encourage and motivate your learner, leading to an improvement. Feedback can be given formally after an assessment, for example, in writing, or informally by talking to your learner.

The advantages of providing feedback are that it:

- can boost your learner's confidence and motivation
- creates opportunities for clarification, discussion and progression
- emphasises progress rather than failure
- enables your learner to appreciate what they need to do to improve or change their practice
- identifies further learning opportunities or actions required
- informs your learner of what they have achieved.

Different feedback methods

Descriptive – describes examples of what could be improved and why, and is usually formal. Using this method lets you describe what your learner has done, how they have achieved the required assessment requirements and what they can do to progress further.

Evaluative – usually just a statement such as *well done* or *good*. This method does not offer helpful or constructive advice and is usually informal. It does not give learners the opportunity to know what was done well or how they could improve.

Constructive – is specific and focused to confirm your learner's achievement or to give developmental points in a positive and helpful way.

Destructive – relates to improvements which are needed and is often given in a negative way which could demoralise your learner.

Objective – clearly relates to specific assessment requirements and is factual regarding what has and has not been met.

Subjective – is often just a personal opinion and can be biased, for example, if the assessor is friendly with the learner. Feedback might be vague and not based on the assessment requirements.

How to provide feedback

Try and have a conversation when giving feedback to include your learner in the process. You could ask them some questions to clarify their understanding regarding what you are telling them.

When providing feedback, whether verbally or in person, try and make sure it is:

- based on facts and not opinions
- clear, genuine and unambiguous
- constructive, developmental and supportive
- detailed regarding what was or wasn't achieved, and what needs improving or developing further
- documented: records must be maintained for audit purposes and proof of progress and achievement
- focused on the activity not the person
- helpful and honest.

Always identify if any further action is needed i.e. if the learner has not met all the requirements. It could be that questions could be asked to fill in any gaps or another assessment activity will need to take place.

Feedback hints

Often, the focus of feedback is likely to be on mistakes rather than strengths. If something positive is stated first, any negative comments are more likely to be listened to and acted upon. Starting with a negative point may discourage learners from listening to anything else that is said.

Feedback should always be adapted to the level of learner i.e. don't use higher level words or jargon when their level of understanding is lower. Be aware of noisy environments and distractions when providing feedback. You could:

- ask the learner how they feel they have done before giving the feedback
- use eye contact, speak clearly and allow time for learner questions and clarification
- state something positive first to maintain attention
- own your statements by beginning with 'I'
- use the word 'however' instead of 'but'.

Example:

Start with something positive e.g.

I really liked the way you delivered your session, you came across as very confident.

Link with 'however' to anything that needs improving e.g.

...however, if you had faced the learners a bit more rather than looking at the screen I could have heard your voice better.

End on a positive or developmental note e.g.

It was a very interesting topic and I feel I've learnt something new.

This is known as the 'praise sandwich' as a negative point is sandwiched between two positive or constructive points.

Reading list

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

Ofqual (2009) *Authenticity – a guide for teachers*. Coventry: Ofqual.

Ollin R & Tucker J (2016) *The Vocational Assessor Handbook* (6th Edn) London Kogan Page

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

Tummons J (2011) *Assessing Learning in the Lifelong Learning Sector* Exeter Learning Matters

Wilson L (2012) *Practical teaching: A guide to assessment and quality assurance* Andover Cengage Learning

Website list

Assessment in education - <http://www.tandfonline.com/toc/caie20/24/1>

Assessor resources - www.anngravells.com/resources/assessment123

Institute for Apprenticeships - <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/institute-for-apprenticeships>

Ofqual Guide to Authenticity: <http://tinyurl.com/OfqualAuthenticity>

Peer and self-assessment: www.nclrc.org/essentials/assessing/peereval.htm

Plagiarism: www.plagiarism.org