

How would you
assess students'
skills and knowledge



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Assessment is the process of establishing the nature and quality of our students' learning and measuring whether learning has actually taken place. Assessment is a key part of the teaching cycle because it enables us to measure achievement against set standards in order to ascertain if our trainees have acquired the skills and knowledge needed at a given stage of training, to diagnose learning needs and to select for further training. It is also the means by which we measure learning at the end of a course and certificate achievements.

The teaching cycle begins with an initial assessment. This gives a baseline of each student's existing skills and knowledge and identifies any individual learning needs, helping teachers/trainers to plan their lessons to meet any specific needs and remove potential barriers to learning. The next stage of assessment is formative. Formative assessment should be carried out on a regular basis as it highlights any weaknesses which may need to be addressed and provides opportunities to adapt teaching to learners' individual needs.

Informal assessment and evaluation is constant in the form of learners' comments and feedback, and question & answer sessions to check understanding in a lesson. We cannot rely solely on this though, and need to establish a process by which the assessment yields results which are measurable, valid, reliable and fair. The final stage of assessment is summative. This is the assessment, usually made on completion of a course, which measures whether trainees have reached to the required standard to pass the course and/or achieve a qualification.

It is generally quite formal, taking the form of an examination or portfolio, and must refer to all areas and objectives of the course. There may be considerable overlap between summative and formative assessment, particularly in modular courses or those with a reflective account such as an NVQ task book. A valid assessment is one which actually measures what it is supposed to, i. e. the quality of learning rather than someone's memory or ability to write prose. Reliable assessments will be replicable, with consistent methods and criteria that will yield the same results on re-test and similar results with a different group of trainees.

Validity and reliability should guarantee a degree of fairness, but we also need to ensure all trainees have an equal chance of getting the best results by providing alternative materials or formats, extra time and so on where needed. Assessment can take many forms, the most common being: Written tests and exams Practical tasks and demonstrations Presentation and observation Assignments, projects and essays Self assessment Ipsative assessment (comparing to the baseline or previous performance of the same task) Question and Answer sessions (used to check understanding and share information).

Assessment and record keeping go hand in hand because without a record, all assessments lose their value and meaning very quickly. From the initial assessment and diagnostics through to final qualifications, keeping records of the assessment process enables us to measure success (both of the teaching and the trainees), track progress, ensure we are providing the appropriate support and maintain consistency. In addition to the assessment process, records also enable us to share information with appropriate people,

monitor feedback and progress, recognise achievement and qualifications, and build a fuller picture of each trainee.

As trainers we are accountable to our employers, our learners and the law. Maintaining correct records of learner and lesson information ensures we are meeting both the legal requirements and our learners' needs. A register of attendance is a legal reference, and documents such as Individual Learning Plans, lesson plans and assessment results are all subject to audit. All records about learners are also subject to the Data Protection Act, meaning we cannot hold any information which is unnecessary or irrelevant to the training programme, and we may not hold records for longer than necessary.

For example, when trainees go out on work placements they are asked to provide mobile telephone numbers in case there is a need to contact them urgently. As they are only needed for a very specific and short period of time, these numbers are kept in a record which can only be accessed by a limited number of staff and is destroyed as soon as the placements are completed. Other records are maintained for longer periods but they are kept relevant, confidential and up to date to ensure that they are auditable at any time and accessible as a source of information as and when needed by trainers, learners, or inspectors.