A GUIDE TO GOOD PRACTICE IN INDUSTRY TRAINING ORGANISATION STRUCTURES AND SYSTEMS FOR ON-JOB ASSESSMENT

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Summary

Industry Training is distinctive for its significant use of 'on-job' learning, which includes on-job assessment. However, little has been known about learning and assessment in on-job contexts, compared with off-job or classroom-based contexts. Even less has been known about the structures and systems that support on-job assessment practices. Yet these on-job assessment systems impact on learners and the quality of their learning, workplace conditions and productivity, and the credibility of the Industry Training system as a whole.

The guide is a resource based on the best available evidence from a research project involving an analysis of New Zealand and international literature, a survey of ITOs, and focus groups with ITO assessors and ITO staff. The primary intended audience for the guide is quality assurance and assessment staff at Industry Training Organisations (ITO). However, employers and workplace-based assessors, training advisors or managers, as well as roving (ITO-contracted) assessors, may also find it useful.

We recognise that each ITO faces unique challenges in relation to covering a sometimes disparate range of industries, that industry practices and workplace conditions vary considerably, and that ITOs must grapple with legacy assessment systems that are not always ideal for today's circumstances. Rather than being highly prescriptive, and in order to support the work that some ITOs are already considering or doing, we have distilled from the research four high-level principles which can be interpreted and adapted by each ITO:

1. ITOs and employers should have a clear purpose for assessment and work together.
2. ITO assessment structures and systems must support the learning process.
3. Assessment requires appropriately recruited, trained, and professionally developed people.
4. Moderation contributes to validity and reliability of assessment decisions.

Each principle in this guide is accompanied by a discussion, good practice examples, and a set of questions to guide ITOs in thinking about how to develop their assessment systems and structures. The guide is ultimately about supporting the *alignment* of learning and assessment practices with assessment structures and systems. If the people involved – ITO training advisors, roving and workplace-based assessors, moderators, verifiers, trainers, and employers – are appropriately trained and understand each other's roles, they can collaborate to produce a coherent system for on-job learning and assessment. ITOs have a lead role to play in ensuring this happens.

The production of a guide to ITO assessment structures and systems

Purpose and audience

This is a guide to good structures and systems for supporting on-job assessment. It is designed to assist ITOs in thinking about how they could make their workplace assessment structures more robust, more effective, and promoting of high-quality learning.

The guide is the culmination of research that has considered different models of workplace assessment used around the world and in New Zealand. The research scope has been limited to a focus on the structures and systems of assessment, rather than the practices themselves. However, since the structures and systems are there to support assessment practices, we have included some comment on high quality assessment practices and how ITOs can support those.

This guide's primary intended audience is quality assurance and assessment staff at Industry Training Organisations. However, employers and workplace-based assessors, as well as roving (ITO-contracted) assessors, may also find it useful.

Development of this guide

The guide is based around a set of four high-level principles for developing and maintaining good assessment structures and systems. We have been able to distill the principles from evidence analysed throughout this research project. Details about each phase of the research are shown in the following table, and outputs are available from the Industry Training Federation (www.itf.org.nz).

Each phase of the research involved consultation with industry and researchers in order to inform the following phase. At Phase 1, we consulted and reviewed published research and used it to inform the development of a survey. We then used the survey findings to inform development of focus group questions and exercises to probe deeper into issues emerging from the survey. We then integrated the survey and focus group findings in our report (see Vaughan & Cameron, 2010) and made several suggestions about possible improvements to aspects of assessment structures and systems:

- Target investment in assessors more tightly
- Develop career pathways for assessors
- See assessment as part of an infrastructure for workplace development
- Address gaps in knowledge about assessment in the workplace

We generated a draft set of principles from the Phase 2 findings and our suggestions. We used this draft set of principles as the basis for a discussion in the Phase 3 focus groups. As result of those discussions, we refined the principles to four main ones which incorporate all the dimensions of the research project:

- research themes from Phase 1;
- findings and our suggestions from Phase 2;
- discussions from Phase 3; and
- our educational and assessment knowledge.

Table 1 **Phases of the research**

Phase	Research method	Output available
1	Background paper based on review of most relevant literature	Vaughan, K., & Cameron, M. (2009). *Assessment of Learning in the Workplace: A Background Paper.* Wellington: Industry Training Federation.
2 (a) 2 (b)	Survey of ITO staff Focus groups with ITO staff and assessors	Vaughan, K., & Cameron, M. (2010a). *ITO Workplace Assessment Structures and Systems: Survey and Focus Group Findings*. Wellington: Industry Training Federation.
3	Focus groups with ITO staff and assessors	This guide: Vaughan, K., & Cameron, M. (2010b). *A Guide to Good Practice in Industry Training Organisation Structures and Systems for On-Job Assessment*. Wellington: Industry Training Federation.

How to read this guide

We would like our readers to consider the principles described as high-level guides for how to think about developing good assessment structures and systems. This publication is best understood as a resource based on the best available evidence, that must be interpreted by each ITO in order to be used. It is therefore not highly prescriptive because "there is no rule about what is best practice in any given situation. Knowledge of best evidence, however, is an excellent starting point for figuring out what might be good practice in a particular context" (Robinson, Hohepa, & Lloyd, 2009, p. 50). We therefore hope that all ITOs can relate to and customise the principles according to their particular situation.

Thanks to ITO staff and assessor participation in a series of focus groups held to discuss these draft principles, we have been able to bring the principles to life with stories to help in thinking about developing good assessment structures and systems. We have constructed these stories or examples from an amalgamation of stories told, and examples given, to us by ITO staff and assessors. In some instances we have fleshed out direct examples given to us about ITO systems being considered or actively developed. In other instances we have 'up-turned' stories about frustrations, limitations, and issues being faced to produce an example of what it could be like.

None of the examples in this guide are intended as a template or blueprint for what ITOs should do. We recognise that each ITO faces unique challenges in relation to covering a sometimes disparate range of industries, that industry practices and workplace conditions vary considerably, and that ITOs must grapple with legacy assessment systems that are not always ideal for today's circumstances. We also recognise that there are sometimes terminology differences between ITOs. Where we have used technical terms (e.g. 'verifier'), we have used the ones most commonly cited by ITO staff that have spoken with us. We have also tried to make the meaning clear with explanation, contextual information, or examples.

We would like to point out that some of the ITOs that participated in the research were already considering, had begun to establish, or were continuing to develop, high quality assessment structures and systems. Therefore we would like them to read this guide in terms of the evidence and support it provides for the directions they are pursuing. Throughout the research we found that ITOs were eager to learn about what other ITOs were doing. Therefore we also see this guide as contributing to an overall framework for sharing of strategies and mechanisms for improving assessment structures and systems.

The layout of this guide

The rest of this guide is divided into four sections, one for each principle of good assessment systems. Each section contains an explanation of the principle and the issues surrounding it, a good practice example to illustrate that principle, and questions to guide your thinking about your ITO's structures and systems. Some sections also include brief references, where relevant, to evidence analysed during previous phases of the research project upon which this guide is based (see Vaughan & Cameron, 2009 and Vaughan & Cameron, 2010).

The first principle in this guide is that ITOs and employers should have a clear purpose for assessment and that they work together to realise this. This principle is about collaboration between two different parties that have something in common: the desire to produce a well-trained workforce. The principle emphasises clarity around what assessment needs to do and that the right knowledge and skills are being assessed. It also addresses communications between ITOs and employers, and ITO support for employers so that workplaces can, in turn, support their trainees.

The second principle is that ITO assessment structures and systems must support the learning process. This principle focuses on how assessment and learning are linked. It emphasises that assessment is, like learning, a process. We suggest that ITOs can play a role in providing learning support materials. We also suggest that assessments look at competence across unit standards, in keeping with the holistic nature of trainees' real-life working situations.

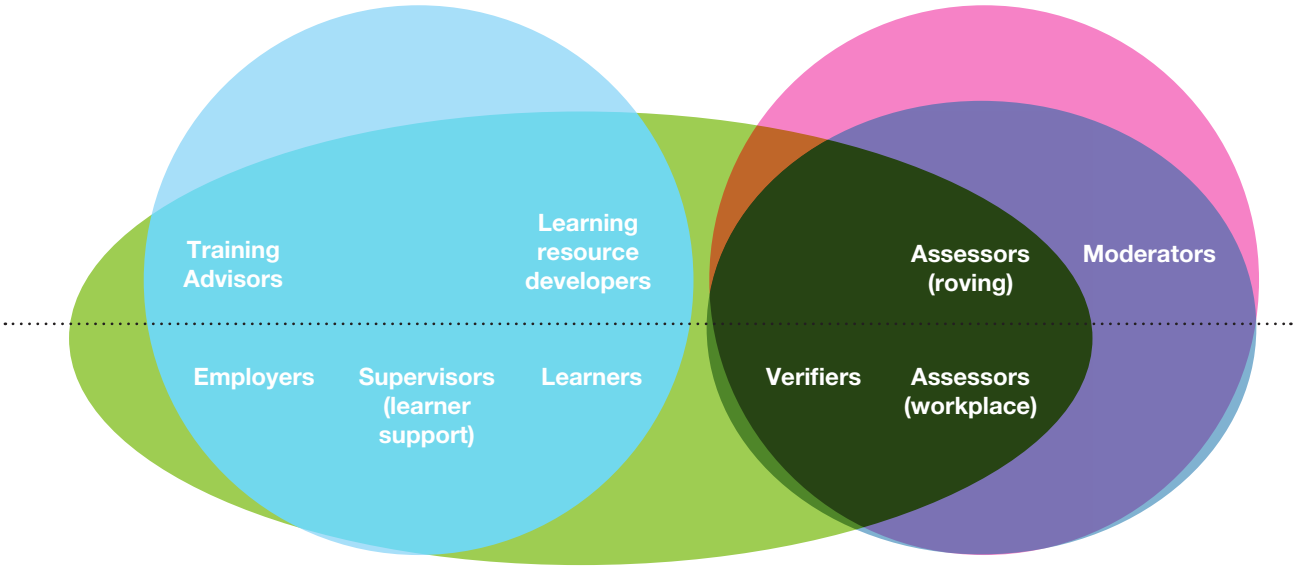
The third principle is that good assessment requires appropriately recruited, trained, and professionally developed people. This principle looks at workplace learning's potential for authenticity in learning and assessment and what is needed to realise it. Because assessing requires different expertise from training, and because training, assessment and evidence collection roles are often divided between different people, it is critical that the right people are selected for these roles and that they all have an understanding of assessment. The discussion and good practice examples also highlight the critical role of the verifier and how training and professional development can help them take a business-as-usual, authentic approach to their role. We suggest that professional development is important for verifiers and assessors.

The fourth and final principle is that moderation contributes to validity and reliability of assessment decisions. Moderation is an essential part of assessors' ongoing learning. This is because assessments are not self-evident, just as standards are about combinations of criteria and evidence-in-practice rather than simply a written definition. We suggest that moderation activities offer an opportunity for assessors and moderators to 'talk the standards into place' and build consistency of judgment.

These principles, discussion, good practice examples, and guiding questions are really all about aligning learning and assessment practices with assessment structures and systems. If the people involved – ITO training advisors, assessors, moderators, verifiers, trainers, and employers – are appropriately trained and understand each other's roles, they can collaborate to produce a coherent system for on-job assessment. ITOs have a lead role to play in ensuring this happens. This guide is intended to support the work that ITOs already do or are considering doing.

The following diagram shows the key roles that can be played by people in ITOs and workplaces when translating the four principles into practice. Some roles (e.g. workplace assessor or training advisor) are important for more than one principle.

Figure 1 **Translating principles to practice: key roles**



Four principles of good ITO assessment practice

- ITOs and workplaces agree assessment purposes and work together.
- ITO assessment systems should support the learning process.
- Appropriately recruit, train, and professionally develop people.
- Moderation contributes to validity and reliablity.

Principle 1: ITOs and workplaces should have a clear purpose for assessment and work together

The essence of this principle

Assessment should help people gain qualifications

ITOs' core role is encouraging people to gain qualifications that contribute to a better qualified and more productive workforce. Therefore the key purpose of assessment is to contribute to worker learning, achievement, motivation and self-confidence. On-job assessment has the potential to be a meaningful route to gaining qualifications which can contribute to better delivery of services to clients, better business outcomes and contribute to organisational quality assurance practices.

Start with good standards

For assessment to achieve its purpose it needs to be valid — that is, it assesses the knowledge and skills that it sets out to assess. ITOs want qualifications to focus on what is important for people to know and be able to do. Focus group ITO representatives emphasised that effective assessment begins with sound unit standards. Sound standards clearly describe the knowledge and skill outcomes that are being assessed. ITOs therefore clearly need to ensure the relevance and clarity of their unit standards.

Help workplaces to support learning and assessment

Writing down the "rules" or policy for assessment is a necessary start for the purposes of assessment to be achieved in action, but it is only the first step. The 'trickle down' effect sometimes means that what is intended does not happen consistently within organisations and workplaces. The key to assessment that does what its designers intend is a shared understanding within and across the sector – an understanding of the purposes of assessment and of what needs to happen for those purposes to be achieved. One of the possible reasons for an individual's failure to complete a qualification is a lack of understanding by people in the workplace about assessment.

Develop quality resources

ITOs also develop and make available assessment guides for apprentices, other trainees, employers and assessors. Writing these in a manner which communicates directly with readers requires skills in addition to content knowledge.

Communicate with workplaces

ITO training advisors have a critical leadership and quality assurance role. This includes their roles in workplaces and their links with, and support of, assessors and verifiers. They are an important link in the chain that leads to robust and valid workplace assessment. Managers in workplaces need to be clear about what is required from them to carry out their assessment responsibilities. Where feasible, it is helpful for training advisors meet with managers and supervisors at the beginning of the training set out in Training Agreements. This enables ITOs to communicate face-to-face with the people who have the most direct responsibility for supervising trainees and to help to clarify roles and responsibilities. It also ensures that trainees, as well as their supervisors, are more likely to understand what is required to successfully gain qualifications.

Good practice example #1: supporting workplaces to support trainees

ITOs support employers to take responsibility for trainees

Helen, an ITO training advisor, was concerned that many workplaces did not deliver on their training agreements with the ITOs and trainees. For example, workplaces did not prepare trainees for assessment. Helen wanted to improve the 'assessment literacy' of managers and supervisors in the workplace so that people would share responsibility for ensuring that trainees were properly supported to achieve qualifications. Rather than helping to sort out problems which resulted from a lack of understanding about how to support trainees to complete qualifications successfully, she shifted her focus to setting up systems and processes well from the beginning. This involved 'refreshing' the relevant people, or training people who were new to supervising a trainee, every time a trainee entered the workplace. She ensured that employers and supervisors understood the training agreements, their responsibilities, their employees' responsibilities, qualification structures and unit standards, and ways to manage assessment. This practice resulted in better informed employers who were more successful in supporting their trainees in their learning and their achievement of qualifications.

Employers can be supported to work together

The ITO also set up peer support relationships between employers, particularly where they were small-to-medium sized businesses. The support included making learning support for training advisors an explicit part of the roving (ITO-employed) assessor role and having those assessors work alongside the advisors to talk to employers about formulating workforce development plans across the businesses as a group. The employers felt supported in thinking about their trainees and gained a 'big picture' understanding of how training and qualifications benefit the industry as a whole.

Workplaces recognise learning and achievement

The ITO also encourages workplace recognition of learning and celebration of achievement. Some workplaces have posted photographs of staff, listing their qualifications, on the wall so that customers and staff can appreciate their achievements. Others have arranged for graduation ceremonies on achievement of qualifications. These exercises have recognised staff that have achieved and demonstrated to other staff that learning and qualifications are an important dimension of the business and that the employer values its staff and their development.

Good practice example #2: Offering professional development to build capability

The ITO identifies a range of key roles in workplace assessment

One ITO decided to demonstrate leadership in the area of workplace assessment by providing professional development for those involved in workplace assessment. They identified a range of people that they could assist to better support trainees and assessment processes. Some of these people were workplace-based assessors or verifiers, but others were supervisors and managers with less formal, but still key, roles in supporting trainees in the workplace.

The ITO leads capability-building in assessment and the support of assessment

The ITO offered a series of workshops in "Training and Assessment in the Workplace". These were designed to build workplace capability by encouraging key people in workplaces – not only assessors but also managers and supervisors – to gain one or all of several unit standards:

- 7106 (Provide Guidance for Individual Adult Trainees)
- 7108 (Deliver On-Job Training to Adults)
- 18203 (Verify Evidence for Assessment for Candidate)
- 4098 (Use Evidence to Assess Candidate Performance)

The workshops were intended to teach the skills and knowledge that a manager or supervisor needs in order to prepare, support, and review on-job training. The workshops showed managers and supervisors how to prepare and provide guidance to adult learners. They also provided the fundamental processes and elements needed when conducting workplace verification and assessment. The workshops not only developed workplace-based assessors' and verifiers' skills for their roles but also gave them a better sense of the issues for trainees and how their assessment practices, and the practices of the workplace, could better support trainees' learning. Managers and supervisors who participated in these workshops gained a greater understanding of their role in relation that of the assessors and verifiers. They also gained an understanding of learning and assessment issues for trainees and how to support them on a day-to-day basis.

Questions you can ask in your ITO

How often do we directly communicate our assessment expectations with managers and supervisors in workplaces? How do we know that they understand our expectations? How do they know that we have heard their ideas and any concerns?

Are our training plans outlining trainee, employer and trainer intentions and responsibilities in clear and plain English? Have we had our documentation and written support materials independently reviewed for clarity? Are they intelligible to trainees and employers?

Do we understand what is going on if candidates fail to gain qualifications? (e.g. Unmotivated or unsupported candidates? Employers using assessment for an occupational standard instead a qualification standard?) How can we find out?

Are we satisfied with the unit standards we use? Are they fit for purpose for the industry? Do we have information on how well particular standards have worked for trainees, their employers, and the industry?

Do we have enough training advisors, working in the right way, to achieve our purposes? Do training advisors work with workplaces to help tailor assessment to their organisational and operational needs?

How can we encourage employers to recognise the efforts and achievements of staff in a workplace?

Principle 2: The ITO's assessment structures and systems must support the learning process

The essence of this principle

Assessment and learning are linked

When assessment happens during learning, it is usually informal and known as formative assessment. Formative assessment happens when a supervisor gives a trainee feedback on how they are getting on with a particular aspect of their work. For example, a hairdressing salon owner may watch an apprentice consult with a client about her preferences for hair colour, discuss with the apprentice the pigments that would best work together, and then watch him mix them. This is a combination of guidance and formative assessment, which provides support for the apprentice's learning. Summative assessment, on the other hand, is what happens when the supervisor considers that the apprentice is ready to demonstrate knowledge of the different elements of particular tasks—this happens at the end of a particular learning process, and is when a judgement is made that the standards have been met. Summative assessment results tell us whether or not the person has met the standard. Formative assessment helps the learner to reach that standard.

Assessment is an on-going process not a one-off event

When well designed and implemented, assessment provides opportunities for trainees to demonstrate the knowledge and skills required to meet competency standards set out by an ITO. It is therefore not just a 'one-off' event that happens between assessors and trainees. Assessment is the evidence-gathering process carried out by trainees, verifiers, and assessors that supports trainees to achieve what is required for gaining qualifications.

Support is needed for learning and assessment

Some ITOs have a predominantly self-paced training model, where the trainee works through training materials at their own pace, writing responses to questions in workbooks which are then assessed. While this approach can work well for some trainees, for others it can be problematic — it can be a very lonely way to learn for some people, and frequently the workbooks are not sufficiently connected to their day-to-day work. The workbooks may not be user-friendly and may become barriers to the completion of qualifications, especially in circumstances where the trainee has difficulties reading the material. In such a case the trainee may already have the skills that are required for the qualification, but may not be able to demonstrate their learning because the assessment method is unsuitable. This kind of mismatch has led some ITOs to move towards embedding training and assessment within the normal workplace practices. Rather than learning and assessment being seen as separate processes they become part of everyday practice. Where assessment requires the completion of workbooks, trainees are able to work together in groups, sometimes with a trainer, to complete these assessments.

An explicit contract is required

Supervisors are best able to provide the support required for learners to achieve qualifications when they understand what a trainee must be able to do in order to achieve a qualification, what their role is in supporting the learner, and how the learner will be assessed. The strategy and means of support should be recorded.

Good practice example

Informal feedback is part of the assessment process

Andrea runs a successful business. She has a reputation for developing apprentices who are successful in industry awards. She has been an assessor and understands that her apprentices require on-going opportunities to observe more experienced workers and to develop their skills. All learning and assessment records are kept up to date and apprentices are given frequent formal (summative) and informal (formative) feedback on their progress. She provides opportunities for apprentices to practice and refine their skills. She is committed to high professional standards in her business and expects the same from all of her employees. As a result she has her choice of staff – both apprentices and other employees. Prospective employees know that they will be provided with on-going feedback on their learning, as well as opportunities to test their skills in competitions.

Assessment is tailored to real-life learning and on-job competency

The apprentices use a variety of tools and undertake a variety of tasks in their work, including selecting and using different hand and power tools, interpreting drawings or instructions, undertaking measurements and calculations, and carrying out their work in a generally safe manner. Use of each tool and performance of each task is covered by a separate standard. However, in their real-life working situation the apprentices work in a holistic manner. They select and use a tool as a result of interpreting a drawing and making a calculation for the purposes of doing some part of their job. The ITO therefore ensures that assessments are also undertaken in a more holistic manner. Competence is blended across standards, rather than observed or tested in isolation.

Clear information from ITOs helps workplaces to support learning

The apprentices and Andrea are well supported by their ITO, which provides an electronic version of a Training Agreement (e.g. on CD-Rom) so that it can be tailored to learner needs. Each apprentice receives a satchel with the support materials and documentation needed to track their progress towards the completion of their qualification. Andrea also receives clear information on her role in supporting her apprentices throughout their qualification. The ITO supports the use of a range of evidence, moving beyond direct observation to reviewing photographs of finished work by the apprentices, feedback from clients who have had interactions with the apprentice, and more use of open questions with candidates to get them to explain what they are doing or have done.

Questions you can ask in your ITO

How can we support employers and training advisors to develop their knowledge of the learning/assessment dynamic?

Do our Training Agreements specify clearly the knowledge and skills that trainees are required to demonstrate? Do they specify how the trainees will learn these skills?

Do our Training Agreements require employers to have a named person who has the responsibility to oversee the progress of the trainee?

How does our ITO develop its understanding of learning and assessment throughout the organisation? How do we know we are making progress?

Do we produce integrated assessment materials for several unit standards when they are typically assessed together in the workplace?

Principle 3: Good assessment requires appropriately recruited, trained and professionally developed people

The essence of this principle

Assessment requires additional expertise to training

Assessment is a distinct activity from training and involves additional skills and knowledge. Assessors must be able to make judgements about performance and competence and maintain a relationship with the learner that looks for opportunities to enhance learning as well as provide authentic, robust assessment.

Validity and reliability are strengthened when there are several sources of evidence

Workplace learning frequently involves dividing the roles of teacher or trainer, assessor, and evidence collector between different people. This makes workplace learning different from other institutional educational settings. It can be an assessment strength to have different people in different roles because they can contribute to broader and potentially more valid judgments of achievement than relying on the judgment of one individual.

Multiple roles demand understanding

Having multiple people participating in the assessment process can also work against fair, accurate and reliable assessments unless all the people are informed about their roles, and are aware of how their judgments contribute to the overall assessment of an individual's achievement and competence. It is imperative that all of the people involved in the assessment process have some understanding of what is being assessed, and why and how this contributes to a standard or qualification.

Assessors have different strengths

Workplace-based (WPB) assessors have strength in their knowledge of specific workplaces and trainees. Roving (multi-workplace) assessors have strength in their knowledge and ability to assess across a wide range of workplaces. Some ITOs employ (rather than contract) their roving assessors to ensure that they have the people that they require for good assessment.

Assessors need to be committed to learning and have other important attributes

ITOs require assessors who are committed to the industry and to supporting learners and employers. Workplace-based assessors are often nominated by others for the role and on the basis of their technical expertise. It is important to also consider other attributes such as good communication skills, literacy and numeracy skills, thoroughness, and trustworthiness, because these are essential to being a good assessor. The ability to assess across a range of unit standards requires assessors to have a deep understanding of what they are assessing, as well as the important 'soft skills'. Workplace-based (and sometimes also roving) assessors' motivations may include a desire for career and professional development or be about attaining a certain status. These sorts of motivations can be useful for ITOs in supporting assessors but they may be problematic if they are the only motivations.

Assessors need appropriate accreditation scope so they can develop expertise

Because assessment is more than a one-off event, assessors need to continue developing their familiarity with particular standards and their assessment expertise. They need to practice assessing in similar fashion to doctors practicing medicine. Having too wide a scope of accreditation (e.g. entire domains) without enough actual assessment opportunities makes it difficult for assessors to make good, reliable judgments about people's competency. ITOs therefore need to ensure they have an appropriate number of assessors who have an appropriate accreditation scope. This can be tricky where ITOs have inherited legacy systems with large numbers of assessors with a wide scope of accreditation, because ITOs are not the employer of their workplace-based assessors.

Assessors require professional development after training

Assessors work best when they can think flexibly and exercise judgment about competency. Ideally, every ITO will encourage its assessors to continue developing a deep knowledge of the work they will be assessing and the assessment practices in which they are involved. Assessors themselves will want opportunities to deepen their understanding of assessment and to have links with other assessors so that they can belong to a 'community of practice' that shares and develops knowledge of good practice.

Verifiers can be a "weak link" in the system

Verifiers (variously known in different ITOs as technical verifiers, evidence collectors, third party verifiers, and attestors) pose a challenge in this system because they are located in the workplace as employers or employee supervisors or managers, and they generally lack any assessment-specific training.

Verifier work is critical

However, verifiers are critical to the assessment process in a range of different ways – sometimes checking performances that cannot be observed in a single assessor visit or when it is not practical for an external assessor to do it, sometimes providing support and feedback to trainees, and sometimes acting as defacto assessors (carrying out assessments in all but the final sign-off). They need appropriate support, training, and time to carry out their role, as well as clearly documented guidelines for what they are verifying.

ITOs need to invest in verifiers

Without some ITO investment in verifiers, the quality of their judgments will be variable (resulting in unreliable assessments) and assessment is likely to become a cursory, tick-off approach. This may be because verifiers require training in understanding how the evidence they collect contributes to a standard and to a qualification. Any lack of understanding at that level poses a risk to the reliability of the assessment structures. Verifiers need a clear understanding of where and how they fit in the big picture.

Good practice example #1: assessors

Discerning management of recruitment works best

An ITO has decided to improve its management and development of assessors by moving many of its workplace-based assessors into verifier roles and employing a group of roving assessors. Part of this process has involved holding a series of workshops with assessors and verifiers to discuss the changes, agree common purposes for assessment, and agree roles and working partnerships. The ITO has also introduced some simple pre-requisites to the formal training, such as requiring assessor and verifier candidates to write or talk about why they would like to be in the role and provide a referee or reference. These are designed to test out how reliable and committed people are.

Assessor training requires more than a single unit standard

The ITO trains assessors to understand assessment purposes and processes, and to build confidence about assessing and becoming part of a community of assessors. Unit Standard 4098 (Use Standards to Assess Candidate Performance) is not the main goal of the assessor training but a by-product of it. Assessors may gain the standard but they are not automatically eligible for registration as assessors. Instead they must go on to some specific training offered by the ITO. The ITO also trains verifiers (the existing and former workplace-based assessors will undergo specific verifier training).

Professional development is integral to registration

Part of the registration process involves a commitment from each assessor to attend at least two professional development workshops every year. One of these involves meeting with other assessors and verifiers. The other involves meeting with assessors (for assessors) or with verifiers (for verifiers). Assessors and verifiers use the workshops to discuss assessment practices, tricky issues (e.g. pressure to pass candidates, gaps in evidence) and engage in moderation (different kinds that are fit for purpose).

ITOs can manage for ongoing development

Part of the ITO's management of its assessors involves gathering feedback about their performance from a range of sources, including learners, managers, and employers. They use this information to support the ongoing professional development of assessors, as well as for quality assurance purposes. Assessors are supported through a career pathway that includes opportunities to achieve a Certificate in Adult Education (level 4) and to become an assessor for Recognised Current Competency (RCC) or Professional Conversation. The ITO also supports assessors with peer-to-peer coaching and mentoring on-site and with a virtual forum for assessors and for verifiers who are located in areas or on work sites that are geographically isolated.

Good practice example #2: verifiers

Check who is really doing the assessing

An ITO found that a particular qualification was being undermined by an assessor and several verifiers who had arranged what seemed to them like a logical division of labour in the assessment process. The assessor effectively contracted out assessments to managers and supervisors in the workplace and assumed a final sign-off role more minor to the role of the verifiers, resulting in unit standards being awarded inappropriately. The ITO saw the significance of this for the meaning of "competency" in this particular industry and moved to improve the situation.

Clarify roles

The ITO first clarified the role of their verifiers as being one of vouching for the repeatability of particular competencies (e.g. being able to start up a particular piece of machinery). Assessors would still assess the candidate but they now had someone else who could vouch for the candidate's competency in terms of performance consistency.

Improve training and professional development

The ITO also changed the training and registration processes for verifiers. They required verifiers to complete Unit Standard 18203 (Verify Evidence for Assessment of Candidate)—a standard which was formerly only compulsory for assessors (along with Unit Standard 4098: Use Standards to Assess Candidate Performance). The ITO then moved to register verifiers, providing a form of endorsement for their skills and role. The ITO provided professional development for verifiers through workshops with assessors present. This allowed verifiers to understand how they could work with assessors beyond simply following an instruction to collect certain evidence.

Take a business-as-usual approach

With a deeper understanding of their role, verifiers were able to move from undertaking verification as a separate, designated assessment activity to undertaking it as part of business-as-usual. For example, they worked out ways to give candidates an opportunity to start up the machinery at the beginning of every shift and to have a verifier who was working on something else in close proximity.

Select the right person for the role

Finally, the ITO also paid particular attention to who was chosen to verify evidence used for assessments. In some cases, they realised that a senior manager had the verifier role by virtue of being a manager but was often not actually around in order to see the candidate working. The ITO talked to the employer to get a better understanding of how things worked at a day-to-day level and located a more appropriate floor-level manager to take on the verifier role.

Questions you can ask in your ITO

What kinds of attributes do we most want in our assessors and verifiers? Are we getting the right kind of people? How do we know? How can we find them? Have we, along with the employer, located the best person for the verifier role in the workplace?

What do we most want assessors and verifiers to know and be able to do? Does this reflect what industry wants? To what extent is this covered through US4098 and US18203? What can we learn from models in other ITOs?

How can we support the development of deep assessment and industry expertise for flexible thinking in our assessors? How can we get buy-in from assessors and employers for ongoing assessor professional development?

Who plans assessor and verifier professional development? How do we know it is relevant and supports their learning? How can we help assessors and verifiers to best work together?

Are verifiers looking at how they can verify as part of business-as-usual? How can we help verifiers to flexibly assist assessors and learners?

Principle 4: Moderation contributes to the validity and reliability of assessment decisions

The essence of this principle

Moderation is not straightforward because assessment is not a self-evident process

We moderate assessments because judging performance is not a straightforward process. Standards always have to be interpreted, especially when the evidence moves beyond reproducing material that has been provided in training manuals to demonstrations of knowledge or skill in applied situations. A 'standard' can never reside in just words on a page but instead comes from a combination of criteria, including experience of the range of evidence-in-practice, a history of judgments made in the past, and the type of tasks set. Moderation develops and extends the collective sense that builds from all of these. How, for example, is it decided that a candidate can "identify plant diseases"? Is identifying diseases from pictures in textbooks acceptable evidence? Would identification of actual specimens be a more valid assessment? Should assessment take place in the laboratory or in the field? How many diseases must they be able to identify? Should more 'tricky' examples be included in the task? How are they expected to demonstrate that they are not guessing? What support materials is it acceptable to use? Moderation helps assessors to understand what assessment criteria look like in practice, and to develop a shared understanding of evidence showing that a candidate can demonstrate their achievement of the standard.

Care is needed if limiting moderation to checking workbooks

All ITOs use moderation as a process to confirm that the assessment judgments are fair, reliable and accurate. At the most basic level this involves a moderator checking the accuracy of assessor judgments of trainees' written answers to questions in their workbooks. Moderators may judge that, in their view, a response is incorrect, although this has been judged to be correct by an assessor. Or the reverse situation may occur. Some ITOs provide their assessors with 'model' or sample answers to reduce the variability in assessment. However, this can lead to a routine-focused approach whereby trainees are expected to come up with one 'right' answer if the assessment documents do not clearly explain this. Moderation needs to be thought of more broadly than as just a post-event check-up between an individual assessor and a moderator, so that moderation processes can fully support assessment decisions at a system-wide level. Effective moderation helps to ensure the comparability of different assessments, the quality of the assessments, and the degree to which trainees are meeting the standards.

Moderation has greater value and pay-off when it is a collective exercise

Moderation is both necessary and expensive, since the most effective moderation occurs when assessors meet together to discuss and reach agreement about assessment processes and outcomes in their sector. This is especially important when making judgments about performance in more complex skills. Providing assessors with comprehensive written assessment criteria can still leave too much room for individual assessor interpretation. Moderation workshops can reduce the variability in assessor judgments. Moderation workshops can be powerful professional development for assessors, as they come to 'talk the standards into place', and reach consensus about what the standards look like in practice, the evidence that shows that the standards have been achieved, how evidence is collected, and the basis on which assessment decisions are made. Assessors collaborate to compare their judgments and either confirm or adjust them. This kind of moderation contributes to the confidence that people can have that assessment decisions are fair and consistent throughout the ITO.

Pre-moderation of assessment materials is useful

All assessment materials require pre-moderation to ensure that they are fit for purpose and are appropriate to the level and credit value of the unit standards. Pre-moderation helps to ensure that the assessment tasks are capturing the essence of the standards that are being assessed, that they are clearly expressed, and are fair and manageable.

Moderation with assessors before assessment improves reliability

Pre-moderation workshops can develop assessor understandings of what counts as sufficient evidence of achievement of standards before they assess these standards. Assessors can independently assess samples of work before they are collectively discussed. Several samples may be needed before assessors collectively develop clarity on the evidence that is required. While it is not likely to be possible to work through all standards in a qualification, if all assessors experience pre-moderation of some key standards, their judgements back on the job are likely to be more dependable. Pre-moderation also saves time later in the moderation process. When assessors are confident about what they are assessing there will be less need for post-moderation, and a smaller sample of assessments should suffice. Some ITOs are also using pre-moderation strategies after identifying problems through previous post-moderation exercises. They may have meetings with assessors whose registration or accreditation scope is being reconsidered, or where assessors need support to improve their performance.

Moderation contributes to quality assurance of the standards themselves.

Moderation also helps ITOs refine qualification standards. Effective moderation process can identify unit standards that fail to capture the competencies required by industry on the National Qualifications Framework. Moderation may focus on all of the issues covered in this Moderation section yet still fail to uncover shortcomings in some unit standards. Moderation must ensure that all requirements of a unit standard are covered in the assessment – this process allows for the identification and development of improvements to the standards. Closely reviewing the evidence collected against each unit standard contributes to robust unit standards, and reduces the likelihood of a group of assessors coming to their own particular agreement on what they think the standard is, regardless of the actual published documents that are supposed to specify this.

Good practice example

Take a lead role

An ITO understands that moderation is critical to the integrity of its qualifications and its assessor network. The ITO takes a lead role in quality assurance here because it knows that there can be serious health and safety, production, and quality assurance consequences if workers are judged capable of tasks they cannot yet accomplish.

Consider suitability of written materials for ESOL learners

However, the ITO does not take an uncritical quality assurance stance that reduces everything to compliance. It keeps in mind the big picture of producing highly competent workers for the industry. The industry employs significant numbers of people who use a first language other than English at home. Pre-moderation ensures that the assessment tasks are aligned with the standards and with current expectations of industry practices. The ITO has found that previously text readability had been assumed rather than tested. Tasks are now checked by English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) specialists. Text that appeared readable to an assessment writer becomes much more accessible when it has been rewritten by an ESOL specialist.

Moderation can produce evidence of assessor reliability

When new standards and/or assessment guides are introduced, assessors and moderators meet together to build common understandings of evidence that demonstrates that the standards have been achieved. Then they practise assessing common examples of trainee performance against the different standards. When high levels of reliability in assessor judgements are achieved, the ITO can have a measure of confidence in the assessment practices of assessors who attended the workshop.

Pre-moderation can reduce post-moderation

A small sample of assessments from those who attended the workshop is moderated following workplace assessment. A larger sample of assessments from assessors who did not attend pre-moderation training is moderated.

Questions you can ask in your ITO

How does our ITO address moderation? Is it a technical exercise or do we see it as an opportunity to build shared understandings about assessment criteria? Does moderation contribute to refining the standards themselves so that they better reflect industry requirements?

How can we strengthen moderation within our ITO? Can we reduce the time spent in post-moderation, by using processes that strengthen assessor judgments? Would it be useful to use external moderators (not from our ITO) to help us to improve our moderation processes?

How do we report the findings from moderation so that we can improve our practices? Do moderators have or need access to professional development other than the meetings where moderation takes place?

Could we make greater use of technology to provide exemplars of trainee performance that meet standards?

Appendix One: ITO focus group participation

	Phase 2	Phase 3
1	Agriculture ITO	Agriculture ITO
2	ATITO	ATITO (2)
3		BCITO
4		Boating ITO
5	Careerforce	Careerforce
6	Competenz	Competenz
7	ESITO	ESITO
8	ETITO	ETITO
9		EXITO
10	FITEC	FITEC
11	FRSITO	FRSITO
12	Horticulture ITO (2)	
13	Learning State	Learning State
14	Retail Institute	Retail Institute
15		Seafood ITO
16	SkillsActive	SkillsActive
17		Social Services ITO
18	Tranzqual	Tranzqual

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