

Integrated Assessment enhancing efficient learning and skills development

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South Africa is faced with a skills shortage in most industries and the quality of the South African education system has been rated 133rd out of the 142 countries that participated in the 2011 - 2012 World Economic Forum study. While budgets available for education are not less than in other developing countries, the education system seems to be failing; especially the poorer people in South Africa. Research has shown that South Africa has not been successful in improving cognitive skills and learning achievements. The assumption can be made that the statistics are the result of staid teaching methods and a need for training of more learning and development professionals. One of the newer teaching methods and approaches being embraced globally is the use of Integrated Assessment. Integrated Assessment can have a huge impact on the efficiency in the transfer of skill and could assist in solving the South African Skills Development dilemma.

Learning and development professionals understand the phrase “Integrated Assessment”, but what does it really mean? What value is derived from it for the learner or training institution? Integrated assessment is assessment as an integral part of teaching and learning and occurs at various levels and moments throughout the course of a learning programme. It informs curriculum and learning programme development. Integrated assessment starts in the classroom and can follow a variety of approaches, but at the end it strives to integrate theory and practice and is on-going, as opposed to a once off assessment at the end of the course.

For an assessor to apply integrated assessment effectively, it is necessary to have a clear understanding of level descriptors, the purpose of the qualification and the exit level outcomes required. Assessors also have to have a clear understanding of the main learning areas of the course and which areas need to be assessed separately. During integrated assessment, assessors must find ways to integrate teaching and learning and identify areas where applied competence can be assessed. The advantage of this is that there is an indication of the situation at different points during the course and teaching methods can be adjusted when assessment results are not favourable. The learning absorption is not determined at the end of the course only. The process and instruments can also be adjusted in order to improve learning outcomes to underpin the ideal that assessment should be undertaken in support of meaningful learning and not just to allocate a pass or failure mark.

In order to apply integrated assessment effectively, it is also necessary to plan the curriculum carefully, with assessment points being built into the process. Such assessments should be in line with the ETQA’s assessment guidelines and strategy, especially with regards to quality assurance and reporting requirements. As is the case with any assessment, independent moderation of the results is still required. Such planning should take into account the purpose of the learning, the needs of the learners, outcome objectives and, lastly, the required content in order to fulfil on the purpose, needs and objectives. A

project plan of learning activities will assist in adhering to learning objectives and assessment points in order to equip learners with competence that can be applied in the workplace.

Ultimately, integrated assessment is about the integration of skills, knowledge and attitudes, all working together to form workplace competence. It is an on-going assessment eventually leading to an assessment of every part of the course in clusters of learning areas that have something in common. It is assessment undertaken on small parts of learning, to reinforce learning and to assess the progress of learning during the course, rather than just at the end. Integrated assessment should demonstrate understanding rather than the ability merely to regurgitate facts and should link theory with practice, being an assessment of theoretical knowledge, as well as practical skills.

The art of integrated assessment is to balance the issue of competency across all learning units while also realising that unit standards are not equally 'important'. There are key competencies to each qualification that are critical to achieve. Therefore the assessment plan should be appropriately weighted. It is therefore important to ensure that the sample of the learning is sufficiently representative of the overall purpose of the qualification. It is also crucial that the assessor is convinced that learners can provide sufficient evidence of competency in relation to the qualification. Tools used in order to assess a student will include oral evidence such as presentation, speeches, interviews, peer instruction sessions and oral examinations. On the other hand, integrated assessment will also include written evidence in the form of assignments, portfolios of evidence, tests, charts, posters and any other written evidence of learning.

It is necessary for training providers to consider current and future skills requirements when designing a curriculum incorporating integrated assessment. Integrated assessment should be in line with customer requirements and take gap analysis into consideration. It is a two-way communication and actually forms the bridge between traditional teaching methods and the mentorship of learners. When embarking on learning and development based on an integrated assessment approach, it is necessary to do a thorough need analysis, develop a clear policy and framework and do pre-assessments. It could also be beneficial to do a pre-training workshop with learners in order to determine current education levels and understanding of the subject as well as decide on objectives.

Once the teaching starts, progress is tracked and measured on an on-going basis and successes are celebrated when they happen. When all the correct steps are followed and integrated assessment is applied correctly, there will be many successes to celebrate.

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Boilerplate:

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