Marking guides and student feedback

A key principle of competency-based assessment is **reliability**. Reliability is about trying to ensure that an assessment tool and process will result in consistent assessment outcomes regardless of the assessor. In other words, if different assessors look at the same evidence from a candidate at different times, the outcome will be the same – the judgement about whether the candidate is competent or not yet competent will be the same. This requirement becomes more complicated where the outcome of the assessment results in a grade (eg competent, credit or distinction).

Key factors in ensuring the reliability of assessment tools and processes are:

- assessors must share a **common view** of what it means to be competent (see the reading on *Visualising Competence* in About Assessment > Resources)
- assessors must have **clear guidance about how to judge the quality** of the assessment evidence they are considering.

One method of enhancing reliability of assessments is to develop clear **decision-making rules** for the assessors to follow as part of the development of all assessment tools. These decision-making rules often appear as marking guides for teachers. These guides need to be validated as part of the assessment validation process undertaken by the teaching section.

**Things to include in marking guides**

1. An indication of the standard expected for practical activities, based on the unit of competency but expressed in everyday workplace language. This should be included in an observation guide as “expected performance”, for example:
   - Specific descriptions of the behaviours that should be observed for a competent performance
   - Descriptions of behaviour that would indicate that a candidate is not yet competent. See an example of this in the reading on *Visualising Competence*.
   - For graded units, descriptions of the behaviours that would indicate that the candidate meets the expectations of a higher grade.

2. For knowledge assessments, clear advice about how many questions need to be answered satisfactorily and an indication of any critical questions that must be answered correctly. This important decision needs to reflect the knowledge requirements of the unit and should be reviewed as part of the assessment validation process.

3. Guidance to an assessor about the amount of assistance (if any) that might be given to a candidate in the performance of an assessment task.

4. Any specific conditions or restrictions for the assessment, such as the location, time restrictions, currency of evidence (in portfolios), the amount of supervision required to oversee the task, the nature of the people who can provide third party evidence etc.

5. Guidance about how to make an overall judgement of competence when judging evidence from multiple sources. For example, can high performance in one task compensate for low performance in another task? Or is there a minimum level of performance required for each task.
6. Suggested answers for quiz questions and expected content for written assignments can be developed to assist assessors.

The marking guide, except for the suggested answers, can be provided to students to assist them to prepare for their practical performance or in the preparation of their evidence for a written task.

Marking guides should not be developed in isolation – they should be on the table for assessment validation, along with the advice given to students and the assessment activities and instruments.

**Incorporating feedback to students**

Feedback to students about their performance in a practical assessment or about written or "product" evidence that they have submitted is a vital part of the assessment process. Marking guides can be formatted to be used for the purpose of providing feedback to students.

Students can be provided with the marking guide, which they then submit with their evidence. The guide is used then used by the teacher to record the “result” and the feedback to the student about their evidence. A scan of the completed marking guide and feedback can be made and stored in the section. This becomes part of the documentary evidence that is stored to comply with ASQA requirements regarding storage of assessment evidence.

Examples of marking guides can be found in many of the sample assessments under the Examples tab in the About Assessment resource. The *Construct Concrete Features* example shows how student signature and student feedback can be incorporated into an observation checklist. Go to About Assessment > Resources to see a *Record of assessment outcome* incorporating feedback to students.

Feedback is particularly important when a student has been found to be not yet competent. There should be an explanation of why the decision was made, for example, the information that was missing or not correct in a written assessment task, or a description of the aspects of the student’s practical performance that did not meet the requirements. And most importantly, there needs to be advice to the student about what they can do next, such as arranging a further attempt at a practical task or re-submitting written material.

Adapted from: *An Assessor Guide: Validation and Moderation*, National Quality Council, TVET Australia, 2010