

Assessment Standards South Africa (ASSA - NPC)

1. Rationale for the establishment of an independent assessment standards body

In consultation with stakeholders in the field of people assessment, it became evident that a number of tests¹ are being used in the country that are non-psychological. Despite being non-psychological, these tests should be used ethically and should conform to best practice standards. Hence a platform that provides opportunity for public reviews in the interests of promoting quality assessment in South Africa would be beneficial. As such a task force was convened to consider the possibility of overseeing test standards in South Africa. The task force comprises representatives from the Health Professions Council of South Africa Psychometrics Committee (HPCSA); Society for Industrial and Organisational Psychology (SIOPSA) and its interest group People Assessments in Industry (PAI), Psychological Society of South Africa (PsySSA), Association of Test Publishers (ATP) and the International Test Commission (ITC).

A recommendation from the task force was the investigation into setting up an independent non-regulatory external assessments standards structure ideally with the support of the Department of Labour and the HPCSA to assist in implementing a robust, best practice and technology enabled process that could be used to review people assessment instruments and tests. Further, based on the experience in other countries the voluntary submission of assessment instruments for objective evaluation and reviews will raise the general standard and awareness of using quality tests.

In line with this proposal, the Assessment Standards South Africa was constituted as an NPO. It is envisaged that this body will look at the broad spectrum of instruments that are used in South Africa and will not be limited to psychological tests only. In cases where an instrument meets the criteria for test classification as a psychological test, the applicants will be informed accordingly about submitting the test for review to the HPCSA as per the statutory requirements.

This proposed procedure could greatly assist the HPCSA in that it would ensure that tests received by the HPCSA for classification, have already been screened based on objective criteria by competent and qualified reviewers. This could ultimately provide for a more streamlined and timeous review by the HPCSA.

2. Nature of– Assessment Standards South Africa

Mission Statement

To establish Assessment Standards South Africa as an independent South African test review center which promotes the quality standards of testing, assessment, and measurement practices in the country.

Activities

The Assessment Standards South Africa:

- Would provide a minimum standards focus in South Africa for all activities in relation tests and testing.
- Maintain a website and online platform to provide information for best practice, results of test reviews and access to information about tests and testing
- Manage and disseminate information on standards relating to tests and testing. This includes information on qualifications in test use, tests reviews, test registration and the publishing and dissemination of advisory statements, in addition to guidelines and other literature on standards for the construction, use and availability of tests.

The activities of The Assessment Standards South Africa presented here should be considered as applying to all such procedures, whether or not they are labelled as ‘psychological tests’ or other similar assessments and whether or not they are adequately supported by accessible technical evidence

3. Proposed structure: Assessment Standards South Africa NPC

Set up as a non-profit organisation with a board of Directors comprising relevant stakeholders from:

- The HPCSA (Observer status)
- Department of Labour (Status to be determined)
- PsySSA
- SIOPSA and PAI
- The ATP
- The ITC (Observer status)
- The website will be custom built to suit the content necessary for test submission, evaluation and review. A modified system of peer reviews currently used by academic

journals is envisaged. An online platform will provide for more structure and clarity. Further it will ensure timely delivery of the reviews.

- The content and evaluation criteria for test reviews are being developed in relation to the current HPCSA test classification guidelines as well as those proposed by EFPA, modified to take the South African assessment context into consideration as well as the varying needs of different assessment techniques. These guidelines will be circulated for comment and ratification of such a system by the relevant professional bodies mentioned above.
- These criteria will be clear and transparent and maintain the rigour required for test development and adaptation.
- In terms of the process of undertaking reviews, internationally recognised and benchmarked systems, most notably the BUROS system, the Norwegian system and the COTAN system are being examined with a view to adapting the best practices from each of these to suit the South African assessment landscape.

4. Concluding comments

The Assessment Standards South Africa is thus envisaged as a non-statutory (NGO and registered Non-Profit Company) entity that promotes and evaluates rigorous standards for assessment in South Africa. As indicated in this proposal, the steering committee for the Assessment Standards South Africa consists of key representatives from across all disciplines in Psychology, with the common goal of promoting responsible and ethical test standards in South Africa. Currently represented by the chairpersons of the respected professional societies and associations.

The Assessment Standards South Africa is committed to engaging with other organisations, individuals and stakeholders in the public and private sector once the review system is fully operational to determine further steps in the classification, training and ultimately better testing in SA.

Note: *Tests and Testing (adapted from the ITC Guidelines on Test Use 8 October 2013, Version 1.2)*

Any attempt to provide a precise definition of a 'test' or of 'testing' as a process is likely to fail as it will tend to exclude some procedures that should be included and include others that should be excluded. For the purpose of this document, the terms 'test' and 'testing' should be interpreted broadly.