

Commentary on HPCSA Position Statement: South African Guidelines for System-based Testing

ATP SA agrees that system-based testing should be conducted in accordance with best practice guidelines and professional and ethical standards in test use.

However, several points in the HPCSA's *South African Guidelines for System-based Testing* document bear further consideration or clarification.

Section 3: Minimum requirements for all psychological tests

a) It must be scientifically developed or adapted for use in the intended population of the South African context;

Depending on the nature and design process followed for instruments developed outside of South Africa, and supported by empirical evidence

collected in the South African context, the adaptation of etic-based instruments may or may not be necessary. Shouldn't this point be left to individual practitioners' professional judgement?

i) scores must be interpreted by using South African norms if it is norm-referenced; and

Section 3(i) note that scores for norm-referenced instruments must be interpreted using South African

norms. Requiring all applications of psychological assessment conducted within South Africa to use South African norms ignores certain contexts where the use of international norms may be more appropriate (e.g., when assessing for expatriates, for senior management appointments in a multinational company, or in safety-critical roles).

Section 4: Administration and supervision

While the preamble (Section 2) notes the position statement is consistent with the International Test Commission (ITC) guidelines, there is no acknowledgement of the unsupervised but controlled mode of administration. This goes against the spirit and intent of the ITC's (2005) *Guidelines on computer-based and internet delivered testing* and ignores the established approach of providing log-in details to known users only in the controlled mode.

Test taker authenticity and cheating

- b) For moderate or high stakes testing confirm that procedures are in place to reduce the opportunity for cheating. Technological features may be used where appropriate and feasible (e.g. Skype, CCTV or similar platforms), a follow-up supervised assessment, or a face-to-face feedback session (e.g. for post-sift assessment in job selection situations).

This section notes technological features (as well as follow-up supervised assessment or face-to-face feedback sessions) as ways to reduce cheating

opportunities in moderate or high stakes testing, but does not acknowledge instrument design characteristics (such as utilising an item banking approach and the incorporation of data forensics to detect deviant response patterns) or web patrolling (to detect compromised item content) as viable and effective procedures to reduce opportunities for cheating.

Section 6: Computer-generated reports

- b) Every report on a psychological test, whether computer-generated or not, must be signed by a professional who is qualified to report on the test. Signing such a report indicates that the person takes professional responsibility for the contents of the report as if he/she had written it.

The paper reiterates computer-generated reports are not a substitute for professional judgement, with modifications to be made where necessary

(Section 6.b), and that unmodified and unsigned reports shouldn't be disseminated to unqualified persons (Section 6.c). However, this position is at odds with recent research examining the role of human judgement in relation to algorithmic assignment of weightings when integrating information

- c) Unmodified and unsigned computer-generated reports should not be disseminated to unqualified persons such as test-takers, parents, teachers, line managers, etc.

for selection decision purposes. For example, Dr Nathan Kuncel and colleagues have determined the validity of decision-making improves as more optimal

weightings are consistently assigned when integrating information, rather than relying on human judgement to process each integration subjectively (Kuncel, 2020).

Section 8: Results interpretation and giving feedback

- i) Take account of ethical compliance surrounding the provision of feedback using computer-based test interpretation (e.g. the difficulty of knowing the effect of providing negative feedback to a test-taker, the lack of knowledge of the emotional state of the test-taker, or the difficulty of providing immediate support to a test-taker when feedback has a negative impact).

This section appears to be an edited version of a point appearing in the ITC *Guidelines*, where the original point referred to providing feedback using the

internet, not the use of computer-based test interpretation. Two considerations:

- Delivering feedback virtually: The shift to virtual working necessitated by the COVID pandemic meant the delivery of assessment feedback also moved online. Despite the remote

nature of such feedback sessions, surveyed participants still reported the sessions being valuable.

- The use of computer-based test interpretation: Similar to the previous comment regarding clauses in Section 6, Dr Kuncel’s work has pointed to algorithmic integration of data being more consistent and accurate than relying on human judgement.

Section 10: Technological issues in computer-based (CBT) and internet testing

b) Confirm that the system the test-taker is using is documented as being suitable.

Section 10.b appears to place onus on the test user to ensure that each test taker will be

utilising a device (whether it is a desktop computer, laptop, tablet or smartphone) that is suitable given the system / technological requirements for a particular test to be delivered successfully. Is that the intent?

Section 14: Psychometric qualities

Subsections in Section 14 (Psychometric Qualities) require test publishers to only offer tests that have been “evaluated and classified by the Professional Board for Psychology”, and test users to only use online testing platforms offering the same. The inclusion of “evaluated” appears at odds with the Psychometrics Committee’s revised mandate as of February 2019 and will cause confusion.

Test publishers:

Test users:

c) Publish and offer online only those tests that have appropriate psychometric evidence to support their use, and that have been evaluated and classified by the Professional Board for Psychology.

d) For Internet testing, use only those websites supported by publishers who offer validated psychometric tests that have been evaluated and classified by the Professional Board for Psychology.

Section 14: Equality of access for all groups

- a) To monitor for possible adverse impact, collect data on the number of individuals accessing the system-based test from diverse groups. Such information may include ethnicity, gender, age, disability, religion, and sexual orientation.
- b) Where there is evidence of possible inequality of access, offer the use of alternative methods of testing.

Monitoring test scores of diverse groups for potential adverse impact is a necessary and important part of professional and ethical test use. However, monitoring the number of

individuals accessing a systems-based test (Section 14.a) would be highly dependent on the nature of the applicant pool. Shouldn’t Section 14.b be amended to recommend test users by default inform candidates of the alternatives available to them should they encounter difficulties of access?

Recommendation on version control management

Psychom Comm
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Finally, while the document's publication date is currently included in small print on the last page of the *SA Guidelines*, we would recommend that the date and/or version control

number of the current "active" document be included on the front page. The general layout of the ITC's test guidelines provides a useful example in this regard. This would facilitate ease of use and reduce the potential for confusion, as the current dating is easily missed.

The ATP Steering Committee

18 November 2021

References

- International Test Commission. (2005). Guidelines on Computer-based and Internet-delivered Testing. Document reference: ITCG-CB-20140617. Available for download from www.intestcom.org.
- Kuncel, N. (2020). Predictors and process in selection decisions. Keynote address at the *40th Annual Assessment Centre Study Group Conference*. Johannesburg, South Africa, 12-13 March 2020.