

Professional Discussion

Benefits of using professional discussion

Professional discussion provides a holistic approach to assessing knowledge and understanding and is useful in determining not only what and how a candidate is performing, but also their analytical and decision-making abilities. As an assessment method, it can be one of the best ways of testing the validity and reliability of a candidate's evidence. It is important to bear in mind that professional discussion it is not a question and answer session and does not replace observation and other stated methods of assessing candidate performance.

There are three key stages in organising professional discussion, namely planning, facilitating/assessing and recording.

Planning the discussion

The assessor needs to be clear about the purpose of using professional discussion and the required outcomes in the early stages of the planning process. What is to be covered by professional discussion will largely be determined by the standards/evidence requirements to be met. The assessor may decide to use this method because; it is a requirement for a specific part of the award/unit being assessed; there are gaps in evidence which can be effectively closed by using this method.

Candidates should be informed of the format the discussion will take. Assessors should agree a list of areas/points (as per an agenda) they wish their candidate to cover. It is recommended that candidates receive a written copy of these points in advance of the discussion.

Facilitating and assessing the discussion

Professional discussion is a method of assessment and as such should not be confused with having an unfocused social chat. However, assessors do want their candidates to feel comfortable about the process and therefore the assessor's interpersonal skills are key in achieving positive results.

The assessor's role is to manage the process in order to allow their candidate to prove their knowledge and understanding in a supported environment but without the assessor constantly directing and leading the conversation. During the discussion, the assessor may use a number of techniques to ensure the discussion remains focused and effective i.e. periodically summarising points covered, questioning to probe for more information or to clarify certain points of the discussion.

As the beginning of the discussion the assessor is likely to be doing most of the talking i.e. reiterating the reason for the discussion and agreeing how the main points of the discussion will be assessed and recorded etc. However as the discussion progresses, there should be a gradual 'handing over' to allow the candidate to enter into a full discussion where they have the opportunity of doing most of the talking.

Recording evidence from the discussion

A record of the discussion should be produced to show how the points (relating to the standards/evidence requirements), have been covered.

There are various options for recording professional discussion; audio or video taping or paper based logging. If using an audio/video tape, it is important to agree this with your candidate first to ensure they are comfortable with this method of recording.

Whatever recording method selected, the assessor needs to ensure that the evidence resulting from the discussion is clearly referenced to the appropriate standards/evidence requirements. This is important to enable effective verification.

Example of a format for recording professional discussion

Tape counter number	Discussion point/area covered	Standards/evidence requirements met
1 -27	Covers methods of assessment: APL, formal testing, simulations	ACE Knowledge requirements (a)
27 -43	Covers feedback and advice to candidates and agreeing the next steps in the assessment process	ACE A1.3b, covering performance criteria a, d and f