



The British
Psychological Society
Psychological Testing Centre

Psychological Testing: *A User's Guide*

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Introduction

This guide is about using psychological tests and the principles of good test use. Previous test guides issued by the British Psychological Society (the Society) have tended to focus on technical issues underlying tests themselves. While these are essential to the effective use of psychological tests, they represent only one aspect of good practice in testing.

This guide is designed to answer seven questions in two main areas:

Questions about tests:

1. What are psychological tests?
2. What should I look for in a psychological test?
3. Where can I find out more about particular tests and test suppliers?

Questions about test use:

1. What knowledge and skills do I need to qualify as competent in the use of psychological tests?
2. How do I obtain a Certificate of Competence as a test user?
3. How do I maintain my competence and keep up-to-date on matters relating to psychological testing?
4. How do I ensure that I follow good practice?

Among the issues addressed are:

1. The need for people to be competent test users and to use technically sound tests.
2. The services provided by the Society to test users.
3. Defining standards of competence in test use.
4. Procedures for Certification of qualified test users.
5. The provision of independent evaluations of tests through the Society's Test Reviews.
6. The Psychological Testing Centre Online (www.psychtesting.org.uk): the web-based entry to information on tests and testing for test users, test takers and test developers.

Section 1: Questions about tests

What are psychological tests?

It is very difficult to define 'tests' in a way that everyone would agree upon. In their *Guidelines to Test Use*, the International Test Commission (ITC) describes the areas covered by tests and testing as follows:

1. Testing includes a wide range of procedures for use in psychological, occupational and educational assessment.
2. Testing may include procedures for the measurement of both normal and abnormal or dysfunctional behaviours.
3. Testing procedures are normally designed to be administered under carefully controlled or standardised conditions that embody systematic scoring protocols.
4. These procedures provide measures of performance and involve the drawing of inferences from samples of behaviour.
5. They also include procedures that may result in the qualitative classification or ordering of people (e.g. in terms of type).

Any procedure used for 'testing', in the above sense, should be regarded as a 'test', regardless of its mode of administration; regardless of whether it was developed by a professional test developer; and regardless of whether it involves sets of questions, or requires the performance of tasks or operations (e.g. work samples, psycho-motor tracking tests).

Tests are designed for a purpose and the use of a particular test will vary according to the objectives of assessment. Some broad distinctions between different categories of tests can be made as follows.

Categories of test

In general, all tests fall into two broad categories. There are those designed to assess dispositions, such as personality, beliefs, values, and interests; abnormal phenomena such as anxiety and depression, etc., and to measure motivation or 'drive'. These are known as **measures of typical performance**. They tend to take the form of self-report questionnaires and do not have 'right' and 'wrong' answers. Second, there are those designed to measure ability, aptitude or attainment. These are known as **measures of maximum performance**. Such tests either consist of questions with right answers, or tasks that can be performed more or less well. This distinction between typical and maximum performance can be applied to tests used in educational testing, for clinical assessment and diagnosis, and for testing in the workplace.

Measures of typical performance

Measures of typical performance generally fall into three main categories: measures of **Personality**, measures of **Vocational** or **Occupational Interests** and

measures of **Drive, Motivation and Need**. Tests of typical performance are usually administered without any time limit on their completion. Measures of typical performance may be designed to assess differences between people within normal ranges of functioning or may be specifically designed to help understand types or degrees of dysfunction.

Personality inventories. Personality concerns the way we characteristically respond to other people and situations: how we relate to other people, how we tackle problems, our emotionality and responsiveness to stress, and so on. Personality inventories are good examples of tests that assess disposition. Dispositions describe our preferred or typical ways of acting or thinking. Test items of these traits do not have right and wrong answers. Rather, they attempt to measure how much or how little we possess of a specified trait or set of traits (e.g. *gregariousness, empathy, decisiveness*). Most instruments designed to measure dispositions are administered without a time limit and stress the need for people to answer honestly and openly. But, in some situations, such openness may be difficult to achieve (for example, if it is perceived that one's chances of being selected for a job depend on the results).

Such problems are less likely to arise when personality and other measures of disposition are used in situations where one can be sure that it is in the test taker's best interests to co-operate and be honest (e.g. in clinical assessment or vocational guidance).

Interest inventories. While interests are also related to personality, measures of interests focus more on what sort of activities we find attractive and which we would rather avoid. Interest inventories are designed to assess in a systematic manner people's likes and dislikes for different types of work or leisure activity. Satisfaction at work requires not only possessing the necessary skills to do the job competently but also having sufficient interest in it. Like tests of personality, these are not tests in the sense of having right and wrong answers.

Interest inventories have an obvious application in guidance and in staff development assessment situations in work, where people may need help in sorting out what they do or do not want to do. They provide a means of exploring new options with people, of suggesting areas of work that they would not have otherwise considered. As with personality assessment, assessing interests may provide a useful positive way by opening new doors for people in a career guidance context.

Both personality and interest assessment inventories are essentially different *in kind* from ability tests, even though the same psychometric principles apply (the need for reliability, validity and standardisation). Such inventories are the means of providing a more qualitative description of people. Most of the available personality and interest tests are **self-report** or self-description instruments. That is, they are like a highly structured, written interview that has

been standardised and subjected to psychometric analysis. If properly used, they can provide valuable sources of data about personality and interests to supplement information obtained from other sources (symptom checklists, performance analysis, references, interviews, and the like).

Measures of drive, motivation and need. Measures of motivation and need focus on the factors which drive us to action (such as the need for success) or cause us to refrain from action (such as the fear of failure). Many personality and interest measures provide – either directly or indirectly – also provide measures of need.

People's levels of drive or motivation can be thought of as having both state and trait components. Some people are characteristically more *driven* than others: some people always seem to be on the go, seeking more and more work or responsibility, while others are the opposite. This is the trait component. At the same time, any individual will vary in their level of drive from time to time. Some days they will feel they have more get-up-and-go than on other days. This is the state component.

Many personality inventories measure aspects of trait motivation.

These are often called *needs*:

1. the need for achievement;
2. the need to be with other people;
3. the need to have approval from others;
4. the need to avoid failure, and so on.

Needs motivate us in that they tend to establish our priorities and our goals. Interest measures also provide some indication of motivation. Generally, people strive hardest at those things that interest them most.

Measures of maximum performance

Measures of maximum performance measure how well people can do things, how much they know, how great their potential is, and so on. Many of these measure general, rather abstract, characteristics (e.g. *verbal fluency, spatial orientation, numerical reasoning*) while others may seem more concrete and functional (*clerical speed and accuracy, programming aptitude*). The distinguishing feature about such tests is that they tend to contain questions, problems or tasks for which there are right and wrong (or good and bad) answers or solutions.

Maximum performance tests can focus on what people know or can do (attainment tests) or what they are capable of knowing or doing (tests of ability). Tests of attainment are used to assess knowledge and skills acquired through education and instruction. Examples include tests of literacy, mathematics knowledge, foreign language proficiency or mastery in a craft. Such tests tend to be narrowly defined in content and targeted at the achievement of specific standards.

Tests of ability assess broader areas of what a person can do. While scores on such tests are influenced by education and training, they are not designed to assess specific areas of knowledge or skill. Examples of such tests are measures of verbal reasoning (the ability to comprehend, interpret and draw conclusions from oral or written language), numerical reasoning (the ability to comprehend, interpret and draw conclusions from numerical information), spatial reasoning (the ability to understand and interpret spatial relations between objects) and mechanical reasoning (understanding of everyday physical laws such as force and leverage involved in the use of tools and equipment). There are also performance tests which measure abilities such as motor skill, hand eye co-ordination and ability to replicate patterns and shapes.

Tests of maximum performance are usually timed. In some cases the time limitation is very strict and the emphasis is placed on how quickly a person can respond to the items. Tests that contain relatively easy items, but with a strict time limit are called **speed tests**. In other cases, the time limit is designed to allow most people to complete all the test items, and the focus is on how many they are able to get right. If the score you get is mainly affected by your ability to answer the questions – rather than your speed – the test is a **power test**.

Aptitude

The term 'Aptitude Test' is often used very generally to refer to any instrument that may be used to assess how well an individual is likely to perform in a specific training programme or job. Attainment tests, ability tests and personality tests are all used to predict future performance, and so the term 'aptitude' has more to do with prediction than with a specific category of test.

Psychological dysfunction

Tests of psychological dysfunction are among the most complex form of psychological test in dealing with areas that are both sensitive and difficult to diagnose. They are also among the most diverse group of tests in covering a number of conditions and symptoms, and their use requires both general clinical expertise as well as specific knowledge of a particular test. They include assessments of neuropsychological damage resulting from physical trauma or from pathological conditions.

Areas of application

In addition to these categories of tests, broad distinctions can also be made in terms of the settings in which psychological tests are most frequently used.

These are:

1. The Occupational Setting in which tests are used in careers guidance, to help select personnel, to assess their training and development needs, and in promotion.

2. The Educational Setting in which tests are used to diagnose learning difficulties, assess levels of educational attainment, learning and instructional needs, and for entry into secondary and tertiary levels of education.
3. The Health Related Setting in which tests are used to identify and assess emotional and behavioural conditions and disorder as an aid to determining appropriate treatments or therapy.

In each of these three main settings, one can further divide the areas of application into more specific domains or areas of knowledge. Test users who are skilled and competent in the use of tests in one domain may often need a great deal of further training to use tests in other domains – even within the same general setting (i.e. health related, educational or occupational). This is not so much because the tests may be more difficult to use, but because the proper interpretation of any test depends on the user’s knowledge of the area of application as well as their knowledge of the test.

In all three settings, tests are used for three principal reasons:

1. They provide a standardised method for assessing and diagnosing individuals.
2. They provide such information more efficiently than most other methods of assessment (e.g. interviews or observation).

They provide access to the measurement of qualities that are difficult to assess through other means. Psychological tests measure qualities that are less tangible than physical measurements such as height, length, mass or speed. Even when there is observable evidence of a condition such as a reading problem or behavioural disorder, the extent and causes of such problems may not be clear from the physical evidence available. So, in contrast to the manifest, observable features of physical measures (i.e. they can be experienced directly by our senses), psychological tests often measure qualities that are hidden, covert or latent (i.e. they cannot be directly or so easily experienced through our senses). As such, psychological tests may provide the only reliable and efficient means of assessment.

What should I look for in a psychological test?

The introduction to the *ITC Guidelines on Test Use* states that:

‘Tests should be supported by evidence of reliability and validity for their intended purpose. Evidence should be provided to support the inferences that may be drawn from the scores on the test.’

Where to find such evidence

Training in test use will provide the test user with the knowledge and skills needed to understand the information in the test manual, and to know when important information is missing. What should be found in a test manual is clear evidence of the psychometric properties of the test showing how extensive the research supporting the test is (e.g. on how many people and in how many

settings the information was collected), how strong the research evidence is (i.e. the extent to which the test has been shown to be reliable, valid and free from bias), and support for the interpretations that can be given to scores.

So, the key things to look for are evidence that it is a reliable measurement instrument and that it measures what it says it measures. You also need to be provided with advice on how to interpret the results of the test and guidance on what sort of conclusions you might draw from them.

The test supplier should provide the user with this information in the user and technical manuals. Sometimes these manuals are provided separately, sometimes combined in a single volume. The test manuals should describe the history of the test. This history should include any relevant theory supporting the test, the steps taken to construct the test, details of research and summaries of the results of such research. The manuals should also state whether the test was designed for a broad, general range of uses, or whether it was designed for use with specific groups of individuals (e.g. ages, occupations, types of condition, as an aid to specific diagnoses or decisions).

With a statement of what the test is supposed to measure, we can then look for numerical evidence of how successful the test construction process has been. We will now examine some of the general quality checks that should be reported in a test manual.

Reliability

Reliability is concerned with how accurate or precise a test score is. When a test is administered, the outcome is an observed score on the quality measured by the test. However, all measurement procedures physical as well as psychological are subject to some degree of error. In order to know how much weight to place on the observed score, you need to know how accurate the test is as a measuring device. Measures of test reliability allow us to estimate that accuracy. This is a key characteristic of psychometric testing and what makes it so much more valuable than other forms of measurement: For a psychometric test, we can quantify the degree of accuracy of the scores we obtain.

Being able to quantify measurement error has important consequences for how we use tests. For example, if you are carrying out an in-depth individual assessment of a person, on the basis of which you will be making some important decision, then you need a high degree of accuracy in your measurement. On the other hand if you are using a test to sort people into one of two groups, and you are not concerned too much about making a few errors in this process, then the reliability of the test can be less. In general, reliability can be increased by making tests longer, and is decreased by shortening them. However, for a given test length, reliability will depend a lot on how well the test has been designed and developed.

Reliability is one of the most important topics in training in test use. Test users need to get to grips with the concept of reliability, with understanding how it can be measured and understanding what its implications are.

Validity

Validity is concerned with what the test score actually measures. It is insufficient to merely state that a test is a measure of, say, mechanical aptitude, tolerance of stress, or proficiency in mathematics. Statements like these must be supported by research that demonstrates a test score is a meaningful measure of the quality or qualities the test was designed to assess.

Like reliability, the understanding the concept of validity is critical to competent test use. A test is not simply either valid or not. Test manuals will contain reports of research relating to various aspects of what the test is designed to measure. These studies will never prove the tests validity, once and for all, because validity is contextual. A test can be valid for one application but completely irrelevant for another. The studies reported in the test manual should support the claims that are made about the tests and its use, and provide the basis on which the test user can make inferences about people's behaviour and predictions about the future performance.

Interpretation

Scores (e.g. 16 out of 25 items correct) obtained on tests are typically converted into a 'standard' form to facilitate their interpretation. This may be carried out by using tables of 'norms' or by reference to criterion scores.

Norms provide information about the distribution of scores in some population (for example, 'UK working adults') and scores can be converted into numbers that show how a person has performed relative to this population. Instead of saying the person got 16 out of 25 correct, we might say they performed at a level equivalent to the top 30 per cent of the UK working adult population. Norms are important because the latter type of statement is more meaningful and useful than the former.

To be able to use norms and interpret these transformed scores, a test user must understand the process by which these scores are arrived at and what they represent. Many tests of disposition and interest generate several scores rather than one single score. Accurate interpretation of these scores depends on understanding the pattern of relationships between them. The process of converting obtained scores into normed scores is sometime carried out by hand (using tables provided in the test manual). Increasingly, though, these operations are carried out using computer programs. It is important, however, that the test user understands what these transformations are doing and why. The test manual should explain how the scores are transformed, what data the transformations are based on, and how the transformed scores should be interpreted.

Normative interpretations of scores simply tell us how a person has performed relative to other people. A much more powerful approach is to use the relationship between test scores and criterion measures. These are external measures of interest, such as training outcome, job success, categories of mental dysfunction, etc. Criterion measures provide another means of aiding the interpretation of scores. To take a very simple example, if we know (from our

validation research) that the failure rate in a training course of 50 per cent for people who score less than 10 on a test, 35 per cent for those who score between 10 and 15, and only 20 per cent for those who score 16 or above, then we can criterion-reference the score by converting the scores into predicted training outcomes. In effect we can classify the people on the basis of their test scores in terms of risk of training failure.

Fairness and bias

Tests are intended to discriminate between people – to show up differences where these are real. What they should not do is discriminate unfairly. That is, show differences where none exist, or fail to show differences that do exist.

It is possible that factors such as sex, ethnicity or social class may act to obscure, mask or bias a person's true score on a test. If this is the case, the observed test score may not be an accurate or valid reflection of the quality assessed through the test. This has been a concern of test designers for a considerable time, and an entire body of psychometric research has been devoted to developing methods for evaluating whether a test score is biased against different population subgroups. Test manuals should state whether the test has been evaluated for potential bias, what methods have been used to carry out such an evaluation and the results obtained.

Training in test use will help to clarify the important distinction between test bias and test score differences. Two people (or two groups of people) may get different scores on a test either because there is a real difference between them or because the test has a bias that causes the scores of one to be greater than the scores of the other. It is bias that we need to remove or minimise in the design of tests, not differences.

Where can I find out more about particular tests and test suppliers?

The Society publishes independent reviews of tests available in the UK. These have focused on test use in occupational settings. However, from 2005 we also publish reviews of tests for use in educational and health related settings.

The Society's test reviews provide detailed descriptions of each test and an evaluation of its key technical properties: reliability, validity, and information relating to interpretation. The Society's test reviews were originally only available in paper format, in a number of volumes that were published every two or three years from the late 1980s. Now they are web-based and available through the Society's Psychological Testing Centre's website (www.psychtesting.org.uk).

The Society's test reviews are directed towards practitioner test users. Other more academic reviews are available. For examples, the Buros Institute in the USA publishes a series of test reviews in the *Mental Measurements Yearbook*.

The Society also publishes a *Directory of Test Publishers* and all the publishers included have agreed to have their tests reviewed by the Society. The *Directory* is available on the Psychological Testing Centre's website (www.psychtesting.org.uk).

Section 2: Questions about test use

What knowledge and skills do I need?

What do we mean by being competent in test use? The ITC has defined this as follows:

‘A competent test user will use tests appropriately, professionally, and in an ethical manner, paying due regard to the needs and rights of those involved in the testing process, the reasons for testing, and the broader context in which the testing takes place.’

‘This outcome will be achieved by ensuring that the test user has the necessary competencies to carry out the testing process, and the knowledge and understanding of tests and test use that inform and underpin this process.’ (*ITC Guidelines on Test Use*, 2000)

Determining competence depends on two things: evidence of someone’s performance in carrying out an activity, and standards against which to judge how well someone has performed the activity. Defining such standards for the use of psychological tests has been the main focus for the Society since 1987. The standards produced by the ITC are closely related to those produced by the Society.

Occupational testing. Two sets of standards have been produced by the Society for the use of tests in the occupational setting. These are the Level A Standards, which cover basic psychometric principles, test administration and the skills required to use attainment and ability tests, and the Level B Standards, which cover more advanced psychometric principles, and the skills required to use tests of personality and interest. Based on these standards, a number of user qualifications have been produced: Test Administration; Level A, Level B Intermediate, and Level B Full (see below for more details). In addition to the standards themselves, an open learning pack has been developed for Level A, as well as guidance on how to assess someone’s competence in the use of tests in occupational settings.

Educational and health related testing. Level A qualifications have been developed for the use of tests in educational settings. Work is in progress on the development of qualifications for use of tests in health related settings in these areas (analogous to the occupational Level B).

The standards developed by the Society require that, to be declared competent, an individual must be able to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the psychometric principles underlying test construction, knowledge of the types of tests that are available, when it is appropriate to use them, and to be able to administer, score and interpret tests in order to provide accurate and meaningful feedback to others.

The Society's Psychological Testing Centre is working towards the production of an integrated suite of qualifications that will acknowledge the common foundations of all testing in psychometric principles, good practice in test administration and so on, and then place these within the various domains where testing is used. For example, the knowledge and skills needed to use tests appropriately in the diagnosis of childhood learning disorders is very different from that needed to use test in the assessment of applicants for jobs – yet both rely on applying the same psychometric principles but in different contexts.

How do I ensure that I follow good practice?

The ITC has produced international guidelines on test use (available from their website: www.intestcom.org) that have been endorsed by the Society. These guidelines embody the same principles of good practice that the Society has embedded within its test user qualifications and its Code of Good Practice in Psychological Testing (see Appendix C). These various codes are based on some very simple common-sense principles:

1. You should know the limits of your own competence.
2. You should be competent in what you do.
3. You should know the strengths and limitations of the tools you use.
4. You should treat all people involved in the testing process with respect.
5. You should ensure that you have their informed consent to the test conditions.

Testing involves more than just the test user. In addition to the test user, who administers scores and interprets the test, the process of testing generally involves the following parties:

1. The Developer who designs and develops the test.
2. The Supplier who publishes and provides access to the test. The supplier might also be the developer, but it is common for suppliers to publish tests developed by psychologist's independent of the supplying organisation.
3. The Test Taker or Candidate, who is the person to whom the test is administered.
4. The Client, who is the person to whom the results from testing are reported. The client might also be the test taker, but in many instances the results for a test taker will be reported to a third party: for example, an employer, or a parent or guardian.

It is also important to recognise that the functions of the test user may be distributed between a number of people. The person who administers the test may be different from the person who scores it. Yet another person may do the interpretation.

Each of these parties shares responsibilities for the process of testing. The developer and supplier share the responsibility for ensuring the quality of the test and for the adequacy of documentation provided for the use of the test.

The users have the responsibility of ensuring that they understand why a client wants to use psychological tests, that testing is a suitable means of achieving the client's goals, and that the use of the tests and test score's are fair to the candidate.

Clients and test takers

The responsibilities set out by the Society most clearly focus on the developer, supplier and user. The ITC has outlined guidelines defining the nature of the relationship between test taker and test user (see Appendix B). These emphasise the point that both test taker and test user have rights and responsibilities.

Organisations that employ testing, for whatever purposes, also have obligations and the ITC advocate the establishment of explicit organisational policies on testing (see Appendix A). These not only serve to place the function of the test user within a broader context, but it also protects the test user from inappropriate demands that might otherwise be made by those in more powerful positions in the organisation.

They do not directly reflect the responsibilities of the client and the test taker. So what are their responsibilities? The client has the responsibility of ensuring that those offering advice on testing and services in test use are competent to do so.

It is both the user's and the client's responsibility to ensure that the purpose of testing has been clearly communicated to the test taker, that the test taker understands the procedure's that will be used for testing, how the test information will be used and to whom it will be communicated. As such, it is also the test taker's responsibility to ensure that he or she understands why the tests are to be used and to raise any concerns that he or she has in advance of testing.

Testing as a social contract

In effect, testing is a social contract in which all parties should seek a common shared understanding of the process. At present, the only recourse that a client or a test taker has if they feel that a test has been used inappropriately is to raise the issue with an appropriate professional body such as the Society or to seek legal advice. As stated earlier, the Society believes that the best cure is prevention. To this end, the following set of simple questions provides a means by which each party can contribute to responsible use of psychological tests.

The purpose of testing is clearly stated and communicated to all parties involved in the testing process.

1. What is the purpose of testing? What are the outcomes that will be achieved through testing?
2. Why are these specific tests being considered or recommended? What evidence is there that these tests are relevant to the outcomes being sought? What evidence is there that these tests are appropriate for the people who are to be assessed?

The procedures for testing are clearly stated and communicated to all parties involved in the testing process.

1. Who will administer the tests? What evidence is there that they are competent to administer them?
2. When and where will the tests be administered? Is this a suitable environment for the administration of the tests?

How the test information will be used is clearly stated and communicated to all parties involved in the testing process.

1. Who will score the tests? Who will interpret the scores? What evidence is there that the scorer/interpreter is competent to score/interpret these tests?
2. How will the test score be communicated? What actions will be taken to ensure that the communication of test scores is accurate and meaningful?
3. How will the confidentiality of the test scores be protected? Who will have access to the test scores? Why are they being given access to the test scores?

Procedures for dealing with inquiries and complaints about the process of testing are clearly stated and communicated to all parties involved in the testing process.

1. Who will handle inquiries and complaints? Are they competent to handle enquiries or complaints?
2. What actions will be taken in response to an inquiry or complaint? Will these actions ensure that the inquirer or complainant is treated fairly and ethically?

How do I obtain a Certificate of Competence as a test user?

Currently, the Society provides Certificates of Competence in the area of Occupational Testing (Level A and B) and Educational Testing (Level A).

The new Educational Certificate follows the model developed from the 1980s for occupational test user certification. The model requires you, as a potential test user, to demonstrate your competence in testing to someone who is accredited by the Society as an assessor for the relevant Certificate. Such assessors are Chartered Psychologists who have had their assessment procedures verified by The Society. The Society has authorised them to sign you off as 'competent' against each of the Units required for the Certificate.

Once you have had your competence assessed in this way, you may apply to the Society for the appropriate Certificate. You are then eligible to have your name entered on the Register of Competence in Psychological Testing (RCPT).

Using tests in work and occupational settings

For practical purposes, the Society has divided its specification of competence in occupational testing into two 'levels': Occupational Levels A and B.

Occupational Level A defines the basic foundation skills and competence needed for the use of a limited range of types of test (those which are easier to

interpret). Occupational Level B extends this to cover the competences required for using most of the other psychological tests employed in occupational assessment (including measures of personality). Occupational Level A is considered to be the starting point for progress on to Occupational Level B.

Within Occupational Level A, a subset of the competences required have been 'packaged' into a qualification in test administration. Many people's involvement in testing is at this level. That is, they are not responsible for choosing, or interpreting and reported back on tests, but they do administer and score tests and manage the testing sessions. The Occupational Test Administration qualification provides a stepping stone towards the complete Occupational Level A qualification as well as being a useful qualification in its own right.

Today, most test suppliers require those seeking access to test materials for use in occupational settings to hold Occupational Level A or Occupational Level B certificates or to complete training courses that provide this level of qualification. Other restrictions may apply to specific diagnostic tests (e.g. for clinical assessment) where more advanced training and experience are required.

As with all professional development, there is no well-defined end point and there are many alternative routes one can take to achieving competence. Occupational Levels A and B mark points along a general developmental path. Some people may follow this path on beyond Level B, while others may choose to progress no further than Level A.

The *Certificates* are based on a set of standards, which relate to an individual's ability:

1. To use certain types of psychological test fairly and effectively within occupational settings (such as, personnel selection, vocational guidance, management development);
2. To adhere to the codes of practice and professional conduct defined by the Society and other relevant bodies (for example, the Chartered Institute of Personnel Development (CIPD)).

Detailed Checklists of Competences define the standards. Copies of these are contained within the Occupational Level A and Level B *General Information Packs*, which are available from the Society's Psychological Testing Centre's office or from the Psychological Testing Centre's website (www.psychtesting.org.uk). The Occupational Level A General Information Pack incorporates information about the Occupational Test Administration Certificate.

What do the Occupational Test User Certificates provide?

Possession of the *Occupational Test Administration, Level A or Level B (Intermediate or Full) Certificates* provides evidence of your basic competence in certain areas of occupational testing. It is important to note that the *Occupational Test Administrator Certificate* does not provide a full test user qualification. It is expected that certified test administrators will always work under the supervision

of a Level A or Level B qualified test user. Level A does not cover all areas of testing and assessment: it represents the foundations. *Occupational Intermediate Level B Certificates* cover the use of specific self-report personality measures and similar types of instrument. *Occupational Full Level B* expands on this to provide and breadth of understanding needed by the more sophisticated test user.

With a *Occupational Level A Certificate* you can start to make use of tests. You are qualified to use a wide range of attainment, ability and aptitude tests sold by the test publishers and also to use some interest inventories. Publishers generally classify their test materials in terms of the competence level required for their use. Most now use the Society's classification into Levels A and B, though this is not universal. Part of your Occupational Level A training involves getting to know the range of products on the market, how they are classified and how they may be used.

Becoming an occupational test user

The most common route to becoming a test user is to attend a training course (typically five days) in 'Occupational Testing'. This is still the fastest route to an Occupational Level A Certificate. However, the Level A standards are very demanding and some people may find it difficult to meet all the requirements within the traditional training format. The intensive short residential course is also relatively expensive both in training fees and in terms of the time needed away from work.

Courses that are more spread out in time provide you with more time to absorb the new ideas and concepts and to practise the skills and techniques. To this end, many trainers (especially for in-house training) offer courses that are in two or three parts with periods of a week or more in between.

Increasingly, web-based training packages are becoming available to supplement residential training. In addition, paper-based open learning materials are also available (Bartram & Lindley, 2000¹).

While web-based training and open learning provide alternatives to traditional training methods for acquiring competence, all potential test users have to have their competence assessed to the standards set by the Society – regardless of how they have acquired their knowledge and skills. Typically, the assessment will involve attending a number of assessment workshops for the assessment of your practitioner skills and the submission of various items of evidence of your competence (your 'portfolio').

Once you have acquired the necessary competence, you then need to have that competence assessed, in order to obtain your British Psychological Society Certificate, and register as a test user with the relevant test publishers or suppliers.

¹ Bartram, D. & Lindley, P. (2000). *The BPS 'Level A' Open Learning Programme*. Oxford: BPS Blackwell.

How do you obtain a Certificate as an occupational test user?

Any person who can provide sufficient evidence that they meet the standards required for *all* the items on the checklist of competences will be eligible to apply for the relevant a British Psychological Society Certificate of Competence in Occupational Testing (Level A or B). To obtain a *Certificate*, your competence has to be assessed by someone who is recognised by the Society as qualified to assess people for that particular *Certificate*.

1. If you are planning to acquire your competence through a training course, you should check whether the course provides an assessment by a Society verified assessor. The course organisers should be able to confirm this. The Society also holds a list of verified assessors that you can check. This is available on the Psychological Testing Centre's website (www.psychtesting.org.uk).
2. If you are not following a training course with built-in assessment, but have acquired your competence through some other route, you can use the List of Assessors to obtain details of those who operate in your area. In some cases these are individual consultants, in others, people working in consultancy companies or for publishing organisations.

Assessment of competence is subject to a verification process carried out by the Society. This process is designed to ensure that the Chartered Psychologists on the List of Assessors assess people fairly and set comparable standards for levels of competence. The Society provides very detailed guidelines on assessment for the Certificates and all registered assessors are subject to monitoring and quality checks by the Society through its verification scheme. All assessors are Chartered Psychologists who themselves hold the relevant Certificate and who have expertise in occupational testing and assessment.

It is important to note that the Society's Certificates of Competence in test use do not constitute a qualification in psychology and do not confer any 'psychologist' status on their holder.

Using tests in educational and health related settings

The new Educational Level A Certificate is obtained in a similar way to the Occupational Level A Certificate. You will need to demonstrate your competence to a verified assessor for the Certificate and then apply to the Society for the appropriate certificate.

Full details of the procedures and access to training provision are available on the Psychological Testing Centre website (www.psychtesting.org.uk).

At the time of writing the new health related qualification will only be available through postgraduate health psychology training courses. Details will be available from the Psychological Testing Centre's website (www.psychtesting.org.uk) when courses have been set up.

Register with one or more test publishers or suppliers

You do need to register with a publisher before you can purchase tests. Publishers will register those people who successfully complete their own training courses and those with appropriate British Psychological Society Certificates. In some cases, the Society's Certificate will be deemed to provide only partial qualification for registration and some additional training will be required.

The *Occupational Level A Certificate* holder is deemed by the Society to be competent to use all attainment and group ability and aptitude tests and a limited range of interest measures in occupational assessment settings. The tests covered by the various reviews of Level A tests (published by the Society) illustrate the range of materials which the Level A user is considered competent to handle.

The ability tests covered by Occupational Level A do not include individual 'IQ' tests – such as the Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scales, the Stanford-Binet and the British Ability Scales. These require more extensive training and are used in a more 'clinical' fashion. As such, they would be of doubtful relevance in occupational testing.

All the major test suppliers now recognise the *Occupational Level A Certificate* as evidence of competence and use it as a basis for the registration of test purchasers. It is important to note that the Society does not set or define the conditions of supply for publishers. For registering as a purchaser of personality tests, you will need to have the appropriate Intermediate Occupational Level B Certificate or Full Occupational Level B qualification. Please note that you should also clarify the terms and conditions of registration with the publisher of each of the instruments you want to use.

Each publisher can set their own conditions, but most now treat the Occupational Level A Certificate as sufficient evidence for registration for ability testing and an Intermediate Occupational Level B Certificate as providing exemption from a substantial amount of Occupational Level B training. Currently, test users with an Occupational Full Level B Qualification will be able to buy and use a large number of tests with either no additional training or with reduced familiarisation training. Details of the tests you will be able to use and the additional training requirements, if any, are available from the Society's Office on the Psychological Testing Centre's website (www.psychtesting.org.uk).

For the latest information on terms and conditions of registration for purchasing tests relating to educational and clinical testing, consult the Psychological Testing Centre's website (www.psychtesting.org.uk) and the relevant publishers.

How do I maintain my competence?

Maintaining competence is about continuing to practice and continuing to update oneself in terms of knowledge, understanding and skill.

There are two main mechanisms provided by the Society to support this:

1. The Psychological Testing Centre Online;
2. The Register of Competence in Psychological Testing.

The Psychological Testing Centre Online (www.psychtesting.org.uk) provides access to a wealth of information about tests and testing. You can subscribe to the Society's test reviews and keep up-to-date on the latest information about issues and debates in testing. There is news about events (conferences, workshops) and access through structured links to test publishers, research institutions and professional societies with interests in testing.

As a British Psychological Society Certificate holder you can join the Society's *Register of Competence in Psychological Testing*. Register members have their own area on the Psychological Testing Centre's website (www.psychtesting.org.uk) and have free access to the Society's test reviews and other information either free of charge or at discounted rates. If someone wants to check whether you are a current test user, they will expect to find you on the Register.

1. Having the Certificate indicates that you were competent at the time of its award.
2. Being on the Register indicates that you are a current practitioner and that you have maintained your competence since you obtained your Certificate.

As with any professional register, the Society will reserve the right to remove the name of anyone from the Register if it is found that they have operated in a way that is contrary to relevant codes of good practice (see Appendix C for the Code of Good Practice in Psychological Testing).

Further information

The British Psychological Society's Psychological Testing Centre operates a website designed for test users, test takers and other involved in or interested in testing: the Psychological Testing Centre Online (www.psychtesting.org.uk). Further information on all the issues discussed in this booklet can be found there or be obtained from the Society's Psychological Testing Centre office:

1. Information packs on the Occupational Level A and Level B Standards and the Educational Level A Standards.
2. Information about the BPS Blackwell Level A Open Learning Programme.
3. Information about training courses for test users.
4. The Society's test reviews.
5. A Directory of Test Publishers and Distributors (this lists all those publishers who have consented to having their tests reviewed by the Society).
6. The Society's publication *Selection and Development Review* (issued six times a year – free to registered test users).

Please note that the contents of this Guide and its Appendices are subject to update and revision. The most up-to-date version will be found on the Psychological Testing Centre's website (www.psychtesting.org.uk).

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The Society does not operate any form of accreditation or approval service with respect to publishers and distributors or to tests themselves. It is, therefore, unable to offer advice on the choice, use or origin of tests.

The Society would be pleased to receive comments about this guide to help us inform others about the fair and valid use of psychological tests. Any comments and enquiries should be forwarded to the above address.

Appendix A: ITC Guidelines for an outline policy on testing

The following guidelines relate to the need for organisations to consider their policy on testing in a systematic manner and to ensure that everyone involved is clear as to what the policy is. The need for an explicit policy on testing is not confined to large organisations. Small and medium-sized enterprises that use testing, as well as large ones, should pay regard to testing policy in the same way as they do to health and safety, equal opportunities, disability and other areas relating to good practice in the management, treatment and care of personnel.

While the following considerations or requirements may need to be adapted for use by individual test users operating as sole professional practitioners, it remains important that they have a clear understanding of their own policy and can communicate it to others.

A policy on testing is produced in order to:

- ensure personal and organisational aims are met;
- ensure that potential misuse is avoided;
- demonstrate commitment to good practice;
- ensure test use is appropriate for its purpose;
- ensure tests do not discriminate unfairly;
- ensure evaluations are based on comprehensive, relevant information;
- ensure tests are only used by qualified staff.

A policy on testing will need to cover most if not all the following issues:

- proper test use;
- security of materials and scores;
- who can administer tests, score and interpret tests;
- qualification requirements for those who will use the tests;
- test user training;
- test taker preparation;
- access to materials and security;
- access to test results and test score confidentiality issues;
- feedback of results to test takers;
- responsibility to test takers before, during and after test session;
- responsibilities and accountability of each individual user.

Any policy needs to be regularly reviewed and updated as advances in testing, or changes in practice occur.

Relevant parties need to have access to and be informed about the policy on testing.

Responsibility for any organisation's testing policy should reside with a qualified test user who has the authority to ensure implementation of and adherence to the policy.

Appendix B: ITC Guidelines for developing contracts between parties involved in the testing process²

Contracts between the test user and test takers should be consistent with good practice, legislation and the test user's policy on testing. The following is provided as an example of the sort of matters such a contract might cover. The details will vary as a function of the assessment context (e.g. occupational, educational, health related, forensic) and local or national regulations and laws.

Contracts between test user, test takers and other parties are often implicit and unspoken (at least in part). Making clear the expectations, roles and responsibilities of all parties can help to avoid misunderstanding, harm, and litigation.

For their part, the test user will endeavour to:

- b.1 inform test takers of their rights regarding how their test scores will be used and their rights of access to them ;
- b.2 give adequate prior warning of any financial charges that may be entailed by the testing process, who will be responsible for their payment, and when payment will be due;
- b.3 treat test takers with courtesy, respect and impartiality regardless of race, gender, age, disability, etc.;
- b.4 use tests of proven quality, appropriate for the test takers, and appropriate for the assessment purpose;
- b.5 inform test takers prior to testing about the purpose of the assessment, the nature of the test, to whom test results will be reported and the planned use of the results;
- b.6 give advance notice of when the test will be administered, and when results will be available, and whether or not test takers or others may obtain copies of the test, their completed answer sheets, or their scores;
- b.7 have a trained person administer the test and have the results interpreted by a qualified person;
- b.8 ensure test takers know if a test is optional and, when it is, the consequences of taking or not taking the test;
- b.9 ensure test takers understand the conditions, if any, under which they may re-take tests, have tests re-scored, or have their scores cancelled;
- b.10 ensure test takers know that they will have their results explained to them as soon as possible after taking the test in easily understood terms;

² From the *International Test Commission Guidelines on Test Use* (2000).

³ Legislation varies between countries on this issue. For example, the current UK Data Protection Act provides rights of access to data stored on computer different from those for data written on paper.

⁴ While tests and answer sheets are not normally passed on to others, there is some variation between countries in practice relating to what test takers or others are permitted to have. However, there is much greater variation in the expectations of test takers concerning what information they will be given. It is important that contracts make clear what they will not be given as well as what they will.

- b.11 ensure test takers understand that their results are confidential to the extent allowed by law and best practice;
- b.12 inform test takers who will have access to their results, and the conditions which scores will be released;
- b.13 ensure that test takers are aware of the procedures for making complaints or notifying problems;

The test user will inform test takers that they are expected to:

- b.14 treat others with courtesy and respect during the testing process;
- b.15 ask questions prior to testing if uncertain about why the test is to be administered, how it will be administered, what they will be required to do and what will be done with the results;
- b.16 inform an appropriate person about any condition that they believe might invalidate the test results or which they would wish to have taken into consideration;
- b.17 follow the instructions of the test administrator;
- b.18 be aware of the consequences of not taking a test if they choose not to take it, and be prepared to accept those consequences;
- b.19 ensure that, if required to pay for any the testing service(s), payment is made by the agreed date.

Appendix C: British Psychological Society Code of Good Practice for Psychological Testing

RESPONSIBILITY FOR COMPETENCE

People who use psychological tests are expected by the British Psychological Society to:

1. Take steps to ensure that they are able to meet all the standards of competence defined by the Society for the relevant Certificate(s) of Competence in Testing, and to endeavour, where possible, to develop and enhance their competence as test users.
2. Monitor the limits of their competence in psychometric testing and not to offer services, which lie outside their competence nor encourage or cause others to do so.
3. Ensure that they have undertaken any mandatory training and that they have the specific knowledge and skills required for each of the instruments they use.

PROCEDURES AND TECHNIQUES

People who use psychological tests are expected by the British Psychological Society to:

4. Use tests, in conjunction with other assessment methods, only when their use can be supported by the available technical information.
5. Administer, score and interpret tests in accordance with the instructions provided by the test distributor and to the standards defined by the Society.
6. Store test materials securely and to ensure that no unqualified person has access to them.
7. Keep test results securely, in a form suitable for developing norms, validation, and monitoring for bias.

CLIENT WELFARE

People who use psychological tests are expected by the British Psychological Society to:

8. Obtain the informed consent of potential test takers, making sure that they understand why the tests will be used, what will be done with their results and who will be provided with access to them.
9. Ensure that all test takers are well informed and well prepared for the test session, and that all have had access to practice or familiarisation materials where appropriate.
10. Give due consideration to factors such as gender, ethnicity, age, disability and special needs, educational background and level of ability in using and interpreting the results of tests.

11. Provide the test taker and other authorised persons with feedback about the results in a form, which makes clear the implications of the results, is clear and in a style appropriate to their level of understanding.
12. Ensure test results are stored securely, are not accessible to unauthorised or unqualified persons and are not used for any purposes other than those agreed with the test taker.

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Sections of this Guide have been adapted from:

Bartram, D. & Lindley, P. (2000). *The BPS 'Level A' Open Learning Programme*. Oxford: BPS Blackwell.

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