

ABTC ASSESSMENT GUIDANCE DOCUMENT

for Practitioner Organisations (PO) and Assessor Organisations (AO)

Introduction

These guidelines set out best practice in terms of the assessment process for those organisations carrying out practitioner assessments.

The ABTC member organisation should aim to provide assessment procedures that requires a supportive, objective, fair, transparent, timely and confidential process for applicants, while maintaining standards, through the assessing organisations.

In order that organisations carry out assessments using this approach, assessors will need to be trained to carry out the role and be required to confirm maintenance of confidentiality of the process and that they have no conflict of interest for any applicant they assess.

A minimum of two assessors should be involved in the process for each applicant.

Each organisation will have confirmed that they have an appeals process and that it follows in principle, the ABTC appeals process.

The ABTC roles are:

- Animal Trainer
- Animal Training Instructor
- Animal Behaviour Technician
- Accredited Animal Behaviourist (temporary register which has now closed)
- Clinical Animal Behaviourist
- Expert Witness

The ABTC standards for each role are found at: <https://abtc.org.uk/practitioners-info/>

For each ABTC role an individual must demonstrate that they meet the standard for the role. Each standard has two parts:

- The Knowledge and Understanding (K & U)
- The Performance Criteria (PC)

For Knowledge & Understanding (K&U) there are four ways of carrying out the assessment:

- The applicant having completed an ABTC recognised course
- Applicant has passed Practitioner Organisation's own, internal assessed, course (AT and ATI)
 - Organisations may require all potential members to pass their course
 - Organisations may accept applicants who have passed a course provided elsewhere

- Assessment by the ABTC APEL assessors for ABT and CAB or by Organisation's Assessors for AT and ATI
- Organisations may accept applicants who have been assessed by another ABTC PO/AO

ABT and CAB roles

Not everyone will have had the opportunity to undertake formal study in a college/university. They may have studied subjects different to those areas covered by the standards or completed a course that is not yet recognised by the ABTC as meeting the requirements. If this is the case applicants can submit evidence of having the Knowledge and Understanding through APEL.

The Accreditation of Prior Experience and/or Learning is known as APEL. APEL is a recognised way to demonstrate meeting a professional standard. It does this by the individual showing what they have learnt through provision of documentation and, importantly reflection.

All the Knowledge & Understanding statements must be met for successful assessment in any given role, prior to assessment of the Performance Criteria.

For the Performance Criteria (PC):

Organisations will assess applicants to confirm that they have the practical skills, competence and experience to be able to effectively perform the relevant role. All the Performance Criteria must be met for successful assessment in any given role.

All ABTC practitioners must use scientific, evidence-based methods that adhere to the principles of LIMA (least intrusive, minimally aversive) and the Humane Hierarchy model, be compassionate to animals and their associated humans, and uphold high standards of animal welfare at all times.

This is the basis for the ABTC standards. All practitioners are required to adhere to the ABTC Code of Professional Conduct, which can be found here: <https://abtc.org.uk/practitioners-info/>

The ABTC, as regulator of the Training and Behaviour sector, has a responsibility to ensure that organisations which assess practitioners on the ABTC registers, demonstrate how they effectively assess applicants against both the Knowledge & Understanding and the Performance Criteria of the ABTC standards. The ABTC also has a responsibility to carry out regular quality assurance of those assessment practices.

Practitioner Organisations and Assessment Organisations should provide ABTC's Practitioner Assessment Committee (PAC) with details of their assessment procedures and documentation.

This should include, but is not limited to:

- Application process
 - how/where advertised
 - information given to applicant
 - requirements from applicant eg particular courses, written questions
 - mentor/support provision
- Assessment process
 - Assessor training/requirements (eg role, membership)
 - Dealing with documentation covering K & U
 - Liaison between Assessors

- Decision to call applicant to Performance Criteria (PC) assessment
- An overview of the assessment process for K & U
- An overview of management of the APEL process for K & U
- An overview of the assessment process for PC
- Assessors
 - List of Assessors, including their membership role

Organisations will regularly review and, sometimes, revise their processes. Any time the process, documentation, Assessor training, etc, is changed information and revised information should be forwarded to PAC (via admin@abtc.org.uk)

Annually ABTC will request a declaration that the review has taken place and that all revised information has been supplied to ABTC, along with a list of current Assessors.

Assessment Process – Performance Criteria Guidelines

Types of Evidence

- The evidence produced should be assessed against Performance Criteria for Animal Trainer (AT)/Animal Training Instructor (ATI)/Animal Behaviour Technician (ABT)/Clinical Animal Behaviourist (CAB).
- The following evidence will be recorded on PO/AO documentation:
 - Written answers to questions, anonymised case records, anonymised communications with clients/professionals.
 - Observation video or live observation. Written informed consent should be obtained from the client to use their consultation for this purpose. The applicant, animal and client should be clearly visible and identifiable. The video should include clear audio.
 - Oral interview – Questions should ensure that all necessary Performance Criteria are assessed and will be individual to each applicant ie used for clarification and to check understanding if required.

Supportive and constructive feedback will be given to the applicant to clearly outline the assessment outcome and the next stages of the assessment process.

Oral interview

During an oral interview the assessment questions should allow the applicant to fully demonstrate their Knowledge and Understanding or Performance Criteria. This can be achieved by using open questions such as the following:

- Can you please explain?
- Can you clarify what you mean by?
- What was the thinking behind?
- How did you ?
- Can you tell us about?
- Can you identify any factors that?
- Can you think of any alternatives to?
- Can you suggest ways in which?
- Can you describe your reasons for?
- It was nice to see please can you share a little more about?

- Give other examples in relation to PC/K&U

All Performance Criteria must be met via any combination of the above methods.

All assessment should follow the SOFTT approach

- Supportive – the assessment should be supportive in its application rather than judgemental.
- Objective – the assessment provides right and wrong answers based on fact. It allows the assessor to mark the answer against specific criteria using a standardised assessment tool. Objective assessment provides a reliable and valid method of assessment ensuring there is no unintended bias.
- Fair – the assessment must allow equal opportunity to every applicant to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding. The assessments will be based on the learning outcomes provided.
- Timely – feedback should be given promptly and with clear direction on areas for improvement and identify areas of good practice.
- Transparent – the methods of assessment and marking criteria should be clear prior to the assessment. There should also be access to assessment question examples with the process of how final marks are calculated.

Assessors

Assessors have a responsibility to the Practitioner/Assessor Organisation (and ABTC) to:

- Uphold standards
 - Ensuring that all performance criteria have been met at least once
- Maintain good records of every aspect of the assessment process
- Remain objective

Assessors have a responsibility to the Applicant to:

- Provide opportunities for the person to showcase their skills
 - Remembering that performance criteria can be met using written/observation/oral evidence or a combination
- Use the SOFTT approach when giving feedback – written and oral - to applicants
 - Supportive – encouragement and being positive but not unrealistic
 - Objective – based on the evidence and Performance Criteria
 - Fair – unbiased, based on the evidence not preconceived ideas
 - Transparent – Clarity of the process essential; straightforward feedback
 - Timely – Timescales made clear from the outset and adhered to
- Communicate effectively and empathically at all times

Assessors have a general responsibility to:

- Ensure that the assessor will be able to demonstrate competence in the standards for any of the roles for which they are assessing and in the skills which the role entails
- Ensure that they only assess for species with which they are experienced and competent
- Ensure that they have the appropriate assessor training including counselling and coaching skills in order to assess appropriately
- Ensure complete confidentiality of the process
- Ensure that there is no conflict of interest as it pertains to the applicant under assessment

- Communicate appropriately with all involved in all aspects of the process at all points of the process

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Assessors need verbal and written communication skills. Additionally, they need specific skills pertaining to questioning and feedback.

General Communication Skills:

- The ability to put people at ease and create a safe environment for all present
- Be sensitive to cultural and diversity aspects which may pertain to any of those present in the assessment and, if appropriate, modify the way the assessment is held in order to appropriately accommodate these while still adhering to standards
- The ability to move through the assessment process at an appropriate pace, allowing for individual needs, but ensuring fairness by upholding requirements
- The ability to recognise stress/distress in any person or animal present and amend processes appropriately in light of this
- The ability to coach and / or counsel an applicant through a challenging situation in order that the applicant learns from the experience and can take something positive from the situation, should things go wrong
- Be able to recognise and have the skills to intervene to stop and redirect a situation if things go wrong
- Be able to remain supportive whilst upholding standards and objectivity
- Ensure that at all times assessment is to the standard and against the laid down assessment criteria in order to maintain objectivity
- Understand when it is appropriate to give feedback during the assessment in order to facilitate other aspects of the assessment and ensure that this feedback is appropriate and adheres to good practice

Verbal Communication Skills

The two main areas of verbal communication will revolve around questioning and feedback delivery.

All communication should follow good counselling practice, for example:

- Active listening skills should be evidenced
- Questions should be selected that are best likely to answer the criterion under assessment, for example open vs closed
- Questions should not be leading or judgemental
- Probing questions should be asked in a manner which does not imply judgment
- Questions may need to be rephrased for clarity, it is the role of the assessor to try to enable the applicant to understand the question and therefore showcase their knowledge
- Feedback offered during assessment must be timely in order to assist the best performance of the applicant
- Feedback needs to be constructive and supportive
- If appropriate, discussions on feedback can be entered into, but this should not influence the objectivity of the assessment.

Written Communication Skills

The two main written areas in which an assessor would be involved are feedback and record keeping. All written communication should adhere to the principles of “writing in plain English” in order to ensure clarity and readability. All reports whether written for submission to the PO/AO or to the applicant need to meet all legal requirements such as adherence to GDPR.

- Feedback needs to
 - be appropriately structured, constructive and supportive
 - be laid out to ensure that the applicant is aware of the performance criteria under discussion and how their performance in the assessment met/fell short of the criteria
 - offer advice for preparation for future assessment, if this will be required
- Records need to
 - provide a detailed and accurate account of the assessment by each individual assessor
 - accurately reflect where the applicant has met/not met performance criteria and evidence this objectively
 - evidence discussions between assessors and, particularly where there is disagreement on a point of assessment how this has been resolved and the final decision

SPECIFIC SKILLS FOR THE ROLES – AT, ATI, ABT, CAB

It is assumed that the assessor will be able to demonstrate competence in the standards for any of the roles for which they are assessing and in the skills which the role entails. Some people may be able to assess for more than one role.

All Assessors should be:

- Experienced with the species in which the applicant is to be assessed
- Able to appropriately and safely manage all animal and human participants in any ‘live’ assessment (if used).

ABTC Appeals Process guidance/good practice

Grounds for appeal

Appeals can be made on the following grounds only:

1. The assessment process has not been properly followed
2. The assessment outcome is disputed

The applicant should not be disadvantaged by submitting an appeal in good faith. Appeals which are judged to be vexatious, malicious or frivolous will not be considered.

The process

All information submitted in relation to appeals will be dealt with confidentially and will only be disclosed to those persons involved in making a decision on appeal, or as necessary to progress the appeal.

Intention to appeal should be submitted to the assessing organisation/body in writing within three weeks of receiving notification of the assessment outcome.

The applicant should be given six weeks from the date of intention to produce the evidence underpinning their appeal. This will include:

- Clear written evidence to show where the assessment process was not followed

And/or

- Clear written evidence to show the basis for disputing that assessment criteria have been met

The applicant is asked to ensure all submitted information is clearly labelled, easy to access and navigate.

The appeal documents will be considered by the original assessors and two further assessors who have declared no conflict of interest. This *may* mean the assessing organisation/body must liaise with the ABTC to find appropriate appeals assessors.

Applicants will be informed of the identity of the further assessors and will be given the opportunity to indicate if they are concerned about any potential conflict of interest. Such concerns will be respected and new assessor(s) allocated, should the applicant wish.

It may be felt necessary for the parties involved in the appeals process to meet. This would be best achieved by video conferencing. The meeting would be recorded with the undertaking that no recordings may be shared by any party with any party outside of the immediate appeals process. The applicant may have a chosen individual to represent, advocate for, or support them at the meeting.

The applicant will be sent written notification of the outcome of the appeal within six weeks of all relevant documentation having been provided to the assessing organisation/body's office or meeting having taken place.