SASSOa

A System To Assess And Score A Trainees Achievement. Method And Possibilities

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Abstract

"SASSO" is a system meant to propose a mark or grade on a descriptive trainee assessment in an objectified way in order to assess and quantify consistently the observed skills and achievements of a trainee compared with the expectations based on the profession profile of a starter. The tool was developed to quantify in an unambiguous and complete way the performance of a trainee and taking into consideration the results of peers.

Observed assessment findings are entered in a spreadsheet tool. This tool converts automatically the marked data into a raw score and proposes an ECTS grade and a local grade.

SASSO fulfils highly the guidelines published by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education.

DEVELOPING an ASSESSMENT AND GRADING SYSTEM

In the early 1990's in co-operation with the trainee tutors of the subject of Speech Therapy of the Faculty of Health Care Vesalius, University College Ghent, a procedure was developed to determine the scores and grades of speech therapy trainees. The initial target was to develop an objective assessment and grading tool based on the trainee's observed professional behaviour, the profile of the profession and the expected general and profession specific skills of a trainee, covering as much factors as possible. Later new possibilities were added as in combination with the increasing development of available computer software, more particularly of spreadsheets, it became possible to process more information in less time.

In 2000 the system was presented in Helsinki (Simoens, 2000)

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[a] SASSO: Dutch acronym name, meaning "Systeem voor Assessment en Scoring van Stagiairs in Opleiding", a "System to Assess and Score a Trainees Achievement"

In 2005 the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area were published. Verification of the features of SASSO made it clear the tool corresponds highly to the guidelines published by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education.

ORGANISATION OF THE TRAINING PERIOD

An outline of the training period gives an overview of the elements taken into consideration.

In University College Ghent for speech therapy students four training periods are organized in different authentic settings. Each period lasts approximately three months: one day a week during the third and fourth semester and two days weekly during semesters five and six. A grade is given at the end of the first and second period. The assessment for the training periods in semesters five and six is combined in one grade.

The trainee settings are authentic situations in special schools, rehabilitation centres, hospitals and free practices offering a representative series of tasks. Training situations differ: clients/patients with different problems, different coaches and tutors and the tasks with different levels of complexity.

The tasks of the trainee evolve from observing and participating to almost independent work in semesters five and six.

During every training period trainees are coached by at least one responsible worker of the trainee post and observed twice or more times by a lector/supervisor from the University College and member of the board of examiners. In most training places two or even more coaching therapists are available. Both the person responsible for the trainee place and the lector/supervisor are speech therapist.

As health care workers' first responsibility is helping patients/clients, assessing students is second priority. Therefore a clear, common reference is needed. That is why SASSO refers to the starting professional as a reference in determining whether observed behaviour can be expected from a trainee. For students it is a reachable goal and health care workers may refer to the start of their job.

Before starting their traineeship students are well informed. They receive a vade-mecum containing substantial and organizational aspects of their traineeship, have the possibility to practise some skills in the skills lab, get presentations on general traineeship topics and on the assessment system SASSO. All the information, included the presentations and a students version of the conversion tool, is available on the electronic learning environment.

THE PROCEDURE

An overview of the five step procedure has been published in 2006 by Löfgren e.a.(Simoens 2006).

The SASSO procedure is rather simple and combines a norm-referenced assessment based on the professional profile with a comparative evaluation based on the results of all students of the same subject in a comparable authentic situation and level of study.

Step one: observing and registering

The responsible worker of the trainee post and/or the tutor observes the trainee. The observations made are registered in an open form or in a structured form. In the latter the observer only has to make specific notes of how the student effects his tasks.

Step two: feed back

In this crucial step the assessor and the trainee come to an agreement concerning the trainee's performance. Advices and/or remarks are given. Both the student and the assessor have to sign the form to avoid any discussion in the quantification and classification process (step four). A copy of the completed forms is saved in the student's portfolio that he might continuously consult them and – if he decides to – use them for self grading.

Step three: Summarizing

The tutor collects the registration forms and transfers the remarks to the assessment form. In the present form eighty one items containing all aspects of the training period to be evaluated are sorted. For every item a Likert scale has been worked out containing levels of performance presenting a range of possible remarks.

Once the form has been filled in the assessment is registered and may be quantified.

Step four: Quantification and Classification

The information on the evaluation form is manually keyed in into a spreadsheet wherein the relative importance of the groups of sections, the sections of items and all the items are fixed. In this way the spreadsheet converts the marks automatically and consistently into a raw score.

Step five: Scoring and Grading

In a meeting preparing the deliberation the tutors may adjust the marks if needed. This is possible according to earlier made agreements or when strong evidence makes it necessary.

The tutors confirm and present the student's marks to the board of examiners. Based on the proposed marks the board of examiners deliberates and awards marks and grades.

FEATURES

Individualized

The individual achievements of the student are expressed in the evaluation form and the skills profile. In that students may compare their individual level of performance with the level of the starting professional. Follow up of the consecutive forms reveal to some extent an evolution of the achievements.

Immediate feedback gives the students the possibility to reply by which false impressions may be corrected.

Objective

All students are equally assessed with the same reference: the starting professional. As the raw scores of trainees with a comparable level of experience are grouped the system takes their specific acquired level (in consecutive traineeship periods) into account.

Additional information due to tasks out of the traineeship cannot be incorporated without agreement.

Grading and scoring can hardly be affected by the assessors as the calculation of the raw scores – the basis for grading – is consistently calculated based on fixed values.

Complete

Combined with the theoretical courses, the practical training and the traineeship vade-mecum containing organizational aspects students have a considerable amount of information at their disposal. The evaluation form contains all assessed topics and reports clearly the findings to the assessment partners. If a new task emerges it may easily be added. The tutors have to agree concerning topics that have to be added permanently.

Transparent

The student not only has an overview of the evaluated tasks and competences; by allowing self assessment and even self grading by means of the tool published on the e-learning system the student has the possibility to select priorities in correcting his performances.

For complete transparency the tutors might decide to release the figures and relative values used to calculate the raw score.

Faultless Calculation

Using a spreadsheet prevents miscalculations.

If by incident an error occurs while entering the marks the error is indicated. The number and level of the inputs is counted and returned for control reasons.

Flexible

The spreadsheet makes it easier to add items if necessary, facilitates simulations and new combinations of tasks and allows computing a variety of relations between the results.

As the procedure is based on the registration of observable behaviour the analysis of this behaviour may lead to more profound discussions concerning for instance the reasons why it is established.

The first version of the assessment form contains an enumeration of tasks, features, demands. In order to adapt it to contemporary insights on assessment corresponding skills are being added by which the trainee gets an assessment from two different perspectives.

If wanted the printed reports may present detailed information concerning the assessment. All information showing the results of the computation may be disclosed: the raw score or the proposed total grade of the professional profile, a grade per group of items, the raw scores of each item and so on.

International Applicable

In order to assess international students the procedure and the tool are easily adaptable by simply translating only the evaluation form and the report.

In consequence of the use of a Likert scale the home university receives a structured description of the trainee's work in an authentic situation.

As the raw scores are automatically converted into a proposal for an ECTS grade (European commission, 2007) no extra conversion or decision is needed. In that way adding an ECTS grade is directly "skill based".

STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN THE EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION AREA

In view of the guidelines published by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education SASSO corresponds in more than one way to the expectations as it:

• *is explicitly designed to measure the achievement of the intended learning outcomes objectives*: using the Likert scale results in an extensive list of expected achievements; adding the corresponding skills making it more extensive and complete

• *is appropriate for their purpose, whether diagnostic, formative or summative*;

• has *clear and published criteria for marking*; it is the responsible tutors decision whether to release or not the figures and relative values used to calculate the raw score

• is *undertaken by people who understand the role of assessment in the progression of students towards the achievement of the knowledge and skills associated with their intended qualification*: SASSO has been developed within the University College and is used in consultation with responsible persons of the trainee posts. The lectors/supervisors of the University College have the final responsibility;

• *where possible,* does *not rely on the judgements of single examiners*; at least one coach and one tutor fill out a form;

• takes *account of all the possible consequences of examination regulations*: legal and institutional regulations from the government or the board are at the student's disposal;

• has *clear regulations covering student absence, illness and other mitigating circumstances*; this information is available in the vade-mecum every student receives before starting his training period;

• ensures *that assessments are conducted securely in accordance with the institutions stated procedures*; the procedure is recognised by the examination board. If necessary students have the possibility to consult an ombudsman or to appeal against a decision.

• is *subject to administrative verification checks to ensure the accuracy of the procedures*. All documents, software, registers are available for the (examination) board or other authorities (for example an international accrediting commission)

In addition, students should be clearly informed about the assessment strategy being used for their programme, what examinations or other assessment methods they will be subject to, what will be expected of them, and the criteria that will be applied to the assessment of their performance. All information concerning the training period is available on the e-learning-environment, is published in the vade-mecum and / or explained in preparatory sessions.

Supplementary features

To a certain extent and not unconditionally the tool makes it possible to profile the trainee settings, the assessors, the influence of specific authentic situations and other.

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