

Implementation of the BPS
Standard for Design and
Delivery of Assessment
Centres



SYMBIOTICS



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Executive Summary

Symbiotics Ltd is a highly experienced Human Performance Company, established in 1996, that has expertise in all elements of human performance when operating in the workplace. We are involved in the design and implementation of assessment and development centres, offering bespoke solutions to meet the needs of our clients, and specialising within the selection and assessment of candidates within high stress, risk or consequence industries such as aviation and the emergency services. A number of our test environments and scenarios have been developed to provide the ability to uncover the unique characteristics, traits, skills and aptitudes to ensure the candidate is the right fit for this unique environment.

In order to ensure our assessment/development centres are delivered to the highest standards, we are committed in ensuring our continual adherence to the guidelines laid out by the British Psychological Society. This document explains what the standards are and how we intend to meet them, clearly defining the responsibilities of Symbiotics and of the Client when planning and delivering an assessment/development centre.

1. Introduction

Assessment/development Centres (referred to throughout this document as 'Centres') involve the assessment of groups of people in a work-based context, using multiple methods and assessors to measure multiple work-related criteria. The candidates take part in a variety of exercises, which can include interviews, group activities, psychometric tests and work-simulation exercises. They are observed by a team of trained assessors, who evaluate each candidate against pre-determined, work-related behaviours. The data derived from the assessment measures is then collated in order to support final assessment recommendations, or to develop an action plan. When implemented properly, Centres are a systematic and rigorous means of identifying behaviour and predicting performance, which can support selection and recruitment, promotion and development within the workplace.

The BPS is the representative body for psychology and practitioners within the United Kingdom. The Division of Occupational Psychology (DOP) exists to promote the professional interests of occupational psychologists, including providing advice and guidelines for those working with the profession. The DOP's Standard for the Design and Delivery of Assessment Centres (2015) aims to raise the standard of Centre practice by defining the methods of best practice for designing and delivering Centres, and is intended as a UK implementation of the International Organization for Standardization's ISO-10667 (2011) standard for Assessment Service Delivery.

There are a number of reasons Symbiotics Ltd feels it is imperative to adhere to the Standard. Firstly, this promotes a fair process for the candidates, reduces any potential for discrimination and ensures the process is legally defensible, helping to protect the Client from claims of unfair assessment. Secondly, it ensures an evidence-based approach, meaning that the criteria and methods used offer maximum value in providing valid information to support decision-making or development. Lastly it provides a mark of quality to regularly evaluate our practice against, ensuring our Clients continue to receive the highest quality of service that best fit their needs.

2. Explanation of the Standard

The Standard covers each stage of design and delivery of Centres, including:

- Contracting and Scoping
- Designing the Centre
- Ensuring Standards of Competence and Behaviour for the individuals involved
- Preparing for Centre Delivery
- Implementing the Centre
- Integrating Data and Decision-Making
- Reporting Centre Results and Providing Feedback
- Managing Centre Data
- Evaluation of the Centre

The following section details the requirements of the Standard, and the responsibilities of Symbiotics and the Client in ensuring this is adhered to. Aspects of the Standard have been omitted where the information has been deemed not relevant to the Client's responsibilities or understanding, or where Symbiotics has created additional documentation providing greater detail on specific policies.

2.1 Contracting and Scoping

The Standard sets out the process for defining the scope of the Centre and in developing the resulting contract.

In order to reach an agreement on the provision of the Centre, it is important that all of the necessary information to support the Centre design is shared at this stage. Symbiotics will guide the Client on the relevant points for discussion and provide documentation to support the process; this may involve several stages of scoping meetings and contract negotiation. The Client should endeavour to be clear in their communication of requirements to support this process.

Symbiotics' Responsibilities

- Symbiotics will provide the Client with access to documentation that demonstrates the validity of the agreed assessment approach.

- Symbiotics will assume responsibility for ensuring the competence of staff who contribute to the assessment centre.
 - If the staff are provided by Symbiotics, Symbiotics will ensure they have appropriate training and qualifications for their role
 - If the staff are provided by the Client, Symbiotics will provide clear specifications of personnel competence to the Client. Symbiotics can also provide the necessary training to ensure staff competence.
- Symbiotics will work to current accepted technical and professional standards and will address ethical, professional and legal issues in designing the Centre. Symbiotics will provide the client with advice on how to meet these standards.

Client Responsibilities

- The Client shall determine the aim of the assessment, and communicate clearly what their assessment needs are. This includes:
 - The purpose of the Centre (selection procedure, development etc)
 - The demographics of candidatesIf available, the Client should supply supporting documentation of the assessment need.
- The Client shall comply with ethical, professional and legal requirements raised by Symbiotics, including adhering to informed consent and data protection procedures.

Agreement

Prior to any work in implementing the Centre, Symbiotics and the Client will reach an agreement on the detailed specifications of the service. This will involve discussion of any constraints on the process, including budgetary constraints; the agreement should ensure that the recommended approach will balance budgetary constraints without compromising standards.

- The agreement should be clearly documented, including the Client's agreement to the terms and conditions of the service, including financial arrangements, and the roles and responsibilities that will be assumed by the Client and Symbiotics.
- The agreement will include a detailed plan for the Centre, including the assessment rationale, scope of the criteria to be assessed, procedures and methods used, the management of data and the resource and logistical requirements.

- The Client will agree with Symbiotics a procedure for notification and agreement of any changes made to the initial specification.

2.2 Designing and Planning the Centre

The Standard defines the recommended process for design and planning prior to implementing the Centre.

Symbiotics will work carefully with the Client to explore their needs and recommend the most appropriate design and format of Centre. Symbiotics will advise where a Centre may not offer the most appropriate method to meet the Client's needs.

Assessment Criteria

The identification of criteria for assessment should be based on a relevant job analysis. The purpose of the job analysis is to identify the behaviours or activities that discriminate between good and bad performers in the role.

- The Client should provide the relevant documentation if the job analysis data already exists, for example an existing competency framework. This will then need to be mapped to the assessment criteria, and additional performance indicators may need to be created.
- If there is no existing job analysis data, Symbiotics will work with the Client to carry out a job analysis.

The following will be considered when developing the assessment criteria:

- Number of criteria to be assessed – The maximum number of criteria lies between 6 and 12. Where there are more criteria to be assessed, the length of the Centre may need to be extended.
- Degree of independence between criteria – There should be limited overlap between criteria
- Interpretation of criteria – Positive and negative performance indicators will be used to ensure consistent interpretation of performance
- Scoring of criteria – Scores will be assigned using a rating scale, which will be consistent across all assessment methods within the Centre. Symbiotics uses a five-point behaviourally anchored rating scale. There will be an agreed process for integrating scores and determining final ratings.

Assessment Methods

The methods used in the assessment should reflect the work context, work activities and processes used in the target job or role, as identified by the job analysis; they should also present all candidates with an equal opportunity to demonstrate their capabilities. Symbiotics will recommend the type and range of assessment methods appropriate for meeting the Client's needs, including where a bespoke exercise may be created; the relevance of the assessment methods to the work context will be documented. The design of the Centre and relevant exercises should reflect the following:

- Each assessment criteria will be assessed by at least two different assessment methods across the Centre
- Where possible, exercises should closely reflect the role. The level of difficulty of the exercise should be consistent with the challenges of the role
- Exercise design will take into account the capacity of assessors; the number of criteria per exercise should generally be limited to four
- Exercise design will not convey an advantage or disadvantage to any subgroup

Logistics

Processes and plans must be produced for managing the logistics of the Centre. This includes:

- Records of the methods used to produce and maintain assessment materials, and prevent these being accessed without authorization by candidates
- A Centre manual that includes all documentation relating to the Centre, and a process for securely distributing these
- An overall timetable for the day, which will be prepared by Symbiotics
- A process for collecting information on candidate disabilities; Symbiotics and the Client will agree on the process for dealing with requests for accommodations
- A process for communicating travel, residential arrangements and other logistical information to candidates before attendance of the Centre

2.3 Preparing for Centre Delivery

Providing a Centre Policy Statement

The Standard states that the Client must have a Centre policy statement covering the following issues: ethics, diversity, security, the briefing of Participants, Participant rights, data protection, provision for feedback, handling appeals, Centre staff training and competence issues, quality assurance and evaluation and monitoring. Where the Client does not have an existing policy statement, Symbiotics will assist in the creation of this. In accordance with the policy statement, Symbiotics and the Client will ensure that:

- Candidate are treated in a fair and consistent manner in accordance with legislative requirements
- Centre results and personal data are treated in accordance with data privacy requirements (see below)
- Procedures and timelines to resolve complaints and appeals are established and documented
- Consideration is given to the feedback provided to candidates
- Candidates are provided with sufficient information prior to the Centre, to make an informed decision whether to participate
- Candidates have given consent before their feedback is shared with other parties

Data Protection

All data will be managed in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR, 2016).

- Candidates will provide consent before the Centre; this includes retention of data for research purposes
- Data will only be used for the agreed purpose of the Centre and will not be held for longer than is necessary. Data held for research purposes will be anonymised
- Data will be stored securely (e.g. in a locked folder)
- Access to data will be limited to those with a right to know
- Consent must be obtained before releasing data
- Reports will not be valid for more than 12 months after the Centre

Informed Consent

The Client must have a clear procedure for obtaining informed consent from the candidate for use of their data.

Candidate Feedback

Candidates should be provided with an opportunity to receive qualitative feedback on their performance. How this will be provided will be discussed with the Client during the scoping and contracting phase.

Candidates will be told if and how they will receive feedback prior to attending the Centre, and when they are likely to hear about the decision made based on their results. If a report will be sent to others, such as the candidate's line manager, the candidate must be advised and give consent before attending the Centre.

Managing and Procuring Resources

Symbiotics will make recommendations to the Client regarding the quantity and quality of resources required to deliver the Centre. This will take into account the schedule of the centre, the number of candidates and the exercises/activities used.

Personnel:

- The Centre will have more than one Assessor assessing each candidate.
- Symbiotics must ensure that the number of personnel is adequate for the number of candidates, in order to ensure workload does not impact on ability to perform their tasks effectively. The ratio of Assessors to candidates will be 1:2, with a maximum ratio of 1:3 where unavoidable.
- Symbiotics will confirm that all Centre staff meet the role requirements of competence in advance of the Centre. Where necessary, training and refresher sessions will be provided by Symbiotics to ensure all personnel are competent.
- Where stakeholders are attending the Centre, such as a senior staff member acting as an observer, Symbiotics will ensure they are briefed and instructed on how to behave, in order to ensure no disturbance to the Centre

- Where technical equipment is used, Symbiotics will ensure there is appropriate technical support for any problems that may arise; this may be a specialist in attendance, or access to remote technical support

Symbiotics may consult with the Client in allocating Centre roles. Where possible, diversity will be taken into consideration among staff. Symbiotics will ensure that appropriate and relevant briefing information is provided to all personnel.

Materials:

Symbiotics will provide a checklist of the materials required for the centre. This will include documentation for personnel, candidate materials, stationery, technology and materials required to provide disability accommodations. These materials should be delivered to the Centre with enough advance for personnel to check and test all materials.

Symbiotics may delegate provision of materials to the Client where appropriate.

Venue:

When planning the centre, Symbiotics or the Client must procure a suitable venue for accommodating Centre demands. This should consider the number of people and therefore the number of rooms required, and other appropriate facilities such as bathrooms and rest areas. The environment should be free from distractions such as loud noises, and well lit, ventilated and at an appropriate temperature, to allow candidates to relax and focus on the task at hand.

Timetables and Scheduling

- Symbiotics will prepare the necessary scheduling information, including Centre timetables, individual timetables for all roles within the Centre and for candidates, and a matrix assigning assessors to candidates.
- Schedules will allow for sufficient breaks and times to move between activities
- Schedules will avoid conflicts where candidates are seen by an assessor known to them
- Diversity of candidates will be considered in allocating candidates to groups

Contingency planning

Symbiotics will formulate a contingency plan to deal with unexpected events and minimize disruptions to the Centre, while maintaining safety and a fair process.

Preparing and Informing Candidates

- Symbiotics will provide a pack of materials that can be sent as part of the joining instructions to candidates, the content of which is to be agreed with the Client. Where appropriate, the Client may take on responsibility for the provision of some of the content.
- The information provided in the pack will be in-line with the Centre policy statement and will include logistical information and all the information necessary for candidates to make an informed decision to consent to participate.
- The briefing will include enough information to allow candidates with disability related, or other needs to anticipate where they may need to ask for accommodations to be made.
- Candidates should be provided details of a contact person for any queries they may have.
- The information packs should be sent out at the earliest opportunity to allow candidates time to prepare for the Centre.

Grievances and Concerns

The Client must ensure that there are clear procedures to accommodate grievances or appeals. Candidates should be told how they can raise concerns, queries and challenges to results. Responses to queries should be as open and informative as possible, while maintaining the integrity of the assessment process and meeting GDPR requirements.

2.4 Centre Delivery

Symbiotics will be responsible for allocating responsibility of Centre delivery to a Centre Manager. The Centre Manager responsibilities may be adopted by the assigned Lead Assessor. The Centre Manager is responsible for centre facilitation, record keeping and security, and quality assurance, as well as ensuring the Centre adheres to its design and this Standard. Further details of the responsibilities of the Centre Manager are provided in additional Symbiotics documentation.

2.5 Data Integration

The Standard defines how data should be integrated to determine final results, development recommendations and feedback, which may inform decision-making.

The Client will be responsible for all decisions about candidates that arise from the Centre outputs.

- Rules for determining the overall Centre Rating are defined in the design phase
- Symbiotics applies arithmetic approaches to determine the Overall Centre Rating
- When the Client is making decisions using the outcomes, they must ensure there is a person present with appropriate training in interpreting the data.
- A record of Centre outcomes must be made. If the outcome decision deviates from Centre recommendations, an explanation of why should be documented.
- External evidence must only be considered in overall centre ratings if the relevant data exists for all candidates and is considered valid and relevant to the assessment criteria. It must be integrated using a clear framework.
- If the Client wishes to consider external information that does not meet the above criteria, it should be considered at a separate meeting.
- Where feedback is to be provided, the data recording process will include procedures for recording the relevant qualitative information needed for feedback delivery

2.6 Communicating Outcomes

- Symbiotics will agree with the Client how outcomes of the Centre shall be reported.
- Symbiotics will provide the Client with guidance on how information and results can be used and interpreted.
- Symbiotics will provide reports as soon as possible to support Client decision-making.
- Symbiotics will ensure that reports are presented in a consistent and appropriate format, ensuring reports are accurate and can be easily understood by the end user.
- Access to the reports will be provided by Symbiotics in a manner agreed with the Client.

Feedback

- Whether feedback is provided by the Client, or by Symbiotics, will be decided in the scoping phase.
- Feedback should be delivered as soon as possible following the Centre.

- The person nominated to deliver the feedback must have the necessary training to do so in a sensitive and constructive manner and must be familiar with the Centre and its content. They should have access to the qualitative and quantitative evaluations from the Centre.
- Where written feedback is provided, candidates must be provided with a contact to direct any questions they may have towards. Symbiotics also produce a candidate-focused version of the Advanced Personality Questionnaire, which provides the candidate with written feedback on their personality results.
- Where oral feedback is provided, candidates should be provided with a written record of the discussion.

2.7 Post-Centre Review

The purpose of the post-centre review is to ensure all learning points from the Centre are collated to be used in improving future Centres.

Evaluating the Centre Process

- The Centre Manager will ask for feedback from all Centre personnel, to be consulted when designing future centres.
- Symbiotics will supply candidates with a feedback evaluation form.

Long-Term Evaluation

The Client should consider a long-term plan for evaluation of the Centre, which should be undertaken by a professional with appropriate skills in research methodology and Centre good practice. Symbiotics can assist the Client in carrying out the evaluation.

- On-going series of Centres should be evaluated annually, with a major review every 3-5 years
- The evaluation process will address the reliability, validity, diversity and utility of the Centre. This should include both quantitative and qualitative analysis
- The recommendations from the evaluation will inform any decisions regarding the maintenance or alteration of Centre design

3. Summary of Symbiotics' Responsibilities

- Symbiotics will provide advice and guidance to the Client on how to adhere to Centre best practice and meet legal, ethical and professional standards
- Symbiotics will ensure that the approach used is valid and best suited to the needs of the Client
- Symbiotics will work with the Client to produce an agreement detailing the specific process and procedures for implementing the Centre, the responsibilities of both parties and terms of service
- Symbiotics will carry out a job analysis to determine the assessment criteria, where this information does not already exist
- Symbiotics will recommend appropriate Exercises to the Client for assessing the determined criteria
- Symbiotics will provide recommendations on the necessary resources required to run the Centre and provide checklists of materials
- Symbiotics will ensure the design of the Centre meets the Standard of optimal number of criteria to be assessed, ensuring each criteria is assessed twice, and ensuring the assessor to candidate ratio is appropriate
- Symbiotics will provide clearly documented and behaviourally defined scoring criteria for measuring candidate performance, and will use arithmetic methods to determine overall candidate ratings
- Symbiotics will ensure all Centre staff meet the definitions of role competence, and provide the relevant person specifications to the Client. Symbiotics will offer training where appropriate
- Symbiotics will assist the Client in creating a Centre policy statement
- Symbiotics will adhere to all data protection requirements in accordance with GDPR
- Symbiotics will work with the Client to determine how candidate accommodations will be met
- Symbiotics will allocate responsibility for implementing the Centre to a Centre Manager/Lead Assessor
- Symbiotics will ensure appropriate technical support for the Centre is provided, if necessary
- Symbiotics will produce/provide the necessary documentation for planning the day, to include the Centre manual and timetables
- Symbiotics will provide guidance to the Client on how to interpret Centre outputs and ensure that output reports are clear, accurate and timely
- Symbiotics will support the Client in carrying out long-term evaluation of the Centre, if required

4. Summary of the Client's Responsibilities

- The Client must determine the assessment need and ensure the Centre addresses an appropriate and legitimate aim. The Client shall communicate their needs clearly to Symbiotics
- The Client must comply with ethical, legal and professional issues raised by Symbiotics
- The Client shall agree with Symbiotics the details of the service to be provided before commencement of Centre planning
- The Client should provide documentation of any previous job analyses, if available, to support the selection of performance criteria
- The Client must ensure candidates are provided with the necessary information about the Centre
- The Client must comply with data protection regulations and use data only with the appropriate consent from candidates
- The Client must ensure they have a Centre policy statement
- The Client must have a clear policy for dealing with grievances or appeals
- If selecting or providing the venue, the Client must ensure that it is appropriate for Centre requirements
- Any Centre staff provided by the Client must have the appropriate training or qualifications for the role, including for the delivery of feedback post-Centre, as defined by Symbiotics
- The Client shall support Symbiotics in developing the Centre plan, including determining how accommodations will be made
- The Client must assume responsibility for making decisions or action plans based on Centre outputs, and ensure outputs are interpreted by those with appropriate training
- The Client should consider the long-term evaluation plan for the Centre; Symbiotics can support with this

5. Questions

If you have any questions regarding the Standard, or anything else discussed in this document, please don't hesitate to get in touch with your contact at Symbiotics, who will be happy to assist in answering any queries you may have.

Alternatively, general enquiries can be directed to: admin@symbioticsltd.co.uk

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