

Renewing your Assessment Practising Certificate



Dr Anna Smith MDG, Lead APC Assessor for the Dyslexia Guild provides a refresher on the application process for specialist assessors

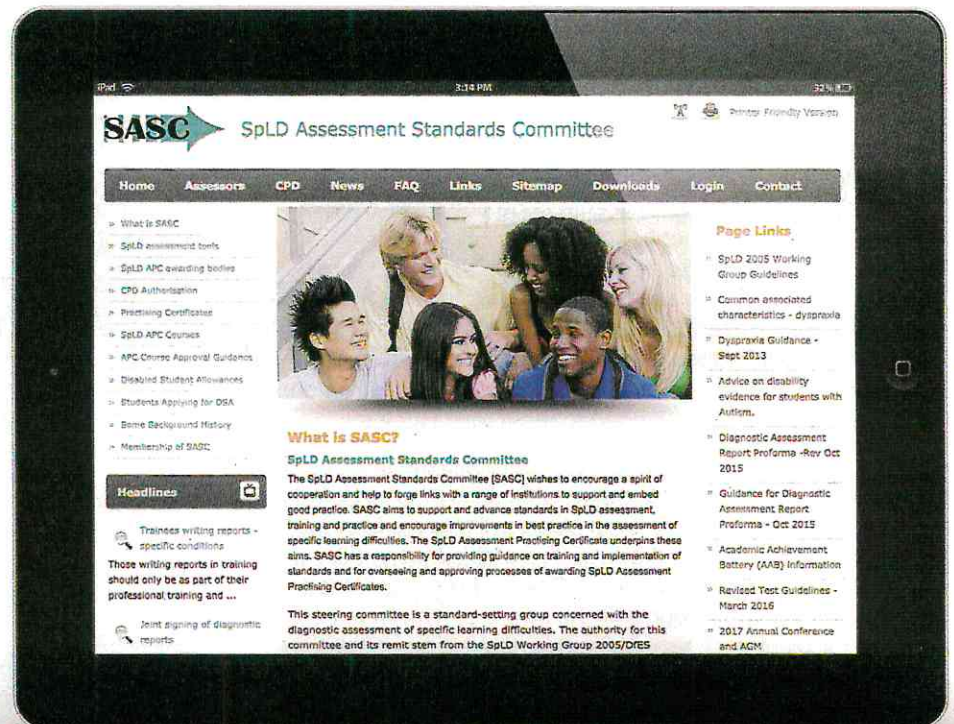
Every three years, those of us with an active Assessment Practising Certificate (APC) prepare to go through the renewal process and it can sometimes feel stressful and uncomfortable. It is difficult to eliminate these feelings entirely from the process but it's worth considering that most reports fail through easily avoidable mistakes. If you are planning to renew your APC in the near future, refresh your knowledge with these pointers to help you avoid some of the most common renewal pitfalls.

Calculating your scores

We all make mistakes but if you check your scores a few times you will usually pick these up. Recent changes in the advice given by the SpLD Assessment Standards Committee (SASC) means that if you make one or two minor errors in a report then reviewers can point these out to you and ask you to return the same corrected report in order to gain your renewal. However, if the errors are high in number or impactful on the report then unfortunately this means the application won't be passed. The simple solution is to double or triple check your answers and also consider whether your scores and associated values look right. The most frequent errors occur with confidence intervals, so when proofreading consider that these should be about 6 to 10 points away from the mean with the score lying in the middle of the interval. If this is not the case, have another look at the way you calculated them. Another frequent error is where scores in the text don't match those in the table and that is usually where a mistake has been spotted but not corrected in both places.

Composite scores: to report or not to report

The approach to composite scores varies across task batteries but for



the Test of Memory and Learning (TOMAL-2), the Comprehensive Test of Phonological Processing (CTOPP-2) and the Test of Word Reading Efficiency (TOWRE-2), the guidelines ask that we report composites, even where there are significant discrepancies. The exception to this is the Wide Range Intelligence Test (WRIT) where significant discrepancies between the two subtests are considered to invalidate a composite, and also significant differences between the two composites themselves are thought to invalidate the general ability score. A rule of thumb for the WRIT is to check differences greater than 9 and use Tables 6.3 and 6.6 in the manual to verify whether those difference are significant.

Discussing discrepancies

Discrepancies are often the interesting and important components of a report and you may well want to discuss them. However, you may not always have a table to help you decide whether two scores are truly different. You may for example be comparing phonological awareness with an aspect of reading skill which means you are evaluating scores from two different batteries. In this situation, confidence intervals can provide you with a degree of objectivity; where there is an absence of an overlap you can feel confident that this is a true discrepancy and you can describe these differences as 'marked' or 'important' but it is important to reserve the term 'statistically significant' for differences that you have evaluated using a table or a statistical technique.

Writing summaries and conclusions

These two parts of the report can often be confused and it is useful to consider how they differ. The summary is a crucial part of the report and at times it is the only part of the report that is read. It should provide a succinct but stand-alone outline of all the important information concerning an individual including a summary of their background, a statement concerning their diagnosis, and a summary of the evidence to support this diagnosis. There should also be an outline of that person's compensatory strengths and a brief description of how the difficulties you have evaluated impact upon their literacy, study or workplace skills.

The conclusion should focus on the outcome of your considerations and a good tip when writing this section is to begin with an accepted definition of the diagnosis under consideration. A very frequent reason for reports not being passed for renewal is that the evidence in the report does not appear to fit with the conclusion and a definition will help to anchor your evidence to the diagnosis.

Summaries for each section

Although you are including a final summary, summaries of each section are equally important and can help you consolidate and make sense of the information you have accrued through testing and observation. This section is likely to be enormously helpful to the individual, as it should be free of technical data and jargon and should

be a simple outline of their difficulties in this area of learning.

Qualitative information

Although test scores are hugely important, qualitative data plays a large part in a diagnosis. Quite often, reports will contain very rich qualitative information about some aspects of performance but this may not be consistent. It is most commonly absent in the section describing underlying ability but of course the analysis of performance during these tests can often be quite revealing. For example, where a child defines a word by leaving out crucial information or syntax may suggest that they know the meaning of the word but have difficulties with expressive language. Practical tasks of visuospatial processing, where an individual is asked to create a design with puzzle pieces can also reveal difficulties in fine motor co-ordination which you may want to investigate further.

Describing each test

Happily, you only ever need to write a description of a test once as you can use it repeatedly for each report but of course it is crucial that this description is a good one. Make it concise but with an outline of what you are measuring and what you have asked the individual to do.

Which tests to use

It is well worth a visit to the SASC website as the document entitled 'Revised Test Guidelines March

2016' provides a list of tests that are considered acceptable for Disabled Student' Allowance (DSA) reports (this can be found within the 'Downloads' section). SASC does state however that this advice '...does not preclude approved assessors from using alternative tests on occasions where these are deemed necessary, but in such cases a justification for their use should be provided in the report.' A good example of this is if you are testing someone with English as an additional language and you feel justified in using another more appropriate test. A good tip here is to communicate clearly your intentions when including information in a report that you feel might be misinterpreted.

Visit the SASC website

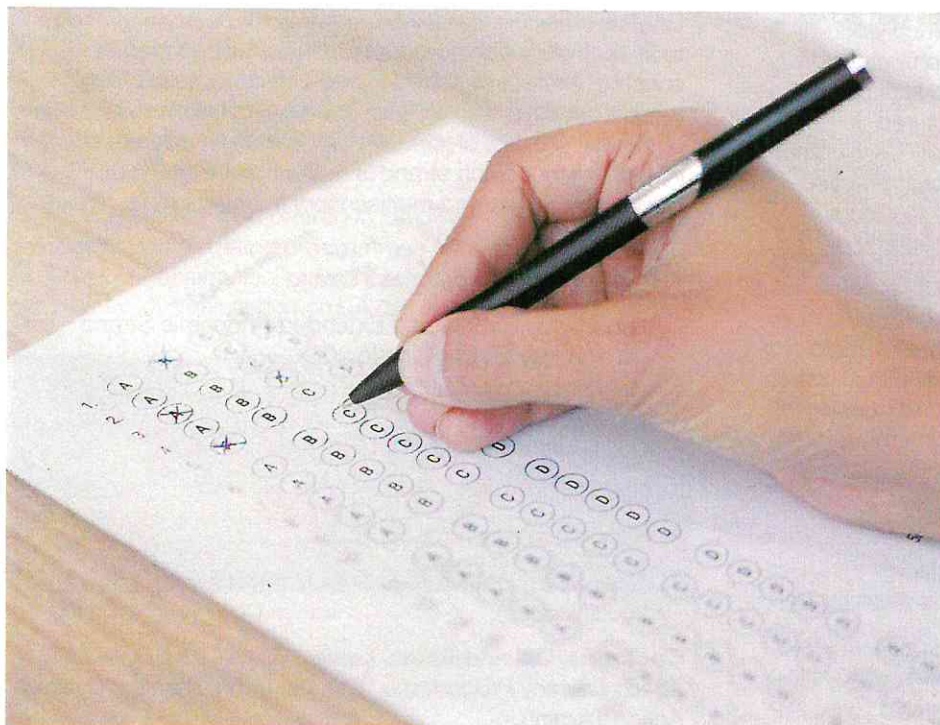
The website also contains other updated information you may need. If you look at the bottom left of the site, you will see a section entitled 'Headlines' and this will give you all recent changes in SASC advice. <http://www.sasc.org.uk/>

Visit the Dyslexia Action website

There is a section devoted to APC renewal on our website with lots of information to help you. See: www.dyslexiaaction.org.uk/page/assessment-practising-certificate

Last but not least...

Make sure you select a report that you feel confident about and that you have written in the last eighteen months, take full advantage of all the advice that you can find and give yourself plenty of time to prepare for the submission.



Ed Notes:

Guild Members also have access to the Guild Forums and in particular the forum on Assessment and APC where you can post queries to Anna and other Guild Members. Login to the Guild Member's website at:

<https://training.dyslexiaaction.org.uk/guild-members>

See also Anna's article: Assessment Practising Certificate: recognition of your competence to undertake diagnostic assessments for dyslexia and specific learning difficulties, *Dyslexia Review* Vol 26 No 2, October 2015, also available on the Guild Member's website.