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# Evaluating assessments in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Reflections on a framework for validation – 5 years on

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Paper presented at the  
*15<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference of the Association for Educational Assessment in Europe (AEA-Europe)*  
*Tallinn, 6-8 November 2014.*

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## **Abstract**

In essence, validation is simple. The basic questions which underlie any validation exercise are: what is being claimed about the test, and are the claims warranted (given all of the evidence). What could be more straightforward? Unfortunately, despite a century of theorising validity, it is still quite unclear exactly how much and what kind of evidence or analysis is required in order to establish a claim to validity. Despite Kane's attempts to simplify validation by developing a methodology to support validation practice, one which is grounded in argumentation (e.g. Kane, 1992), and the "simple, accessible direction for practitioners" (Goldstein & Behuniak, 2011, p.36) provided by the *Standards* (AERA, APA, & NCME, 2014), good validation studies still prove surprisingly challenging to implement. Increasing assessment of 21st Century skills such as collaborative problem-solving, creativity and decision-making, potentially requiring different forms of assessment, will only make the process more complex.

In response, a framework for evidencing assessment validity in large-scale, high stakes examinations and a set of methods for gathering validity evidence was developed in 2008/2009. The framework includes a number of validation questions to be answered by the collection of appropriate evidence and by related analyses. Both framework and methods were piloted and refined. Systematic implementation of the validation framework followed which employs two parallel validation strategies:

- an experimental validation strategy which entails full post-hoc validation studies undertaken solely by research staff
- an operational validation strategy which entails the gathering and synthesis of validation evidence currently generated routinely within operational processes.

Five years on, a number of issues have emerged which prompted a review of the validation framework and several conceptual and textual changes to the language of the framework. These changes strengthen the theoretical structure underpinning the framework.

This paper presents the revised framework, and reflects on the original scope of the framework and how this has changed. We also consider the suitability and meaningfulness of the language employed by the framework and explore the implications of recent fundamental changes made to the framework for the validation of both traditional assessments and those designed to assess 21st Century skills.

## **Full paper:**

<http://www.cambridgeassessment.org.uk/Images/202665-research-matters-19-winter-2015.pdf>