



CAMBRIDGE ASSESSMENT

Translating validation research into everyday practice: issues facing an international awarding body

Stuart Shaw* and Victoria Crisp

*shaw.s@cie.org.uk

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Abstract

An argument-based approach to validation ensures that the task of validating inferences derived from test scores is scientifically sound (Kane, 2006). The approach first entails determining the inferences to be specified based on test scores, then deciding on the sources of evidence that would support or refute those inferences, collecting appropriate data, and finally analyzing evidence (giving consideration to competing interpretations of test scores). However, articulating such a transparent, multi-perspective validity argument is both demanding and potentially impracticable. Collecting appropriate evidence requires dedicated and significant research effort.

Validity evidence must be gathered for every assessment, but the process of constructing, marking and awarding an assessment involves many different people over a period of time. There will be commonality between assessments for certain parts of the construction, marking or grading process. In many assessment processes the evidence for validity is implicit. It is possible to demonstrate confidence in the interpretations of the test scores because a particular actor in the process has undertaken their role correctly or has certain knowledge. The expert participants make frequent internal judgements when constructing a test, marking a script or participating in grading. To evidence the confidence in these judgements these need to be made explicit, whether through audit trails or through various research techniques.

This paper discusses the challenges around how to routinely elicit validity evidence and proposes some potential strategies for use in an operational context. It also explores the potential for nurturing new institutional thinking and awareness of validity. Thus giving individuals the opportunity to consider the impact that their part of the overall process has on the valid interpretations of test scores by test takers and other stakeholders, as well as informing policy for the implementation of assessment validation.

Reference

Kane, M.T. (2006). Validation. In *Education Measurement* (4th ed.), ed. R.L. Brennan. Westport: Praeger.



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