



CAMBRIDGE ASSESSMENT

'Can you dig it?': developing an approach to validly assessing diverse skills in an archaeological context

Martin Johnson¹ and Carena Lewis²

¹Assessment Research and Development Division, Cambridge Assessment

²Department of Archaeology, University of Cambridge

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Abstract

The Higher Education Field Academy (HEFA) is a widening participation programme of the University of Cambridge (Department of Archaeology). It aims to use participation in archaeological excavation to help secondary school students build confidence in their existing abilities (academic and personal) and develop a range of transferable skills needed for success in further education and the workplace. The Assessment Research and Development department at Cambridge Assessment has been collaborating with HEFA to refine its assessment procedures.

The development process has encountered a number of conceptual challenges which resonate with areas of vocational assessment. A principal challenge has been to construct an assessment model that is sympathetic to the intentions of the learning programme whilst providing robust observation-based outcomes and avoiding heavy requirements that might corrupt learning relationships. This involved developing an approach to validly assessing 'soft' skills that could be scaled up in an activity that already requires high staff-learner ratios.

This paper describes the process of assessment development; through the stages of construct elicitation and articulating expert practitioners' tacit skills, to the validation of the assessment through trialling and qualitative and quantitative data gathering. The challenges encountered in this collaborative project have important parallels with vocational assessment; not least in providing an example of a localised development of an assessment model which contrasts with more recent 'top-down' trends in assessment.

