



ASSOCIATION OF TEST PUBLISHERS

# A proposal for collaboration between the Psychometrics Committee and the Association of Test Publishers of South Africa

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# Table of contents

Introduction ..... 3

Overview of the Association of Test Publishers of South Africa ..... 4

Possible points for collaboration ..... 5

Conclusion..... 7

References ..... 8

APPENDIX A - ATP SA Members Charter..... 9

# Introduction

In light of the history of South Africa and its fairly recent change to a democratic dispensation and a constitution that promotes the ethical and fair treatment of all citizens, Psychology has a critical role to play in South Africa with regard to skills development, the identification and development of potential in people, informing learning and development practices, organisational design, and assisting those requiring psychological and neuropsychological support. In order for the role of Psychology and Psychology practitioners to optimally contribute to people development in South Africa, all stakeholders and the relevant governing bodies need to work together to strengthen the discipline, to promote the science of psychology and to use psychology to help address the challenges of our society.

Following the productive and positive stakeholder meeting that was held on the 5<sup>th</sup> of March 2015, the Association of Test Publishers (ATP) would like to propose the continuation of such collaboration and to promote open communication between the ATP, the HPCSA and other stakeholder parties. The documents that formed the basis of the discussions at the above-mentioned meeting were generally very positively received and we would like to retain the positive energy and spirit of collaboration that it brought about. With this in mind, and in recognition that there are broad areas of overlap and agreement, for example, following internationally accepted and recognised best practice principles and procedures, such as that of the European Federation of Psychological Associations (EFPA) which has already been formally accepted by the HPCSA as their base framework.

As was shown by the positivity around (prior to, during and immediately following) the stakeholder meeting of 5 March 2015, open communication and discussions toward obtaining clear guidelines and accepted procedures while striving to accommodate different stakeholder groups' perspectives and input can lead to a very positive and mutually accepted and practically achievable way forward.

While in the past, the relationship between the Professional Board for Psychology (and particularly the Psychometrics Committee) of the HPCSA and the Association of Test Publishers of South Africa (ATP) has not been as positive or productive as could be hoped for, we are convinced that - in the spirit of clear, open and timeous communication and collaboration towards positive joint goals in line with international best practices – we can resolve issues that have been problematic and reach a point where all parties and stakeholders can positively contribute to the important scientific and professional work that needs to be done in the field of psychological assessment towards optimal people development in South Africa.

The Executive Committee of the ATP, backed by support of other member organisations, feels strongly that it is important to build a strong professional relationship of positive collaboration and mutual respect between the Board and the ATP as together we can achieve much more for the good of the profession of psychology and the potential benefits that this in turn holds for the country.

It is with this aim in mind and in a spirit of positive collaboration that we present the proposal contained in this document to the Psychometrics Committee. In it we share the vision, mission, and objectives of the ATP and propose points of possible collaboration.

# Overview of the Association of Test Publishers of South Africa

ATP SA is a non-profit association organised to represent providers of tests and assessment tools and/or services related to education, employment, certification/licensing or clinical use.

At a meeting on 8 April 2005, the Psychometrics Committee of the HPCSA requested the coordination of test publishers as a stakeholder group. The ATP was formed to represent the interests of test developers and publishers in South Africa and to with the aim of establishing a single entity for better collaboration and ease of communication with the HPCSA. Mr William Shisana described the meeting as “the beginning of a journey of cooperation and consultation”.

The ATP was formed at a meeting which took place at Thomas International’s Offices in Brooklyn, Pretoria on 11 May 2005. A formal constitution was created and accepted, establishing the ATP as a legal body. The vision and mission of the ATP SA are described below.

## **Vision**

The Association has adopted the mission statement of the Association of Test Publishers International, which reads as follows:

“It is the mission of this Association to promote the ethical and effective use of assessment instruments.”

## **Mission**

ATP SA strives to promote and advance the role of quality assessment in the workplace and wherever else assessments are used, advancing the profession of testing as a whole. To achieve this, ATP SA focuses on two primary approaches:

- **Advocacy for the industry:** Similar to ATP International, ATP SA monitors legislative, legal and regulatory bodies that commonly deal with testing issues. This reflects ATP SA’s mission to promote the ethical and effective use of assessment instruments through informing the public and governmental bodies about the contributions professionally developed tests can make.
- **Education for its members and the broader public:** ATP SA strives to promote the dissemination of information to interested parties within South Africa, informing best practice principles in line with international practices and contributing to the public’s right to be informed about testing and good testing practice.

The ATP fully recognises and fully subscribes to the following:

- The importance of using assessments according to ethical, scientific and other principles of internationally accepted best practice
- The value of having assessments evaluated in terms of their quality, in line with international best practice
- The need to categorise assessments in terms of the accessibility to individuals with different levels of qualification

## Possible points for collaboration

In 2004, the HSRC conducted a nation-wide survey around a needs analysis for test users (Foxcroft, Paterson, le Roux & Herbst, 2004). They identified a number of key areas that needed to be addressed around testing. Recommendations around the use of tests, regulation, training, development were made. Most of these have not been fully addressed in the last 10 years and addressing the issues that were highlighted and which are still important would form a good basis from which to start the way forward.

In the spirit of collaboration, we would like to consider these recommendations and to perhaps set an agenda for the continued co-operation between test publishers and the Psychometrics Committee. From ATP's perspective, we have indicated where we see clear possibilities for being able to partner with the Psychometrics Committee to help achieve these goals:

1. Develop a clear description of what constitutes a psychological test and how it is differentiated from other types of tests

Currently, there is not a widely accepted definition of what is versus what is not a psychological test. If the determination of whether a test is measuring a psychological construct or not is purely the domain of the Professional Board of Psychology, we feel that the definition should be one that Psychology Professionals agree with and understand. ATP would like to work closely with the Board and other stakeholders in formulating the definition of what is and what is not a psychological test. This can also be done in collaboration with Psychological Societies such as PsySSA and SIOPSA and higher education to gain wider consensus.

2. Disseminate user-friendly information on what a psychological test is and who may use such a test as an awareness raising exercise among those stakeholders external to the psychology professions who use psychological test information

Once a clear definition has been formulated, this can be easily communicated to external stakeholders. This will also help clarify who may or may not access different types of tests. This will also help reduce some anxiety in the industry around the requirements of submission of tests for classification. Most members of ATP and professional societies have a

well-established marketing platform that can easily be used to disseminate information to professionals and the wider public.

3. Clearly delineate the purposes of test use and the scope of practice for professionals in the various registration categories and re-align training programmes accordingly

In some registration categories, the restrictions regarding the use of tests are somewhat counter-intuitive. For example, research psychologists may research, design, analyse and otherwise interpret the statistical results of psychological tests, but may not provide feedback to individuals (which is sometimes a requirement for research to be conducted). This is sometimes uncomfortable, as the person who understands the test best cannot relay this interpretation to the individual completing it. We understand that the scope of practice documents are still in development, and we believe that stakeholder engagement around scope of practice would help move the finalisation of these documents forward.

4. Review the test classification process and find mechanisms to complete the process with greater speed.

ATP members have collaborated with Board members to create the current proposal for the test classification process. The ATP are happy to continue to support the Board in implementing the processes included in the proposal, or coming up with new ways where the suggested process may require revision.

5. Introduce a comprehensive test review system using a standardised format and provide practitioners with easy access to the review information.

The ATP have for a long time championed the use of the EFPA rating system for the evaluation and review of tests. We believe this is the route that has been accepted to be followed by the Board, and will support the Board in any of their efforts to practically implement EFPA-aligned principles and procedures. ATP members are in support of peer-review, and are happy to have their tests formally reviewed according to EFPA standards and procedures, given that the reviewers are competent and can provide feedback timeously.

6. Develop competency standards for all levels of assessment practitioners and revise training programmes where necessary so that they can produce practitioners with the desired competencies.

The ATP would like to work with the board and representatives of higher education departments to ensure that the skills required to use psychological tests appropriately and effectively are properly addressed in higher education training programmes across all registration categories.

7. Training programmes to build test development expertise are needed and black test developers in particular are needed.

The ATP feel very strongly that this is an urgent need. We would like to collaborate with training institutions and with the Board to help promote the development of these rare skills and support black test developers moving into and becoming established in the field of psychological test development, publication and distribution.

8. Develop a Code of Practice for test developers, publishers and distributors.

Please find attached the Members Charter of the ATP that could stand as a Code of Practice.

The following points included as recommendations are not included as suggestions as they are no longer deemed relevant, or are not deemed relevant to the specific collaboration between ATP and the Board.

1. Urgently review the requirement that practitioners should only use tests registered with the Professional Board for Psychology and shift the emphasis to requiring that practitioners use high quality, culturally appropriate tests. (Related to points 1 and 2.)
2. Provide appropriate continuing professional development activities related to advances in the field, psychological test use and assessment practice. (Related to Point 7.)
3. A model needs to be developed with respect to who will be responsible for developing tests and who might coordinate test development.
4. Existing national and international tests identified in the present project need to be urgently adapted, revised or updated.
5. New culturally and linguistically appropriate tests need to be developed to fill gaps in the toolkits of assessment practitioners. (Related to Point 7)

## Conclusion

It is ATP's greatest wish that we can partner with the Professional Board for Psychology in order to provide support, guidance on matters regarding psychological tests and assessments, and mechanisms that would hopefully allow smooth transitions and efficient functioning of processes where possible. ATP shares and applauds the HPCSA's values of prudence, transparency, accountability, fairness and social responsibility, thereby safeguarding the interests of all its stakeholders. We would like to have a system in place whereby the ATP can hold open conversation with the Professional Board (and particularly the Psychometrics Committee) on issues that impact on psychological testing in South Africa.

## References

Foxcroft. C., Paterson, H., le Roux, N., & Herbst, D. (2004). *The test use patterns and needs of psychological assessment practitioners*. Pretoria: Human Sciences Research Council.

# APPENDIX A - ATP SA Members Charter

The following standards serve as criteria that the ATP (South Africa) members endeavour to adhere to when developing, publishing distributing and publishing psychometric instruments. These standards place particular emphasis on the appreciation of South African cultural and diversity features whilst being modeled of the European Federation of Psychologists' Associations (EFPA) Review Model for the description and evaluation of psychological tests to ensure adherence to best practice standards internationally.

## **A. ATP (South Africa) members will provide test materials meeting with minimum accepted standards**

This section is concerned with the various attributes of the documentation supplied with the psychometric instrument including administrator's manual, technical handbooks, booklets of norms, supplements and updates. Test publishers and suppliers undertake to provide a complete set of material to the recipient.

The ATP (South Africa) members strive to meet four broad standards with respect to the test material: Explanation of the rationale, adequate and appropriate technical documentation, clear procedural instructions and ensuring materials of an acceptable quality.

### **A.1 ATP (South Africa) members will provide an explanation of the rationale of the psychometric instrument**

The presentation of the rationale will include the theoretical foundation of the construct, the test development procedure including steps to standardise the instrument in South Africa, item analysis and item analysis model used, an explanation of the content validity and a summary of relevant research.

### **A.2 ATP (South Africa) members will provide adequate and appropriate technical documentation**

The focus of this section is on the quality, comprehensiveness and clarity of the documentation. The technical documentation requires that a well-argued and clearly presented description of what it is designed to measure and why it was constructed in the way it was. Full details of item sources, piloting, item analysis, comparison studies and changes made during development trails should be provided. Clear and detailed information will be provided about sizes and sources of the standardisation sample and standardisation procedure with particular emphasis on the process of

South African standardisation. Clear and detailed information is provided about sizes and sources of norms groups (including the South African norm group(s) presented). Good and clear explanations will be provided about the reliability of the instrument and a comprehensive range of internal consistency and retest measures will be provided with explanations of their relevance and the generalisability of the assessment instrument, which will include generalisability in the South African context. Good and clear explanation of the validity of the instrument with wide range of appropriate studies clearly and fairly described.

### **A.3 ATP (South Africa) members will provide the necessary procedural instructions for the user**

For test administration, clear and detailed explanations and a step-by-step procedural guide will be provided with detailed advice on dealing with candidates' questions and potential problem situations. For test scoring and norming, clear and detailed information will be provided with checks described to deal with possible errors in scoring. For interpretation and reporting, detailed advice will be provided on interpreting different scores, understanding normative measures, including South African examples, and dealing with relationships between different scales. Sufficient illustrative examples and case studies will be provided - including South African case studies. For providing feedback and debriefing test takers, detailed advice will be provided on how to present feedback to candidates. For good practice issues on fairness and bias, detailed information will be reported about sex and ethnic bias studies with South African examples, which will include relevant warnings about use and generalisation of validities. For restrictions on use, clear descriptions will be provided as to who should and should not be assessed, with well-explained justifications for restrictions such as disability, minimum literacy levels required etc. Detailed references to relevant supporting academic literature and cross-references to other related assessment instrument materials will be provided.

### **A.4 The quality of the materials ATP (South Africa) members will provide will meet a minimum accepted standard**

The general quality of the test material including test booklets, answer sheets, test objects and software will meet a minimum accepted standard. The local adaptation of the test including language translation will also be of a minimum accepted standard. The ease with which the test taker can understand the test and with which the responses or answers can be made by the test taker will be of the required standard. The quality of the items will also meet with local and international accepted standards.

**B. ATP (South Africa) members will regulate their test publishing process in accordance with self-governance principles**

This section is concerned with the regulation of the test publishing process. Test publishers and suppliers undertake to adopt a self-regulatory process that enables compliance with the principles and regulations embodied in the EFPA review model for the description and evaluation of psychological and educational tests. These processes run parallel with any legislative or regulatory processes that may be required by statutory bodies.

**B.1 ATP (South Africa) members will conduct an evaluation of their psychological and educational tests**

ATP (South Africa) members will for all their psychological and educational tests conduct a complete review and rating in accordance with the EFPA review model and guidelines for the description and evaluation of psychological tests.

**B.2 ATP (South Africa) members will classify their psychological and educational tests for the suitability of test user required**

The ATP (South Africa) members will classify their psychological and educational tests in accordance with the EFPA criteria indicating the suitability and level of expertise required by the test user.

**B.3 ATP (South Africa) members undertake to make available the overall self-evaluation and level of test user expertise required for all their psychological and educational tests**

The ATP (South Africa) members will publish on the ATP (South Africa) website an overall evaluation of their psychological and educational tests and include their classification of the level of expertise required by test users.