

Box 11.

Portfolio assessors: scenarios

Combining the role of the mentor and assessor is often considered problematic. On the hand, most people will agree that the mentor is probably the person who is best informed about the learner's competencies. As a consequence, ignoring the mentor's opinion in assessing the portfolio can be considered as missing the chance to improve the validity of the assessment. On the other hand, combining the roles of assessor and mentor can put a strain on the relationship between mentor and learner, because learners may be reluctant to discuss any difficulties they are facing for fear of repercussions in the assessment. Below we use the metaphors of the mentor as teacher, PhD supervisor, driving instructor, and coach to distinguish between four (non exclusive) scenarios. When mentors are in the role of a teacher, their role of assessor is most prominent. When they are in the role of a coach, they do not assess at all.

The teacher

This is the most common assessment scenario in education. Just like most teachers in primary, secondary, and higher education, mentors discuss their learners' performance and progress *and* assess their level of competence at the end of a course.

PhD supervisor

In some scenarios the role of the mentors in the assessment procedure of portfolios can be compared with the role of supervisors of PhD students. In many countries, the formal assessment of theses/portfolios is the responsibility of a committee. Supervisors invite their peers to sit on the committee but they themselves are not a member of the committee. A negative assessment of the thesis/portfolio would harm their reputation among their peers. For this reason they are highly unlikely to invite their peers to sit on the committee unless they are convinced the portfolio meets the criteria. As a consequence, mentors and students have the same interest: to produce a thesis or portfolio that merits a positive judgment.

Driving license instructor

In this model the roles of the mentor and the assessor are strictly separated. The mentor/driving instructor mentors the learner in acquiring the required competencies, which are shown in the portfolio. If the mentor thinks the learner is competent, he invites an assessor from a professional body (i.e. the examiner from the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency) to assess the competence of the learner result. The learners can also approach the licensing agency themselves.

Coach

In this model, the learners themselves have the initiative. They can ask, for instance, a senior colleague to coach them until they have achieved the required level of competence. This scenario is likely, for instance, when a professional wants to acquire an additional qualification. The assessor would be someone from an external body.