

# **Skills for Justice**

## **Assessment Strategy for Scottish Vocational Qualifications in Advice and Guidance**

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## 1. Background

Skills for Justice is the sector skills council for employers, employees and volunteers in the Community Justice, Community Safety and Legal sectors throughout the United Kingdom. In addition, Skills for Justice have assumed responsibility for the Advice and Guidance sector and have developed this strategy for SVQs in Advice & Guidance. This Assessment Strategy has been developed for Advice and Guidance however it aligns with Skills for Justice overarching Assessment Strategy for other sectors within the Justice footprint. This includes:

- Custodial Care including the public and private sector establishments
- Community Justice
- Courts and Tribunals Services
- Forensic Science
- Fire and Rescue Sector
- Legal Services
- Prosecution Services
- Police Forces
- Law Enforcement Agencies including SOCA, HMRC, UK Border Agency
- Youth Justice

**This assessment strategy applies to Scottish Vocational Qualifications for Advice and Guidance.**

## 2. Introduction

This document sets out the specifications of Skills for Justice for the assessment and quality assurance for Scottish Vocational Qualifications that sit within the Advice and Guidance sector. The following sections outline Skills for Justice's specific principles in regard to:

1. external quality control of assessment
2. workplace assessment
3. the use and characteristics of simulation
4. the required occupational expertise of assessors and verifiers
5. liaison between the SSC and the Awarding Bodies

These principles are in addition to the regulatory requirements that Awarding Bodies must meet for the delivery of Scottish Vocational Qualifications as required by the Regulatory Authority, SQA Accreditation.

This Assessment Strategy does not describe these systems in detail. It only provides the overarching principles. These systems may vary from one Awarding Body to another and Skills for Justice accepts this, providing the overarching principles of this document are consistently put into practice.

Skills for Justice sees itself as working in partnership with Awarding Bodies in order to deliver quality assessment and will be happy to provide them with appropriate support in implementing its requirements.

## 3. Quality Assurance A rigorous and robust system of Internal and External Verification

The monitoring and standardisation of assessment decisions will be achieved by a robust and strong external quality assurance process. The mechanisms required to achieve this are outlined by the Regulatory Authority.

In addition to the Regulator's requirements Skills for Justice will require all external quality assurance reports and other data relating to a Centre to be evaluated by the Awarding Body and any risks relating to quality control to be addressed. External quality assurance, monitoring, support and control should be put in place as appropriate to each centre's level of risk.

## 4. Workplace Assessment

Skills for Justice believes that direct observation by a competent assessor (as outlined in Section 6.1) or testimony from an Expert Witness (as outlined in Section 6.2) is always to be preferred.

Expert Witness testimony has parity with assessor observation unless otherwise stated in unit evidence requirements. The Expert Witness testimony may be used as an alternative assessment method to Assessor observation but should not entirely replace this. **The Assessor is responsible for making the final judgement in terms of the candidate meeting the evidence requirements for the unit.**

Skills for Justice recognises that there are alternative evidence sources which may be used where direct observation is not possible or practical e.g. work products, records, reflective accounts, professional discussion etc.

In order to ensure that the evidence used to assess candidates is valid, all centres must demonstrate that the candidates have access to the types of resources commonly in use in the sector and that the pressures and constraints of the workplace are reflected.

It is accepted that the assessment of some knowledge and understanding may take place in a different environment, for example in a training and development centre or another environment, which is not the immediate workplace. However, the assessment of this knowledge and understanding should be linked directly to workplace performance and should include performance evidence.

## 5. Simulation

Assessment in a simulated environment should only be used in the following circumstances:

- Where the nature of the work activity presents high risk/danger to the candidate and others, for example, personal safety
- Where evidence in the workplace will not be demonstrated within an acceptable time frame

The Awarding Bodies should issue adequate guidance to their centres as to how these simulations should be planned and organised. In general this guidance must ensure that the demands on the candidate during simulation are neither more nor less than they would be in a real work situation. This guidance should clearly state the strategy for simulations. Simulations must be agreed between the representative from the Awarding Body who is responsible for external quality assurance and with the person who is responsible for internal quality assurance in the assessment centre, prior to use.

### **ALL SIMULATIONS SHOULD FOLLOW THESE BASIC PRINCIPLES:**

1. A centre's overall strategy for simulation must be examined and approved by the person from the Awarding Body who is responsible for external quality assurance.
2. The nature of the contingency and the physical environment for the simulation must be realistic and candidates should be given no indication as to exactly what contingencies they may come across.
3. Where simulations are used they must reflect the requirements of the units.
4. The location and environment of simulation must be agreed with the person responsible for internal quality assurance, prior to taking place and be checked by the Awarding Bodies representative responsible for external quality assurance.

5. All simulations must be planned, developed and documented by the centre in a way that ensures the simulation correctly reflects what the specific unit seeks to assess and all simulations should follow these documented plans.
6. There should be a range of simulations to cover the same aspect of a unit so that the risk of candidates successfully colluding is reduced.

## **6. Requirements of Assessors, Expert Witnesses and Verifiers**

Skills for Justice believes that the occupational expertise of assessors, expert witnesses and those responsible for internal and external quality assurance is one of the key factors underpinning valid, fair and reliable assessment. The integrity and professionalism of assessors, expert witnesses and those responsible for quality assurance are of paramount importance. Centres must ensure that staff whose role is assessment or quality assurance are given sufficient time to carry out their role effectively.

### **6.1 Assessors**

All assessors must:

1. be occupationally competent. This means that each assessor must, according to current sector practice, be competent in the functions covered by the units they are assessing. They will have gained their occupational competence working within the Advice and Guidance sector or within an appropriate occupational sector. They are not required to occupy a position in the organisation more senior than that of the candidate they are assessing. However, centres must be alert to the risks that all such arrangements could present and ensure that sufficient quality controls are in place through the internal quality assurance process to minimise the possibility of collusion between candidates and assessors.
2. provide current records of their skills and supporting knowledge and understanding in the context of a recent role directly related to the units they are assessing as a practitioner, trainer or manager.
3. be familiar with the units; and must be able to interpret and make judgements on current working practices and technologies within the area of work
4. maintain their occupational competence by actively engaging in continuous professional development activities in order to keep up to date with developments relating to the changes taking place in the Advice and Guidance sectors. These activities may include those offered by the Awarding Body, Skills for Justice or other relevant providers in the sector
5. hold or be working towards the appropriate assessor qualification specified by the Regulatory Authority.
6. Approved centres will be required to provide the Awarding Body with current evidence of how each assessor meets these requirements; for example, certificates of achievement, testimonials, references or any other relevant records. Where an assessor is working towards the relevant Assessor qualification, Awarding Bodies must require that assessment decisions are countersigned by another assessor who holds an assessor qualification. The assessor holding the qualification for assessing must meet the criteria laid out in points 1 and 2 above.

Where a new qualification is being introduced and there are not sufficient occupationally competent assessors to meet the counter signatory requirements as above, centres may use assessors who are not occupationally competent for up to 18 months from introduction of the qualification.

Any such arrangements should be agreed with the Awarding Body and be monitored through the external quality assurance process.

## 6.2 Expert Witnesses

The use of expert witnesses is encouraged as a contribution to the provision of performance evidence presented for assessment. The role of the expert witness is to submit evidence to the assessor as to the competence of the candidate in any given unit. This evidence must directly relate to candidate's performance in the work place which has been seen by the expert witness.

All Expert Witnesses must:

1. be occupationally competent in the area being assessed. This means that each expert witness must, according to current sector practice, be competent in the functions covered by the units to which they are contributing. They will have gained their occupational competence working within the Advice and Guidance sector or within an appropriate occupational sector.
2. maintain their occupational competence by actively engaging in continuous professional development activities in order to keep up to date with developments relating to the changes taking place in the Advice and Guidance sector. These may include those offered by the Awarding Body, Skills for Justice or other relevant providers in the sector.
3. provide current records of their skills and current supporting knowledge and understanding in the context of a recent role directly related to the qualification/unit that they are witnessing as a practitioner, trainer or manager.
4. be familiar with the unit; and must be able to interpret current working practices and technologies within the area of work.
5. be inducted by the centre so that they are familiar with the standards for those units for which they are to provide expert witness evidence. They must also understand the centre's recording requirements and will need guidance on the skills required to provide evidence for the NOS/units.

## 6.3 Internal Quality Assurance

Those responsible for the internal quality assurance must:

1. be occupationally knowledgeable across the range of units for which they are responsible prior to commencing the role. Due to the risk critical nature of the work and the legal implications of the assessment process, they must understand the nature and context of the assessors' work and that of their candidates. This means that they must have worked closely with staff who carry out the functions covered by the qualifications, possibly by training or supervising them, and have sufficient knowledge of these functions to be able to offer credible advice on the interpretation of the standards. Those conducting internal quality assurance must also sample the assessment process and resolve differences and conflicts on assessment decisions.
2. understand the content, structure and assessment requirements for the qualification they are verifying
3. maintain their occupational knowledge by actively engaging in continuous professional development activities in order to keep up to date with developments relating to the changes taking place in the Advice and Guidance sector. These activities may include those offered by the Awarding Body, Skills for Justice or other relevant providers in the sector.
4. hold or be working towards the appropriate internal verification qualification as specified by the Regulatory Authority.
5. occupy a position in the organisation that gives them the authority and resources to coordinate the work of assessors, provide authoritative advice, call meetings as appropriate, visit and observe assessment practice, and carry out all the other important roles of internal quality assurance.
6. have an appropriate induction to Advice and Guidance qualifications that they are quality assuring, provided to them by the Centre, and have access to ongoing training and updates

on current issues relevant to these qualifications. Information on the induction and continuing professional development of carrying out internal quality assurance must be made available to the Awarding Body through its external verification process.

7. where the person responsible for internal quality assurance is working towards an internal quality assurance qualification, Awarding Bodies must require that their quality assurance decisions are counter-signed by another person who holds the qualification for internal quality assurance.

## **6.4 External Quality Assurance**

Those persons conducting external quality assurance must:

1. be occupationally knowledgeable and have gained their knowledge working within the sector or associated professional/occupational area.
2. have a thorough understanding of the qualifications they will be quality assuring
3. have a detailed knowledge of the Awarding Bodies' systems and documentation
4. have a thorough understanding of the guidance produced by the Awarding Bodies describing assessment and quality assurance practice
5. maintain their occupational knowledge by actively engaging in continuous professional development activities
6. keep up to date with developments relating to the changes taking place in the Advice and Guidance sector. These activities may include those offered by the Awarding Body, Skills for Justice or other relevant providers in the sector.
7. hold, or be working towards, the appropriate external verifier qualification as specified by the Regulatory Authority.