



Maritime Skills Alliance

Assessment Strategy (v13)

Section 1

1.1 Purpose

The purpose of this assessment strategy is to set out the quality assurance arrangements for the assessment and verification of Proficiency Qualifications for the maritime sector throughout the UK. It provides information about the experience, qualifications and occupational competence requirements for those involved in the process. It also details the evidence requirements and conditions of assessment necessary to achieve the Proficiency Qualifications. This strategy will be useful in informing learners, employers, assessors, verifiers and Awarding Bodies alike.

1.2 Scope

This assessment strategy covers all current Proficiency Qualifications, which are either accredited within the Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF) for use in England, Wales and Northern Ireland or accredited by SQA Accreditation for use in Scotland, and approved by the Maritime Skills Alliance and its members (see [SQA Awarding](#) and [MSA](#) websites).

All Proficiency Qualifications for the maritime sector, which are approved by the Maritime Skills Alliance and its members are covered by this assessment strategy. Those Proficiency Qualifications that have additional regulatory or specialist assessment requirements are identified and dealt with in specific sections of this strategy.

Note that both SQA Awarding, and the Maritime and Coastguard Agency, as the regulator for the maritime sector, also have their own assessment requirements, as do approved providers.

1.3 Features

Proficiency qualifications for the maritime sector cover all aspects of vessel handling at sea, and on rivers and other inland waterways. They also cover navigation, vessel engineering and specialist areas including handling of passengers and cargo, sea fishing, and towage.

These qualifications require evidence of proficiency and underpinning knowledge, which includes activities undertaken in the workplace. Their purpose is to raise skills levels and performance across the workforce and to help facilitate transfer and progression.

They ensure that individuals develop the skills and knowledge, which are needed to perform safely, reliably and consistently at work and to the standards required by the Maritime and Coastguard Agency. The knowledge content of the qualifications is designed to underpin the competences required and enhance an individual's ability to respond to unfamiliar situations. It will support those who require the basics, but will also develop those who require significantly more detailed knowledge and understanding to progress to more senior positions.

The flexibilities inherent in a unit based qualifications framework allow employers and individuals to choose qualifications and units most appropriate to the job roles that they are undertaking and which meet regulatory requirements. Progression and transfer within the sector is thereby facilitated by the completion of further units appropriate to the new job roles. These qualifications play a key part in ensuring that the sector has the qualified workforce it needs to meet future challenges.

1.4 The Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF)

All qualifications accredited on the Regulated Qualifications Framework (which has replaced the Qualifications and Credit Framework) are made up of units of assessment, which are allocated a credit value. This credit value is based on the average amount of time taken to complete the learning and assessment required by each unit. The calculation is based on notional learning hours: 10 notional learning hours = 1 credit. Units with differing credit values are therefore a feature of qualifications, reflecting the varying learning and assessment requirements of units.

Credits become the common currency between qualifications and are accumulated in different sized qualifications. These are:

- Award: 1-12 credits
- Certificate: 13-36 credits
- Diploma: 37 or more credits

Each unit of assessment is also allocated a level that reflects the degree of challenge of each unit. The units of assessment detail the learning outcomes and assessment criteria which a candidate can accumulate, and combine together within a qualification of the appropriate size and level to meet their individual and employer needs.

1.5 The Scottish Qualifications and Credit Framework (SCQF)

Scottish Government encourages bodies to ensure qualifications are credit rated for the SCQF wherever possible. Qualifications contained within the mandatory section of a Scottish Modern Apprenticeship and SVQs must always be credit rated for the SCQF. An increasing number of maritime qualifications and units are therefore credit rated against SCQF level descriptors.

1.6 Proficiency Qualifications

Proficiency Qualifications in Maritime Studies are designed for use in the maritime sector. They cover all aspects of water-borne transportation and related activities.

1.7 Equality of Opportunity and Diversity

The Maritime Skills Alliance is committed to developing and implementing high quality qualifications, which are accredited for use throughout the UK, which comply with all current relevant legislation, and Ofqual and SQA Accreditation regulatory requirements. Awarding Bodies' policies, procedures and guidance detail the equality of opportunity and diversity implications for assessors and verifiers.

Section 2

2.1 Working with Awarding Bodies

An effective working relationship between Maritime Skills Alliance and awarding bodies, whose markets relate to the maritime sector, is central to the successful delivery of the Maritime Skills Alliance's strategy. Maritime Skills Alliance will continue to work closely with awarding bodies through its Maritime Qualifications Board (MQB).

In addition to engagement and technical activity at MQB level, individual memoranda of understanding and/or action plans are agreed with each Awarding Body to drive forward a range of operational and development activity.

The Maritime Skills Alliance respects the individuality and confidentiality of each awarding body offering qualifications to the sector in which they are offered. The Maritime Skills Alliance understands the need for differentiation in types and levels of service provided by awarding bodies to meet wide-ranging conditions across the sector, its labour market and potential sector entrants.

2.2 External quality control

The sector view is that it is important for external quality control to be achieved through an effective external verifier sampling process combined with an annual approved centre risk rating system. Primarily, external quality control is aimed at improving internal verification and assessment practice, and the effective exchange of information between centres, awarding bodies and the Maritime Skills Alliance.

Awarding bodies' external quality control will be achieved through these requirements:

Each year all external verifiers will complete the recommended number of days of Continuing Professional Development (CPD), comprising training or other developmental activities relevant to the maritime sector and approved by the appropriate Awarding Body. Training should include relevant updating in respect of changes to legislation and regulations impacting on the sector, standardisation activities and good practice developments in assessment and verification. As appropriate awarding bodies will invite the Maritime Skills Alliance and the Maritime and Coastguard Agency to observe and/or provide relevant input to CPD activity.

- Awarding bodies will operate a risk rating system that is applied to each active approved centre
- Awarding bodies will carry out risk assessment and risk rate each approved centre for maritime qualifications. External verification activity, and in particular the scope and rigour of sampling, is required to reflect the risk rating status of each centre.
- Maritime Skills Alliance, through its Maritime Qualifications Board, will maintain ongoing dialogue with awarding bodies to monitor practices, consider issues and gain feedback, which impact on qualifications design and the use of units of assessment.

2.3 Approval of Centres to offer Qualifications linked to international and UK regulatory requirements

In addition to the approval procedures and quality assurance systems developed by Awarding Bodies, it is necessary for centres that wish to offer qualifications that meet the requirements of the Maritime and Coastguard Agency to also meet their approval and quality assurance procedures. This is a separate and additional requirement over and above that of the awarding bodies. The MCA should be contacted direct to ascertain their current demands

Section 3

3.1 Approved Centres

Approved Centres which are learning and skills providers, deliver training and assessment services to learners and their employers in and around the workplace. Providers usually employ or contract with assessors, who often work peripatetically, to visit learners in their workplace at pre-arranged or contracted times.

3.2 Occupational competence of assessors

The role of an assessor is a demanding and complex one, requiring a high degree of both interpersonal and organisational skills. They are required to make accurate and objective decisions as to whether the learner's performance meets the assessment requirements laid out in units of assessment.

For assessments to be considered valid, the assessor must meet the following requirements. Any assessments carried out by personnel who do not meet these requirements will be deemed a contribution to workplace testimony.

Assessors are required to:

- Provide current evidence of competence, knowledge and understanding in the areas to be assessed, to the satisfaction of the awarding body and the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (where appropriate). This will normally be achieved through providing evidence of competence in the roles that are to be assessed, which may be a log book showing time spent at sea and job roles undertaken, and/ or the achievement of qualifications relevant to the areas being assessed or by virtue of the professional seafaring certification that they hold.
- Demonstrate competent practice in work based assessment methods through the achievement of appropriate assessor qualifications on the RQF or ones accredited by SQA Accreditation. Any new assessors, who do not currently hold any of these qualifications, should undertake the qualifications based on the current Learning and Development (L & D) NOS. Assessors with previous unit achievement of A1, D32 and/or D33 satisfy requirements, provided evidence of continuous professional development has updated workplace assessment practice. Recognition of assessors in this way is only valid between a centre and an Awarding Body in respect of specific qualifications, and is not transferable to other bodies or qualifications.
- Demonstrate their continuing professional development to ensure they are up to date with work practices in their sector area of expertise and developments in the Proficiency Qualifications they assess.
- Have a full and current understanding of the content and requirements of the qualifications being assessed.
- Operate safely as an assessor in a maritime environment. MSA therefore strongly recommends that the relevant MCA recognised safety courses have been undertaken.
- Assessors 'in training' who are not fully recognised as competent by awarding bodies may carry out assessment practice. For the period in training and working towards recognition, the assessor must have assessment activity monitored and signed off (countersigned) by a fully recognised and competent assessor. The 'in training' period should be limited to twelve months and have clear development goals set for achieving recognition and competence.

3.3 Occupational competence of internal verifiers:

Approved centres appoint internal verifiers and their role is to ensure consistency and quality of assessment within the centre. The internal verifier will monitor assessment activities and provide feedback to assessors, co-ordinate standardisation and provide guidance to assessors.

For assessments and verification to be considered valid, the internal verifier must meet the following requirements:

Demonstrate sufficient and current understanding of the qualifications to be internally verified, and know how they are applied in the sector area(s) concerned, to the satisfaction of the Awarding Body. Relevant knowledge and understanding of the workplace areas to be sampled during verification is required. Relevant experience of working in or with the sector area(s) is preferable. Demonstrate competent practice in internal verification and assessment. They would usually hold an appropriate qualification in internal quality assurance eg 'Award in The internal quality assurance of assessment processes and practice' (RQF) or 'Internally monitor and maintain the quality of workplace assessment' (SCQF) and must be able to understand the principles and practices of internal verification.

Where an internal verifier has not achieved a formal qualification recognised by the Qualification Regulator, they must be working towards one.

Internal Verifiers must:

- Demonstrate their continuing professional development to ensure they are up to date with work practices in their sector and developments in the qualifications they verify.
- Know where and when to access specialist sector advice, where additional specialist or technical knowledge relating to assessment and verification decisions is concerned.
- Operate safely as an internal verifier in a maritime environment, it is therefore strongly recommended that all relevant MCA safety courses have been undertaken.
- Internal verifiers 'in training' who are not fully recognised as competent by Awarding Bodies may carry out verification practice. For the period in training and working towards recognition, the internal verifier must have verification activity monitored and signed off (countersigned) by a fully recognised and competent internal verifier. The 'in training' period should be limited to twelve months and have clear development goals set for achieving recognition and competence.

Section 4

4.1 Assessment evidence

At up to RQF level 2 and SCQF 5, Proficiency Qualifications are designed to include elements of work-based assessment and therefore workplace performance evidence is essential for specific units of assessment. The Proficiency Qualifications contain three types of units.

1. Occupational skills units must be assessed through evidence that the tasks have been undertaken satisfactorily in the workplace or an acceptable simulation, supported by independent oral examination and other acceptable evidence supplied by the learner. Assessment requirements and guidance are outlined on each unit.
2. Occupational knowledge units must be assessed through oral and written questioning methods relevant to the needs of the learner on or off-the job. It is important to follow the assessment requirements and guidance outlined on each unit.

3. Underpinning knowledge units must be assessed through oral and written questioning methods relevant to the needs of the learner on or off-the-job. It is important to follow the assessment requirements and guidance outlined in each unit.

The use of a Training Record Book (TRB) that has been approved by the Maritime Skills Alliance and which is relevant to the part of the sector in which the learner is based, will contain a list of tasks that must be undertaken to achieve proficiency. The TRB will become the property of the learner when they start their learning programme and be used by them to record when and where each task was undertaken. It will need to be countersigned by a member of the workplace personnel able to provide testimony that the task has been completed satisfactorily. The completed TRB will then be used as supporting evidence to demonstrate that the work-based elements of the units have been undertaken.

The MSA is responsible for the design and issue of the TRB and ensuring that it reflects current requirements and is kept up to date.

In addition for qualifications at RQF level 3, SCQF level 6 and above which will lead to a MCA Certificate of Competency, it will be necessary for learners to pass an invigilated written examination to meet MCA certification requirements and to pay the appropriate fee.

The MCA will be responsible for making the necessary arrangements to ensure that the examinations are available and of a suitable standard.

4.2 Workplace testimony

Workplace personnel may contribute to the assessment process by providing workplace testimony. Those providing the testimony must be familiar with the activity being carried out and able to make a judgment that the task has been completed to organisational procedures and to the required standard. The person providing the testimony is not in a position to decide if the learner is competent overall, they are only able to judge the specific instance they observe. The overall decision regarding competence of the learner will be made by the assessor and may be subject to verification.

4.3 The use of simulation for providing evidence

The use of simulation to replace normal working practice is only acceptable in agreed circumstances. It includes units of assessment that address rare conditions or emergency situations, which might endanger learner safety. These exceptions are clearly defined in the assessment guidance in the relevant units. In such cases this will require the agreement of the external verifier.

When simulations are used they must be designed to mirror the same activity, as it would be carried out in the workplace and include:

- The number and sequence of actions needed to complete the activity
- The number and complexity of factors needed to complete the activity
- The urgency with which the activity must be completed and
- Achievement of an outcome(s) in the same time constraints that might apply in the workplace

Simulation can only be used to provide the sole evidence for one complete unit where the subject to which it relates happens very rarely or is extremely hazardous e.g. firefighting.

4.4 Recognition of prior learning and experience

Evidence from past achievement may be included as evidence within assessment methods for Proficiency Qualifications.

Evidence of knowledge and understanding can be presented as supplementary evidence, provided it is a measurable assessed outcome of learning which links to outcomes detailed in the units of assessment and confirms current competence.

Assessors should make best use of all the assessment methods available to them in ensuring the most reliable and effective use is made of claims of prior learning and experience which relate to the individual learner's circumstances.

All learners, presenting evidence from past achievements, must also be able to demonstrate current competence.

Section 5

5.1 The role of external verifiers

Awarding Bodies appoint external verifiers to perform a number of quality assurance tasks on their behalf. They visit centres to monitor the assessment and verification processes and sample learners' work to ensure that standards are maintained and are compliant with Awarding Bodies' procedures. This will include both the competence and underpinning knowledge elements that form a qualification. External verifiers also have a developmental role in assisting centres to develop best practice and to provide information on new qualifications and developments in assessment and verification.

External Verifiers are required to:

- Demonstrate sufficient and current understanding of the areas within the sector being externally verified. Where necessary the MSA will advise the awarding bodies as to the suitability of potential EVs qualifications and/or experience.
- Demonstrate sufficient and current understanding of the Proficiency Qualifications to be externally verified, and know how they are applied in the sector, to the satisfaction of the awarding body.
- Have achieved an appropriate qualification in external quality assurance acceptable to the Qualifications Regulator, eg 'Award in The external quality assurance of assessment processes and practice' (RQF) or 'Externally monitor and maintain the quality of workplace assessment' (SCQF)
- Conduct external quality assurance of the assessment process, within one year of commencing work as a verifier for an active centre. External verifiers who hold the D35 qualification must provide evidence of continuous professional development which demonstrates updated external verification practice.
- Complete a minimum of two days Continuing Professional Development (CPD) each year, composed of training or other developmental activities relevant to the maritime sector and approved by the awarding body.
- Have good report writing, auditing and communication skills to the satisfaction of the Awarding Body.
- Know where and when to access specialist sector advice, where additional specialist knowledge relating to assessment and verification decisions is concerned.

Appendix 1

The Maritime Skills Alliance

The MSA was established in 2004 to provide a focal point for the development of skills, standards and qualifications within the maritime sector. Its members as at August 2016 are:

- Border Force
- British Marine
- British Tugowners' Association
- Company of Watermen and Lightermen
- International Association of Maritime Associations
- International Jack Up Barge Operators' Association
- Marine Society and Sea Cadets
- Maritime and Coastguard Agency
- Merchant Navy Training Board
- MYBA The Worldwide Yachting Association
- National Workboat Association
- Port Skills and Safety
- Royal National Lifeboat Institution
- Royal Navy
- Royal Yachting Association
- Seafarers UK
- Seafish Industry Authority
- Thames Skills Academy

Appendix 2

QCF accredited qualifications

Qualifications that are covered in this strategy as at June 2016 are as follows:

RQF:

- Level 2 Award in Maritime Studies: Deck Rating
- Level 2 Award in Maritime Studies: STCW Safety
- Level 2 Award in Maritime Studies: Marine Vessel Hospitality
- Level 2 Award in Nautical Studies
- Level 2 Certificate in Maritime Studies: Able Seafarer (Deck)
- Level 2 Certificate in Maritime Studies: Able Seafarer/Tug Rating (Deck)
- Level 2 Certificate in Maritime Studies: Engine Room Rating
- Level 2 Certificate in Maritime Studies: Watch/Tug Rating (Engine Room)
- Level 2 Diploma in Maritime Studies: Able Seafarer (Engine Room)
- Level 2 Diploma in Maritime Studies: Marine Vessel Maintenance (Electro-Technical)
- Level 2 Diploma in Maritime Studies: Marine Vessel Maintenance (Engineering)
- Level 2 Diploma in Maritime Studies: Rivers, Inland Waterways and Limited Distances to Sea
- Level 2 Diploma in Maritime Studies: Sea Fishing
- Level 2 Diploma in Maritime Studies: Workboats

- Level 2 Diploma in Maritime Studies: Marinas and Boatyards
- Level 3 Award in Maritime Studies: Marine Vessel Hospitality Supervision
- Level 3 Diploma in Shipping and Maritime Operations (Deck)
- Level 3 Diploma in Shipping and Maritime Operations (Engineering)
- Level 3 Diploma in Maritime Studies: Officer of the watch on vessels of less than 500 gross tonnage (Near coastal)
- Level 3 Diploma in Maritime Studies: Office of the Watch on vessels of less than 3,000 gross tonnage (Near coastal)
- Level 3 Diploma in Maritime Studies: Officer of the Watch (yacht) of less than 3,000 gross tonnage (unlimited)
- Level 4 Award in Maritime Studies: Tug Master less than 500 gross tonnage
- Level 4 Certificate in Maritime Studies: Tug Master less than 3000 gross tonnage
- Award in Maritime Studies: Use of Radar and Electronic Chart Systems in Code Vessels at QCF level 3

SCQF - SQA Accredited Qualifications:

- Award in Maritime Studies: Deck Rating at SCQF Level 5
- Certificate in Maritime Studies: Able Seafarer (Deck) at SCQF Level 5
- Diploma in Maritime Studies: Rivers, Inland Waterways and Limited Distances to Sea at SCQF Level 5
- Diploma in Maritime Studies: Sea Fishing at SCQF level 5
- Diploma in Maritime Studies: Able Seafarer (Engine Room) at SCQF Level 5
- Diploma in Maritime Studies: Workboats at SCQF Level 5

NB This list will be added to from time to time. Please consult the MSA website www.maritimeskills.org for an up-to-date list.

Appendix 3

History of changes

ACG approved the MSA's Assessment Strategy on 19 September 2012.

Changes will take place during the life of the assessment strategy, and this section records those changes. This document is the latest version and incorporates the changes summarised below.

Version	Description	Date	Authorised by
9	Addition of word 'and' to page 5 bullet 1 and addition of appendix 3: 'History of changes'	January 2012	MSA
10	Update MSA membership list and SQA accredited qualifications	September 2012	MSA
11	Minor updating and presentational changes. Updated MSA membership list. Update qualification list. Addition of the regular review	September 2015	MSA

	statement below.		
12	<p>Changes made at the request of SQA (Accreditation):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Re-worded section 1.5 • Removed a superfluous reference to MCA requirements which are additional to qualifications • Corrected the requirement for assessors who are not qualified <p>We have also replaced references to the QCF with RQF, its replacement.</p>	December 2015	MSA
13	<p>Addition of two new members to the list of MSA members.</p> <p>Addition of four new qualifications for the SCQF, and withdrawal of one.</p> <p>Removal of two ports qualifications from the SCQF list, because Port Skills and Safety has its own Assessment Strategy.</p>	August 2016	MSA

The MSA's Assessment Strategy will be thoroughly reviewed every three years or earlier if circumstances dictate. The next review is due in 2018.