

Financial Services

Skills Council

Assessment Strategy

Providing Financial Services S/NVQs at Levels 2 and 3

June 2008

Assessment Strategy for S/NVQs in Providing Financial Services

1. Introduction

The FSSC, as the Sector Skills Council for the Financial Services, is responsible for developing an assessment strategy for the qualifications based on its National Occupational Standards.

This responsibility means that FSSC must:

- a) recommend how external quality control of assessment will be achieved;
- b) define which aspects of the national standards must always be assessed through performance in the workplace;
- c) define the extent to which simulated working conditions may be used to assess competence and any characteristics that simulations should have, including definitions (where appropriate) of what would constitute a realistic working environment (RWE) for the qualifications concerned;
- d) define the occupational expertise requirements for assessors and verifiers in consultation with industry and in agreement with awarding bodies.

This Assessment Strategy for the S/NVQs in Providing Financial Services addresses the four areas indicated above.

2. Review and Evaluation of this Strategy

The FSSC and awarding bodies will continually monitor the effectiveness of this strategy. It will be reviewed annually and revised where necessary every two years. FSSC will therefore establish arrangements for awarding bodies to provide feedback that will assist in the evaluation and review of this strategy. This feedback will also be used to evaluate assessment and verification practices, identify and promulgate good practice and inform any improvements to be made to this strategy.

Awarding bodies and their approved centres will be encouraged to submit comments and suggestions for improvements. This will be through formal dialogue between the FSSC and the awarding bodies.

3. External Quality Control of Assessment

The quality of the assessment process is the responsibility of the awarding bodies. The following information is provided by the FSSC as guidance to awarding bodies, who are reminded that they must meet the relevant regulators' criteria. The FSSC encourages flexibility and innovation of approach alongside robust systems to support quality control. The FSSC welcomes opportunities to meet with external verifiers appointed by the awarding bodies.

Awarding bodies should ensure that detail is available for each of the following:

3.1 External Verification

External Verifiers (EVs) should verify assessments at approved centres. The normal frequency of external verification visits is two per year (a total of two days per year). However, the exact frequency should be determined by the risk assessment of the awarding body.

The verification should include inspection of the records of evidence and assessment. Awarding bodies should consider rotating their external verifiers in order to encourage standardisation, independence of assessment and the sharing of good practice.

External verifiers will be expected to sample assessment decisions using a strategy based upon:

- assessment decisions across all units contained within S/NVQs in Providing Financial Services;
- assessment decisions that include a sufficient range of learners to provide assurance that the assessor is consistent over the range;
- a full range of assessment methods used, for example, observation and use of product evidence.

3.2 Risk Assessment

In order to promote appropriate levels of monitoring of centres, awarding bodies should adopt a risk management system. This approach is consistent with the approach taken by the regulatory authorities. Where there is a risk to the quality and consistency of assessment, e.g., as a result of commercial interests or as a result of relationships between candidates and assessors, awarding bodies should ensure that appropriate mechanisms are in place to ensure the reliability of the assessment.

Awarding bodies should ensure that a risk assessment has been carried out for each approved centre and that a strategy to minimise the risk has been implemented.

3.3 Awarding Body Meetings

The FSSC will arrange regular meetings with awarding bodies. The aim of the meetings will be to promote consistency in the assessment process. All awarding bodies offering S/NVQs in Providing Financial Services will be expected to attend one FSSC meeting per year.

4. Evidence

4.1 Evidence

Wherever possible, evidence of occupational competence should be generated and collected through performance under workplace conditions (see section 4.2 below). Evidence must be authentic, current, sufficient for purpose and valid – and should come from real work produced in the workplace.

There may, however, be situations where the actual workplace may not be appropriate, or where waiting for naturally occurring evidence is impractical, and therefore simulation may be necessary. Guidance on simulation is provided in section 4.3.

In all cases, the evidence provided should demonstrate that candidates:

- have achieved all the stated performance outcomes;
- possess and are capable of applying all the required items of knowledge and understanding.

Additional guidance on evidence requirements will be specified at unit level; this guidance may be developed by the FSSC in partnership with awarding bodies or by individual awarding bodies.

4.2 Evidence from Workplace Performance

It is accepted that not all employees have identical workplace conditions and therefore there cannot be assessment conditions that are identical for all candidates. However, assessors must ensure that, as far as possible, the conditions for assessment should be those under which the candidate usually works. The evidence collected under these conditions should also be as naturally occurring as possible.

Evidence from the workplace includes observable performance, physical products of work (such as reports, plans, correspondence), witness testimony, etc.

Candidates must also demonstrate that they meet the requirements of relevant regulatory bodies operating within the sector, in particular, the Financial Services Authority (FSA), as they apply to qualifications comprising NOS.

4.3 Use of Simulation in Assessments

Where a lack of opportunity for workplace assessment should prove to be a barrier to access for a candidate in any part of S/NVQs in Providing Financial Services, the setting up or devising of assessment situations will be allowed, when it can be demonstrated that circumstances require it in areas related to:

- safety;
- legislation/regulation;
- security;
- infrequent occurrences;
- cost;
- significant interruption to candidate's or employer's business.

It is recognised that there may be other assessment situations where simulation may have to be used. In such instances, awarding bodies should give consideration to the reliability and validity of the likely evidence before agreeing to simulation.

Where simulation is used, it should be designed to ensure that:

- the candidate is required to use materials and equipment found and used within the workplace environment;

- the candidate is provided with information, advice and guidance in line with that which would be provided in the workplace environment in the given context;
- the candidate is required to carry out actions and responsibilities which would normally be delegated to someone competent in the occupational area within the workplace environment;
- the physical environment and situation replicates the workplace environment;
- other people with whom the candidate interacts in performing the activity behave 'in character' for the given situation.

In all cases, the centre should agree its plans for simulation with the external verifier to ensure that it is satisfactory as well as gaining Awarding Body approval before implementation.

5. Competence of Assessors and Verifiers

The FSSC acknowledges the very important role and responsibility that assessors and verifiers have in maintaining the quality and integrity of S/NVQs. Awarding bodies and other stakeholders therefore have to have confidence in the actions and decisions of assessors and verifiers.

The FSSC, awarding bodies and employers recognise that there may be occasions when there are limited opportunities for workplace assessment due to logistical difficulties and availability of an external assessor to carry out assessment in the day-to-day working environment. This is sometimes compounded by issues to do with both confidentiality and the security arrangements which are essential in many commercial situations.

The requirements for assessors and internal verifiers for the S/NVQs in Providing Financial Services, as set out in this assessment strategy, acknowledge the reality of this assessment context. Alternative models are therefore available to enable centres to carry out the processes of assessment and internal verification. It is at the discretion of the awarding bodies as to which model they allow to ensure that assessors and internal verifiers comply with their requirements for assessment and internal verification.

1. **Standard model** – this model requires assessors and verifiers to hold appropriate qualifications in addition to demonstrating relevant occupational experience.
2. **Employer equivalent training model** – this model recognises that managers and supervisors may have developed equivalent skills and understanding through the employment context to enable them to take on assessor and internal verifier roles without holding the specified qualifications for assessors and/or internal verifiers.

N.B. The Employer Equivalent Training Model must be approved specifically by the awarding body.

Guidance on the application of both models in the assessment context is provided in section 5.2.

5.1 Introduction to the Employer Equivalent Training Model

The employer equivalent training model will be appropriate where this has the full agreement of the awarding body and the requirements set out below and in section 5.2 are met. This model recognises the key role of supervisors and managers in the assessment process and builds upon the extensive role already carried out by supervisors and managers in the financial services sector in developing and monitoring the competence of staff. This means that, wherever possible and as agreed with the awarding body, assessment can be conducted by supervisors and managers in the workplace regardless as to the position of specific qualifications.

Where the employer equivalent training assessment model is used, supervisors and line managers carrying out the assessment or internal verification role in agreement with the awarding body, must confirm that they are competent to undertake these roles by demonstrating that they have completed appropriate training and development to do this. They must demonstrate that their training maps 100% to the National Occupational Standards on which the approved regulatory qualifications for assessment and/or internal verification are based. This mapping process must be agreed by the awarding body who should also confirm that the experience and skills of potential assessors and verifiers are of an equivalent level of rigour and robustness as those associated with the achievement of the regulatory body approved qualifications for assessment.

Assessment and verification must always be to the national standards for assessment and verification even when the requirement to hold the regulatory approved assessment and verification awards is removed.

The employer equivalent training model waives the need for the regulatory body approved qualifications for assessment. This model must be confined in application to a particular organisation, i.e., those assessing performance can only do so in the context of their own employer.

This employer model could if required be combined with the standard model; for example, assessors and internal verifiers under the employer equivalent training model could work alongside external verifiers under regulatory requirements and assessors can work with internal verifiers and external verifiers under the standard model. This must be agreed with the awarding body.

5.2 Specific Requirements for Verifiers and Assessors

Competence of External Verifiers

A primary responsibility of the external verifier is to assure quality of internal verification and assessments across the centres for which they are responsible. External verifiers therefore need to have a thorough understanding of quality assurance and assessment practices as well as technical awareness related to the qualifications that they are externally verifying. It will be the responsibility of the awarding body to select and appoint external verifiers.

Potential external verifiers should:

- hold (or be working towards) an appropriate qualification as specified by the regulatory authorities and/or awarding bodies, confirming their competence to externally verify S/NVQ assessments;

- have experience of working within the financial services industry gained through current or prior employment;
- have an up to date technical awareness relevant to the S/NVQs they are seeking to externally verify. Technical awareness is defined as a general overview of the subject area sufficient to ensure that assessment and portfolio evidence are reliable and that relevant health and safety requirements have been complied with;
- have a sound and in-depth knowledge of the National Occupational Standards;
- demonstrate their commitment to maintaining their industry knowledge by ongoing professional development, e.g., through undertaking training courses and/or membership of industry organisations.

Competence of Internal Verifiers

A primary responsibility of the internal verifier is to assure the quality and consistency of assessments by the assessors for whom they are responsible. Internal verifiers therefore need to have a thorough understanding of quality assurance and assessment practices, as well as sufficient technical understanding related to the qualifications that they are internally verifying.

It will be the responsibility of the approved centre to select and appoint internal verifiers.

The majority of internal verifiers will operate under the standard model. However, in some instances, awarding bodies may have agreed to adopt an employer equivalent training model. Requirements for internal verifiers under each of the two models follow:

Standard Model	Employer Equivalent Training Model
<p>Internal Verifiers must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • hold (or be working towards) an appropriate qualification, as specified by the regulatory authorities and or awarding bodies, confirming their competence to internally verify S/NVQ assessments; • have a sound and in-depth knowledge of the occupational standards; • have credible up to date technical understanding, developed through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ experience as a practitioner in the role covered by the S/NVQ, and/or ➤ achievement of professional qualifications attesting to their competence in the role covered by the S/NVQ, and/or ➤ experience in the supervision of people who perform the role covered by the S/NVQ, and/or ➤ providing training in a workplace 	<p>Designated staff, approved by the awarding body, who take on the role of Internal Verifier must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • have completed the company's in-house training scheme which must have been confirmed by the awarding body as providing the equivalent level of rigour and robustness of the regulatory body approved qualifications for internal verification; • have a sound and in-depth knowledge of the occupational standards; • have credible up to date technical understanding, developed through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ experience as a practitioner in the role covered by the S/NVQ, and/or ➤ achievement of professional qualifications attesting to their competence in the role covered by the S/NVQ, and/or

context for those who perform the role covered by the S/NVQ.

- experience in the supervision of people who perform the role covered by the S/NVQ, and/or
- providing training in a workplace context for those who perform the role covered by the S/NVQ.

When ensuring centres are appointing and retaining internal verifiers for S/NVQs in Providing Financial Services, the Financial Service Skills Council would expect awarding bodies to look for individuals who can demonstrate that:

- they have credible expertise in Providing Financial Services relevant to the level/s of the S/NVQs they are seeking to verify;
- they have kept, and will continue to keep, themselves up-to-date with developments and practice in the Providing Financial Services industry;
- they have a thorough understanding of the NOS for Providing Financial Services at the level/s of the S/NVQs they are seeking to verify.

As part of the process, it is suggested that centres should consider:

- what previous posts they have held and determine whether these are relevant in providing expertise in the area of Financial Services internal verification;
- the relevance and currency of qualifications held;
- the level at which these posts have been held;
- how familiar they are with the NOS for Providing Financial Services at the level of the S/NVQs they are seeking to internally verify.

Competence of Assessors

The primary responsibility of the assessor is to assess candidates to the required quality and consistency, against the national occupational standard. It is important that an assessor can recognise occupational competence as specified by the national standard. Assessors therefore need to have a thorough understanding of assessment and quality assurance practices, as well as have in-depth technical competence related to the qualifications for which they are assessing candidates.

It will be the responsibility of the approved centre to select and appoint assessors. The majority of assessors will operate under the standard model. However, in some instances, awarding bodies may have agreed to adopt an employer equivalent training model. Requirements for assessors under each of the two models follow:

Assessors/Workplace Assessors	Employer Equivalent Training Model
<p>Assessors must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • hold (or be working towards) an appropriate qualification, as specified by the regulatory authorities, confirming their competence to assess S/NVQ candidates; 	<p>Designated staff, approved by the awarding body, who take on the role of assessors must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • have completed the company's in-house training scheme which has been confirmed by the awarding body as providing the equivalent level of rigour and robustness of the regulatory body

- have credible up to date technical competence, developed through:
 - expertise gained in recent actual experience of working in the occupational area, and/or
 - achievement of qualifications which attest to their competence in the role covered by the S/NVQ, and/or
 - experience in supervising people who perform the role covered by S/NVQ, and/or
 - experience gained in providing training in a workplace context for those who perform the role covered by the S/NVQ.

approved qualifications for assessment;

- have credible up to date technical competence, developed through:
 - expertise gained in recent actual experience of working in the occupational area, and/or
 - achievement of qualifications which attest to their competence in the role covered by the S/NVQ, and/or
 - experience in supervising people who perform the role covered by S/NVQ, and/or
 - experience gained in providing training in a workplace context for those who perform the role covered by the S/NVQ.

When ensuring centres are appointing and retaining assessors for S/NVQs in Providing Financial Services, the Financial Service Skills Council would expect awarding bodies to look for individuals who can demonstrate that they:

- have credible expertise in Providing Financial Services relevant to the level/s of the S/NVQs they are seeking to assess;
- have kept, and will continue to keep, themselves up-to-date with developments and practice in the Providing Financial Services industry;
- have a thorough understanding of the NOS for Providing Financial Services at the level/s of the S/NVQs they are seeking to assess.

As part of the process, it is suggested that centres should consider:

- what previous posts they have held and determine whether these are relevant in providing expertise in the area of Financial Services assessment;
- the relevance and currency of qualifications held;
- the level at which these posts have been held;
- how familiar they are with the NOS for Providing Financial Services at the level of the S/NVQs they are seeking to assess.

5.3 Continued Personal and Professional Development

It is important that verifiers and assessors, and also designated staff under the Employer Equivalent Training Model, continue their own development to help them in their respective S/NVQ roles. It is expected that each approved centre will provide development programmes for its assessors and internal verifiers to support them in maintaining their technical or occupational expertise.