



Guide to assessing

# Workplace Core Skills



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## Introduction

This guide is written for people who are preparing to support or assess modern apprentices, employees, students or trainees in gaining certification for workplace-assessed Core Skills Units.

It has two purposes:

- ◆ to introduce the revised Units for assessing Workplace Core Skills from 2008
- ◆ to provide general information to standardise the assessment of candidates for Workplace Core Skills Units

There are specially written Assessment Support Packs for each Core Skills Unit, giving advice on the types of activities that could be used to assess the Unit and the contexts in which assessment can take place.

## About Core Skills

In almost every aspect of our lives, people need to be able to communicate with each other, work with each other, solve problems, use information and communication technology, and have a command of numeracy. People can no longer expect to stay in the same job all their lives, nor can they expect to follow the same working patterns. Significant developments in information technology and quicker and more effective ways of communicating with people all over the world have revolutionised many workplaces. Most people now recognise that training and education continues throughout our lives as we adapt and develop new skills to meet the needs of the ever changing workplace.

The term 'Core Skills' covers a variety of broad skills and abilities that allow us to manage and adapt how we respond to a changing society. They are critical to the workplace, and to life and learning generally. They help us put knowledge into action in a flexible way, and they help us adapt our existing knowledge and skills to the demands of new situations.

## Recent changes

The Core Skills framework, the qualifications, and the assessment approaches need to be as flexible as possible, to make the most of opportunities that arise from technological advances. The Core Skills Framework has now been updated, taking into account feedback on the original framework and a number of developments in:

- ◆ the revised Draft Core Skills Framework of March 2008
- ◆ a number of consultation events with stakeholders
- ◆ research into the national and international initiatives related to Core Skills
- ◆ expectations from employers
- ◆ emerging thinking on literacy, numeracy and ICT in the Curriculum for Excellence initiative
- ◆ Modern Apprenticeships
- ◆ new and revised SVQs

The main changes are that:

- ◆ the Core Skills of Numeracy, Information and Communication Technology and Working with Others have been refreshed to reduce barriers and increase opportunities for learning
- ◆ the Core Skills of Communication and Problem Solving remain unchanged, however additional contextualised examples have been provided for guidance
- ◆ a revised set of assessment materials for each Unit has been produced — these materials are available from all Core Skills awarding bodies.

## **The new Workplace Core Skills Units for 2008**

The Workplace Core Skills Units are designed for use with SVQs, within Modern Apprenticeships, or more generally in the workplace. There are 20 Units — one at each of the four levels for each of the five Core Skills. The Core Skills are:

- ◆ Communication — using skills in reading, writing, and speaking
- ◆ Numeracy — using numbers and graphical information
- ◆ Information and Communication Technology — using computers and information technology
- ◆ Problem Solving — critical thinking, analysing problems, planning, organising and completing an activity to solve a problem and reviewing and evaluating how well this problem solving activity worked in practice
- ◆ Working with Others — working co-operatively with others to reach a common goal and reviewing co-operative contribution

This framework of five Core Skills will now be used for all Core Skills certification in Scotland. Some awarding bodies will offer all 20 of these Units; others will offer a subset of the 20 appropriate for the context their candidates are working in.

The four-level Core Skills framework used in the workplace is exactly parallel to the Core Skills framework used in SQA National Qualifications.

Since 2000 every person receiving a Scottish Qualifications Certificate also received a record of Core Skills achievement through a Core Skills profile. Candidates often receive their first Core Skills profile after sitting Standard Grades, and are able to add to and build on this as they continue through education and training. The profile is updated whenever the candidate achieves a new Core Skill or a higher level of one they already have. Workplace Core Skills Units from all awarding bodies contribute to this profile.

This means that all Core Skills certification in Scotland is based on the same national Core Skills framework. This should make it much easier for candidates and employers to keep track of their Core Skills achievements in school, college, training and employment.

## Levels

The levels for Workplace Core Skills are as follows:

| <b>Old names for levels</b> | <b>SCQF Level</b> |
|-----------------------------|-------------------|
| Access 3                    | 3                 |
| Intermediate 1              | 4                 |
| Intermediate 2              | 5                 |
| Higher                      | 6                 |

As candidates move up through the levels, they take on activities which are more demanding in breadth and depth, and in the extent of individual responsibility required.

### **SCQF Level 3 — simple**

Designed for those who have little or no skill and experience of using the Core Skill in a workplace setting and who need support in doing so. Work would be basic and familiar, for example, at trainee level.

### **SCQF Level 4 — straightforward**

Designed for those who have some skill and experience of using the Core Skill in a workplace setting, for example, at assistant worker level.

### **SCQF Level 5 — routine but with some complex features**

Designed for those who have a reasonable level of skill and experience of using the Core Skill in a workplace setting, for example, at intermediate or supervisor level.

### **SCQF Level 6 — complex**

Designed for those who have significant skill and experience of using the Core Skill in a workplace setting, for example, at managerial level.

To help you to plan the best programme for each candidate, the following charts summarise what is required in each Core Skill at each of the four levels.

## Communication levels

| Skill                     | SCQF Level 3  | SCQF Level 4   | SCQF Level 5   | SCQF Level 6   |
|---------------------------|---|--|--|--|
| Reading and understanding | Read and understand a simple document related to your work.   | Read, understand and evaluate a straightforward document related to your work.   | Read, understand and evaluate a document related to your work which either presents and analyses factual content, or presents a sustained point of view or central argument.     | Read, understand and evaluate a complex document related to your work which either: contains a set of facts and an analysis of them, or a sustained argument. It will be a substantial and detailed text with complex sentences, specialist words, and concepts that may be unfamiliar to you. It is likely to have more than one purpose. |
| Writing                   | Produce a document, or related documents totalling 80 words or more which conveys several pieces of information, opinions or ideas.   | Produce a document, or related documents, totalling 300 words or more, which conveys several items of information, opinions or ideas.  | Produce a document, or related documents, totalling 500 words or more, which conveys several items of information, opinions, ideas or aspects of a subject.                      | Produce a well-structured document, or a collection of related documents, totalling 700 words or more, which conveys several items of complex information, opinions or ideas.  |
| Speaking and Listening    | Take part in a simple discussion with at least one other person, or give a short presentation to one or more people, lasting a minimum of two minutes including time for questions. | Take part in a straightforward discussion with at least one other person, or give a short presentation to one or more people, lasting a minimum of three minutes including time for questions. | Make a substantial contribution to a discussion with at least one other person, or make a presentation to others lasting a minimum of four minutes including time for questions. | Make a substantial contribution to a discussion on a complex topic with at least one other person, or make a presentation to others on a complex topic lasting a minimum of five minutes, including time for questions.  |

## Numeracy levels

| Skill   | SCQF Level 3   | SCQF Level 4  | SCQF Level 5  | SCQF Level 6  |
|---|--|---|---|---|
| Using Number                                    | Carry out a variety of simple number tasks related to your work which involve calculations requiring one or two steps. | Carry out a variety of straightforward number tasks related to your work which involve calculations requiring a minimum of two steps.           | Apply a wide range of numerical skills to solve work related problems.  | Apply a wide range of numerical and statistical skills to solve complex work related problems.  |
| Measuring                                       | Read and use a simple scale on a graph or a familiar measuring instrument, for example a ruler or thermometer.         | Read and use a straightforward scale either on an instrument such as a ruler or a graph.  | Not required at this level.   | Not required at this level.   |
| Use graphical format to find out information    | Extract information from at least one of the following: a table; chart; graph; diagram.                                | Extract and interpret information from at least one of the following: a table; chart; graph, diagram.   | Interpret information from a series of straightforward related graphical forms such as tables, graphs, charts or diagrams.                      | Extract, analyse and interpret information from complex graphical forms such as qualitative graphs, or graphs where part of the axis has been omitted, histograms, graphs showing relationships or complex variables, graphs requiring interpolation and extrapolation. |
| Use graphical format to communicate information | Communicate information by completing at least one of the following: table; chart; graph; diagram.                     | Select an appropriate graphical form and use it to communicate information through at least one of the following: table; chart; graph; diagram. | Select an appropriate graphical form and use it to communicate information through at least one of the following: table, chart, graph, diagram. | Select an appropriate graphical form and use it to communicate information such as a table, line graph, bar chart, pie chart, histogram, diagram, qualitative form.   |

## Information and Communication Technology levels

| Skill                     | SCQF Level 3   | SCQF Level 4   | SCQF Level 5  | SCQF Level 6  |
|---------------------------|--|--|---|---|
| Performing ICT Operations | Carry out ICT activities related to your work which involve simple operations.   | Carry out ICT activities related to your work which involve straightforward operations.  | Carry out ICT activities related to your work including using hardware responsibly and presenting information in an appropriate mode.   | Carry out a range of ICT activities related to your work including resolving common hardware and software problems and presenting information in an appropriate mode.   |
| Processing Information    | Carry out simple ICT activities related to your work which involve using menu/list-based applications software.  | Carry out a range of straightforward ICT activities related to your work which involve application software.   | Carry out a range of non-routine ICT activities related to your work which involve application software.  | Carry out a range of complex ICT activities related to your work which involve application software, selecting and launching application software, entering, processing and output of data.   |
| Accessing Information     | Use ICT to locate information relevant to your work, using local or remote data sources, and locating information which matches one keyword and is in an appropriate format. | Use ICT to locate information relevant to your work, locating information in different formats from a range of local or remote data sources, using appropriate search techniques, and selecting relevant information which matches criteria. | Use ICT to locate information relevant to your work locating information in different formats from a range of local or remote data sources, applying a search strategy, evaluating information found against given criteria and evaluating search strategy. | Use ICT to locate information relevant to your work, locating information in different formats from a range of local or remote data sources, applying a complex search strategy, evaluating information found against chosen criteria and evaluating search strategy. |
| Keeping Information Safe  | Demonstrate safe practice in using ICT to handle information by keeping information safe by observing common ICT security measures.  | Demonstrate safe practice in using ICT to handle information by recognising security risks and acting accordingly.   | Demonstrate safe practice in using ICT to handle information by keeping data secure.  | Demonstrate safe practice in using ICT to handle information by keeping data secure, using passwords, using virus protection software, backing up data and maintain a personal file area.   |

## Problem Solving levels

| Skill                    | SCQF Level 3   | SCQF Level 4  | SCQF Level 5  | SCQF Level 6   |
|--------------------------|--|---|---|--|
| Critical Thinking        | Investigate reasons why a simple problem related to your work has arisen.  | Investigate reasons why a straightforward problem related to your work has arisen. The problem will occur in a familiar situation. A number of steps will need to be taken to deal with the problem.  | Investigate and analyse why a non-routine problem in your workplace has arisen. The problem is likely to involve either a situation which is unfamiliar to you, or a familiar situation where you need to clarify the relationships between the contributing factors.   | Investigate and analyse a complex problem related to your work. The problem is likely to involve a situation which is unfamiliar to you and the analysis of complex or unfamiliar variables.   |
| Planning and Organising  | Plan, organise and carry out a simple activity to deal with a problem, recognising the main reasons for the problem and suggesting a way to deal with the problem.                               | Plan, organise and carry out a straightforward activity to deal with the problem, working out an action plan, choosing and obtaining the resources you will need and carrying out your action plan.   | Plan, organise and carry out an activity to deal with the problem, working out an action plan, choosing and obtaining the resources you will need, and carrying out your action plan.   | Plan, organise and carry out your suggested approach, working out an action plan, choosing and obtaining resources and carrying out your action plan.  |
| Reviewing and Evaluating | Check how well your approach to the problem solving activity worked in practice, asking your Assessor's advice on how to identify the strengths and weaknesses of your problem solving activity. | Check how well your approach to the problem solving activity worked in practice, identifying the strengths and weaknesses of your problem solving activity, suggesting ways of solving similar problems in the future based on this experience. | Check how well the problem solving activity worked in practice, working out how you will decide whether each stage of your problem solving activity has been successful, gathering evidence to help you decide how well your problem solving activity worked, deciding how effective each stage has been and devising ways of solving similar problems in future. | Check how well the problem solving activity worked in practice, identifying the criteria you will use to decide how effective every aspect of your problem solving activity has been, gathering evidence relevant to chosen criteria, recommending ways of solving similar problems in future. |

## Working with Others levels

| Skill                               | SCQF Level 3  | SCQF Level 4   | SCQF Level 5   | SCQF Level 6  |
|-------------------------------------|---|--|--|---|
| Work co-operatively with others     | Work co-operatively with at least one other person to identify your role and how it relates to the roles of others. Carry out your role, adapting your actions and behaviour, asking for and providing information and support  | Work co-operatively with at least one other person to identify the main roles within the activity, what your role is, what tasks you will do and how they relate to others. Carry out your role, adapting your actions and behaviour, asking for and providing information and support   | Work co-operatively with at least one other person to identify the main roles within the activity, what your role is, what tasks you will do and how these relate to others. Organise and carry out your role, pro-actively seek and offer support to and from others  | Work co-operatively with at least one other person to analyse and organise the requirements of your own role and the roles of others. Negotiate working methods, modify your behaviour, and motivate yourself and others to progress towards a common goal  |
| Reviewing co-operative contribution | Check how well you contributed by deciding on measures you can use to judge how well you co-operated, asking for feedback on your contribution, making a judgement on how well you co-operated and setting personal objectives for how you could improve your own co-operative working skills in the future | Check how well you and others contributed by deciding on measures you can use to judge how well you co-operated with others, asking for feedback on your contribution making a decision on how well you co-operated with others, and how well the co-operative working arrangements operated overall, setting objectives for how you could improve your own co-operative working skills and future co-operative working arrangements | Check how well you and others involved contributed to the co-operative working activity, developing criteria to evaluate your own and others contribution, asking for feedback, using your chosen criteria to decide how well you co-operated with others, and how well the co-operative working arrangements operated overall, justifying your decision with supporting evidence, setting objectives for improving your own co-operative working skills and future co-operative working arrangements. | Check how well you and others involved contributed to the co-operative working activity, developing criteria to evaluate your own and others contribution, seeking and considering feedback and advice, using your chosen criteria and feedback to evaluate how well you co-operated and co-operative working arrangements worked overall, using conclusions and reflection to set objectives for improving own co-operative working skills and make recommendations on any future co-operative working arrangements. |

## The new Core Skills documents

The documentation for each of the 20 Workplace Core Skills is in two parts: the Unit specification and the assessment support pack.

### Units

Each Unit contains, in one short document, all the essential information needed by the candidate and the assessor.

The first section, ‘What are Core Skills?’ and the last section, ‘What can I do next?’ are common to all the Units. The remaining sections are specific to each Unit. They are:

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <b>What is this Core Skill Unit about?</b>                           | An overview of the skills that are needed and what is involved in doing the Unit.   |
| <b>What should I know or be able to do before I start this Unit?</b> | This describes entry requirements. For Access 3 it is not necessary to have any specific prior knowledge or experience before starting on a Unit. For the other levels, the prior knowledge and experience needed is described.                           |
| <b>What do I need to do?</b>   | A list of the tasks that have to be carried out. Candidates have to provide evidence that they can do everything in this section.   |
| <b>How will I show that I have achieved this Unit?</b>               | A description of the evidence that should be gathered and any special conditions for this. For example, in Problem Solving, all evidence must relate to a single problem-solving activity; evidence cannot be gathered piecemeal from different problems. |
| <b>What might be involved?</b>                                       | Examples of the types of activities that could be undertaken to achieve a Unit.   |

### Assessment support packs

There is a support pack for each of the 20 workplace-assessed Core Skill Units.

Each pack has three parts:

- 1 Information for assessors.
- 2 Exemplar assessment tasks.
- 3 Exemplar recording documentation.

# Assessing Core Skills — issues to be considered

## Groundwork: what are the roles of assessors and candidates?

The roles of the assessor and the candidate in assessing Core Skills knowledge and performance are the same as for assessment of vocational skills in SVQs.

### Assessor and candidate together

Assessor and candidate should plan how assessment will take place. The candidate should be able to identify tasks and activities which he or she is already involved in, and which could be used to produce evidence. The assessor will agree these and provide assessments which fill the gaps in this naturally occurring evidence.

### Your role as assessor

- ◆ ensure candidates understand what is to be assessed and how it is to be assessed
- ◆ ensure the conditions and materials required for assessment tasks are available
- ◆ observe and record candidates carrying out the activities described in the standards — records should say what has been observed, how it is carried out, and what it demonstrates
- ◆ question candidates and record results
- ◆ authenticate the evidence candidates provide
- ◆ help candidates to gather and present evidence
- ◆ judge evidence
- ◆ record achievement
- ◆ identify gaps in candidates' knowledge and skills
- ◆ provide feedback to candidates

### The candidate's role

- ◆ prepare for assessment — become familiar with the standards, what is to be assessed and how it is to be assessed
- ◆ carry out activities and/or answer questions, and gather and present evidence for assessment
- ◆ receive feedback from the assessor

## **First step: is Core Skills certification necessary?**

A distinctive feature of the National Qualifications system in Scotland is that there is a range of ways in which candidates can achieve Core Skills certification. All Standard Grade candidates will get a Core Skills profile, which means that most young people will already have achieved some Core Skills in their last year at school — nearly all school leavers will have achieved Communication, Numeracy and Problem Solving; and about two thirds are likely to have achieved ICT at some level.

In general, young people who have Standard Grades at Credit level (Grade 1 or 2) are likely to have several Core Skills at Intermediate 2. Young people who have Standard Grades at General level (Grade 3 or 4) are likely to have several Core Skills at Intermediate 1. Young people who have achieved Standard Grades at Foundation level (Grade 5 or 6) are likely to have achieved Core Skills at Access 3. (There is a complete listing of coverage of Core Skills through Standard Grades and other National Courses in SQA's Core Skills catalogue Automatic Certification of Core Skills in National Qualifications).

What this means is that you will find that some candidates will already have a Core Skills profile before entering employment or training, and this can be built on as the candidate or employer requires. It also means that your starting point should always be to check whether or not the candidate already has Core Skills certification, and whether separate Core Skills assessment is needed.

### ***Modern Apprenticeships***

In Modern Apprenticeship frameworks, apprentices (ie candidates) need to achieve all five Core Skills. The framework document for each apprenticeship specifies the minimum level required for each Core Skill and whether or not this Core Skill is to be separately certificated. In many of the frameworks, Core Skills do not need separate assessment because they have already been mapped by the Sector Skills Council against the SVQ standards and have been shown to be fully implicit within the SVQ. SQA does not certificate against the mapping.

However, even where the apprenticeship does not insist on mandatory separate certification of Core Skills, it is possible that some employers may wish this for their apprentices. In this case, the framework document may show where the evidence *may* be found in the SVQ and the Assessor should be able to show where this evidence is actually found.

Where separate certification is needed, it is quite likely that candidates will have already achieved at least some of the Core Skills at the level required through their Standard Grades and through National Qualifications taken in their fifth year at school or college.

As an example, let's say an apprenticeship framework requires the following Core Skills profile:

- ◆ Communication and Working with Others at SCQF Level 5
- ◆ Numeracy, Information and Communication Technology and Problem Solving at SCQF Level 4

It is possible that a person leaving school at the end of fifth year, with Standard Grades at General and Credit levels, already has certification for most of the Core Skills at the levels required for this Modern Apprenticeship, or even at a higher level than is required. For example:

| Qualification obtained at school   | Core Skill certification  |
|--|---|
| Mathematics at Standard Grade General  | Numeracy at SCQF Level 4  |
| English at Standard Grade Credit   | Communication at SCQF Level 5   |
| Computing Studying at Standard Grade General                                 | Problem Solving at SCQF Level 4<br>Information and Communication Technology at SCQF Level 4 |
| Core Skill Unit achieved through the Personal and Social Education programme | Working with Others at SCQF level 4   |

This apprentice would only need to upgrade Working with Others to SCQF Level 5. However, if the employer agrees, and there are clear opportunities, it would be good practice for a candidate to upgrade other Core Skills to a higher level.

### **So, is separate assessment necessary?**

If separate Core Skills certification is required, the candidate must be entered for the relevant Workplace Core Skills Unit, and the candidate's evidence must be assessed against the standards for the Unit, subject to normal quality assurance procedures. However, this does not necessarily mean that a separate portfolio of evidence has to be gathered for each Core Skill.

Where a candidate is working towards an SVQ, and Core Skills are a natural part of that SVQ, it is possible to assess the SVQ and the Core Skills simultaneously — the assessor does not need to construct separate Core Skill assessments. Some Core Skills are only partly implicit in an SVQ and will need extra bits of assessment to complete them. The Assessment Support Packs for each Core Skills Unit give exemplar assessment which can be used for this purpose.

SVQs which have been recently accredited or re-accredited may include information on opportunities to gather Core Skills evidence. This 'signposting' is carried out by the Sector Skills Council / Standard Setting Body when developing the standards.

## Planning

If you have decided that separate certification is needed, you should now draw up an assessment plan. Core Skills are life and work skills and are therefore used naturally throughout our home, community and working life. Every opportunity should be taken to assess Core Skills as they are applied in a natural work setting and context. An Assessment Plan will help identify the opportunity to capture this type of naturally occurring assessment but should not be so prescriptive as to prevent assessment taking place as the situation presents itself.

The evidence a candidate produces for an SVQ can sometimes be used to assess a Core Skills Unit, or a part thereof.

The stages of drawing up the assessment plan might be:

- 1 You and the candidate get to know the Core Skills Unit.
- 2 You both consider the candidate's previous learning and experience and the scope for using evidence from this.
- 3 You both work out whether any SVQ evidence could also be used for Core Skills assessment. (Where the evidence is common to both, you will, though, need to make two distinct assessment decisions: one for the SVQ, the other for the Core Skills Unit.)
- 4 If there is a shortfall of evidence, plan where the additional evidence will come from.
- 5 Make the assessment plan.

If the candidate is not completing an SVQ alongside the Core Skills Unit, a similar planning process should take place — you should identify whether any naturally-occurring workplace activities can be used to gather evidence for the Unit. The guidance which follows assumes that candidates will be completing the Core Skills Unit alongside an SVQ, but similar stages and processes apply to candidates completing Core Skills Units on their own.

### ***Stage 1: Getting to know the Core Skills Unit***

In exactly the same way that assessors and candidates need to be familiar with what the SVQ standards are looking for, they also need to become familiar with the Core Skills Units which are to be assessed and, in particular, the evidence requirements. We do not expect all candidates to produce the same evidence, but it is important that the evidence they do produce meets these requirements.

## ***Stage 2: Consider the candidate's previous learning and the scope for using it***

For candidates who are already competent in some or all areas (eg because they have worked in a relevant job for many years), consider Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) — there is more information about this in the next section. For candidates who are not yet competent and require training in some areas, organise a training plan. For candidates currently carrying out many of the duties covered in the Unit(s), draw up an assessment plan.

If there are too many areas where the candidate's current job does not match the Unit(s), a lower level Unit, or another Core Skill altogether, may be more appropriate. In Modern Apprenticeships you may not have this option, as the Core Skills level for the apprenticeship will be specified.

## ***Stage 3: Work out whether any SVQ evidence can also be used for Core Skills assessment***

If the candidate has recently achieved some SVQ Units, you should consider whether or not they could use their existing evidence to demonstrate competence in Core Skills. For example, when carrying out any of the activities required by the SVQ elements, has the candidate worked with others, used ICT, or used written communication skills?

If a candidate is just starting an SVQ, check to see whether the Core Skill is involved in any of the SVQ requirements. Core Skills signposting, or the Core Skills maps produced by the Sector Skills Council / Standard Setting Body for Modern Apprenticeships are useful for this. The Awarding Body will be able to provide contact details of the relevant SSC/SSB.

Identify what the common evidence might be and examine to what extent this evidence will meet the evidence requirements of the Core Skill Unit.

Just as you would help candidates to identify appropriate evidence for the SVQ, you should help candidates to decide whether or not that evidence would help them demonstrate achievement of the Core Skills Unit.

- (a) Does it overlap with any of the Core Skills requirements?
- (b) What further evidence is required?

You do not need to gather a separate portfolio of evidence for the Core Skills Unit, but you do need to make two assessment decisions about each piece of evidence, judging each against the standards of the SVQ and the standards of the Core Skills Unit. You will need to keep records of how and where the candidate's portfolio covers Core Skills — a matrix is useful for this or you could use the Assessment Plan as a basis for indexing this. You will also need to document the assessment decisions you have made for the Core Skills Unit.

***Stage 4: If there is a shortfall of evidence, plan where additional evidence will come from***

Evidence may be generated by the SVQ activity, even if it is not required for the SVQ assessment. Or, it may be that the SVQ Unit does not naturally generate evidence for the Core Skill. In this case, specially-devised assessment tasks will be needed. There are examples of these in the Assessment Support Packs. You can use the examples with your candidates, or better still, use them as models to develop contextualised tasks at the same levels.

Think about assessment methods:

- (a) Should you expand existing SVQ assessment methods to produce Core Skills evidence?
- (b) Should you design assessments which can be used alongside SVQ assessment to produce Core Skills evidence?
- (c) Would it be better to deal with the Core Skills entirely independently of the SVQ?

See the next section for more information about assessment methods.

***Stage 5: Make an assessment plan***

Agree with your candidate what will be assessed, and how, where, and when it will be assessed. Remember, though, that assessment can occur naturally and you should take every opportunity to record this.

It is a good idea to set target dates for completing the candidate's programme of Units.

The assessment plan should be reviewed each time you and the candidate meet, and should be amended where necessary. It may take the candidate longer to achieve some Units, or some Units might be achieved before the planned date. The plan is purely a guide and should not prevent the candidate from presenting evidence which occurs in a natural context.

## The approach to assessment

Remember that the approach you take to assessing Core Skills needs to be holistic, focusing on the entire Core Skill rather than its various aspects.

Each Unit describes how many tasks are required, and how far the evidence can be derived from different activities:

- ◆ Communication — three tasks, one each for reading, writing, speaking and listening. These tasks cannot be broken down further — for example, all the requirements for writing have to be met in one task.
- ◆ Problem Solving — one task.
- ◆ Working with Others — one task or a range of tasks.
- ◆ Numeracy — various tasks across a range of activities.
- ◆ Information and Communication Technology — various tasks across a range of activities.

Evidence for Information and Communication Technology and Numeracy can be collected from various tasks, although, it is not a good idea to collect evidence from a variety of small tasks, as this increases the assessment burden for both assessor and candidate. It also gives you less reliable evidence of the candidate's competence.

It is a better idea to combine Core Skills assessments, just as you can combine Core Skills with SVQ Units. For example, a single strand of work might require the candidates to read some written materials, write a report on these, and make a presentation to his or her colleagues. This will provide opportunities to cover all the tasks in a Communication Unit. Similarly, in the Information and Communication Technology Unit, it makes sense to combine the 'using hardware' task with one of the other tasks — the candidate will use a mouse, monitor, etc as they use packages or perform searches.

You could also combine assessment of two different Core Skills — for example, if the candidate uses ICT to produce a document, this could also be used in written communication, or it might be relevant to the task in Problem Solving.

## Training

Sometimes, a candidate will not be fully competent in every part of the requirements for the Core Skills Unit. In this situation, training will be required.

Sometimes the training itself can be used as an opportunity to collect evidence. For example, many companies have induction programmes for new or promoted members of staff, and these programmes can often provide opportunities to gather evidence for a range of Core Skills. Similarly, other generic training courses, such as team-building exercises or customer care workshops, can provide opportunities to develop and assess Core Skills.

### Example 1

An auditor has used a computer system connected to the company network, for several years. During this time she has developed a range of ICT skills: in using the computer and spreadsheet, database and word processing applications. She should be able to produce evidence for the first two of the three requirements of the Information and Communication Technology Unit at SCQF Level 5:

'Performing ICT operations'

'Processing information'

However, she has limited experience of carrying out searches to extract and present information from local or remote computer data sources — the third requirement of the ICT Unit.

This is preventing her from completing the Unit. A short training course would develop her existing skills, and, on completing it, she would have gained knowledge and skills in the following areas:

- ◆ knowledge of the content and search facilities of a range of computer data sources
- ◆ how to extract information from local and remote computer data sources

### Example 2

Working with Others, especially at the higher levels, covers: working co-operatively with others; analysing the requirements of your own role and the roles of others; organising your own role; negotiating working methods; promoting co-operative working; modifying your behaviour to meet the needs of others; and motivating yourself and others to progress towards a common goal.

There are many work based activities which would enable a candidate to evidence all these skills such as managing a specific project which requires the candidate to work with and control the work of others, or organising with colleagues, a conference or event which involves many tasks such as booking external presenters, accommodation, travel and transport, catering and hospitality etc.

# Collecting evidence

## Advice on generating and collecting evidence

Once the planning issues are decided, and your candidates are confident about their ability to meet the requirements of the Core Skills Units, candidates can begin the process of gathering, presenting and recording evidence for assessment.

Your tasks as assessor are carried out in the same way as for any other SVQ assessment. In the same way as you would do when you are assessing SVQs, you will review the candidate's progress and give advice and encouragement where it is needed. Reviewing and monitoring the work of the candidate is a normal part of the training and assessment process (eg by observing and questioning and providing feedback to help learning).

Candidates should be free to express any doubts they might have and to ask for help without worrying that by displaying ignorance or inability to carry out a task they will be penalised. To avoid confusing candidates, you must make it clear when assessments are being made.

As evidence is presented, you have to decide whether or not candidates have met the standards. The evidence should be measured against the standards as set out in the Workplace Core Skills Unit. Three key questions to ask yourself are:

- ◆ Have they demonstrated their knowledge and skills as set out in the Workplace Core Skills Unit?
- ◆ Do you have sufficient evidence to make your judgement about their competence — have all the requirements set out in the Workplace Core Skills Unit been met?
- ◆ Is the evidence authentic — is it the candidate's own work?

If the same evidence is being used for both an SVQ Unit and a Core Skills Unit, you have to make two separate assessment decisions — you cannot assume that because the standards of the SVQ Unit have been met, the requirements of the Core Skills Unit are met automatically. It is your role to check the evidence against both Units.

As soon as possible after the assessment you should let candidates know how they have performed, and then record the assessment decision and candidate's achievement.

## Examples of assessment methods

Methods of generating and assessing evidence for Core Skills are the same as for other SVQ Units. There is specific advice on assessment methods in the Assessment Support Packs, which deal with each of the Workplace Core Skills in more detail. The next few subsections, though, give some general hints and tips on how common methods of generating and assessing evidence might be applied to Core Skills.

## Methods of generating naturally-occurring evidence

### Portfolios

A portfolio is a file or folder for collecting and organising material to be assessed. For example, for Communication it could contain samples of work, a log, diaries, notes, witness statements, audio/video tapes, notes from meetings, informal notes and formal reports. It can be stored in hard copy or electronic copy (e-portfolio)

If the candidate is completing a Workplace Core Skills Unit along with an SVQ, he/she does not need to compile a separate portfolio for the Core Skill. However, there must be clear cross-referencing, identifying which evidence relates to the Core Skills Unit (an evidence matrix is a useful way to do this) and there must be documentation recording the Core Skills assessment decisions taken.

### Accreditation of prior achievement

Where candidates can produce evidence to show that they have acquired knowledge, understanding and skills in any of the Core Skills areas, you can assess this evidence just as you would assess evidence from any other source. Accreditation of prior learning is as useful for Core Skills as it is for SVQs, and it works on the same principles. Remember APL is only valid if candidates can provide sufficient and authentic evidence that their competence in the areas claimed is still up-to-date.

#### Example 3

The auditor candidate from Example 1 has chosen Information and Communication Technology at SCQF Level 5 because she feels that using ICT at this level is part of the daily routine of her job. It will make sense for this candidate to get credit for the competence she has already achieved. She can do this through the APL procedure.

The candidate needs to provide evidence of past achievements to prove that she has already reached the standards. The process of assessment is different here only in the preparatory stages. The candidate would take responsibility for collecting the evidence. It must still be current, and she must also be able to prove that it is her own work.

When the candidate presents the evidence, it is your job to decide whether it meets the standards. Looking at work samples is a good source of evidence, but you might also have to rely heavily on witness testimony — signed statements from other people — that the samples are solely the work of the candidate. (There is more about witness testimony on the next page.)

Alternatively, the candidate's line manager could provide a statement saying that she has observed the candidate carrying out duties competently over a period of time. It would also be appropriate to view the candidate's own personal account of her performance, reflecting on what she did and why. The candidate's response to questions would provide further evidence of her competence.

## **Observation**

Direct observation by the assessor of the candidate's natural performance at work is a valid and very reliable method of assessment of the standard of performance of Core Skills. Performance can be assessed during the normal course of work, or while the candidate is carrying out a project or assignment.

You should complete an observation checklist to record that candidate's performance has met the required standard. It is not essential that this be done then and there, if this might affect the candidate's performance. For example, for a candidate working in sales in the retail sector being assessed on communication skills, it might influence the behaviour of potential customers if they were aware that they were dealing with a trainee undergoing assessment.

The checklist should show how you reached a decision on your candidate's competence, giving details of the activity, the date observed and how the observation relates to the requirements of the Unit.

## **Witness testimony**

There may be some activities you would like to observe on several occasions but which you cannot be around to see every time. You might therefore decide to seek an opinion from someone else who can make a valid comment — witness testimony — about a candidate's performance. Witness testimony should be viewed as supporting evidence — it is not sufficient by itself for an assessment decision to be made. The witness cannot be expected to judge the candidate's skills against the detailed requirements of the Core Skills Units — it is your responsibility as assessor to do that.

If witness testimony is used, you should ideally identify witnesses and opportunities for using witnesses as part of the assessment planning.

The testimony should record what the candidate has demonstrated, how, and in what circumstances. It should also say who witnessed the candidate, including a description of the person's job role or relation to the candidate, and whether he or she is familiar with the standards.

In judging this sort of evidence you will have to consider the value of the evidence from witness testimony, and it will have to be supplemented by other evidence, including questioning candidates. This is especially so in instances where it is important that you, as assessor, can see the candidate's skill in action, such as in the oral communication example above.

It is likely to be most useful for providing evidence of authenticity — for example, as a check that ICT outputs are actually the work of the candidate. It can also be useful as supplementary evidence which shows that the candidate is competent in specific aspects of a skill. For example, in assessing Working with Others, the witness might be asked to provide comment on the quality of the candidate's interactions with other group members. In this instance, the witness testimony might supplement evidence from logs and questioning.

## Questioning

On some occasions, you might not have had the opportunity to assess all aspects of performance during your observation, or it may not be feasible for you to do so. Questioning may also be needed when you need to confirm something, for example, in Working with Others, has the work actually been carried out by the candidate? Has the candidate made accurate statements in a log?

Sometimes, in order to make your assessment decision, you might want to ask the candidate questions which test their knowledge. For example, if your candidate was a Care Worker who had to provide information to a client who was in some distress, and you were assessing spoken Communication, you would want to check that he/she 'knows how to express ideas so that a spoken communication conveys meaning clearly to its listeners'. In this situation, you may wish to confirm your assessment decision by asking your candidate some questions. These questions can be spoken or written — the type you use will depend on your candidate's needs.

Where evidence is gathered from questioning, your record must show how the questions relate to the requirements of the Workplace Core Skills Units. Where oral questioning is used, you must provide notes on the questions you asked and the answers given by your candidate. Written responses to questions may also be used — for example, some parts of the assessment for Numeracy will probably involve a sequence of calculations and reasoning, and this will work best when written down.

## Logs and personal statements

Logs involve the candidates keeping a record of their own performance. As an example, logs used for assessment of Working with Others are likely to contain a plan, a record of activities, a diary, and examples of materials such as reports. As well as being used for assessment, they can also be used in reviews of the candidate's progress and what has still to be achieved.

If a log is carefully constructed to capture evidence, and its use is supervised, it can give direct and valid evidence of the candidate's actions and skills. It can show that skills have been effectively used. It can be used to collect evidence over a range of work and, if maintained over a period of time, can also provide evidence of consistent performance.

You may decide to gather evidence of knowledge and understanding and performance by asking your candidates to produce personal statements. These are often used to support other sources of evidence, for example, to explain a product. If you decide to use this method, you must check that the statement is accurate and authentic — in other words that the claims made by candidates about their competence are genuine.

Personal statements and logs completed by candidates can be very useful forms of evidence. Some candidates however, may find it difficult to produce written statements, and you should take care that requiring candidates to produce this form of evidence does not become a barrier to their achievement. Bear in mind the fact that logs can be on paper, disk, CD Rom, audio or video tape, or any other form of media communication normally used by the candidate.

Where candidates have special assessment requirements, alternative forms of assessment should be considered.

## **Product evaluation**

Product evaluation — often used in assessing SVQs — involves assessing how well an actual product meets the standards. In Core Skills, product evidence is most valid for the writing task in Communication. Most other Core Skills Units tend to focus on process skills, so product evidence on its own is unlikely to meet the requirements. However, it can be a useful addition to a portfolio of different kinds of evidence, for example a print-out for the ICT Core Skill.

## **Specially-set assessment tasks**

All the methods of gathering and assessing evidence considered so far can be generated from the candidate's normal work activities — evidence generated from naturally-occurring activities provides the best evidence of Core Skills achievement.

However, Core Skills are designed to be broad and transferable skills which candidates will use in a variety of occupational, social, and personal situations. Because of this, there will often be aspects of a particular Core Skill which fall outside the candidate's normal work activities. This will vary from job to job — for example, some candidates may make daily use of reading and talking skills, but will only rarely produce written communications. Others might perform calculations regularly but make little use of graphical information. In these instances, candidates will have to be given specially-set assessment tasks to fill the gaps.

## **Simulation**

Simulation is any structured task that reproduces real situations. For example, complex problems for Problem Solving at SCQF Level 6 may not arise very often, and when they do it will seldom be at a time which can be pre-determined. This will mean that it could be difficult to find a suitable opportunity to observe the candidate. It may also be difficult to get sufficiently detailed reports from witnesses to allow for a valid assessment. In this kind of situation, simulation can be used effectively.

There may also be occasions when a candidates' job does not exactly match the Core Skill requirements. When this happens, you should identify whether an opportunity exists for them to demonstrate their competence elsewhere in the organisation. If not, and if the gap is relatively small, it may be possible to set up a simulation, either inside the workplace or elsewhere, and supplement this by questioning. Bear in mind, though, that simulation is, by definition, not real, and its use should be exceptional.

## **Assignments and projects**

Assignments and projects involve a set task carried out over a period of time. They are often useful for Problem Solving because the assessment for this Unit has to come from one overall task, for example, the single task which has to be performed for Problem Solving will involve planning, carrying out, and evaluating the solution of one problem situation. Evidence for Communication, Numeracy, Information and Communication

Technology and Working with Others can come from different tasks, but even here it is good practice to integrate tasks. The Assessment Support Packs provide examples of assignments and projects.

Assignments and projects can be designed to allow candidates to be assessed on more than one Core Skill. They can also provide opportunities to integrate Core Skills assessments with SVQ activities.



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