e-skills uk

SVQ for IT Users (ITQ)
Assessment Strategy

Scotland

This document sets out the SVQ assessment strategy appropriate for Scotland. Changes from the existing arrangements are summarised at the end of the document.

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Contents

1 Introduction

1.1 Background to the new SVQ Framework

The 2008 development of the National Occupational Standards (NOS) for Using IT, this SVQ Qualification Structure and the associated Assessment Strategy are key tools in the planned delivery of the Sector Skills Agreement for IT (SSA).

The SSA is uniting employers, educators, government and others to create a coherent strategy for IT skills based on a common, employer-led plan of action, that will transform the IT skills landscape such that:

> All organisations in every sector will be fully realising the potential of IT to help drive their business goals, so that the UK is a world leader in its exploitation of IT for innovation, service and business competitiveness.

> All individuals in the UK will have - and will continue to develop - the IT user skills necessary to fully participate in the e-economy.

> IT user skills will enhance individuals' employability, social lives and ability to benefit from online services.

World class research cited in the Qualifying for the Information Age – the e-skills UK Sector Qualification and Learning Strategy[1] (SQLS) identifies, that workers in virtually all occupations need to be able to use more sophisticated IT systems more effectively to create new sources of customer value. Users will, not only need increased levels of skills in basic desk top technology; they will also increasingly need to be skilled in security management and IT support processes and tools, and also the use of communications and mobile technologies.

The SSA for IT sets out a clear target state for stakeholders delivering and beneficiaries receiving better IT user skills:

> A simplified, flexible framework for recognising achievement in IT skills operates across the UK, throughout both the education system and industry.

The SQLS, together with the Action Plan for Scotland, designed to deliver on the SSA, identifies the following principle[2] for delivering on this target.

> Principle 4: The ITQ Framework will be used to organise and position learning and qualifications within the coherent environment. All IT user qualifications and learning will be recorded through a recognised Record of Achievement

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[1] Available for download at: www.e-skills.com/SQLS.

[2] See SQLS (e-skills UK, 4th April 2008) page 5.

This means that, for the SVQ:

- All IT User qualification and learning will be based on common unit descriptions directly aligned to the National Occupational Standards for IT Users[3] and encompassed in the ITQ Framework.

- Qualifications and learning are described in a consistent way, which is understood by employers and learners.

- Learners at all stages will engage with a common environment that will enable seamless progression.

- There is recognition and central aggregation of all individuals' elements of learning and achievement within a formal record that is meaningful to employers.

- Funding agencies are able to monitor achievement and return on investment.

The National Occupational Standards (NOS) for Using IT and enhancement of the flexibility of the SVQ both in terms of content and how it is delivered will form a major part of the implementation of the SQLS for IT users. This will enable further alignment of all IT user qualifications and learning with the NOS.

The SVQ for IT users will be referred to hereafter as the ITQ.

1.2   Policy changes

The ITQ is designed to support the development of the SQLS principle for an ITQ Framework, by setting out the requirements for an up to date IT user qualification based on the NOS, tailored to the needs of businesses and their staff. The ITQ also takes account of changes to policy and the qualifications environment. Key changes include the following.

> Credit frameworks

   The revised IT User NOS have been designed to support the development of units of credit for inclusion in the SCQF. e-skills UK will collaborate with Awarding Bodies in Scotland to ensure that units directly aligned to the NOS will meet employers and learners needs and, where appropriate, contribute to the ITQ.

> Core skills[4]

   The revised IT User NOS signpost opportunities for naturally occurring core skills in Information Technology, Communication, Application of Number, Problem Solving and Working with Others.

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[3] National Occupational Standards for IT Users version 3. November 2008. http://nos2008.e-skills.com

[4] See separate documentation: IT User Key and Core Skill Mapping Sep 08.xls

Final version approved March 2009

1.3   Principles of ITQ suite of qualifications

Three principles underpin the proposed ITQ suite of qualifications.

1   Flexibility of approach in response to sector, employer and learner needs:

> for sectors – to tailor and contextualise IT training both to reflect the increasing diversity of job roles and the use of specific systems and software

> for employers – to ensure skills application and development enables practical exploitation of the potential of IT for business improvement

> for learners – to ensure they are equipped with the appropriate skills to support their personal or career development.

2   Flexibility of content – to stimulate and inspire new learning and support progression, the ITQ offers a range of solutions varying in:

> size – from taster courses and bite-sized units to full-time programmes of study

> level of complexity – from SCQF Level 4 to 6

> content – incorporating a range of options for different IT systems and applications.

3   Flexibility of assessment method as appropriate to the individual and the unit, which minimises the assessment burden for learners. The ITQ can therefore accommodate both:

> electronic testing using simulation, tests and tasks

> portfolio-based evidence demonstrating the application of skills, knowledge and understanding.

2   ITQ Assessment Strategy

2.1   Accreditation of prior achievement

Many people develop their skills in using IT through undertaking qualifications, such as vocational qualifications, vendor certificates and general qualifications. In order to allow candidates to build on their existing skills and to avoid duplication of assessment, a system for recognising the contribution that some of these qualifications can make to achieving the ITQ has been developed. This includes:

> those awarded by the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA);

> units on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF); and

> units on the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) available in Northern Ireland, England and Wales, and Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF);

> other qualifications (such as vendor awards).

For qualifications not accredited by a national regulatory body, additional criteria may be set for validation, covering for example:

> quality assurance; and

> independent assessment.

The ITQ has the potential to incorporate a wide range of IT user skills qualifications and training through such a system of validation. At each qualification level, optional units can be assessed:

> wholly using evidence arising from the workplace and/or simulation; or

> by a combination of certificated knowledge and skills from a validated qualification and workplace or simulated evidence.

2.1.1 Recognition process for Contributing Units and Qualifications

e-skills UK will, in collaboration with the Joint Awarding Body Forum, implement a process by which units and qualifications are mapped against the elements of one or more Areas of Competence within the National Occupational Standards and validated using an agreed set of criteria. These will be referred to as 'contributing units' or 'contributing qualifications'.

This process involves mapping qualification or unit content against the knowledge, understanding and skills specified by the NOS. This mapping may be carried out by any party, but e-skills will have responsibility for verifying the mapping, in consultation with the awarding bodies, to make sure that in all cases:

> the knowledge, understanding and skills content of the qualification match the components of the relevant Area of Competence within the NOS.

For qualifications or units not accredited to the National Qualifications Framework or awarded by the Scottish Qualifications Authority, the certificating agency must have satisfactory systems meeting the criteria agreed by e-skills UK and the Awarding Bodies for:

> quality assurance; and

> independent assessment.

A register of qualifications and units which have been recognised as contributing to the ITQ will be maintained by e-skills, this will also indicate the Areas of Competence within the NOS (or component elements) for which they provide coverage. Where an Area of Competence within the NOS is only partially covered by a contributing qualification, the remaining content must be evidenced by other means.

Acceptance of contributing qualifications is mandatory for all ITQ Awarding Bodies irrespective of the originating Awarding Body (AB). An Awarding Body offering ITQs must accept recognised qualifications from any other AB if the following conditions are met:

> the candidate presents the original qualification or unit certificate for inspection by the ITQ centre; and

> the certificate was achieved no more than three years prior to the date of presentation to the centre. It is the responsibility of the Awarding Bodies and their centres to ensure that certificated skills and knowledge are still current.

Some approved units entitle candidates to claim exemptions for more than one ITQ unit. In such cases, the candidate does not have to claim exemptions for all of the possible ITQ units unless he/she chooses to do so.

2.1.2 Using contributing qualifications as evidence

All units, with the exception of the mandatory unit Improving Productivity Using IT, may be achieved via a contributing qualification or unit.

Achievement via a contributing qualification or unit does not necessarily demonstrate work-based application of the knowledge, understanding and skills contained in the ITQ unit.

2.2   Assessment and verification

2.2.1 Assessors

Assessors will be appointed by approved centres to assess candidate performance and judge the validity of the assessment IT activities undertaken for a specific and real purpose.

Where expert witnesses make a significant contribution to the assessment process:

> the assessor will be responsible for approving the selection of expert witnesses including evidence of occupational competence and monitoring their contribution to the assessment process; and

> a register of all accepted expert witnesses must be maintained by the centre

The assessor will be responsible for making assessment judgements including for units where evidence relies extensively on witness testimony. The assessor will make use of appropriate witness testimony as part of the overall assessment of the candidate. In addition the assessor must ensure that witness testimony clearly matches the level and breadth of performance described in the NOS, and this may be done, for example, by the assessor questioning the witness against the knowledge and skills specified in the NOS.

In addition to the requirements of the regulatory authorities[5], assessors must:

> have carried out continued professional development to familiarise themselves with current standards for assessment; and

> have the IT experience and occupational competence to enable them to make a valid judgement about the demonstration of competence in the area they will be assessing.

2.2.2 Internal verifiers

Internal verifiers will be appointed by approved centres to ensure the quality and consistency of assessments within the centre. In addition to the requirements of the regulatory authorities[6], Internal Verifiers must have the necessary skills and experience to assess the units and qualifications they are verifying.

2.2.3 External verifiers

External verifiers will be appointed by the relevant Awarding Body to monitor and assure quality and consistency of assessments within and between centres.

In addition to the requirements of the regulatory authorities[6], External Verifiers must have the necessary skills and experience to assess the units and qualifications they are verifying.

2.3   Quality Assurance

The Awarding Bodies are required to operate comprehensive strategies for the external verification of assessment procedures, processes and outcomes, which must include the four following specific elements.

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[5] Awarding Body Criteria. SQA, 2007. p39

2.3.1 Sampling strategy

External verifiers must ensure that they observe a sample of assessments and assessors in their centres, as well as examining candidate portfolios and interviewing candidates, witnesses, assessors and internal verifiers, as agreed with the regulatory authorities. Where assessment of the mandatory unit is the only unit for which actual work-based evidence is available, it should be externally verified for every sampled candidate. The external verifier, not the centre, will determine which assessments, candidates, witnesses, assessors and internal verifiers are to be sampled.

2.3.2 External verification planning

Centre assessment plans, recording forms and systems must be made available on request to the External Verifier. The External Verifier must be informed in advance:

> if the centre wishes to use simulations; or

> if the centre wishes to use knowledge tests.

The External Verifier must be satisfied that these accord with the recommendations on the acceptability and use given in this strategy.

2.3.3 Risk analysis

Awarding Bodies are required to identify and quantify risks associated with ITQ assessment and verification processes and to determine corrective actions to eliminate or reduce these risks. All external verification reports and other data relating to a centre should be evaluated by the Awarding Body and its risks relating to quality control assessed. External verification, monitoring and control arrangements should be put in place as appropriate to each centre's level of risk. Awarding Bodies are required to state that they are complying with relevant regulatory authority guidance on assessing and managing risk.

2.3.4 Awarding Body Forum

Awarding Bodies, through the quality control mechanisms specified by the regulatory authorities, must ensure a rigorous and effective control of centres and the assessment and verification process so that judgement of what is valid, authentic, current, reliable and sufficient evidence is maintained across all assessment contexts.

To ensure consistency of assessment it is required that all Awarding Bodies participate in the e-skills Joint Awarding Body Forum which will be the focus for ensuring that assessment and verification of competence is carried out consistently and fairly across all assessment contexts.

The Joint Awarding Body Forum will, within the individual Awarding Bodies agreed methodologies, develop and maintain a common understanding of the standards and promote good assessment and verification practice.

Annex A Guidance for Awarding Bodies on recommended assessment methods

A.1 Mandatory unit assessment

In order to reflect the standards of competence expected by employers, all evidence for the ITQ mandatory unit must be naturally occurring from IT activities undertaken for a specific and real purpose. This does not necessarily mean that candidates must be in paid employment. However, the setting in which they are assessed should be a realistic working environment (see Criteria for realistic working environments A.1.1 below).

The evidence for the assessment of the mandatory unit that candidates provide will come from tasks or activities. The end user will typically specify the purpose and general content for the tasks. In many situations, the candidate's employer or client will specify the end product.

However, valid evidence can also arise from:

> the search for employment (e.g. CVs, job applications and emails to potential employers)

> social activities (e.g. club membership databases, posters and websites)

> enterprise activities (e.g. business plans, budgets and marketing materials)

> voluntary activities (e.g. cash flows, programmes and newsletters)

> learning and studying subjects other than IT (e.g. internet research for a geography assignment, reports/dissertations and presentations).

It is for the assessor (assisted by the expert witness where relevant) to ensure that the activities were for a real purpose. By the very nature of IT, work activities can be carried out in a variety of locations, not confined to the traditional office setting.

A.1.1 Criteria for defining realistic working environments

A realistic working environment is one which meets all the following criteria:

> based on a work task, activity or scenario that is sufficiently challenging for the level of understanding and skills to be assessed;

> includes a comprehensive range of demands and constraints typical of those that would be met in a real work context;

> gives candidates access to people, equipment and materials that would be normal for the tasks or activities represented;

> places candidates under pressures of time that would be normal in the workplace for the type of tasks and activities represented; and

> is replicable, to allow reassessment under comparable conditions, where necessary.

A.2 Optional unit assessment

All ITQ optional units may be assessed using any method, which clearly demonstrates that the learning outcomes and assessment criteria have been met. Assessments must also take into account the additional information provided in the unit Purpose and Aims relating to the level of demand of

> the activity, task, problem or question and the context in which it is set;

> the information input and output type and structure involved; and

> the IT tools, techniques or functions to be used.

Examples of assessment methods are:

> e-assessment;

> knowledge tests;

> scenario-based assessment;

> portfolio of evidence taken from activities involving the use of contemporary ICT systems;

> witness testimony;

> professional discussion;

> other types of assessment developed by the Awarding Body and supported by e-skills UK as meeting the assessment criteria

Whatever method is used, Awarding bodies must have appropriate systems and procedures to:

> ensure that assessment arrangements meet relevant assessment design principles and quality assurance regulations; and

> make sample assessment materials available for discussion by the joint awarding body forum, as required.

A.2.1 e-Assessment

Online or e-assessment may be used to assess some learning outcomes and assessment criteria relating to performance, knowledge and understanding, for example, of the performance skills in formatting text or understanding of the reasons for choosing different software tools.

Awarding Bodies, employers or providers may develop e-assessments. Where e-assessment is used, Awarding Bodies must ensure that on each assessment occasion:

> the performance, knowledge and understanding being assessed matches that specified in the relevant ITQ unit;

> the level is sufficiently challenging; and

> the assessment methodology used is robust and reliable.

Where employers or providers develop e-assessments, these should be agreed in advance with the awarding body.

A.2.2 Knowledge tests

Knowledge tests, often delivered electronically, can be used to assess some learning outcomes and assessment criteria relating to knowledge and understanding, for example, knowledge of security risks or organisational guidelines.

Awarding Bodies, employers or providers may develop knowledge tests. Where knowledge tests are used, Awarding Bodies must ensure that on each testing occasion:

> the knowledge being tested matches that specified in the relevant ITQ unit;

> the level is sufficiently challenging; and

> the assessment methodology used is robust and reliable.

Where employers or providers develop knowledge tests, these should be agreed in advance with the awarding body.

A.2.3 Scenario based assessment

Awarding Bodies, employers or providers may develop scenarios to provide the *purpose* for using IT. The scenario and associated tasks must be carefully designed to ensure that:

> the candidate undertakes practical tasks or activities that produce assessable outcomes;

> the performance, knowledge and understanding being assessed matches that specified in the relevant ITQ unit;

> the level is sufficiently challenging; and

> the demands and constraints result in the purposeful use of IT, and where relevant reflect those that would typically be met in a real work context.

Scenarios may be combined with other methods of assessment, for example to provide a purpose for a series of online assessment tasks.

A.2.4 Portfolio assessment

Valid evidence can arise from:

> activities undertaken for or at work;

> the search for employment (e.g. CVs, job applications and emails to potential employers); and

> social activities (e.g. club membership databases, posters and websites), such as:

  • enterprise activities (e.g. business plans, budgets and marketing materials);

- voluntary activities (e.g. cash flows, programmes and newsletters); or

- learning and studying subjects other than IT (e.g. internet research for a geography assignment, reports/dissertations and presentations).

By the very nature of IT, activities can be carried out in a variety of locations not confined to the traditional office setting.

Portfolio evidence should arise naturally from tasks and activities involving the use of IT and may include:

> product outcomes – in the form of outputs or screenshots produced using IT – should form the majority of evidence; and

> ephemeral evidence – where this is the only evidence for an element, example, of planning, should be cross checked by oral questioning and backed up by brief written evidence – for example in the form of annotations, storyboards or 'witness statement' (see below).

e-skills UK actively encourages the use of electronic portfolio management tools.

A.2.5 Witness testimony

A 'witness' is someone who provides a written statement about the quality and authenticity of a candidate's work for assessment purposes. To make a statement the witness must have first hand experience of the candidate's performance and understanding of knowledge, skills and understanding required to do the work. Witnesses can be drawn from a wide range of people who can attest to performance, including line managers and experienced colleagues from inside the candidate's organisation.

A witness statement may be needed when the candidate is performing day-to-day activities, which leave little or no evidence behind, for example, agreeing the outcomes to be produced using IT and any deadlines that need to be met or understanding and meeting organisational guidelines for data security and file storage. The witness can, in particular, provide evidence relating to the candidate's competence:

> when reviewing, testing and recommending ways of Improving Productivity using IT towards [IPU] the mandatory unit;

> when using specialist or bespoke IT software applications;

> in meeting customer requirements; and

> of working within organisational guidelines.

Annex B   Summary of key changes to the ITQ

	Current position	Proposed approach
Qualification Type	SVQ	SVQ
Titles	Level 1 SVQ for IT Users Level 2 SVQ for IT Users Level 3 SVQ for IT Users	Level 1 SVQ for IT Users (ITQ) Level 2 SVQ for IT Users (ITQ) Level 3 SVQ for IT Users (ITQ)
Component units	Based on NOS for IT Users v2 Consists of: • Statements of competence • Knowledge criteria • Knowledge components • Skills criteria • Skills component Key skills in IT related but not integrated	Units at SCQF levels 4, 5 and 6 based on NOS for IT Users v3 Consists of: • Learning outcomes • Assessment criteria Skills and knowledge components are indicative and will not form the basis of assessment (unless defined through a syllabus or test specification) Level of demand amplified in Unit Aims and Purpose.
Content	NOS defined for 17 Areas of Competence	NOS defined for 25 Areas of Competence
Conditions of Award	Defined in terms of e-skills UK defined unit values	Defined for each level in terms of SCQF unit credit points
Accreditation of prior achievement	Exemption for recognised contributing units and qualifications	No change
Assessment strategy	Assessment must be based on purposeful activities Assessors must hold a "D" or "A" award Verifiers must hold "V1" award	Assessment for mandatory unit must demonstrate purposeful application of skills and knowledge Assessors must be appropriately trained External quality control procedures in line with SQA assessment strategy[6]

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[6] SQA Guide to Assessment, June 2008

Abbreviations used in this document

AB	Awarding Body
APA	Accreditation of Prior Achievement
APL	Accreditation of Prior Learning
IPU	Improving Productivity using IT (mandatory unit)
NOS	National Occupational Standards
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NVQ	National Vocational Qualification
QCA	Qualifications and Curriculum Authority
SCQF	Scottish Credit and Qualification Framework
SQA	Scottish Qualifications Authority
SQLS	Sector Qualifications and Learning Strategy
SSA	Sector Skills Agreement
SVQ	Scottish Vocational Qualification