



The Sector Skills Council for
environmental and land-based industries

**Assessment Strategy
for SVQs at Levels 1 – 4
in the Environmental and Land-based Sector**

July 2009

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Assessment Strategy for SVQs at Levels 1 – 4 in the Environmental and Land-based Sector

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1 Introduction

This document sets out the recommendations and specifications of Lantra on behalf of the environmental and land-based sector, for the assessment and quality control systems required for Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs) at Levels 1 – 4. This strategy is common across the Lantra footprint and should be used in conjunction with the specific guidance documents for the development of SVQs which relate to each industry.

The following sections outline Lantra's industry specific principles in regard to:

- External quality control
- Workplace assessment
- The use and requirements for simulation
- The required occupational expertise of assessors and verifiers.

These principles are in addition to the generic criteria that awarding bodies must meet for the delivery of SVQs, as required by the relevant sections of the Scottish Qualifications Authority's (SQA's) *Awarding Body Criteria (2007)*. This Assessment Strategy does not describe these systems in detail. It only provides the overarching principles. The Awarding Body may develop their own quality assurance measures in order to enhance the principles of assessment. Lantra accepts this providing the overarching principles of this document are consistently put into practice.

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2 External Quality Control

Lantra is looking for strong and robust external quality control which could be by:

- 2.1 Set banks of questions
- 2.2 Independent assessment of specified units
- 2.3 Enhanced system of assessment and verification.

2.1 Set banks of questions

This method involves the use of banks of questions. These banks of questions will assess candidates' knowledge and understanding of specific units. They will be either locally devised and assessed, and moderated by the external verifier, or, centrally devised, locally assessed, and moderated by the external verifier.

A bank of questions should be prepared for each unit specified, together with the anticipated key points of knowledge or understanding required in response. Candidates' responses can be oral or written. Types of questioning could include:

- Open written response assessment
- Oral questioning
- Multiple choice tests.

These question banks will be moderated by the external verifier to ensure the validity and reliability of the questions and answers and to ensure consistency and standardisation between centres.

The questions and anticipated key points of knowledge and understanding required in response must be developed to take into account the variety of contexts within the industry.

External quality control of the Veterinary Nursing industry will take place through examinations developed by the awarding body.

The awarding body will monitor and review the operation of the examination for effectiveness, and to take account of changing circumstances (for example, new technologies, procedures or areas of legislation).

2.2 Independent assessment of specified units

This method requires that assessment of part of the SVQ is carried out by an independent assessor.

Independent assessment must:

- Be carried out by individuals who are competent to assess the subject and who meet the requirements for assessors (see Section 5.1).
- Be carried out by an assessor independent of the candidate (i.e. an assessor who is not the usual assessor of the candidate).
- Be carried out by an assessor independent of the centre, with candidates randomly selected by the independent assessor.
- Be achieved through assessing one specified unit. The unit selected will be at the discretion of the independent assessor, as agreed with the usual assessor.

Internal verifiers should include the verification of the independently assessed units in every sample and are required to compare the outcomes of assessments made by independent assessors with those made by the candidate's usual assessor to identify any trends that may indicate concerns about consistency. Where such concerns are identified, the internal verifier must take appropriate action to ensure consistency is achieved. Information on comparisons of the assessments made by independent assessors and those made by usual assessors must be made available to external verifiers.

The external verifier should include the verification of the independently assessed units in every sample.

Anybody undertaking independent assessment must not be responsible for the verification of the evidence that they have assessed.

2.3 Enhanced system of assessment and verification

The monitoring and standardisation of assessment decisions will be achieved by a robust and strengthened assessment, internal and external verification system. The mechanisms required to achieve this are in addition to those outlined in SQA's *Awarding Body Criteria (2007)* and could include increased sampling or other methods agreed with the industry and the awarding body.

2.4 External verification

- The awarding body must ensure that all new assessment centres, or existing centres wishing to extend their provision, are able to meet all regulatory and assessment strategy requirements.

If it is clear that a new or existing centre is experiencing difficulties, the awarding body should supply additional support, either through more frequent external verifier visits or by other appropriate means, for example through training and development or through visits by other specialist support staff.

- Lantra would request that advice and support offered by external verifiers is consistent across all centres offering the awards. In order to achieve this, the awarding body should hold standardisation events with external verifiers. In addition, the monitoring and support that an approved centre receives must be consistent with that centre's risk rating (see Section 2.6 below). The external verifier, not the centre, should determine the assessments, candidates and assessors to be sampled. Sampling should take place during the development of a candidate's portfolio, and not only at the point of signing off.
- Rotation of external verifiers is recommended to promote the standardisation of verification.

2.5 Internal verification

- Internal verifiers should develop a sampling procedure which is in line with regulatory guidance.
- Internal verifiers should be able to demonstrate how the internal verification sampling process ensures that:
 - A selection of portfolios are sampled during their development stage.
 - A selection of portfolios are sampled on completion.
 - All types of evidence are sampled.
 - All assessors are sampled, including those based at different sites.
 - The work of different assessors is compared (where possible this comparison should be across the same unit(s)).
 - The full range of units across the qualification is sampled.
 - Internal verifiers should observe assessors conducting candidate assessments at regular intervals according to awarding body guidelines, risk rating and experience of assessor. The reliability, validity and authenticity of evidence must be checked during these observations.
 - Standardisation should be an integral part of the IV process.
 - The IV is responsible for signing off a candidate's record of achievement prior to certification request.
 - The IV is responsible for agreeing the countersigning arrangements for new assessors who have not achieved the appropriate qualification (as required by the regulatory authorities).

2.6 Risk rating and risk management

Lantra believes that systems of risk rating and risk management will protect the integrity of the assessment/verification process by ensuring that external verification, monitoring control and support mechanisms are put into place according to each centre's level of risk. The systems should also focus on the following:

- Assessment/verification bias – any personal, professional or pedagogical relationship between candidates, assessors, internal verifiers and external verifiers should be declared to the awarding body.
- Conformance to centre approval criteria to ensure that the integrity of the qualification is maintained.

The system for risk rating and risk management should be reviewed and revised, as appropriate, following any guidance issued to awarding bodies from regulatory authorities.

Where risk is identified, Lantra would expect that one or more of the following actions would be taken by the external verifier/awarding body:

- Conduct a spot visit at short notice
- Meet and/or observe each candidate or a larger sample of the candidates at the centre in question
- Increase the frequency of verification visits
- Conduct candidate and/or employer interviews, as required, over the telephone
- Or other action appropriate to the risk.

2.7 Awarding organisation forum

A key concern of the industry is that all assessment and verification is consistent and carried out in line with the assessment strategy and guidance documents. To this aim Lantra, with awarding bodies, will identify opportunities for all those involved in the assessment and verification process to share good practice and keep up to date with the latest requirements of the industry by facilitating regular awarding organisation meetings.

All awarding organisations delivering work-based qualifications, including SVQs, will be invited to provide appropriate representation at these meetings. The meetings will provide opportunities to discuss issues concerning quality control, as well as for industry specialists to update awarding body representatives. The meetings will also enable discussion on:

- Any assessment and quality control problems identified by employers and other key stakeholders or by the awarding bodies themselves
- Assessment and verification issues and will require the awarding body to respond appropriately to all identified issues within reasonable timescales.

Lantra and its industry experts will also use these meetings to provide the awarding body with the advice and support they need to maintain and enhance quality control. This exchange of information is viewed as essential in maintaining the validity and reliability of the National Occupational Standards and therefore the uptake of the qualifications.

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3 Workplace assessment

Lantra believes that all assessments of a candidate's performance must take place in a real working environment that reflects industry working practices. This principle will apply to all units except those for which simulation has been deemed acceptable (see Section 4).

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

Lantra has no objection to the assessment of knowledge and understanding taking place in a different environment, for example a college or another environment which is not the immediate workplace. However, the assessment of this knowledge and understanding should be linked directly to workplace performance.

3.1 Witness testimony

Lantra recognises that for the assessment of workplace performance to be as natural and efficient as possible, the use of witness testimony has a crucial role in the collection of evidence.

Witnesses must be fully briefed and clear about the purpose and use of the testimony. Any relationship between the witness and candidate should be declared and noted by the assessor.

Witnesses must be able to demonstrate to the assessor that they have the necessary expertise in the area for which they are providing testimony. This information should be noted by the assessor.

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4 Simulation

Simulation should only be used where it is difficult to collect evidence through a real work environment/situation. Simulations will usually deal with contingencies such as unexpected problems, emergencies, or other incidents which will not necessarily occur frequently, or where opportunities are not available. Such instances are specified within the relevant guidance for development of SVQs.

The awarding body must issue adequate guidance to their centres as to how these simulations should be planned and organised. In general this guidance must ensure the following:

- Simulations should only be used where prescribed in the relevant guidance for the development of SVQs.
- All simulations must be planned, developed and documented by the centre in a way that ensures the simulation correctly reflects what the standard seeks to assess.
- The physical environment for the simulation must be as realistic as possible and draw on real resources that would be used in the industry.
- Where simulations are used they must be based in an environment which reflects industry working practices (as defined in Section 3) and must be based on current working practice. This will be monitored by the awarding body.
- Simulations can only be used to supplement real work activities and should not be the only source of evidence used to indicate competence.
- A centre's overall strategy for simulation must be approved by the awarding body.

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5 Occupational expertise of assessors and verifiers

Lantra believes that the occupational expertise of assessors and verifiers is one of the key factors underpinning valid and reliable assessment. The sections below define essential criteria in addition to the requirements of SQA's *Awarding Body Criteria (2007)*.

5.1 Assessors

All assessors must:

- Be occupationally competent and knowledgeable in respect of the units they are going to assess. The awarding body must ensure that assessors have verifiable, relevant and current industry experience and knowledge of the occupational working area at, or above, the level being assessed. This experience and knowledge must be of sufficient depth to be effective and reliable when judging candidate's competence. Assessors' experience and knowledge could be verified by:
 - CV and references
 - Possession of a relevant NVQ/SVQ or other equivalent qualification
 - Membership of a relevant professional body.
- Be familiar with the National Occupational Standards; and must be able to interpret and make judgements on current working practices and technologies within the area of work
- Have sufficient time to carry out the role
- Receive an appropriate induction to the SVQs that they are assessing
- Actively engage in relevant, industry specific continuing professional development activities to keep up to date with developments relating to the industry in which they are assessing
- Hold or be working towards the appropriate qualifications for assessors.

Information on the induction and continuing professional development of assessors must be made available to the external verifier.

Approved centres will be required to provide the awarding body/external verifier (as appropriate) with current evidence of how each assessor meets this requirement; for example, relevant qualifications, recent performance appraisal records, testimonials or references. Lantra/awarding body meetings will discuss guidance to centres and external verifiers on the types of evidence that may be used. Lantra is aware that, in some cases, the requirements for occupational competence will mean that some candidates may have more than one assessor, each assessing different units or aspects of those units. Lantra would approve and encourage such an approach as helping to assure the quality of assessment.

5.2 Internal verifiers

Internal verifiers must:

- Be occupationally competent and knowledgeable in respect of the units they are going to verify. The awarding body must ensure that internal verifiers have verifiable, relevant and current industry experience and knowledge of the occupational working area at, or above, the level being verified. This experience and knowledge must be of sufficient depth to be effective and reliable when verifying assessors' work. Internal verifiers' experience and knowledge could be verified by:
 - CV and references
 - Possession of a relevant NVQ/SVQ or other equivalent qualification
 - Membership of a relevant professional body.
- Have sufficient knowledge of the work activities and assessment process to be able to offer credible advice on the interpretation of the standards, moderate assessments and resolve any differences and conflicts.
- Be fully conversant with the National Occupational Standards; and must be able to assist assessors with interpretation and the making of assessment judgements. They must be able to make judgements about the assessment process being applied by assessors.
- Co-ordinate the work of assessors, provide advice, call meetings as appropriate, observe assessments and carry out all the other important roles of an internal verifier.
- Receive an appropriate induction to the SVQs that they are verifying.
- Actively engage in relevant, industry specific continuing professional development activities to keep up to date with developments relating to the industry in which they are verifying.
- Hold or be working towards the appropriate qualifications for internal verifiers.

Information on the induction and continuing professional development of internal verifiers must be made available to the external verifier.

In exceptional circumstances should the requirements for occupational and verification competences prove unrealistic, i.e. presenting substantial difficulties in recruiting internal verifiers, Lantra would support alternative internal verification arrangements. For example, allowing two verifiers for a centre; one with the relevant systems knowledge IV qualification to verify the quality of assessment systems and the other with the required level of knowledge and experience of the industry to verify technical issues. The awarding body would be responsible for agreeing and monitoring this arrangement.

5.3 External verifiers

The awarding body should ensure that external verifiers:

- Have knowledge, experience and understanding of the industry relevant to the awards they are verifying
- Understand the National Occupational Standards, and their correct interpretation and application. It is recommended that the external verifier has a good understanding and preferably experience of the assessment and internal verification process.
- Receive an appropriate induction to the SVQs that they are verifying.
- Actively engage in relevant, industry specific continuing professional development activities to keep up to date with developments relating to the industry in which they are verifying.
- Hold or be working towards the appropriate qualifications for external verifiers.

Should the requirements for occupational and verification competences prove unrealistic, i.e. presenting substantial difficulties in recruiting an appropriate number of external verifiers, Lantra would support alternative external verification arrangements. For example, allowing two verifiers for a centre; one with the relevant EV qualification to verify the centre's quality procedures and the other with the required level of knowledge and experience of the industry to verify technical issues.

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Assessment strategy glossary

Assessment	The process of making judgements about the extent to which a candidate's work meets the assessment criteria for a qualification or unit or part of a unit.
Assessor	The person who assesses a candidate's work.
External verifier	An individual appointed by the awarding body to ensure accurate and consistent standards of assessment between centres offering the same award.
Internal verifier	An individual appointed by the centre to ensure accurate and consistent standards of assessment between assessors operating within a centre.
Independent assessment	Assessment of candidate's work that is carried out by assessors that do not have a vested interest in the outcome.
Knowledge and understanding	The information that candidates need to know and demonstrate in order to carry out tasks effectively.
Mandatory unit	A unit that must be achieved as part of a specified qualification.
National Occupational Standards	National Occupational Standards: statements which describe the outcomes of competent work in an occupational field.
SVQ	Scottish Vocational Qualification
Occupationally competent	Ability to carry out work activities to the National Occupational Standards required.
Performance criteria	Tasks that candidates are expected to carry out as part of their job role.
Qualification structure	Details the qualification route or units at each level needed to gain the SVQ.
Simulation	An activity or situation that is not naturally occurring but is devised for the purposes of providing evidence of competent performance.
Witness testimony	A statement provided by an expert within the field to clarify that the candidate can conduct the stated tasks.
Workplace assessment	Assessment that is carried out within the candidate's place of work.