

**The  
Sector Skills Council  
for  
Active Leisure  
and  
Learning**

*SHAPING SKILLS FOR THE FUTURE*

**ASSESSMENT STRATEGY  
FOR  
NVQs & SVQs**

Approved by UKCG February 2007

## INTRODUCTION

This document sets out the recommendations of SkillsActive, the Standards Setting Body for Active Leisure and Learning, for the assessment and quality control systems required for the National and Scottish Vocational Qualifications that come under its umbrella. An annex for each qualification will be added to this generic document to detail any specific requirements to that qualification, or suite of qualifications. .

SkillsActive representing employment interests in the sector is interested in the continuing availability of high quality qualifications that are fit for purpose, command public confidence and are understood by those taking them and those who use them for recruitment, or for other, purposes. The Sector Skills Council has long advocated that consistent standards are maintained across the Awarding Bodies who deliver the Scottish and National Vocational Qualifications on behalf of the industry.

This document is built around the following fundamental principles that SkillsActive has advocated for some time:

- **National Occupational Standards establish the benchmark of competent performance in the sector;**
- **S/NVQs should be assessed over a period of time in the workplace;**
- **assessment of an individual's competence should be rigorous, efficient and cost effective using approaches that have the support of employers, the Awarding Bodies and other interest groups**
- **S/NVQs, because they are rooted in these standards, must therefore be seen as different from traditional qualifications in their application in the industry;**
- **competence in the workplace is unique and has to be seen as different from training.**

## BACKGROUND

The current provision of NVQ/SVQ awards in Sport, Recreation and Allied Occupations and Active Leisure and Learning extends across Levels 1 to 4. These are currently offered by six Awarding Bodies, one for Scotland and the remainder in the rest of the UK.

This is the 3<sup>rd</sup> version of SkillsActive (formally SPRITO's) Assessment Strategy, which builds on the strategy which was approved by PSAG initially in September 1999 and re-recognized in July 2002

The Sector Skills Council's guiding principle is "**to act as the guardian of the industry's National Occupational Standards,**" to this end the industry has realised that a documented assessment strategy that lays down the overarching principles of assessment is vital to maintain the reliability and validity of these awards in the future, particularly if even more Awarding Bodies wish to offer these NVQs and SVQs, and they are to remain of value to employers.

The aim of the strategy is to build and improve on the current system and this document sets out the definitive requirements of the industry for **all** those who provide these qualifications.

### **Overarching assessment principles**

It is crucial to SkillsActive that "the industry" has confidence in the application of its National Occupational Standards, together with the industry values statements/code of ethics. This demands that those involved in the assessment process at every level, display an understanding, and have experience, of the technical and occupational requirements of the active leisure and learning industry and the sub sectors they are involved with; as well as a thorough and consistent interpretation of S/NVQ assessment principles.

The Industry has consistently and firmly placed both its National Occupational Standards and Scottish and National Vocational Qualifications in the world of work.

## KEY COMPONENTS OF THE ASSESSMENT STRATEGY

National Occupational Standards can be used for a variety of purposes, and the following sections apply where formal assessment of the NOS is necessary for qualification and accreditation purposes, to achieve the key principles set out above. These requirements are in addition to, and in no way conflict with, the generic criteria that Awarding Bodies must meet for the delivery of NVQ/SVQs, as required by the QCA's *NVQ Code of Practice* and the relevant sections of the SQA's *SVQ Criteria and Guidance for Awarding Bodies*.

### 1. The layout of the National Occupational Standards

The SSC has been very careful to incorporate current best practice in the way its National Occupational Standards are laid out and expressed. Awarding Bodies must use the National Occupational Standards as accredited by UKCG.

Great care has been taken to ensure that the National Occupational Standards are able to be properly assessed in ways which promote validity, reliability and fairness.

### 2. **Assessment Methodology, Evidence Requirements and aspects of them that must be assessed in the workplace**

SkillsActive has defined which aspects of its National Occupational Standards must always be assessed through performance in the workplace, even those for which assessment through simulation is allowed. (this is discussed in a later section). Quality assessment, for most aspects of these National Occupational Standards, cannot be achieved without regular access to the workplace.

The SSC intends to work closely with the Awarding Bodies to indicate the ways in which this is best assessed by providing guidance on the nature and type of assessment. In all cases candidate performance must be assessed in the workplace, although it will be made clear which aspects of the range must be assessed through performance evidence and which aspects could be assessed using supplementary evidence through scenarios, case studies, questioning etc.

The SSC will work with the Awarding Bodies to develop and agree **qualification specific annexes** for each of the separate S/NVQs that are submitted to UKCG, and these will be attached to this assessment strategy.

It is incumbent upon each Awarding Body to ensure that all candidate assessment captures the fundamentals expressed in this document and incorporates that detailed in any relevant annex. The information contained in the annex will amplify the generic statements into context/occupationally specific requirements such as the need for assessors to hold specific qualifications.

### 3. **Design of the National and Scottish Vocational Qualifications**

SkillsActive carefully designs each of its S/NVQs to ensure that they contain opportunities for transfer and progression and that they are flexible enough to meet the differing requirements of both large and small employers, indoor and outdoor environments as well as the public, private and voluntary sectors. This assessment strategy supports flexibility in the use of the qualifications by a variety of employers and candidates, and tries not to place barriers to access through imposing unnecessary rigidity to the process.

Given the flexibility of the mandatory and optional structures on which the NVQs and SVQs are based there should be no reason for a candidate to attempt a unit for which they have no workplace assessment opportunities on a consistent basis.

### 4. **External Quality Control**

SkillsActive believes that external quality control will be achieved by the following measures:

- The monitoring and standardisation of assessment decisions through a system of assessment and verification

The monitoring and standardisation of assessment decisions will be achieved by a robust and strengthened external verification system underpinned by risk rating and management.

#### 4.1. External Verifiers and External Verification

From active and on-going research, which started in the latter part of 1999, the SSC has confirmed that employers value a strengthening of the External Verification process rather than the introduction of some other 'independent' measure(s), which may prove to be a barrier to candidate access and take-up.

SkillsActive expects:

- EVs to command respect from their peers in the occupational sector of the industry and the application of the criteria in the sections below will ensure this
- every Awarding Body to seek advice, if and when required, from the SSC, on the technical qualifications, experience and competence of prospective External Verifiers in the selection and deployment of EVs. Action taken as a result of the advice to be fed back to the SSC
- to provide, if necessary, input to the EV training days.
- meet with every Awarding Body as necessary to understand the quality assurance processes being used

SkillsActive has worked with its industry partners and the Awarding Bodies to develop criteria to measure the occupational competence of **external verifiers** and ensure the consistency of its advice. In addition to the requirements of the *Code of Practice* and the *SVQ criteria*, Awarding Bodies should ensure that prospective External Verifiers:

- Hold Verifier Unit V2 and it is recommended, also hold the Assessor Units A1 and A2 (New external verifiers should be given a clear action plan for achieving unit V2)<sup>1</sup>
- Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of, and support for, the Sector's Values Statements and Codes of Ethics and how they are applied in assessment
- Match the technical criteria which are developed for each occupational area or sporting context to ensure their current technical competence in relation to verifying the units being assessed.
- Be occupationally competent in the area appropriate to the level of the qualifications they are to be verifying;
- Provide evidence of knowledge, understanding and application of the National Occupational Standards together with Technical Definitions where appropriate.
- Be committed to the application, further development and refinement of the National Occupational Standards and SVQs/NVQs.
- Demonstrate a commitment to uphold the integrity of the National Occupational Standards and prevent their misuse.
- Are aware of national issues affecting vocational education, training and qualifications in the sector
- Provide evidence of knowledge of the Active Leisure and Learning framework of qualifications

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<sup>1</sup> The A and V units have replaced the D units, although the D units remain valid. This footnote applies to Internal Verifiers and Assessors

- Be committed to the content and guidance provided in the current edition of the SSC's Assessment Strategy
- Demonstrate their ability to maintain credibility with the sector and to retain the confidence of the industry through commitment to ongoing personal and professional development

External Verifiers must sample the work of all assessors.

All new assessment centres should be approved by their external verifier before any candidates are registered;

the frequency of centre visits for existing and new centres should conform to the risk assessment and management process requirements

#### 4.2. Risk rating and risk management

SkillsActive anticipates that improvements in Awarding Body approaches to gathering, monitoring and analysing statistical data will improve the overall rigour of external verification and the SSC will assist Awarding Bodies to do this.

The industry welcomes the development of a system of risk rating and risk management. SkillsActive believes that such systems of risk rating and risk management will ensure that external verification, monitoring control and support mechanisms are put into place according to each centre's level of risk. The systems, currently being developed by the Awarding and regulatory bodies, will offer substantial enhancements to the quality control systems for NVQs and SVQs. SkillsActive will be prepared to discuss adaptations to this strategy following detailed discussions with individual Awarding Bodies about their risk strategies so that the SSC is re-assured that any adaptations only serve to strengthen quality and not undermine it.

The systems for risk rating and risk management should be reviewed and revised, as appropriate, following any guidance issued to Awarding Bodies from the regulatory bodies.

Where risk is identified, Skills Active suggests that one or more of the following actions could 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 and compare assessment materials
- increase the frequency of verification visits
- conduct candidate and/or employer interviews, as required, over the telephone
- or other action appropriate to reducing the risk.

#### 4.3. Internal verification

The SSC has worked with its industry partners and the Awarding Bodies to develop criteria to measure the occupational competence of **internal verifiers**:

Internal Verifiers are appointed by an approved centre and approved by the Awarding Body through their External Verifier.

Internal Verifiers should only verify the decisions of assessors that fall within their acknowledged area of technical and occupational competence.

Internal Verifiers should be in a position to influence an approved centre's assessment policy and to facilitate the assessment process

and should be one of the following:

- employed by the same organisation (approved centre) as the assessors or...

- working in partnership with, and drawing on evidence from, assessors' organisation(s)(approved centre)

The prospective **Internal Verifier should:**

- Hold Verifier Unit VI and it is recommended, also hold the Assessor Units A1 and A2 (New internal verifiers should be given a clear action plan for achieving unit VI)
- Meet the Technical criteria developed for each occupational area or sporting context to ensure their technical competence in relation to the units being assessed.
- Provide evidence of recent experience in the occupational area.
- Provide evidence of knowledge, understanding and application of the National Occupational Standards with the Assessment Specification.
- Provide evidence of knowledge, understanding and support of the relevant Sport and Recreation Values Statements.
- Demonstrate a commitment to uphold the integrity of the National Occupational Standards and prevent their misuse.
- Provide evidence of their ability to maintain occupational competence and to participate in IV/assessor training initiatives for continuous professional development.
- Approved Centres may have additional generic criteria and personnel specifications in addition to the above

The Internal verifier is responsible for the consistency of standards across all portfolios

Internal verifiers should observe each assessor conducting candidate assessments at regular intervals. The reliability, validity and authenticity of evidence must be checked during these observations.

#### 4.4. Awarding Bodies Forum

Skills Active has worked closely with all its Awarding Bodies to establish the Awarding Bodies Forum. It is a requirement for all Awarding Bodies offering the NVQs/SVQs in this sector to:

- Attend quarterly meetings of the main Active Leisure and Learning Awarding Body Forum
- Discuss and resolve issues concerning quality control, to ensure the consistent interpretation of the National Occupational Standards across all the Awarding Bodies
- Receive updates from industry specialists on current industry developments and initiatives
- Set and monitor targets for the implementation of the SVQs and NVQs

The Terms of Reference of the Awarding Bodies Forum are designed to improve cross-Awarding Body standardisation of assessment decisions and issues.

#### 4.5. Independent Assessment

Joint QCA/SQA Guidance *“Developing an assessment strategy for NVQs and SVQs”* requires that ‘a significant part of the assessment for an NVQ or SVQ is carried out in a manner which is demonstrably independent of anyone who might have a vested interest in the outcome of the assessment decision’.

Skills Active has concluded that risk assessment and management of centres is the best method to ensure external quality control for this strategy.

**The NVQ/SVQ is the confirmation of an individual’s competence in the workplace over a period of time.** The gathering of performance evidence through observation

or products of work is the preferred assessment method and these requirements are to be itemised in a series of qualification specific annexes to capture the requirements of every standard together with the types of additional evidence suitable for proving that standard. Centres should be encouraged to develop standard banks of questions to cover the required depth of underpinning knowledge and the requirements of that work location.

The SSC continues to support the conclusion that independent assessment is not required for this strategy as external quality control is fulfilled via the risk assessment and management of centres.

## 5. Workplace assessment

### 5.1. Assessment Centres must:

- ensure that candidates have access to the resources commonly in use in the industry and that the pressures and constraints of the workplace are properly reflected
- ensure that the principles and values of the occupational area(s) are embedded in the operation of the workplace;
- demonstrate a commitment to quality and good practice which may include the pursuit of other schemes which recognise industry best practice;
- ensure that assessment sites conform with Health and Safety requirements and good health and safety practice is reflected in assessment.
- maintain a register of all assessors and Internal Verifiers
- provide evidence of their plans to keep Assessors and Internal Verifiers updated with current industry requirements

where applicable, the SSC will provide advice on the minimum “resource requirements” needed by an Approved Assessment Centre to provide adequate experience to the candidate.

### 5.2. Assessors

Assessors are appointed by an Approved centre and approved by the Awarding Body through their occupationally competent External Verifier. ***They should only assess in their acknowledged area of technical and occupational competence.***

Assessors should be one of the following:

- employed by the same organisation as the candidate or...
- working in partnership with, and drawing on evidence from, the candidate's organisation or...
- an expert brought in to supplement the expertise of the candidate's own organisation or as an additional external method of quality assurance.

The prospective Assessor should:

- Hold the Assessor Units A1 and A2 [*New assessors should have a clear action plan for achieving units A1 and A2. An assessor or verifier who has gained certification must support assessment decisions by assessors who are still working towards certification.*]
- Meet the Technical criteria developed for each occupational area or sporting context to ensure their technical competence in relation to the units being assessed.

- Provide evidence of recent experience and competence in the occupational area to the level of the qualification(s) they wish to assess.
- Provide evidence of knowledge, understanding and application of the National Occupational Standards with the Assessment Specification.
- Provide evidence of knowledge, understanding and support of the relevant Active Leisure and Learning Values Statements and how they are applied in assessment.
- Demonstrate a commitment to uphold the integrity of the National Occupational Standards and prevent their misuse.
- Provide evidence of their ability to maintain occupational competence and to participate in assessor training initiatives for continuous professional development.
- Approved Centres may have additional generic criteria and personnel specifications in addition to the above

All assessors who operate within the S/NVQ system should gain A1 and A2 Assessment Units, thereby confirming their ability to utilise the full range of tools required to properly assess the individual at work over a period of time.

### 5.3. Witness testimony

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

Witnesses must be fully briefed and clear about the purpose and use of the testimony and should be encouraged to achieve Unit L20 “Support the achievement of competence in the workplace”. Any relationship between the witness and candidate should be declared and recorded for internal and external verification purposes.

Witnesses must be able to demonstrate that they have the necessary expertise in the relevant area and their testimony should:

- ❖ be specific to the activities or product;
- ❖ give a brief description of the circumstances of the observation;
- ❖ give a brief description of the background of the witness and the observed activity;
- ❖ identify the aspects of competence demonstrated;
- ❖ be signed and dated

The assessor should carefully check the witness testimony against the points listed above.

## 6. Simulation

Simulation should only be used where it is difficult to collect evidence through a real work situation, the real work environment or within an acceptable time frame. Simulations will usually deal with contingencies such as unexpected problems, emergencies, or other incidents which will not necessarily occur frequently. *Such instances are specified within the individual annexes for qualifications or suites of qualifications.*



The Awarding Bodies must issue adequate guidance to their centres as to how these simulations should be planned and organised. In general this guidance must ensure that the demands on the candidate during simulation are neither more or less than they would be in a real work environment/situation. In particular:

- 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 and be approved by the external verifier.
- all simulations should follow these documented plans
- 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 a realistic work environment and must be based on current working practice
- the use of simulation will be monitored by the external verifier to ensure that where simulations are used, they are based in a realistic work environment

## **CONCLUSION**

The SSC offers this third edition assessment strategy to the UKCG for consideration and approval. This industrial sector is greatly concerned over health and safety issues and cannot afford for ill qualified individuals to be deployed within the workforce.