Assessment Strategy for NVQs/SVQs for Contact Centres

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Contents

1.   Introduction

The NVQ/SVQs[1] are intended to be appropriate and manageable for people in a wide range of work roles involving Contact Centres.

In order to increase take-up and employer participation it is essential to complement the updated content with streamlined assessment processes without reducing their validity.

Two substantive changes to existing practice are proposed:
- recognising other qualifications and employer programmes of learning as counting towards achievement of the NVQ/SVQ
- an enhanced role for 'expert witnesses'.

In addition we actively encourage the use of electronic portfolio management tools.

This assessment strategy was developed in consultation with:
- employers
- training providers and colleges
- awarding bodies
- the regulatory authorities.

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[1] The content and structure of these qualifications is published separately:
   see National Occupational Standards for Contact Centres ICS converted
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2.　　Recognition of other qualifications and programmes of learning

Many people develop skills through undertaking qualifications such as Vocationally Related Qualifications (VRQ), 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 Contact Centre NVQs/SVQs is proposed.

This extension of existing accreditation of prior achievement (APA) arrangements will save candidates, centres and awarding bodies time and effort.

ICS will work with the regulatory authorities and awarding bodies to develop processes to map the contribution to the NVQ/SVQ of qualifications in the following categories:

- those on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) or accredited by the Scottish Qualifications Authority
- other qualifications (such as vendor awards).

In the longer-term it is intended to include employer training schemes. The content and assessment methodology of these employer schemes will need to map against the National Occupational Standards (NOS) and this assessment strategy.

The NVQ/SVQs have the potential to incorporate a wide range of skills qualifications and training through such a system of recognition. At each qualification level units can be assessed:

- wholly using evidence arising from the workplace or simulation or
- by a combination of certificated knowledge and skills (from a recognised qualification or employer training scheme) and workplace or simulated evidence.

2.1　　Recognition process

n collaboration with the regulatory authorities, awarding bodies, and other key stakeholders, processes will be implemented by which the contribution of qualifications and employer training schemes are mapped against the components of one or more of the optional units of the e-skills NVQs/SVQs. These will be referred to as 'contributing qualifications' and 'contributing schemes' respectively.

Recognition by the regulatory authorities of programmes and qualifications which are not inside the NQF is central to the emerging plans to introduce credit frameworks in Northern Ireland, England and Wales. Similarly the existing Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) will be expanded to include a wider range of content than presently covered.

It is likely that any validation process developed by the regulatory authorities for non-framework programmes for the purposes of issuing credit will require detailed criteria and codes of practice. Similar criteria and codes of practice will also be applied to the recognition of programmes contributing to the NVQs/SVQs if required by the regulatory authorities. If there is no regulatory requirement then ICS and the Awarding Bodies will set the criteria through the Awarding Body Forum in agreement with the regulatory authorities.

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2.1.1 Recognising qualifications

For qualifications accredited to the National Qualifications Framework or accredited by the Scottish Qualifications Authority the 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 ICS 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
- where applicable assessment of the contributing qualification or unit includes practical tasks or activities carried out in a realistic working environment.

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

- quality assurance
- independent assessment.

A register of qualifications and units which have been recognised as contributing to the Contact Centre NVQs/SVQs will be maintained by ICS; this will also indicate the NVQ/SVQ units (or component parts of units) for which they provide coverage. Where NVQ/SVQ unit content is only partially covered by a contributing qualification, the remaining content must be evidenced by other means.

A submitting body may appeal to the regulatory authorities[2] where mapping verification decisions are disputed.

Acceptance of contributing qualifications is mandatory for all NVQ/SVQ Awarding Bodies irrespective of the originating Awarding Body (AB). An Awarding Body offering NVQs/SVQs 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 NVQ/SVQ centre
- 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.

2.1.2 Employer training schemes

In the longer term it is anticipated that employers may wish to seek recognition for their in-house training schemes as contributing to one or more optional units of the NVQ/SVQ. This will allow the Contact Centre NVQ/SVQs to be customised to meet the particular needs of employees within that organisation.

Recognition of employer training schemes acknowledges that some large employers have their own in-company training and appraisal schemes that, whilst built on the same principles as national qualifications, were tailored to their own enterprises.

Employers who operate high quality training schemes will already be meeting a range of internal standards set to meet their own needs, often in conjunction with external awarding bodies. For a

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[2] represented by QCA and SQA (Accreditation) officers

scheme to be recognised it would need to demonstrate content and processes of a standard at least equivalent to that required when delivering NQF qualifications.

Criteria will be developed as described in section 2.1 above to assess the suitability of employer schemes and appended as an annexe to this assessment strategy.

Examples of the criteria which could be used are:

- entry requirements
- the training delivery and assessment mechanisms
- duration of training
- equality and inclusion
- certification and progression
- qualifications/experience of trainers and assessors
- quality assurance systems
- external verification or inspection reports.

3.   Assessment

In order to achieve an NVQ/SVQ, a candidate must apply specified skills, knowledge and understanding to their actual job role. There is no requirement that every area of competence should be demonstrated in the workplace, and it is one of the key functions of an assessment strategy to define those areas which must be assessed in the workplace and those which can or must be achieved in other ways. It should be noted that the design of the Contact Centre NVQs/SVQs is such that no candidate can achieve the qualification without demonstrating a prescribed minimum amount of actual workplace performance.

The NOS for Contact Centres give an indication, without being overly prescriptive, of the types and scope of activities the competent person should be able to carry out.

For NVQ/SVQ units, candidate evidence however produced (work-based, simulation or recognised qualification) must reflect this. Where examples are given in the NOS (following 'such as' or 'e.g.') evidence must cover all of the **types** and the full **scope** of the activities listed. Evidence of several activities will normally be required.

3.1   Workplace assessment

At each qualification level the mandatory units **must** be assessed using evidence arising from the workplace. All optional units **may** be assessed using evidence arising from the workplace. For all workplace assessments:

- evidence should arise naturally from workplace tasks and activities e.g. job sheets, work logs, contact reports etc
- ephemeral evidence, for example of decision taking, should be cross checked by oral questioning and backed up by brief written evidence – for example in the form of annotations or storyboards
- the assessment of workplace performance should be as natural and efficient as possible and therefore evidence of competence should, where possible, come from work colleagues acting as 'expert witnesses'.

3.1.1 Knowledge tests

Some employers use knowledge tests, often delivered electronically, to assess an employee's knowledge and understanding of, for example, organisational procedure. Knowledge components specified in the standards may be assessed by the use of such knowledge tests, which follow a standard model of assessing knowledge within an NVQ/SVQ by using questions.

As with any knowledge test being used within an NVQ/SVQ, assessors and internal verifiers must ensure that:

- the knowledge being tested matches that specified in the NOS
- the assessment methodology used is robust and comparable to existing awarding body practices.

The use of knowledge tests should be agreed in advance.

3.2   Simulation

Simulation is not permitted for mandatory units. Any sector specific unit must be assessed according to the requirements of that sector's Assessment Strategy.

Where tasks and activities are simulated they must be undertaken in a realistic working environment.

3.2.1   Criteria for defining realistic working environments

A realistic working environment is defined by the following criteria:

- based on a work task, activity or scenario that is sufficiently challenging for the level of the 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
- is replicable, in order to allow opportunities for reassessment under comparable conditions, where necessary.

3.3   Roles and occupational competence

3.3.1   Assessors

Assessors will be appointed by approved centres to assess candidate performance and judge the validity of work place assessments.

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
- a register of all accepted expert witnesses must be maintained by the centre and be subject to review as part of the external verification process.

The assessor will be responsible for making assessment judgements including for units where evidence relies extensively on expert witness testimony. The assessor will make use of appropriate expert 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, assessors must:

- have carried out continued professional development to familiarise themselves with current standards for assessment
- have relevant Contact Centre experience and occupational competence to enable them to make a valid judgement about demonstration of competence in the area they will be assessing.

3.3.2 Expert witnesses

Expert witnesses can be drawn from a wide range of people who can attest to performance in the workplace, including line managers and experienced colleagues from inside the candidate's organisation or from other organisations such as customers or clients.

The expert witness can, in particular, provide evidence relating to the candidate's competence:

- when working with, or supporting, specialist products, equipment or systems
- in meeting customer requirements
- of working within organisational procedures.

Expert witnesses should at least:

- have a minimum of two years supervisory, managerial or training experience in the units for which they are providing evidence
- demonstrate a working knowledge of the National Occupational Standards units they are attesting to
- demonstrate clear evidence of appropriate continuous professional development.

In addition it would be desirable for the expert witness to hold or be working towards an appropriate unit of competence in the assessment of workplace performance. If this is not the case, they should hold a post that involves responsibility for the quality of work performed by those for whom they are acting as an expert witness.

3.3.3 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, Internal Verifiers must have the relevant Contact Centre experience and occupational competence to enable them to make a valid judgement about a demonstration of competence in the area they will be verifying.

3.3.4 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, where expert witnesses make a significant contribution to the assessment process, the register of all accepted expert witnesses should be reviewed as part of the external verification process.

In addition to the requirements of the regulatory authorities, External Verifiers must have the relevant Contact Centre experience and occupational competence to enable them to make a valid judgement about a demonstration of competence in the area they will be verifying.

3.4   Using contributing qualifications as evidence

All units, with the exception of those designated by an 'X' in the following tables, 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 NVQ/SVQ unit. The following conditions therefore apply:

A.   One or two optional NVQ/SVQ units may be gained **in full** via a contributing qualification or unit, where assessment of the contributing qualification or unit includes practical tasks or activities carried out in a realistic working environment (see 2.1.1 and 3.2.1)

B.   Only the knowledge, understanding and skills contained in any further optional NVQ/SVQ units may be gained via a contributing qualification or unit. However **application** of these must be demonstrated, based on workplace evidence, regardless of whether or not the contributing qualification or unit could be accepted under A above.

Unit Title	
1 Develop personal and organisational effectiveness	X
2 Health and Safety in ICT and Contact Centres	X
3 Contact Centre systems and technology	
4 Customer care	
5 Direct selling and customer acquisition in Contact Centres	
6 Interpersonal and written communication	
7 Performance management	
8 Remote support for products or services	
9 Staff resource planning for Contact Centres	
10 Incident Management	
Sector specific unit[3]	X
Supporting learning and development (from Employment NTO)	X
Managing people and resources (from Management Standards Centre)	X
Managing quality (from Management Standards Centre)	X
Project Management (from ECITB)	X
Use IT systems	
Use IT to exchange information	
General uses of IT	
Use IT software	
Email	
Internets and intranets	
Word processing software	
Spreadsheets software	
Database software	
Specialist or bespoke software	

[3] This can be an accredited unit from **any** suite of NVQ/SVQs which is relevant to the candidate's job role. The UV of this unit is determined by the qualification level in which it will be used up to a maximum of 40. Availability of these units is at the discretion of the Awarding Bodies.

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4.   Quality control of assessment

Four measures have been identified to enhance the quality control of assessment:

- Definition of the sampling strategy
- Verification planning
- Risk Analysis
- The Awarding Body Forum.

The Awarding Bodies are required to operate comprehensive strategies for the external verification of assessment procedures, processes and outcomes. Specific elements to be included in their methodologies are:

4.1   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, expert 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, expert witnesses, assessors and internal verifiers are to be sampled.

4.2   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.

4.3   Risk analysis

Awarding Bodies are required to identify and quantify risks associated with NVQ/SVQ 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.

4.4   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 routinely participate in the joint Awarding Body Forum[4] which will be the focus for ensuring that assessment and verification of competence is carried out consistently and fairly across all assessment contexts.

The 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.

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[4] The JABF is composed of all of those Awarding Bodies which offer any of the NVQs and/or SVQs
based on the National Occupational Standards for which ICS is responsible.
AB membership of the JABF comprises: City & Guilds, Edexcel, Intellect, LCCIEB, OCR,
Pitmans Qualifications and SQA (Awarding). In addition QCA and SQA (Accreditation)
attend representing the regulatory authorities.

Institute of Customer Service
2 Castle Court
St Peter's Street
Colchester
CO1 1EW

T: 01206 571716

ICS Institute of Customer Service

F: 01206 546688
E: enquiries@icsmail.co.uk

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instituteofcustomerservice.com