

**Assessment Strategy
For
NVQs/SVQs in the Justice Sector**

February 2008

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1. Background

Skills for Justice is the sector skills council covering all employers, employees and volunteers in the criminal justice sector throughout the United Kingdom. This includes:

1. the police
2. custodial care, including prisons, secure transport and electronic tagging
3. community justice, including supervision and rehabilitation of offenders, services for victims, survivors and witnesses and community safety
4. court services, including court administration and management, judges and magistrates
5. HM Revenue & Customs law enforcement
6. prosecution services, including the Crown Prosecution Service in England and Wales, the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service in Scotland and the Public Prosecution Service in Northern Ireland

Skills for Justice has brought together the work of three former National Training Organisations (NTOs), the Police Skills and Standards Organisation, the Custodial Care NTO and the Community Justice NTO. Between them these three NTOs were responsible for four suites of National Occupational Standards: Policing, Custodial Care, Community Justice and Youth Justice. Each of these suites had a related assessment strategy.

With the creation of the sector skills council for the justice sector it is appropriate to now bring those four assessment strategies together and to provide a coherent and cohesive approach to assessment across the sector.

This assessment strategy will therefore replace the four assessment strategies as from May 2006

2. Introduction

This document sets out the recommendations and specifications of Skills for Justice on behalf of the justice sector of the UK, for the assessment and quality control systems required for the NVQs/SVQs.

The following sections outline Skills for Justice's specific principles in regard to:

1. external quality control of assessment
2. workplace assessment
3. the use and characteristics of simulation
4. the required occupational expertise of assessors and verifiers
5. liaison between the SSC and the Awarding Bodies

These principles are in addition to the generic criteria that Awarding Bodies must meet for the delivery of NVQs/SVQs, as required by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority's (QCA's) '*NVQ Code of Practice*' and Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA 's) '*SVQ Criteria and Guidance*' for Awarding Bodies

This Assessment Strategy does not describe these systems in detail. It only provides the overarching principles. These systems may vary from one Awarding Body to another and Skills for Justice accepts this, providing the overarching principles of this document are consistently put into practice.

Skills for Justice sees itself as working in partnership with its Awarding Bodies in order to deliver quality assessment and will be happy to provide them with appropriate guidance and support in implementing its requirements.

3. External Quality Assurance - A rigorous and robust system of Internal and External Verification

The monitoring and standardisation of assessment decisions will be achieved by a robust and strong external verification system. The mechanisms required to achieve this are outlined in QCA's '*NVQ Code of Practice*' and Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA 's) '*SVQ Criteria and Guidance*' for Awarding Bodies.

In addition to the Regulators' requirements Skills for Justice will require all external verification reports and other data relating to a centre to be evaluated by the Awarding Body and any risks relating to quality control to be addressed. External verification, monitoring, support and control should be put in place as appropriate to each centre's level of risk.

All assessors, internal verifiers and external verifiers must meet the requirements of the *NVQ Code of Practice* and the *SVQ Criteria and Guidance*.

4. Workplace Assessment

Assessments of candidates' performance must take place in a work based situation, except for those units for which simulation has been deemed acceptable (see Section 5 below).

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

It is accepted that the assessment of some knowledge and understanding may take place in a different environment, for example in a training and development centre or another environment, which is not the immediate workplace. However, the assessment of this knowledge and understanding should be linked directly to workplace performance and should include performance evidence.

Skills for Justice believes that direct observation by a competent assessor (as outlined in Section 6.1) or testimony from an Expert Witness (as outlined in Section 6.2) is always to be preferred. Expert Witness testimony has parity with assessor observation unless otherwise stated in unit evidence requirements. The Assessor is responsible for making the final judgement in terms of the candidate meeting the evidence requirements for the unit.

Skills for Justice recognises that there are alternative evidence sources which may be used where direct observation is not possible or practical e.g. work products, records, reflective accounts, professional discussion etc.

5 Simulation

Simulations should only be used where stated in the National Occupational Standards. Where simulation can be used within individual units, it is specified in Appendix B.

Assessment in a simulated environment should only be used in the following circumstances:

1. where evidence in the workplace will not be demonstrated within an acceptable time frame.
2. where the nature of the work activity presents high risk/danger to the candidate and others, for example, firearms operations

The Awarding Bodies should 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 nor less than they would be in a real work situation. This guidance should clearly state that the strategy for simulations should be approved by the External Verifier and all simulations must be agreed with the internal verifier prior to use.

ALL SIMULATIONS SHOULD FOLLOW THESE BASIC PRINCIPLES:

1. A centre's overall strategy for simulation must be examined and approved by the external verifier
2. The nature of the contingency and the physical environment for the simulation must be realistic and candidates should be given no indication as to exactly what contingencies they may come across.
3. Where simulations are used they must reflect the requirements of the National Occupational Standards.
4. The location and environment of simulation must be agreed with the internal verifier prior to taking place and be checked by the external verifier.
5. All simulations must be planned, developed and documented by the centre in a way that ensures the simulation correctly reflects what the National Occupational Standard seeks to assess and all simulations should follow these documented plans.
6. There should be a range of simulations to cover the same aspect of the unit so that the risk of candidates successfully colluding is reduced.

6. Requirements of Assessors, Expert Witnesses and Verifiers

Skills for Justice believes that the occupational expertise of assessors, expert witnesses, internal and external verifiers is one of the key factors underpinning valid, fair and reliable assessment. The integrity and professionalism of assessors, expert witnesses, internal and external verifiers are of paramount importance. Centres must ensure that both assessors and verifiers are given sufficient time to carry out their role effectively.

6.1 Assessors

All assessors must:

1. be occupationally competent. This means that each assessor must, according to current sector practice, be competent in the functions covered by the units they are assessing. They will have gained their occupational competence working within the justice sector or within an appropriate occupational sector. They are not required to occupy a position in the organisation more senior than that of the candidate they are assessing. However, centres must be alert to the risks that all such arrangements could present and ensure that sufficient quality controls are in place through the internal verification process to minimise the possibility of collusion between candidates and assessors.
2. be able to demonstrate consistent application of the skills and the current supporting knowledge and understanding in the context of a recent role directly related to the NOS that they are assessing as a practitioner, trainer or manager.
3. 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
4. maintain their occupational competence by actively engaging in continuous professional development activities in order to keep up-to-date with developments relating to the changes taking place in the justice sector. These activities may include those offered by the Awarding Body, Skills for Justice or other relevant providers in the sector
5. hold or be working towards the assessor qualification as approved, and specified by, the regulatory authorities. Achievement of the qualification must be within the timescales laid down by the Regulatory Authorities. Approved centres will be required to provide the Awarding Body with current evidence of how each assessor meets this requirement; for example, certificates of achievement, testimonials, references or any other relevant records. Where an assessor is working towards the qualification for assessing NVQs, Awarding Bodies must require that assessment decisions are countersigned by another assessor who holds the qualification for assessing NVQs. The assessor holding the qualification for assessing NVQs must meet the criteria laid out in points 1 and 2 above.

Where a new NVQ/SVQ is being introduced and there are not sufficient occupationally competent assessors to meet the countersignatory requirements as above, centres may use qualified NVQ/SVQ assessors who are not occupationally competent for up to 18 months from introduction of the NVQ/SVQ.

Any such arrangements should be agreed with the Awarding Body and be monitored through the external verification process.

Centres should ensure that they check the Appendices for any additional requirements for specific Justice Sector NVQs/SVQs.

6.2 Expert Witnesses

All Expert Witnesses must:

1. be occupationally competent. This means that each expert witness must, according to current sector practice, be competent in the functions covered by the units to which they are contributing. They will have gained their occupational competence working within the justice sector or within an appropriate occupational sector.
2. maintain their occupational competence by actively engaging in continuous professional development activities in order to keep up-to-date with developments relating to the changes taking place in the justice sector. These may include those offered by the Awarding Body, Skills for Justice or other relevant providers in the sector.
3. be able to demonstrate consistent application of the skills and the current supporting knowledge and understanding in the context of a recent role directly related to the NOS that they are witnessing as a practitioner, trainer or manager.
4. be familiar with the National Occupational Standards; and must be able to interpret current working practices and technologies within the area of work
5. have had an appropriate induction to Skills for Justice NVQs/SVQs, the assessment centre and Awarding Body requirements, and have access to ongoing training and updating on current issues relevant to these NVQs/SVQs and NOS.

6.3 Internal Verifiers

All Internal verifiers must:

1. be occupationally knowledgeable across the range of units for which they are responsible prior to commencing the role. Due to the risk critical nature of the work and the legal implications of the assessment process, Internal Verifiers must understand the nature and context of the assessors' work and that of their candidates. This means that they must have worked closely with staff who carry out the functions covered by the national occupational standards, possibly by training or supervising them, and have sufficient knowledge of these functions to be able to offer credible advice on the interpretation of the standards. IVs must also sample the assessment process and resolve differences and conflicts on assessment decisions.
2. understand the content, structure and assessment requirements for the NVQs/SVQs they are verifying
3. maintain their occupational competence by actively engaging in continuous professional development activities in order to keep up-to-date with developments relating to the changes taking place in the justice sector. These activities may include those offered by the Awarding Body, Skills for Justice or other relevant providers in the sector.
4. hold or be working towards the internal verifier qualification as approved, and specified by, the regulatory authorities. Achievement of the qualification must be within the timescales laid down by the Regulatory Authorities.
5. occupy a position in the organisation that gives them the authority and resources to co-ordinate the work of assessors, provide authoritative advice,

- call meetings as appropriate, visit and observe assessment practice, and carry out all the other important roles of an internal verifier.
6. have an appropriate induction to Skills for Justice NVQs or SVQs and the standards that they are verifying provided to them by the Centre, and have access to ongoing training and updating on current issues relevant to these NVQs, SVQs and standards. Information on the induction and continuing professional development of internal verifiers must be made available to the external verifier.
 7. In England, Wales and Northern Ireland, hold or be working towards the Internal Verifier qualification as approved, and specified by, the regulatory authorities. Achievement of the qualification must be within the timescales laid down by the Regulatory Authorities. Where an Internal Verifier is working towards their Internal Verifier qualification, Awarding Bodies must require that their internal verification decisions are counter-signed by an Internal Verifier who holds the qualification for internally verifying NVQs. The Internal Verifier holding the qualification for internally verifying NVQs may or may not meet the criteria laid down in point 1 above. Such arrangements should be agreed with the Awarding Body and be monitored through the external verification process.

6.4 External Verifiers

All External Verifiers must:

1. be occupationally knowledgeable and have gained their knowledge working within the sector or associated professional/occupational area.
2. have a thorough understanding of the national occupational standards for the qualifications that they will be verifying
3. have a detailed knowledge of the Awarding Body's systems and documentation
4. have a thorough understanding of the qualification system and national policy and guidance documents produced by the regulatory authorities and Awarding Bodies describing assessment and verification practice
5. maintain their occupational competence by actively engaging in continuous professional development activities in order to keep up-to-date with developments relating to the changes taking place in the justice sector. These activities may include those offered by the Awarding Body, Skills for Justice or other relevant providers in the sector
6. hold, or be working towards, the external verifier qualification as approved, and specified by, the Regulatory Authorities. Achievement of the qualification must be within the timescales laid down by the Regulatory Authorities
7. have, where appropriate, undergone relevant security checks due to the nature and confidentiality of the information that they will be exposed to. This will be arranged by Skills for Justice in conjunction with the Awarding Bodies.

The Awarding Body may seek clarification from Skills for Justice of the appropriateness of the specific external verifier applicant where appropriate.