Assessment Strategy

for Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs) in the Land-based and Environmental Sector

December 2015

Contents

1   Introduction

The purpose of this assessment strategy is to set out the recommendations and specifications for the assessment and quality assurance of Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs) in the Land-based and Environmental sector.

This strategy is common across the Lantra footprint and should be used in conjunction with any additional guidance documents related to specific SVQs.

The following sections outline Lantra's industry specific requirements with regard to:

- external quality control

- workplace assessment

- the use and requirements for simulation

- the required occupational expertise of assessors and verifiers

These recommendations and specifications are in addition to the generic principles that awarding bodies must meet for the delivery of SVQs, as required by the relevant sections of the current *SQA Accreditation's Regulatory Requirements.*

The Awarding Body may also 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.

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 pre-set 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. 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 take into account the variety of contexts within the industry.

The awarding body will monitor and review the use of set banks of questions for effectiveness, and to ensure they 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

This method is 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 the current *SQA Accreditation's Regulatory Requirements* 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.

- The awarding body must ensure that advice and support offered by external verifiers is consistent across all centres offering the awards. In order to achieve this, the awarding body must require external verifiers to take part in regular standardisation activities (with a minimum of at least once a year). 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 at different times as the candidate works towards achievement of the SVQ, 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 candidate evidence is sampled during development stage

  - a selection of candidate evidence is sampled on completion

  - all types of evidence is 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 assessment of 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 authority)

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 the regulatory authority.

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 organisations 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 and address issues concerning assessment and quality control, as well as for industry specialists to update awarding organisation representatives. The meetings will also enable awarding organisations to:

- review and report on issues with the National Occupational Standards which may inform future review and development

- consider trends and developments which may have an impact on development, delivery, assessment and quality assurance of qualifications

Lantra and its industry experts will also use these meetings to provide the awarding organisations 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.

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.

Those providing witnesses testimony 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 to make a judgement that the candidate has completed the task to organisational procedures and to the required standard. The overall decision regarding competence of the candidate will be made by the assessor and is subject to internal and external verification.

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 additional guidance documents related to specific 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 document

- 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, reflecting industry working practices and drawing on real resources that would be used in the industry

- the simulation must also reflect the same pressures and time constraints that might apply in the workplace

- all simulations must be agreed beforehand with the external verifier and 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

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 and quality assurance. The sections below define essential criteria in addition to the current *SQA Accreditation's Regulatory Requirements*

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 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 which are outlined at:

  http://accreditation.sqa.org.uk/accreditation/accreditationfiles/About_Us/Assessor_and_Verifier_Competence_FINAL.pdf

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 is aware that, in some cases, the requirements for assessor 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 this

approach to assure the quality of assessment. This would be monitored by the internal verifier.

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 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 which are outlined at:

  http://accreditation.sqa.org.uk/accreditation/accreditationfiles/About_Us/Assessor _and_Verifier_Competence_FINAL.pdf

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 and internal verifier 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 which are outlined at:

  http://accreditation.sqa.org.uk/accreditation/accreditationfiles/About_Us/Assessor_and_Verifier_Competence_FINAL.pdf

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 external verifier 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.

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 are not the candidate's usual assessor and 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 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
Optional unit	A unit which is selected from a list to form part of a qualification
Performance criteria	Tasks that candidates are expected to carry out as part of their job role
Qualification structure	Details the mandatory and optional units needed to gain the SVQ
Simulation	An activity or situation that is not naturally occurring but is devised for the purposes allowing the candidate to demonstrate 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 candidates place of work

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