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Assessment Strategy for the Retail SVQs
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1   Introduction

The qualifications currently covered by this Assessment Strategy are listed in Appendix 1.

In 2008 Skillsmart Retail published the Retail Sector Qualifications Strategy (SQS), which was developed in partnership with the awarding bodies, employers and regulators. To support full implementation of the SQS, the Assessment Strategy for NVQs and SVQs was amended so as to relax slightly the restrictions on the use of simulation as an assessment method. The Assessment Strategy now allows for simulation to be used to assess performance in a limited selection of basic functions which do not involve interaction with customers. However, it is still a key principle of the Assessment Strategy that assessment should be based on workplace activity, and in those limited circumstances where simulation is allowed it is still a strict requirement that the key characteristics of the working environment should be realistically simulated in relation to the function being assessed.

2   Key Principles

A set of key principles have been firmly established over the past five years which inform the proposed assessment strategies and which should be used in interpreting their application. These principles are that:

Evidence of Competence is Based on Workplace Activity	SVQs recognise competence in the workplace; as such evidence should reflect workplace activity and aim to reflect attainment within an organisational context.
Assessing National Occupational Standards and SCQF Levels	Assessment should assess the achievement of National Occupational Standards but must also ensure that the methods employed are those that are most relevant for the level being assessed and sector expectations of candidates at that level. For example, this means that, whilst observation should be the principle method to assess individuals at SCQF level 5, other methods like professional discussion and assignments might well be employed to assess individuals at SCQF level 6 and above.
Developing a Skilled Workforce	Assessment practice should contribute to the development of a skilled workforce and the choice and application of assessment methods must reflect this ideal.
Integrating Systems for Capturing Evidence of Competence	Skills formation in the Retail sector, delivered through staff induction and ongoing training & development programmes, is required by organisations to capture the unique character and culture that the organisation wishes to project. To this end assessment systems for SVQs should, where possible, be integrated with organisations' training and HR models for developing and recognising the competence of their workforce.

3   Assessment Strategies

3.1 The Use and Application of Simulation

In broad terms, the Retail sector holds the view that simulation is a practical and effective tool for establishing skill and understanding, where naturally occurring evidence of competence is unavailable or infrequent. However the sector feels that there is very little that can be assessed by simulation with the exception of:
- some aspects of Health & Safety and Security, and
- some basic functions which do not involve interaction with customers.

Skillsmart Retail requires that awarding bodies:

a   Discourage the inappropriate use of SVQs by organisations that do not assess candidates in a working environment. SVQs are only suitable for individuals who are in some form of working capacity in the sector, or, in a limited set of contexts, are being prepared for work and will be assessed in a realistic working environment (see section 3.1.1 below for definition).

b Establish criteria to ensure that simulation is not used as the sole form of evidence for any unit of an SVQ, except where allowed for specific units in Section 3.2 of this Assessment Strategy. This should be expressed in guidance for qualifications operating in the sector.

c Provide clear guidance to centres to indicate that evidence towards an SVQ should come from the workplace except where simulation is expressly allowed in the evidence requirements for a particular unit. Workplace evidence may be gathered in the context of full, part-time, casual or voluntary employment. Assessment may be undertaken in a 'work placement' (i.e. fulltime students placed into a working environment for a day per week) although supporting evidence from a supervisor or manager, associated with some form of work activity must supplement the assessment process.

3.1.1 Providing Realistic Working Environments (RWE)

Where simulation is used the sector requires that:

a Simulation must be undertaken in a Realistic Working Environment

b Awarding bodies provide guidance for centres, which requires that Realistic Working Environments:

"provide an environment which replicates the key characteristics of the workplace in which the skill to be assessed is normally employed".

A realistic working environment (for the purpose of simulated work activities) is regarded as one that replicates a real working environment. For example, a college shop that operates on a commercial basis (i.e. it has a profit and loss account) is acceptable for retail environments but a shop laid out in a classroom environment isn't. However, simulated activity may be used within a retail setting itself, for assessment purposes in order to prevent any barriers to achievement.

3.2 Units which are required to be assessed through performance

Assessment for the SVQ must always be carried out in a retail environment except where a realistic working environment is permitted for simulation. Simulation is allowed only where:

- the assessment criteria require the learner to respond to an emergency;

- a unit covers a limited selection of basic functions which need not involve interacting with customers;

- a unit originates from another SSC or SSB and the originator expressly allows simulation to be used for that unit.

A list of those units for which simulation is allowed is appended to this document.

Evidence generated from simulated activities will not be acceptable for any other unit.

3.3 The Role and Competence of Assessors, Expert Witnesses and Verifiers

A wide variety of issues impact upon the participation of organisations and take-up by individuals, of SVQs. These issues relate to other matters as well as the quality of an assessment process, however, they are central to the way assessment is managed.

To this end, Skillsmart Retail requires that the following conditions be fulfilled.

3.3.1 The Role of Supervisors and Managers in the Assessment Process

The principle is established that, wherever possible, assessment is conducted by colleagues, supervisors and/or managers in a workplace environment. Where the skill or capability of these individuals is inadequate to deliver the requirements of the organisation or the quality infrastructure, external services (to the work unit or organisation) may be introduced (peripatetic assessors). If the candidate is employed in the Retail sector, in no circumstances may a Retail SVQ be delivered without the involvement of the candidate's line manager or the owner/manager to confirm the candidate's competence.

Where in-store line managers carry out the assessment or internal verification roles, retail stores with the agreement of their awarding body may choose between:

a   achieving the appropriate regulatory body approved unit qualifications for assessment and internal verification

OR

b   demonstrating that the company's training and development activity undertaken to prepare, validate and review these assessment / verification roles, maps 100% to the National Occupational Standards which these qualifications are based on. The mapping process **must be agreed** by the awarding body as providing the equivalent level of rigour and robustness as the achievement of the unit qualification.

The alternative option described in (b) above, which waives the need for the regulatory approved units in the Retail Sector, must be confined in application to an 'organisation by organisation' and 'qualification by qualification' basis. **Prospective organisations must be able to confirm that their in-house practices conform to the requirements of the standards in association with the prospective awarding body who will be offering the qualification**.

3.3.2   The Role of Peripatetic Assessors / Internal Verifiers in the Assessment Process

Peripatetic assessors and internal verifiers must hold or be working towards the appropriate regulatory body approved qualifications for assessment and internal verification.

The services offered by the peripatetic assessor must complement the activity of a line manager or owner/manager and the competence of a candidate employed in the Retail sector may not be confirmed without the participation of a line manager or owner/manager in the process. It is also requested that specific reference be made to auditing this provision, within external verification processes.

3.3.3 The Role of Expert Witnesses in the Assessment Process

There are a number of different sub sectors in retail selling a huge range of products. Consequently there are occupations within the retail store which are undertaken by specialists e.g. beauty consultants, bakers and visual merchandisers. These specialist occupations are reflected in the retail National Occupational Standards which means that in many cases assessors will not be competent in performing the occupational requirements of the standards.

In these instances the assessor **must use** an expert witness[1] to provide evidence in confirming to the candidate's competence. The assessor will make the final judgement.

A list is appended of those units for which expert witness testimony is required, should the assessor lack the necessary occupational competence.

3.3.4 Occupational Competence of 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.
Skillsmart Retail requires that:

"Expert witnesses must be able to demonstrate practical experience and knowledge in the unit being assessed."

It is unlikely that a person could become a full expert in less than six to twelve months of being employed in the retail sector. However a person could become expert in a unit very quickly if this was the focus of their job role e.g. preparing fresh produce for sale. The assessor should make a judgement as to the level of expertise held by the expert witness and where necessary confirm this with a member of the store management team.

3.3.5 Occupational Competence of Assessors

Skillsmart Retail requires that:

"Assessors are required to be Competent in performing the occupational requirements of the retail generic standards, in terms of performance and knowledge, and also demonstrate an in-depth knowledge of both the generic and specialist standards they are assessing.
The acquisition of this competence will have been gained either from direct employment in the same occupational role as the national occupational standards or in an operational supervisory, managerial or in-company trainer position of employees carrying out this role."

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[1] An expert witness is an experienced peer of the candidate, or the candidate's line manager. The expert witness is not consulted as a professional assessor, but as someone who is expert in the occupation to be assessed.

Skillsmart Retail requirements for the occupational competence of assessors in the retail industry is that they must have worked in a retail company either as a retail assistant, as a supervisor/team leader/manager or as an in-company trainer of retail assistants.

It is unlikely that retail assistants would have achieved occupational competence in less than twelve months, or less than six months if employed in a managerial position, but individuals with less experience could be considered as assessors if sufficiently occupationally competent.

3.3.6 Occupational Competence of Verifiers

Skillsmart Retail requires that:

"**Internal Verifiers** are required to have a current Understanding of the content, structure and occupational requirements of the standards that they are internally verifying. The acquisition of this understanding will have been gained while working directly within the retail occupational area in either an operational or a support function.

The level of understanding should be sufficient to allow them to make a judgement as to whether the assessor has fully assessed candidates against all the performance and knowledge evidence requirements for the national occupational standards."

It is unlikely that a person could have gained this level of understanding in less than six months of being employed in the retail sector, but individuals with less experience could be considered as Internal Verifiers if they have the required level of understanding.

"**External Verifiers** are required to have a current Understanding of the occupational requirements of the standards they are verifying. The acquisition of this understanding will have been gained while working within the occupational area in either an operational or a support function.

The level of understanding should enable them to relate to and understand the requirements of the national occupational standards and be sufficient to enable them to determine whether the evidence collected for a candidate met all the evidence requirements."

It is unlikely that a person could have gained this level of understanding in less than six months of being employed in the retail sector, but individuals with less experience could be considered as External Verifiers if they have the required level of understanding.

3.3.7 Continuing Professional Development of Peripatetic Assessors and Verifiers

The sector also requires that individuals involved in these activities maintain currency of skill and understanding of the sector, in line with the role they are fulfilling. It is a Skillsmart Retail requirement that guidance on Continuous Professional Development of peripatetic assessors and verifiers must be implemented, in that:

"All assessors and verifiers, if not currently employed within a Retail sector company, will need to prove they have a current working knowledge of the sector they are assessing or verifying. This can be demonstrated by

maintaining records of evidence from occupational updating activities such as:

- o *Internal or external work experience*

- o *Internal or external work shadowing opportunities*

- o *Other relevant CPD activities with the prior approval of the awarding bodies"*

Note: Retailers who have chosen not to use the appropriate regulatory body approved qualifications for assessment and internal verification should be encouraged to offer the unit qualifications as CPD where the willingness by the employer to support this additional activity becomes known to the awarding body.

3.4 External Quality Control of Assessment - Risk Identification and Management

The application and implementation of external quality control (i.e. independent assessment, external moderation, tests and projects) was thoroughly researched during the project and the main report[2] (section 6) details the reasons sector employers felt it was considered neither feasible nor practical. The rationale supported by employers was that a robust quality system is based upon processes associated with risk assessment and management.

The awarding body's risk rating system must be auditable by the regulatory bodies.

3.4.1 Risk Identification

In order to achieve the required level of external quality control, the awarding body must undertake a risk assessment of **each** prospective centre at the point of **application for approval to offer any Skillsmart Retail qualification**. The awarding body must obtain information on a number of specified 'risk factors' for each prospective centre at the point of approval. Skillsmart Retail would recommend the following, but awarding bodies should feel free to recommend alternative risk factors, which would be more appropriate.

- Prospective centres' experience of operating SVQs.
- The appropriateness of existing systems, or systems developed to meet the requirements of other quality assurance regimes, for the delivery of SVQs.
- Whether the prospective centre has had a previous application for centre approval refused or their approval status withdrawn.
- The proposed ratio of candidates to assessors and internal verifiers, taking account of whether the assessors and internal verifiers are full-time or part-time in their roles.
- Whether candidates are going to be in employment (paid or voluntary), on work placements or learning in a realistic working environment (see section 3.1.1 for definition).

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[2] "Skills formation and recognition of employees in the Distributive sector: findings and recommendations of the DNTO assessment strategy project" (1st November 2000)

The awarding body must have a **method of rating** the prospective centre against each of the risk factors noted above and, also, producing an overall rating which identifies the level of risk associated with the prospective centre. The rating should then be used by the awarding body in determining the degree of support during the first year of approval.

3.4.2 Risk Management

In order to identify and manage risk during ongoing centre operation, the awarding body must undertake a **yearly risk assessment of each active centre for the Retail SVQs**. The awarding body must obtain information on a number of specified 'risk factors' for each centre. Skillsmart Retail would recommend the following, but awarding bodies should feel free to recommend alternative risk factors, which would be more appropriate.

- The turnover of assessors and internal verifiers.
- The throughput of candidates.
- The ratio of candidates to assessors and internal verifiers, taking account of whether the assessors and internal verifiers are full-time or part-time in their roles.
- Whether public funding is being accessed for the training of candidates towards/assessment of candidates for the SVQs.
- Whether candidates are in employment (paid or voluntary), on work placements or learning in a realistic working environment (see section 3.1.1 for definition).

The awarding body must have a **method of rating** each centre against each of the risk factors noted above and, also, producing an overall rating which identifies the level of risk associated with the centre. The rating should then be used by the awarding body to assist in determining the level of ongoing support for the centre, including the level of external verification activity.

END

Appendix 1: Qualifications covered by this Assessment Strategy

SVQ 1 Retail Skills at SCQF level 4

SVQ 2 Retail Skills at SCQF level 5

SVQ 3 Retail (Sales Professional) at SCQF level 6
SVQ 3 Retail (Visual Merchandising)at SCQF level 6
SVQ 3 Retail (Management) at SCQF level 6

Appendix 2: SVQ units for which simulated activities are allowed

Unit ref.	Unit title
B.01	Move goods and materials manually in a retail environment
B.02	Keep stock at required levels in a retail environment
B.23	Receive driver-controlled deliveries of fuel on a petrol forecourt
B.24	Control deliveries of motor fuel on a forecourt
C.01	Wrap and pack goods for customers in a retail environment
C.39	Process the self-service dispensing and purchase of motor fuel on a forecourt
E.01	Help to keep the retail unit secure
E.02	Help to maintain health and safety in a retail environment
E.03	Work effectively in your retail team
E.04	Keep the retail environment clean and hygienic (non-food)
E.06	Help to maintain health and safety in a retail environment
E.07	Help to keep the retail unit secure
E.11	Help to monitor and maintain the security of the retail unit
E.18	Monitor and maintain health and safety in a retail environment

Appendix 3: SVQ units for which expert witness testimony is required if the assessor is not expert in the specialism covered by the unit

Unit ref.	Unit title
B.10	Process bake-off products for sale in a retail environment
B.12	Process greengrocery products for sale in a retail environment
B.13	Finish meat products by hand in a retail environment
B.20	Contribute to food safety in a retail environment
B.21	Maintain food safety while working with food in a retail environment
B.22	Monitor and help improve food safety in a retail environment
B.23	Receive driver-controlled deliveries of fuel on a petrol forecourt
B.24	Control deliveries of motor fuel on a forecourt
B.31	Hand-process fish in a retail environment
B.32	Contribute to the control and efficiency of dough production in a retail environment
B.33	Select, weigh and measure bakery ingredients (Improve)
B.34	Hand divide, mould and shape fermented doughs (Improve)
C.09	Process payments and credit applications for purchases in a retail environment
C.10	Process cash and credit transactions in a retail environment
C.11	Assemble retail products in customer's home/workplace
C.12	Promote loyalty schemes to customers in a retail environment
C.15	Enable customers to apply for credit and hire purchase facilities
C.17	Provide the lingerie fitting service in a retail environment
C.18	Follow guidelines for planning and preparing visual merchandising displays
C.19	Follow guidelines for dressing visual merchandising displays
C.20	Order graphic materials for visual merchandising displays
C.21	Dismantle and store visual merchandising displays
C.22	Make props for visual merchandising displays
C.23	Put visual merchandising displays together
C.24	Choose merchandise to feature in visual merchandising displays
C.25	Plan, monitor and control how graphics are used in visual merchandising displays
C.26	Monitor the effect of visual merchandising displays and layouts
C.27	Allocate, monitor and control visual merchandising project resources against budgets

Unit ref.	Unit title
C.28	Contribute to developing and putting into practice the company's visual merchandising policy
C.29	Create plans, elevations and drawings to realise visual merchandising ideas
C.30	Develop individual retail service opportunities
C.31	Provide a personalised sales and after-sales service to your retail clients
C.35	Promote beauty products to retail customers
C.37	Help customers to buy National Lottery products in a retail environment
C.38	Assist customers to obtain appropriate insurance (FSSC)
C.39	Process the self-service dispensing and purchase of motor fuel on a forecourt
C.40	Establish customer needs and provide advice regarding tiling products
C.41	Advise customers upon measuring and planning for the fixing of tiles
C.42	Advise customers upon the fixing of tiles
C.43	Maintain a display of cut flowers in a retail store
C.45	Help customers to choose alcoholic beverages in a retail store
C.47	Promote the store's credit card to customers
C.58	Provide a counter/takeaway service (People 1st)
C.52	Help customers to apply for the store's credit card and associated insurance products
C.54	Help customers to choose delicatessen products in a retail outlet
C.55	Portion delicatessen products in a retail outlet to meet individual customers' requirements
E.12	Plan, monitor and adjust staffing levels and schedules in a retail environment