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| **Assessment Strategy** |  |
| **Sector** | Optical Services  |
| **Qualification Title(s)** | Certificate in Optical Practice Support at SCQF 7 |
| **Developed by** | Skills for Health  |
| **Approved by ACG** |  |
| **Version**  | Final 01 |

**Assessment Strategy for the**

**Certificate in Optical Practice Support at SCQF 7**

**Introduction**

This strategy sets out specifications for the assessment and quality control of the Certificate in Optical Practice Support. It has been produced by Skills for Health in cooperation with Optometry Scotland, sector representatives, SQA Accreditation and awarding body partners.

This assessment strategy relates to the following qualification:

* **Certificate in Optical Practice Support at SCQF Level 7**

This document outlines the principles that underpin the assessment of the above qualification with regard to:

1. External quality control of assessment
2. Assessment
3. Use and characteristics of simulation
4. Roles within the assessment and verification process
5. Sources of evidence

These principles are in addition to the regulatory requirements that awarding bodies must meet as specified by SQA Accreditation.

1. **External Quality Control of Assessment**

The standard external verification model will apply to these qualifications. Awarding

bodies are responsible for the competence of those involved in external verification activities and must require them to monitor centre performance in accordance with regulatory requirements, sampling all aspects of qualification delivery.

External verification will include both assuring the quality of the centre that is responsible for making the assessment and sampling from the judgments made on a number of candidates to ensure they are of consistent quality. Skills for Health work with awarding bodies to ensure that:

* there is a comprehensive strategy for sampling assessment which is applied

 across centres

* the level of sampling undertaken in external verification is sufficient to guarantee consistently high standards between centres and between awarding bodies
* external verification takes place using scrutiny of documents and observation of the assessment and verification practices in assessment centres subject to the need for confidentiality
* external verification is planned proportionally and linked to centre performance
* external verifiers are required to take part in regular standardisation activities.

Skills for Health will work with all stakeholders to evaluate the effectiveness of the qualification structures and this assessment strategy.

1. **Assessment**

Candidates will be expected to demonstrate competence in the required Mandatory Units and a minimum of one out of the three Optional Units. They must also be able to perform to the required standard over a period of time.

Assessment of candidate’s performance must take place during the course of their day-to-day work. Direct observation of the candidate’s performance in the workplace must be the primary source of evidence. Observations should be of naturally occurring practice within the candidate’s work role and include demonstration of application of knowledge and understanding. This principle will apply to all units except where simulation has been deemed acceptable.

**2.1 Equal opportunities**

All candidates should have equal access to assessment regardless of geographical location, work setting and patterns of work.

* Candidates must be enabled and supported to undertake a qualification
* The qualifications must be delivered within the constraints of current legal practice
* The needs of under-represented groups should be addressed
* All individuals involved in the process should clearly demonstrate their commitment to equality of opportunity.

**2.2 Holistic assessment**

Each unit has knowledge and understanding relevant to the specified area of practice. Assessment of knowledge and understanding should, wherever possible, be carried out during performance to ensure integration of theory and practice. Evidence of knowledge and understanding should be clearly identified within the audit trail.

Assessors need to ensure that the candidate can apply knowledge and understanding within the context of the units. Assessors may use holistic assessment to establish the knowledge and understanding required to support competent practice. This approach will support establishing knowledge and understanding within and across units.

1. **Use and Characteristics of Simulation**

Simulation should only be undertaken in a minority of situations when the candidate is unable to complete the unit because of the lack of opportunity within their normal day to day practice. Simulation may also be considered if there is a potential risk to the candidate or others. Evidence of competence in such situations is viewed as essential to ensure best practice and confidence in the candidate’s ability to act appropriately.

Where simulation is used it **must** replicate usual activities in realistic workplace settings. Simulation can never be the sole source of evidence for a unit.

The use of simulation to support evidence should be agreed in advance by the assessor and candidate at the assessment planning stage. Those involved in the assessment process must be satisfied that the use of simulation does not compromise the rigour and integrity of assessment.

Evidence gathered using simulation must result from activities that have taken place in a realistic working environment. A realistic working environment should include the following features:

* It should reflect the workplace conditions and environment and include facilities, equipment and materials used in the workplace for the activities being assessed.
* It should reflect the relationships, constraints and pressures met in the workplace
* Information available to the candidate on the nature of the activity must be consistent with the policies and practices typical of the workplace setting
1. **Roles within the Assessment and Verification Process**

The assessment centre will be responsible for maintaining up-to-date information on assessors, internal verifiers and expert witnesses. Skills for Health has identified that, in keeping with the ethos and breadth of units within the qualifications, there may be the following people involved in the assessment and verification process:

* assessors; co-ordinating assessors; expert witnesses; internal verifiers; external verifiers

Details of the relationship between the candidate and the above must be declared and noted by the assessor.

**4.1 Assessor**

The assessor is the key to the assessment process. All assessors must:

* 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 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 quality assurance process to minimise the possibility of collusion between candidates and assessors.
* provide current records of their skills and supporting knowledge and understanding in the context of a recent role directly related to the qualification units they are assessing..
* take responsibility for maintaining and improving their knowledge and skills. This should be credible and maintained through clearly demonstrable continuing professional development appropriate to the area of assessed practice. It is expected that learning and development activity will contribute to professional development, inform practice and assist assessors to meet their roles and responsibilities in an informed, competent and confident manner
* have knowledge and experience of the regulation, legislation and/or codes of practice applicable to their role and the setting within which they work
* take the lead role in the assessment of observed candidate performance in relation to the units of the qualification.
* must hold, or be working towards, an appropriate assessor qualification as identified by SQA Accreditation, the qualification regulator or alternative\* as acceptable to the Awarding Body. Achievement of assessor qualification needs to be within appropriate timescales. Assessors, who are working towards an appropriate assessor qualification and have the necessary occupational competence and experience, as identified above, should be supported by an appropriately qualified assessor. Appropriately qualified assessors must review and countersign decisions and activities. Assessors holding older assessor qualifications must be able to demonstrate that they are assessing to the current standards.

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

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

\*The individual may have completed a qualification and/or training course/programme which has been confirmed by the awarding body as providing the equivalent level of rigour and robustness of the regulatory body approved qualifications for assessment.

**4.2 Co-ordinating assessors and Lead assessors**

To allow flexibility of the assessment process, candidates may have more than one assessor each assessing different units or aspects of units. In such circumstances a named and agreed co-ordinating assessor must be identified. They will be responsible for co-ordinating the assessment of an individual candidate.

Co-ordinating assessors will be responsible for the integration, planning and directing of assessment for the whole qualification. Co-ordinating assessors must ensure best use is made of all evidence available to make judgements about the competence of candidates. The co-ordinating assessor should make the final judgement of competence for each unit that has been assessed by more than one assessor.

The co-ordinating assessor must be a qualified assessor who is occupationally competent and experienced.

It is expected that all assessors will work closely with internal verifiers to ensure standardised practice and decision-making within the assessment process.

**4.3 Expert witness**

The nature of work to be assessed may include situations of a sensitive nature which require confidentiality. There may also be occasions when there are no occupationally competent assessors for occupationally specific units. In such circumstances expert witnesses may be used as a source of performance evidence in the workplace.

Expert witnesses can be drawn from occupationally competent individuals who can attest to the candidate's performance in the workplace. This may include line managers or other experienced colleagues from inside an organisation or from other agencies.

Expert witnesses may prove particularly important for those candidates who are indirectly supervised during part of their work role, but who have contact with a range of different professionals in the course of their work activities.

Evidence from expert witnesses must meet the requirements of validity, reliability and authenticity. Expert witnesses must be inducted by the centre so they are familiar with those units for which they are to provide expert witness evidence. Expert witnesses must:

* be occupationally competent in the area being assessed. 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.
* 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 sector.
* provide current records of their skills and the current supporting knowledge and understanding in the context of a recent role directly related to the qualification unit that they are witnessing.
* be familiar with the qualification unit; and must be able to interpret current working practices and technologies within the area of work.

A qualified assessor must assess the evidence provided by an expert witness including its contribution to overall evidence of competence.

**4.4 Internal Verifier**

The Internal Verifier is central to the quality assurance and verification of assessment of performance evidence in the workplace and must:

* be occupationally knowledgeable. This means that each assessor must, according to current sector practice, be knowledgeable of the functions covered by the units they are verifying. They will have gained their occupational knowledge through working within the sector.
* provide current records of their skills and supporting knowledge and understanding in the context of a recent role directly related to the qualification units they are verifying.
* take responsibility for maintaining and improving their knowledge and skills. This should be credible and maintained through clearly demonstrable continuing professional development appropriate to the area of practice.
* have knowledge and experience of the regulation, legislation and/or codes of practice applicable to their role and the setting within which they work
* must hold, or be working towards, an IV qualification as identified by SQA Accreditation, the qualification regulator. Achievement of IV qualification needs to be within appropriate timescales. Internal verifiers, who are working towards an appropriate IV award and have the necessary occupational knowledge and experience, as identified above, should be supported by an appropriately qualified internal verifier. Appropriately qualified internal verifiers must review and countersign decisions and activities. Internal Verifiers holding older qualifications must be able to demonstrate that they are verifying to the current standards.

**4.5 External Verifier**

The External Verifier is the key link for awarding bodies in the quality assurance and verification of the assessment of candidates’ performance in the workplace.

External verifiers must:

* be occupationally knowledgeable. They will have gained their occupational knowledge working within the sector.
* have a thorough understanding of the qualifications they will be quality assuring
* hold, or be working towards, the appropriate EV qualification as identified by SQA Accreditation, the qualification regulator. External verifiers holding older qualifications must be able to demonstrate that they are verifying to current standards

External verifiers who are not yet qualified but have the necessary occupational knowledge and experience, can be supported by a qualified external verifier who does not necessarily have the occupational expertise or experience.

1. **Sources of Evidence**

Evidence must be from the candidate's performance at work and although it is expected that a range of different assessment methods will be used, there **must** be:

* **direct observation of practice by a qualified assessor**

Other sources include but are not limited to:

* reflective accounts
* observation by an expert witness
* professional discussion with a qualified assessor
* direct questioning and assignments
* assessment of products generated during the candidates’ normal work practices

It is recognised that alternative forms of recording assessment evidence will evolve using information and communications technologies including e-portfolios. Regardless of the form of recording used, the guiding principle must be that information about practice must comply with legal requirements and best sector practice in relation to confidentiality (including GDPR). This information must also be traceable for internal and external verification purposes. Additionally, assessors must ensure they are satisfied the evidence presented is **valid, authentic, reliable, current and sufficient** (VARCS) and meets the requirements set out in this strategy.