

**The
Sector Skills
Council for
Active Leisure, Learning and Well
being**

MORE PEOPLE, BETTER SKILLED, BETTER QUALIFIED

**QUALITY ASSURANCE STRATEGY
FOR
QUALIFICATIONS THAT CONFIRM OCCUPATIONAL COMPETENCE
Including SVQs and the QCF replacements for NVQs**

Updated February 2012

INTRODUCTION

This document sets out the recommendations of SkillsActive, the Sector Skills Council and Standards Setting Body for Active Leisure, Learning and Wellbeing for the assessment and quality control mechanisms required for those qualifications that *confirm occupational competence* and come under its umbrella. A separate annex for each qualification will be added to this generic document to detail any specific requirements for that qualification, or suite of qualifications.

Employment interests in the sector are interested in the continuing availability of high quality qualifications that are fit for purpose, command public confidence and are understood by those taking them and those who use them for recruitment, or for other purposes. SkillsActive has long advocated that qualifications that confirm occupational competence are assessed and quality assured consistently across the Awarding Organisations¹ who deliver them (including SVQs and QCF qualifications with NVQ in the title, or intended to replace the previous NVQs).

This document is built around the following fundamental principles that SkillsActive has advocated for some time:

- **National Occupational Standards establish the benchmark of competent performance in the sector;**
- **Qualifications that confirm occupational competence must be assessed over a period of time in the workplace;**
- **assessment of an individual's competence should be rigorous, efficient and cost effective using approaches that have the support of employers, the Awarding Organisations and other interest groups**
- **qualifications that confirm occupational competence, because they are rooted in these standards, must therefore be seen as different from traditional qualifications in their application in the industry;**
- **competence in the workplace is unique and has to be seen as different from training.**

BACKGROUND

The current provision of qualifications that confirm occupational competence in Active Leisure, Learning and Wellbeing extends across QCF Levels 1 to 4 and in Scotland SCQF levels 5-9 is offered by a range of Awarding Organisations.

This is the 4th version of SkillsActive's (formally SPRITO's) Assessment Strategy, which builds on the one first approved by PSAG in September 1999, re-recognised in July 2002 and again in 2007.

The Sector Skills Council's guiding principle is "**to act as the guardian of the industry's National Occupational Standards,**" to this end a documented quality assurance strategy that lays down key overarching principles is not only vital to maintain the reliability and validity of these qualifications in the future, but ensuring

they remain of value to employers. Especially with more Awarding Organisations offering these qualifications that confirm occupational competence.

The aim of this strategy is to build and improve on the current system and this document sets out the definitive requirements of the industry for **all** those who provide these qualifications.

Overarching quality assurance principles

It is crucial to SkillsActive that “the industry” has confidence in the application of its National Occupational Standards, together with the industry values statements/code of ethics. This demands that those involved in the assessment and verification processes at every level, display an understanding, and have experience, of the technical and occupational requirements of the active leisure, learning and well being industry and the sub sectors they are involved with; as well as a thorough and consistent interpretation of these principles for qualifications that confirm occupational competence.

The Industry has consistently and firmly placed its National Occupational Standards, SVQs and QCF replacement NVQs in the world of work.

¹ The term Awarding Organisations is used in a generic way throughout this document however please note that in Scotland the relevant and specific terminology is Awarding Body/bodies

KEY COMPONENTS OF THE ASSESSMENT STRATEGY

These requirements are in addition to, and in no way conflict with, the generic criteria that Awarding Organisations must meet for the delivery of QCF qualifications with NVQ in the title as required by Ofqual and SVQs as required by SQA Accreditation's regulatory requirements for Awarding Bodies, they are also complimentary to the *Additional Requirement for Qualifications that use the title NVQ within the QCF (September 2009)*

1. The layout of the National Occupational Standards

The SSC has been very careful to incorporate current best practice in the way its National Occupational Standards are laid out and expressed. Awarding Organisations must use the National Occupational Standards as contained in the UKCES NOS Directory.

Great care has been taken to ensure that the National Occupational Standards allow qualifications to be built from them that are able to be properly assessed and quality assured in ways which promote validity, reliability and fairness.

2. Assessment Methodology, Evidence Requirements and aspects of them that must be assessed in the workplace

SkillsActive has defined which aspects of the National Occupational Standards that have been used to inform qualification development must always be assessed through performance in the workplace, even those for which assessment through simulation is allowed (see later section). Quality assessment, for most aspects of those qualifications that confirm occupational competence, cannot be achieved without regular access to real work activities.

The SSC intends to work closely with the Awarding Organisations to indicate the ways in which this is best assessed by providing guidance on the nature and type of assessment. In all cases learner performance must be assessed in the workplace, although it will be made clear which aspects of the "what you must cover" must be assessed through performance evidence and which aspects could be assessed using supplementary evidence for example through scenarios, case studies and questioning.

The SSC will work with the Awarding Organisations to develop and agree **qualification specific annexes** for each of the separate qualifications that confirm occupational competence, and these will be attached in due course to this assessment strategy.

It is incumbent upon each Awarding Organisation to ensure that assessment of all learners captures the fundamentals expressed in this document and incorporates that detailed in any relevant annex. The information contained in the annex will amplify the generic statements into context/occupationally specific requirements such as the need for assessors to hold specific qualifications.

3. Design of Qualifications that confirm Occupational Competence

SkillsActive, as a regulated Submitting Body has carefully designed the rules of combination and units of common content to allow the creation of regulated qualifications that confirm occupational competence²; ensuring that they contain opportunities for transfer and progression and that they are flexible enough to meet the differing requirements of both large and small employers, indoor and outdoor environments as well as the public, private and voluntary sectors. This quality assurance strategy supports flexibility in the use of the qualifications by a variety of employers and learners, and tries not to place barriers to access through imposing unnecessary rigidity to the process.

Given the flexibility of the structures of the qualifications there should be no reason for a learner to attempt a unit for which they have no workplace assessment opportunities on a consistent basis. In addition the SSC as a Submitting Body has developed a number of "non VQ" progression routes to facilitate opportunities for learning away from the workplace.

² In Scotland SkillsActive submits the structures and content of the SVQs that confirm occupational competence for approval by the SQA Accreditation.

4. Quality Control

SkillsActive believes that quality control will be achieved by a combination of the following measures - the monitoring and standardisation of assessment decisions will be achieved by a robust and strengthened external verification system underpinned by risk rating and management.

4.1. External Verifiers and External Verification ³

From active and on-going research, which started in the latter part of 1999, the SSC has confirmed that employers value a strengthened External Verification process rather than the introduction of some other 'independent' measure(s), which may prove to be a barrier to learner access and take-up.

SkillsActive expects:

- EVs to command respect from their peers in the occupational sector of the industry and the application of the criteria in the sections below will ensure this
- every Awarding Organisation to seek advice, if and when required, from the SSC, on the technical qualifications, experience and competence of prospective External Verifiers in the selection and deployment of EVs. Action taken as a result of the advice to be fed back to the SSC
- to provide, if necessary, input to the EV training days.
- to meet with every Awarding Organisation as necessary to understand the quality assurance processes being used.

SkillsActive has worked with its industry partners and the Awarding Organisations to develop criteria to measure the occupational competence of **external verifiers** and ensure the consistency of its advice. In addition to the requirements of the *Additional Requirements for Qualifications that use the title NVQ within the QCF* and the *SQA Accreditation's regulatory requirements for Awarding Bodies*, Awarding Organisations **must** ensure that prospective External Verifiers:

- hold a level 4 Award in Externally Assuring the Quality of Assessment Processes and Practice and if appropriate the Level 4 Certificate in Leading the External Quality Assurance of Assessment Processes and Practice. In Scotland, this is now Learning and Development Unit 12. Or from the past they could hold the verifier unit V2 , or unit D35 (New external verifiers should be given a clear action plan for achieving the appropriate qualification(s))
- it is also recommended that they hold Assessor qualification Level 3 Award in Assessing Competence in the Work Environment or the old Unit A1 and or unit D32, and/or D33. In Scotland, this is the now the Learning and Development Unit 9DI
- demonstrate knowledge and understanding of, and support for, the Sector's Values Statements and Codes of Ethics and how they are applied in assessment
- match the technical criteria which are developed for each occupational

area or sporting context to ensure their current technical competence in relation to verifying the units being assessed.

- be occupationally competent in the area appropriate to the level of the qualifications they are to be verifying;
- be knowledgeable about, and understand the application of, the National Occupational Standards together with Technical Definitions/Syllabi where appropriate.
- be committed to the application, further development and refinement of the National Occupational Standards and qualifications that confirm occupational competence.
- uphold the integrity of the National Occupational Standards and prevent their misuse.
- are aware of national issues affecting vocational education, training and qualifications in the sector
- are knowledgeable of the Active Leisure, Learning and Wellbeing framework of qualifications
- are committed to the content and guidance provided in the current edition of the SSC's Quality Assurance Strategy
- show commitment to ongoing personal and professional development

External Verifiers must sample the work of all assessors and internal verifiers. All new assessment centres should be recognised by their external verifier before any learners are registered; the frequency of centre visits for existing and new centres should conform to the risk assessment and management process requirements. All verification decisions made by a trainee external verifier must be checked by a qualified external verifier.

³ Some organisations now refer to External Verifiers as External Quality Advisers

4.2. Risk rating and risk management

SkillsActive anticipates that improvements in Awarding Organisation approaches to gathering, monitoring and analysing statistical data will improve the overall rigour of external verification and the SSC will assist Awarding Organisations to do this.

The industry welcomes the ongoing refinement of a system of risk rating and risk management. SkillsActive believes that such systems of risk rating and risk management will ensure that external verification, monitoring control and support mechanisms are put into place according to each centre's level of risk.

SkillsActive will be prepared to discuss adaptations to this strategy following detailed discussions with individual Awarding Organisations about their risk strategies so that the SSC is re-assured that any adaptations only serve to strengthen quality and not undermine it.

The systems for risk rating and risk management should be reviewed and revised, as appropriate, following any guidance issued to Awarding Organisations from the regulatory bodies.

Where risk is identified, Skills Active suggests that one or more of the following actions could be taken by the external verifier/Awarding Organisation:

- conduct a spot visit at short notice
- meet and/or observe each learner or a larger sample of the learners at the centre in question and compare assessment materials
- increase the frequency of verification visits
- conduct learner and/or employer interviews, as required, over the telephone
- or other action appropriate to reducing the risk.

4.3. Internal verification

The SSC has worked with its industry partners and the Awarding Organisations to develop criteria to measure the occupational competence of **internal verifiers**:

- Internal Verifiers are appointed by a recognised centre and approved by the Awarding Organisations through their External Verifier.
- Internal Verifiers should only verify the decisions of assessors that fall within their acknowledged area of technical and occupational competence.

Internal Verifiers should be in a position to influence a recognised centre's assessment policy and to facilitate the assessment process and should be one of _____ the following:

- employed by the same organisation (recognised centre) as the assessors or...
- working in partnership with, and drawing on evidence from, assessors' organisation(s)(recognised centre)

The prospective **Internal Verifier must**:

- Hold a Level 4 Award in the Internal Quality Assurance of Assessment

processes and practice and if appropriate the Level 4 Certificate in Leading the Internal Quality Assurance of Assessment Processes and Practice. In Scotland this is now Learning and Development Unit 11. From the past they could hold verifier unit V1 , or unit D34 (New internal verifiers must be given a clear action plan for achieving the appropriate qualification(s)

1. it is also recommended that they hold Assessor qualification Level 3 Award in Assessing Competence in the Work Environment or the old Unit A1 and/ or unit D32, and/or D33 In Scotland, this is now Learning and Development Unit 9DI

- Meet the Technical criteria developed for each occupational area or sporting context to ensure their technical competence in relation to the units being assessed.
- have recent experience in the occupational area.
- be knowledgeable of the relevant industry Values Statements and Codes of ethics.
- be committed to upholding the integrity of the National Occupational Standards and preventing their misuse.
- participate in IV/assessor training initiatives for continuous professional development.

Recognised centres may have additional generic criteria and personnel specifications in addition to the above.

The Internal verifier is responsible for the consistency of standards across all portfolios. Internal verifiers should observe each assessor conducting learner assessments at regular intervals. The reliability, validity and authenticity of evidence must be checked during these observations.

All verification decisions made by a trainee internal verifier must be checked by a qualified internal verifier.

4.4. Awarding Bodies Forum

Skills Active has worked closely with all its Awarding Organisations to establish the S/NVQ Awarding Organisations Forum. It is a requirement for all Awarding Organisations offering the qualifications that confirm occupational competence in this sector to:

- attend regular meetings of the main Active Leisure and Learning Awarding Organisations Forum
- discuss and resolve issues concerning quality control, to ensure the consistent interpretation of the National Occupational Standards across all the Awarding Organisations
- receive updates from industry specialists on current industry developments and initiatives
- set and monitor targets for the implementation of the qualifications that confirm competence in the workplace

The Terms of Reference of the Awarding Organisations Forum are designed to

improve cross-Awarding Organisation standardisation of assessment decisions and issues.

5. Workplace assessment

5.1. Assessment Centres must:

- ensure that learners have access to the resources commonly in use in the industry and that the pressures and constraints of the workplace are properly reflected
- ensure that the principles and values of the occupational area(s) are embedded in the operation of the workplace;
- demonstrate a commitment to quality and good practice which may include the pursuit of other schemes which recognise industry best practice;
- ensure that assessment sites conform to Health and Safety requirements and good health and safety practice is reflected in assessment.
- maintain a register of all Assessors and Internal Verifiers
- provide evidence of their plans to keep Assessors and Internal Verifiers updated with current industry requirements

Where applicable, the SSC will provide advice on the minimum "resource requirements" needed by a Recognised Assessment Centre to provide adequate experience to the learner.

5.2. Assessors

Assessors are appointed by a Recognised Centre and approved by the Awarding Body through their occupationally competent External Verifier. **They should only assess in their acknowledged area of technical and occupational competence.**

Assessors should be one of the following:

- employed by the same organisation as the learner or...
- working in partnership with, and drawing on evidence from, the learner's organisation or...
- an expert brought in to supplement the expertise of the learner's own organisation or as an additional external method of quality assurance.

All assessment decisions made by a trainee assessor must be checked by a qualified assessor Assessors **must**:

- hold Assessor qualification Level 3 Award in Assessing Competence in the Work Environment or in Scotland, this is now Learning and Development Unit 9DI. New assessors must be given a clear action plan for achieving the appropriate qualification(s)
- meet the Technical criteria developed for each occupational area or sporting context to ensure their technical competence in relation to the units being assessed.
- have recent experience and competence in the occupational area to the level of the qualification(s) they wish to assess.

- be knowledgeable and have understanding of the National Occupational Standards and the Assessment Specification.
- support of the relevant Active Leisure and Learning Values Statements and Codes of Ethics and how they are applied in assessment.
- uphold the integrity of the National Occupational Standards and prevent their misuse.
- participate in assessor training initiatives for continuous professional development.

Recognised Centres may have additional generic criteria and personnel specifications in addition to the above

5.3. Witness testimony

SkillsActive recognises that for the assessment of workplace performance to be as natural and efficient as possible, the use of witness testimony should be encouraged, and has a crucial role in the collection of evidence.

Witnesses must be fully briefed and clear about the purpose and use of the testimony. Any relationship between the witness and learner should be declared and recorded for internal and external verification purposes.

Witnesses must be able to demonstrate that they have the necessary expertise in the relevant area and their testimony must:

- be specific to the activities or product;
- give a brief description of the circumstances of the observation;