

Assessment Strategy

Health and Social Care NVQ/SVQ (Levels 2, 3 and 4)
Assessment Strategy
(May 2004)

1 Introduction

This strategy sets out recommendations and specifications for the assessment and quality control of the health and social care suite of National Occupational Standards (NOS) across the UK.

The NOS referred to in this document underpin the National Vocational Qualifications/Scottish Vocational Qualifications (NVQ/SVQ) at level 2, 3 and 4.

This includes Health and Social Care level 2; Health and Social Care level 3, with titles for (Children and Young People) and (Adults); Health and Social Care level 4, with titles for (Children and Young People) and (Adults).

The standards, assessment strategy and award structures are jointly owned by the Care Council for Wales, Northern Ireland Social Care Council, the Scottish Social Services Council, Skills for Health and Topss England¹ who worked in partnership to review the National Occupational Standards and Awards in Care.

The following sections outline the principles that underpin the assessment of the above standards and qualifications with regard to:

1. external quality control
2. workplace assessment
3. the use and characteristics of simulation
4. the required occupational expertise of assessors and verifiers.

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 (QCA) /Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) current guidance & requirements.

¹ The joint partnership of the Care Council for Wales, Northern Ireland Social Care Council, the Scottish Social Services Council, Skills for Health and TOPSS England will, for ease of reading be specified throughout the rest of the document as “the joint partnership”

2 Occupational expertise of assessors, verifiers and others involved in the assessment and quality assurance process

2.1 Assessment in the Health and Social Care Workplace

The standards setting bodies require that all assessments of a candidate's performance must take place in the workplace, and that observation should be of naturally occurring practice within the candidate's work role. This will include the demonstration of the application of knowledge. This principle will apply to all units, elements, except where simulation has been deemed acceptable.

The requirements for occupational competence may mean that some candidates have more than one assessor/expert witness, each assessing different units or elements (see Section 2.3.1 to 2.3.3 for further explanation). In such cases, one assessor must take the co-ordinating role for each candidate. Therefore, centres will be required to appoint assessors who are capable of carrying out co-ordination when working with expert witnesses/multiple assessors.

2.2 Equal opportunities

There should be equality of access for candidates regardless of work setting and patterns of work. Candidates must be enabled and supported to undertake awards.

In addition the needs of under-represented groups should be addressed. These include specific needs in relation to candidates:

- from ethnic minority communities
- experiencing disability
- experiencing sensory impairment.

In Wales this will include those candidates who wish to undertake their award through the medium of Welsh or bilingually. This will include assessment and knowledge acquisition through the medium of Welsh or bilingually and will require both Welsh medium/bilingual provision throughout assessment, verification and external assessment.

All other individuals involved in the process i.e. assessors, expert witnesses, mentors and verifiers should clearly demonstrate their support of equal opportunities throughout the assessment process.

2.3 Roles within the assessment process and occupational expertise of those involved in the assessment and quality assurance process

The assessment centre will be responsible for maintaining up-to-date information on assessors, internal verifiers and expert witnesses.

The Standards Setting Bodies (SSBs) have identified that, due to the breadth of the units within the qualifications, there may be the following key roles for those involved in the assessment process:

2.3.1 Assessors

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

- be occupationally competent. This means that each assessor must be capable of carrying out the functions covered by the units they are assessing to the standard described within them, according to current sector practice. This experience should be credible and maintained through clearly demonstrable continuing learning and development. In due course, the implementation of regulatory requirements may mean that assessors will need to hold appropriate care/health qualifications. Awarding bodies will be notified of any changes in regulatory requirements for assessors by the appropriate regulatory bodies.
- have knowledge of the health and social care settings, the regulation, legislation and codes of practice for the service (where applicable), and the requirements of national standards at the time any assessment is taking place.
- hold or be working towards, an appropriate assessor qualification. Achievement of the qualification will need to be within appropriate timescales
- be able to assess holistically the values contained and embedded in the values section of the National Occupational Standards
- take the lead role in the assessment of observed candidate performance. Assessors are expected to take on this role in relation to at least the core units of the award. Where only two of the core units are undertaken, assessors are expected to observe candidate performance in relation to at least 2 further units.

Assessors who are not yet qualified against the appropriate 'D' or 'A' units but have the necessary occupational competence and experience, can be supported by a qualified assessor who does not necessarily have the occupational expertise or experience, but must have:

- occupational competence across some units
- a relevant occupational background
- an appropriate assessor qualification

The Awarding Body/SSB forum will develop advice on these issues.

If more than one assessor is required, assessment needs to be coordinated. One of the assessors involved in the process will draw together all assessment decisions made by specialist assessors, and the contributions from expert witnesses across the whole qualification.

2.3.2 Expert witnesses

The use of Expert Witnesses is encouraged as a contribution to the assessment of evidence of the candidate's competence, where there are no occupationally competent assessors for occupationally specific units.

The expert witness must have:

- a working knowledge of NOS for the units on which their expertise is based
- current expertise and occupational competence i.e. within the last two years, either as a practitioner or manager, for the units on which their expertise is based.

This experience should be credible and clearly demonstrable through continuing learning and development. In due course the implementation of regulatory requirements may mean that expert witness will need to hold appropriate Care / Health qualifications.

- either any qualification in assessment of workplace performance, such as L20 from the Learning and Development suite, Support Competence Achieved in the Workplace, OR a professional work role which involves evaluating the everyday practice of staff.

2.3.3 Internal Verifiers

The internal verifier is key to the quality assurance and verification of the assessment of performance evidence in the workplace.

Internal verifiers must:

- be occupationally knowledgeable in respect of the units they are going to verify prior to commencing the role. It is crucial that internal verifiers understand the nature and context of the assessors' work and that of their candidates due to the critical nature of the work and the legal and other implications of the assessment process
- have working knowledge of the health and social care settings, the regulation, legislation and codes of practice for the service (where applicable), and the requirements of national standards at the time any assessment is taking place
- occupy a position that gives them authority and resources to co-ordinate the work of assessors, provide authoritative advice, call meetings as appropriate, visit and observe assessments and carry out all the other internal verification roles as defined by the relevant national occupational standard (i.e. V1)
- hold, or be working towards, the appropriate IV qualification. Achievement of the qualification must be within appropriate timescales

Internal verifiers who are not yet qualified against the appropriate 'D' or 'V' units but have the necessary occupational competence and experience, can be supported by a qualified internal verifier who does not necessarily have the particular occupational expertise or experience. However, the supporting internal verifier must have relevant occupational expertise as a practitioner, manager or trainer. This can also be used as a method of supporting the accreditation of trainee internal verifiers.

2.3.4 External Verifiers

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 and have gained their knowledge through working within the sector or appropriate professional/occupational area and demonstrate updating through CPD activities
- hold, or be working towards, the appropriate EV qualification. Achievement of the qualification must be within appropriate timescales

- have a working knowledge of the health and social care settings, the regulation, legislation and codes of practice (where applicable) for the service, and the requirements of national standards at the time any assessment is taking place

External verifiers who are not yet qualified against the appropriate 'D' or 'V' units but have the necessary occupational competence and experience, can be supported by a qualified external verifier who does not necessarily have the occupational expertise or experience. This can also be used as a method of supporting the qualification of trainee external verifiers.

3 Service Users & Carers

Service Users and Carers are in an advantageous position in relation to receiving a service and having direct contact and experience of care worker provision. Their views of the care received should be seen as relevant and important in the assessment of the candidate's performance, alongside other sources of evidence.

Service users and carers may provide witness testimony to provide service user/carer testimony. Final decisions about the status of this testimony in the candidate's assessment will be made by the assessor.

Service users and carers said the following about contributing to assessment

"Conversations with users and carers can illicit useful information and should be taken into consideration".

"The service user should be consulted on specific areas of work of the care worker".

4 Sources of Evidence

Evidence must be from the candidate's performance in the workplace and will include the integration of the value requirements and the application of knowledge assessed through direct observation of practice by a qualified assessor.

Where appropriate assessment guidance for each unit will be developed and maintained by the Awarding Body/SSB forum.

It is expected that a range of different assessment methods are used:

- direct observation of practice by a qualified assessor
- observation of occupationally specific units by an expert witness
- inference of knowledge from direct observation of practice
- direct questioning and assignments
- assessment of products
- APEL and APL

The sources of evidence will include:

- candidate practice – including the record of the observation of the candidate's performance
- candidate's reflective account/practice journal

- products of the candidate's own work and contributions they have made such as: care plans, minutes, reports, project reports, etc.
- case studies
- witness testimony
- service user/carer testimony
- answers to oral and written questions
- written assignments and projects
- previous experience and learning
- role play

Performance evidence should be gathered wherever possible from naturally occurring evidence collected in the work place. Knowledge to support performance should be based on practice evidence and reflection.

It is recognised that, in the future, alternative forms of recording assessment evidence will evolve using information & communications technologies. Regardless of the form of recording used, the guiding principle must be that information relating to practice information must comply with legal requirements and best practice in the sector in relation to confidentiality of information and be trackable for internal and external verification purposes.

Where candidates have particular needs the evidence required may vary, provided that any alternative evidence demonstrates the standards of competence as identified in the unit or any part of the unit. Awarding Bodies offering this qualification must ensure that they comply with Section C: "*Arrangements for candidates with particular assessment requirements*"².

4.1 Evidence from Other Relevant Qualifications

There are qualifications which provide evidence of required knowledge and understanding, whether in whole or part, for the N/SVQ. The role of these in providing evidence of the underpinning knowledge should be considered in other fora, including the assessment for the vocational qualifications.

5 Simulation

Simulations should only be undertaken in the minority of cases, where the candidate is unable to complete the standards because of the lack of opportunity within their practice i.e.:

- where performance is critical but events occur infrequently and yet a high degree of confidence is needed that the candidate would act appropriately - for example, where there is a high risk of harm or abuse to the individuals, key people in their lives and others, or where events such as medical emergencies (such as cardiac arrest) occur and competence is vital to ensure best practice and results,

² QCA, CCEA and ACCAC (2000) "*Arrangements for the statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland*" QCA; SQA (2001) "*Guidance on Special Assessment Arrangements*"

- where performance is critical, happens frequently but where there is risk of harm to the candidate or service user in a real situation, for example, dealing with aggressive or abusive situations (although evidence from direct observation should be used where possible).

Where simulations are used they **must** replicate working activities in realistic workplace environments³.

6. External Quality Control

The SSBs will work closely with awarding bodies to achieve external quality control of assessment. This approach:

- will build on the good relationships that the SSBs already have with awarding bodies
- will provide opportunities to identify and address particular areas of risk, and to improve quality and consistency
- will support awarding bodies to monitor centres' performance to identify levels of risk and target external verification activity in centres where it is most needed
- will provide information and statistics about take up and completion for each country, and updates on trends and developments, which can be used by the SSBs to identify any potential problem areas and agree appropriate remedial action

In order to do this, the SSBs aim to establish a Forum to meet on a regular basis to identify and address issues arising from the implementation of the national occupational standards and the related qualifications. These issues will inform the continuous improvement of the NOS and awards derived from them. For full details of the terms of reference for this forum see Appendix 1.

6.1 External Verification

The standard external verification model will apply to the qualifications. Awarding bodies must require external verifiers to monitor centres' performance in accordance with SQA/QCA requirements, sampling all aspects of the qualifications' delivery.

Awarding bodies must require external verifiers to take part in regular standardisation activities (with a minimum of at least once a year).

7. Review and evaluation

This Assessment Strategy will be subject to periodic review and evaluation at intervals determined by the SSBs/Awarding Body Forum.

³ Realistic working environments that replicate what is likely to happen when an individual is carrying out their normal duties and activities

Standards Setting Bodies/Awarding Bodies Forum – Terms of Reference

The Forum will:

- provide information and statistics about take up and completion for each country, and updates on trends and developments, which can be used by the Sector Body to identify any potential problem areas and agree appropriate remedial action
- review and report on issues about the standards and their implementation which may inform future review and development processes
- report on risk factors arising from centre performance
- involve the awarding bodies in relevant, ongoing design and development work
- facilitate regular meetings between the SSBs and lead verifiers or appropriate individuals from awarding bodies
- facilitate the flow of information between the SSBs and the awarding bodies in relation to problems in interpreting the standards/assessment requirements
- consider changes in policy and legislation which affect the standards and awards
- consider trends and developments which might have an effect on either of the parties
- consider areas of risk and issues which may affect quality of assessment and achievement
- agree on the best way to receive information about the competence of assessors and ways of sampling
- agree on the best ways to improve data collection, quality, consistency in assessment and proposals for addressing issues which may affect the achievement of awards
- provide advice to Awarding Bodies on CPD and qualification currency issues in respect of assessors/witnesses/IV/EV claims to occupational competence