



ASSESSING NSQF QUALIFICATIONS **Assessors' Handbook**

High-Quality Assessment in NSQF Qualifications

Effective, consistent and quality-assured assessment is essential for qualifications. It enables the qualifications to gain recognition, credibility and value in an education and skills system. As a result, qualifications become a form of currency, used to gain employment and to access further or higher education and training.

It is important that everyone involved in the assessment of National Skills Qualifications Framework (NSQF) qualifications takes steps to ensure high quality in their assessment practice. Learners want the assurance that the assessment is fair and that judgement of their competence is the same as that for all other candidates. Employers want to be sure that holders of NSQF qualifications have been assessed against all the outcomes described in the qualification.

The key requirements for assessment of NSQF qualifications are laid out in the **National Quality Assurance Framework (NQAF) Assessment Manual**.

This Handbook complements NQAF Assessment Manual as a reference for assessors. It provides explanations of key terms and concepts in competence-based assessment, and is designed to supplement assessor training programmes.

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Background & Introduction

The National Skills Qualifications Framework (NSQF) enables skills qualifications to be recognised nationally and to be compared with one another. All NSQF qualifications are developed in close consultation with employers. As a result, employers and learners can have confidence that the qualifications are relevant to the skills needs of the sector they work in and that they are nationally approved.

The Role of Assessment in NSQF Qualifications

Assessment is an essential component of high-quality qualifications. Employers need to be sure that holders of a qualification have been tested to show that they can carry out the outcomes described to the standards set in the qualification. Learners need to be sure that the assessment is fair and that everyone completing the same qualification is assessed to the same standard.

The Assessor's Handbook

This Handbook is designed for everyone involved in the assessment of candidates who are taking an NSQF qualification. It is designed to help you understand

- the key issues involved in effective assessment
- the processes that underpin assessment in NSQF qualifications
- how to prepare for and carry out assessment of candidates
- how to ensure high-quality standards in assessment
- how to access resources and support for your role as an assessor.

The Assessor's Handbook is divided into 4 sections:

Section 1: Key Issues in Assessment

Section 2: The Assessment Lifecycle

Section 3: Assessment in NSQF Qualifications

Section 4: Resources to Support Assessment

Section 1: Key Issues in Assessment

Overview

This section covers:

- assessment in academic and vocational (skills) qualifications
- the role of NOS in assessment
- the role of assessment in RPL and in training programmes
- key principles in assessment
- key uses of assessment

The information contained in this section will enable you to:

- recognise how the assessment of competence differs from the assessment of knowledge
- apply NOS to assessment processes
- identify the issues you need to take into account when carrying out effective assessment of competence
- consider how a candidate's level of work experience will affect how they address assessment requirements

1. Assessment in academic and vocational (skills) qualifications

Assessment is an essential part of any qualification. It measures how far an individual taking the qualification (the **candidate**) has met the learning requirements (**learning outcomes**) of that qualification. However, although assessment is an essential part of all types of qualifications, the form of the assessment varies according to the aims of the qualification.

Broadly speaking, qualifications are often described as coming from one of two different learning traditions:

- **Academic learning** is usually seen as the development of knowledge of a particular subject or area. Assessment of academic learning requires learners to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of the subject. The methods most often associated with assessment for academic qualifications include written examinations, essays and vivas, where individuals discuss the subject with an examiner.
- **Vocational learning** is usually seen as the development of practical skills, and is most often associated with people learning a trade or craft. The aim of vocational qualifications is to ensure that individuals are competent to carry out the role they are training for. **Competence** involves understanding how to carry out a task, why to do it in this way and, importantly, how to overcome problems if they arise. As a result, assessment in vocational learning usually requires learners to demonstrate that they can carry out the tasks needed for their role, and that they understand why they are working in this way. A wide variety of methods can be used to assess vocational learning. These include observation of the individual carrying out tasks either in the workplace or in simulated situations.

In reality, many qualifications combine elements of both academic and vocational learning. For example, to qualify as an engineer, a learner needs to combine academic study at university with practical learning in a range of environments. Similarly, people working in manufacturing roles need the practical skills required to operate equipment. They also need to understand how the equipment works so that they can work safely and solve problems if things go wrong.

Assessment in NSQF qualifications is designed to measure the candidate's competence in their role. This means assessing how far the individual candidate can:

- carry out the tasks included in their role safely and effectively, following required processes and procedures;

- make appropriate decisions about how to carry out tasks and explain why they have taken those decisions
- describe how they might change or adapt their work practices according to the needs of the situation, for example if things go wrong.

What does this mean for the assessor?

Many assessors may come from an academic background. As a result, it can be difficult to adjust to the different methods needed for the assessment of competence. Here are some points to bear in mind to help make the move from academic to competence-based assessment:

- **The role of knowledge:** Competence-based assessment focuses firmly on the practical application of knowledge, rather than on understanding of theories. Candidates may not be used to discussing the theories underpinning their practice, or be familiar with academic studies in their area. However, they may be able to explain their work very clearly in non-academic terms. Assessors need to ask questions that enable individuals to describe and explain their work in a way that allows them to demonstrate their knowledge appropriately.
- **Assessing at an appropriate level:** It is important to remember that, in assessing competence, an assessor is not looking for perfection. The next page provides information about the standards that form some of the qualifications in the NSQF. In coming to a decision about whether a standard has been met, the key question that the assessor must bear in mind is 'Has this person shown they can carry out this activity safely and appropriately?'

2. The role of National Occupational Standards in assessment

Many NSQF qualifications have been developed by Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) for their industry or sector. These qualifications are based on [National Occupational Standards \(NOS\)](#). These standards define what people need to know and be able to do in their role. This section looks at what assessors need to know about NOS.

a) Performance criteria and knowledge & understanding statements

NOS define how a task should be completed. They describe what an individual needs to do to complete the task to the appropriate standard (the [performance criteria](#) or [PCs](#)) and the knowledge and understanding they need to do this successfully. The PCs and knowledge & understanding statements are important because these are the criteria used to assess the candidate.

b) NOS and Qualification Packs

Many Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) have designed qualifications to support specific job roles and developed a series of NOS relevant to the tasks required by that role. The NOS specific to a job role are combined into a [Qualification Pack \(QP\)](#).

The number of NOS in a QP varies. In some cases, all the NOS in a QP are mandatory: this means that the candidate must demonstrate that they meet the standards in all of the NOS. Other QPs may include a mixture of mandatory and optional NOS: the options reflect the fact that, very often, people working in similar roles carry out different tasks. All candidates need to complete the mandatory NOS. They then complete a given number of optional NOS most relevant to their own context. In all cases, the candidate needs to demonstrate that they meet the requirements of the number of NOS specified in the QP.

c) Evidence requirements for NOS

Candidates need to provide [evidence](#) that they can meet the PCs and have the knowledge & understanding specified in the NOS for their job role. This evidence can take many different forms. Below there are a few examples of the ways in which a candidate might provide evidence. They might:

- carry out the task while being observed by the assessor ([direct evidence](#));
- carry out the task in a simulated environment (e.g. in a classroom). For example, candidates training to make clothes may be asked to make an example in a classroom or workshop.
- provide documentary evidence (e.g. official record sheets or audits) showing they have carried out this task effectively.

- provide artifacts or products they have made. For example, a weaver may provide examples of the cloth they have made, or a candidate who is learning business skills may provide examples of documents they have produced.
- provide written testaments from people for whom they have carried out tasks in the NOS. Examples might include written reports from a manager.
- discuss their work with the assessor, demonstrating their knowledge & understanding of the principles underpinning the way they work.
- provide short case studies describing tasks they have completed and providing a rationale for and/or evaluation of the choices they made.

This is not an exhaustive list and other forms of evidence may be appropriate.

Remember that one piece of evidence is likely to provide evidence for more than one performance criterion and/or knowledge & understanding statement. For example, candidates who are studying beauty and wellness may be observed carrying out a treatment. This will involve carrying out the task at hand (e.g. providing massage therapy) but also speaking with the client, and perhaps providing information or guidance. As a result, they will be demonstrating a range of skills all integrated into the same task. As the assessor, you need to be able to identify how the evidence relates to a range of criteria, rather than requiring a different and individual piece of evidence for each criterion. This integrated approach – where a number of criteria are assessed with one piece of evidence – is central to the assessment of competence.

What does this mean for the assessor?

- The NOS provide the basis for assessment within each qualification. It is vital that you become fully familiar with the NOS contained in the Qualification Pack for the qualification you are assessing.
- A wide range of evidence may be acceptable in helping you assess whether or not the individual has met the requirements of the PCs and knowledge & understanding statements in a NOS. Your role as assessor is to decide if the evidence demonstrates the candidate's competence in the area being assessed.
- Remember that you need to take an integrated approach to assessment, rather than ask candidates to address each criterion in isolation. Your role is to identify how a single piece of evidence might match the requirements of a range of criteria.
More information about assessing evidence is included in **Section 3**.

3. Key principles of assessment

Effective assessment is vital to ensure that candidates have met the standards required by a qualification. Without this assurance of quality, the currency and standing of the qualification is put at risk.

Assessment in NSQF qualifications is based on a series of key principles. These principles reflect international norms for educational assessment. As an assessor, it is important to understand these key principles, and to ensure that your assessment practice reflects them.

5 Key Principles of Assessment

Assessment should be:

1. **Valid:** The assessment process or method must be designed so that it assesses what it is intended to assess. Validity in assessment is supported when the qualification provides appropriate descriptions and measures of the activities carried out in the specified job roles.
2. **Reliable:** The assessment generates the same outcome over time and place, irrespective of the person making the judgement/decision. This means that:
 - if a candidate is assessed by two different assessors, those assessors should come to the same judgement
 - if the same work is assessed at different times, the decision should remain the same.

Assessment bodies support the reliability of assessment through assessor training and through building in checks and balances in the assessment process. You can read more about these in Section 3.
3. **Manageable:** The assessment is manageable for all concerned and remains cost-effective and efficient.
4. **Accessible:** The assessment avoids placing unnecessary barriers to the demonstration of attainment. Assessment bodies ensure accessibility when they have arrangements in place to support candidates who may need additional help. An example of this might be providing a large-print copy of a task for someone who has vision impairment.
5. **Transparent:** The assessment criteria and methodology are clearly identified and shared with teachers/trainers and, where appropriate, candidates.

What does this mean for the assessor?

Assessors have an important role in ensuring that assessment is both valid and reliable. Accredited Assessment Bodies must ensure that assessors are fully equipped to carry out their role appropriately.

All assessors should:

- participate in, and successfully complete, an assessor training programme;
- complete [standardisation](#) tasks as part of that training;
- demonstrate that they have appropriate knowledge/experience of the job role for the qualification which they are assessing;
- keep up to date with requirements or changes in job roles so that they are applying the performance criteria appropriately;
- complete all assessment tasks to the standard and within the timeframes set by the Assessment Body;
- participate in regular reviews and updates as required.

More information on these processes can be found in **Section 2**.

4. Assessment and the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

There are two main routes for candidates to complete a qualification. These two routes are through [Recognition of Prior Learning \(RPL\)](#) or by completing a training course. The choice of route depends on their level of workplace experience.

RPL is a vital component of the NSQF. However, it is important to remember that everyone taking an NSQF qualification – either as part of their training course or via an RPL route – is assessed against the [assessment criteria](#) for their particular qualification. As a result, individuals and employers can be sure that everyone holding the same qualification has met the same standards.

People who have been working in their role for some time may not have been formally trained. However, they may have become competent in their role as a result of:

- participating in training activities which are not assessed. This type of learning is called [non-formal learning](#). Examples of non-formal learning activities might be attendance at presentations and workshops, or through guided learning with a manager.
- carrying out tasks repeatedly, or working out by themselves how to do things better. This type of learning is called [informal learning](#). People may not be able to explain how they have learned to carry out a task – they simply know that they know how to do it.

RPL is very important for people who have learned to do their job in this way. It can help them gain qualifications by taking into account the learning they have gained through the experience of working.

Stages in the RPL Process

At its heart, RPL is a process of assessment. However, it is also a learning process. It involves a series of stages:

Stage 1:

The employer or manager needs to identify someone to support the RPL candidate as they work to complete the RPL process. This role can be done by a training provider or a [workplace advisor](#). The workplace advisor does not need to be a formal role – it is simply someone in the workplace who understands what is involved in completing an NSQF qualification, and who can guide the individual learner as they work towards it.

Stage 2:

Working with the advisor, the individual begins to compile a **portfolio of evidence** of their knowledge, skills and experience. The portfolio is needed to demonstrate how the individual meets the performance criteria and knowledge & understanding requirements of the qualification. Evidence can take many different forms.

Importantly, many people find that the process of compiling their portfolio helps them to identify and talk about their learning – and to identify where they might need additional learning. For this reason, it is a very important and often very useful development process.

Stage 3:

The assessor is responsible for making the decision on whether the evidence presented by the individual meets the normal assessment requirements of the qualification.

- If the evidence meets all the requirements, the qualification can be awarded
- If the evidence meets some – but not all – of the requirements, the assessor can identify the areas where additional learning and evidence is needed.

What does this mean for the assessor?

It is important to remember that all candidates need to meet the same assessment criteria, regardless of whether they are coming via an RPL or training course route. However, there may be differences in the ways RPL candidates and trainees present their evidence or talk about their learning. For example, cohorts of candidates who have followed a training programme may have a more consistent way of describing and explaining technical or theoretical aspects of their work. They may also take a consistent approach to the completion of their portfolio of tasks.

Candidates coming via an RPL route are likely to have a more individual approach to the completion of assessment requirements, drawing on their own particular work experience. As a result, these candidates may have more diverse approaches to discussing their practice or presenting their portfolio. They may be less likely to describe their learning using technical or theoretical terms.

As an assessor, it is important to be open to this range and diversity and to recognise that, although candidates might take different approaches, they should all be meeting the same standard.

5. Key uses of assessment

Assessment plays an important role in the learning process, and can be used for different purposes at different stages. As an assessor, it is important that you understand the different purposes of assessment, and recognise the role you are carrying out.

a) **Diagnostic assessment:**

This type of assessment is often used at the start of a learning process to identify what an individual learner already knows or can do in relation to the standards they are expected to meet. Examples of diagnostic assessment include pre-course tests to assess an individual's current level of knowledge and/or competence before they begin a learning programme. Diagnostic assessment is an important feature of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL).

b) **Formative assessment**

Formative assessment is used to test an individual's progress at different stages as they work through a learning programme. Formative assessment is important for helping individuals – and their training providers – identify areas of strength and weakness, and to prioritise areas for further work. All learning programmes and RPL processes leading to NSQF qualifications should involve some forms of formative assessment, usually carried out by trainers or advisors.

c) **Summative assessment**

Summative assessment is carried out at the end of a learning programme or RPL process. It is the process of measuring a candidate's overall achievement against the **assessment criteria** for a qualification to decide if the qualification can be awarded.

What does this mean for the assessor?

Assessors are responsible for carrying out summative assessment of candidates' evidence. They decide if the evidence is of an appropriate standard and make a recommendation about the result. Importantly, before qualifications can be awarded, the assessors' decisions are scrutinised as part of the assessment body's **quality assurance** processes.

More information quality assurance of assessment is contained in **Section 2**.

Section 2: The Assessment Lifecycle

Overview

This section covers:

- the different stages required for effective and robust assessment
- the roles required for effective and robust assessment
- quality assurance in the assessment process

The information contained in this section will enable you to:

- identify how the stages in the assessment lifecycle support robust assessment
- identify how your role as an assessor fits into the overall assessment process

1. The Assessment Lifecycle

The summative assessment carried out by assessors is one in a series of stages required to ensure that people can have confidence in the level and quality of the NSQF qualifications.

These stages of assessment can be seen as a 'lifecycle' which is constantly repeated and renewed. This lifecycle includes activities which take place before, during and after the assessor carries out assessment. Each stage in the lifecycle is briefly described below.

Stages in the assessment lifecycle

Before assessment

- a) **Design** – The design stage is where the [assessment strategy](#), assessment criteria and the methods of assessment are determined by the purpose of the qualification and the level of demand required by the NSQF Level and that they are in line with all the key principles of assessment. The assessment body is responsible for this overall design.
- b) **Development** – At the development stage, the assessment body works to ensure that all of the assessment materials and tools required by candidates and assessors, along, with guidance and supporting documents, reflect the requirements of the assessment design. The assessment guidance document is one of the resources developed at this stage.

During assessment

- c) **Delivery** – This stage includes the preparation for and the carrying out of assessment. It includes the preparation of assessors, including the [standardisation](#) of assessment.
- d) **Carrying out assessment and recording outcomes** – The two main tasks of assessors are to:
 - carry out the assessment as they have been instructed, judging how far the evidence the candidate provides meets the assessment criteria;
 - record their decisions appropriately, providing a clear rationale for those decisions. This is particularly important step for ensuring the reliability and validity of the assessment.

Following assessment

- e) **Finalising assessment decisions and confirming results** – The final stage in the assessment process requires a series of steps to ensure that the assessment has

produced valid and reliable results. The first step in this process is a check on the decisions made by assessors before results can be finalised. This check is needed to ensure that the assessment has been fair and consistent across all assessors and assessment centres. This process of **moderation** is designed to ensure that final results reflect a fair and consistent application of the assessment criteria.

- f) Issuing certificates** – The qualification certificate provides proof that the candidate has successfully completed all of the assessment requirements of that qualification. The certifying body is responsible for ensuring that all successful candidates receive their certificate as soon as possible following the confirmation of result, and for ensuring the security of certificates.
- g) Evaluating the performance of assessment** – The reliability of assessment includes ensuring that the standards and practices of assessment remain consistent over time. This stage includes an evaluation of all aspects of the assessment, including the performance of assessors, to ensure that all aspects of the assessment have met the required standards.

A quality assurance model underpins the assessment lifecycle. Each stage has defined processes which must be followed, with documentation and records available for external scrutiny. These records may be used to deal with requests for information or with complaints or appeals. Details of the quality assurance requirements for assessment are contained in the **NQAF Assessment Manual**.

What does this mean for the assessor?

Reliability is one of the key principles of assessment. The moderation of assessors' recommendations is essential to ensure the reliability of results provided by assessors working in organisations across the country.

The judgements made by all assessors are scrutinised at the stage before final decisions are announced. It is vital that the assessor provides a clear record of the judgements that they have made, giving a clear rationale for their decisions. This information is particularly important if the moderating team question the assessor's decision. The absence of a clear and convincing rationale may mean that the assessor's decision is overturned at the moderation stage.

2. Roles to support effective assessment

The assessment lifecycle shows that robust assessment depends on the work of a range of people and teams working in different roles.

The following roles are needed to ensure high-quality assessment processes and practices and to guarantee the standards and integrity of NSQF qualifications.

- **Competent Body staff:** The Competent Body is the body which has overall responsibility for the qualification, including all aspects of assessment from design and delivery through to certification. The Competent Body staff who are responsible for these aspects need to:
 - liaise directly with employers and stakeholders to ensure that the design of the assessment meets the needs of the sector
 - design the assessment tools
 - provide the required guidance on how assessment should be carried out
 - monitor the work of assessors, assessment bodies and training providers to ensure that assessment is carried out in line with the quality standards.
- **Lead Assessors:** Lead Assessors are responsible for ensuring that assessment is carried out to the required standards. To do this they:
 - deliver training for assessors, under the guidance of the assessment body or the Competent Body
 - monitor the standardisation of assessors before 'live' assessment begins to ensure that all assessors can apply the standards consistently
 - sample the work of the assessors to ensure it continues to meet the required standards
 - provide expert assessment decisions in borderline cases.
- **Assessors:** The role of the assessor is to carry out the summative assessment and to recommend the result. However, this result can only be finalized once it has been through the Competent Body's quality assurance processes.
- **Trainers:** Trainers have an essential role in ensuring that individuals are well prepared for the final, summative assessment. They do this by providing formative assessment of the individual's progress throughout their course of study. As a result, trainers need to have a full understanding of the standards and the requirements of assessment.

- **(Workplace) Advisors:** Workplace advisors are important for experienced workers who wish to undertake a qualification using RPL. The workplace advisor is a person in the workplace who understands what is involved in completing the NSQF qualification, and who can guide the individual as they work towards it. Workplace advisors need to understand fully how evidence of learning matches the standards of the qualification.

What does this mean for the assessor?

The assessor has an essential role in supporting reliable assessment. However, for assessment to be reliable, the assessor cannot work in isolation. He or she needs to be sure that the decisions they make are consistent with the standards and the decisions of others in the assessment team and with Competent Body requirements.

Importantly, trainers also have an essential role in assessment, and many trainers may also be assessors. This dual role helps to ensure that the training they provide is informed by a full understanding of assessment processes. To ensure fairness in assessment, the assessment body's quality assurance processes ensure that trainers do not provide summative assessment for their own students.

3. Quality assurance in the assessment of NSQF qualifications

The quality of NSQF qualifications as a whole can only be assured if each qualification on the framework guarantees this quality. Without valid and reliable assessment, a qualification cannot provide this guarantee.

All aspects of NSQF qualifications must meet the requirements laid out in the **National Quality Assurance Framework (NQAF)**. This framework lays out the quality standards which qualification designers and developers must meet in order for a qualification to be entered onto the NSQF. The NQAF also lays out the quality standards which training providers and assessment bodies must meet in order to be accredited to deliver qualifications.

Quality assurance in the design of assessment:

Before they can be entered on to the NSQF, all qualifications should go through a rigorous review process. The **National Skills Qualifications Committee (NSQC)** has overall responsibility for the approval of NSQF qualifications. Before approving a qualification, the NSQC needs to be sure that:

- the assessment criteria and methods are appropriate for the qualification and its level on the NSQF;
- the assessment process is manageable and accessible
- the assessment will produce valid and reliable results.

Quality assurance in the delivery of assessment

Assessment for NSQF qualifications can only be delivered by trained assessors working with **accredited assessment bodies**. These accredited assessment bodies are responsible for ensuring that all aspects of assessment meet the quality assurance standards laid out in the NQAF. This includes demonstrating that:

- all assessors have been trained and approved
- all assessors are fully aware of their responsibilities during and following assessment
- the security of the assessment can be guaranteed. This includes checking the identity of candidates and ensuring the security of assessment materials and records.

Quality assurance in the certification process

Once candidates have been assessed, the certifying body has a rigorous process to ensure that certificates are issued only to those who meet the standards of the qualification. These processes include:

- the monitoring of recommended results as they come in to identify any potential areas of concern (e.g. places where recommended results seem to vary from the normal pattern)
- the moderation of results through a system of sampling and checking recommendations.
- putting in place systems to ensure that certificates are secure and cannot be faked.

What does this mean for the assessor?

Assessors need to understand the importance of quality assurance and to follow the processes which apply to their work. These processes are described in more detail in the next section.

For more information, see **NQAF Assessment Manual** .

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Section 3: Assessing NSQF Qualifications

Overview

This section covers:

- assessment criteria in NSQF qualifications
- making judgements about evidence
- using Assessment Workbooks to support assessment
- preparing to carry out an assessment
- completing an assessment

The information contained in this section will enable you to:

- identify how a candidate's context may affect their approach to the completion of the qualification
- identify how your personal style might impact on the assessment process
- make judgements about the appropriateness of evidence
- understand the role and promote the use of Assessment Workbooks to support reliable assessment
- make effective preparations for carrying out assessments
- complete assessment processes appropriately.

1. The components of assessment

Skills-based qualifications contain two main elements which guide assessment: knowledge & understanding and performance.

a) Knowledge & understanding

Statements of **knowledge & understanding** define what the candidate needs to **know and understand** in order to be competent to carry out the tasks and activities included in the NOS. Candidates normally demonstrate that they have this knowledge and understanding either in writing or through a structured conversation – known as a **viva** - with the assessor.

b) Performance criteria

The **performance criteria (PCs)** define what the candidate needs to **be able to do** in order to be competent. Candidates normally demonstrate that they can do perform tasks either by being observed by the assessor or providing evidence of their competence (e.g. things they have made; statements of what they have done given by a manager etc).

Taken together, the knowledge & understanding statements and the performance criteria underpin the assessment criteria for the qualification.

It is important to remember that all tasks in the workplace integrate knowledge, understanding and performance. For example, repairing a piece of equipment may involve a great many steps and may require in-depth knowledge of the equipment to find and address the fault.

Assessment should mirror this integrated approach. Assessors need to understand how a single piece of evidence or an observed activity can provide evidence for a number of different statements and criteria. By understanding how assessment criteria group together within a single workplace activity, the assessor and the candidate can identify how to ensure that the different components of assessment are integrated effectively. The Competent Body should provide information for assessors to support this understanding.

Using an [assessment matrix](#) both assessors and candidates can identify where evidence meets a range of assessment criteria. More information about assessment matrices is included in **Using Assessment Workbooks To Support Assessment**.

What does this mean for the assessor?

As the assessor, it is essential that you understand the assessment criteria for the qualification you are assessing, and how these criteria can be grouped to support integrated assessment.

This grouping of criteria depends on a strong understanding of the role which the candidate carries out in the workplace. Without this understanding you may over- or under-estimate the interdependence between workplace activities. This may lead you to expect the candidate to be able to address too many criteria at the same time, or require them to duplicate work unnecessarily.

The qualification assessment strategy may require you to have experience in the work you are assessing: i.e. to be [occupationally competent](#). However, experience alone is not sufficient to ensure that assessment is carried out consistently across all assessors. The guidance developed by the Competent Body should support you in understanding how the different assessment criteria group together in a task, and how to ensure you assess appropriately.

2. Candidates for NSQF qualifications

NSQF qualifications focus on the knowledge, understanding and skills needed for competence in a job role. The people who are candidates for NSQF qualifications may come from a wide range of backgrounds and/or be working in very diverse circumstances. Some may have very academic backgrounds and others may have had very limited access to formal education.

As an assessor, it is important that you understand the circumstances of the people taking qualifications and how these circumstances might affect the way they approach assessment. Here are a few of the issues you might need to consider:

- The depth of knowledge and skills needed for job roles is reflected in the NSQF Level. The majority of NSQF qualifications sit between Level 2 and Level 5 of the NSQF. At these levels, job roles involve routine tasks and factual knowledge of an occupational area, rather than expertise in the area.
- A few qualifications require candidates to hold a degree (or equivalent). Many NSQF qualifications require candidates to have completed between Year 8 and Year 10 of school and some have no education requirement. As a result, the majority of candidates for NSQF qualifications are unlikely to have experience of university-level education. This means they may not routinely use technical terms or theoretical concepts linked to their role in the workplace. This lack of more academic vocabulary, however, is unlikely to affect their competence in the workplace.
- Candidates with limited experience of formal education may view assessment as a very threatening process. They may lack confidence in their ability to complete assessment. It is important to ensure that your delivery of assessment is as objective as possible, and does not undermine the individual's confidence.
- Candidates following an RPL route need to generate evidence of their competence from their workplace practice. If a particular activity is not part of their normal job, they are unlikely to provide evidence of how to complete that activity. They also need the support of their employer when gathering evidence. If their employer is not particularly supportive, the candidate might have difficulty doing this. This means that you may find gaps in their evidence of knowledge and skills.

What does this mean for the assessor?

As an assessor, you need to ensure that your approach to assessment and your expectations of candidates are guided by an understanding both of the qualification requirements and of the candidates' context.

You need to ensure that you:

- understand fully the NSQF level and the assessment criteria for the qualification you are assessing – and how these translate into practice in the workplace.
- take a positive approach to assessment, examining evidence and listening to answers so you can identify what a candidate *can* do, as opposed to focusing on finding fault or gaps. This does not mean that you should disregard areas where a candidate is not competent. It does mean, however, that your expectations must reflect the level and requirements of the qualification rather than lead you to seek 'perfect' answers.
- adopt an approach to questioning in any observation or oral component which puts the individual at ease and allows them to demonstrate what they know and can do. Being able to put candidates at their ease is an essential skill for an assessor.
- are fully familiar with the Competent Body's processes for dealing with RPL candidates who can only provide partial evidence of how they meet the assessment criteria. In many cases, this might involve identifying the additional learning they need to complete before being reassessed.

3. Making judgements about evidence

Evidence lies at the heart of assessment of skills. Skills develop over a long period, and assessment at a single point in time is unlikely to provide the level of evidence needed to show if a candidate has the required level of competence for a job role. This is why formative assessment plays such an important part in the candidate's journey to completing the qualification.

The Competent Body is responsible for defining the role of formative assessment in the overall assessment of a candidate. Formative assessment requires the candidate to gather evidence of their growing skills, knowledge and understanding. It may take the form of classroom tests. However, there are many other forms of evidences. Here are some examples:

- artifacts or objects made by the candidate (e.g. a piece of cloth made for a weaving qualification);
- records of completed tasks (e.g. photographs or written records of repairs for a plumbing qualification);
- documents or correspondence which demonstrates that the candidate has carried out tasks well (e.g. emails from managers commenting on performance).

The most important thing is that the evidence gathered by the candidate demonstrates how they address the assessment criteria of the qualification.

Although the form of evidence may vary from qualification to qualification, there are some key criteria which all assessors need to apply when making judgements about evidence.

Criteria for 'good' evidence: Evidence provided by candidates needs to be:

a) appropriate: The evidence must be appropriate to the assessment criteria of the qualification. For example, if a mechanic is required to demonstrate that they can repair an engine fault, the evidence needs to show that they have repaired the fault. Without this evidence, the validity of the assessment can be questioned. The assessment strategy should define the types of evidence deemed appropriate for the qualification.

b) sufficient: A candidate has to demonstrate that their competence in order to achieve an NSQF qualification. However, being able to carry out a task once may not, in itself, demonstrate competence. You may need to see evidence that the candidate has carried out tasks on a number of occasions before you can confirm that they are competent. As an assessor, you need

to judge if there is sufficient evidence to demonstrate that the candidate is competent to carry out the activities described in the assessment criteria.

- c) authentic:** If evidence is authentic, it provides a true record of what the individual candidate did and it reflects a realistic task in the workplace. It is important that the assessor is convinced that the evidence presented by the candidate is not fabricated or invented simply to address the assessment criteria.
- d) current:** It is important that evidence reflects what the candidate knows and can do at the point when they undertake assessment. As a result, the evidence they provide must demonstrate their current levels of knowledge and skills. This is particularly important when considering evidence as part of an RPL process. If too much time has passed since the individual carried out tasks or learned to do new activities, their competence may not be current. Competent Bodies should have a view on the length of time that evidence of learning can be considered current.

What does this mean for the assessor?

Assessors need to use their professional judgement to identify if the evidence provided by the candidate meets the criteria for evidence. This is why assessors may need to be occupationally competent in the area which they are assessing,

However, decisions about the acceptability of evidence is not dependent on the individual assessor's own personal view. It is determined by the guidance given in the assessment strategy and supporting documents, and it is subject to review in the quality assurance process.

As an assessor, it is important that you follow the guidance provided for assessment of the qualification and that you participate in training and standardization provided by the assessment body to ensure you are applying the assessment criteria in line with qualification requirements.

4. Using Assessment Workbooks to support assessment

A range of assessment tools can be used to underpin valid, reliable and robust assessment of qualifications. Assessment Workbooks are examples of a type of tool which can support diagnostic, formative and summative assessment.

a) What are Assessment Workbooks?

Assessment Workbooks provide support and guidance for candidates to help them gather the evidence of their skills, knowledge and understanding. They provide a series of tasks, activities and questions for the candidate to complete, along with space for the candidate to document answers and evidence. As the candidate works through the workbook, the ideas and materials they gather can form part of a portfolio of evidence linked to the assessment criteria of the qualification.

Key features of Assessment Workbooks

- An Assessment Workbook relates to a single qualification. It provides tasks and activities which allow candidates to demonstrate how they apply the knowledge they have gained to the practical tasks required in their job role. The workbook provides space for the candidate to record their answers and responses to the questions and tasks. The workbook also includes practical tasks for the candidate to complete.
- The tasks and activities in the Assessment Workbook should be cross-referenced to the qualification assessment criteria. This information is included as a matrix in the workbook. Importantly, each task, activity or question may relate to a number of different criteria. As a result, the workbooks can support an integrated approach to the assessment of knowledge, understanding and skills.
- Each Assessment Workbook for candidates is supported by a version for assessors. The Assessor's version of the Assessment Workbook provides guidance for all assessors, outlining what they should look for in the candidate's answers. It also highlights forms of evidence which are or are not acceptable in response to the tasks in the workbook. In this way, the Assessor's Workbook for a qualification supports consistency in assessment across the assessors and training providers who are using the workbook.

b) The role of the Assessment Workbooks in assessment.

Assessment Workbooks provide a tool which can support assessment at different stages of the learning process:

- **Diagnostic assessment:** Training providers can use Assessment Workbooks as diagnostic tools. Asking candidates to complete some of the activities and tasks at the beginning of learning process can help identify what the candidates already know – and where they might need additional support. This can be especially useful for candidates who already have work experience.
- **Formative assessment:** By working through the Assessment Workbook as a learning programme progresses, candidates can gather evidence of their progress. This also provides information for training providers, demonstrating where additional learning might be needed.
- **Summative assessment:** A completed Assessment Workbook provides a portfolio of evidence for the final assessment of candidates. Assessors may review the workbooks to identify where there is strong evidence of the candidate's knowledge/skills, and where additional evidence is needed.

c) The role of Assessment Workbooks in RPL

Assessment Workbooks are especially useful for candidates undertaking an RPL route to a qualification. The structure they provide allows the candidate to describe their work and their learning in a new way, helping them to reflect on what they know and can do. As a result, the evidence captured in the workbook can provide the assessor with a fuller and more accurate view of the candidate's knowledge and skills, and can help to identify where there may be gaps in experience and understanding.

What does this mean for the assessor?

The role of an Assessment Workbook in the assessment of a qualification should be defined in the assessment strategy. As an assessor, you must check if Assessment Workbooks are being used in your context. If so, you need to ensure you are fully familiar with the content and the guidance for assessors, and that you understand how the workbook should be incorporated into your assessment judgements.

For more information about Assessment Workbooks and how they are developed, visit the India EU Skills website (<http://www.india-euskills.com>)

5. Preparing for and carrying out assessment

The assessment process can be divided into 5 main stages. Use this checklist to remind you of some of the key issues to be addressed at each stage.

PLEASE NOTE: This checklist does not provide comprehensive details on how to carry out assessment. All assessors MUST complete appropriate training and read in detail the assessor guidance for the qualification they are assessing.

Stage 1: General Preparation

This stage ensures that you understand fully your role and responsibilities well before you begin assessing candidates.

1. Make sure that you are fully familiar with:
 - a) the assessment criteria of the qualification you are assessing,
 - b) the assessment strategy for the qualification
 - c) the guidance for assessors for the qualification
 - d) any action you need to take to avoid conflict of interest
2. Make sure that you have completed:
 - a) all of the training requirements for assessors
 - b) any standardisation task(s) required by the assessment body
3. Make sure that you have confirmed with the assessment body:
 - a) the times when you will/will not be available to undertake assessments
 - b) when and where you will be required to carry out assessments

Stage 2: Before each assessment

On the day of the assessments, it is important that you are fully prepared.

Before the assessment begins, make sure you:

- a) have sufficient copies of all of the assessment materials (including assessment record sheets) needed for the candidates you are going to assess
- b) have a list of candidate names/numbers
- c) know the timing of each assessment
- d) can see a clock or watch so that you can keep to time

- e) have access to a quiet area where you can complete the candidate assessment record(s) in confidence

Stage 3: During the assessment

Your role as the assessor is to gather objective evidence of how far the candidate meets the standards of the qualification. It is important to consider how your own body language, tone of voice and seating position can affect the candidate's performance. Here are some points to consider:

During the assessment, make sure you:

- a) check the candidate's identity before the assessment begins. (NB If you realise you know the candidate you MUST stop the assessment. This candidate will be reassigned to a different assessor.)
- b) put the candidate at their ease, checking they understand what they have to do
- c) carry out observation and questioning in an objective manner, taking care not to imply criticism or praise
- d) make notes discreetly and appropriately, so that the candidate does not see what is written and the process does not interrupt the flow of the assessment.
- e) signal the end of the assessment clearly and appropriately

Stage 4: Immediately following the assessment

You must ensure that the assessment record and any other required paperwork are completed in full immediately following the assessment. Delays in completing the records can result in mistakes being made and delays to the assessment process overall.

Immediately following the assessment, make sure you:

- a) complete the assessment record fully for each individual candidate, following the guidance provided by the assessment body
- b) provide a clear and objective justification for your recommended result. This justification is an essential tool in ensuring the reliability of results, and in addressing any complaints which may arise.
- c) store and return the completed paperwork in a way which maintains its security and ensures it cannot be tampered with.

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Visit the Project website to find out more about the project and to access a wide
range of information and resources.

