Guide to Assessment and Quality Assurance For Employers and Training Providers Offering National Vocational Qualifications

C O N T E N T S

About This Guide

This guide to Assessment and Quality Assurance for National Vocational Qualifications is aimed at staff employed by training providers, by employers, or by voluntary organizations who offer National Vocational Qualifications awarded by the TVET Council (TVETC).

The purpose of this guide is to take you through the whole process of assessing and quality assuring our qualifications, from start to finish. It explains our policies, the reasons for them, and how to comply with them.

About The TVET Council

The TVET Council (TVETC) is a statutory body established to promote the growth and quality of technical and vocational education and training in Barbados.

Its main functions are to:

    a.   advise the Minister on policy relating to technical and vocational education and training

    b.   prepare plans for technical and vocational education and training in accordance with national policies and economic needs

    c.   make grants or loans for the support and provision of technical and vocational education and training

    d.   establish standards and qualification for technical and vocational education and training

Our National Vocational Qualifications of Barbados (NVQs) are unit-based qualifications which recognize competence in a job role. They are based on standards of competence that are set by Industry Lead Bodies.

Section B:

Assessment and Quality Assurance

1   Overview Of Assessment

One of the most important factors contributing to public confidence in qualifications is the quality of the assessment which candidates undertake to achieve them. At the TVET Council, we strive to ensure that the assessment process is both rigorous and fair, and that assessment tasks are appropriate to the national standards defined within each qualification.

What we mean by *assessment* is measuring the evidence of a candidate's attainment of knowledge, understanding, and skills against defined criteria.

These are some of the methods by which we make sure that the system used for assessing our qualifications is credible, cost-effective, and valued.

     ⬦   validating the standards for qualification through consultation with stakeholders and approval by the Standards Approval Committee.

     ⬦   ensuring that assessments are well-designed, consistently applied, and allow candidates to show that they are able to meet qualification standards

     ⬦   underpinning all assessment by a coherent and effective system of quality assurance

Principles of Assessment

We strive to ensure that assessment of our qualifications is *valid, reliable* and *practicable.* We also aim to make it flexible and cost-effective.

In order to maintain rigorous and credible national standards, all assessment must be valid and assessment decisions reliable. Centres should also ensure that the application of assessment tasks is practicable, i.e. they make best use of human and physical resources and time.

Validity Of Assessment

Each assessment – whether it's a written question paper or a project brief - should be designed in such a way that it provides candidates with an opportunity to produce the evidence that shows they have the knowledge and skills to satisfy the requirements of the qualifications.

An assessment is valid when it:

◈   is appropriate to purpose (e.g. practical assessment should be used to assess practical skills)

◈   allows the production of evidence of candidates' performance which can be measured against standards defined within the qualification

◈   is accessible to all candidates who are potentially able to achieve it

Practicability

For assessments to be practicable (i.e. capable of being carried out both efficiently and cost-effectively) there have to be adequate resources and time. Examples of this are:

◈   in the context of oral assessments or interviews, balancing the need for assessment reliability with considerations of staff and candidate time and potential stress

◈   in the context of assessing practical skills, bearing in mind any resource implication

◈   an assessment system with the flexibility to meet the needs of all candidates

Reliability

To be reliable, assessment decisions (based on standards in a qualification) on candidates' performance must be consistent across all assessors and all candidates undertaking the same assessment task. In any assessment system, procedures have to be put in place to ensure this.

Assessment decisions are reliable when they are based on evidence that is:

◈   generated by valid assessments generated under consistently-applied conditions of assessment (e.g. open book, supervised or invigilated)

◈   the authenticated work of the candidates being assessed

and when they are:

◈   taken on the basis of clearly-defined performance related criteria

◈   consistent across the range of assessors applying the assessment in different situations, contexts and with different candidates

◈   consistent over time

2   Overview of Quality Assurance

A key objective of the TVET Council's quality assurance procedures is to ensure that the assessment of our qualifications is valid and reliable – i.e. that candidates who have shown that they can meet the standards of a qualification receive certificates, and that those who have not, do not. This has to be achieved in a practical and cost-effective manner so that quality assurance does not become a burden to our centres. Our quality assurance procedures must also ensure consistency of standards over time for all qualifications.

Quality Assurance Principles and Elements

Quality Assurance Principles

TVETC's quality assurance systems are based on the following principles:

◇   The TVET Council's assessment and quality assurance system should be understandable to stakeholders, effectively administered, publicly accountable and cost-effective to operate.

◇   Qualifications should be accessible to all candidates who have the potential to achieve them.

◇   The criteria which define the performance required of candidates for them to achieve qualifications should be appropriate to purpose, explicit and in the public domain.

◇   Each unit and NVQ Award should be unique and necessary, and should comply with the relevant qualification specification.

◇   Assessments should be valid, reliable and practicable, and assessment results should be in line with qualification's criteria.

◇   Qualifications should be offered in centres which have the resources and expertise to assess candidates against the qualification's criteria.

◇   Staff in centres should be provided with effective support in assessing candidates for certification.

◇   Procedures for the approval of centres should take due account of their track record and approval gained from other quality-regulating organizations.

Quality Assurance Elements

♢   ***Approval of NVQs***
The Council will put in place formal procedures to approve each proposed NVQ against explicit criteria to ensure fitness for purpose.

♢   ***Approval as a TVET Council Centre***
The Council will publish criteria that relate to the management procedures which underpin the implementation and assessment of TVET Council qualifications in centres.

♢   ***Approval to offer specific TVETC qualifications***
The Council will publish criteria that relate to the resources required of centres for the implementation and assess of specific NVQs.

♢   ***Internal verification of internal assessment***
The Council will publish criteria that relate to the processes by which centres ensure that all internal assessment is valid, reliable, practicable and cost-effective.

♢   ***External verification of internal assessment***
The Council will establish external processes by which it ensures that internal assessment is in line with the national standards set out in the qualifications.

♢   ***Quality control of external assessment***
The Council will, where appropriate, put in place external assessment to ensure that national standards are adhered to.

♢   ***Monitoring TVET Council's quality assurance elements***
The Council will ensure periodic monitoring of all processes which are used to measure the success of the quality assurance elements in supporting a consistent application of national standards.

How Quality Assurance Is Carried Out

Approval As An NVQ Centre

All private training providers and employers will require individual approval to become a TVET Council centre. Some will be visited to ensure that the centre criteria are met, and to discuss how their systems and TVET Council's can dovetail together.

For more information, please refer to *Guide to Approval for Training Providers and Employers*, copies are available from the Council's Quality Assurance Unit, telephone 435 3096.

Approval To Offer Specific Qualifications

The process of being approved to offer specific qualifications will depend on your centre's track record in the subject area of the qualification. If your centre is new, or has not offered qualifications in the area before, a visit from an external verifier will be necessary. If your centre has experience in the subject area and a good track record, and if you have made an approval submission that provides satisfactory information, then a visit may not be necessary. For more information, please refer to *Guide to Approval for Training Providers and Employers,* copies are available from the TVET Council's Quality Assurance Unit, telephone 435 3096.

Internal Verification

It is important that training providers and employers ensure that internal assessments are made in a consistent manner. We will assume that all candidates in your centre who are entered for the same qualification are assessed to a common standard – which means that you will have to apply methods of ensuring that your assessments are consistent. Where external verification reveals a significant problem with your assessments, we may look into the way your internal verification is being carried out.

External Verification

The TVET Council will deploy External Verifiers to sample the work of your candidates to check that the qualifications are being assessed in a way which maintains national standards.

External Assessment

This is not a typical feature of NVQ assessment, but it may be introduced as a form of external quality control and used where appropriate and necessary.

3   Assessing NVQs

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Competence

In the context of vocational qualifications, competence means:

"the ability to carry out prescribed activities to nationally pre-determined standards in an occupation. The definition embraces cognitive, practical and behavioural skills, underpinning knowledge and understanding, and the ability to react appropriately in contingency situations".

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About NVQs

National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) are work-based qualifications that assess someone's competence in a work situation and certify that the individual can perform the work role to the standards expected in employment.

NVQs are based on national occupational standards of competence drawn up by standards-setting bodies known as Industry Lead Bodies. The standards describe the level and breadth of performance that is expected of persons working in the industry or sector which the NVQ covers.

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Explanation of NVQ Levels

NVQs cover five levels of competence, from entry level staff at Level 1 through to senior management at Level 5.

Level 1 Entry level

Recognises competence in a range of varied work activities performed in a variety of contexts. Most work activities are simple and routine. Collaboration with others through work groups or teams may often be a requirement.
Substantial supervision is required especially during the early months, evolving into more autonomy with time.

Level 2 Skilled Occupations

Recognises competence in a broad range of varied work activities performed in a variety of context, some of which are complex and non-routine. Involves some responsibility and autonomy. Collaboration with others through work groups or teams and guidance of others may be required.

Level 3 Technician and Supervisory Occupations

Recognises competence in a broad range of complex, technical or professional work activities performed in a wide variety of contexts and with a substantial degree of personal responsibility and autonomy. Responsibility for the work of others and the allocation of resources are often a requirement. The individual is capable of self-directed application, exhibits problem-solving, planning, designing and supervisory capabilities.

Level 4 Technical Specialist and Middle Management Occupations

Recognises competence involving the application of a range of fundamental principles and complex techniques across a wide unpredictable variety of contexts. Very substantial personal autonomy and often significant responsibility for the work of others and for the allocation of resources, as well as personal accountabilities for analysis, diagnosis, design, planning execution and evaluation.

Level 5 Chartered, Professional and Senior Management Occupations

Recognises the ability to exercise personal professional responsibility for the design, development, or improvement of a product, process, system or service. Recognises technical and managerial competencies at the highest level and includes those who have occupied positions of the highest responsibility and made outstanding contribution to the promotion and practice of their occupation.

The Competence Of Assessors And Verifiers

The TVET Council will check to see whether staff in your centre who are responsible for assessing and verifying have the appropriate training in assessment and/or internal verification. One of our responsibilities as an awarding body is to ensure that persons responsible for externally verifying NVQs have the appropriate training in external verification.

Standards-setting bodies now produce guidance on the occupational expertise of Assessors and Verifiers. We will therefore check that staff in centres have the appropriate occupational expertise as defined by the standards-setting bodies. These may choose to define occupational expertise in terms of the number of years in an occupation, the contexts in which this must be achieved, and/or a range of qualifications recognized by the industry.

We will use this guidance, during approval and external verification visits, to inform our decisions about the occupational expertise of your Assessors and Internal Verifiers.

External Quality Control Of Assessment

External Quality Control of Assessment is used to establish and improve the rigour and credibility of assessment decisions across centres. It will normally be achieved through intensive external verification and independent assessment, where necessary.

The TVET Council will use Quality Networks[1] as the mechanism for achieving, maintaining and improving on best practice in the delivery of NVQs to national standards.

Internal Assessment And Verification

Internal assessment is a process by which staff in centres decides whether candidates have achieved the standards of a qualification. This is done by applying assessment methods devised within centres or developed by the TVET Council. All assessment methods, internal and external, must be *valid, reliable,* and *practicable* if they are to maintain rigorous and credible national standards.

NVQs are subject to a quality assurance process called **internal verification**. This is an important element of our quality assurance framework, and centres have fully-developed responsibility for it.

The aim of internal verification is to ensure that staff in centres are making consistent assessment decision in accordance with the assessment criteria defined in our qualifications. Centres can do this in slightly different ways, perhaps depending on their size. What is important is that all staff are aware of the need for a system, and adhere to it. It is good practice to nominate an internal verifier to oversee the various processes involved in internal verification for each NVQ, and to act as link with the TVET external verifier.

A successful result of internal verification is that centres avoid the scenario where an inexperienced individual member of staff is responsible for devising and applying internal assessment without the assessment material having been subject to wider centre scrutiny, expertise and endorsement.

Following the steps we have outlined below (numbered 1-8) in your centre should ensure that your internal assessments, and the internal verification process which supports them, are carried out successfully.

1   **Assessment Specification: Content And Standards**

An important element of valid and reliable assessment is knowing what is required by the national standards.

NVQs provide details of what evidence candidates have to produce and in what contexts. For example, where standards specify the

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[1] Meetings where Centre staff and External Verifiers discuss interpretation of standards and share best
    practices in   Assessment and Verification.

knowledge evidence that is required, you should select the method of assessment best suited to generating this type of evidence, like a project, a written test of knowledge, or an oral assessment.

You should familiarize yourself with the documents which set out the information about the evidence your candidates must be able to generate - for example, the evidence requirements section of Unit specifications.

2   Selecting An Instrument Of Assessment And Devising The Assessment Task

For all NVQs, you should identify the skills candidates have to demonstrate, and the knowledge and understanding they need to attain, before devising your assessment. Assessment should be designed according to the requirements in the standards, and could be designed within your centre or as part of a consortium, drawing on the expertise of experience colleagues. You could also draw on the assessment support materials provided. For example, we publish Assessor's Guidelines for some NVQs.

Your choice of the most appropriate instrument of assessment will depend on a number of factors:

In some occupational areas, demonstrating a practical skill can also show that candidates can apply the knowledge and understanding needed for competence. In other areas, knowledge and understanding may not be apparent from the performance. For example, in assessing Administration it may not be clear that candidates know when to use one system for storing information as opposed to another. In such cases, an additional method of assessment may be required to supplement any observation you may do of the skill.

  ◇   it must be fit for purpose (e.g. where practical skill need to demonstrated you should choose a practical assessment)

  ◇   it has to allow candidates to produce enough evidence of the skills and knowledge specified in the qualification and ensure adequate coverage of all the outcomes

  ◇   it must generate evidence which can be measured against the standards specified in the qualification

  ◇   it should help all assessors of all candidates to make reliable assessment decisions where the same instrument of assessment has been applied. (**Note:** where a choice of assessment instruments is offered to candidates, you must take care to ensure that the options are of equal demand – otherwise a candidate's result could depend on which option was chosen)

An instrument of assessment should also be chosen to make the best use of available resources. This is what we mean by an instrument of assessment being **'practicable'**. Where there is the possibility of more than one assessment instrument providing a valid assessment, e.g. you should consider choosing the method

which is least disruptive, least demanding of assessors' or candidate's time, and most cost-effective.

To sum up, staff in centres designing assessment tasks should:

◇ be clear who has overall responsibility for the assessment of a particular qualification within the centre (the internal verifier)

◇ start devising assessment tasks early enough to allow time for the internal verification process to take place

◇ check the Unit specification carefully to see what type of assessment instrument is expected or suggested, e.g. a case study, a practical assignment. The assessment instrument should be fit for purpose

◇ ensure that all Outcomes (or Elements) are covered (i.e. the assessment is valid) to the appropriate level of demand (as embodied by Performance Criteria)

◇ where possible, combine the assessment of outcomes by grouping related tasks to a particular problem solving situation or scenario (see the next sub-section 'Integrated Assessment'

◇ work together as a team which involves all those assessing the Unit. All candidates taking the Unit should be assessed by an internally-verified assessment.

◇ contact the Quality Assurance Unit at telephone number 435-3096 to determine what support assessment materials are available for the NVQs they are delivering.

Integrated Assessment

For any Outcome or Unit, it is not necessary to design an instrument of assessment to assess each Outcome or Performance Criterion (PC) separately - a more integrated approach to assessment can:

◇ take less time

◇ avoid over-assessment and improve motivation

◇ give assurance of overall competence and improve validity

◇ benefit the teaching/learning process

Good assessment planning, covering a number of outcomes as a whole activity, will help to lighten the assessment burden for both Assessors and candidates - this is called **'integrating assessment'**. It will, in general, help make your assessments more practicable and, frequently, more valid where tasks and knowledge are grouped together more naturally.

Candidate evidence must be cross-referenced back to the standards to show that all parts -including PCs and range where these are defined - have been met.

Using Simulation in NVQs

Standards-setting bodies are encouraged to produce guidance on simulation, and on what constitutes a realistic or real working environment (RWE) in which simulation may be appropriate.

This means that, as the awarding body for NVQs, we will check during approval and external verification visits that our centres are complying with the guidance on simulation and when its use for generating candidates' evidence is acceptable.

Training providers should be aware that replicating a realistic working environment can be costly and time-consuming for centres which cannot provide all the associated work pressures, interruptions, and contingencies. One way of achieving this would be to form a partnership with an employer who can provide the workplace environment, but who does not necessarily have the expertise in assessment.

In general, though, simulations can be useful in a number of circumstances:

⬦ where health, safety and security matters prevent candidates becoming involved in activities which may endanger themselves, others, and the environment, e.g. the use of chemicals

⬦ if the NVQ requires candidates to cope with contingencies which cannot be assessed as part of normal work activities, e.g. how they would cope in an emergency

⬦ where confidentiality prevents the candidate from disclosing information, e.g. in financial services, where client confidentiality must be maintained

⬦ where there are problems with access to the NVQ, e.g. time constraints

⬧ where cost of materials and equipment would be prohibitive for use for assessment purposes only

Apart from ensuring that your plans to use simulation are in line with the guidance issued by the standards-setting body, you should ask your self how critical and frequent is the activity which your candidates have to be able to demonstrate.

If the activity is critical and routine, the promotion and nature of the evidence for this activity is particularly important. For example, a candidate might be responsible for installing power appliances every day, but failure to meet health and safety requirement could be disastrous. You may want to think about obtaining evidence from different sources or using different instruments of assessment so that you can be absolutely certain of your judgement. In this type of case, simulation might be useful in complementing naturally-occurring performance evidence.

If the activity is less critical but routine, the assessment would be best carried out using naturally-occurring evidence from the workplace. However, simulation may be necessary in circumstances where direct observation may be unacceptable, for example, because confidentiality is an issue.

If the activity is critical and rare, then simulation may be best used as a substitute for naturally-occurring evidence. You could use simulation, for example, where you are trying to assess how a candidate would handle a contingency, but where disruption to the workflow would have health and safety and cost implications.

If the activity is less critical but rare, simulation might be required because the opportunities for assessment do not arise often. However, you would need to weigh up the costs of using simulation very carefully – since the activity being assessed is not important as others, the evidence generated will be very limited in what it can tell you about the candidate's expertise.

3   **The Responses or Solutions Expected During Assessment**

In devising an assessment, it is important to think about what you will accept as evidence and how this will be marked or measured. Ideally, you should determine your assessment scheme, i.e. marking instructions, at the same time as you devise your assessment – this will ensure they are complementary to each other. For example, for a practical skills test, you should consider devising an observation checklist defining the skills and activities you expect to see during assessment.

For a written test, you must produce an assessment scheme which covers all possible valid responses and how they will be marked – sometimes a test can turn out to be easier or more demanding than you intended.

You must ensure that, when determining your responses or solutions, you anticipate all the acceptable responses to your questions. In other words, where you set an open question, make sure that your solution identifies all the acceptable responses from your candidates. For a short-answer question, there may only be one correct answer. Ensuring that marking instructions match your questions in this way is an important reason why your assessment scheme should be tried out before being applied to all candidates.

4   Vetting The Assessment And Associated Assessment Scheme

While the task of writing assessment specifications may have been delegated to one member of staff, it is important that others delivering the Unit have a chance to vet the assessments and assessment schemes before they are finalized. This will help to ensure that they are fit for purpose, valid and practicable. Where this vetting results in a change to part of the assessment, you must take care to make a corresponding change in the assessment scheme.

The usual way of ensuring that assessments are appropriate to the task for which they have been designed is to consult with a more senior member of staff who has responsibility in that occupational area. In many organisations for example, members of staff have been assigned internal verification, and it is the responsibility of the Internal Verifier to oversee the assessments in the NVQ. This involves confirming that the assessments are of a suitable standard and apply to current Unit Specification for the qualification being offered.

Note: Even after an assessment has been applied, you may find that after assessing a few candidates and in discussion with colleagues, the observation checklist needs to be amended. For a written test, where a group of candidates are completing an assessment at the same time, you may have to make changes to the make further adjustments. For example, for process or practical skills marking instructions to include further answers.

These changes can often be done informally, but it is essential to make sure any changes are agreed and communicated to all Assessors.

5   Assessing Candidate Evidence

You should now have a valid and practicable assessment which you can use with your candidates. However, valid assessments can be used inappropriately and you need to be aware of how the reliability of your assessors can have a bearing on the fair and consistent assessment of your candidates.

Conditions For Assessment

When applying an assessment, you should be aware that there are certain conditions which need to be created at the time in order for the assessment to be valid and reliable. There are many different types of assessment conditions, but what they all have in common is that they must be applied consistently and effectively to all candidates if national standards are to be maintained. Unit specifications are frequently prescriptive about such conditions.

For example, in assessments involving observation of practical skills, you should ensure that:

 ◇   candidates know they are being assessed

 ◇   candidates know what skills or activities you expect them to demonstrate, and

 ◇   your observation is as unobtrusive as possible

In a written test, you should ensure that candidates are:

 ◇   given a quiet environment in which to complete the assessment

 ◇   subject to the same time restrictions for the test unless there are arrangements for special assessment requirements

 ◇   subject to invigilation to ensure silence and non-collaboration

 ◇   aware of when they are able to consult text books, dictionaries or use calculator

Decisions about interpreting assessment conditions - e.g. what we mean by **'open'** and **'closed'** book assessments - should be taken on a centre-wide basis and not left to the individual Assessors to decide.

For assessments such as projects, where candidates may be asked to complete practical assignments, case studies or portfolios, you should ensure they are aware of:

    ◇   how much they can confer amongst themselves

    ◇   the level of support you will offer them, and

    ◇   to what extent they are able to consult text books, dictionaries or use personal computers

Authentication

Where you do not have the opportunity to observe candidates carrying out activities or producing evidence at first hand, you will need to take steps to confirm that your candidates' evidence really was produced by them. This is often called **'authentication'**. It also helps to minimise the number of times candidates are involved in malpractice cases because they received assistance from other sources or plagiarized the work of other candidates/authors.

Authentication can be achieved by one or more of the following methods:

    ◇   questioning
    ◇   personal statements produced by your candidates
    ◇   personal logs
    ◇   peer reports
    ◇   witness testimony
    ◇   countersigning of evidence

Personal Logs

Where candidates are producing evidence of attainment over an extended period, you can ask them to maintain a diary or **'log'** of the planning, developing and reviewing activities they have undertaken while completing the assessment tasks. They should be encouraged to include any particular successes or problems encountered (you can also use these as a basis for further questioning). This authenticating device also serves a useful purpose in that it encourages candidates to plan and review their work.

Peer Reports

Where your candidates have been involved in group work, reports by members of a group of peers can help to explain individual involvement in the task. It would be wise, however, not to place

too much reliance on this method if you are concerned about friendships or rivalries influencing these reports.

Countersigning Of Evidence

Countersigning of evidence is often used in NVQs, particularly as Units are signed off. It is normal practice to have candidates sign and date personal statements and for Assessors to sign and date observations and questioning. Where a Unit has been signed off, the signatures of candidates and Assessors should be included, along with the signature of the Internal Verifier if the material has been included in the sample for internal verification.

NB: Witness testimonies, personal statements and questioning are also assessment methods and will be discussed in detail later.

Best Practice In Assessment

Stages In Assessment

You are advised to involve your candidates as much as possible in the assessment process, as this helps to encourage a greater understanding and sense of ownership over the NVQ. Assessment planning is a key feature of the process – it is important that your candidates are involved in this stage to help identify any opportunities which will occur naturally in the workplace. Involving your candidates can be most helpful where you are less familiar with the candidate's work – for example you might be a visiting Assessor, and your candidate would be well placed to advise you of what evidence is already available.

You might also want to encourage your candidates to become involved in collecting, presenting and cross-referencing the evidence, but beware that this does not become a requirement or a burden to candidates who are unable to do this effectively.

Literacy And Oral Skills

In choosing a method of assessment, take care to ensure that, if there are candidates who are competent in their occupation, but have difficulty providing the written or oral evidence which the instrument of assessment would require, this does not become a barrier to assessment for them.

For example, asking your candidates to produce a personal statement as evidence of their knowledge and understanding might take the expertise in written skills beyond what is required in the standards. In this case, you could choose an alternative

method of assessment, such as oral questioning, to ensure your candidates have the appropriate knowledge and understanding.

Methods Of Assessment Used In NVQs

In NVQs, there are methods of assessment which are used more than others, and this section looks at these in detail and how they are applied.

Observation

Most NVQs require observation by the Assessor at some stage in the assessment process. Like any other methods of assessment you use, observation should be planned in advance to take advantage of any skills or activities which occur naturally in the workplace, making best use of the available resources. You should also plan to assess as many skills and activities as possible during the observation by integrating Elements and PC where practicable (see the paragraphs on 'Integrated Assessment' page 14).

To help you observe your candidates, you should devise an observation checklist to record the skills and activities demonstrated by your candidates. It is bad practice to simply use the PCs as a checklist because this leads to a fragmented approach to assessment and tells you very little about whether your candidates are able to transfer skills to other contexts.

Remember that for some NVQs, observation can also tell you what candidates know, understand and can apply (and where knowledge is not apparent from performance, you must ensure that this is assessed in other ways, such as questioning).

The most valid and reliable source of evidence in NVQs is when an assessor has been able to observe candidates demonstrating skills or carrying out activities at first hand. Where this is not possible, the standards may state that alternative ways of assessing candidates can be used. One alternative is for the observation to be carried out by a witness, and for this person to produce a statement (a 'witness testimony') recording what the candidate demonstrated, how, and in what circumstances.

Witness Testimony

Witness testimony can be valuable source of evidence where it has been produced by a reliable witness - the more valuable the evidence.

There are various criteria you should consider as you and your candidates identify witnesses as part of the assessment planning process. These include:

    ◈   is the witness familiar with the national standards and what is required of candidates

    ◈   how much does the witness interact with the candidate in the workplace

    ◈   how well does the witness know your candidates and what is expected of them in the workplace

A witness who can meet all three of these criteria can often be a most reliable source of evidence. However, this should not rule out seeking witness testimony from someone who can not meet all three - at the very least, they may be able to confirm or authenticate that your candidates carried out activities. On the other hand, for an assessor, their witness testimony may be less valuable in what it can tell you about your candidates' expertise.

Ideally, witness testimony should include the witness signature, the date, details of the witness's relationship to the candidate, and where appropriate, should be presented on headed notepaper. This would allow you to confirm that the witness testimony is genuine.

In deciding to use witness testimony, you must ensure that this is consistent with the national standards, and is valid and practicable. For example, witness testimony can be useful tool in helping you to authenticate evidence that your candidates claim to have produced. However, questioning your candidates or asking them to produce personal statements could be just as effective.

Witness testimonies are often used in assessing NVQs to help with situations such as shift work and confidentiality when you, the assessor, may not be available.

Like all other sources of evidence, the final decision about what it can tell you about your candidates' expertise must be taken by the assessor.

Product Examination

As candidates work towards achieving NVQs, they will produce evidence in the form of products of their work. This evidence could be paper-based or stored electronically, and could include reports, memos or letter, or more bulk or perishable evidence such as food products (in which case, you may find you assess records of the evidence, such as photographs).

In assessing products, you should again ensure you produce a record of your assessment - a checklist would be useful.

Personal Statements

Personal statements can be a valuable tool for telling you what your candidates know, understand and can apply to the range of activities and skills they are required to demonstrate as part of their qualifications. They are also an effective way of confirming that evidence presented by candidates is their own work.

Some candidates may be very comfortable producing personal statements, for example those candidates working towards NVQs where good written communication skills are an occupational requirement. However, there will be other NVQs where written communication skills are less critical, and you should be wary of relying on this source of evidence if it demands more than is stipulated in the national standards. Where your candidates are unable to provide personal statements, you should consider using other methods of assessment to establish their expertise, such as questioning.

Questioning

This method of assessment is used to generate evidence for a variety of reasons:

⬦   to assess contingency PCs or range where it would not be practical or safe to wait until the skill or activity can be observed

⬦   to authenticate your candidates' evidence

⬦   to address gaps in knowledge and understanding

⬦   to confirm your candidates' knowledge and understanding where it is not apparent from performance

Oral or written questions can be used, and your choice of method should reflect any special assessment requirements which your candidates may have. For example, some candidates do not respond well to written questions.

In the other assessment situations, such as during an observation or product examination, it would not be practicable to use written questions if you want your candidates to explain why they carried out an activity in such a way when an alternative method may be available.

It is important to keep record of questions and candidate responses as this will form part of the evidence.

Most of these methods of assessment can also be used to help you authenticate evidence presented by a candidate as their own work.

Sufficiency Of Evidence

The evidence requirements section of the standards for an NVQ gives an indication of how much performance evidence and knowledge candidates will need to produce, and in what contexts. Often the evidence requirements will also state the assessment method which should be used in generating the evidence, and the quantity of evidence required to show expertise.

As an Assessor, you must be satisfied that your candidates have produced enough evidence of sufficient quality to prove to you that their expertise has been demonstrated consistently over a period of time. This means that you are confident that your assessment decision is valid and reliable, and that your candidate will be able to retain and transfer the skill and knowledge and understanding into a range of contexts of situations.

Inferring Competence

Inferring competence means that, although your candidates may have produced performance evidence to meet some aspects of the evidence requirements or range statements, you may be able (where the standards allows) to infer that the candidate would be able to perform across all aspects should it be required. Your grounds for reaching this decision could be based on other evidence of knowledge and understanding. You should be aware that inferring expertise does not mean that no evidence is available - you need to have evidence in order to be able to infer competence, and can justify your decision to an internal verifier and external verifier.

You may at times choose to infer expertise. However, it would be unwise to infer that a candidate can perform to a national standard when the evidence relates only to knowledge and understanding. In NVQs, the application of knowledge and understanding in the workplace is essential in meeting national standards.

6   Checking The Consistency Of Assessment Decisions

How To Avoid Assessor Bias

Your centre can enhance the reliability of assessment by being aware of how assessment decisions could be biased by factors which should have no bearing on the assessment process or your judgements. These factors may include your subconscious personal prejudices. For example, you may find females easier to teach or neater in their work and unconsciously assess their evidence more generously.

For NVQs, appearance or dress sense should not be allowed to influence your decision unless these are of significance in the qualification - where dress is to be taken into consideration, it will be explicitly stated in the standards.

Another factor which may affect your judgement is described as the **'halo and horns'** effect. The halo effect may emerge when you are familiar with your candidates and good performance in the past leads you to assume they are performing well at present. The opposite of this is the horns effect where no matter how well your candidates are performing, your judgements of poor performance in the past are continuing to influence your assessment decisions now.

Another way of ensuring that assessment decisions are objective and consistent, and based only on the criteria laid down in the national standards, is separating the role of adviser/coach/ mentor from the role of Assessor - a member of staff other than the mentor or adviser (where a mentor or adviser is being used) makes assessment decisions about the candidate's evidence. Note, however, that separating the roles could have resource implication for centres where there may be few staff.

Further methods for enhancing objectivity and consistency include:

         ◇   well written national standard with assessment instructions

         ◇   training for Assessors

         ◇   standardisation of assessment decisions

Standardisation of assessment decisions is an important part of ensuring Assessor reliability. Internal verification should ensure that staff carry out checks on the on-going application of standards. This will establish that part-way through assessing

candidates' evidence, the assessment decision have not become too harsh or more lenient.

The standardisation methods you will use depend on the nature of evidence. There are a number of techniques:

◈ for practical or process skills, you will need a form of agreement trial, perhaps involving pairs of assessors. This model is most effective if an internal verifier assesses a sample of candidates alongside the assessor. Both should initially make independent judgements, and then discuss discrepancies and reach consensus.

◈ if using coursework, folios, reports or case studies, you should consider setting up agreement trials based on the assessment scheme. In a small centre, this can be done informally by sharing samples of candidates' work, discussing it and reaching a consensus. In larger centres with many staff, it will require a more formal system of agreement under the direction of the internal verifier. The important thing is that discussing discrepancies and coming to a shared understanding based on the assessment criteria will allow you to apply a common standard.

◈ if the candidate evidence consists of scripts from written tests, you should divide up the evidence so that assessors assess the same section across all candidates. This allows each Assessor a better chance to understand and apply associated assessment schemes. It also balances those assessors who might be a little hard or a little lenient in their assessment and helps to eliminate halo and horns effect. You should pay particular attention to borderline decisions.

If your centre is small, it may be necessary to work with another centre.

Presenting and Recording Evidence

For NVQs, there are a few tips for presenting and recording evidence and assessment decisions that you may want to consider:

◈ consistency in the approach to presenting evidence and recording assessment decisions helps to clarify what is expected of candidates and other assessors involved in the assessment process. For example,

you may want to consider producing some standard forms for recording questions (and candidates' responses), personal statements, and witness testimony statements. These can help to ensure that the national standard is maintained for those candidates doing the same qualification.

⬥ using an evidence index at the front of the document with space to number, describe, and indicate where the evidence can be found, helps all those involved in the assessment process to keep track of the evidence.

⬥ encouraging the candidate in the process of collecting and presenting the evidence helps them to become familiar with the standards, especially where you have started this process by working on Units which are relevant to your candidate's day-to-day work.

⬥ Cross-referencing evidence back to the national standards is a requirement of NVQs. This is to ensure that all parts of the standards have been assessed.

Gathering and Presenting Evidence – Using Portfolios

For some NVQs, we have produced a range of recording documents in the form of Candidate Achievement Records (CARs) or candidate portfolios.

These documents help you and your candidates to collect, present and cross-reference the evidence to the national occupational standards. They are also a means of recording your assessment decisions, and they tell an external verifier what stage a candidate has reached in achieving the NVQ.

You are strongly recommended to use the nationally-devised recording documents when available. Should you choose to use your own recording documents they should meet with our quality assurance requirements.

Recording documents do not need to be paper-based - it is possible to use an electronic format for collecting and structuring the evidence. Whatever format you and your candidates choose to use, the documents must show what evidence was generated, the assessment decisions you made, how the evidence meets the standard, and where the evidence can be located. You should avoid photocopying items simply to put them in a portfolio - a clear explanation of where the evidence can be found (for example,

in a filing cabinet) may be sufficient for the external verifier to follow it up and include it in the visit.

There are various reasons why record keeping is so important:

◇ it provides a way of tracking a candidate's progress in achieving an NVQ

◇ it helps candidates to make claims for certification of their expertise

◇ Internal Verifiers and External Verifiers use the records to sample assessment decisions

◇ it helps us to monitor the quality assurance of our qualifications

If your candidates' evidence is incomplete, or cannot be located, of if there is inaccurate cross-referencing to the standards, there is a risk that an Internal Verifier or External Verifier will be unable to confirm your assessment decisions.

7   Recording Your Assessment Decisions

Once you have carried out your assessments and have sufficient, relevant, reliable and authentic evidence showing that your candidates have met the standards, you are in a position to make and record your final assessment decisions. You may decide in reviewing the evidence, however, that there is some part of the evidence which requires re-assessment before you record your decision.

Re-assessment

Where candidates have been unsuccessful in demonstrating their attainment of skills and knowledge or competence, they can be re-assessed.

You will need to consider whether your candidates need to re-take the whole assessment or only part. This will depend on:

◇ the assessment instrument that has been used

◇ the purpose of the assessment

For example, in demonstrating a practical skill or in completing a practical assignment, it may not be possible to re-assess only those parts of the performance in which the candidate failed to demonstrate competence. Otherwise you would fragment the

assessment process and be unable to make judgement about the candidate's performance in the Outcome or Unit as a whole.

Often, however, the conditions in which you carried out the original assessment may not be identical - particularly in a workplace. This can ensure that the re-assessment is as challenging for candidates who are familiar with the assessment as it is for those completing it for the first time.

In assessments which test knowledge and understanding and other cognitive skills, it would be bad practice to give candidates the same assessments repeatedly, and to ask them identical questions - they would be able to rehearse the expected answers without knowing why they were acceptable. In these situations, you will need to have alternative assessments available and ensure that other candidates have also not undertaken the assessment recently.

In all cases of re-assessment, the assessment must be of equal demand to the original assessment.

For written tests, designed to identify the candidate's knowledge or understanding at a given point in time or as a single entity, it may also be necessary to reassess the whole Unit since it may not be possible to extract some of the items for re-assessment.

Where it is possible to isolate an outcome which has not been achieved, it should be possible to re-assess just that outcome. Where parts of several outcomes are involved, it would be more straightforward to present the candidate with a completely new assessment.

Where the evidence is generated over a period of time, such as in a long-term project, it may be possible to re-do parts of an assessment. It may, for instance, be feasible for the candidate to resubmit the part of the project where there is a problem and for this then to be incorporated into the final submission.

However, where a project has been designed as an integrated assessment, the candidate may be required to undertake the whole assessment again to show ability to complete the project as a single complex task. In such cases, the candidate may have to work to a different project specification.

Difficulties With Re-assessment

There are practical difficulties with re-assessment over an extended period, such as:

◇ candidates may become de-motivated

◇ the Unit may be phased out

◇ it may become increasingly difficult to supply the candidates with suitable alternative assessments

or

◇ in the case of group work, there may be no further opportunities to re-assess an unsuccessful candidate where the others have achieved the standard

Where candidates repeatedly fail to demonstrate their competence, you should offer guidance on alternative areas or levels of learning or study.

In theory, there is no limit to the number of times candidates may be re-assessed. However, you should become familiar with difficulties arising from assessment over a period of time and perhaps advise the candidate of a more appropriate qualification.

8 Forwarding Results To The TVET Council And Maintaining Assessment Records

All qualifications which are wholly or partly internally assessed are subject to external verification. As your candidates complete their qualifications, we will carry out external verification in the form of visits to your centre or by asking you to send in material to the TVET Council.

Internal verification processes should ensure that the candidate evidence, assessment materials and records are maintained and/or dispatched to the TVET Council in line with external verification requirements for the qualifications being offered.

Centres are required to retain candidate evidence for a minimum of six (6) months.

4 External Verification Of Internal Assessment

Introduction

Internal verification is carried out by centre staff. External verification on the other hand is carried out by External Verifiers appointed by the TVET Council.

The TVET Council's Verifiers are experienced practitioners in their occupational areas, and in training, who have been trained in verification. We monitor their work to ensure that they consistently apply national standards of assessment,

as it is important that both centres and External Verifiers make assessment decisions accurately and consistently.

External Verifiers always begin from the premise that centers have made assessment decisions correctly, and that the purpose of the external verification exercise is to confirm the centres' decisions. They assume that all candidates entered for the same qualification are assessed to a common standard – i.e. that internal verification is operating effectively.

External verification focuses on the validity of the assessment instruments, how they are applied, and the reliability of the centres' assessment decisions. Normally, centres will be visited twice a year. The emphasis will be on looking at completed candidate evidence and assessment records. No centre would be allowed to certificate candidates without first having been externally verified to ensure that it meets our quality assurance requirements.

Centres will not be able to claim certificates for their candidates until ten (10) weeks have lapsed between the date of entry and a request for a certificate. This is to allow us to carry out our quality assurance on qualifications before issuing certificates.

Entry Information And Scheduling The Visit

External verification visits will be triggered in two ways.

◇ it will be triggered when we receive entry information from the centre within a fixed time period.

◇ it will be triggered by us where we expect the centre to be delivering NVQs - based on past history - but where no entry information has been received within the time period. In such cases we will endeavour to support the centre through a development visit. However, this is unlikely to trigger certification if insufficient evidence is available.

Where centres are delivering a range of NVQs in an occupational area, the external verifier will concentrate on any NVQs nearing completion, but will also take the opportunity to scrutinize evidence from any other NVQ in that area.

For each entry, we will need:

◇ Candidate's date of birth and National Registration Number

◇ Unit/Group Award details

Candidate Sampling

In cases where we have received entry information, we will let you know which candidates the verifier wishes to include in the sample. The sample of work for verification should, ideally, comprise the work of 12 candidates. This number is large enough for us to be sure of the reliability of your assessment. For centres with less than 12 candidates, the entire group of candidates' work will be scrutinized. Where a centre has more than 12 candidates entered for a Unit, we will select the candidates who will be sampled, and will tell you. There are two benefits to this approach: first, it will ensure rigour, as the awarding body will carry out the selection using a random selection method; second, from the centre's point of view, the procedure is simple to administer. However, where submissions are very extensive - and this may be frequent - the Verifier may have to sub-sample the evidence.

5   External Assessment

Introduction

This section explains:

   ◇   stages in external assessment and how they contribute to quality assurance

   ◇   the assessment instruments generally used for external assessment

In external assessment the responsibility for judging candidates' work and reaching decisions on candidate attainment rests with the awarding body rather than the centre. The principles underpinning external assessment are the same as those for internal assessment - external assessment must be *valid, reliable* and *practicable.*

The stages in external assessment are similar to those of internal assessment, except that the quality control procedures within each stage are carried out by the awarding body rather than the centre. This means that we are responsible for:

   ◇   producing assessment instruments and detailed assessment schemes

   ◇   establish conditions under which assessments take place

   ◇   taking centre judgements into accounts

   ◇   assessing candidates evidence

Each type of assessment instrument currently used for internal assessment of NVQs could conceivably be used for external assessment.

The assessment instruments most commonly used are:

⬦   written examinations or tests (question papers)

⬦   projects or coursework (including investigations, assignments, and case studies)

⬦   oral assessments or tests

⬦   observation of performance or skill demonstrations

6   Special Assessment And Certification Arrangements

Introduction

This section of the guide gives general guidelines for making requests for candidates who require either special external or internal assessment arrangements.

It is important to note that where special assessment arrangements are applied, they may result in an amended certificate being issued. Each case is looked at individually in accordance with the general guidelines outlined here.

Principles Of Special Assessment Arrangements

Special assessment arrangements are intended to enable candidates to demonstrate their level of competence in relation to the qualification standards. They are not intended to compensate for lack of competence and should not:

⬦   give an unfair advantage to candidates

⬦   reduce the validity and reliability of the assessment or compromise the credibility of the award

⬦   mislead users of NVQs about candidates' competence

Candidates with a physical disability, a sensory impairment, a specific learning difficulty, or a temporary disability at the time of the assessment may be eligible for special assessment arrangements in line with these principles.

General Guidance On Special Assessment Arrangements

Special assessment arrangements should, as far as possible, reflect candidates' usual methods of working. The arrangements permitted depend on the circumstances of individual candidates and should do no more than is necessary to allow candidates to demonstrate their competence.

As assessment arrangements vary depending on the qualification concerned, candidates' needs for special assessments arrangements will also vary. It is important to consider whether candidates need the same arrangements for all assessments.

Special Arrangements For Internal Assessment

Providing that the assessment is able to generate the required evidence that candidates have achieved all the Outcomes of a Unit and have met the assessment criteria, approval for special assessment arrangement may not be necessary. If there is any doubt as to the acceptability of your arrangements, you should seek approval from us.

Section C:

Appeals

Appeals

By a Centre against the TVET Council

The process of assessing and quality assuring our qualifications involves us making a number of decisions affecting your centre.   If you are the Head of a Centre, you or your representative, can appeal against decisions taken by our officers - if you do not agree with them.

Appeals concerning centre approval or verification decisions should be submitted in writing to the Executive Director, TVET Council within 20 working days of notification of the decision you wish to appeal. The appeal would normally be investigated and a decision made within 30 working days of receipt of the appeal. If you do not feel that your appeal has been satisfactorily resolved at this stage you have the right to take your appeal to the Quality Assurance Committee, whose decision is final.

By a candidate against a centre

If a candidate who is being assessed for an NVQ award disagrees with an assessment decision, he or she has the right to appeal. The candidate should know the grounds on which an appeal can be made, and the procedure for doing so.   Centres are responsible for publishing an appeals procedure which should:

- State that all appeals will be dealt with internally in the first instance
- Set out the basis on which appeals may be made
- Outline the steps to be followed
- Ensure the maintenance of full records at each stage (i.e. the nature of the appeal, persons involved and dates of discussions and meetings and the decision reached) as evidence that an appeal has been processed.

It will help you and the candidate to have timescales within which each stage of an appeal will be processed.

There should be at least three stages in your procedure:

1. The candidate should appeal in writing to his/her assessor clearly stating the points of disagreement and the evidence on the portfolio which the candidate believes meets the requirements of the performance criteria, knowledge and range for claiming competence. The main reasons for appeal are likely to be that the candidate does not understand why he/she is not yet competent due to unclear feedback or the assessor has misinterpreted the evidence. The assessor should meet with the candidate within 10 working days and go through the assessment process, clearly explaining the findings. The assessor should confirm the findings in writing to the candidate.

2. Candidates who are not satisfied with the outcome from stage 1 can then appeal in writing to the Internal Verifier. The appeal does not need to contain the detail given before as the documents from stage 1 should be passed to the Internal Verifier. The Internal Verifier should meet with the candidate and the assessor within 10 working days and should confirm the findings in writing to the candidate.

3. To proceed to stage 3, the candidate must have exhausted all of the internal appeals procedures. Candidates who are not satisfied with the outcome after stage 2 may then appeal in writing to the TVET Council. At this point the TVET Council's Appeals Procedure will be followed and will involve the use of all the reports from stages I and 2. The TVET Council's decision will be final and the appeal deemed to be closed.