

A Guide to Assessments and Assessment Methods

The Role of the Assessor

Assessors are at the front of the assessment process and, as such, are the first line of quality assurance within the delivery of vocational qualifications. An Assessor undertakes the marking, reviewing and/or assessment of evidence produced by the learner.

This involves getting to know the learner and their style and capabilities, planning the generation of evidence with them and supporting the collection of the planned evidence.

As an Assessor gets to know his/her learner, they will learn what style they write in, the types of wording they use, their abilities and knowledge. This is important information to ensure that they are able to make a truthful declaration when the time comes.

'I confirm that I have assessed all of the work produced and have ensured that the work is that of the learner. I have ensured that during the learning process the evidence is authentic, sufficient, valid and current to the standards required.'

Assessors also ensure that the assessment process runs according to the requirements of the organisation they are employed by and, by virtue of this, the requirements of the Awarding Organisation and the Regulator.

They are often the first people to report problems or ask for advice from their Internal Quality Assurer raising points to address in order to ensure the integrity of the delivery and certification of the qualification.

Initial Assessment

Centres should complete an initial assessment with learners prior to the commencement of the qualification to ensure that the subject matter and level of the qualification is the most appropriate to meet their needs.

This initial assessment should also form part of the planning process so that the most appropriate methods of assessment are chosen to suit the learner and their learning environment whilst also meeting any mandatory assessment methods the qualification may contain.

It is at this time that Recognised Prior Learning (RPL) should be considered and if seen as a viable option, the learner should be encouraged to provide their evidence for consideration.

The Assessment Process

Plan

Prior to carrying out an assessment thorough planning should be completed to identify the assessment methods to be used to provide the learner with the best opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge, skills and behaviours in order to meet the requirements of the qualification.

Assessors will plan to collect two types of evidence performance evidence designed to demonstrate what the learner is able to do and knowledge evidence designed to demonstrate what the learner knows and understands.

On occasions, as indicated later in this guide, performance evidence can also demonstrate knowledge and understanding but knowledge evidence does not normally demonstrate performance.

Plans should include:

- ✓ The location and time that assessment will take place
- ✓ Ensure that the evidence produced will meet the needs of being authentic, valid, reliable, current and sufficient
- ✓ Identify any mandatory assessment methods
- ✓ Identify the qualification requirements that will be met by the planned assessments

The learner should be included within the planning process so that they are aware of what is required of them and how it matches to the requirements of the qualification.

Plans should be documented and agreed upon by both the Assessor and learner so that they can be reviewed and updated at a later date.

There are occasions when naturally occurring evidence presents itself and this should not be discounted on the basis that it has not been preplanned. It should be used where appropriate to evidence the requirements of the qualification. This should not form a replacement of well planned evidence and should be seen as a source of complimentary evidence.

Judge

Once evidence has been generated it must be judged against the requirements of the qualification. This should be the agreed opinion of the Assessor and learner of the extent the evidence meets the requirements of the qualification.

It should index the evidence against the requirements of the qualification clearly showing the claims to competence that have been made. The most appropriate method of indexing the evidence against the requirements of the qualification are decided upon during the approval process of the centre but usually a 'matrix' style indexing is used.

When judging evidence, the Assessor should ensure it is:

- ✓ **Authentic** – is it the work of the learner?
- ✓ **Valid** – is the evidence relevant to the qualification requirements?
- ✓ **Reliable** – if a different Assessor completed the assessment would they reach the same decision?
- ✓ **Current** – does the evidence show the learner meets the qualification requirements at the time of the assessment? Especially important when using Recognised Prior Learning (RPL)
- ✓ **Sufficient** – does the evidence meet the requirements of the qualification

Feedback

Feedback must be provided to the learner for each assessment carried out and recorded on the assessment documentation and should feed into both assessment planning and the completion of progress reviews. The feedback should provide the learner with information relating to:

- ✓ Whether the planned assessment has been completed
- ✓ The quality of the assessment completed
- ✓ What has been covered within the standards
- ✓ What is required to be completed to move the qualification forward

Mandatory Assessment Methods

Some units may require mandatory forms of assessment to be completed. If The AO states that there are no mandatory assessment methods, a suggestion of the types of assessments that could be used may be provided.

Keeping Assessment Effective

Well planned assessments target what is needed to meet the qualification requirements and further developed evidence can offer opportunities for more effective assessment.

If a learner produces a statement or explains a time that they were involved in a certain situation, it is more effective to make sure that they say what they did, how they did it and why they did what they did.

This can often provide evidence that can be referenced against both competencies and knowledge and encourage a learner to demonstrate their achievement of the qualification requirements.

Authentication of Learner Evidence

Centres must have knowledge and certainty that all assessments undertaken are entirely the work of the learner being assessed and a statement of authenticity signed by the learner and Assessor must be present within the portfolio.

The exact wording of the statements of authenticity are at the discretion of the centre but the below are examples that can be used or used as a basis for the generation of a statement.

Learner Declaration

I confirm that all of the evidence presented in relation to the qualification/unit has been produced by myself and meets the requirement of being authentic, sufficient, valid and current to the standards required.

Assessor Declaration

I confirm that I have assessed all of the work produced and have ensured that the work is that of the named learner. I have ensured that during the learning process the evidence is authentic, sufficient, valid and current to the standards required.

Recording Assessments Using Technology

Technology can be used for the recording of assessments and can often provide greater flexibility and enhance the effectiveness and quality of the assessments being conducted.

Where technology is used, the Assessor should:

- ✓ Identify those present within the assessment
- ✓ Identify the date and time of the assessment, if recorded at a later date, eg. where an audio recording is used for an observation after the event due to background noise, both the original date and time and the recorded date and time should be recorded and an explanation of why it has been recorded at a later time
- ✓ Identify the timeframe for evidence where recorded assessments are in excess of 5 minutes

Recordings should be made available in the most appropriate format to ensure that it can be reviewed at a later date. Where recordings have been conducted using bespoke software packages, the centre is required to make this software available, at their cost, to allow for monitoring activities to take place.

Group Assessments

Well planned and structured group assessments can be an effective manner to conduct assessment, eg. where a qualification requires group activities or working.

When group assessments are conducted it is important that the assessment process maintains the integrity of the delivery and certification of the qualification.

Judgments of evidence should be made accurately so that individual learners are awarded recognition for their efforts and work and not collectively awarded recognition where they played no or insufficient part within the activity or working.

Using Remote Assessment

On occasions it may be appropriate to offer qualifications through the use of remote assessment and guidance should be sought from your AO to ensure that the systems in place will maintain the integrity and requirements of the qualification.

There needs to be in place clear lines of communication between the learner, Assessor and quality assurance systems so that guidance, support and feedback is not reduced in any way.

The learner also needs details of how to contact their IQA in case the Assessor is unavailable, or they wish to appeal against a decision made by the Assessor.

Centres must also have methods in place of ensuring the authenticity of the work produced and submitted by the learner and learners should be regularly questioned to ensure that the work is theirs and also to provide the opportunity to further enhance the evidence through the use of knowledge questions or professional discussions.

Continuous Professional Development

Continuous Professional Development (CPD) is a structured learning process that aids in the updating of an individual's knowledge to ensure competence to practice taking on board new knowledge, skills and practical experience.

As to who should undertake CPD activities, the short answer is everyone who is involved in the delivery and quality assurance of AO and Ofqual regulated qualifications.

The process of CPD is important to support the quality of the learning journey provided to learners.

As the name suggests, CPD is an ongoing process with individuals carrying out activities throughout the year.

Records of these activities should usually be updated at a minimum of once every 6 months but for individuals who carry out multiple activities within the year it may prove beneficial to update the records more frequently to ensure that all relevant information has been recorded.

CPD covers a multitude of subjects and specialisms and so definitive lists of what should be completed aren't appropriate.

An individual should consider the subject matters contained within the qualification(s) they have responsibility for as this will provide guidance on the types of subjects and specialisms to include when participating in the CPD process

It is not just about the subjects being delivered within the qualification(s), CPD should take a more holistic approach to include assessment and quality assurance practices so that not only is the knowledge of the subject being delivered up to date, the individual is continually improving their skills and abilities as a delivered and/or quality assurer.

Examples of potential CPD activities could include:

- ✓ Shadowing other delivery staff
- ✓ Observing a visiting expert
- ✓ Carrying out action research
- ✓ Standardisation meeting activities
- ✓ Contributing to or reading professional publications
- ✓ Attendance at conference and training days
- ✓ Peer to peer mentoring and support
- ✓ Undertaking relevant qualifications
- ✓ Delivery across a wide range of types of customers

The following information should be recorded for CPD activities that have been undertaken

- ✓ Date activity took place
- ✓ Description of the activity
- ✓ How the activity has helped to further develop knowledge, skills and abilities
- ✓ How the development will be implemented in supporting the delivery of SFEDI Awards qualifications
- ✓ Details of any further activities that are required

Data Protection and Confidentiality

Many of the potential assessment methods that could be used in order to support the delivery of a qualification may lead to the inadvertent collection of data and confidential information, for example where a piece of product evidence has been gathered.

In these instances, both the learner and the centre should take all reasonable steps to ensure that data protection and confidentiality legislation and policies are followed and data that should not be released within the public domain is protected.

Protection of Minors in Evidence Collection

Where video or photography is used in order to collect evidence for the completion of a qualification, care should be taken where minors (those under 18) are included within. Both the learner and the centre have responsibility for ensuring child protection legislation and policies are followed and that minors are not put at risk.

If a minor is included within video and/or photographic evidence it is the responsibility of the centre to inform the learner of:

- ✓ The requirement to obtain the permission from the minor's parent or guardian prior to collecting the evidence
- ✓ The purpose of the restrictions that are in place when making use of video and/or photographic evidence
- ✓ The requirement to retain evidence for the purpose of quality assurance and the timeframe that evidence will be retained
- ✓ The requirement to store video and/or photographic evidence securely
- ✓ The associated child protection legislation

Expert Witness/Witness Testimony

Suitable for:

Competency Assessment ✓

Knowledge Assessment ✓

Witness statements can provide an excellent option for capturing evidence of situations where it is unlikely that the learner could be observed by their Assessor.

For example, if a learner has recently dealt with a customer complaint during which it was necessary for them to seek assistance from a colleague or line manager, this scenario could be captured as evidence through a witness statement.

Witness statements need to be carefully planned and structured to ensure they provide specific detail on the area being assessed.

For this reason, it's advisable to either provide a template or for the Assessor to interview the witness and record their statement either in writing or digitally.

Witness statements have a tendency to be overly generic, providing testament as to the learner's general excellent behaviour and performance, but failing to provide specific detail or examples of how and when this has been demonstrated.

Good Practice

- ✓ Plan thoroughly before starting an expert witness/witness testimony
- ✓ Involve others as part of the planning process
- ✓ Be prepared
- ✓ Keep Assessor interruptions to a minimum but remember that knowledge questions can be asked to further enhance the evidence, eg. when did they do that? What affect did them completing that have on the organisation?
- ✓ Provide feedback to the learner on completion of the expert witness/witness testimony

Knowledge Questions

Suitable for:

Competency Assessment ✘

Knowledge Assessment ✔

Qualifications are ordinarily made up of assessment criteria which needs to be met through evidence of competence and knowledge.

Learner's knowledge can be tested during observation and professional discussion and an effective assessment plan, should include identification of skill related knowledge which can be verbally questioned during a planned observation/professional discussion assessment.

This is an example of good holistic planning and to ensure that they are not disadvantaging the learner, the Assessor should plan for as much knowledge criteria as possible to be covered in this way, to avoid unnecessary duplication.

It is likely that the learner will have a quantity of knowledge criteria that they haven't met in the course of providing evidence of competence, in this circumstance it would be good practice for the Assessor to provide the learner with a set of knowledge questions, which they can then provide written or verbal responses to. Indeed, this is particularly useful where knowledge criteria are multi-part and complex.

There is a school of thought which suggests that knowledge questions should be used at the beginning of study, because the learner should develop knowledge before they can develop skill.

This is to be advised where learners are brand new to the job role and/or industry, however, as previously mentioned, this could lead to unnecessary duplication of effort and should therefore be avoided where the learner is experienced.

Good Practice

- ✔ Plan thoroughly before starting a knowledge question assessment
- ✔ Ensure only elements of knowledge are being targeted within the qualification as competence cannot be assessed through this method
- ✔ A single knowledge question should be used for a specific knowledge criterion within the qualification
- ✔ Provide feedback to the learner on completion of the knowledge question assessment

Learner Statement

Suitable for:

Competency Assessment ✓

Knowledge Assessment ✓

Statements provide an effective method of gathering information from a learner in order to meet qualification requirements without an Assessor having to be present at all times.

It is a way of a learner providing information of their normal working practices or how they handled a particular type of situation.

They should be well planned to ensure they provide the relevant information to meet the qualification requirements and relate to real life situations that they have been involved in providing dates, times, what they did, how they did it and why they did what they did.

Good Practice

- ✓ Plan thoroughly before progressing with a learner statement
- ✓ Keep the statement relevant to the subject matter
- ✓ Remember to ask the learner what they did, how they did it and why they did what they did
- ✓ Provide feedback to the learner on completion of the learner statement

Observation

Suitable for:

Competency Assessment ✓

Knowledge Assessment ✓

Observation is one of the most commonly used assessment types and can be applied to most situations.

They are normally conducted by the Assessor and can be used to confirm that the learner has met the requirements of the qualification by demonstrating their competence. Observations also allow the Assessor to enhance the evidence by asking the learner knowledge based questions.

Observations are a particularly useful way of capturing naturally occurring evidence (i.e. evidence which isn't pre-planned) and when recording the Assessor should ensure that they attempt to record an account of all that occurs.

Observations are less obtrusive than other assessment methods and therefore allow the Assessor to get a true reflection of the learner's skill and character.

It can be difficult to ensure that all detail is captured during an observation, particularly if conducted in a busy environment and so Assessors need to focus on recording key events and facts only and attempt to minimise disruption as much as possible.

Good Practice

- ✓ Plan thoroughly before starting an observation
- ✓ Involve others as part of the planning process
- ✓ Be prepared
- ✓ Limit distractions during the observation
- ✓ Be fully equipped
- ✓ Keep Assessor interruptions to a minimum but remember that knowledge questions can be asked to further enhance the evidence, eg. why did you do that?
- ✓ Provide feedback to the learner on completion of the observation

Product Evidence

Suitable for:

Competency Assessment ✓

Knowledge Assessment ✓

Product evidence refers to any real work output which the learner produces, i.e. letters, emails, documents, reports, risk assessments, etc.

It should be used as supplementary evidence as it isn't possible for an Assessor or learner to declare product authentic, or reliable, without a corresponding personal statement, observation or witness statement, for example.

Product evidence is invaluable, however, in the provision of 'proof' of work completed and the standard met and the collection of product evidence should therefore be encouraged for this reason.

Good Practice

- ✓ Plan thoroughly before collecting product evidence to ensure relevance
- ✓ Involve others as part of the planning process
- ✓ Ensure data protection and confidentiality requirements are maintained
- ✓ If product evidence cannot be presented within a portfolio of evidence, its location should be signposted so that it can be accessed during monitoring activities
- ✓ If data protection and/or confidentiality requirements means that product evidence cannot be viewed during monitoring activities, it cannot be included as evidence
- ✓ Professional discussions, expert witness/witness testimonies and learner statements should be used to develop the product evidence into valid and effective evidence maximising its use with meeting the qualification requirements
- ✓ Provide feedback to the learner on completion of the product evidence assessment

Professional Discussion

Suitable for:

Competency Assessment ✓

Knowledge Assessment ✓

Professional discussions provide an ideal tool for a learner's final assessment, as it can be used to effectively record a mix of unrelated criteria, across units, in order to bring a portfolio to completion.

Professional discussions need to be very carefully planned, using the assessment plan and both the Assessor and learner need to be absolutely clear on what criteria is due to be covered, what additional, supplementary evidence needs to be provided, how the professional discussion will be recorded and when and where the meeting will be held. The assessment plan can then be used as a 'to do' list, in order to ensure that no criteria is missed.

Professional discussions provide the Assessor and the learner with the tool to fully explore evidence presented, in order to maximise the cross referencing potential of any evidence recorded.

Professional discussions should be recorded by the Assessor although it is important that the Assessor ensures that they do not dominate the process.

The Assessor should, where possible, ask open, 'non-leading' questions and ensure that the learner is doing most of the talking and providing most of the explanation. This is to ensure the validity and authenticity of the evidence.

Professional discussions can be recorded in writing, but digitally recorded discussions provide additional authenticity and can speed up the process.

Good Practice

- ✓ Plan thoroughly before starting a professional discussion
- ✓ Involve others as part of the planning process
- ✓ Be prepared
- ✓ Limit distractions during the professional discussion
- ✓ Be fully equipped
- ✓ Keep Assessor interruptions to a minimum but remember that knowledge questions can be asked to further enhance the evidence, eg. why did you do that? How did you do that?
- ✓ Provide feedback to the learner on completion of the professional discussion

Recognition of Prior Learning

Suitable for:

Competency Assessment ✓

Knowledge Assessment ✓

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is defined as:

'A method of assessment that considers whether a learner can demonstrate that they can meet the assessment requirements for a unit through knowledge, understanding or skills that they already possess and do not need to develop through a course of learning.' (Ofqual 08/3726)

This essentially means that as long as a learner is able to meet all or some of the assessment requirements of a qualification, RPL allows them to receive recognition for their learning (regardless of the method it was accessed). This can reduce duplication of learning activities but needs the centre to assess and verify the learner's claim.

It should be noted that the learner is still required to demonstrate that they meet (or have met) the learning outcomes and assessment criteria of all of the qualification.

The RPL process is straight forward:

Stage 1: Awareness

All learners should be informed about RPL or how they can 'claim recognition' for prior learning so they are in a position to make an active choice whether to pursue this option. This awareness should detail the philosophy of RPL, the process, support available and any impact on costs.

Stage 2: Pre-assessment

The learner should collect all relevant evidence with support available from the centre in guiding the learner. The nature and content of the evidence will be driven by the learning outcomes and assessment criteria for which they are seeking RPL against.

Stage 3: Assessment

The Assessor must review the evidence submitted and make a judgment as to its suitability in meeting the requirements of the qualification (usually achieved through a mapping exercise).

Assessment must be valid and reliable to ensure the integrity of the units, qualification and RPL system as a whole – to achieve this; the same assessment and QA mechanisms as for a standard assessment apply (e.g. IQA/EQA).

Stage 4: Awarding Recognition

This is done the same as a standard approach to awarding recognition – recorded in the learner record and issue of certification.

Stage 5: Feedback

The Assessor will feedback to the learner indicating and discussing the results

Stage 6: Appeal

If a learner wishes to appeal against a decision the normal route and process of appeal should be followed.

Good Practice

- ✓ Plan thoroughly before progressing with RPL
- ✓ Involve others as part of the planning process
- ✓ Ensure the learner is fully aware of what is required and that RPL is not a short cut to the achievement of the qualification
- ✓ Ensure the evidence being used is within the required timescales
- ✓ Complete the plan, judge, feedback assessment cycle as normal
- ✓ Complete the quality assurance process as normal
- ✓ Provide feedback to the learner on completion of the RPL process

Scenario or Case Study

Suitable for:

Competency Assessment ✘

Knowledge Assessment ✔

An effective way of exploring and assessing a learner's knowledge is to see how it has been applied and scenario or case study based assessment can do just that.

Through the provision of a scenario or case study and the completion of knowledge based questions a learner is able to demonstrate their understanding of a subject matter and provide the Assessor with the opportunity to further develop the evidence through knowledge questioning or professional discussion.

Good Practice

- ✔ Plan thoroughly before progressing with a scenario or case study assessment
- ✔ Make sure that the scenario or case study is well planned and constructed
- ✔ The scenario or case study should provide the learner with a situation for them to apply their knowledge, not provide them with the answers to the questions
- ✔ Questions should be open questions in order to allow for effective assessment
- ✔ Ensure the questions accurately target the qualification requirements
- ✔ Provide feedback to the learner on completion of the scenario or case study assessment

Simulation

Suitable for:

Competency Assessment ✓

Knowledge Assessment ✓

In exceptional circumstances evidence from simulation can be used to complement the primary evidence drawn from activities. Simulation should only occur where the learner would otherwise be precluded from providing the necessary evidence for demonstrating they met the requirements of the standards because of the nature of their environment or work.

Simulated activities should match as closely as possible those that occur in a real environment. This is particularly important where these activities and their outcomes are being assessed to provide evidence to demonstrate the learner is meeting the requirements of the standards.

If simulation is to be used, prior agreement as to the arrangements must be sought from SFEDI Awards prior to the assessment taking place.

Activities should take place in a realistic working environment that:

- ✓ Is based on activities, events, challenges and markets
- ✓ Includes a comprehensive range of demands, activities, constraints and challenges typical of those that would be met in a real environment
- ✓ Gives learners access to facilities, advice and support that would be normal for the activity, event or type of challenge presented
- ✓ Places learners under pressures of time, resources and access to support that would be normal in an activity, event or type of challenge presented
- ✓ Is organised and managed as would a real activity
- ✓ Is subject to normal workplace controls regarding health and safety, equal opportunities, and codes of conduct

Good Practice

- ✓ Plan thoroughly before progressing with simulation to ensure it is the only option
- ✓ Involve others as part of the planning process
- ✓ Be prepared
- ✓ Limit distractions during the simulation, it should reflect real life conditions
- ✓ Keep Assessor interruptions to a minimum but remember that knowledge questions can be asked at the end of the simulation to further enhance the evidence, eg. why did you do that?
- ✓ Provide feedback to the learner on completion of the simulation