

Understanding assessment in Apprenticeships

This document from the assessment resources is aimed at those who are new to developing assessment. It introduces some of the key terms and concepts.

Assessment involves making objective and impartial judgements based on evidence gathered from a variety of sources to determine the extent to which an apprentice demonstrates achievement of the performance requirements (competency) set out in an Apprenticeship [standard].

The Apprenticeship system is a competency-based system that involves:

- accredited training designed and delivered to support an apprentice's progress towards the standard, enabling them to perform at the required level of competency;
- methods of monitoring apprentice progress;
- mechanisms for assessing against agreed competency standards and for recording and reporting achieved competence;
- a qualification and certification system based on the demonstration of competencies.

To be assessed effectively, such a system assumes that:

- appropriate thresholds for attainment can be uniformly set;
- most apprentices will be able to achieve them in all settings;
- different activities can reflect the same standards;
- assessors can judge apprentice performance consistently.

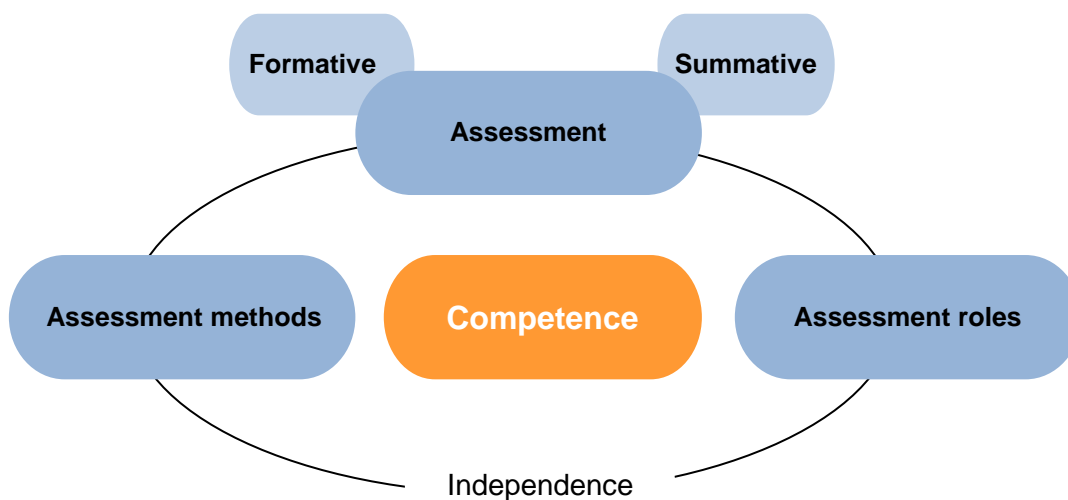
A high-quality assessment system will:

- satisfy accepted assessment principles (see box on right);
- provide the right emphasis on the different parts of the standard;
- give apprentices confidence in the quality of their training and appropriate feedback to enable them to develop;
- give employers confidence that they have qualified, well-trained employees.

Principles of high-quality assessment in vocational training	
Standard	A clear standard exists against which attainment can be assessed
Authenticity	What is assessed is produced by the candidate and no one else
Currency	Evidence of attainment is up to date and relevant to the standard
Validity	The assessment method is appropriate to the evidence requirements of the standard
Reliability	The method of assessment produces evidence that clearly demonstrates that the standard has been met
Fairness	All candidates have an equal opportunity to attain the standard
Consistency	The standard is applied consistently to all candidates in all assessment situations
Manageability	Assessment can be delivered without excessive strain on resources or candidates

Assessment of competence

The competence assessment system can be very simply represented as shown in this diagram.



The terms are explained in the following pages.

Competence covers the knowledge, understanding, problem solving and technical skills, and attitudes, behaviours and ethics. The term 'competent' refers to a person's ability to perform to the standard of performance expected in employment.

Competency encompasses:

- performance of individual tasks (task skills);
- management of a number of different tasks within the job (task management skills);
- responding to irregularities and breakdowns in routine work (contingency management skills);
- dealing with the responsibilities and expectations of the work environment (occupational environment skills);
- applying skills and knowledge to new situations and environments (transferability skills).

Assessment of competence requires a combination of performance evidence and knowledge evidence gathered over time and preferably from different sources, using a variety of methods and in various contexts.

Meeting performance requirements on one occasion does not necessarily imply competence. Competence should not be inferred from one performance or a single piece of evidence. Therefore, the critical aspect is that there is sufficient evidence of suitable quality to make a safe inference that the apprentice has demonstrated achievement and has done so consistently.

Formative and summative assessment

There are strong links between competence, learning and assessment. Every act of assessment gives a message to apprentices about what they should be learning and how they should be learning it, so assessment activities need to be constructed with that in mind. In this way, assessment fulfils two important requirements: measuring competence, and improving the learning/training process.

Formative assessment (also referred to as assessment for learning) provides feedback that does not directly contribute to the achievement of a programme objective but informs both the training process and the learning process. It is considered as feedback 'without prejudice'.

Summative assessment (also referred to as assessment of learning) makes a judgment on an apprentice's performance compared to the requirements of the standard, and is recorded as contributing to achievement. Summative assessment may take place either on the job (at the workplace) or off the job (with a learning provider or at an assessment centre).

Assessment methods

Assessment can be achieved through a variety of approaches. These can be broadly categorised as:

- Written (online or paper-based) assessment tasks or tests to assess theoretical or technical knowledge
- Observation of performance – directly or virtually (such as video or live web cam)
- Practical assessment through production of a project, product, or portfolio of work
- Viva or oral to assess theoretical or technical knowledge and understanding (professional discussion) or to supplement/authenticate other types of assessment evidence.

A range of assessment methods are explored more fully in the *Compendium of assessment methods*.

Assessment roles

Assessor: An assessor is a person who makes assessment judgments, especially for the purposes of vocational or work-based qualifications. They operate in colleges, training centres and the workplace and may be employed by a training provider, freelance, or be a member of the employer's own staff. For QCF regulated qualifications, assessors are required to hold Level 3 qualifications themselves. The role of assessors is central to assessment as they:

- establish what evidence is required then organising assessment
- make the assessment decision (by drawing inferences by comparing evidence with required learning outcomes)
- record the results
- review and evaluate procedures.

Examiner: An examiner is a person who sets and marks examinations to test people's knowledge or proficiency. The examinations could be written or practical (think of a driving test).

Internal Verifier (IV) / Internal Quality Assurer: The primary role of an Internal Verifier (IV) is to monitor the work of a caseload of assessors to ensure that they are applying the assessment criteria consistently across all assessment activities and candidates. They may be employed by the training provider or may be a member of the employer's own staff.

Moderator: A moderator reviews assessment decisions, assessment documents or examination papers to ensure consistency, or oversees a formal assessment or examination. These are often based in higher education or awarding organisations or may be freelance.

External Verifier (EV) / External Quality Assurer: An External Verifier (EV) undertakes a similar role to an internal verifier (IV) but is responsible for verifying the quality of assessment and verification decisions across a caseload of assessment centres to ensure candidates, assessors and verifiers are working, assessing and verifying to consistent standards. They also facilitate standardisation processes and usually report directly to an awarding organisation.

Independence of Assessment

To assess consistently across many employers there needs to be an external assessment system, accountable for the consistency of assessment in most settings. Assessment within such systems must be designed to provide valid and reliable, high-quality assessment and achievement data.

Principles of Assessment

Principles of Assessment The Rule of Three

Three Questions in Assessment Design

What forms or types of
evidence should be sought?

How much evidence is
required?

Where should the evidence be
recorded for future validation?

Three Principles of Assessment

Use assessment methods that
are integrated

Select methods that are
relevant

Use a broad base of evidence
for competence

Three Assessment Drivers

Ensuring competence and
productivity

Ensuring consistency

Ensuring that the pillars of
assessment are considered

Validity

Reliability

Flexibility

Fairness

Assessment – The Rule of Threes

- Three major questions in assessment design
- Three major principles in assessment
- Three assessment drivers for competence

The three major questions in assessment design

1. What forms or types of evidence should be sought?
2. How much evidence is required?
3. Where should the evidence be recorded for future validation

The three major principles in assessment

If followed, these guiding principles will help assessors to make sound judgments about competence:

1. **Use assessment methods that are most capable of assessing competence in an integrated manner.** Integrated methods assess a number of elements of competence and all their performance criteria simultaneously. For example, observations of performance could be used to assess an apprentice for workplace management skills, knowledge of the subject matter or context, ethical principles, work planning, within the one assessment event. Nevertheless, it is dangerous to infer too much from observation of performance since professionals find themselves in a very wide variety of contexts. Thus, there almost inevitably will be occasions in which knowledge will need to be tested independently of performance.
2. **Select methods that are most direct and relevant to what is being assessed.** For example, to assess diagnostic competence in the training of auto mechanics, assessors must observe the steps in diagnoses—a performance assessment—whereas the interpretation of circuit diagrams or a set of instructions can be assessed through a written test. To assess overall competence, both these methods and a number of others will need to be used.
3. **Use a broad base of evidence for the inference of competence.** The competency-based approach to assessment emphasises performance underpinned by knowledge, a greater variety of evidence than is traditional, and direct assessment methods. A mix of methods should be used for providing evidence from which to infer competence, as the narrower the base of evidence, the less it can be generalised to the performance of other tasks. For instance, performance on paper-and-pencil tests in any profession will probably be too narrow a base for assessing occupational competence.

The three assessment drivers for competence

1. **Ensuring true competence and ultimate productivity (or employability, or eligibility to progress):** This is often characterised as being able to work unsupervised to a standard of their colleagues or of the sector.
2. **Ensuring that the assessment methods used are consistent with the nature of the work being undertaken:** For example, domiciliary care would not naturally be assessed using only written examinations; neither would accountancy be normally assessed through observed assessments or professional dialogue.
3. **Ensuring that the core pillars of validity, reliability, flexibility, and fairness are considered in any assessment.**

The use of these core pillars are widespread in Apprenticeships, but what do these terms mean in this context?

The following has been adapted from the National Framework for the Recognition of Training.

Validity

Assessments are valid when they assess what they claim to assess. This is achieved when:

- assessors are fully aware of what is to be assessed as indicated by the standard;
- evidence is collected from tasks that are clearly related to what is to be assessed;
- there is sufficiency of different evidence to demonstrate that competency has been met.

Validity principles:

- Assessment should measure performance against the competency standards developed by industry.
- Assessment procedures must cover the range of skills and knowledge needed to demonstrate competency.
- Assessment should be a holistic process that integrates knowledge and skills with their practical application.
- Knowledge is important for all competencies although its significance will be greater in some environments. Assessment must measure whole competence including those aspects of knowledge and understanding that underpin performance.
- Methods of assessment should be appropriate to the evidence sought and the setting in which assessment may be logically, safely and economically conducted.
- Judgements to determine an apprentice's competency should be made, wherever practicable, on evidence gathered on a number of occasions and in a variety of contexts or situations. In most cases, it is not possible to infer competency from one successful performance. The ability of an apprentice to apply knowledge and skills in new and different situations cannot be inferred when performance has only occurred once and in one context.

Reliability

Assessments are reliable when they are applied and interpreted consistently from apprentice to apprentice, assessor-to-assessor, occasion-to-occasion, and from one context to another. Without reliable assessments, there can be no comparability of credentials.

Reliability principles:

- Assessment practices should be monitored and reviewed to ensure that there is consistency in the interpretation of evidence. Mechanisms should be established to resolve anomalies.
- Assessors must be competent and have knowledge of assessment techniques and knowledge of the area of competence they are assessing.

Flexibility

Assessments are flexible when they can be successfully adapted to a range of contexts and the needs of individual apprentices.

Flexibility principles

- Assessment should cover both the on and off-the-job components of training in an integrated system, as far as is practicable.
- Competency must be demonstrated and assessed under conditions as close as possible to those under which the competency will be normally practised.
- This means that wherever practicable assessment should occur in a workplace environment or an environment that closely simulates/replicates the workplace where the apprentice will be using equipment and performing roles and tasks, which are part of everyday activities.
- Additional demands should not be placed on the apprentice in the assessment process that extends the conditions normally expected for the competency to be achieved.
- Assessment should be practical, conducted under safe conditions and create minimum disruption where carried out in the workplace.
- Assessment procedures should provide for the recognition of competence no matter how, where or when demonstrated. This should include provision to recognise and assess prior achievement.

Fairness

Assessment is fair when it places all apprentices on equal terms and does not disadvantage particular individuals.

Fairness principles:

- Assessment practices and methods must be equitable to all groups of apprentices. Assessment must not directly or indirectly limit or impede access by individuals on the grounds of age, race, sex, disability, employment status, or social or educational background. Nor should it discriminate against people from non- English speaking backgrounds or people with low literacy skills where English literacy/communication is not critical to the competency required in the workplace.
- Assessment procedures and the criteria for judging performance must be clear to all apprentices.
- The more complex the assessment of performance the more difficult it will be to understand the process and the less effective the assessment will be. A system that is as simple as possible will meet this requirement more easily than a complex one.
- Assessment must be practical, cost effective and create minimum workplace disruption.
- Everyone involved in the assessment process should be aware of their responsibilities through formal processes built into the design of the training program and assessment instruments. Non-compliance may provide the basis for an appeal or for an application for reassessment. These include aspects such as:
 - identification and knowledge of the standards against which performance is measured
 - the forms of assessment to be used and consideration of alternative forms of assessment
 - who devised the assessment process, how it will be implemented and by whom
 - if the assessment requires more than one type of evidence, how the different assessments are brought together
 - recording processes and who keeps them.
- Internal and external verification should be available so that all stakeholders can feel confident in they system
- An appeals mechanism must be established to allow apprentices to challenge assessments and provision must be made for reassessment. The nature and form of the provision for re-assessment will depend upon the circumstances under which the learner is being assessed.