Skills for Care & Development
Sgiliau Gofal a Datblygu

Skills for Care and Development Assessment Principles

October 2026, V1.2

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1 Introduction

1.1. Skills for Care and Development (SfCD) is an alliance of key organisations from England, Northern Ireland, Ireland, Scotland and Wales with varied roles across social work, social care, children and young people, early years and childcare, with remits across workforce development and regulation.

1.2. This document sets out the minimum expected principles and approaches to assessment and internal quality assurance and should be read alongside qualification regulatory arrangements and any specific requirements set out for qualifications. **Additional information and guidance regarding assessment can be obtained from Awarding Organisations/Body (AO/B) and from SfCD partner organisations using the links in Appendix A.**

1.3. The information in this document is intended to support the quality assurance processes of AO/Bs and approved centres that offer qualifications in the sectors.

1.4. Where Skills for Care and Development qualifications are jointly supported with Skills for Health, Skills for Health assessment principles should also be considered.

1.5. Throughout this document the following terms are used:

- “Unit” is used for simplicity, but this can mean module or any other similar term.
- “Centre” is also used for simplicity; this means the training / learning provider who is approved to deliver qualifications by the AO/B.
- Individual and others: "individual" refers to the person or people receiving care or support. "Others" may include families, carers, other people in the setting, team members and other professionals.

1.6. In all work, we would expect assessors to observe and review learners upholding core values and standards, inclusive practices, professional behaviour, and attitudes required for quality practice and being assessed within the qualification.

1.7. All learners should follow appropriate standards for conduct. All parties involved in any form of assessment must know and embrace the values and standards of practice set out in these documents.

1.8. The voices of individuals who use services must be at the centre of all assessor and learners' practice. This should be apparent throughout the evidence provided for a learner's practice. Learners should also be provided an opportunity to provide feedback throughout the assessment and internal quality assurance process.

2 Assessment principles

2.1. Good practice dictates the following:

- Robust initial assessments are needed to identify and plan for each learner's needs, ensuring their role and responsibilities meet all qualification requirements, including the mandatory and optional units.
- Centres should have in place processes to identify and recognise opportunities for use of Accredited Prior Learning (APL) and/or Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), and these should meet the requirements of the AO/B.
- Centres should also have in place processes to support reasonable adjustments, and again, these should meet the requirements of the AO/B.

2.2. The centre must monitor that learners are registered with the AO/B **before** formal assessment continues.

Assessors must be able to fully evidence and justify the assessment decisions they have made in line with the principles of validity, authenticity, reliability, currency and sufficiency. Assessment records should be accurate, legible and complete, and meet requirements set out by the AO/B and associated assessment strategy where this is in place.

2.3. The following should be read in conjunction with Addendum 1, set out in Appendix C: Skills-based assessment must include direct observation as the principal and most reliable assessment source of evidence, carried out by the assessor in person with the learner in their workplace. Observation must be carried out over an appropriate period of time and not be end-loaded. Evidence should be naturally occurring and minimise the impact on individuals who use care or support, their families and carers.

Where a centre has valid and genuine reasons for being unable to meet the direct observation requirements, short-term flexible approaches may be

permitted. These approaches must be standardised, and the centre must discuss and agree this with the AO/B. See 2.8 and 5.5

2.4. Assessment decisions for skills-based learning outcomes must be made during the learner's normal work activity by an occupationally qualified, competent and knowledgeable assessor.

2.5. Assessors must demonstrate occupational competence and sector knowledge at or above the level they assess, maintaining this through ongoing continual professional development.

- In examples where assessors are returning to practice, a professional development plan should be in place to ensure current sector competency against the level, the subject matter being assessed, and overall assessment practices.
- If an assessor is occupationally competent but not yet qualified, a qualified assessor must make the final assessment decisions. These must be validated through countersigning and supported by robust internal quality assurance, sampling plans and activities until qualification requirements are met.
- It is the responsibility of the AO/B to confirm that assessors in centres are suitably qualified and competent to make assessment decisions.

2.6. Simulation must only be used to assess skills-based learning outcomes when specified in the unit assessment requirements or agreed with the AO/B or agreed with the External Quality Assurer acting on behalf of the AO/B.

2.7. Witness testimony from others, including those who use services, their families and professionals, can be an important contribution to evidence in the assessment process and can enrich and triangulate other evidence obtained. A witness testimony does not replace direct observation and should not be used as the only evidence of skills. A witness testimony and an expert witness testimony are two different types of evidence. Informed consent must be gained for those providing witness testimonies.

2.8. Expert witnesses play an important role in assessments. They must:

- have a working knowledge of the relevant units
- be occupationally competent in the relevant units, and
- have either a qualification in workplace assessment or a role evaluating staff performance within their area of expertise.

2.9. Appropriate processes to identify and recruit, confirm, support, and standardise suitable expert witnesses should be applied by the centre and assured by the AO/B.

2.10. The expert witness is a reliable source of evidence:

- where the assessor is not occupationally competent in a specialist area e.g. a healthcare task, an expert witness testimony can be used for direct observation of the unit (not the whole qualification) where they have occupational expertise in the specialist area.
- when used as a method to enrich, supplement, and add triangulation to other assessment methods and outcomes.
- in supporting flexibility where there are valid and genuine factors in not being able to obtain direct observation in the workplace e.g. individual considerations, environment and practice sensitivities. Occasions where this is needed must be discussed and agreed with the AO/B. This should not be the sole primary method used in place of all observations.
- where allowed as per the assessment strategy.

2.11. The use of expert witnesses should be determined and agreed by the assessor, in line with internal quality assurance arrangements and AO/B requirements for assessment of units within the qualification and the sector. The assessor remains responsible for supporting the expert witness through the process and making the final assessment decision.

3 Assessment of knowledge-based learning outcomes:

3.1. The assessment of knowledge-based learning outcomes:

- may take place in or outside of a real work environment
- must be made by an occupationally qualified and knowledgeable assessor, qualified to make assessment decisions
- must be robust, reliable, valid and current
- can be supported by eLearning programmes to support overall summative assessment, by helping learners acquire and review knowledge, but they cannot replace practical assessment in a real work environment

- may include pre-set automated tests (such as multiple-choice questions) which contribute evidence towards summative decisions. However, they must be complemented by direct assessment methods that demonstrate the learner's ability to apply knowledge in real work situations
- must take into account APL/RPL to avoid duplication of learning.

4 Recording and documentation

4.1. All assessment and quality assurance evidence, regardless of format, must comply with confidentiality and data protection laws. Information must be traceable, auditable, authenticated, and meet assessment principles. In addition, no recordings should compromise anyone's privacy or dignity. As such, clear and robust referencing is necessary to establish a relationship between the evidence and the assessment standard, which validates competence. Referencing should clearly indicate the specific location within the evidence where the relevant skills and knowledge are claimed, either in paper-based or e-portfolios.

5 Use of technology in the assessment process

5.1. Centres should have in place robust policies and procedures regarding Artificial Intelligence (AI) and technology, and these must meet requirements as set out by the AO/B.

5.2. Technology, platforms, and e-portfolios can support assessment by enabling planning, reviews, learner reflection, professional discussions, and capturing evidence from expert witnesses. When using technology in these contexts, ensure:

- recording, storage, and access comply with confidentiality and data protection legislation
- individuals receiving care or support and others are not unintentionally recorded
- informed consent must be freely given by everyone involved in the assessment and this must be documented.

5.3. Using technology to observe and verify learner competency (remote observation) is not allowed if it risks anyone's privacy, dignity, or confidentiality.

5.4. Where permitted by sector or qualification guidelines, technology may be used to remotely observe learners' task-based competencies, such as online meetings or remote support to colleagues. Such evidence must be clearly marked and distinguished from other types. It should not be used when there is a requirement for direct interaction with individuals using care or support services or others.

5.5. The remote observation approach in 5.4 is supplementary and does not replace direct observation as the primary assessment method. It should be used to support and enhance planned direct assessments throughout the qualification.

5.6. Centre practices in the use of technology are to be monitored and assured by the AO/B, and this should include centre consideration of the following:

- Use aligns to adherence to any additional guidance set by the AO/B, the qualification, which is being assessed, any specific sector considerations and associated assessment strategies in place.
- The centre understands the ethical considerations in the use of technology in the sectors and has policies and procedures in place to support use.
- Robust approaches to risk assessment are used to ensure risks to individuals and others are eradicated.
- Centre practices and approaches are guided and supported by thorough standardisation.
- Technology and programmes used are standardised, accessible, safe and reliable.
- If the centre allows assessor and internal quality assurer use of personal devices (e.g. phones, tablets, or personal laptops), then procedures should be in place to ensure data and confidentiality aspects. This includes consideration of where and how devices are accessed to view learner evidence.
- Assessment planning and discussion should capture the relevant and safe opportunities to use technology, along with the approach used to explore and mitigate any risks.
- Evidence recording methods and assessment outcome processes do not increase the risk of any data or confidentiality breaches.

- Assessment outcomes and decisions and outcomes generated by use of technology in the process are reliable, sufficient and traceable.
- All protocols are upheld in the 'observation' context e.g. permissions sought and confirming the purpose of the assessment activity.
- Assessment activities where technology is used, must be incorporated in internal and external quality assurance sampling planning and activities.
- Learners are not disadvantaged by the use of technology and they are aware of its use.
- Learning requirements, support, skill development or other developmental needs of the learner are fully supported throughout the qualification process.
- Technology is used well to genuinely enhance the assessment process, experience, outcomes and digital skills of the learner.
- Practices and lessons learned should be shared by all to support review and continuous improvement.

6 Internal quality assurance

6.1. Internal quality assurance is key to ensuring the assessment of evidence is of a consistent and appropriate quality. This process should be supported by robust sampling plans and activity that takes place at beginning, middle and end of the qualification journey and accounts for any potential risks in the assessment process. Those carrying out internal quality assurance must be occupationally knowledgeable in the unit they are assuring and be qualified to make quality assurance decisions. It is the responsibility of the AO/B to confirm that those involved in internal quality assurance are suitably qualified for this role.

6.2. If the internal quality assurer is knowledgeable but not yet qualified, a qualified internal quality assurer must make final decisions. A clear countersigning strategy should support and confirm decisions by unqualified staff until they are fully qualified.

6.3. Those involved in internal quality assurance must have the authority and the resources to monitor the work of assessors. They have a responsibility to highlight and propose ways to address any challenges in the assessment

process (e.g. to ensure suitable assessors are assigned to reflect the strengths and needs of particular learners).

6.4. Those carrying out external quality assurance must be occupationally knowledgeable and understand the policy and practice context of the qualifications in which they are involved. It is the responsibility of the AO/B to confirm that those involved in external quality assurance are suitably qualified for this role.

6.5. Those involved in external quality assurance have a responsibility to promote continuous improvement in the quality of assessment processes.

Definitions

Occupationally competent: This means that each assessor must be capable of carrying out the full requirements of the specific qualification units they are assessing. Occupational competence may be at unit level for specialist areas: this could mean that different assessors may be needed across a whole qualification, while the final assessment decision for a qualification remains with the lead assessor. Being occupationally competent also means being occupationally knowledgeable. This occupational competence should be maintained annually through clearly demonstrable continuing learning and professional development.

Occupationally knowledgeable: This means that each assessor and internal quality assurer should possess knowledge and understanding relevant to the specific qualifications and / or units they are assessing or internally quality assuring. This occupational knowledge should be maintained annually through clearly demonstrable continuing learning and professional development. It is crucial that internal quality assurers understand the nature and context of the assessors' work and that of their learners.

Qualified to make assessment decisions: This means that each assessor must hold a qualification suitable to support the making of appropriate and consistent assessment decisions. AO/B will determine what will qualify those making assessment decisions according to the unit of skills under assessment. A list of general assessor qualifications is included in Appendix B. Please also refer to additional guidance for qualifications in the relevant nation, where available.

Qualified to make quality assurance decisions: AO/B will determine what qualifies those undertaking internal and external quality assurances to make decisions about that quality assurance. A list of general internal qualification assurance qualifications is included in Appendix B. Please also refer to additional guidance for qualifications in the relevant nation, where available.

Witness testimony: Witness testimony is an account of practice that has been witnessed or experienced by someone other than the assessor and the learner.

Appendix A: Skills for Care and Development partnership website links

Skills for Care and Development

Northern Ireland Social Care Council

Social Care Wales

Skills for Care

Scottish Social Services Council

Appendix B: Recognised assessor and internal quality assurance qualifications

This list aims to provide an overview of generally recognised qualifications. Please gain additional guidance from the individual nation and AO/B where needed. Please also check and apply CPD/CPL requirements for qualifications held.

Assessor:

- D32 Assess Candidate Performance and D33 Assess Candidate Using Differing Sources of Evidence
- A1 Assess Candidate Performance Using a Range of Methods and A2 Assessing Candidates' performance through observation (plus CPD/CPL in line with current L&D9 or L&D9DI)
- Level 3 Award in Assessing Competence in the Work Environment (for competence / skills learning outcomes only)
- Level 3 Award in Assessing Vocationally Related Achievement (for knowledge learning outcomes only)
- Level 3 Certificate in Assessing Vocational Achievement
- Qualified Teacher Status
- Level 3 Award in Assessing competence in the work environment
- Certificate in Education in Post Compulsory Education (PCE)

- Social Work Post Qualifying Award in Practice Teaching
- Certificate in Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector (CTLLS)
- Diploma in Teaching in the Lifelong Learning sector (DTLLS)
- Mentorship and Assessment in Health and Social Care Settings
- Mentorship in Clinical/Health Care Practice
- L&D9DI - Assessing workplace competence using Direct and Indirect methods (Scotland)
- L&D9D - Assessing workplace competence using Direct methods (Scotland)
- Tutor/Assessor Award Level 3 Awards and Certificate in Assessing the Quality of Assessment
- Level 4 Awards and Certificates in Assuring the Quality of Assessment
- Level 3 Award in Education and Training
- Level 4 Certificate in Education and Training
- Level 5 Diploma in Education and Training
- Level 3 Certificates in Assessing Vocational Achievement
- Specific to Wales: Relevant learning programmes which support practice learning/practice education on social work, they must be regulated and approved by Social Care Wales
- Specific to Scotland: Teaching Qualification for Further Education plus CPD in line with current L&D9D
- Level 3 Certificate in Assessing Occupational Achievement – In Person
- Level 3 Extended Certificate in Assessing Occupational Achievement

Internal Quality Assurance:

- Level 4 Certificate in Leading the Internal Quality Assurance of Assessment Processes and Practice
- Level 4 Award in the Internal Quality Assurance of Assessment Processes and Practice
- D34 Unit: Internally verify the assessment process
- V1 Verifiers Award

- V1 Conduct internal quality assurance of the assessment process (plus CPD/CPL in line with the current L&D11 standard)
- L&D11- Internally Monitor and Maintain the Quality of Workplace Assessment (Scotland J8RT 04)
- Level 4 Award in Internal Quality Assurance of Assessment
- Level 4 Certificate in Leading the Internal Quality Assurance of Assessment

Appendix C: Addendum: The review of assessment and quality assurance qualifications (October 2026)

Skills for Care and Development welcomes the review of assessment and quality assurance qualifications and recognises the revised qualifications as equivalent to those currently accepted.

However, the minimum requirement for assessors carrying out assessment practice within the sector, is the achievement of the Assessing Occupational Achievement – In Person unit within the overall qualification structure.

The guidance for skills-based assessment remains unchanged in Section 2.3. This must include direct observation as the principal and most reliable source of assessment evidence. Direct observation must be undertaken in person by the assessor, observing the learner carrying out their role within the workplace.

To support evolving assessment practices, new assessors could also seek to achieve the Assessing Occupational Achievement – Remote unit, but this must only be in addition to Assessing Occupational Achievement – In Person. Achievement of the Remote unit alone, though, does not meet the requirements for assessment practice within the sector. The guidance referenced in Section 5 of this document regarding the use of technology to observe learner competence remains unchanged.

Additionally, to support continuous professional development, existing qualified assessors may wish to further develop their practice by engaging with refreshed qualification content and associated developments in assessment approaches.