



NVQ portfolios - key messages and principles

These key messages and principles are for awarding bodies and external verifiers. The purpose of these messages and principles is to encourage approaches to the collection and presentation of evidence of competence which minimise bureaucracy and reduce the burden of assessment without compromising quality.

External verification



Key messages

- Awarding bodies and external verifiers are placing too much emphasis on paper portfolios at the expense of other evidence.
- A range of methods should be used to assess NVQs, driven by candidates' normal activities in the workplace.
- External verifiers must be prepared to sample various types of assessment decisions, including those made at the place where the evidence is located, instead of relying too heavily on portfolio based decisions.



Principles

Awarding bodies should review their assessment guidance to ensure that centres are advised of the full range of assessment techniques and methods of presenting evidence that are acceptable in the occupational sector(s) under consideration. The review should aim to reduce reliance on paper portfolios and associated paperwork, while ensuring that centres keep up to date, auditable records of assessment and internal verification. Guidance should take into account the nature of the occupational competences associated with specific NVQs, as well as other issues such as confidentiality, which will influence the way assessment is conducted.

External verifiers should encourage centres to adopt a range of approaches to assessment, consistent with awarding body guidance, and consider alternatives to paper-based portfolios for the presentation of evidence.

Sources of evidence can include:

- direct observation of the candidate;
- photographic, audio, video or other electronic recording of candidate activity;
- the presentation of artefacts produced by the candidate;
- previous achievements;
- questioning the candidate to assess the underpinning knowledge and understanding and/or to authenticate the validity of other evidence.

It is not necessary to keep copies of all the evidence produced in one place, ie in a portfolio. Evidence of competence, where it is in paper or other material form, can be kept where it is naturally located, eg in the filing cabinet, desk or workshop. If this approach is adopted, a record of assessment must be kept which shows the evidence produced, the assessment decision, and where the evidence is located.

Internal verification



Key messages

- Verification has tended to concentrate on paperwork and the process of assessment; to improve quality, verification must focus more on assessors' judgements.
- Verifiers must be able to interrogate assessors' judgements by focusing on those critical features that distinguish between competent and not yet competent candidates.



Principles

External and internal verifiers should focus on the accuracy and consistency of assessors' judgements against the requirements of the national standards.

Internal verifiers must ensure that accurate, auditable records of assessment are maintained.

For each assessment decision, the following information is required:

- who was assessed?
- who conducted the assessment?
- what was assessed?
- when was it assessed?
- what was the assessment decision?
- where is the evidence located?

This information should be endorsed with the candidate's and assessor's signatures and dates. Records of assessment must be audited by the external verifier and must be held by the centre until the awarding body authorises their release.

Assessors and candidates



Key messages

- The term ‘collecting evidence’ may have been interpreted too literally in the past and this has led to the notion of the portfolio as a means of collecting evidence.
- The primary role of assessors is to make accurate decisions about the competence of candidates against the national standards, and they must be able to justify their decisions.



Principles

Assessors must be able to make sound and consistent judgements about the acceptability of evidence. Centres have a responsibility for ensuring the competence of the assessors they employ, so that trust can be placed in the assessment decisions of assessors without the need to insist on paper evidence to back up every assessment decision.

When planning assessment, assessors should make use of a combination of assessment methods. Candidates should be encouraged to cross-reference and avoid an element by element or pc by pc approach to collecting evidence, whether or not a paper portfolio is used for presenting evidence. ‘Evidence rich’ activities, ‘project’ or ‘event’ approaches to collecting evidence can contribute to a reduction in the overall amount of evidence collected. The presentation of evidence should not be confined to paper-based portfolios, but assessors must keep auditable assessment records. Candidates need to understand what constitutes actual evidence of competence. Where paper-based material is presented for assessment, candidates should avoid the inclusion of reference documents, training materials and other evidence that does not demonstrate competence. Proper assessment planning can help candidates to relate their activities to the requirements of the NVQ.

