

Implementing the national standards for assessment and verification [second edition]

The Assessment and Verification Units D32, D33, D34 and D35

Since September 1993, representatives from some key organisations interested in the way the national standards for assessment and verification are being implemented have been meeting as the Assessor and Verifier Working Group.

This joint guidance has been developed as a result, in close liaison with awarding bodies. It has been written for those involved in assessing and verifying the national standards for assessment and verification. It aims to:

- clarify how the national standards for assessment and verification should be implemented;
- improve the quality of assessment and verification nationally.

Although the guidance focuses on the assessment of NVQ units, the principles it describes also apply to SVQs. SCOTVEC is currently updating its own leaflet on the assessment of these units.

As many readers will know, Training and Development Lead Body (TDLB) responsibilities have been incorporated into the Employment Occupational Standards Council (EOOSC). To avoid confusion this guidance note refers to the Assessment and Verification Units as the D3 units.

This is the second edition of the joint guidance. It has been updated to reflect changes to the Assessment and Verification Units, and to incorporate comments on the first edition. It also takes into account the recommendations of the Beaumont Report, and the subsequent NCVQ/DfEE Action Plan, which were based on interviews with users of NVQs during 1995.

New units for GNVQ assessors were published in September 1995, and references to GNVQs have been removed from this booklet, except where they are particularly relevant. It is worth noting that if GNVQ assessors wish to assess NVQs or NVQ units, they will still need to hold D32 and/or D33.

1 | Introduction

This guidance outlines agreed best practice in implementing the national standards for assessment and verification. We are aiming to achieve this best practice as soon as possible, while recognising that interim arrangements may be needed while the system is being established. Centres planning to use interim arrangements should first check that they are acceptable to the awarding body (normally through the external verifier). The awarding body's decision will depend on its own plans for implementing the *Common Accord*.

As this second edition of the guidance is being published two years after the first, it is expected that considerable progress towards achieving best practice will already have been made. As a result, far fewer interim arrangements should now be needed.

1.1 | The role of the Assessment and Verification Units D32-D35

Although this guidance focuses on the assessment of the D3 units for certification purposes, it is important to remember the units' fundamental role in setting the national standards for NVQ assessment and verification. NVQ assessment should always be carried out in line with the national standards contained in D32 and D33; and verification in line with the national standards in D34 and D35. Therefore the standards are also the basis for monitoring NVQ assessment and verification practice.

It is also important to note that the units have a clearly defined and limited role within the Training and Development standards. The D3 units were developed specifically for competence-based assessment of individual candidates for national certification purposes. There are other units within the Training and Development framework which can be used for other types of assessment, for example:

- E11 for IIP assessors;
- D21 for non-competence-based assessment;
- D11 for formative assessment.

When NVQs or NVQ units are not being used, organisations should seek advice from the Employment Occupational Standards Council (EOSC) to identify more appropriate national standards.

2 | Definitions

The following terms have been used in this guidance:

- **assessor-candidate** – a candidate who is working towards D32 and/or D33;
- **candidate** – an NVQ candidate (ie the person being assessed by the assessor-candidate);
- **assessor** – the assessor generally in the NVQ system. For the Assessment Units D32/D33, 'assessor' refers to the person assessing the assessor-candidates. The assessor must be qualified to D32 and/or D33;
- **D3 units** – the Assessment and Verification Units of the Training and Development framework.

For the sake of readability, this guidance refers to assessors and assessor-candidates in most parts. However, the principles also apply to verifiers and verifier-candidates. Many of the aspects of NVQ (and unit) assessment which are covered apply to all candidates in the system.

3 | Evidence

For D3 Units, as for all NVQs and units, evidence is needed of:

- performance; and,
- knowledge and understanding.

The revised Units D32-D35 contain detailed specifications of the evidence needed.

3.1 | Performance evidence

Assessor-candidates need to produce performance evidence for each of the D32 and/or D33 elements – evidence of knowledge and understanding alone is not enough. This performance evidence should usually be produced in real assessment environments.

As for all NVQs, prior achievements and experience should be accepted as evidence if:

- they are relevant to the national standard;
- they are authenticated; and,
- the assessor-candidate's competence in assessment can be confirmed as current.

In some cases, most of an assessor-candidate's performance evidence will be prior achievement. In others, prior achievement will be used as supporting evidence, or as knowledge evidence.

3.1.1 | What is performance evidence?

The minimum amount and type of performance evidence needed is set out in the evidence requirements for each element.

For Units D32 and D33, most performance evidence is:

- the **product of activities** (for example, assessment plans, records of evidence and decisions); or,
- **process** i.e. how the assessor-candidate carried out activities (for example, how the assessor-candidate gave feedback).

3.1.2 | Ways of collecting performance evidence

The following assessment methods may be useful in collecting performance evidence.

- **Product** evidence is usually assessed by examining the product itself, or a copy or record of the product (for example, the assessment plan, or a copy of the record of evidence).
- **Process** evidence is usually assessed by an assessor:
 - observing the process taking place;
 - watching a video of the process;
 - listening to an audio tape of the process.(Witness testimony may also contribute to the process evidence – see below.)

These assessment methods can be combined and adapted to suit individual needs and circumstances. Whatever methods are used, they should always be valid and reliable. Assessors need to keep records of their observations and judgements for continuity and verification.

When performance evidence is collected by an assessor observing the process, the observation must be carried out against the national standards. For best practice, observation should be carried out by an assessor who holds D32 and/or D33. If this is not possible, alternative sources of evidence may be used.

For example, the observation may be carried out by someone in close contact with the assessor-candidate, such as a supervisor, colleague, mentor, line manager, or trainee-assessor. In this case, the records of the observation would be produced as evidence, and then assessed by an assessor who holds D33. This type of evidence is sometimes known as 'witness testimony' (see Section 3.2).

It is unlikely that an assessor-candidate will cover the full range of an element or elements on a single occasion. It is also unlikely that the full range for national occupational competence will be covered by performance evidence from just one job context. It is therefore important to consider the need for supporting evidence.

Evidence to support an assessor-candidate's performance evidence will be needed when:

- it is not obvious from the performance evidence how all the performance criteria were met. For example, it may not be clear how an assessment plan submitted for D331 met performance criterion c): 'the opportunities selected provide access to fair and reliable assessment';
- the performance evidence does not fully cover all performance criteria. For example, if there is no disagreement in drawing up the assessment plans submitted for D331, performance evidence will not cover performance criterion e): 'if there is disagreement with the proposed assessment plan, options open to the candidate are explained clearly and constructively';
- the performance evidence does not cover the full range. For example, the evidence requirements for D332 state that three or more of the sources in range statement 1 must be covered by performance evidence; the remainder may be covered by supporting evidence. (Range statement 1 is 'natural performance; simulations; projects and assignments; questioning; candidate and peer reports; candidate's prior achievement and learning'.)

Supporting evidence can be collected in a variety of ways, including:

- a log kept by the assessor-candidate, recording processes and judgements made in line with the performance criteria;
- answers to oral questions on how the performance criteria were met and why the judgements were made;
- written or oral answers to 'what if?' questions, tackling contingencies and range classes not fully covered by performance evidence.

3.2 | Witness testimony

Witness testimony may be used as evidence towards Units D32-D34 in two ways:

- as performance evidence – either the main performance evidence, or as supporting evidence (for example, to cover 'gaps' in range);
- as confirmation of the 'ownership' of evidence (for example, to show that an assessor-candidate did draw up the plan with a candidate).

The assessor of the assessor-candidate will need to judge how much value to place on each witness testimony, and decide whether other performance evidence will be needed. Under no circumstances can witness testimony be accepted as the only source of evidence for Units D32-D35. At the very least, the assessor-candidate will need knowledge evidence covering the knowledge specification.

The following is general guidance on witness testimony for Units D32-33. Assessors should also ask awarding bodies for specific guidance.

3.2.1 | Key principles for using witness testimony as performance evidence

Witness testimony may be used as valid evidence of an assessor-candidate's performance against national standards only when:

- it is provided by an individual who is in a position to make valid comment on the assessor-candidate's performance;
- the content of the testimony is relevant to the national standards;
- the testimony is authenticated – it should include the author's signature, address and telephone number (for example, be written on headed paper);
- the use of witness testimony is justifiable (for example, if an assessor-candidate is working in a remote area, or in a confidential situation.)

Examples of good practice show that testimony should also include:

- a statement explaining the witness' professional relationship with the assessor-candidate (for example, line manager, colleague);
- a description of a specific activity carried out by the assessor-candidate;
- an indication of when, and in what context, the activity was observed;
- an indication of how the testimony relates to the performance criteria and range statements of the element(s) for which the assessor-candidate is claiming competence.

3.2.2 | Judging witness testimonies

The assessor is responsible for judging:

- the validity of a witness testimony;
- the value of each testimony in terms of its contribution to the assessor-candidate's overall evidence. Can it be taken as the main performance evidence, or only as supporting evidence?

In order to make these judgements, the assessor needs to find out how well the witness understands NVQ assessment and the national standards. The assessor needs to know whether the witness is:

- 1) an individual with occupational expertise, who is familiar with the national standards and working towards D32/D33 (for example, an assessor-candidate); or,
- 2) an individual with occupational expertise, who is familiar with the national standards (for example, a line manager, colleague or member of staff); or,
- 3) an individual with occupational expertise who is not familiar with the national standards (for example, a work associate, member of staff or trainee); or,
- 4) an individual who comes into broad contact with the assessor-candidate, and who is not familiar with the national standards (for example, a supplier, customer, client or NVQ candidate).

The greater a witness' understanding of the national standards, the higher value the assessor can give to their testimony - this is a 'sliding scale' effect. For example, an assessor might accept:

- evidence from a witness in category (1) as main evidence of performance;
- evidence from a witness in category (4) as part of supporting evidence.

The assessor also needs to look at the value of a witness testimony in terms of its place within the overall 'package' of evidence for a unit or units. Relying too heavily on witness testimonies – rather than assessments made directly by a qualified assessor – may undermine the validity of the final assessment decision. Therefore, it is not desirable for the majority of performance evidence for a D3 unit to be witness testimony.

3.2.3 | Further checking

The 'key principles' outlined in paragraph 3.2.1 must be checked. When looking at a witness testimony, the assessor may also wish to:

- clarify some points made in the testimony;
- confirm with the witness that it is genuine.

This might involve contacting the witness directly. (This is why it is essential to include a name, address and telephone number in the testimony.) Verifiers will also need to be able to check some witness testimonies as part of their normal sampling activities.

3.2.4 | Using witness testimony to confirm 'ownership' of evidence

Witness testimony can also be used to confirm that evidence – in particular, product evidence – is an assessor-candidate's own work. For example, witness testimony could confirm that an assessor-candidate had:

- developed and agreed the assessment plans in D321 or D331;
- made the judgements contained in records provided for D332.

When used in this way, a witness testimony should still include:

- the witness' signature, address and telephone number;
- a note on the professional relationship between the witness and the assessor-candidate.

3.2.5 | Using witness testimony as evidence for D34 and D35

The principles and guidelines above also apply to using witness testimony as evidence towards an internal verifier-candidate's achievement of D34.

In the case of D35, witness testimony is acceptable to 'fill gaps' where evidence is still needed for some parts of the standards, as long as:

- the majority of the external verifier-candidate's performance evidence is directly assessed by a qualified assessor;
- the witness testimony follows the 'key principles' given in Section 3.2.1.

Witness testimony towards D35 could come from another external verifier or a monitoring officer from the awarding body, or possibly a centre co-ordinator or internal verifier.

3.2.6 | Other benefits of witness testimony

Providing witness testimony can be a good way for 'witnesses' to start working towards their own achievement of D32. When appropriate, witnesses can be encouraged to:

- develop competence in assessment;
- eventually achieve their own unit certificates.

In this way, they will gain recognition for the important part they play in the assessment process, and the organisation will have a larger pool of qualified assessors operating to national quality standards.

NVQ candidates being assessed by the assessor-candidate could also be asked if they are willing to provide witness testimony. For example, they might provide testimony on how the assessor-candidate carried out assessment planning with them, using D321 and/or D331 as the basis of their comments.

3.3 | Simulations

Strictly speaking, any source of evidence other than a candidate's normal work activities is a 'simulation' in NVQ assessment terms. Certainly, different people use the term simulation to describe many different sources of performance evidence other than naturally occurring work activities. The sources called simulation include models, test rigs, rehearsals, role plays, work-based projects, off-the-job projects and paper exercises.

Different types of simulation are appropriate for different types of competence. They may be used to provide performance evidence, evidence of knowledge, or both.

3.3.1 | Simulation and the D3 Units

There are three ways in which simulation may occur during preparation for qualifying as an assessor or verifier:

- simulations to practise skills during development sessions;
- information on simulations as a source of evidence for NVQs;
- evidence from simulations towards D32-35.

Practising and developing skills

Simulations such as role plays of feedback sessions and observations of fellow-learners during training workshops provide excellent opportunities for assessor-candidates to practise and develop skills needed for competence in a 'safe' environment. However, problems can arise when they are used as a source of evidence for certification (see below).

Simulations as a source of evidence for NVQs

'If/when/how' simulations can be a useful way to assess aspects of occupational competence towards an NVQ or unit. Assessor- and verifier-candidates should be given information on using simulations as a source of evidence for NVQs. The depth of information they need will depend on their future role. For example:

- verifiers (internal and external) need to be able to give advice to assessors on simulations, so need a thorough grounding;
- assessors aiming for, and operating to, D32 do not need full knowledge of simulations. They need to be able to plan with their candidate(s) when to use pre-set simulations, and administer pre-set simulations correctly. However, they do not need to design simulations and should ask advice, for example, from their verifier, when pre-set simulations are necessary;
- assessors aiming for, and operating to, D33 do need an in-depth understanding of when and how simulations can be relevant and realistic. They are expected to plan directly with their candidate(s) a wider range of opportunities for collecting evidence (see D331 range statement 1).

All qualified D32-D35 holders need to be aware of the main points about simulations and NVQs, in case issues of simulation crop up with candidates.

It is useful to introduce information on simulations in relation to the particular NVQ(s) or unit(s) which the assessor-candidates or verifier-candidates will be assessing or verifying. Different sectors need to use simulations in different circumstances. For example, simulations can be helpful when there are problems assessing some care and legal competences because of confidentiality; or when there are problems assessing aircraft pilots or gas fitters because of safety factors.

Using evidence from simulations towards D32-35

Many people feel that it is inappropriate to use evidence from simulations towards Units D32-D35.

NCVQ and the NVQ awarding bodies offering the units:

- consider that the most valid evidence comes from assessor-candidates carrying out real assessments against real NVQs;
- expect that assessor-candidates' main performance evidence will come from real assessment against NVQs or NVQ units.

However, in exceptional cases, some evidence from simulations may be used, although it is important to check first with the awarding body (normally through the external verifier).

People preparing for the introduction of NVQs in their organisations may use simulations to help them get to know the national standards for assessment and/or verification; develop skills and knowledge; and build up their confidence. However, problems often occur inadvertently when people are keen to get going, and wish to gain their D3 unit certificates before they have candidates to assess. It is difficult to show valid evidence of occupational competence in assessment or verification to the national standards before 'real' assessment of 'real' candidates.

The following notes have been written to clarify what is and is not acceptable in terms of evidence from simulations for D32-D35. This builds on the joint guidance leaflet *Implementing the National Standards for Assessment and Verification* (published February 1994), and on the assessment guidance with the revised D32-D35 units.

3.3.2 | Simulation and D32/D33

Wherever possible, the main performance evidence for D32 and D33 should come from assessing NVQs or units. However, this may not always be possible in cases where:

- an NVQ does not yet exist;
- the assessor-candidate does not yet have actual NVQ candidates to work with;
- the assessor-candidate does not have enough candidates to meet entirely the full range of evidence requirements;
- confidentiality means that no 'real' performance evidence can be made available.

Under these circumstances, three approaches could be taken to assessment. All of these could be considered to be forms of simulation (as they are not 'real' assessments of 'real' NVQs), and all may provide some valid evidence towards the D3 units.

- 1) Using standards other than NVQs/units for assessment.
- 2) Using 'mock' assessments.
- 3) Where contingencies and aspects of range have not occurred in performance, and supporting evidence is required to fill the gaps.

It is important to check with the awarding body (normally through the external verifier) before using any of these approaches.

Using standards other than NVQs

The guidance with the revised D32/D33 units defines 'national standards' as:

'National Occupational Standards developed and endorsed by an industry Lead Body or Occupational Standards Council, which are grouped into Units and used to design National and Scottish Vocational Qualifications.

National standards agreed as the specifications for GNVQs and GSVQs.

National standards formatted accurately in outcome terms, in line with the required characteristics of the above qualifications.'

It is vital that an assessor with D32 and/or D33 is able to use the NVQ framework competently. Therefore, within their 'package' of evidence, all D32/D33 assessor-candidates must show that they can assess accurately against national standards within the NVQ framework. The guidance with the revised D3 units states:

'The combined performance and knowledge evidence must demonstrate that the assessor-candidate can assess accurately for SCOTVEC/NCVQ accredited/validated qualifications.'

The joint guidance leaflet issued in February 1994 set out the following guidance for cases in which an NVQ does not yet exist:

'Best practice expects that assessor-candidates will provide their performance evidence directly from assessing the above awards (NVQs/units etc.). Where these are not yet available, drafts or pilot versions recognised by the Employment Department (now DfEE) as part of the standards development programme may be used.

'Where such national standards or drafts do not yet exist within the assessor-candidate's area of occupational expertise, as an interim measure some performance evidence would exceptionally be accepted from assessments made against other standards.'

The need for this interim measure is decreasing as more NVQs become available. In the future, assessor-candidates will no longer need to use evidence from assessments made against standards other than NVQs/units.

If standards other than NVQs or draft standards are used to provide performance evidence, assessor-candidates need to provide substantial supporting evidence of their ability to operate within the NVQ framework and criteria. This supporting evidence might come from realistic simulation, or from thorough checking of their knowledge and understanding.

Evidence which comes from assessments of GNVQ units should also be treated as evidence from a simulation. Assessor-candidates using GNVQ assessments as performance evidence are still required to provide further evidence that they are able to assess within the NVQ context.

Using mock assessments

Mock assessments occur when an assessor-candidate assesses real evidence against NVQ standards, without having 'real' NVQ candidates aiming for national certification.

It is not acceptable for mock assessments against standards other than NVQs, or against draft standards, to be used as the main performance evidence for D32 or D33. However, mock assessments against other standards might contribute some supporting evidence to fill 'gaps'.

Mock assessments against NVQ standards are often used:

- in training sessions;
- in standardisation/consistency sessions, in which internal verifiers ask *their* assessors to judge the same pieces of evidence to reach consistent assessment decisions within a centre.

In these contexts, mock assessments are valuable tools. However, they are not sufficiently realistic to provide the main performance evidence of an assessor-candidate's competence for D32/D33. This is because important pressures of working with real candidates, in real environments, are usually missing. These include:

- the critical importance of the assessor-candidate's performance to the real NVQ candidate;
- the ongoing relationship between the assessor-candidate and the NVQ candidate, rather than the one-off assessment which usually occurs in mock assessments (for example in D321 performance criteria f, g and i);
- the assessor-candidate's responsibility for making autonomous decisions and following the NVQ assessment procedures correctly (for example in D321 performance criteria b, c and d);
- the adaptations assessor-candidates need to make to meet different candidates' needs while maintaining national standards (for example in D322 performance criteria a, b and j);
- the logistics and practicalities of a real setting: location, time, documentation and so on (for example in D322 performance criteria e and g);
- the relationships and links with other people;
- verification procedures.

Mock assessments would only provide sufficiently realistic simulations to give evidence of competence in D32/D33 if these pressures of the real assessment environment could be reproduced.

For similar reasons, as stated in the guidance for the revised units, role play is not an acceptable source of main performance evidence for providing feedback on NVQ achievement. In training sessions, learners often take it in turn to perform an activity, observe and give feedback, and observe as a trainee assessor. This is not realistic enough to provide valid evidence of competence for D324 or D333.

If a centre feels it needs to use mock assessments, it should obtain advice and approval from its awarding body (normally through the external verifier).

Covering gaps in the range and contingencies

Simulations could offer a useful way to provide evidence to 'fill the gaps' of range or contingency performance criteria not covered by real assessments of real NVQs.

For example, for D324 and D333, an assessor-candidate may have evidence of giving feedback to an inexperienced candidate (range statement 2), where the evidence is sufficient to decide that s/he is competent (range statement 3) in three NVQ elements. In this case, it would be acceptable to provide supporting evidence to cover other aspects of the range. So the assessor-candidate might give feedback against non-NVQ standards or in mock assessments, to an experienced candidate (range statement 2), where the evidence is insufficient to make a decision yet (range statement 3).

Alternatively, it may be appropriate (and more economical) to check the assessor-candidate's knowledge of how to adapt feedback to suit these aspects of range as stated in the assessment guidance.

3.3.3 | Simulation and D34

Simulations can be used in a similar way for D34 as for D32 and D33. NCVQ and the NVQ awarding bodies expect that, in order to be valid and cost-effective, internal verifier-candidates' evidence will normally come from real verification activities for NVQs/units. Setting up sufficiently realistic simulations to provide the main performance evidence for the elements of D34 is difficult, and can be expensive.

For example, D342 performance criterion d) states that 'information is stored securely and disclosed only to those who have a right to it'. To simulate this situation would mean replicating pressures such as senior staff requesting information they don't have authority to see, and balancing the cost of storage in a commercial environment against security. A full environment 'rehearsal' would be needed, which would be expensive and difficult to set up.

Work shadowing of internal verifiers can be a useful approach, to develop internal verifier-candidates. It may also give internal verifier-candidates opportunities to collect some evidence. However, as in D32 and D33, realism must be carefully considered, in particular accountability and ongoing relationships.

As validity is less of a problem for some aspects of D342, it is more acceptable to use simulations to give supporting evidence to cover 'gaps'. For example, NVQ candidates may not have reached the stage where submissions for the award of certificates need to be made. In this case, it would be acceptable for internal verifier-candidates to use mock information and submission records to cover that aspect of the range.

If centres plan to use simulations for D34, they should first obtain the approval of their awarding body, which will check that the simulations are valid and make sure that their use is justified.

3.3.4 | Simulation and D35

D35 should only be available to external verifiers operating on behalf of an awarding body. Performance evidence must come from:

- providing information, advisory and support services on NVQs to centres;
- verifying NVQ assessment practice and centre procedures;
- maintaining records of visits and providing feedback to the awarding bodies about NVQs.

Assessment for D35 should not involve simulation, except to fill 'gaps'. As stated in the D35 guidance notes, there are some performance criteria describing contingencies which may or may not occur. In such cases, the external verifier-candidate's knowledge may be checked. Alternatively evidence may be used from previous experience in non-NVQ-related verification work to fill gaps, or some evidence may be used from simulations. For example:

- for D353, national issues (range statement 2) could be covered by a case study if it did not occur naturally;
- for D352, the contingencies of problems (performance criterion h) and disputes (performance criterion i) could be handled through a realistic simulation, although care would be needed in setting up the simulation to ensure validity.

The awarding body will give guidance on specific cases.

3.4 | Knowledge evidence

Knowledge and understanding are fundamental to competent performance, and candidates need to provide knowledge evidence as well as performance evidence.

The revised Units D32-D35 contain agreed national specifications of the knowledge which assessor-candidates (and verifier-candidates) must demonstrate before they are assessed as competent. In some cases, knowledge evidence may also be used to cover range classes and contingency performance criteria (as mentioned above).

The knowledge evidence for the D3 units lists:

- the areas or topics considered essential for each element;
- what assessor-candidates need to demonstrate for each topic (how the knowledge is applied in the element, and the depth or breadth of knowledge needed, for instance: why it is important to.....; how to judge.....).

To make sure that the knowledge component is assessed consistently in all centres, assessors need to judge the assessor-candidates' knowledge against the national specifications without adding to or diminishing them. It can be helpful for assessors to share interpretations.

External verifiers can also provide advice, and will sample knowledge assessments to ensure consistency between centres. Therefore it is important to keep clear records of the knowledge assessed, both that inferred from an assessor-candidate's performance, and that specifically checked. In the latter case, a record of questions asked and answers given will be needed.

3.4.1 | Sources of knowledge evidence

The assessor needs to be confident that the assessor-candidate understands and can apply the knowledge listed.

Knowledge evidence is usually obtained by:

- **inferring knowledge and understanding from performance.** Since competence involves a combination of performance and knowledge, much of the knowledge specified will be apparent in the assessor-candidate's performance evidence and will not need double-checking. An efficient starting point is to identify the knowledge which has already been demonstrated in performance. This provides the most valid check of the assessor-candidate's application of knowledge.
- **specific knowledge checking.** When knowledge is not clear from performance, assessors need to check it specifically. Oral and written questions, based clearly on the knowledge specified, are often useful. Projects based on case study materials may be used, but can be more costly to set up and don't provide such clear evidence of knowledge if a particular point needs checking.

The methods used to collect knowledge evidence should not add unfairly to the competence being assessed. For example, asking assessor-candidates to input answers into a computer would add to the competence in Units D32-D35. Therefore it would be unfair to make it mandatory to use a computer.

3.4.2 | Cross-referring evidence records

As with all NVQs, the same performance and knowledge evidence can be used wherever it is relevant – there is no need to duplicate. It is important for records to include clear cross-references, particularly when evidence is used towards several elements.

The assessment guidance with the revised D32-D35 units indicate some of the common circumstances in which assessor-candidates' evidence may contribute to several elements. However, these are by no means the only possible occasions for efficient evidence collection.

4 | The assessment process

The elements of D32 and D33 are based on the four key stages in the assessment process. In practice these often overlap or repeat their cycle. The stages are:

- **PLANNING** assessment with the candidate to identify the most effective combinations of evidence to suit the candidate's circumstances;
- **COLLECTING** performance and knowledge evidence (spontaneously occurring and planned);
- **JUDGING** each item of evidence (with any supporting information) against the element(s) being assessed, to check that it is authentic, valid and meets the full national standard;
- **DECIDING** whether the overall 'package' of evidence provided by the candidate is sufficient to demonstrate competence against the element(s) being assessed.

Feedback is given to the candidate at all relevant stages of this process.

Note: The term 'package' of evidence does not imply that the evidence needs to be parcelled together in one folder or box (see 'Recording evidence and assessments', below).

4.1 | Assessment planning

Assessors need to plan NVQ assessment with all candidates (including assessor-candidates). Planning assessment:

- helps identify opportunities for collecting evidence effectively and efficiently (see below);
- encourages candidates to be more actively involved in their own assessment process, without raising barriers to those for whom such involvement is inappropriate.

Planning discussions should cover how to collect evidence which occurs spontaneously within the assessor-candidate's normal work. The most effective and efficient combinations of evidence are often a mixture of evidence from assessments planned in advance as well as evidence from situations which could not be anticipated.

Individual activities and pieces of evidence can often contribute to several elements. 'Common evidence' of this kind is strongly encouraged, and should be considered when planning assessment. This is sometimes referred to as integrated assessment.

When introducing people to NVQ assessment, it is often helpful to look at examples of their work activities, and relate these activities back to one or two units. This helps candidates understand which parts of their work might provide evidence. Once people become familiar

with the standards, they can be encouraged to look across elements to see where else their work activities and evidence might be relevant.

4.2 | Collecting evidence

As elements D322, D323 and D332 make clear, collecting evidence is ultimately the assessor's responsibility. Where appropriate, candidates may be encouraged to take on some, or even most, of this responsibility to give them a sense of ownership of their own assessment process. However, this should not be mandatory as, in many cases, it adds to the competence specified. Therefore it is important that assessor-candidates do not get the impression from their D3 unit experience that all NVQ candidates must collect and collate their own evidence.

Where candidates do wish to play an active part in collecting evidence, it is important that there is enough flexibility to enable them to do this. Records and portfolios are often seen as paper-based, but this need not be the case. Collecting paper-based evidence can cause problems for candidates who, for example, have a visual impairment, or do not have access to a photocopier. In fact, evidence may not need copying at all, as long as a clear reference is made in records to what it is, how it relates to the element(s), and where it can be found.

It is not normally appropriate for a separate piece of evidence to be provided for each individual performance criterion, other than for the contingencies identified. In fact, a single piece of good quality evidence may provide evidence towards several elements, sometimes across units.

4.2.1 | Approaches to collecting evidence for the D3 units

The following are two examples of possible approaches to collecting evidence for the D3 units.

- A** Observation of the assessor-candidate's performance by an assessor, supplemented by one-to-one questioning, is a valid way to collect evidence of competence. The assessor's records of these observations and the assessor-candidate's answers to questions form a valid 'package of evidence'. The assessor may take some of the responsibility for structuring the assessor-candidate's evidence.

An assessor-led approach like this has cost implications in terms of assessor time, and may not encourage candidate involvement. However, it has the advantage of not imposing additional demands on candidates for whom taking responsibility for collecting and structuring their evidence is a barrier to fair assessment.

- B** The term 'portfolio approach' is sometimes used in NVQ assessment, particularly when the candidate takes a greater level of responsibility for the process of collecting and structuring evidence.

It can help to reduce the assessor's workload, and can promote the assessor-candidate's involvement in, and responsibility for, their own assessment where appropriate. However, it can result in complaints of bureaucracy and raise barriers to fair assessment, rather than achieve its intention of increasing access to assessment.

A candidate-led portfolio approach can be particularly appropriate for collecting evidence when direct observation of an assessor-candidate's performance by an assessor is difficult to arrange.

For example:

- where the candidate wishes to use evidence from activities outside normal work;
- when night shifts are involved;
- when the candidate works in a remote area.

For development purposes, it is useful for the assessor-candidates' files to contain action plans, development plans, learning and practice materials, formative assessments and so on. However, when evidence is being presented for assessment for national certification of the D3 units, developmental items such as these are not required.

It is strongly recommended that, as evidence is collected, it is reviewed regularly (by the assessor-candidate, or the assessor with the assessor-candidate) to select the evidence which proves the assessor-candidate's competence most effectively and efficiently, ensuring that records are clear, accessible and relevant. This is particularly helpful before verification.

4.2.2 | Appropriate evidence for assessment

The following are examples of evidence which is appropriate for the assessment of D32 and/or D33 units:

- assessment plans;
- the assessor-candidate's records of assessments they have made of candidates' competence;
- feedback sheets from candidates;
- assessment records of the assessor-candidate's competence made by the assessor.
For example:
 - observations of feedback sessions between the assessor-candidate and their candidates;
 - the assessor's judgements of assessment plans prepared by the assessor-candidate;
 - the assessor-candidate's replies to questions demonstrating knowledge.

On the other hand, it would not be appropriate for assessment of D32 or D33 to require items such as:

- training notes;
- lesson plans;
- long descriptive essays;
- details of why an assessor-candidate wishes to achieve the unit(s).

Confidentiality may mean that some documents are not available for use in a candidate's evidence for assessment. In such cases, an alternative, but equally rigorous, arrangement will have to be agreed. The awarding body should be approached when advice is needed (normally through the external verifier).

4.3 | Judging evidence

Judging is about each item of evidence – together with any supporting information.

The key questions are:

- **Is it authentic?** Is it really the candidate's own work or contribution? This is particularly important when looking at product evidence and evidence from prior achievements.
- **Is it valid?** Is it really relevant to the element(s) being assessed? Does it cover part of the range? And is it in line with the evidence requirements or knowledge specifications?
- **Is it to the national standard?** Are all the relevant performance criteria met (for performance evidence)? Does it demonstrate the application, depth and breadth specified in the element(s) (for knowledge evidence)?

If an item of evidence is authentic, valid and to the national standard, it should be accepted as part of the candidate's overall 'package' of evidence.

4.3.1 | 'Relevant' performance criteria

To be judged as meeting the national standard, each item of performance evidence with its supporting information must meet all the performance criteria which are relevant on that occasion. Supporting information is information about how the performance evidence was produced.

Usually, the only criteria which might not be relevant to every assessment occasion are 'contingency' criteria (so-called because they cover situations which do not always occur).

For instance, in D322 the following performance criteria relate to contingencies:

- pc f) 'any pre-set simulations and tests are administered correctly';
- pc i) 'difficulties in judging evidence fairly and reliably are referred promptly to an appropriate authority.'

In addition, performance criterion g): 'The assessor is as unobtrusive as is practicable whilst observing the candidate', would only occur during observed performance.

All other performance criteria in D322 must be met by each item of performance evidence, plus any contingency criteria which do occur. The guidance notes with the revised D3 units identify the contingency performance criteria.

It is only appropriate to generate separate evidence for a particular performance criterion if contingencies do not occur in performance, as indicated in the assessment guidance notes.

Otherwise, it is not appropriate for a separate piece of evidence to be generated for each individual performance criterion. Not only is 'fragmented' evidence of this sort inefficient, it is also often wrong. It only shows that a candidate achieves the standard on a piecemeal basis, rather than being consistently competent to the full national standard specified in the element(s).

For example, an assessor-candidate might put forward for D331:

- a plan;
- supporting information on how it was produced, which indicated that the assessor-candidate had not considered how the opportunities provided 'access to fair and reliable assessment' when drawing up the plan (performance criterion c).

In this case, the plan could not be accepted as meeting the national standard, even if it met all the other performance criteria. It would not be acceptable for the assessor-candidate to submit that plan with an explanation of how they would provide access to fair assessment in the future.

If three plans are required, for instance, it must be possible to prove that each plan is to the national standard, either directly from the plan itself, or in combination with supporting information.

4.3.2 | Judging knowledge evidence

As with all aspects of NVQ assessment, it is important that all assessors in the NVQ system judge knowledge fairly and reliably. When assessing for NVQ certification purposes, assessors must use the national knowledge specification accurately – adding to it or omitting some parts would alter the national requirement unfairly.

So although it is acceptable to build upon the knowledge specification for staff development or other organisational reasons, only the knowledge specified nationally must be used as the basis for judging knowledge when carrying out NVQ assessment.

When assessing knowledge for NVQs, it is the *application* of knowledge which must be assessed, not theoretical knowledge in isolation. So questions like 'why did you choose to do ...?' and 'what would you do if...?' are often useful.

For example, for D324 it would be acceptable to ask:

- What would you do if your candidate didn't provide enough evidence to cover the range?
- How would you vary your feedback to an inexperienced candidate?
- What do the internal and external verifiers need you to record and how?

whereas it would be beyond the national knowledge specification, and too far removed from application, to ask:

- Who developed the theoretical models of constructive feedback?
- Name the different types of records.

The way in which the assessor asks any questions which are necessary can also affect the validity of assessment. It is particularly easy to ask leading questions when trying to encourage candidates to articulate what they know, but this must be avoided so that a candidate's real knowledge and understanding are judged.

Leading, and therefore unacceptable, questions for D324 might include:

- If your candidate had not covered the range, would you advise them of what else they needed and possible sources?
- You would treat an inexperienced candidate much more gently and make sure you emphasised what they had achieved, wouldn't you?
- You need to record assessments and evidence in sufficient detail for the verifiers. How would you do this?

4.4 | Deciding

Deciding is about looking at the overall 'package' of evidence, rather than individual items.

The key questions for each element are:

Is it sufficient?

- Does the evidence overall show that the candidate sustains the standard of performance specified under workplace conditions, rather than showing a one-off demonstration?
- Does it include performance evidence?
- Does it meet all the evidence requirements?
- Do the items of evidence between them cover the full range and any contingencies identified in the performance criteria?
- Do the items of evidence demonstrate that the candidate has the knowledge and understanding specified and is able to apply it – either inferred from performance or checked specifically?

Is there proof of current competence?

- Does the candidate meet the national standard at the time of the assessment? This is particularly important when looking at evidence of prior achievements.

4.5 | Recording evidence and assessments

A clear record to support a candidate's claim to competence is likely to include information on:

- what the items of evidence are;
- where they can be found;
- how they relate to the element(s);
- the assessor's judgements of them;
- the assessor's decisions on the package of evidence;
- any verification sampling.

The recording process needs to match the candidate's evidence to the standards but it is not necessary to provide an individual piece of evidence for each performance criterion. Wherever possible, a piece of evidence should be cross-referenced to a number of elements or units.

It is important that assessor-candidates do not gain the impression from their D3 unit experience that copies of all evidence must be collected in one 'portfolio' by all NVQ candidates. Keeping records in one place can save time and effort, and assessor-candidates may wish to keep copies of all their evidence neatly together (for example, to show at a job interview). However, neat presentation of evidence is not a requirement for the assessment of most NVQs or for the D3 units. Competence, not presentation, must be assessed.

It is sensible to make copies of evidence and assessments – particularly if they have to be sent to a different site. Records and copies should be securely stored, and issues of confidentiality resolved.

5 | Access to assessment

In order to maximise access for all candidates who can meet the required standard, a variety of routes to suit different circumstances needs to be available in the system.

Assessor-candidates with little experience of NVQ assessment may welcome a programme which covers not only assessment, but also their identified development needs through training courses, supported open learning, and so on.

Assessor-candidates who already have substantial experience of NVQ assessment are likely to need an 'assessment-only' route, so that they can achieve the unit(s) without having to attend training unnecessarily.

It is particularly important that evidence of prior achievement is taken into account, and that an 'assessment only' route is available for experienced candidates. Unit D36 contains the national standards for APL Advisors (Accreditation of Prior Learning). This may be useful for advisors who help candidates, including assessor-candidates:

- identify prior achievements relevant to the target vocational qualifications;
- present evidence for assessment.

D36 does not cover the actual assessment itself; this is specified in D33.

Customers of the NVQ system – both organisations and individuals – need clear, accurate information on what is available, so that they can make informed choices to suit their needs. For example, if a centre is only able to offer one route, it should make it clear to enquirers that this is the

only route available at this centre. It must not imply that this is the only route acceptable to the awarding body, when this is not in fact the case. In the same way, awarding bodies should not insist that centres use the awarding body's own training programme for assessors and verifiers.

Where centres and awarding bodies are offering training, they should make it clear exactly what is included in the price they are quoting, and explain what, if any, charges may be extra.

As with all NVQs, it is also important to give clear and realistic information on the commitment needed for someone to achieve a credible national qualification, preferably linked to the individual's identified start point and any development needs. For example, some candidates have apparently gained the impression that 'you can just get an NVQ by doing your job'. This then results in surprise and frustration when the national occupational standards require candidates to look beyond their job to cover the range, for instance, or to understand the implications of a piece of legislation for their work.

In the case of the D3 units, people with no prior experience of NVQs or assessment should not be given the impression that they can attend a two-day course and come away with a certificate for the necessary D3 unit(s). Two-day courses can be useful as a training and practice session, but are extremely unlikely to provide much valid evidence of competence for national certification against the D3 units.

6 | Mutual recognition of certificates of unit credit between awarding bodies

As with credit transfer of all identical units within the NVQ system, awarding bodies recognise each others' certificates of D3 units as proof of assessor or verifier competence. Evidence should not be reassessed for this purpose when, for example, a qualified assessor applies to work for another awarding body, or to assess a different NVQ or level. Centres should make assessor-candidates aware of the transferability of their certificates of unit credit.

However, D32 and/or D33 units are not the only requirements to act as an assessor within the NVQ certification system. Assessors also need:

- an understanding of the national standards and evidence requirements of the NVQs to be assessed;
- sufficient occupational expertise to be able to make an accurate judgement of candidates' competence against the NVQ standards. The precise requirements in relation to occupational expertise vary between sectors and roles, and are specified by the awarding bodies. (In the case of the D3 units, see 'Assessing assessor-candidates' below);
- an understanding of the awarding body's systems, policies, and so on.

It may be that the evidence which assessors present for their D32/D33 assessment can also be used to demonstrate some, if not all, of these aspects.

Assessors do not operate in isolation. To operate as an assessor within the NVQ certification system, it is also necessary to be appointed by an approved centre.

7 | Assessing assessor-candidates

The requirements for the assessors of assessor-candidates are the same as those listed above. In other words they need :

- the appropriate D3 unit(s) for their role, as set out in the *Common Accord* (now incorporated into the *NVQ Criteria and Guidance*), to be implemented within the agreed timescales;
- an understanding of the national standards and the evidence requirements of the D3 unit(s) they are assessing;
- sufficient occupational expertise to be able to make an accurate judgement against the national standards of assessment of the assessor-candidate's competence in assessment;
- an understanding of the awarding body's systems, policies and so on.

The most appropriate way to specify the occupational expertise needed is in terms of the appropriate D3 units. The basic principle is that assessors and verifiers are competent in the units they are assessing or verifying.

The table below sets out the detail of what the principles of assessment/verification competence and occupational expertise mean in practice for those involved in assessing and verifying the D3 units. It covers the units suggested for assessors, internal verifiers and external verifiers of D32-35. In some cases, the same units serve both purposes.

- Column 1 sets out the **requirements for assessment/verification competence**. The units are a requirement for assessors and verifiers of all NVQs, as stated in the *Common Accord/NVQ Criteria and Guidance*.
- Column 2 gives **guidance on other units which are recommended for assessment/verification competence**, as specified in the *Common Accord*
- Column 3 gives **guidance as far as occupational expertise is concerned, not a requirement**.

For the role of...	1: Assessment/ verification competence required by the <i>Common Accord</i> (Requirement)	2: Assessment/ verification competence recommended by the <i>Common Accord</i> (Recommended)	3: Appropriate occupational expertise shown by achievement of: (Recommended)
Assessor of: D32 D33 D34 D35	D32 and/or D33 D32 and/or D33 D32 and/or D33 D32 and/or D33	D32 and/or D33* D32 and/or D33* D32 and/or D33* D32 and/or D33*	D32 D33 D34 D35
Internal verifier of: D32 D33 D34 D35	D34 D34 D34 D34	D32 and D33 D32 and D33 D32 and D33 D32 and D33	D32 D33 D34 D35
External verifier of: D32 D33 D34 D35	D35 D35 D35 D35	D32 and D33 D32 and D33 D32 and D33 D32 and D33	D32 D33 D34** D35

*Note: Where assessors have either D32 or D33, it is recommended that they should obtain the other unit.

** Note: It is recognised that external verifiers may have difficulty in achieving D34 because of cost, lack of opportunity to gain experience, and/or contractual requirements and potential conflicts of interest.

7.1 | Assessing assessor-candidates who are assessing in other NVQ sectors

Assessors qualified with the D32/D33 unit(s) can assess candidates within their own sectoral expertise, including assessor-candidates. Holding a D32 or D33 qualification is sufficient evidence of the assessor's expertise in the occupational sector of assessment, and of the ability to apply the national standard correctly. For example, an assessor with D33 and sectoral expertise in engineering maintenance could assess directly an assessor-candidate who was assessing a candidate against an engineering maintenance NVQ.

Assessors qualified with D32 or D33 may assess D32 assessor-candidates who are assessing an NVQ outside the assessor's sectoral expertise. In such cases, the assessor must have access to verified information that the assessments being made by the assessor-candidates against the national sectoral standards are accurate, fair and reliable. This could, for instance, come from the internal verifier dealing with the NVQ. For example, an assessor might be assessing an assessor-candidate who was, in turn, assessing a candidate for a chemical processing NVQ. If the assessor had no experience of chemical processing, then the internal verifier for the chemical processing NVQ could be asked to check that the assessor-candidate was interpreting the chemical processing standards accurately.

In both cases, best practice would require that newly qualified assessors without previous experience of NVQ assessment should be given the opportunity to build up their expertise, and should be closely monitored by a qualified verifier during the early stages of assessing assessor-candidates.

This document has been prepared on behalf of the Assessor and Verifier Working Group and its representatives from BTEC, City & Guilds, DfEE, EnTra, EOSC, HCTC, LCCI, PEI, RSA, SCOTVEC and NCVQ, in consultation with all the NVQ awarding bodies for these units. (May 1996).

