2018/19

**CDN Essential Skills SLWG – SQA Work Based Core Skills Development**

**Findings and Recommendations**

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**CDN Essential Skills SLWG – SQA Work Based Core Skills Development**

**Findings and Recommendations**

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The group met to explore how SQA Work based Core Skills are delivered across the sector; to identify areas of good practice, challenges that present a barrier to good practice and to make recommendations based on the findings.

# Challenges and limitations

The following points are the current challenges encountered across the sector and have been categorised into general themes:

## Centre / Assessor / Candidate / Employer approach:

* 1. ‘Not my job’ mind-set; assessors can display a lack of confidence in assessing (teaching) core skills, as not in subject area and see as out with their expertise.  
     This mind-set cascades to the candidate and the value of Core Skills is vastly reduced.
  2. Core Skills can be seen as an “add-on” and not integrated with the delivery and assessment of the overall award. This can lead to timing issues and Core Skills not assessed until the very end.
  3. Individual units present different challenges; Numeracy is generally seen as the most challenging to find naturally occurring evidence compared with Communication and ICT. Problem solving and working with others are often straightforward to capture with the overall award.
  4. MA frameworks: requirement to cover core skills across all occupational areas. In a few instances it is viewed that not all are relevant, e.g. ICT in Bricklaying, however, there is evidence to support the impact of lack of numeracy / digital skills on employment and life chances.
  5. Where core skills have already been achieved and certificated, e.g. at school or at NQ level then this is accepted re MA.
  6. In contrast to a class-taught, NC Core Skill, there is a lack of incentive to stretch candidates to the next level, so comprising student centred approach
  7. Candidates can find it challenging to identify skills evidence, and often find it easier to answer a specific question, which was what they became familiar with in school.

## Resources and support available to assessors:

* 1. Providing an ASP can be counter-productive as evidence from Qualification Verification visits shows that these are used as “off the shelf” and relied on as “being safe” for a qualifications Verification visit; in place of naturally occurring evidence workbooks. Case Studies and exemplification can be over-used and become the standard assessment
  2. Support packs offer vague, outdated and very general context which some assessors find challenging; for example, what qualifies as a complex ICT skill for level 6?
  3. Lack of resources/CPD for work place assessors in relation to Core skills is limited (this is not the case for the vocational element) exemplification can be over-used and become the assessment.
  4. Challenging to get naturally occurring evidence for all Core Skills evidence requirements, so may need “top-up” with additional questioning.
  5. Assessor qualifications (L&D9) do not include preparation for assessing work based core skills (only for assessing the curriculum area)
  6. SQA development sessions for core skills work based assessors – but haven’t offered for a while; there was an SQA workplace communication webinar in September 2018 which can be accessed on their website; There is an opportunity for further webinars to be offered (progress has been made on this, see 5.2)
  7. It can be difficult in colleges difficult to bring people together across multiple campuses.
  8. Prior verification of tools of assessment is not available for work-based units. This can make it challenging to encourage innovation and creativity in capturing evidence as many Centres then rely on the ASPs.

## Frameworks and drivers:

* 1. It is a Scottish Government driven target to ensure all 5 Core Skills are achieved in all apprenticeships.
  2. No prior accreditation for workplace skills – evidence has to be generated in the workplace; there remains uncertainty regarding the APL rules.
  3. There is confusion on how Core Skills are mapped across SVQs by Sector Skills Councils (SSC), candidates are then asked to identify specific evidence for core skills. SQA do not certificate mapped Core Skills, as there is no evidence and no quality assurance. If SSC maps skills and this is approved by SQA accreditation and meets work based standards then Core Skills are recognised and do not need separate evidence.

## Good Practice

* 1. Some Modern Apprentices include robust evidence of project work, e.g. video evidence which is uploaded and then sent to customer following MOT – where Communication and ICT skills are captured.
  2. Course team in college to support work placement assessors? D&G: 3 team leaders oversee work placements; D&A the subject areas don’t come together; Perth College UHI – staff development event for assessors run by Core Skills IVs on how to develop skills and capture evidence naturally where possible and using contextualised tools of assessment to fill any gaps; Core Skills induction for all new workplace assessors.
  3. SQA have delivered a Communication webinar which is now available on the SQA website; <https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/files_ccc/SCQFCommunicationCoreSkillsWebinar290818.mp4>  
     and accompanied by a Q&A sheet: <https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/files_ccc/CommunicationCoreSkillsQA290818.pdf>

## Developments during the SLWG

* 1. SDS MA event had a Work based Core skills theme; and focused on the importance of gathering evidence as it occurs naturally – this has had a noticeable positive impact\* on Centres’ approaches to capturing evidence as it occurs naturally.

\*SQA EVs reporting marked difference in evidence being gathered naturally and fewer instances of the ASP being used as an off the shelf.

* 1. SQA delivered a fully subscribed Core Skills Webinar on ICT and Numeracy, this is now available on the SQA website accompanied with a Q&A sheet:   
     <https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/files_ccc/CoreSkillsNumeracyandICTWebinar020519.mp4>
  2. At Perth college UHI (Motor Vehicle) progress has been made for assessors to take responsibility for assessing core skills (previously taught as timetabled classes within the college) this has involved all assessors engaging in CPD activity – aim to have all assessors complete all 5 Core skills to level 6. Currently being mentored/supported by core skills team.
  3. UHI have formed a new Work based Core skills group: are collating resources and exploring range of contextualised materials available.
  4. KM - SDS has provided a proposal to include a Core Skills Surgery for Healthcare Modern Apprenticeship in coming Academic Year (Appendix 1)

## Recommendations

* 1. Qualification verifier approach to focus on supporting centres to encourage gathering naturally occurring evidence during EV visits; where pre-prepared, standalone assessments are used, this should be reflected in a recommendation to use naturally occurring evidence where possible and good practice recorded where naturally occurring evidence is being used.   
     Action - SQA (S Riddell) to add this as an agenda point for Core Skills Verification Group Standardisation meetings.
  2. Assessor competency – to encourage Centres to take responsibility to ensure that assessors are confident to be innovative in capturing core skills as they occur in the workplace. This could be achieved by promoting workshops and “Core skills surgeries” providing opportunities for Centres to have access to Qualification Verification support (as per SDS proposal above 5.5)
  3. Set up a mechanism which encourages assessors to share and discuss ideas and exchange practices, how to tackle the tricky areas of work place assessment of Core Skills – eg setting up a Jisc group, SQA U Share area set up for Core Skills

# Appendices

## Appendix 1 Karen Murray, Skills Development Scotland

**Proposal to pilot a Core skills delivery surgery for Healthcare Modern Apprenticeship providers**

**Background and rationale for proposal**

The College Development Network(CDN) hosted a short life working group tasked with reviewing the delivery of core skills in work-based learning/Modern Apprenticeships to make appropriate recommendations for improvement. This group identified that intelligence from SQA external verification activity, Education Scotland and Skills Development Scotland quality review activity has recognised that there is a potential improvement area for the contextualisation and delivery of the work-based core skills through naturally occurring evidence in the workplace. This particularly relates to the assessment of ICT and numeracy. However, the group also noted that potentially some workplace assessors lack confidence about straying too far from the SQA Accreditation exemplar core skill assessments which they know will meet SQA Awarding Body core skill assessment standards. It is thought that this possibly dilutes the quality of core skill assessment practice and the value it brings for the learner in Modern Apprenticeships. The group proposed that by supporting assessors and external verifiers to work together and identify and resolve the challenges they may have in utilising naturally occurring evidence for core skill assessment, a clearer picture of what the issues are for using naturally occurring evidence would be found and through collaborative approaches, solutions could be identified. It was thought by the group that the best approach would be to pilot a collaborative workshop/surgery involving assessors/internal verifiers and external verifiers in one particular sector where there is thought to be an issue. This would provide direct support for those involved but would also act as an “action research” piece to inform wider sectors, with the learnings being shared (e.g. on online platforms/development hubs) through the participating agencies to colleges and other work-based learning providers.

The healthcare sector was chosen as it is an area where members of the group felt that the challenge was noticeable for some colleges.

**Proposal**

To deliver a short interactive numeracy/ICT “surgery” for volunteer work-based assessors/SQA numeracy/ICT external verifiers delivering healthcare Modern Apprenticeship frameworks within a “safe space” for the assessors.

Objectives:

* To develop a mutual understanding about any barriers to using naturally occurring evidence (All- SQA/providers/colleges/SDS/external verifiers)
* To share own approaches used to gather core skill evidence by work-based assessors (providers/colleges)
* To critique and suggest bespoke solutions for generating naturally occurring assessment evidence in the workplace (external verifiers/SQA core skill leads)
* To gather the high level anonymised learnings from the surgery session to share with the wider Modern Apprentice provider network (CDN/SQA/SDS)

**Next Steps**

If the group is in agreement to proceed, Karen Murray, SDS, will circulate a list of providers in the healthcare sector (~55). A mixture of colleges/independent providers could be invited to participate, aiming for a maximum number of 10 pilot participants. The event could be set up for late August 2019 or as agreed by the group. SDS will lead on the administration and coordinate agency participation and provide small budget for event catering. It would be helpful if another agency could supply location (SDS rooms v short supply).