



The Retail Sector's Assessment Principles  
for the Qualifications & Credit Framework

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## Contents

1	Key principles .....	3
2	Knowledge-based qualifications (Retail Knowledge) .....	4
3	Applied qualifications .....	4
4	Competence-based qualifications (Retail Skills) .....	5
4.1	The use and application of simulation.....	5
4.1.1	Use of simulation as an assessment method .....	5
4.1.2	Definition of a Realistic Working Environment (RWE) .....	6
4.2	The role and competence of assessors, expert witnesses and verifiers ...	6
4.2.1	The role of supervisors and managers in the assessment process....	6
4.2.2	The role of peripatetic assessors and internal verifiers in the assessment process .....	7
4.2.3	The role of expert witnesses in the assessment process .....	7
4.2.4	Occupational competence of expert witnesses .....	7
4.2.5	Occupational competence of assessors .....	7
4.2.6	Occupational competence of verifiers .....	8
4.2.7	Continuing professional development of assessors and verifiers .....	8
4.3	External quality control of assessment .....	9
4.3.1	Risk identification.....	9
4.3.2	Risk management .....	9
	Appendix 1: Qualifications covered by these Assessment Principles .....	11
	Appendix 2: Retail Skills units for which simulated activities are allowed	12

## 1 Key principles

Assessment methodologies and guidance for qualifications in the retail sector are developed and interpreted in accordance with the following key principles:

<b>Principle 1:</b> <b>Assessment should contribute to developing a skilled workforce</b>	Assessment practice in the retail sector should contribute to the development of a skilled workforce. The choice and application of assessment methods must be consistent with this principle.
<b>Principle 2:</b> <b>Systems for capturing evidence of competence should be integrated</b>	Skills formation in the retail sector, as delivered through staff induction and ongoing training and development programmes, reflects the unique character and culture of the organisation. To this end, the assessment systems for both competence-based and the knowledge-based qualifications should, where possible, be integrated with organisations' training and HR models for developing and recognising the knowledge and competence of their workforce.
<b>Principle 3:</b> <b>Assessment methods should be appropriate for the level and nature of the qualification units to be assessed</b>	Methods of assessing achievement against learning outcomes and assessment criteria must be appropriate for the level being assessed and sector expectations of candidates at that level.
<b>Principle 4:</b> <b>Evidence of competence should come from workplace activity</b>	The sector's competence-based qualifications recognise competence in the workplace. Evidence of competence should therefore come from workplace activity and aim to reflect attainment within an organisational context. Observation should be the principle method to assess individuals at Level 2, but other methods such as professional discussion and assignments may be appropriate to assess achievement at Levels 3 and above.

## **2 Knowledge-based qualifications (Retail Knowledge)**

Assessment methodologies for the retail sector's knowledge-based qualifications are developed by the Awarding Organisations that offer them. Assessment methodologies should be consistent with Principles 1, 2 and 3 as set out in section 1 of this document.

## **3 Applied qualifications**

Qualifications have been developed by Awarding Organisations and Skillsmart Retail that use applied learning techniques and are delivered through full and part-time education. Qualifications for the fashion retail sector are included in this category.

Applied qualifications typically combine theory and its practical application. They are based on shared units and are open to be offered by all retail awarding partners. The assessment methodology for these qualifications is developed by Awarding Organisations and the evidence of success gathered must include evidence of the practical application of knowledge and, where required, work placements.

## 4 Competence-based qualifications (Retail Skills)

### 4.1 The use and application of simulation

In broad terms, the retail sector holds the view that simulation is a practical and effective tool for establishing skill and understanding, where naturally occurring evidence of competence is unavailable or infrequent. However the sector feels that there is very little that can be assessed by simulation with the exception of:

- some aspects of Health & Safety and Security, and
- some basic functions that do not involve interaction with customers.

Skillsmart Retail requires that Awarding Organisations:

- a Discourage the inappropriate use of competence-based qualifications by organisations that do not assess candidates in a working environment. Competence-based qualifications are suitable only for learners who are in some form of employment in the sector, or, in a limited set of contexts, are being prepared for work and will be assessed in a realistic working environment (see section 4.1.2 below for definition).
- b Establish criteria to ensure that simulation is not used as the sole form of evidence for any unit of a competence-based qualification, except where allowed for specific units that meet the criteria set out in Section 4.1.1 of these Assessment Principles. This should be expressed in guidance for qualifications operating in the sector.
- c Provide clear guidance to centres to indicate that evidence towards a competence-based qualification should come from the workplace except where simulation is expressly allowed in the evidence requirements for a particular unit. Workplace evidence may be gathered in the context of full, part-time, casual or voluntary employment. Assessment may be undertaken in a 'work placement' (i.e. fulltime students placed into a working environment for a day per week) although supporting evidence from a supervisor or manager, associated with some form of work activity, must supplement the assessment process.

#### 4.1.1 Use of simulation as an assessment method

Assessment for competence-based units must always be carried out in a retail environment except where a Realistic Working Environment (as defined in 4.1.2) is permitted for simulation. Simulation is allowed only where:

- the assessment criteria require the learner to respond to an emergency;
- a unit covers a limited selection of basic functions which need not involve interacting with customers;
- a unit originates from another SSC or SSB and the originator expressly allows simulation to be used for that unit.

A list of those units for which simulation is allowed is appended to this document.

Evidence generated from simulated activities will not be acceptable for any other unit.

#### 4.1.2 Definition of a Realistic Working Environment (RWE)

Where simulation is used the sector requires that:

- a Simulation must be undertaken in a Realistic Working Environment
- b Awarding Organisations provide guidance for centres that requires that Realistic Working Environments:

*"provide an environment that replicates the key characteristics of the workplace in which the skill to be assessed is normally employed".*

A Realistic Working Environment (for the purpose of simulated work activities) is regarded as one that replicates a real working environment. For example, a college shop that operates on a commercial basis (i.e. it has a profit and loss account) is acceptable for retail environments but a shop laid out in a classroom environment is not. However, in order to prevent any barriers to achievement, simulated activity may be used for assessment purposes within a real working environment.

#### 4.2 The role and competence of assessors, expert witnesses and verifiers

A wide variety of factors affect the participation of organisations and take-up by individuals of competence-based qualifications. These issues relate to other matters as well as the quality of an assessment process but are central to the way assessment is managed.

To this end, Skillsmart Retail requires that the following conditions be fulfilled.

##### 4.2.1 The role of supervisors and managers in the assessment process

Wherever possible, assessment should be conducted by supervisors and/or managers in a workplace environment. Where the skill or capability of these individuals is inadequate to deliver the requirements of the organisation or the quality infrastructure, services external to the work unit or organisation may be introduced (peripatetic assessors). If the candidate is employed in the retail sector, in no circumstances may a competence-based qualification for the retail sector be delivered without the involvement of the candidate's line manager or the owner/manager to confirm the candidate's competence.

Where in-store line managers carry out the assessment or internal verification roles, retail stores with the agreement of their Awarding Organisation may choose between:

- a achieving the appropriate regulatory authority approved qualifications for assessment and internal verification

**OR**

- b demonstrating that training and development activity undertaken by the employer to prepare, validate and review these assessment/verification roles, maps 100% to the National Occupational Standards on which these qualifications are based. The mapping process **must be agreed** by the Awarding Organisation as providing the equivalent level of rigour and robustness as the achievement of the qualification.

The alternative option described in (b) above, which waives the need for the regulatory approved units in the retail sector, must be applied on an 'organisation by organisation' and 'qualification by qualification' basis. **Prospective organisations must be able to confirm that their in-house practices conform to the requirements of the NOS in association with the prospective Awarding Organisation who will be offering the qualification.**

#### **4.2.2 The role of peripatetic assessors and internal verifiers in the assessment process**

Peripatetic assessors and internal verifiers must hold or be working towards the appropriate regulatory authority approved qualifications for assessment and internal verification.

The services offered by the peripatetic assessor must complement the activity of a line manager or owner/manager and the competence of a candidate employed in the retail sector may not be confirmed without the participation of a line manager or owner/manager in the process. It is also requested that specific reference be made to auditing this provision, within external verification processes.

#### **4.2.3 The role of expert witnesses in the assessment process**

There are a number of specialist sub-sectors in retail. Consequently the sector has competence-based units relating to specialisms such as bakery, beauty consultancy and visual merchandising. In many cases assessors will not have the requisite experience of these specialist areas. In these instances the assessor **must use** an expert witness to provide evidence in confirming to the candidate's competence.

An expert witness is an experienced peer of the candidate, or the candidate's line manager. The expert witness is not consulted as a professional assessor, but as someone who is expert in the occupation to be assessed. The assessor will make the final judgement.

A list is appended of those units for which expert witness testimony is required, should the assessor lack the necessary occupational competence.

#### **4.2.4 Occupational competence of expert witnesses**

Expert witnesses can be drawn from a wide range of people who can attest to performance in the workplace, including line managers and experienced colleagues from inside the candidate's organisation. Skillsmart Retail requires that expert witnesses have proven practical experience and knowledge relating to the content of the unit being assessed.

It is unlikely that someone could become an expert in their entire job role in less than six to twelve months of being employed in the retail sector. They could, however, very quickly become an expert in the content of a single unit if this was the focus of their job role. The assessor should make a judgement as to the level of expertise held by a potential expert witness and, where necessary, confirm this with a member of the store management team.

#### **4.2.5 Occupational competence of assessors**

Assessors in the retail sector should have an in-depth knowledge of, and be competent in performing, the occupational requirements of the generic

competence-based units as well as any specialist units for which they do not use expert witness testimony.

This competence will have been acquired either in direct employment in the occupational role to which the unit relates, or in employment as a manager, supervisor or in-house trainer of employees carrying out the role.

It is unlikely that occupational competence will have been achieved in less than twelve months of employment as a retail assistant, or less than six months in a managerial position, but individuals with less experience could be considered as assessors if sufficiently occupationally competent.

#### **4.2.6 Occupational competence of verifiers**

**Internal Verifiers** (or equivalent quality assurance experts) in the retail sector must have a current understanding of the structure, content and occupational requirements of the units that they are internally verifying. This understanding will have been acquired while working directly within the relevant occupational area in either an operational or a support function.

The level of understanding should be sufficient to allow the Internal Verifier to judge whether the assessor has fully assessed learners against all the assessment criteria in the unit.

It is unlikely that a person could have gained this level of understanding in less than six months of being employed in the retail sector, but individuals with less experience could be considered as Internal Verifiers if they have the required level of understanding.

**External Verifiers** (or equivalent quality assurance experts) in the retail sector must have a current understanding of the occupational requirements of the units they are verifying. This understanding will have been acquired while working within the relevant occupational area in either an operational or a support function.

The External Verifier must understand the requirements of the units sufficiently well to be able to determine whether sufficient evidence of the learner's competence has been collected.

It is unlikely that a person could have gained this level of understanding in less than six months of being employed in the retail sector, but individuals with less experience could be considered as External Verifiers if they have the required level of understanding.

#### **4.2.7 Continuing professional development of assessors and verifiers**

All assessors and verifiers, if not currently employed within a retail organisation, will need to prove they have a current working knowledge of the sector they are assessing or verifying. This can be demonstrated by maintaining records of evidence from occupational updating activities such as:

- o Internal or external work experience
- o Internal or external work shadowing opportunities
- o Other relevant CPD activities with the prior approval of the Awarding Organisations

**Note:** Retailers who have chosen not to use the regulatory authority approved qualifications for assessment and internal verification should be encouraged to offer the qualifications as CPD where the willingness by the employer to support this additional activity becomes known to the Awarding Organisation.

### 4.3 External quality control of assessment

The application and implementation of external quality control (i.e. independent assessment, external moderation, tests and projects) has been thoroughly researched and employers felt it was neither feasible nor practical. The rationale supported by employers was that a robust quality system is based upon processes associated with risk assessment and management.

The Awarding Organisation's risk rating system must be auditable by the regulatory authority.

#### 4.3.1 Risk identification

In order to achieve the required level of external quality control, the Awarding Organisation must undertake a risk assessment of **each** prospective centre at the point of **application for approval to offer any Skillsmart Retail qualification**. The Awarding Organisation must obtain information on a number of specified 'risk factors' for each prospective centre at the point of approval. Skillsmart Retail would recommend the following, but Awarding Organisations should feel free to recommend alternative risk factors if more appropriate:

- Prospective centres' experience of operating competence-based qualifications;
- The appropriateness of existing systems, or systems developed to meet the requirements of other quality assurance regimes, for the delivery of competence-based qualifications;
- Whether the prospective centre has had a previous application for centre approval refused or their approval status withdrawn;
- The proposed ratio of candidates to assessors and Internal Verifiers, taking account of whether the assessors and Internal Verifiers are full-time or part-time in their roles;
- Whether candidates are going to be in employment (paid or voluntary), on work placements or learning in a Realistic Working Environment (see section 4.1.2 for definition).

The Awarding Organisation must have a **method of rating** the prospective centre against each of the risk factors noted above, including an overall rating that identifies the level of risk associated with the prospective centre. The rating should then be used by the Awarding Organisation in determining the degree of support during the first year of approval.

#### 4.3.2 Risk management

In order to identify and manage risk during ongoing centre operation, the Awarding Organisation must undertake a **yearly risk assessment of each active centre for the retail sector competence-based qualifications**. The Awarding Organisation must obtain information on a number of specified 'risk factors' for each centre. Skillsmart Retail would recommend the following, but Awarding Organisations should feel free to recommend alternative risk factors, which would be more appropriate.

- The turnover of assessors and internal verifiers.

- The throughput of candidates.
- The ratio of candidates to assessors and internal verifiers, taking account of whether the assessors and internal verifiers are full-time or part-time in their roles.
- Whether public funding is being accessed for the training of candidates towards/assessment of candidates for the competence-based qualifications.
- Whether candidates are in employment (paid or voluntary), on work placements or learning in a realistic working environment (see section 4.1.2 for definition).

The Awarding Organisation must have a **method of rating** each centre against each of the risk factors noted above and, also, producing an overall rating which identifies the level of risk associated with the centre. The rating should then be used by the Awarding Organisation to assist in determining the level of ongoing support for the centre, including the level of external verification activity.

## **Appendix 1: Qualifications covered by these Assessment Principles**

### ***Competence-based***

Level 1 Award in Retail Skills  
Level 1 Certificate in Retail Skills  
Level 1 Diploma in Retail Skills

Level 2 Award in Retail Skills  
Level 2 Certificate in Retail Skills  
Level 2 Diploma in Retail Skills

Level 3 Certificate in Retail Skills (Sales Professional)  
Level 3 Certificate in Retail Skills (Visual Merchandising)  
Level 3 Certificate in Retail Skills (Management)

Level 3 Diploma in Retail Skills (Sales Professional)  
Level 3 Diploma in Retail Skills (Visual Merchandising)  
Level 3 Diploma in Retail Skills (Management)

### ***Knowledge-based***

Level 1 Award in Retail Knowledge  
Level 1 Award in Retail Knowledge (Construction and Electrical Merchandising)

Level 2 Award in Retail Knowledge  
Level 2 Certificate in Retail Knowledge  
Level 2 Certificate in Retail Knowledge (Construction and Electrical Merchandising – Building)  
Level 2 Certificate in Retail Knowledge (Construction and Electrical Merchandising – Domestic Heating and Plumbing)  
Level 2 Certificate in Retail Knowledge (Construction and Electrical Merchandising - Commercial Heating)  
Level 2 Certificate in Retail Knowledge (Construction and Electrical Merchandising – Timber)  
Level 2 Certificate in Retail Knowledge (Construction and Electrical Merchandising – Electrical)  
Level 2 Certificate in Retail Knowledge (Construction and Electrical Merchandising – Climate Management)  
Level 2 Certificate in Retail Knowledge (Construction and Electrical Merchandising –Building Interiors)  
Level 2 Certificate in Retail Knowledge (Construction and Electrical Merchandising –General)  
Level 2 Diploma in Retail Knowledge  
Level 2 Diploma in Retail Knowledge (Construction and Electrical Merchandising)

Level 3 Award in Retail Knowledge  
Level 3 Certificate in Retail Knowledge  
Level 3 Diploma in Retail Knowledge  
Level 3 Diploma in Retail Knowledge (Garden Retail)

## Appendix 2: Retail Skills units for which simulated activities are allowed

This list includes only Skillsmart Retail's units. For guidance on assessing imported units, please refer to the relevant sector's own assessment principles.

SR ref.	Unit title	URN on RITS
B.01	Move goods and materials manually in a retail environment	F/503/5656
B.02	Keep stock at required levels in a retail environment	J/503/5657
B.17	Organise own work to meet a dough production schedule in a retail environment	A/503/5672
C.01	Wrap and pack goods for customers in a retail environment	K/503/5683
E.01	Recognise and report security risks in a retail environment	F/503/5723
E.02	Comply with workplace health and safety requirements in a retail environment	J/503/5724
E.03	Work effectively in a retail team	L/503/5725
E.04	Keep the non-food retail environment clean and tidy	R/503/5726
E.06	Protect own and others' health and safety when working in a retail environment	Y/503/5727
E.07	Reduce security risks in a retail environment	D/503/5728
E.11	Manage the prevention of wastage and loss in a retail environment	H/503/5732
E.18	Monitor and maintain health and safety in a retail environment	M/503/5734

### Appendix 3: Retail Skills units for which expert witness testimony is allowed if the assessor is not expert in the specialism covered by the unit

This list includes only Skillsmart Retail's units. For guidance on assessing imported units, please refer to the relevant sector's own assessment principles.

SR ref.	Unit title	URN on RITS
B.11	Hand-process fish in a retail environment	K/503/5666
B.12	Process greengrocery products for sale in a retail environment	M/503/5667
B.13	Finish meat products by hand in a retail environment	T/503/5668
B.17	Organise own work to meet a dough production schedule in a retail environment	A/503/5672
B.20	Maintain food safety while working with food in a retail environment	F/503/5673
B.21	Maintain food safety while working with food in a retail environment	J/503/5674
B.22	Monitor and help improve food safety in a retail environment	L/503/5675
B.35	Finish bake-off food products in a retail environment	H/503/5679
B.36	Glaze, coat or decorate bake-off products for sale in a retail environment	Y/503/5680
C.09	Process applications for credit agreements offered in a retail environment	F/503/5690
C.12	Promote loyalty schemes to customers in a retail environment	J/503/5691
C.17	Provide a bra fitting service in a retail environment	Y/503/5694
C.18	Follow guidelines for planning and preparing visual merchandising displays	D/503/5695
C.19	Dress visual merchandising displays to attract customers	H/503/5696
C.20	Order and position signage and graphics for visual merchandising displays	K/503/5697
C.21	Dismantle and store props and graphics from visual merchandising displays	M/503/5698
C.22	Make props and decorate fixtures and panels for visual merchandising displays	T/503/5699
C.23	Assemble visual merchandising displays	D/503/5700
C.24	Choose merchandise to feature in visual merchandising displays	H/503/5701
C.25	Manage the use of signage and graphics in visual merchandising displays	K/503/5702
C.26	Evaluate the effectiveness of visual merchandising displays	M/503/5703
C.27	Manage budgets for visual merchandising projects	T/503/5704
C.28	Contribute to improving a retail organisation's visual merchandising policy	A/503/5705
C.29	Design visual merchandising display layouts	F/503/5706
C.37	Provide National Lottery products to customers	L/503/5708

<b>SR ref.</b>	<b>Unit title</b>	<b>URN on RITS</b>
C.42	Advise customers on the fixing and care of tiles	R/503/5709
C.45	Help customers to choose alcoholic beverages in a retail environment	J/503/5710
C.47	Promote a retail store's credit card to customers in a retail environment	R/503/5712
C.52	Help customers to apply for a retail store's credit card and associated insurance products	M/503/5717
C.54	Help customers to choose delicatessen products in a retail environment	T/503/5718
C.55	Portion delicatessen products to meet customer requirements in a retail environment	A/503/5719
C.59	Demonstrate make-up and skincare products to customers at a beauty counter in a retail environment	T/503/5721
C.60	Operate a customer record card system on a beauty counter in a retail environment	A/503/5722
E.12	Produce staffing schedules to help a retail team to achieve its targets	K/503/5733