

Assessment Development Marking and Grading - CSCS and QSCS Policy



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About this Document

Agreed by the SOLAS Construction Services Executive and reviewed by the Construction Service Quality Assurance Group (CSQAG), this document applies to all training and assessment activities within the CSCS and QSCS portfolio. For practical reasons the content herein may be interpreted and communicated via other SOLAS documents and procedures.

Where there is any lack of clarity or a conflict of interpretation, the content of this document takes precedence. Requests for changes to this document should be made to the Construction Services Manager who will direct the Construction Services Quality Assurance Group to review and to advise accordingly.

This document is one of a number of SOLAS documents that has been prepared to meet the requirements of the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999 and the Education and Training Act, 2012.

The documents listed below are related to SOLAS Construction Services CSCS and QSCS assessment processes:

- 1) SOLAS Construction Services CSCS and QSCS Policy and Procedures for Managing Assessment System Malpractice x 2
- 2) SOLAS Construction Services CSCS and QSCS Assessment Governance and Processes
- 3) SOLAS Construction Services CSCS and QSCS Candidate Guide to Assessment
- 4) SOLAS Construction Services Overarching Quality Assurance Manual

1. Introduction

The SOLAS Construction Services Unit endeavours to enhance the skills and flexibility of the Irish workforce by developing and managing the Construction Skills Certificate Scheme (CSCS) and Quarry Skills Certificate Scheme (QSCS) that are customer-focused, cost-effective, efficient, and quality assured to meet appropriate national and international quality standards as applicable to the individual programme.

The SOLAS Construction Services Unit recognises qualifications, placed on the National Framework of Qualifications, assist workers to gain employment and/or gain access or progression to further education and training, while giving assurance to employers that workers have attained the prescribed standards of competence that will be needed in the workplace.

To facilitate workers to develop relevant skills and competencies through its training programmes, and to receive national recognition through an award, SOLAS ensures that its approach to assessment development, marking and grading is compatible with best practice for workplace competence focused assessment and the requirements of the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999¹ and the Education & Training Act 2012.

The policy outlined in this document sets out the SOLAS CSCS and QSCS approach to fair and consistent assessment and explains how SOLAS addresses the requirements of Awards Councils to whose awards its programmes lead. It describes the principles that underpin SOLAS CSCS and QSCS assessment, the particular emphasis on criterion-referencing and assessment of competence, the range of assessment techniques that SOLAS supports, and the approach used for marking and grading that ensures that SOLAS workers attain awards that are graded and classified in accordance with the Award Councils policies.

¹ Hereafter also referred to as “the Act”

2. The Functions of Assessment

Assessment is the process that determines the extent to which an individual has reached a level of knowledge, skill and competence. It reflects achievement of the standards of the award to which a programme is intended to lead.

Assessment involves making a judgement, which is based on appropriate evidence of a candidate's knowledge, skill or competence by comparison with a known standard.

CSCS and QSCS assessments take place in a range of settings including assessment rooms and simulated workplace environments. The objective of the assessments is to fulfil the following functions:

1. Learning:

- a) Provides feedback to candidates
- b) Stimulates and motivates candidates
- c) Builds on previous achievements
- d) Establishes candidates achievement levels on completion of a training programme
- e) Provides feedback to SOLAS on the learning outcomes of training

2. Quality Assurance:

- a) Helps monitor programme effectiveness over time
- b) Provides data indicating that the programme is achieving the required national standards
- c) Demonstrates compliance with awarding body requirements

3. Certification:

- a) Outlines achievements on completion of a training programme
- b) Grades a candidate's level of performance in terms of achievement of learning outcomes linked to awards placed on the National Framework of Qualifications
- c) Facilitates candidates progression within the workplace or further education and training

3. Main Principles that Underpin CSCS and QSCS Assessments

3.1 Fairness

SOLAS ensures that its procedures for the assessment of CSCS and QSCS candidates are fair. In this context, the organisation strives to ensure that both assessment personnel and candidates consider the assessment arrangements to be appropriate to the standards set out in the programme's training objectives and learning outcomes.

Throughout the programme, the candidates are given adequate opportunities and resources to prepare for the assessment. This implies an open system whereby prior to the assessment event, candidates are, in general terms, made aware of the expected performance criteria and assessment conditions and receive timely, constructive and appropriate feedback on their performance following assessment.

Fairness in assessment provides equity of opportunity for SOLAS CSCS and QSCS candidates in line with Equality Legislation² and is unbiased, impartial and inclusive. To help ensure fairness, it is SOLAS policy that candidates are made aware of:

- 1) The SOLAS publication "CSCS and QSCS Candidate Guide to Assessment"
- 2) The SOLAS approved training providers appeal of assessment results process

3.2 Consistency

A fair assessment requires consistency in terms of assessment procedures, including marking and grading. Consistency does not mean that learning outcomes must always be assessed in the same way.

3.3 Accuracy

Although a variety of assessment techniques can be used to measure attainment, SOLAS endeavours to ensure that any measurement carried out is accurate. To be accurate, CSCS and QSCS assessment measurements will be valid and reliable.

² Equality Act 2004, Equal Status Act 2000

3.3.1 Validity

Any assessment system is valid to the extent that it can accurately measure what it claims to measure:

- 1) Does the assessment measure the training programme's intended objectives/ learning outcomes i.e. skills, knowledge and competence?
- 2) Is the assessment technique used fit for/appropriate to the purpose? (e.g. a practical assessment should be used to assess practical skills)

In order to ensure the validity of the assessment it is therefore SOLAS policy to:

- 1) Clearly define what is being assessed
- 2) Select appropriate techniques and methods to measure candidate attainment

3.3.2 Reliability

Reliability refers to the consistency of measurement of the assessment system. Reliable assessment will produce similar results in similar conditions. The question that arises is whether the assessment will produce the same results in similar, but not identical conditions. If there is a reasonable comparison in the cases selected, then the test is deemed to be reliable. A reliable assessment produces consistent assessment decisions. To be reliable an assessment must:

- 1) Be based on valid assessment techniques
- 2) Ensure evidence is generated under consistently-applied conditions of assessment
- 3) Produce reasonably consistent decisions across the range of assessors applying the assessment in different situations and contexts and with different groups of candidates

In order to strengthen the reliability of assessment it is SOLAS policy that:

- 1) Assessment is undertaken against appropriate criteria
- 2) Assessors know and apply procedures consistently
- 3) Assessment practices are subjected to both internal and external verification as per SOLAS Quality Assurance procedures

3.4 Practicality

Practical considerations for SOLAS include the ratio of assessment time to training time, ease of use, and administrative efficiency. SOLAS also examines the cost/benefit ratio of assessment and by extension the amount of resources that can be reasonably applied for the purposes of assessment.

3.5 Transparency

Transparent assessment policies and guidelines exist within SOLAS to ensure clarity and understanding. These include clear and unambiguous definitions and requirements with regard to fairness, accuracy and reliability.

4. The SOLAS CSCS and QSCS Approach to Assessment

4.1 Criterion-referencing

In common with the learning outcomes approach adopted as part of the National Framework of Qualifications, SOLAS assessment is standards-based and criterion-referenced; that is to say it is undertaken against pre-determined standards of occupational performance that relate to the learning outcomes included in a stakeholder-agreed award standard and a validated programme.

4.2 Competence Based Assessment

In addition to being criterion-referenced, some SOLAS assessments are also competence based, because they involve certain assessment items that are designated as “essential” in order to achieve a pass grade. Assessment items are designated as “essential” only if identified as such in the related award standard and in the programme and assessment specifications prior to assessment development. The “essential” items can relate to areas such as health and safety or other critical legislative or industry standards.

5. Assessment Techniques

It is SOLAS policy to use appropriate assessment techniques. Sometimes these are already specified in the award standard by the Awards Council. It is SOLAS policy to ensure that all learning outcomes are assessed, as required by the awarding body's policy. Assessments need to include assessment techniques in sufficient number and mix to test the achievement of programme learning outcomes. The following assessment techniques are used in CSCS, QSCS and Safe Pass.

5.1 Assessments

Assessment may take the form of a knowledge or practical assessment, for example, theory and practical assessments.

5.2 Practical Assessments

A skills demonstration is used to assess a wide range of practical based learning outcomes including practical skills and knowledge, such as laboratory skills, interpersonal skills or oral language skills. The demonstration of skill including process skills related to practical achievement is assessed by means of practical test. It is essential to use practical tests where key objectives state that the applicant must demonstrate practical achievement in defined tasks.

Practical assessments are generally used where a set period of time is allocated to the candidate to demonstrate practical knowledge, skills or competence. CSCS and QSCS practical skills assessments take place in either a live workplace environment or a simulated workplace environment.

5.3 Theory Test

A theory test provides a means of assessing a candidate's ability to recall and apply knowledge, skills and understanding within a set period of time and under clearly specified conditions. Theory test format normally requires a fixed timeframe and a sight unseen question paper and range of questions. The assessment instrument for theory tests is the test paper i.e. questions or tasks devised for the candidate. A theory test may involve assessing listening and

interpretation skills (aural testing), or may involve assessment through verbal questioning (one-to-one or in a group), or written responses. Assessment instruments used for the testing of theory can include:

- I. **Short answer questions:** these require a response of limited length and may take a number of forms. Some short answer questions may seek specific words or phrases in the response. Short answer questions are generally easy to construct and with the assistance of model answers are relatively easy to mark.
- II. **Multiple choice tests/questions:** these may be used to test factual knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, problem solving and evaluation. As multiple choice questions are not open-ended, they are not useful in assessing communication skills such as the ability to organise and express information and to write fluently and quickly. Although multiple choice questions provide objectivity and reliability as regards marking, assurance of their reliability is an important factor in their design.

6 Marking and Grading

6.1 SOLAS CSCS and QSCS Policy on Marking Assessment

It is SOLAS policy that a fair, transparent and reliable marking system is devised for each assessment, which identifies assessment criteria and allocates marks to each criterion. The acceptable evidence expected in a candidate's response is indicated in a model answer or checklist that shows expected performance against each assessment criterion.

For reasons of arithmetical convenience, but mainly to assist discrimination between pass, and unsuccessful performance, the total assessment marks allocated are set at 100 or multiples of 100. Individual test weightings are determined in accordance with the weightings assigned in the assessment specification of the award standard, or as set out by the appropriate Awards Council's assessment policy. Assessment criteria are marked in a way that is appropriate to the assessment technique i.e. one mark or multiple marks may be applied to an assessment criterion as required. Assessment criteria are allocated marks that reflect their relative difficulty and the syllabus version

6.2 The SOLAS Approach to CSCS and QSCS Grading Assessment Results

For SOLAS CSCS and QSCS programmes leading to Level 5 QQI Special Purpose awards, the following grading approach applies:

- I. When a candidate has not achieved the minimum standards in an assessment, the grade is recorded as 'Referred'
- II. When a candidate achieves or exceeds the minimum standards in an assessment the grade is recorded as 'Passed' To be awarded a pass grade, a candidate must have achieved the standard listed in the assessment instrument for the particular programme.
- III. A candidate may be awarded a 'Credit Grade', if they attain or exceed the standard listed in the assessment instrument for the particular programme.
- IV. CSCS and QSCS candidates who do not attain a pass grade in the theory assessment will not be allowed to undertake the subsequent relevant practical assessment.

7. Assessment Evidence, Marking Sheets and Records

Clear marking schemes and records are a necessary part of an assessment system in SOLAS, as they help to ensure that the assessment is fair, reliable, and transparent. Assessment records include the assessor's marking sheets, summary assessment sheets, assessment attendance records, etc.

It is SOLAS policy that assessment evidence will be authentic i.e. addressed by the candidate during the assessment event, relevant to the assessment criteria and sufficient to satisfy the requirements of assessment criteria. Marking sheets are devised for the purpose of capturing, grading and approving results.

Retention of records and evidence complies with the administrative requirements of SOLAS and with the Award Councils requirements. These requirements are reflected in the SOLAS CSCS and QSCS Assessment Governance and Processes.

7.1 Endorsement of Assessment Techniques (Verification)

It is SOLAS policy that an essential part of the assessment design process is verifying that assessments work as intended. This is in order to ensure that any design flaws are eliminated prior to the assessment being used in a live assessment environment.

7.2 Assessment Review

SOLAS is committed to on-going assessment review as part of its Quality Assurance policy. Processes must be put in place to ensure that assessments are fit for purpose, and that they continue to adhere to the Principles of Assessment (see Section 3) and remain capable of determining the relevant standards of knowledge, skill and competence. This is particularly relevant where programme design or delivery may alter over a period of time.

Appendix 1

Glossary of Definitions

Assessment: the process whereby a candidate's performance is established to ensure that the knowledge/skill/competence is demonstrated to meet the requirements of the National Awards Standards for the award.

Assessment Technique: a method of assessing candidate's evidence for a particular range of learning outcomes, which can take the format of theory tests and practical tests.

Assessment Instrument: the specific test that is devised based on the specified assessment technique, such as the test paper being used in a short answer test, or the brief for a portfolio.

Award: that which is conferred, granted or given by an Awards Council and which records that a candidate has acquired a programme's standard of knowledge, skill or competence.

Awards Council: is a national body that has the power to award certificates of accreditation.

Competence: the practical application of knowledge or skill in a specific situation or context.

Knowledge: the cognitive representation of ideas, events or happenings.

Learning Outcomes: Learning outcomes describe what a candidate is expected to know, to understand and/or be able to do following successful completion of a period of learning.

National Framework of Qualifications: the single structure mechanism for recognising all education and training in Ireland. The National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) is a system of ten levels.

Programme: the process by which candidates may acquire knowledge, skill or competence. It includes courses of study or instruction, apprenticeships, training, assessment and employment.

QQI: Quality and Qualification Ireland is the national awarding body in Ireland.

Skill: the goal-directed performance of a task, underpinned by know-how of the procedural knowledge required.

Standards: Standards identify the knowledge, skill and competence that must be attained to achieve an award.

Validation: the process by which an awarding body shall satisfy itself that a candidate may attain knowledge, skill or competence for the purpose of an award made by the awarding body.