

## Simulation Using Skills Test Artefact (SUSTA)

### **Background**

A significant number of Apprentices in Scotland have had or are having difficulty completing their apprenticeships.

Due to the scope of their employer's work, they are unable to provide workplace evidence for all elements of the SVQ, or there has not been opportunity to gather naturally occurring evidence, or the opportunity for assessment on site. Apprentices have been on the programme in some cases since 2017 and have all completed a Professional Development Award (PDA).

The delays in achievements have been caused by several factors:

- Employers not covering the scope of the qualification in their day-to-day work within the anticipated apprenticeship duration.
- The global pandemic in 2020 and subsequent lock downs.
- Changes to assessment methodology introduced in Scotland in 2017.
- Slow and delayed adoption of the new assessment methodology by the delivery network.
- Industrial action within the education sector.

Solutions have been discussed and implemented from November 2020, and include:

- Use of PDA to cover the Knowledge element of the SVQ.
- Skills Tests being taken out of sequence – which has had little uptake from colleges.
- Evidence from the Skills Test to be mapped to other elements of the SVQ.
- Extended the use of Simulation.

These solutions have assisted some apprentices, however, there are still apprentices that have not yet completed their SVQ using either work-based assessment or any of the approaches listed above.

The solutions that have been in place since 2020 have had a sporadic uptake. The limited feedback received suggests that this is because it requires further time for the assessor and apprentice in college or 'off the job' and additional costs for assessor time and materials.

The construction industry has been a strong proponent to use the achievement of the PDA to cover the skills gaps in the SVQ, bolstering the evidence with professional discussions to evidence how the apprentice will apply the skills and knowledge on the job. Scottish Government, together with SQA Awarding Body and SQA Accreditation have been clear that the PDA cannot be used in lieu of workplace evidence to cover the requirements of the SVQ, except for the knowledge components of the SVQ. It should also be noted that the PDA is not a work-based assessment of competence, it is a self-regulated qualification product under SQA Awarding Body governing principles. It is not however 'accredited' by SQA Accreditation, and in most cases, this will have been completed in the first and second years of the 4-year apprenticeship programme. At this stage, the apprentice will be trained and not assessed as competent.

Another factor to the success of the solutions in place is cost. All the above has an element of additional cost either to the employer or to the college. This must also be factored into any solution going forward.

## **Context**

To complete the Scottish Modern Apprenticeship in Construction Building at SCQF level 6, an individual must complete the mandatory minimum duration of 4-years on programme, and during that time must complete the following to achieve their apprenticeship:

- Professional Development Awards (PDA) at SCQF 6 in the appropriate Construction Craft occupational area.
- Scottish Vocational Qualification (SVQ) at SCQF Level 6 in the appropriate Construction Craft occupational area.
- Integrated Core Skills

Some older apprentices starting at 22 years of age (or older) who can demonstrate sufficient prior site experience may be able to have an accelerated programme of 2 years. They will still be required to cover the elements listed above.

## **Scope**

This solution is only applicable to learners originally registered on a Construction Craft SVQ as part of a Modern Apprenticeship in Construction Building at SCQF Level 6 between August 2017 and July 2022.

All other learners must meet the full requirements of the related Assessment Strategy and Methodology.

## **Proposal**

All Construction Building apprenticeships at SCQF Level 6 have a 'Skills Test' unit that must be completed, generally towards the end of the programme. The timing of the 'Skills Test' has additional flexibilities introduced in 2020 to assist with the apprenticeship completion issues allowing for the evidence to be used against gaps elsewhere in the portfolio.

The 'Skills Test' is a prescribed assessment, both in terms of its content and the time limit to complete the practical tasks that make up the test. It is important to note that this proposal will **not** change or interfere with any of those requirements. They must remain ring-fenced to protect the integrity of the skills test ensuring both standardisation and consistency.

**'Simulation using Skills Test Artefact (SUSTA)'** builds on the skills test and provides an opportunity for a cost-effective and time-effective approach for apprentices to be assessed and complete their apprenticeships.

The assessor and the apprentice are both in the same location for the skills test and will have a completed artefact following the skills test that can then be used to build upon. The approach must be used on a one-to-one basis and driven by the individual apprentices' evidence within their portfolio.

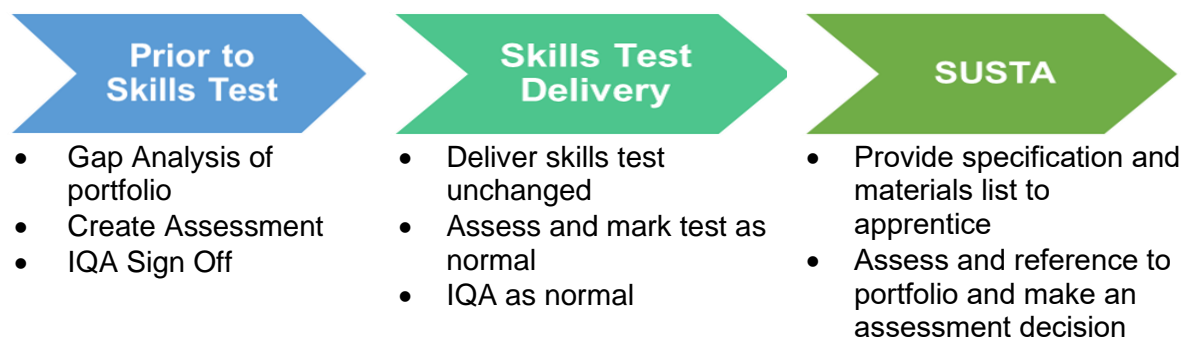
*E.g., The apprentice has gaps in their portfolio for the unit Repair masonry structures. Once the skills test has been completed and marked; the structure could be used to carry out a repair of the completed structure. The assessor could mark elements that are damaged within the structure and in need of repair, the apprentice would then set about repairing the structure as required, whilst being assessed for the SVQ portfolio gaps.*

There are additional steps that would be required, albeit, not significant and detailed below.

For absolute clarity this solution has not been designed for general gap filling, this approach is designed for apprentices where they have exhausted all assessment opportunities to obtain site evidence and have been unsuccessful. The assessor will need to demonstrate all assessment opportunities have been exhausted and this should be documented in the learner's portfolio and be made available for external verification, before using the 'Simulation using Skills Test Artefact' approach.

- In advance of the Skills Test being scheduled, the assessor would be required to conduct a gap analysis of the portfolio to identify the gaps that can be covered. The assessor should already know the progress of any of their apprentices so this should be a minimal exercise for the assessor as there is an expectation of regular contact between the assessor and apprentice to review their progress.
- This gap analysis must be auditable and clearly show where other assessment opportunities have been exhausted. The analysis must be included with the apprentice's portfolio and uploaded to MA Online.
- This approach must be not used to assess whole units.
- The assessor must write an assessment instrument that when conducted provides a realistic working environment, this could include but not limited to time pressures, this must also be retained as part of the assessment process.<sup>1</sup>
- The College Internal Quality Assurance Team must be responsible for seeking and gaining approval from the Awarding Organisation and for signing off the assessment instrument, prior to delivery in line with the Consolidated Assessment Strategy and for the appropriate amount of sampling of the assessments detailed in their Quality Policy and sample plans.
- As per standard practice, the assessor would assess the apprentice as detailed within the appropriate Assessor qualification detailed within the Consolidated Assessment Strategy.
- The Awarding Organisations will have an approval process that is supportive, transparent, and consistent for all SUSTA applications.
- Should the apprentice fail the 'Skills Test' it would not be appropriate to use the 'SUSTA' model as the apprentice may have some remedial learning and the artefact that had been created may not be a suitable starting point for simulation.

**Fig.1**



<sup>1</sup> The Consolidated Assessment Strategy provides further information, and it is strongly recommended that this work is carried out in consultation with the Awarding Body external QA team.

- Allow break for apprentice
- IQA as documented

## **Requirements**

This proposal meets the requirements of CITB's Consolidated Assessment Strategy (CAS), namely the workplace environment is not generating the evidence, the global pandemic has created an extraordinary situation, and the employers are seldomly carrying out the scope of the qualification. This has clearly disadvantaged the apprentices.

The CAS states in section 3 'simulations may only be used where candidates are prevented for gathering direct evidence from the workplace in the normal way because, circumstances occur infrequently, or long-term results are involved'.

The global pandemic special measures and other allowances were in place until the end of 2023 and are extended until the new Consolidated Assessment Strategy has received full sign-off. A formal review of all special measures will then be conducted to ensure alignment with the new Consolidated Assessment Strategy.

## **Simulation**

*'7.1 the use of simulation is permitted during the period of the COVID-19 has created an extra ordinary situation and must follow the requirements of the Consolidated Assessment Strategy, Appendix C, and any specific units that make up the qualification [where the allowable use of simulation is specified]'.*

## **Actions Required**

- CITB to obtain sign off from appropriate Awarding Bodies, SQA Accreditation, and employer representatives.
- The awarding body network and CITB Managing Agency to disseminate to their approved centre network and External Quality Assurance teams.
- Colleges to use and document this approach to assist apprentices who are at risk of exceeding their planned achievement date and/or are beyond their achievement date, after the exploration of all other assessment opportunities.
- All Managing Agencies, to monitor and manage the 'Simulation Using Skills Test Artefact (SUSTA)s' contractually and deal with under performance much earlier in the process for apprentices who are not yet due to complete.
- CITB and Awarding Bodies to provide information, support, and guidance to assessors through webinars and quality events.

***\*This proposal is in addition to all other flexibilities that are currently in place, this proposal has been conceived to enhance the solutions already assisting with the completion of overrunning apprentices.***

## **Reference Documentation**

### **Extract from the Consolidated Assessment Strategy**

#### **Guidance on the acceptable use and characteristics of simulation within SVQs during extra-ordinary events.**

In situations where a displaced, redundant, or employed candidate/apprentice (this measure does not apply to full-time FE/HE learners) will not be able to demonstrate evidence in the workplace, the Awarding Bodies can arrange with their centres, without recourse to CITB, to apply the following principles.

1. A unit must not be assessed solely using simulation, there must be other workplace evidence available to support the achievement of the unit.
2. Allow the use of simulation to cover elements of the qualification that cannot be assessed due to the challenges arising from an unprecedented event.
3. Any simulation must replicate a realistic workplace environment, including time pressures, realistic hazards, materials, and the task.
4. All simulations must be planned, developed, and documented by the centre in a way that ensures the simulation correctly reflects what the unit seeks to assess, and all simulations must follow these documented plans.
5. All simulation should involve the same personnel (real or simulated) as would normally be included (e.g., bricklayer, supervisor, labourer etc.).
6. In instances where there is currently insufficient work-based evidence to infer competence and where simulation is to be used as the assessment method to augment the existing work-based evidence, it must be supported by additional and adequate supplementary evidence which might include questioning; interviews with the learner using a professional discussion; work projects; case studies; special assignments; self-testimony and statements issued by an employer.
7. The centre must detail in writing to the awarding body the task, assessment location and additional internal quality assurance arrangements. The IQA must sign off the arrangements prior to submission to the Awarding Organisation.
8. Simulation must be approved by the Awarding Organisation prior to any simulated assessment taking place.
9. Awarding Organisations must be assured that their centres have robust systems in place to prevent collusion between candidates/apprentices by having enough scope in the 11 2020v2 Approved at ACG 01/07/2020 simulations that allows variations in the task and allows for an assessment decision to be made.
10. In situations where the candidate/apprentice has demonstrated that they have met the required standard for the unit through other practical assessments, such as NOS based units used in teaching qualifications such as Awards, Certificates, Diplomas, National Progression Awards and Professional Development Awards, this evidence can be used to supplement the gaps in NVQ/SVQ providing that the requirements listed above have been met.



CITB would strongly recommend to awarding organisation that they require their centres to explore strategies with the candidate's/apprentice's employers for obtaining work-based evidence before considering the use of simulation. Examples might include using Group Training Associations, thereby carrying out real jobs within the college/training centre and/or involvement with community projects.

Group Training Association (GTA) is the government term for a training group which also shares Apprentices. The GTA model is where several like-minded employers come together to create a separate business entity, which sources appropriate training and delivers Apprenticeships by providing work experience across the range of engaged businesses.

### ***Covid 19 Pandemic Special Measures***

<https://www.citb.co.uk/media/nfbdx4vk/covid-19-guidance-to-the-cas-v3-march-update.pdf>

### ***Document Date***

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