4.3.1   General comments

Assessment is one of the most important elements of apprentice training. The outcomes of assessment have a profound effect on an apprentice's employment opportunities and career options. The right of an institution or an individual to assess an apprentice carries with it very serious responsibilities. This responsibility extends to preserving the value of previous assessments for previous cohorts of apprentices. Poor or inconsistent assessment damages the quality of all awards made by the provider. Mentors and teachers cannot function purely as trainers and advocates for their apprentices; they must also make judgements. Any assessor making a judgement on an apprentice must be competent to do so. This may involve assessment training and independent oversight of assessments. All of the guidelines of CQAG apply fully to apprenticeship programmes.

4.3.2   Assessment on-the-job

Assessment 'on-the-job' faces particular challenges. These include some, or all, of the following: long periods of individual learning outside the formal learning environment; the individual work experiences of particular apprentices; the measurement of real outcomes in the workplace rather than simulated ones in the academy; periodic and brief observation sessions of the apprentice; disjunction between elements and sites; and the level of expertise available in the workplace. Employers and the community of practice have a key strategic interest in the effectiveness of on-the-job assessment.

Assessment of 'on-the-job' achievement should have the following characteristics:

- A continuous record of experience and assessment should be maintained for each apprentice. This record should also contain the apprentice's reflections on their experience. It should be confirmed by the workplace mentor and accessible by the other examiners;

- Provision should be made for the external observation of the apprentice;

- The apprentice should have access to timely sources of feedback on assessment and support for dealing with deficiencies;

- The assessment schedule and regime should be flexible enough to deal with differing workplace situations and adaptive to changing circumstances.

- There should be periodic face-to-face observation of the experience and achievements of the apprentice.

4.3.3 Assessment off-the-job

Assessment of 'off-the-job' achievement may take place at different sites where the programme has been delivered with some variations. Assessment 'off-the-job' should have the following characteristics:

- Identical assessment regime at each site overseen by the Coordinating Provider (format of examination, length etc.);

- Consistent range and level of assessment across each site;

- Sufficient flexibility in topics to allow for delivery differences at each site and for local examiner input, where appropriate;

- Where deficiencies in the 'on-the-job' experience have been remedied by an 'off-the-job' input, the relevant outcomes should be assessed.

4.3.4 Final assessment of competency

The final assessment of apprentices must ensure that they are immediately capable of performing the activities and carrying out the responsibilities normal to the occupation. This assessment should be:

- holistic in that it measures the general competency of the candidate.

- final in that success should mean the entitlement to an award and to registration in the occupation where this is an intended outcome of the programme.

4.3.5 Assessing the assessment

Assessing the assessment is an important element of any QA system. In a distributed apprenticeship training system, it presents particular issues of relevance, equivalence and quality of judgement. These can be dealt with by peer review of assessment and by a second reading of some examination material. Periodic reviews by outside independent assessors are also necessary to ensure that:

- the overall standard is maintained.

- no systematic differences arise between locations.

- assessment material remains relevant.

- the impact of apprenticeship disruption on assessment has been evaluated.