



Assessment Of Prior Learning

Grenada National Training Agency
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Introduction

The National Training Agency was established by the Grenada Council for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (GCTVET) Act of 2009. This body was established by the Government of Grenada to oversee the development and delivery of technical and vocational education and training. This is to ensure that the country's workforce has acquired the competence required to operate at the regional level. This is critical since in order to participate in the implementation of the proposal for the free movement of certified skilled workers which is one of the protocols of the Caribbean Single Market and Economy (CSME), all countries must put structures in place to ensure the availability of standards-driven, competency-based training, assessment and certification for the workforce as promoted by CARICOM.

All training and assessment for certification will be based on the regional qualifications framework which ensures that the system for certification of labour or workforce competencies and accreditation has integrity and credibility and facilitates the integration of the Caribbean workforce. This framework enables the credentialing of skills for individuals in the workplace and in training institutions and accommodates individuals who have prior experience, or recognition/assessment of prior learning.

The National Training Agency (NTA) has many functions including:

- Working with the private sector, public sector, education system and other stakeholders to ensure that the nation has an adequate number of artisans with the skills and competencies required for sustainable development.
- Managing the issuance of certificates in relation to technical and vocational training in the manner as may be prescribed

The scope of the activities of NTA has far reaching effects on workers and employers since the organisation will be responding to the needs of the marketplace. This will encompass training of individuals to acquire both National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) and Caribbean Vocational Qualifications (CVQs) in a variety of occupations at various levels, and the certifying and continuous upgrading of employees in the short, medium and long term.

What is assessment of prior learning?

Assessment of Prior Learning (APL) involves recognizing a candidate's previous certified and uncertified learning in order to ascertain his level of competence/qualification based on the national /regional qualifications framework. Assessment of prior learning is a process which involves the identification, documentation and assessment of learning acquired through formal, non-formal and informal learning. This includes work and life experiences, training, independent study, hobbies and family experiences. It is actually the assessment of uncertified learning gained through work, community or leisure time activities. Assessment of Prior learning is the means by which persons can reflect, identify and demonstrate their range of knowledge and skills through a valid and reliable process.

Benefits of APL

The assessment of prior learning is beneficial to the workers because it enables them to:

- become certified at their appropriate levels
- be aware of their capabilities according to the regional standards
- build their confidence levels
- identify their personal strengths and interests
- identify their knowledge and skills gaps so that they can be aware of which areas they need to develop

Assessment of Prior Learning process

1. Application of candidates

This is done by completing the appropriate application form and submitting it to the National Training Agency.

2. Initial Assessment

The candidate meets with the assessor to discuss the competency standard and the types of evidence required to be produced. This discussion will help the candidate to identify what he can do and in which units he needs to develop.

In addition the candidate will complete the self-assessment for the relevant occupational standard which will then be analysed. The date for the orientation meeting will also be set.

3. Orientation and registration

- The orientation session is done with all applicants as a group. At this session applicants will be introduced to the assessment of prior learning process and informed of what it entails.
- Introduction to portfolio development
- Registration of candidates
- Scheduling of pre-assessment meeting

4. Pre-assessment

The assessor and the candidate meet to develop the assessment plan which focuses on:

- Review of the competency standard /units to be assessed
- Selection of the type, quality and sources of the evidence to be collected
- Selection of assessment methods to be used in the assessment process
- Arranging a date, place and time for the assessment

5. Conducting the assessment

- a. The assessor uses the instrument prepared to collect the evidence required to judge competence. These are based on the plan which was made previously and includes:
 - i) the portfolio
 - ii) Other assessment methods

b. Decision/judgment

After examining and judging the evidence, the assessor makes a decision indicating whether or not the candidate is competent. The candidate's evidence for the assessment of prior learning evidence should:

- i. **Be extensive**--- cover the breadth of the knowledge and skills covered in the competency standards
- ii. **have depth**--- the evidence presented indicate the required learning

- iii. **Be current**-----the knowledge and skills provided must meet current industry standards.
- iv. **Be Sufficient**--- the evidence presented is enough to enable the assessor to judge the candidate's level of competence
- v. **Be authentic** ----the evidence submitted must be the work of the candidate seeking assessment

c. Feedback

The assessor gives feedback to the candidate on his performance. He informs him of his strengths and weaknesses and what improvements need to be made. The assessor also indicates whether or not he is competent at that point .

If the candidate is not yet competent, then re-assessment will have to be done. The Assessor will make recommendations for the training to fill the gaps in the knowledge and skills required to meet the standard before re-assessment occurs.

Appeal

In cases where the candidate is declared not yet competent in particular units, he is free to appeal to the NTA if he thinks that he was treated unfairly. The NTA will then activate the appeals process to facilitate the candidate

d. Internal Verification

The Internal Verifier will review the documentation to verify that the decision given is correct based on the evidence provided.

6. Certification

- External Verification

The External Verifier will be employed by the NTA to critically examine all documentation related the assessment of the candidate. He will submit the results of his evaluation and recommendations to the NTA.

- b. Submission of claims for certification

The claims for certification will be submitted to the Quality Assurance Co-ordinator of the NTA by the External Verifier

- c. Certificate Review Committee

The Quality Assurance Co-ordinator will submit the external verification reports as claims for certification to the Certificate Review Committee for consideration for certification. The report from this meeting will be submitted to the GCTVET.

d. Award of Certificates

The GCTVET will examine the claims as indicated in the report and grant the certification requested if all the criteria are met.

7. Post-certification guidance and support

- a. The post – certification review is conducted with the candidate
- b. Additional training initiated or process restarted

Some assessment methods

A variety of assessment methods are used in CBET. Some of these include:

- Written tests
- Oral questioning
- Professional discussion
- Performance assessment
- Portfolio
- Projects
- Aural assessment
- Case studies
- Oral test
- Role play
- Simulation
- Interviews/Questionnaires
- Third party/Witness testimony
- Peer assessment
- Reports

Explanation of some assessment methods

Case studies

A case study consists of a description of an event, usually in the form of a written presentation, tape recording, video recording, role play or dramatization based on a realistic situation. It is actually an in-depth investigation of one unit which may be an individual, an institution, a group, an organisation or a programme. The learners are guided by a series of instructions as they interpret and analyse the situation, draw conclusions and make decisions. Case studies can be undertaken by individual learners, or by small groups

of learners working together. The most critical aspects of the case study are the analysis, interpretation and conclusions drawn.

Role Plays

In a role-play, learners are presented with a situation, often a problem or incident, to which they then have to respond, by assuming a particular role. The enactment may be unrehearsed or the individual may be briefed in the particular role to be played. Such assessment is more open-ended and learner-centred than simulations. This helps the learner to try out different forms of behaviour in a safe environment and to develop new skills.

Simulations

A simulation is a structured practical exercise with specific objectives involving the organisation and completion of a product or task and which seeks to simulate or mimic real-life conditions. It is a form of assessment in which the learners carry out tasks and or solve problems which replicate the workplace in the off-the-job situation. In a simulation, the learners actively participate in the re-creation of the conditions and pressures of the real situation. It focuses on a particular activity which aims to test analytical, behavioural and decision-making skills.

Performance assessments

Assessing a process or product

Process assessment is used when the steps to complete a task are critical, safety is a major concern, and efficiency of the operation must be observed in order to determine competency. This consists of evaluating the steps which the learner goes through while performing a task.

Characteristics

- Process assessment focuses on the quality of the performance and the efficiency with which it is done.
- This form of assessment is fairly objective but demands observation and expert judgment.
- It requires more time to develop and administer.
- It can pinpoint exactly where procedural errors occurred.
- It can determine specific areas of competency.

Product assessment consists of the evaluation of the final outcome of performing the task/product.

Characteristics

- It is more objective than process assessment
- Products are measured against pre-set standards
- Appearance , function, design and accuracy are of critical importance
- Visual inspection is the main mode of assessment

Projects

A project is any exercise or investigation in which the time constraints have been relaxed. Projects are practical, open-ended and more comprehensive than other assessment assignments. Learners are usually actively involved in creating an item to be showcased or presented as evidence of competence. A significant part of the work is done without close supervision, although the assessor may provide guidance and support.

Written assignments

These comprise of various types of assessment to which candidates are expected to supply written responses.

Portfolio

A portfolio is a purposeful collection of pieces of evidence demonstrating work produced by the learner over a period of time from a variety of sources. A well-constructed portfolio incorporates a selection of evidence which is clearly benchmarked against the relevant competency units and indicates performance relating to the knowledge, skills, and attitudes in accordance with industry standards. Portfolio assessment is often used in the assessment of prior learning.

Oral questioning

Oral questions are questions which permit the learners to express themselves, sometimes giving reasons for carrying out an activity in a particular way. It is important that the assessor interprets the learner's responses correctly since some of the responses may not be in the list of pre-determined answers. Oral questions are often used when a learner has been observed while carrying out a practical task or has created a product.

Interviews

An interview is a conversation between two or more persons (the interviewer and the interviewee) where questions are asked by the interviewer to obtain information directly from the interviewee. This meeting can be specially arranged for the assessment of the skills or qualifications of a learner in which each learner is asked a predetermined set of

questions. It also provides a useful means for offering guidance and support and giving feedback.

Documentation required for APL

Assessment of Prior Learning requires verifiable evidence of performance and achievements. This includes samples of work done, letters of validation or verification from employers and supervisors, training records, references, testimonials, certificates and work records. This will be evidence that the individual has demonstrated the skills, knowledge and attitudes required for the level at which he is seeking to be assessed.

However, in cases where these are not available, an applicant is not debarred from undertaking the assessment. In such a case, if the applicant examines the competency standards and realises that he is capable of performing some or all of the tasks defined for that particular level, he will be eligible for assessment.

Responsibilities of the main persons involved in the APL process

1. NTA's Officer

This officer is responsible for the following:

- Inviting applications for the APL
- Ensuring that the standards for the occupational standards are available
- Arranging meetings with the candidate and assessor to develop an assessment plan
- Providing guidance on the gathering of evidence for the portfolio to support the competency claims.
- Maintaining the register for APL candidates

2. Assessor's responsibilities

The Assessor is responsible for the following:

- Meeting with the candidate to conduct pre-assessment activities
- Providing guidance to the candidate on the preparation of the portfolio
- Preparing the instruments required to conduct the evidence for the relevant units of the competency standards
- Collecting and judging the required evidence

- Presenting the results along with the accompanying documentation to the Internal Verifier

3. Verifiers' responsibilities

The verifiers are expected to examine the documentation presented in order to ensure that the assessments meet the established quality criteria.

4. Candidate's responsibilities

The candidate is required to do the following:

- Participate in interviews /discussions with the assessor /verifier
- Prepare a portfolio to support the claims for competency in a particular occupational area
- Undertake further training if the outcome of the assessment indicates gaps in the knowledge and skills required for the particular level for which he was assessed.

Planning the portfolio

1. Read through the standards
2. Organise units which are related into clusters
3. Decide on which cluster of units you will work on first
4. Create your Action plan- This is the list of functions and tasks for the job. These can be identified in the standards.
5. Collecting and recording evidence
 - Identifying the evidence which needs to be collected
 - Collecting the evidence needed
 - Referencing your evidence – completing the index of evidence sheet
 - Giving details of all units and elements linked to a specific piece of evidence when you use integrated assessment. Note the links on pieces of evidence as well as on the index of evidence (cross-referencing)

6. Presentation of core evidence

- Present information in a clear, consistent and legible manner
- Organise your evidence according to the job function
- Have an explanation for each function and task as indicated in the action plan. Give details; say what was done, why and how it was done. Explanations/narrations must accompany supporting evidence material. Calculations, science and communication skills should be included –show evidence of these as they relate to the functions and tasks performed.
- Reference your evidence – each item should be assigned a unique reference number

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Assessor

An assessor is a specialist who conducts evaluation to determine a candidate's learning outcomes based on established performance criteria. The assessor is a person with the required knowledge and experience in the area being assessed.

Assessment

Assessment is the process of measuring a candidate's performance against pre-determined employment standards.

Assessment Instrument

The tools that may be used to collect evidence of competency based on a unit standard.

Assessment of Prior Learning

This is an assessment process which is used to assist adult learners to reflect upon and demonstrate learning to be measured against some standard in an occupational area. Through this process, the learners provide evidence to validate their achievements which ultimately leads to certification at the appropriate level. It is the assessment and recognition of knowledge, skills and attitudes acquired through formal and non-formal education, training or experience as they relate to specific criteria as set by the examining body.

Award

An award is a certificate, diploma or degree presented to an individual or institution in recognition of the attainment of work competencies or criteria governing the occupation.

Candidate

When an application for a CVQ has been made and the registration has been accepted by the Awarding Body/NTA, the applicant is then described by the Awarding Body, and by those assessing and verifying his/her work, as a candidate for the award for which he or she is enrolled.

Caribbean Vocational Qualifications (CVQ)

Caribbean Vocational Qualifications are based on Regional Occupational/Competency Standards and the Qualification Framework approved by CARICOM's Committee for Human and Social Development (COHSOD) for the development of the regional workforce and the facilitation of the free movement of artisans throughout the CARICOM Region under the CSME.

Certificate

A certificate is a type of award designated to the achievement of set standards as determined by an area of study or skill

Certification

Certification is the issuance of a formal document recognising that a person has attained a standard of proficiency in a set of skills, knowledge and attitude that has been identified as requirements for employment.

Certification of Prior Learning

The certification of prior learning is the designation of an award based on the assessment of learning outcomes gained through life experiences.

Competency

A set of measurable skills, knowledge and attitudes obtained through formal and non- formal education, work experience or life experiences. These knowledge, skills and attitudes are required to perform work activities to the standards required in employment.

Competency-based assessment

The assessment of an individual's performance evaluated against specific learning outcomes or agreed performance standard and not against the performance of other persons. The measurement of skills, knowledge and attitudes obtained by various means, with the purpose of determining the candidate's ability to perform work activities to the standards required in employment.

Competency Standards

These are industry –determined specifications of performance which describe the skills, knowledge and attitudes required by a worker in the performance of a particular role in the workplace. They are the

building blocks for all activities in a competency-based training and certification system and are used as the basis for assessment, certification, articulation and accreditation

Current

To be deemed current, competence in the skill area should be demonstrated no later than five years prior to the assessment period.

Evidence

The variety of samples produced in the form of written documents, work samples, or demonstrations to substantiate a claim of competence attained through prior learning.

Feedback

This refers to the transfer of information from the teacher to the learner following an assessment; it's the teacher's response, indicating the correctness of an answer or action

National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ-GD)

The National Qualifications of Grenada is a certificate of competence awarded to an individual based on the attainment of competencies ascribed to the level of the skill for which the individual is assessed. The NVQ-GD is offered at five levels of attainment.

Performance Criteria

Performance criteria are statements of performance that are used as the basis of assessing an individual's competence in a skill area.

Portfolio

A formally presented document that describes learning achieved from prior experience. It is a package of assembled documented evidence that supports a candidate's claim of competence.

Portfolio Assessment

This refers to the evaluation of the evidence provided as proof of competence in a skill attained through prior learning experiences. The evidence is presented as a collection of documents that are validated against the occupational standards.

Portfolio Development

This is a process of collecting, substantiating and organising documented evidence to support claims of prior learning outcomes.

Relevance

This refers to the applicability of the assessment to the occupational standard being used.

Registration

Formal entry following admission to a programme of training, assessment or professional body in compliance with the regulations governing the organisation or profession.

Standards

Standards are the benchmark achievements used as a measure of skills, knowledge and attitudes required in performing the functions and tasks within an occupation.

Sufficiency

This refers to the extent to which the evidence covers all the performance criteria, range and underpinning knowledge in the regional occupational standard being used.

Valid

This requires that assessment must cover the broad range of skills and knowledge which are essential to competent performance. It also ensures that the judgment of competence is based on sufficient evidence . This is related to the outcomes, performance criteria, range, and evidence statements of the units being attempted by the candidate.

Verifier

A verifier is a specialist who confirms the authenticity of evidence of performance presented for the certification of candidates.

Verification

Verification is the confirmation of the authenticity of evidence of performance presented for the certification of candidates.