

Saudi Skills Standards

Code of Practice

Guide for Colleges of Excellence

September 2014

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Section 1: Purpose, scope, role and terminology

1 Introduction

Saudi Skills Standards is the primary regulatory body overseeing technical and vocational education and training (TVET) in Saudi Arabia. It performs three main functions:

- (i) The definition of National Occupational Skills Standards (NOSS) according to employer needs, and the development of qualification specifications from the NOSS.
- (ii) Assessment and certification of trainees based on learning outcomes derived from the qualifications, through both practical and knowledge-based assessments.
- (iii) Inspection and review of training centers on their ability to impart quality TVET training and assessment.

This Code of Practice (Code) sets out the Saudi Skills Standards (SSS) approach to assessment through the Colleges of Excellence (“Centers”), and its aim of transparency in its dealings with those who use its assessments. It will be subject to revision in line with SSS’s commitment to continual improvement, and Centers are asked to refer to the SSS website for the latest updates.

The Code will be supported by a number of policies and procedures documents that contain more detailed operational and administrative information.

1.1 Scope

This Code applies to all the activities of SSS in its role of designing, developing and administering world-class assessments for trainees in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

1.2 The role of SSS

- (a) SSS’s role is directed towards the assessment of learning and achievement.

- (b) SSS liaises with appropriate Government bodies in order to develop and implement its assessments.
- (c) SSS assessments are based on its current qualification and test specifications for each subject that it offers.
- (d) SSS does not act as a curriculum development body and does not produce curricula or schemes of learning and teaching.

1.3 Terminology

For the avoidance of doubt, the following terms are defined for the purposes of this Code and for clarifying the role of the SSS as an assessment body:

(a) Qualification –

The detailed specification of learning outcomes for both skills and knowledge across a particular subject. The structure is based on units that comprise performance criteria and scope.

(b) Curriculum –

The broad scheme of training and learning for each subject at each level that normally includes learning aims and objectives, academic content, specific learning outcomes or competencies, teaching scheme and teaching/learning resources. The curriculum is developed by Centers.

(c) Test specification –

The detailed plan showing the structure of a final (summative) test that covers a particular set of learning outcomes within a subject qualification.

(d) Assessments –

The tests or instruments devised and developed by SSS that are used to measure the performance of trainees in demonstrating understanding and competence across the qualifications. SSS assessments include assessment through the use

of e-portfolios, knowledge-based synoptic assessment through the use of computer-based tests (CBT), and synoptic skills-based assessment through the use of Capstones tests.

Section 2: General principles

2.1 SSS and TVET

SSS will:

- (a) support and encourage the development of a training and education community in Kingdom of Saudi Arabia dedicated to TVET improvement.
- (b) work effectively with other key stakeholders in Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to promote best international practice in technical vocational education and training (TVET).
- (c) establish and maintain links with other international bodies involved in achieving the highest standards of TVET and assessment.

2.2 Assessment

SSS will:

- (a) remain committed to excellence and best practice in assessment.
- (b) develop mutually beneficial partnerships with assessment providers worldwide to ensure that its assessments are fair to all trainees.
- (c) provide schemes of assessment to enable trainees of all abilities to do their best to enable progression to employment and/or further stages of education.
- (d) ensure that all trainees receive the results that their performance deserves when judged against the relevant assessment criteria.
- (e) use the most appropriate assessment methods to measure trainees' skills and knowledge, embracing new assessment techniques and technologies whenever they enhance the achievement of that objective.
- (f) use expert judgements and statistical evidence to set and maintain performance standards that will match to best international practice.

- (g) comply with all relevant regulatory and procedural requirements and act in accordance with this Code of Practice to ensure that assessment standards are maintained.
- (h) take steps to encourage the appropriate and constructive use of the outcomes of its assessments.

2.3 Quality

SSS will:

- (a) work with renowned international partners in order to establish, develop and maintain its capacity and capability in assessment.
- (b) use stakeholder feedback and self-assessment to target areas for development, innovation and continual improvement.
- (c) develop the skills, knowledge and competencies of its staff, and provide the work environment necessary for them to excel in their work.
- (d) ensure that for each process in its assessment system there is an audit trail that sets out the key evidence that supports the decision taken.
- (e) use an assessment system that is transparent, in that the evidence on which decisions are based will be clear, it will be possible to audit the decision-making process, and it will be possible for those making decisions to be held accountable.
- (f) engage in research and development to enhance its assessments and services.

2.4 Access

- (a) SSS assessment materials will be designed to support equal access to trainees regardless of social background.
- (b) SSS will work with Centers to make Special Arrangements to allow trainees with substantial and long-term disabilities to gain access to the assessments and to demonstrate their attainment in the most appropriate conditions without changing

the demands of the assessment. Special Arrangements available may include an extra time allowance, and the provision of specially adapted test papers or equipment. SSS will not make any adjustments to the competencies being tested in an assessment.

- (c) SSS will assess all trainees according to the same marking criteria.
- (d) SSS will assess all trainees for what they show that they know and can do, not for what they might have achieved had circumstances been different.
- (e) Special Arrangements will not give a trainee receiving them an advantage over other trainees.
- (f) Special Arrangements will not interfere with the integrity of the assessment and will therefore be restricted in certain subjects.

2.5 Support of Centers

SSS will provide clear documentation, procedures and guidance to support Centers in meeting their responsibilities relating to the conduct and administration of SSS assessments.

2.6 Integrity of assessments

SSS will protect the integrity of its assessments by detecting and dealing with cases of malpractice by trainees or Centers, or maladministration by Centers, and by requiring the security of assessment instruments at all times. Centers will be liable to audits and inspection.

2.8 Dealing with complaints and enquiries

- (a) SSS will regard the channel of communication as the Center Principal or the designated senior member of staff responsible for assessments. SSS will not communicate directly with trainees or their parents.

- (b) SSS will provide an Appeals process for those Centers that would like a trainee's result to be reconsidered. Such a process will be conducted through the Center Principal and SSS.
- (c) SSS will consider concerns about trainees' results only when they are submitted as Appeals.
- (d) Centers' concerns or suggestions about any other aspect of SSS's products or level of service will be investigated and will receive a response.

2.9 Confidentiality

- (a) SSS will maintain the confidentiality of personal information collected from Centers about trainees.
- (b) SSS will release trainees' results to third parties where required to do so by regulation or law.
- (c) In the quality assurance and analysis of results, trainees' responses and evidence will not contain personal information by which they can be identified.

Section 3: Assessment specifications

3.1 Principles

- (a) A test specification will be produced for CBT tests for each subject and level, showing the allocation of questions against the knowledge learning outcomes.
- (b) Each test specification will be based on the current qualification specification.
- (c) Test specifications are designed to cover the end-of-program assessment of each subject.
- (d) Test specifications will be made available to Centers.
- (e) The use of e-portfolios for trainees will be conducted according to detailed guidance from SSS and its international partner; Center staff will undergo training to understand and implement the e-portfolio system. The specification for the e-portfolio is to be found in the 'Skills Scope' descriptions in each qualification specification.

3.2 Development of test specifications

- (a) The development of test specifications is carried out in consultation with external bodies, trainers, subject experts, and other stakeholders.
- (b) Those responsible for the drafting and development of test specifications will be experienced both in the subject and in the assessment of trainees.
- (c) Test specifications for CBT tests will be made available to Centers and other stakeholders at least 6 months before the end-of-year assessments to which they refer.

3.3 Contents of test specifications

- (a) Each test specification will contain the structure of the assessment to be undertaken by trainees, the assessment methods and techniques to be used, and include the number of test papers, duration of each, and the marks available for each.

- (b) Each test specification will describe the knowledge and skills coverage for each unit of a qualification.
- (c) The weighting attached to each test paper and skill assessment will be appropriate for the subject, grade and assessment objectives for each subject.

3.4 Revision of test specifications

- (a) Each test specification will be subject to periodic review by SSS.
- (b) Revision of test specifications will be carried out in liaison with teachers, curriculum specialists, and other stakeholders from relevant areas of training and assessment in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

3.5 Assessment criteria for Capstones

- (a) Each Capstone assessment will include guidance material for Centers. This material will refer to the assessment specification and unit coverage.
- (b) Guidance material will include preparatory advice for Centers to administer the assessments correctly (eg resources required and timings).
- (c) Detailed grading criteria for use by assessors will be provided with the Capstone tasks.

Section 4: Computer-based tests, Capstone assessments and e-Portfolio assessment

4.1 General

SSS will ensure that its knowledge-based and practical assessments will be valid and reliable.

4.2 All assessments

(a) Validity: conformity

- (i) Assessments will be consistent with the qualification and test specification for that year in terms of aims, assessment objectives, skills, and learning content.
- (ii) Assessments will be compatible with any published specimen paper or exemplar material.
- (iii) Each individual question or task will fall within the qualification specification.
- (iv) The wording will be at a level of linguistic demand prescribed for Centers in advance.
- (v) Material used will be within the grasp of trainees for their level, and will not draw upon knowledge that is not required by the curriculum for the subject in question.

(b) Validity: avoiding irrelevant effects

- (i) Assessments will be such that the result of a test is unaffected by irrelevant effects (e.g. gender, language, socio-economic group).
- (ii) The wording will be as brief, intelligible and unambiguous as possible.
- (iii) The moderately well prepared trainee will have enough time for both reading the assessment and answering the questions or responding to the prescribed tasks.
- (iv) Material accompanying questions or practical tasks will be relevant.
- (v) Questions will not be so predictable that the paper assesses familiarity with the examination or rote learning only.
- (vi) Test papers will avoid repetition of identical questions from one year to another, except that limited re-use of multiple choice questions may occur.

- (vii) Questions submitted to SSS will be prepared exclusively for the examination, and be original.
- (viii) To safeguard the validity of assessment material, as well as its equitability and reputation, questions and tasks will be kept secure at all stages of drafting, transmission, printing and delivery, whether in hard copy or electronic format, and all staff, examiners and other assessors will be required to sign confidentiality agreements.
- (ix) To safeguard the validity of an assessment, as well as its reputation, arrangements will be made to avoid conflicts of interest for those involved in the setting of assessments.

(c) Discrimination and coverage

- (i) Assessments will be able to discriminate among the trainees for whom they are intended.
- (ii) Each question or task will contribute to the achievement of the assessment objectives. Assessments will not unnecessarily repeat assessment of the same thing, and will avoid overlap between questions and with other papers in the same curriculum in the same year.

(d) Accuracy of content and level

- (i) Assessments will be free of content errors and typographical errors.
- (ii) Assessments will conform to SSS agreed house style, which will itself comply with international best practice with regard to such matters as scientific units and the presentation of diagrams and tables.
- (iii) Any diagrams or illustrations will be clear, accurate and correctly labeled.
- (iv) A test paper will maintain the intellectual challenge and level of demand of the same test paper in previous years.

(f) Practicability factors

The duration of assessments will not be so long as to create too heavy a burden problems for Centers or trainees.

(g) Impact factors

- (i) The nature of the assessments and the material used for them will be conducive to good teaching and training.
- (ii) Practical tests will be authentic, i.e. involve real-world tasks relevant outside the classroom
- (iii) Assessments will require trainees to have knowledge of the whole curriculum and qualification specification.

(h) Other

- (i) Bearing in mind the different genders and backgrounds of trainees, there will be nothing in the content of the assessments that might be offensive or insensitive to any group.

4.3 Tests compiled from item banks (computer-based tests)

- (a) SSS will maintain a bank of items suitable for inclusion in the multiple-choice test and will commission new items from item writers regularly as required.
- (b) Each item will be classified by content and by knowledge or assessment objective, and in any other way that may be appropriate (e.g. use of verbal, numeric or diagrammatic material) in order to facilitate the compilation of a balanced test that satisfies the requirements of the qualification specification.
- (c) The aim will be to produce a test of similar difficulty for different versions of the same test or for the same test in different sessions.
- (d) Items that appear to be invalid when used in a live test will be disregarded in the computation of a trainee's mark.
- (e) After an item has been used in a live test and performed satisfactorily, it may be returned to the item bank for re-use, and post-test data will be stored.
- (f) Each multiple choice test will be compiled in such a way as to ensure coverage of the appropriate learning outcomes from the units of a qualification specification.

4.4 Capstone assessments

- (a) For each Capstone assessment there will be a group of item writers and a reviewer.
- (b) The reviewer may additionally liaise with external bodies or persons expert in national and international assessments when producing a Capstone.
- (c) Item writers and others involved in the drafting and revision of Capstones will be expert both in the subject and in assessment (or at least in the teaching and learning of the subject at the level of the examination).

4.5 Security

- (a) All assessments and associated material are confidential at all times unless stated otherwise.
- (b) Contingency plans will be in place to allow SSS to react swiftly in the event of an assessment's security being breached.

Section 5: Marking and assessment decisions

5.1 Computer-Based Tests

- (a) CBT tests will be marked automatically according to pre-defined data held in the item bank.
- (b) The raw marks obtained from test results will be converted to a grade for each subject test.
- (c) The functionality of the item bank will enable SSS to produce and analyse various data regarding results, trainee and item performance, some of this data may be made available to Centers and will enable them to identify areas of strength and weakness in trainees' performance in each test.

5.2 Capstone Assessments and e-portfolio

- (a) Marking will be conducted by assessors at each Center. Assessors will undergo training from SSS to ensure they mark to the appropriate criteria.
- (b) Centers will also appoint and use experienced assessors to act as Internal Verifiers. The role of the Internal Verifier is to sample and check the assessment decisions made by all assessors in a Center to ensure consistency and accuracy of marking. Internal Verifiers will also receive training from SSS to ensure they act according to the agreed standards.
- (c) SSS will appoint and train its own independent External Verifiers who will sample and check the work of Internal Verifiers for all qualifications in each Center, thus ensuring the highest levels of quality assurance in the assessment of practical tasks.
- (d) Marks awarded by assessors (having been confirmed by Internal and External Verifiers) will be converted to a grade for each subject for Capstone assessments and e-portfolio assessments.
- (e) SSS will ensure that trainees' original evidence for practical tasks is retained for reference until results are issued and for a sufficient period of time thereafter

to allow for the possibility of review, and to be archived to demonstrate and confirm standards over a period of time

Section 6: Reporting of results and certification

6.1 General

SSS is committed to producing results reports that are useful to the trainee and to other stakeholders. Results reports will be produced for individual trainees and will be distributed to Centers. In addition to the SSS results reports, Centers are encouraged to add results from internal assessments carried out throughout the technical training program.

6.2 Maintaining standards

- (a) Statistical methods will be used to maintain standards from one year to another.
- (b) Professional judgement may be used to supplement the statistical evidence in some subjects.
- (c) The specialists supplying their professional judgement for the maintenance of standards will have sufficient experience, expertise and training for their judgement to be sufficiently informed.
- (d) The statistical analysis of test marks and the judgements of the specialists will occur when all raw marks have been compiled, quality checks on the marking have been completed, and there is no likelihood of changes to distributions of marks.

6.3 Quality checks

- (a) The results of all assessments will be checked and scrutinised by SSS and its international partner.
- (b) The results of the tests will be checked, scrutinised and signed off by SSS's Director of Assessment and Certification.

6.4 Grading and Certification

- (a) A grade will be awarded for each of the three assessment components (CBT, Capstone and e-portfolio). The grades will be on a scale of A-D for pass, and F for fail.
- (b) After each grade has been recorded and checked, a final overall grade will be awarded by SSS for each trainee for each qualification according to a pre-determined procedure.
- (c) The final overall grade will also be converted to a GPA score by mathematical conversion.
- (d) The final trainee certification from SSS will therefore include:
 - a component grade for each of the three components
 - an overall grade
 - a GPA score

6.5 Enquiries on results

A clear and detailed procedure is available for a trainee who wishes to enquire about an individual subject result.