

# Strengthening Assessments for Learning

## Technical and Vocational Education and Training



Workshop Proceedings from 8<sup>th</sup> - 14<sup>th</sup> January, 2020 in New Delhi

## Background

The Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship of the Government of India formulated the Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY) Scheme in July 2015. Under this scheme industry relevant training is imparted to the youth, empowering them to join the workforce with the requisite skills, thereby improving their socio-economic status through improved livelihoods. The scheme undertakes this through three channels –

- (i) **Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)** that evaluates the candidate's existing skill sets, knowledge and/or experience gained by formal, non-formal and informal learning, before they are trained,
- (ii) **Short Term Training (STT)** of 6-8 weeks for trainings on 300+ job roles across 34+ sectors, getting students employment-ready and
- (iii) **Special Projects** that imparts skilling proposed directly by employers and by certain institutions to special communities and the marginalised. Over 5.7 million candidates have been assessed under the PMKVY scheme as of April 2020 across the STT, RPL and Special Projects.

Short-term skilling ecosystem conducts assessments based on occupational standards developed by Sector Skill Councils (SSCs). SSCs set standards for assessments and facilitate the Training of Assessor program (ToA). The ToA supports orientation on assessment competencies and the processes associated with assessments while also certifying assessors to conduct an assessment and providing checks on their competency in conducting skill assessments.

## The Workshop

The benefits from well-constructed assessments are many, including information on trainings imparted, outcome of skilling schemes, credible certification and more equitable access to learning and livelihood. However improper assessments can considerably harm candidates as well as other stakeholders including assessment sponsors, assessment developers, training providers, trainers, and employers.

Given the importance of assessments in the skill value chain, a series of workshops were organized by NSDC on "Assessments for Learning in Technical and Vocational Education and Training" from 8-14 January, 2020 in New Delhi.

### Box 1: Technical Collaboration: NSDC and Singapore Polytechnic International

In May 2015, NSDC and Singapore Polytechnic International entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for improving the training of trainers and assessors. The MoU would target improved program design and establishing Trainer and Assessor Academies to serve as centers of excellence and focal points for the training and continuous development of trainers and assessors for India's vocational education and training programs.



The workshops were held by NSDC in partnership with Singapore Polytechnic International (Box 1), with the following objectives:

- Synthesize the practices of key stakeholder groups in the assessment value chain within the overall skilling ecosystem in India;
- Clarify concepts and constructing key processes and mechanisms that facilitate validity, reliability, standardization and analysis in assessments; and
- Enhance capacities of key stakeholders to implement assessments.

The workshops convened 165 participants across all stakeholder groups involved in the skills assessment's life cycle viz. training partners, assessors, assessment agencies and sector skills councils (SSCs) (refer Table 1 and Box 2). Through the consultations, the facilitators helped stakeholders explore their roles and responsibilities during the assessment process, identify challenges and areas of improvement both in operations and in quality, and arrive at best practices and recommendations for each stakeholder group.

**Table 1:** Profile of Stakeholders at the Workshops

Day	Stakeholders	Number of Participants	Profile
Day 1	Certified Assessors	30	Certified assessors and lead assessors having experience of conducting assessments, nominated from SSCs
Day 2	Training Providers	20	Senior leaders from PMKVY implementing TPs, non-funded TPs, and members from Alliance of Skill Training Partners
Day 3&4	Assessment Agencies	25	Senior leaders from Assessment Agencies, selected on the criteria of volume (high and low) and empanelment with SSCs
Day 5&6	Sector Skill Council	60	Senior leaders and Assessment experts from SSCs

## Box 2: Who are the Stakeholders?

- **Assessors** are directly involved in administering assessments and scoring candidates. They interface with the trainees, training centers and assessment agencies and take care of all the administrative aspects of assessments.
- **Training partners/ centers** are responsible for mobilizing, counseling and inducting candidates into the program, training them during the course and making them employment ready.
- **Sector Skill Councils** are the awarding bodies responsible for certification, ensuring quality assurance in assessments and empanelling Assessment Agencies.
- **Assessment Agencies** are the empaneled bodies through which the SSCs design, facilitate and manage the complete assessment cycle.

## Heart of the Matter

A deep dive into respective roles played by different stakeholders helped them reflect upon the challenges faced in designing and administering assessments. This section discusses the issues that were identified during the consultations and suggested inferences and recommendations for redressal.

**Quality and Standardization of Assessments:** One of the central challenges in assessments is the lack of standardization and consistency in the various methodologies used across sectors and assessment agencies.

- **Assessment methods**, including evidence-gathering instruments, vary across different sectors, assessment agencies and sometimes even for the same Qualification Pack (QP).
- **Assessment design aspects** vary and are sometimes challenging, as the performance criteria for QPs are often very extensive.
- **Scoring of assessments** needs to be reviewed as the current system only takes into account final assessment scores and no results from assessments during the training course. There is also a need for greater transparency in the way scoring is done.
- There is also no prescribed mechanism for **re-evaluation of assessment results**.
- **Compliance with TOA** guidelines is inadequate and is of varying durations because of limited awareness of guidelines, among the implementing agencies.



### Box 3: Recommendations to strengthen quality and standardize assessments

- Strengthen stakeholder capacity to design and conduct assessments by issuing **comprehensive guidelines** to ensure standardization and credibility of assessments. The guidelines could include clearly defined roles and responsibilities, components of an assessment framework, escalation matrix and timelines, quality assurance framework, performance evaluation matrix and penalties for malpractices.
- Introduce **evidence gathering instruments** including observation checklists for practical assessments across all QPs, video recording of practical, providing answer books/ keys for theory assessments and photographs and video-recording of assessment site as supplementary evidence.
- Redefine standards to support a balance of **formative tests, project work and practical skills**.
- Explore **technology-based solutions** in assessments to reduce human subjectivity and intervention.
- Strengthen the **TOA process** and assessor efficiency, through assessor guides on do's and don'ts, assessment criteria and assessment metrics, assessment design and instructions for theory and skill practical testing and detailed requirements on specifications for lab infrastructure, equipment and consumables.
- Develop a **knowledge platform** that provides access to guidelines, lists of empaneled agencies across SSCs, blacklisted assessors and agencies, best practices and other notifications.
- Train experts on **question bank creation** and assessment design.

**Financial Viability:** There are issues around financial viability, given the different revenue sharing arrangements across SSCs, assessment agencies and assessors. Delays in payments and lack of predictability in the volume of assessment activity also hamper the financial sustainability of assessment agencies.

- **Revenue share** of assessment agencies varies between 40- 80% of assessment costs per candidate. Assessors are also usually paid a fixed daily rate per batch of students conducted for the assessment, with payments made only post completion of assessments.
- **Delayed payments** of over 90 days post assessment also cause further financial strain to the assessment agencies.

### Box 4: Recommendations to strengthen financial viability

- Re-examine existing scheme-based **disbursement** practices.
- Reduce **delays in payments** under various government programs.

### Monitoring and Quality of Assessors and Assessment Agencies:

There is a need to develop performance evaluation frameworks and incentive mechanisms for attracting good quality assessors and agencies capable of delivering superior assessments.

- **Quality of Assessors** is sometimes compromised, as good assessors are not easily attracted to the skill ecosystem, because of unpredictability of payments, lack of guaranteed assessments and low remuneration and travel to remote locations.
- **Performance Evaluation Frameworks and Incentives for Quality** are currently very limited. There are no incentives for high-quality assessors to engage in the skills eco-system.
- **Integrity Issues** Low compensation and delayed payments sometimes also lead to integrity issues, with assessors passing students without vetting performance.



### Box 5: Recommendations to strengthen monitoring and induct quality assessors

- Develop a **performance matrix** for rating assessors and assessment agencies and encouraging good performers.
- Explore opportunities for **expanding pool of assessors** including direct empanelment by SSCs and making lucrative offers to experienced and interested professionals.
- Re-examine **selection process** and **empanelment** of assessment agencies by SSCs, to ensure that quality agencies are on-boarded.
- Introduce **Quality Assurance Frameworks** for periodic checks on validity, reliability, and fairness of the assessment being conducted.
- Examine the possibility of **online assessments**, especially for skill-based practical.
- Introduce an **audit framework** for monitoring assessments by an independent agency.

- There is a need to strengthen **grievance redressal and escalation mechanism** where problems like infrastructure, non-punctuality of assessors and trainees and coordination issues can be addressed.

### Box 6: Recommendations to take care of operational and administrative issues

- Rationalise **administrative requirements** for assessors and increase focus on assessment process.
- Create **Standard Operating Procedure** for infrastructure requirements and consumables with clearly defined roles of TPs, Center Managers and Trainers.
- Develop a **structured grievance redressal and escalation mechanism** to take up recurring operational issues and coordination issues for sustained redressal.
- Establish **assessment centers** in accessible locations across various sectors and pilot assessment administration at venues separate from the Training Centre.
- Make **training projections** and targets across sectors and qualification pack for improved operational planning on assessments available.

**Operational and Administrative Issues:** Operational and administrative issues also impede the delivery of quality assessments.

- Assessments are often allotted to assessors and Assessment Agencies with little **prior planning** or advance intimation. A higher number of assessments are usually seen in the closing quarter of the financial year, leading sometimes to quality issues.
- Assessors take care of many **administrative tasks**, like handling logistics, candidates' validation, documentation, briefing, evidence gathering and feedback collection. This reduces the time available for conducting assessments.
- Despite training facilities being accredited and requirements communicated well in time, the **infrastructure**, tools, equipment and consumables made available during assessments are of varying standards. There are also issues with the IT portal for uploading of assessment results.

## Conclusion

The consultative nature of the workshop helped review on-ground practices in assessments and analyzed roles played by different stakeholders during the assessment process, challenges faced by them and identified areas for capacity enhancement to improve quality and implementation of assessments. Learnings from the workshop have helped identify interventions required for improvement in current practices, both on the operational and administrative side as well as to strengthen the quality of assessments through standardization methods, monitoring mechanisms and introducing incentives for inducting quality assessors. All these measures, when implemented, would enable improvement in the overall quality of assessments in the skills eco-system.

## Testimonials

“The consultative workshop on assessments organized by NSDC in collaboration with Singapore Polytechnic provided the much needed platform to understand the current on-ground challenges faced by the different stakeholders including Assessors, Assessment Bodies, Training Partners and Sector Skill Councils and identifying the specific areas of improvement in the current skills assessment process.

The workshop enabled sharing of the best assessment practices, international standards of competency-based assessments and different approaches to assessments. It also brought in further clarity on the entire assessment cycle including the role, responsibilities and expectations from each of the stakeholders in the skills ecosystem to ensure quality assessments.

Overall, the series of workshops were well designed, highly participative and had an inclusive approach. As the TVET System in India is still evolving, I believe this kind of initiative adds great value and must continue, to build a reliable and credible skill assessment & certification system in our country.”

Ms. Nayantara Chatterjee,  
Head – Knowledge Management,  
Skill Training Assessment Management Partners Ltd.

“The consultative workshop on assessments organized by NSDC was a wonderful opportunity to interact with the experts from Singapore Polytechnic and to better understand their best practices. It gave us an opportunity to discuss with the experts, the current challenges faced by Assessors in India. It was interesting to understand the approach taken by Singapore Polytechnic on defining assessment strategy, assessment documentation, time-allocation for assessment, etc. We would like to thank the team at NSDC for taking this initiative and look forward to participating in more such consultative workshops.”

Mr. Varun Nagpal,  
AVP - Business Development, Aspiring Minds



Transforming the skill landscape

301, 3rd Floor,  
West Wing, World Mark 1,  
Asset 11, Aerocity,  
New Delhi – 110037  
Tel: +91-11-47451600-10  
Fax: +91-11-46560417  
Website: [www.nsdcindia.org](http://www.nsdcindia.org)

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### About National Skill Development

**Corporation (NSDC):** National Skill Development Corporation, working under the aegis of Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship, is a unique public-private-partnership which aims to catalyze creation of quality vocational training ecosystem in India. The organisation provides funding to build scalable and profitable vocational training initiatives. Its mandate is also to enable support system which focuses on quality assurance, information systems and train-the-trainer academies either directly or through partnerships. Since establishment in 2009, NSDC has trained more than 2 crore people through its partnership with 600+ training partners, wide a robust network of 11,000+ training centers spread over 600 districts across the country. NSDC has institutionalized 37 Sector Skill Councils and is also implementing Government's flagship skill development schemes such as Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY), Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Kendra (PMKK), National Apprenticeship Promotion Scheme (NAPS), among others.

**CONTACT US:** NSDC's Skills Intelligence Platform at [skillsip@nsdcindia.org](mailto:skillsip@nsdcindia.org)

