

Myth Busters Crib Sheet

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1. Purpose of this document

The purpose of this crib sheet is to provide the reader with information and answers to common queries raised through the course of their work. The information in this document is drafted to support the response to mis and dis-information often spread in the complicated skills landscape and address many of the frequently asked questions about competence.

This document has been written by Sector Lead Group 10 (SLG10) for Trades and Installers and is relevant for this group. SLG 10 is referred to as the Super Sector Programme by those working in it and will often be referred to as such.

The myth's listed in this document have been identified by those members of the SLG10 Super Sector programme

2. Definition of Competence

What is the definition of competence?

Individual competence is at the heart of all efforts and activities related to building safely and the principles outlined below apply to everyone however great or small their role in the creation and management of the built environment.

- 1. Competence as SKEB** Competence is a combination of Skills, Knowledge, Experience, and Behaviour (SKEB), incorporating theoretical, practical, and behavioural elements.
- 2. Mutual Dependence with Organisational Capability** Individual competence and organisational capability are interdependent. Organisations must provide leadership, systems, and culture that enable and support competence.

[BS8670 Part 1](#) defines competence for an individual. To be considered competent means that they need to have the appropriate skills, knowledge and experience, combined with appropriate behaviours, to be able to fulfil their defined role, occupation, function or activity and carry out appropriate tasks.

I completed a Vocational Qualification, does that mean I'm competent?

Competence is not just about training and qualifications. A qualification can provide a route to gaining competence, but experience is key to developing these competencies, and ongoing development through CPD, further experience, and on-the-job training is essential to creating and maintaining a competent workforce.

I've worked in the industry for over 30 years, does that mean I'm not competent?

Not necessarily. This work is not intended to invalidate the competence of those in industry today, especially those who have led the way for the next generation.

Competence requirements may change over the course of your career, with changing technology, changing methods and priorities. It is essential to constantly develop your competencies, in every role.

It may be that an assessment of your current competence might be required, and advice given on the competencies to focus on (aligned with Industry Best Practice), providing the guidance on how to gain / improve competence, bringing you to industry agreement on competence.

3. The Industry Competence Steering Group

The Industry Competence Steering Group (ICSG) has been established to develop consensus-based frameworks that set out SKEB for a wide range of industry roles.

The ICSG is a working group under the Industry Competence Committee. This committee has been set up under the Building Safety Act 2022 and reports into the Building Safety Regulator.

The ICC supports and encourages the engagement with ICSG and the use of the frameworks.

A structure can be seen below:



More information about the ICC can be found here: [The Industry Competence Committee \(built environment\) - GOV.UK](#)

What is the Sector Lead Group 10 Super Sector programme?

SLG10 Super Sector programme focuses on the creation of competence frameworks for all those working in trades, installation and maintenance.

There may be confusion about educational standards, education routes, training, who owns what, etc.

The SLG10 Super Sectors bring together over 600 people working in the sectors, to create an agreed view of the Skills, Knowledge, Experience and Behaviours (SKEB). These Sector Groups are made up of:

Built environment participants:

- Sector employers (reflecting different firm sizes, sub-disciplines and positions in the project life cycle) across the 4 home nations
- Member-led trade associations
- Trade union(s)
- Recognised sector skills bodies
- Professional institutions (where relevant)
- Manufacturers (as and where relevant)

Other stakeholders/interested parties:

- CSCS/partner card schemes (where relevant)

- Relevant certification bodies
- Relevant awarding organisations
- Other recognised sector stakeholders (e.g., other relevant sector bodies, safety charities, bodies representing owners, users and/or occupiers of built assets)
- Representatives from Government acting as observers.

Working together with a dedicated Programme Team, the Sector Groups focus on the creation of a competence framework, which are built using the same structure, across all routes and form the baseline of competence, regardless of any existing routes.

Working example:

Rainscreen Façade Installers:

- Group established, led by the National Federation of Roofing Contractors.
- Analysis of existing educational standards and training completed.
- Gaps identified
- Working with the group, the solutions to the gaps were identified (e.g. an update to the National Occupational Standard, identification of additional training course for those working in industry already)
- Competence Framework documents created
- Now implementing those changes.

SLG10 Super Sectors are leading the way in the development of competence frameworks and this is the biggest collaboration programme in industry today.

For more information on the structure, the make-up of the Super Sector programme and contact information, please see the CLC Webpage: [Competence – Construction Leadership Council](#)

4. Competence Frameworks

What is a Competence Framework?

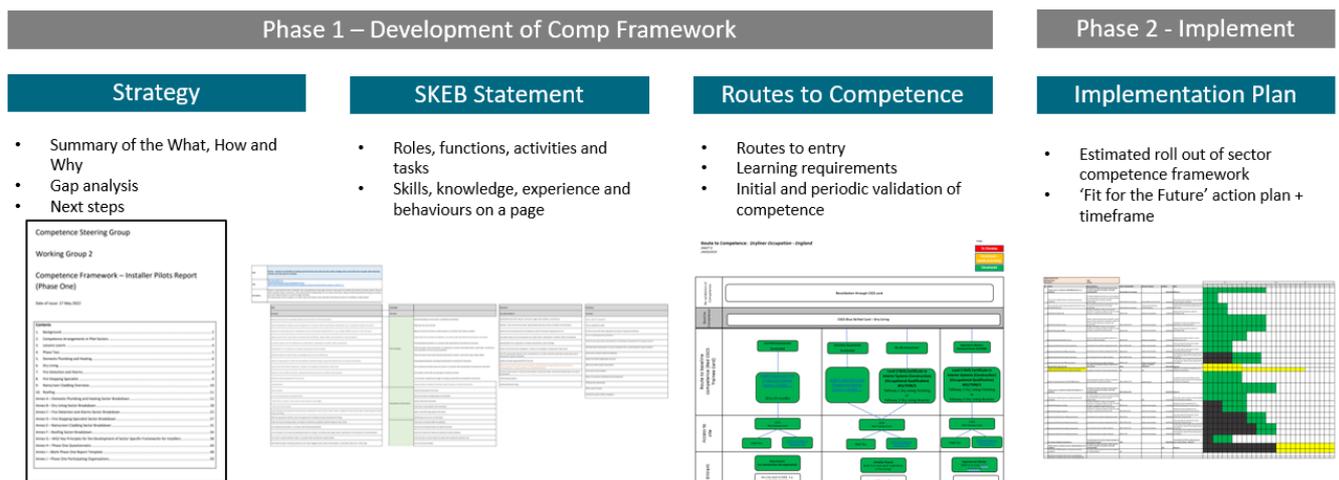
Depending on the type of role, a competence framework may look different. For Project Managers for example, the SLG7 Project Management document provides the required Skills, Knowledge, Experience and Behaviours required in one document. For SLG10 Super Sectors, focussing on installation, maintenance and trade roles, the competence framework is made up of a structured set of documents:

Phase 1 – the sector group develops the competence framework:

1. A **Strategy** – defining the scope of the competence framework and an overview of the roles covered, identifying the gaps in current competence and any identified steps required to develop and implement a fully functioning competence framework.
2. The **SKEB Statements** - outlining the skills, knowledge, experience and behaviours (SKEB) required to obtain competence in the role(s) covered by the framework.
3. A **Route to Competence** - showing the path (or paths) to obtaining initial competence, and then maintaining, individual competence in the occupation(s) over time.

Phase 2 – once the Strategy, SKEB Statement and Route to Competence has been created, the Sector Group moves into an implementation group for the roll out of actions identified:

4. An **Implementation Plan** - identifying what practical steps are required (as well as an estimated timeframe) to allow the review, development of training, and assessment requirements to be implemented. It also includes what individuals in scope to the competence framework will need to do to come into compliance with its requirements. Where a Sector Group falls within a CSCS Card Scheme, a carding journey flowchart with a visual guide is also created.



What's the end game?

An agreed framework detailing the competencies required for all roles. We want to improve competence across the board, which will, in turn, improve productivity, improve the quality of the end product, meet sustainability and Net Zero Carbon targets, and keep people safe.

Why are some stakeholders excluded from the development of the first phase?

We are committed to ensuring that the development of the competence framework is both robust and representative of the industry's needs. Given the industry-defining nature of this work, it's essential that those selected for the working groups are best placed to help establish clear and objective requirements.

To maintain the integrity of the process, we carefully consider potential conflicts of interest, whether conscious or unconscious. This is why individuals who may have such conflicts are invited to contribute through consultation and the rollout phases, rather than the initial establishment of competencies.

We recognise that this approach may not always be perfect, but our shared goal is to deliver the best possible outcomes for the industry and the public. Your ongoing support and understanding are greatly appreciated as we work together to set the standard.

5. Educational Standards

How many educational standards are there?

In the Built Environment in England, for trades and installers, there are two educational standards that inform qualifications, training, etc:

- National Occupational Standards (NOS) – developed, with industry, by the Standard Setting Body, such as the Construction Industry Training Board (CITB), Instructus, SEMTA, etc. These inform Vocational Qualifications, previously called NVQ's. NOS are industry consulted statements of competence which are freely available to be used for multiple purposes and are maintained as a public resource. NOS are also used across all four nations.
- Occupational Standards – developed, with industry, by Skills England. These inform apprenticeships, T-Levels, technical qualifications, etc. Occupational Standards are used in England only.

What are educational standards?

The educational standards help to ensure that training programmes and Qualifications from Awarding organisations can be written to a consistent level, they can also be used for producing toolbox talks on site and help Human Resource (HR) teams create job descriptions to recruit new people to the sector.

The educational standards are reviewed on a regular basis to ensure they reflect current practices, legislation, terminology etc. The standards follow a scheduled review programme to ensure they remain fit for purpose.

Who creates the educational standards?

These educational standards are developed with industry. The definition of “industry” can vary depending on the group developing them, and the occupation.

An Occupational Standard and a NOS are different educational standards and potentially may be reviewed by different groups of industry stakeholders, with a varied view of the definition of competence.

Educational standards have sometimes become disjointed over time, which is something that the Industry Competence Steering Group SLG10 Super Sector programme is trying to address during the Competence Framework development process.

6. National Occupational Standards

What is a National Occupational Standard?

“National Occupational Standards (NOS) are statements of the standards of performance individuals must achieve when carrying out functions in the workplace, together with specifications of the underpinning knowledge and understanding.”

(<https://www.ukstandards.org.uk/en/about-nos>)

The NOS underpin Vocational Qualifications and, in some cases, knowledge and training courses.

The development of these standards is led by Standard Setting Bodies (SSBs), who work under direction set by the NOS Governance Group using NOS Quality Criteria. The SSBs will engage with employers from across the four home nations (England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland) to develop and maintain the NOS. The development of NOS is regulated via the four home nations and must meet specific criteria to be approved. Once approved by the four home nations they can be viewed on the publicly accessible NOS Database.

Are National Occupational Standards qualifications?

No – NOS are used as the foundation and content for the development of some qualifications and training courses.

In England, Wales and Northern Ireland the NOS are used to build National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) units and, along with the NVQ structure, are offered to learners through Awarding Organisations. The NVQs are regulated and are viewable on the Ofqual directory.

In Scotland the NOS are used directly as the units for the SVQ. The SVQs are also regulated and can be viewed through the SQA Accreditation approved qualification directory.

Who “owns” National Occupational Standards?

Skills Development Scotland (SDS) are the managing agent for NOS on behalf of the devolved administrations. Standard Setting Bodies such as CITB will facilitate the development and maintenance of the NOS on behalf of industry.

I heard that a NOS is a legal requirement, is this correct?

Although NOS are not legal documents – qualifications such as NVQs must be based on the NOS. In Scotland, Competence Base Qualifications (CBQs) must be based on the NOS, and approved and accredited by SQA Accreditation.

Is there officially a recognised occupation / job role known as ‘NOS Assessor?’ If there is, what do you need to do to qualify to be one?

No, however there is a NOS which relates to learner Assessment

<https://www.ukstandards.org.uk/en/nos-finder/CLDL09/assess-learner-achievement>

Also in the Learning and Development NOS suite, you can see competencies required for assessment <https://www.ukstandards.org.uk/en/nos-finder?urn=&keywords=&suite=579&occupation=&soccode=&developedby=&validity=&noscategory=>

All NOS have to be approved by the UK NOS and Framework Panel before being published. At that point the NOS Quality Criteria is used to ensure that all NOS meet the required threshold. Where NOS are used in qualifications it is for the Awarding Organisation to ensure assessment of competency is compliant.

How does all of this fit into the Industry Competence Steering Group?

The NOS is used to develop Vocational Qualifications and Training courses which the ICSG Sector Lead Groups can use as a route to gain competence.

Skills England are working with the Industry Competence Steering Group, in particular the SLG 10 Super Sectors, ensuring alignment as the occupational standards created.

7. Occupational Standards

What is an “Occupational Standard”?

An “Occupational Standard” is an educational standard that outlines the skills, knowledge and behaviours required for a specific job role. These occupational standards require practical workplace experience and training or education of at least 12 months (legislation pending to allow shorter duration apprenticeships of 8 months for some apprenticeships) for a typical new entrant to become competent.

<https://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/developing-new-apprenticeships/developing-an-apprenticeship-occupation-proposal/>

The development of these educational standards is led by a group of employers, known as a “trailblazer group”, and underpin the delivery of apprenticeships (England), technical qualifications and T-levels.

An industry body, federation or association may work with stakeholders (employers, trades people, trainers or assessors) to determine and agree what should be included within the educational standard. As a group, they can review the standard, developing the knowledge, skills and behaviours alongside the End Point Assessment (EPA), where the standard has an apprenticeship. When the review is complete, they, in tandem with Skills England and DfE governance, approve and publish the standard. This process denotes that it meets the competence requirements of industry.

To ensure that the occupational standard continues to meet the needs of industry, adjustments and revisions take place periodically. This gives employers and trade bodies confidence that the occupational standard remains relevant.

Who “owns” an Occupational Standard?

From 1st June 2025, legislative responsibility was transferred from the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education to Skills England.

Will there be any changes made under Skills England?

The Department for Education (DfE) has announced Foundation Apprenticeships (subject to legislation being passed), with the first 7 published on Skills England’s [website](#) on 19th May 2025.

Other recent announcements, of which Skills England will be involved, include the new growth and skills levy which will replace the existing apprenticeship levy; some shorter apprenticeships (8 months minimum duration) and end point assessment changes (detail to be confirmed).

Are Occupational Standards a legal requirement?

In some sectors, such as Bricklaying, Steelfixing, Plastering, etc, the occupational standards are not a legal requirement but are a requirement if public / levy funding is being used. The occupational standards are also recognised by industry as benchmarks for apprenticeships or qualifications.

In certain sectors the qualification, e.g. an Apprenticeship, is required to demonstrate competence to join a legal system / structure / register.

For example, to work as a gas engineer in the UK, Isle of Man, Jersey and Guernsey, an individual needs to register with the Gas Safe Register, which is a “license to practice for installers”. For an installer to be able to register they will need to evidence that they completed an Apprenticeship (or Gas Safe Engineer specific qualification) as part of their competence validation.

How does this fit into the Industry Competence Steering Group?

Skills England are working closely with the Industry Competence Steering Group, in particular the SLG10 Super Sectors, ensuring alignment with the occupational standards.

8. Qualifications and other types of awards

What are NVQs / SVQs?

They are qualifications that incorporate the skills and knowledge that are derived from industry agreed NOS and qualification structures. The NVQs and SVQs are regulated by various qualification regulators across the home nations.

They are subject to quality control measures and can only be awarded by regulated awarding organisations. The awarding organisations have rules regarding how they operate. They have to be delivered against an agreed assessment strategy which sets out how assessment should take place. These are sometimes referred to as occupational qualifications, or competence-based qualifications (CBQs)

Is an NVQ/SVQ still a thing?

Yes, an National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) is still recognised by many sectors in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. In Scotland, it is the Scottish Vocational Qualification (SVQ). Collectively, they may also be referred to as Vocational Qualifications (VQs) or N/SVQs.

Vocationally related qualifications (VRQs)

VRQs are study-based, structured-training programs which focus on the development of practical skills and knowledge for a specific subject or a certain job. Learners will undertake written tests as well as being assessed on workplace-related activities. There are multiple skill levels when it comes to VRQs. An important distinction is that you do not need to be employed to undertake a VRQ.

In contrast, VQs are competence-based, work-related qualifications, which are primarily assessed using workplace evidence therefore you must be in active employment to undertake an N/SVQ.

VQs do not require undertaking any specific learning program or taking formal written examinations, when conducted in the workplace however in Scotland, the SVQ can also sit as part of and compliment an apprenticeship programme of off-the-job training and apprentices will often attend a formal learning programme with a training provider.

VRQ's are qualifications that appear on regulated frameworks. These generally are not based on NOS (or may only be based on part of a NOS or apprenticeship) and are not always based on site. Commonly, they are knowledge or training based qualifications.

What are 'Customised Awards?'

A customised award is a unique qualification designed to meet an organisation's specific needs, and are quality assured by an Awarding Organisation or recognised UK Awarding Body. The qualification may also be certificated.

They may support the following:

- responding to local skills improvement plans (LSIPs) and regional skills gaps
- co-designing a qualification to meet an employer/sector need

- fulfilling a competency requirement with a more tailored solution than what is available from the regulated market
- delivering the training course element of a Skills Bootcamp programme
- create progression routes
- stand out from the competition

Are they recognised qualifications?

Although they may be recognised by the Awarding Organisation and employers that use the qualifications, they may not be recognised by the wider industry or Regulatory or Standard Setting Bodies (SSBs). In Scotland, they can be placed on the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework, (if they have been through a credit and levelling exercise) giving it an official SCQF level and credit points.

Who owns them?

They are owned by the organisation that designed them, this could be an employer, federation/association, or an individual business. Customised Awards may have purposes in addition to the achievement or demonstration of competence.

How is the content quality assured?

The content, delivery and assessment should be quality assured by the Awarding Organisation or other third party organisations who will provide the certificate at the end of the training programme.

So Educational Standards are not “competence”?

Educational standards such as NOS define some of the competence requirements for a role or an activity to allow other to develop appropriate training. They set out what needs to be evidenced when an individual's competence is being assessed.

It is the role of the Qualification Assessor and Lead Internal Quality Assurer to determine whether an individual is demonstrating that the competence requirements as set out by the educational standards are being met.

The educational standards do not dictate training but any training designed to support the journey to competence must underpin the education standards. If the training does not underpin the educational standard then it is unlikely that an individual would pass the competence assessment.

How are qualifications in general created?

Awarding Organisations (AOs) may work with Standard Setting Body's (SSB) to create qualifications. This usually follows the development and review work that has been carried out by the SSB and industry. The AO will develop the materials to support the learner's journey, plus they will produce the assessment criteria and any guidance documentation that is required.

AOs may also work with individual organisations to create a qualification. The AOs may use NOS as the basis for qualifications units, but they may also create a qualification that is based on feedback and input from localised employers and stakeholders to create VRQs (see above) that are not necessarily based on NOS.

I've been in this industry for over 30 years, do I now need to do an apprenticeship or VQ?

As we said earlier, these new or updated requirements do not mean that an individual is not competent. Raising the bar on competence means that we all need to look at our own SKEB and utilise existing products to support our own competence. Continuous Professional Development should be part of everyone's career journey. SLG10 Super Sectors is including work for Existing Workers as much as New Entrants and upskilling is a key area of focus.

What other qualifications are Skills England involved with?

Skills England (previously known as IfATE) are involved in the following:

- T Levels – responsible for the procurement and management of T Levels. T Levels are two-year, technical qualifications designed to give students the skills that industry needs. They bring classroom learning and an extended industry placement together.
- Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQs) - Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQs) are level 4 or 5 qualifications that have been quality marked by Skills England to indicate their alignment to employer-led occupational standards. This is an optional process.
- Post 16 qualifications (level 3 and below) – these are approved technical qualifications that align to specified occupational categories. Dependent on the occupational category, the qualification will either align, build upon or selectively cover the relevant occupational standard(s).

9. I'm confused, help

What's the difference between all the Educational Standards?

The difference isn't easy to understand, which is one of the problems with the structure as it currently is. This is something that the Industry Competence Steering Group (for Trades and Installers - SLG10 Super Sector programme) is trying to resolve.

The NOS is created utilising four nation review and denotes skills, knowledge, and behaviours; the occupational standard is England-based and denotes skills, knowledge and behaviours for occupational roles within construction.

Differences:

- Different development organisations create the various educational standards.
- Often different employer groups, Trade Associations, etc are involved in each
- An Occupational Standard is less granular than the National Occupational Standard.
- NOS are grouped into suites according to what they are for. Alongside the NOS, approved qualification structures can be created, explaining how the NOS are grouped together into qualifications / pathways etc, what is mandatory, what is optional, how many etc
- Occupation Standards defines the Knowledge, Skills and Behaviours. It is noted, however, that the Occupational Standards inform early-stage qualifications, which do not always include the need for Experience (apprenticeship and T-Levels).

- A NOS defines the Skills, Knowledge and Behaviours. Neither are aligned with the definition of competence as per regulations.

The Competence Framework will be the single point where SKEBs are identified, rather than different employer groups looking to review different types of educational standards, resulting in a variation of competence, depending on the educational route taken.

Is there a hierarchy of educational standards?

Strictly speaking, there isn't a hierarchy.

Education policy is devolved with each nation deciding how competence and the underlying starts are used. England, for example, utilises occupational standards for apprenticeships but still uses NOS for on site assessment, whereas Scotland utilises the NOS.

In Scotland, the NOS are used directly in SVQs and for CBQs they are used to inform the units.

10. Card Schemes

I'm being told to have a CSCS card to access site, what is it?

A card scheme, or a personnel certification scheme, is a system used to verify that individuals working in specific industries have met benchmarks, qualifications, and safety awareness to relevant industry requirements. It is typically linked to the following:

- **Verification of Qualifications, Certifications and Assessment:** Demonstrates that the cardholder has appropriate qualifications, skills, or experience for their role and occupation.
- **Health, Safety, and Environmental Test and Fire Safety in Buildings Awareness:** Ensures individuals understand basic health, safety and environmental as well as fire safety requirements for working on site.
- **Industry Compliance:** Acts as a benchmark for employers, clients, and site managers to assess whether individuals are suitable for their roles in compliance with sector-specific requirements or regulations.
- **Mobility Across Sites:** Provides a recognised form of identification across multiple employers or projects, for quicker onboarding and access.

Some schemes also provide ID checking, Continuous Professional Development (CPD) recording, evidence of licence requirements, adherence to codes of practice, employment history, professional memberships and other relevant information.

Card schemes may provide physical and / or digital cards. All CSCS Alliance schemes can be verified through CSCS Smart Check solutions as a method to confirm the certification process.

What does it not do?

A card scheme is not:

- A License to Work: Possession of a card does not automatically grant permission to work on a site. It supports but does not replace regulatory or employer-specific requirements.
- A Qualification: The card itself is not a qualification but an acknowledgment that a person has met pre-defined criteria (e.g. a qualification or membership, etc), linking to the card type.
- A Training Provider: Card schemes do not directly deliver training. Instead, they verify qualifications obtained through accredited training providers.
- A Validation of Competence: While the card confirms qualifications and training, it does not guarantee practical competence or behavioural performance on site.

What has happened with industry accreditation cards?

Industry Accreditation, often referred to as "Grandfather Rights," is a legacy mechanism where individuals were able to obtain cards based on experience or long service in the industry without formal qualifications or assessment based on their employer's confirmation of competence. Some schemes have never offered industry accreditation routes, while others have phased these out over the past several years. All industry accreditation cards expired on 31 December 2024.

Key points:

- **Impact on Workers:** Workers with industry accreditation cards may need to upskill through CPD or formal qualifications to continue renewing their cards. There are assessments that can support the person with an industry accreditation card in moving to an appropriate card.
- **Purpose of Transition:** The move away from industry accreditation ensures consistency, promotes safety, and quality, ensuring all workers meet modern industry competence requirements.
- **Support for Transition:** Many schemes provide pathways for workers to gain qualifications, such as recognition of prior learning (RPL) or tailored training programmes. Funding may be available to support these routes.

Does this mean I need to do a full NVQ?

Phasing out of industry accreditation **DOES NOT** mean individuals that qualified at a point in time have to requalify by doing an NVQ or equivalent.

Many individuals have already used an existing academic or vocational qualification to move off of IA or have evidenced membership of an approved professional body to gain a professionally qualified person card (PQP).

For those who do need to evidence a qualification to current standards to retain a Skilled Worker, Supervisor or Manager card, grants are available to CITB-registered employers to help cover the cost while flexible assessment routes are also open to ensure individuals do not need to attend college.

For CSCS cardholders, City and Guilds Craft and Advanced Craft certificates are accepted if completed as part of an apprenticeship. Individuals should also consider whether a CSCS-

logged card is still needed and should check the appropriate scheme's website for more information.

What do I need to do then?

There are often assessments of current competence levels, and do not require individuals to go back to college or take long theory courses. They are often a mix of practical assessments and professional discussions which provide time and cost-effective ways for people to evidence the educational standard to which they are already working.

Individuals should also consider whether a CSCS card is still needed and should check the [CSCS website](#) for more information.

Why can't I just have a Green Labourer Card?

A Green Labourer Card is a card for those on site who perform a labourer role.

If the person is working as a specific occupation (e.g. Bricklayer, Dryliner installer, etc), then they need the appropriate card for their role. A Green Card is not suitable for a skilled, supervisory or management occupation.

Why does a Green Labourer Card now only last for 2 years and what will I do instead?

Labourer cards from some schemes, including CSCS and GQA, are eligible for two years on first application.

Individuals will be able to renew the Labourer card, with renewals eligible for 5 years, if they can evidence they are currently employed as a labourer. Acceptable evidence would include written confirmation by an employer or main contractor.

More details are available via the appropriate scheme's website.