

9. What is the relationship between subject matter expertise and assessment expertise? Why isn't subject matter expertise enough for good assessment? Or why can't someone who has assessment expertise assess any subject?

Good assessment in a particular field cannot happen without a thoroughly informed understanding about the nature of good practice in the subject matter being assessed. At the same time, a subject matter expert will certainly benefit from developing technical knowledge of assessment matters (e.g. understanding how different types of questions yield different kinds of answers; being familiar with issues such as weightings across a number of items or activities in one assessment; learning how to write rubrics, criteria or grading descriptions that will help different assessors judge according to common understandings; and so on). No one becomes an assessment expert without first having a subject area as the medium through which to apply and understand assessment. Any assessment expert must start as an assessor of something, even though they may generalise their knowledge beyond their own subject at some point.

There will obviously be some variation in the relative importance of either assessment expertise or subject matter expertise, depending on the field of knowledge involved; it would be easier, for example, to advise on assessment in customer relations without specialised knowledge, than it would be to advise on assessment in physics without specialised knowledge. Assessment expertise can be generalised in various ways, such as advising on the management of assessment processes, or working with subject matter experts to develop and extend their understanding of the range and potential of assessment; but beyond broad principles, there also needs to be experience of application of those principles in a context with the relevant knowledge base.

In sum, subject matter expertise and assessment expertise are two distinct areas of knowledge and application which need to work together to produce good quality assessment.

[Answer to FAQ 9, The NQF and Assessment, the NQF Gateway]