
Quality Management Systems for non-laboratory settings – Toolkit

Competency-based assessment and
testing provider authorization of practice

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Prior to being authorized to perform testing for clients, it is crucial to ensure testing providers are trained and recognized as competent to perform testing to minimize misdiagnosis.

Continuous education and regular refresher training and competency-based assessments are important to maintain and improve the testers' skills and the safety and accuracy of testing services.

Testing providers certification programs have been implemented in several countries and digitalization of those programs has been used in some countries, such as South Africa, with the support of an external partner (Platforms for Health Systems Strengthening) to streamline the process.

Here is an [example of a testing provider certification program](#): training and assessment materials can be downloaded directly from the website.

While the added value of certification programs is clear, some countries are facing challenges in implementing and sustaining those because of a lack of resources and a high turnover of testing providers. In those settings, alternative ways to ensure testing provider proficiency could be implemented.

In all cases and settings, it is absolutely essential to verify the theoretical and practical skills of testers, using a competency-based assessment approach. Following the assessment, successful testing providers must obtain an authorization of practice letter prior being allowed to test clients.

Testing provider competency requirements should be nationally validated. A final evaluation covering both theoretical and practical aspects should be included in the testing provider training curriculum (see [QMS training curriculum \(PDF, 300 kB\)](#)). This evaluation must be done for each testing provider at the end of the initial training period, before the start of testing clients, and then regularly (at least every 2 years) to ensure continuity. If successful, the testing provider will receive an “authorization of practice/work” certificate/letter/attestation, which should be kept by the testing provider and recorded in testing site.

Evaluation templates are available (see [RTCQI website](#) and the document [Testing provider Competency based assessment tool \(PDF, 375 kB\)](#)) and can be used to develop tailored tools aligned with national standards.

To simplify implementation of an efficient, accessible, agile, and sustainable competency-based assessment program, several options exist:

- Decentralization and task sharing to subnational or local levels: Training and competency-based assessment could be done consecutively where testing is conducted at national, subnational, or even testing site levels. This implies trainers/QA officers are trained and authorized to validate testing providers' competencies and deliver the authorization letter.

- Integration with other QMS activities to optimize resources: example of regular trainings and competency-based assessments could be combined with the site supervision visits (see [Supportive site supervision visit \(PDF, 205 kB\)](#)).

The assessors should take the opportunity of the site supervision visit to assess the testing provider competencies through at least direct observation of the tester (using a validated and standardized checklist (see [Supportive site supervision visit \(PDF, 205 kB\)](#) and [Supportive site supervision visit tools \(XLSX, 55 kB\)](#)), and ideally include a practical evaluation (proficiency testing) using a panel of unknown samples. Those samples could be either DTS or stored (from the testing site or closest site) and tested blindly by the testing providers. If successful, the testing provider should receive an “authorization of practice continuation letter.”

Summary

Components of competency-based assessment programs

- **Training and authorization of practices:** testing providers should be trained using a nationally validated training curriculum and assessed by an authorized personnel member. If successful, an authorization of practice/work letter should be provided.
- **Competency-based assessment:** should include theoretical and practical assessments to ensure testers can perform tests, including specimen collection, result interpretation, adherence to national testing algorithms, and other related tasks (e.g., use of register).
- **Assessment methods:** questionnaires, direct observation, use of unknown samples.
- **Ongoing evaluation and regular reassessment:** Regular assessments and refresher training maintain competency over time. Competency should be regularly reassessed to keep testers updated on best practices and new protocols. (at least every two years).
- **Documentation and accountability:** record of the authorization letters should be kept by the testing provider and in the testing site for internal and external accountability.

Implementation considerations for countries

1. **Regulatory framework:**
 1. Develop and enforce regulations defining performance requirements for testers.
 2. Develop and enforce regulations defining requirements for trainers (authorization of practices).
2. **Standardized training curricula:** Ensure consistent training across all levels.
3. **Standardized competency-based assessment program:** Ensure consistent assessment across all levels.
4. Consider **decentralization and integration** of activities.