

Peer Powered Cities and Regions

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Peer Powered Cities and Regions

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Preface

The overall aim of PROSPECT is to enable *peer to peer learning* in *regional and local authorities* in order to finance and implement sustainable energy plans. The learning will empower them to make use of best practices in developing financing for these plans. PROSPECT will address the needs of regional and local authorities through developing a complete peer to peer learning programme addressing them. The learning process will be focused on how different sustainable energy projects and measures have been successfully financed. Peer to peer learning involves sharing information and experience from each other through mentoring activities, work shadowing, and study tours, among others. The learning programme will be divided into five modules that include development of financing for: i) public buildings, ii) private buildings, iii) public lighting, iv) transport (private and public), and v) cross sectional.

Who We Are

No	Participant Name	Short Name	Country Code	Logo
1	Institute for Housing and Urban Development Studies BV	IHS	NL	
2	The European association of local authorities in energy transition	ENERGY CITIES	FR	
3	European Federation of Agencies and Regions for Energy and the Environment	FEDARENE	BE	
4	Institute for European Energy and Climate Policy Stichting	IEECP	NL	
5	Eurocities ASBL	EUROCITIES ASBL	BE	
6	University of Piraeus Research Center	UPRC	GR	
7	Climate-KIC GmbH	CLIMATE-KIC GMBH	DE	
8	Ober Oesterreich Energiesparverband	ESV	AT	
9	Agencia Regional de Energia para os Concelhos do Barreiro, Moita e Montijo	S.ENERGIA	PT	
10	Mesto Trnava	TRNAVA	SK	



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Executive Summary

Offering a certification in the context of the peer-to-peer learning programme PROSPECT generates added value for both participants and the project consortium. It also brings credibility to the learning method and helps evaluating the quality of the programme. The value of the certificate is further intended to exceed the scope of the project by not only acknowledging participation but by evaluating learning outcomes. At a later stage of the project, scaling strategies will be explored.

The PROSPECT consortium will serve as the certification body. The certificate shall be offered for both mentors and mentees of the learning programme alike. The certification framework will thus focus on the competencies of individuals rather than those of institutions (in the case of PROSPECT, the participating cities). The framework will be based on the competence model consisting of knowledge, skills and attitudes and will translate the learning objectives as defined in the learning programme. The consortium has decided to design the certification framework closely connected to content and concept of the peer-to-peer learning programme, offering micro certificates for each financing scheme introduced in each module.

As an assessment method, case studies and multiple choice tests were evaluated as the most appropriate ways to evaluate the learning outcomes of PROSPECT. The assessment would in any way be conducted online. It is intended to recruit assessors from within the project context to keep costs and resources low.

The detailed assessment process as well as the certification framework will be developed alongside the creation of learning content for the learning programme.

1 Introduction

Certification is a formal and external recognition of an achievement or asset. The most common certifications are:

- Recognition of competencies of individuals (knowledge, skills, attitude; examples: university degrees, employer certificates)
- Recognition of capacities of an institution (e.g. compliance, processes, structures, ISO standards; example: ISO 9001 certification)
- Recognition of a specific achievement of individuals or institutions (e.g. compliance, company profit, carbon footprint; example: certificate for annual financial statement)

Certification is usually provided for entities that are difficult to assess or measure or that require a third and independent assessment. For a certificate to achieve value, there needs to be trust into the standards and processes that link to the certification. This is mainly linked to the independence of the certifying institution as well as to the perceived capacity to assess and measure the certification object.

Certification is based on described standards. Those standards can vary, for example between different levels of difficulty or different requirements. A certificate can either describe that a standard / threshold has been met or describe an achievement on a scale (e.g. percentage, or grade system in universities).

For the PROSPECT peer learning programme, a certification shall offer recognition to the participants and bring credibility to the applied methodology. In the following, the general layout of the certification for PROSPECT is described, explaining which decisions have been taken regarding objectives, scope and body of certification, the assessment methods and process as well as the standard for certification.

2 The Certificate

2.1 Objectives

In general, introducing a certification framework to certify competencies an individual has gained in a formal, non-formal or informal learning set-up can deliver added value in manifold ways. Table 1 gives an overview of such benefits stemming from a certificate.

Table 1: Value proposition of certification

For individuals	For employers	For the wider society
Self-confidence through approved state-of-the-art knowledge	Applicants with proven competencies to successfully perform certain tasks	Incentives to increase knowledge and skillset across relevant workforce
Access to a network of experts	Support in employing the right persons for respective positions	Standardisation, benchmarking and increase of effectiveness and efficiency
Reputation through credible and acknowledged membership in certification register	Guarantee of up-to-date knowledge	Creation of a large network of experts
Visibility on the job market	Indirect access to international network of experts	Credibility on international scale
Proof of commitment	“Quality signal” to relevant stakeholders	

PROSPECT aims to develop and implement an easy and replicable peer to peer learning programme among European local i.e. city and municipality and regional authorities. Peer learning is defined here as sharing of knowledge, skills, competencies, and experience among matched peers from local and regional authorities who learn with and from each other on the topic of implementing and financing sustainable energy and climate projects through innovative financing schemes.

Based on their respective level of experience and desired learning objectives, the participants will be assigned either as a **mentor** or a **mentee** in the learning programme.

A **mentor** is an individual representing a local or regional authority who have had direct experience on or have a specific expertise in financing a sustainable energy and climate action through an innovative scheme and is willing to share insights to a mentee.

A **mentee**, on the other hand, is an individual representing a local or regional authority who wants to learn from an experienced or expert peer on financing a sustainable energy project using an innovative scheme and is interested to apply what they learned in their own context.

The PROSPECT learning programme will focus on two peer learning methods, namely: peer mentoring and study visits:

Peer mentoring is a one-to-one relationship between a mentor and a mentee. Peer mentoring involves a pair of mentor and mentee who will participate in the peer learning programme through one peer mentoring visit and three online engagements.

Study visits involve a peer group composed of one mentor and between 2 to 7 mentees. In the study visit programme, the mentees observe first-hand how the mentor has implemented its sustainable energy or climate action project using an innovative financing scheme and get insights and recommendations directly from the mentor.

For PROSPECT, a certification mechanism can bring various benefits:

- **From a programme perspective**

The certification can bring credibility to and serve as a quality control for the PROSPECT methodology by proving its impact. It allows for transparent measurement of the success of the learning programme through clearly defined standards. Further, it might incentivise and reassure the interest and active participation of mentors and mentees as they must stay engaged until they have received the certificate. In a later stage of the project, the defined standards and the certification can form the basis for a replication strategy of PROSPECT.

- **For participants of the learning programme**

Participants of the learning programme will need some recognition for their effort. Therefore, a programme certificate can reward cities and individuals for their commitment through the learning programme. In their simplest format, certificates that transcend a mere confirmation of participation can create added value by recognizing individual proficiency and achievements in a certain field. On an individual as well as an institutional level, certificates create visibility for the involved person or organisation. The certificate has therefore the ability to create added value even to local authorities outside the project consortium – for example for staff recruitment. In that case, the certificate reveals competencies related to innovative financing schemes for an individual which can then be better evaluated by potential employers.

2.2 The Certification Body

The certification body is the organization which issues the certificate, defines the processes, appoints the assessors and much more. In short, it is the institution responsible for all matters related to the certificate.

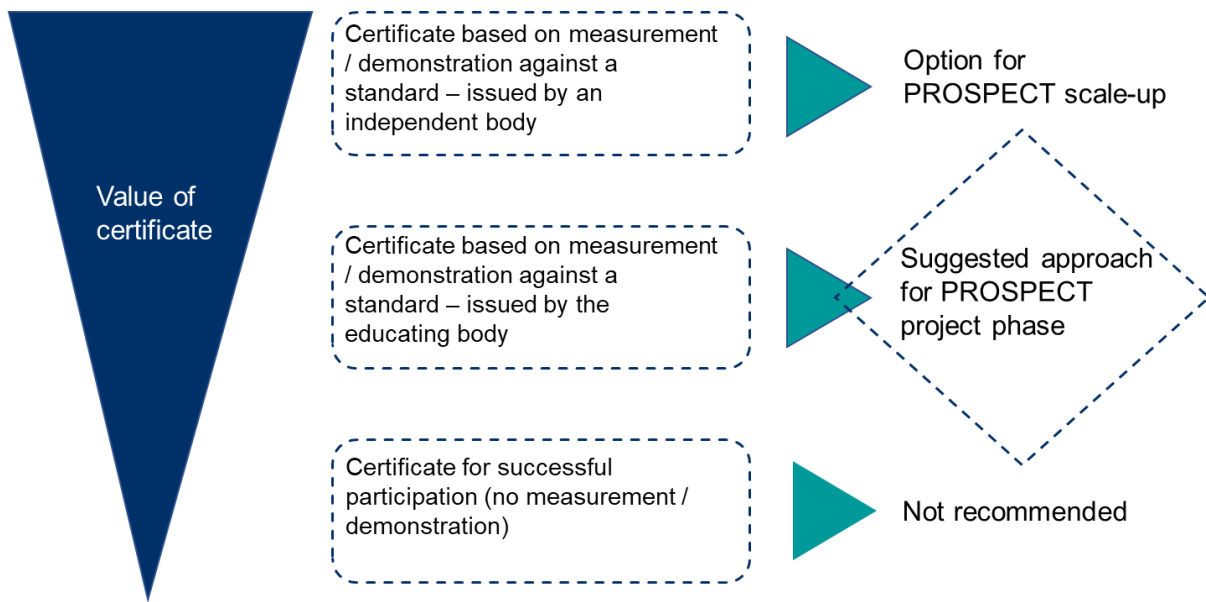


Figure 1: Options for definition of the certification body

Creating an independent certification body for the PROSPECT project phase will not be feasible. According to the ISO standard 17024 a certification body is independent when it has no interest in the delivery of a linked learning programme. This requirement can clearly not be met by the PROSPECT consortium who is responsible for the concept and the delivery of the learning programme. In that sense, the consortium resembles more an educating body.

In this capacity, the consortium can establish an objective standard against which to measure proficiency and carry out assessments. This approach has been suggested for the project setting. This way, the certificate can meet the described objectives as described in chapters 2.1 without putting the consortium under too many formal restrictions.

In the context of developing replication scenarios for PROSPECT, it could be interesting to discuss and explore which institutions might be interested in taking the certification forward in the long-term. There are a few options:

- City networks: to provide a standard and service to member cities
- Financing institutions: to implement risk assessment standards
- Certification institutions: as an extension of existing business
- Training institutions: mainly for mentor certificates, to have a quality control mechanism related to the methodology and learning programme
- A newly created entity: made of consortium partners, to provide an integrated standard and scaling mechanism for both training and certification

The consortium will discuss in the context of replication scenarios if and which of the suggested options to pursue.

2.3 Scope of the certificate

One of the first decisions to take when creating a certificate is who is going to be the assessed entity and thus the certificate holder in the end. In the PROSPECT context, two scenarios are realistic: to certify the professional competencies of the participating individual or to certify management system and process standards of the participating cities.

In the first case, the defined standards could relate to an individual's capacity to

- identify and plan energy efficiency project
- make those projects bankable / investable
- identify the best financing solution
- execute projects successfully, including risk management
- train cities and individuals of the above

As a result, the certification could lead to better projects for cities and better career options for individuals.

In the second case, the standards could capture the (integrated) proficiency of a city to:

- Identify and plan energy efficiency projects
- Make those projects bankable / investable
- Identify the best financing solution
- Execute projects successfully including risk management

The certification could thus lead to easier and cheaper access to funding or financing sources for a city. Figure 2 summarises objectives, value and requirements for those options.

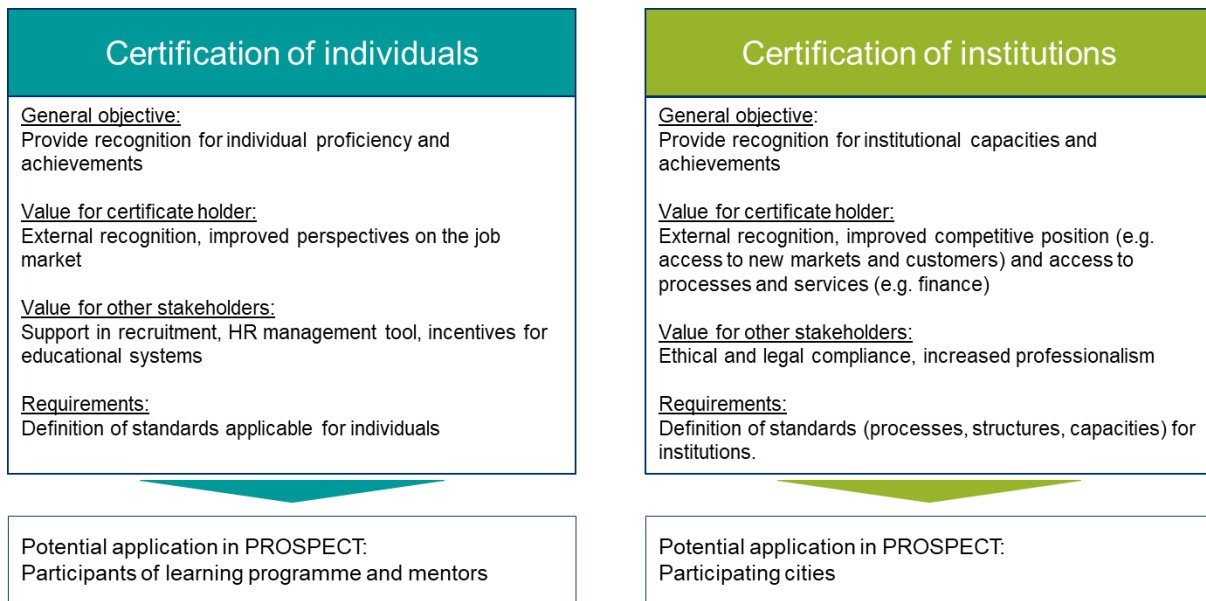


Figure 2: Two options for the target group of PROSPECT certification

The consortium has decided to offer a certification for individuals rather than institutions in the context of PROSPECT based on the wish to offer a reward for participation in the learning programme and to evaluate the learning activities. Therefore, the focus of the certification will lie on competencies rather than on processes and systems.

The aim of the consortium is to create the certificate in a way that is achievable for both mentors and mentees of the learning programme. These two participant groups shall not be distinguished for the certification because the programme is intended as a peer-to-peer mentoring. This entails that like-minded peers are exchanging knowledge at eye level and do not learn from an identified expert in a field. Offering two different kinds of certificates would undermine this idea of equality between the peers.

Offering an additional certificate for mentors which focuses on their training abilities has also been discarded. City representative shall not be discouraged from offering their best practices because they fear to be “judged” on their coaching abilities. Further, the peer-to-peer mentoring concept envisions that the knowledge exchange will not be unidirectional, but rather stem from active exchange.

3 The standard

For a certification to act as an objective assessment of competencies, it necessarily needs to be based on a pre-defined standard, as described for non-formal and informal learning by The European Centre for Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop):

Awarding a certificate on the basis of non-formal and informal learning requires an agreed reference point, for example in the form of an official qualifications standard, an occupational standard or an approved education programme or curriculum. While it is possible to envisage the identification and documentation phases of validation – such as skills audits – to be carried out without a formalised standard, assessment and certification aiming for a qualification need to be carried out to an agreed and approved standard. (Cedefop 2015)

Since the certification standard for PROSPECT is linked to the learning programme, the defined learning objectives are a good starting point for the definition of the standard. The **Learning Module-Related Objectives**¹ focus on the innovative financing schemes, which will be introduced in the learning modules as well as barriers, incentives, advantages, and disadvantages related to them. Success factors and lessons learnt from practical experience shall be analysed to gain insight on the applicability of financing schemes in specific contexts. The **Innovative Financing Scheme-Related Objectives** put a focus on how to successfully access and implement individual financing schemes. Again, the ability to gain knowledge for application is of high importance.

With this background, three options what to certify have been developed as presented below.

Option 1: Definition of a generic standard

Defines generally what it means to be proficient in innovative energy financing

Benefits:

- Certificate bears large value for participants
- Could be applied on a larger scale beyond the project

Disadvantages:

- Knowledge is not necessarily linked to output of the programme
- Long development process
- Involvement of experts necessary to secure that standards meet the expectations of the „market“
- For mentees with only basic knowledge it will be less likely to pass certificate

¹ As defined in the „Draft Structure and Plan for the Learning Program“

Option 2: „Experts in application“

Certificate holders have shown that they know the requirements to unlock innovative financing options.
 Requirement of certificate: Proficiency of various financing schemes and where they are applicable (e.g. understanding of at least 3 financing schemes in at least 2 different areas)

Benefits:

- Knowledge linked to programme
- Certificate holders demonstrate implications of project management and finance

Disadvantages:

- Requirements exceed what participants will have learned in one module

Option 3: Modular certification

Defines a standard for each of the PROSPECT modules and financing schemes („micro-degrees“)

Benefits:

- Closely connected to knowledge disseminated in the learning programme (higher pass-rate)
- Participants can choose how many certificates to apply for

Disadvantages:

- Does not take the ability to compare between different financing schemes into account

Figure 3: Options for certification standard

The discussions around these three options have revolved around different, partially contrarious demands and aims:

- Effort for the candidates

It is the acclaimed wish of the consortium that most or preferably all candidates should be able to get certified after successful completion of the learning programme. It is therefore not intended that the assessment process should be too demanding or take too much time to complete. The learning programme itself is already quite time-consuming given the study visits and related travel. The certificate should not add a too high workload for the participants.

- Linkage with learning objectives

The learning objectives as mentioned above are largely knowledge-based but also application-oriented at the same time. Whichever of the three options presented in figure 3 is chosen, it should reflect the strong focus of the programme towards application. In the peer-to-peer learning concept the dissemination of knowledge is not as standardised as in other kind of educational trainings. It is possible that each study visit or peer mentoring will cover different aspects even when dealing with the same financing scheme in the same learning module. Deriving a standard from a strong knowledge perspective seems therefore unlikely.

- Structure of the learning programme

Within each learning cycle, participants will be asked to sign up for one learning module. The mentor and mentee throughout the learning cycle will presumably only find time to discuss one financing scheme. Even though participants can sign up for more than one learning cycle, it is rather unlikely that most of the participants will have encountered more than one scheme for more than one application area which makes the first two options rather unfeasible.

The consortium has selected the third option of micro-degrees, one for each financing scheme in each learning module. A proposal on how these degrees could look like and how the standard could be derived are currently developed. The results will be presented in the final Report on the Certification Framework.

4 The Assessment

4.1 Assessment requirements

[...] the following criteria need to be considered for each potentially useful assessment tool:

- (a) *validity: the tool must measure what it is intended to measure;*
- (b) *reliability: the extent to which identical results would be achieved every time a candidate is assessed under the same conditions;*
- (c) *fairness: the extent to which an assessment decision is free from bias (context dependency, culture and assessor bias);*
- (d) *cognitive range: whether the tool enables assessors to judge the breadth and depth of candidate's learning;*
- (e) *fitness for purpose of the assessment: ensuring the purpose of the assessment tool matches the use for which it is intended.*

(Cedefop, 2015)

When setting up the assessment process for the PROSPECT certification, the criteria above can help to evaluate the different possibilities. The assessment process is at the heart of the certification and contributes immensely to its quality and recognition. The assessment is supposed to be **objective**. This can be achieved through

- Assessment methods based on well-known/recognised practices
- Objective proof
- Avoiding subjective evaluation criteria and process

The **transparency** of the process should be a high goal when setting it up. Participants should to the full extent be informed about

- Admission criteria
- Assessors profiles
- Assessment procedures and rules

Last but not least, in order to achieve **fairness** of the process, it should

- Avoid discrimination
- Facilitate access to assessment.

4.2 Assessment methods

For a certification for PROSPECT, the following assessment methods have been taken into consideration to find the most appropriate one for the project:

- Test in work environment
- Simulation
- Practical activity
- Case study
- Interview / Oral test
- Evidence portfolio
- Multiple choice test

In table 2 (in the appendix) all these assessment methods are briefly defined. Further, the table contains evaluations for each method's benefits and disadvantages in the project context. Based on these evaluations the following two assessment methods will be further examined: Case study and Multiple-choice test. Until the final version of this delivery, a decision will be taken on the assessment method based on scenarios to be developed as a next step. These scenarios will also consider the combination of both methods.

4.3 Assessment process

The assessment process does not only cover a reliable assessment method, but also defines selection criteria and training guidelines for assessors as well as the logistical questions such as how the assessment will be conducted (online / offline). The process will be defined once the assessment method has been chosen. However, from the beginning of the project on, it was intended to have an online process to limit the costs for the assessment. This requirement shall be kept throughout the further development of the assessment process. In order to keep remuneration for assessors low and to facilitate the recruitment, it is intended to first explore the option to recruit assessors from the project context.

It has, for example, been suggested to follow the peer-to-peer concept and thus to involve the mentors of the learning programme as assessors. This approach will be considered in the creation of the assessment process.

5 Next steps

When the aforementioned decisions have been taken, the certification framework can be developed. This will be presented in the final Report on Certification Framework. As the assessment of competencies of individuals has been agreed upon, the established competency model based upon knowledge, skills and attitudes will be used as a basis for the framework and the assessment.

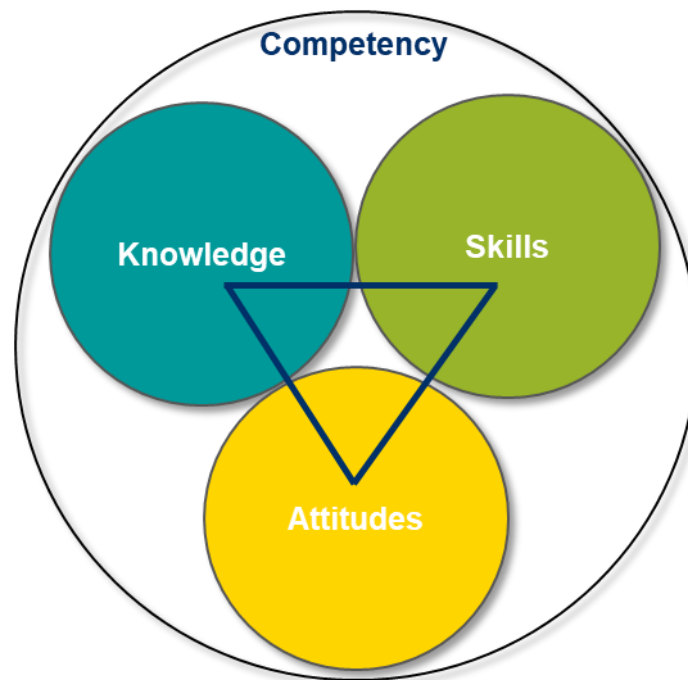


Figure 4: The competency model

The framework will build upon the learning content currently developed for each of the learning modules. Therefore, the development of the certification framework will take part parallel to the development of the learning curriculum in the next months. The framework will in the end contain the standards against which the participants can be assessed.

Whilst developing the assessment process, the position of the certification within the timeline of the learning programme for the individual participant will be determined. The main question to be answered in this context is whether the assessment will form part of the module or will be timely decoupled from the four-step learning cycle. Practicability issues for the participants will play a decisive role in this decision.

References

Cedefop (2015), European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning, Luxembourg: Publications Office, Cedefop reference series; No 104

ISO 17024 (2003): Conformity assessment. General requirements for bodies operating certification of persons

Scottish Qualifications Authority (2017), Guide to Assessment, available at:
http://www.sqa.org.uk/files_ccc/25GuideToAssessment.pdf (date of last access: 01.12.2017)

Appendix

Table 2: Assessment methods

Assessment method	Definition (by the Scottish Qualifications Authority (2017))	Evaluation for PROSPECT
Test in work environment	An environment that replicates the key characteristics of the workplace in which the skill to be assessed is normally employed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + The assessors can check the knowledge in practice - The more the setting is complex the more is difficult to have comparable settings - Two or more assessors for each candidate required - Difficult to create comparable settings in different countries
Simulation	A simulation is a structured practical exercise with specific objectives involving the organisation and completion of a product or resource based task and which seeks to simulate real-life conditions. In a simulation the candidates are active participants who shape the result by their involvement. To be effective, simulations must succeed in recreating the atmosphere, conditions and pressures of the real situation. A simulation focuses on a particular activity and aims to test behavioural, analytical and decision-making skills in a realistic setting.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + The assessor can test experience in practice - Difficult to create such realistic settings - High costs
Practical activity	A practical activity consists of a description of an event, usually in the form of a piece of text, a picture or an electronic recording that concerns a realistic situation. This is then followed by a series of instructions which prompt the candidate, as a detached observer of events, to analyse the situation, identify key issues, draw conclusions and make decisions or suggest courses of action. It is important to remember that in many case studies there are no 'correct' answers and no 'correct' methods of arriving at the decisions. The importance lies in the process of interpretation and decision-making that leads the candidate to a valid conclusion.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Assessors can experience candidates in action - Strong focus on skills, less useful to certify knowledge-based standards - High costs
Case study	A case study consists of a description of an event, usually in the form of a piece of text, a picture or an electronic recording that concerns a realistic situation. This is then followed by a series of instructions which prompt the candidate, as a detached observer of events, to analyse the situation, identify key issues, draw conclusions and make decisions or suggest courses of action. It is important to remember that in many case studies there are no 'correct' answers and no 'correct' methods of arriving at the decisions. The importance lies in the process of interpretation and decision-making that leads the candidate to a valid conclusion.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + The exam is written based on specific cases provided by the assessors + It may be a good way to verify the capacity of the candidate to solve problems, find solutions based on the practice - Different assessors may interpret things in different ways
Interview / Oral test	A professional interview between a candidate and an assessor focuses on evidence already provided or demonstrated by the candidate. The candidate needs to be able to show the assessor how what he or she says in the discussion is backed up in other ways. This could be, for example, by product evidence, witness testimonies,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Allows to have an in-depth and dynamic understanding of the candidate 's experience

	<p>workplace documents or other material either developed through work or in other assessments. It allows candidate to demonstrate the authenticity of his or her evidence, and for the assessor to confirm its reliability and validity.</p> <p>An oral test is a test of the candidate's communication skills. It is often described as the 'assessment of speaking' or 'talking assignment'. Oral tests may take the form of a presentation on a topic chosen by the candidate and a follow-up discussion with the assessor. Candidates are expected to convey information and deploy ideas. Candidates can be assessed individually or as part of a group discussion. It is used to provide evidence of candidates' ability to interpret and communicate ideas and to sustain conversation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Open questions can generate misunderstanding and/or different interpretations - Assessors may judge similar answers in different ways
Evidence portfolio	<p>An evidence portfolio is a means of presenting evidence of candidate achievement. It is a representative collection of different pieces of evidence of a candidate's skills, knowledge and understanding which indicates that they have met the requirements of a qualification. They can be produced in a range of media. Portfolios are appropriate for subjects with strong practical and/or creative content.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + It provides proofs of working experiences already in place - Difficult to find a team of high level assessors available for the role - Different assessors may interpret evidences in different ways
Multiple choice test	<p>Multiple choice questions or items consist of an incomplete statement or a question, known as the 'stem', followed by at least four plausible alternative responses from which the candidate has to select the correct one. The correct response is known as the 'key', while the incorrect ones are referred to as 'distractors'. Multiple choice questions are often called 'objective tests'.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Objective results, developed at central level + Same test for all people applying at the same level - Complex and costly to develop, especially tests assessing high skilled people (involvement of experts for development)



PROSPECT