

Visual Effects (VFX) Assistant Technical Director Assessment Plan

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Introduction

Visual effects (VFX) is the term used to describe any imagery created, altered, or enhanced for moving media. They involve the integration of live-action footage and computer generated imagery to create images, which look realistic but would be dangerous, costly, or simply impossible to capture during live-action shooting.

Assistant technical directors (ATDs) may perform a diverse series of technical support functions in order to ensure the smooth running of a visual effects project. They are responsible for supporting and troubleshooting the pipeline and workflow tools, providing technical assistance to people in creative departments, managing data and resources. ATDs utilise a variety of industry standard graphical applications, scripting languages and operating systems. They may support project by gathering requirements, designing solutions and coding small-scale tools using established pipeline frameworks. They are expected to work well within a team and to be good communicators and problem solvers. Upon successful completion of their apprenticeship the individual could have a diverse career progression. Some may progress to become Pipeline Technical Directors, Software Developers, Riggers, Technical Directors or FX Artists. Some will eventually become Supervisors in their field.

The approach to assessment has been designed to be appropriate, relevant and feasible for apprentices employed in SMEs as well as larger, nationally recognised VFX studios and to ensure consistency across these contexts.

Employers have adopted the following broad principles to inform the approach to assessment:

- Assessment is driven by the Standards and covers the full competencies across knowledge, skills and behaviours.
- Assessment motivates the Apprentice to achieve high standards in the quality of their work and encourages the development of sophisticated workplace behaviours to support their professional development. The determinants of pass and distinction grades give apprentices a clear goal for which to aim.
- The assessment process adds value to both Apprentice and employers regardless of size, by complementing and building on normal management and development tools such as appraisals.
- The assessment will position the Apprenticeship not just as a job, but as the starting or continuation point for a career in the Industry.
- Recommended progressive, structured support throughout the duration of the Apprenticeship through regular Appraisals with the employer will mark a clear recognition of achievements on which the Apprentice has built and on which s/he can continue to build on completion of the Apprenticeship.

- The assessment tools are designed to replicate, as far as possible, live workplace scenarios and activity in response to live studio briefs. They are designed to include and complement typical existing talent management processes so as to reduce the additional assessment cost burden.
- An assessment methodology comprising a mixed set of tools enables the Apprentice to play to their strengths and ensures that they are not disadvantaged by the restriction of one assessment method on one occasion only.
- Grading at pass and distinction supports the Apprentice to achieve the highest standards.
- Regular recording of their learning and progress throughout the Apprenticeship in a Reflective Blog (included in Portfolio) encourages the Apprentice to develop skills in critical self-awareness and the ability to receive and respond to feedback on their work.

Overview

The Assessment Plan is based upon regular recruitment and training industry practice:

On Programme:

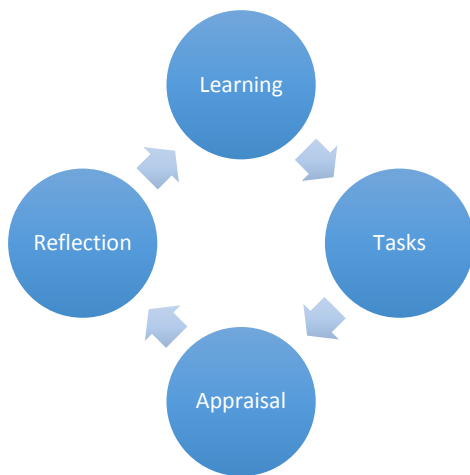
- A recommended series of Quarterly Appraisals at agreed dates during the on programme part of the Apprenticeship. This will ensure that the Apprentice is ready for the End Point Assessment tasks identified below. Appraisal meetings should be conducted by the employer, who will decide whether the Apprentice is making sufficient progress. Wherever possible the training provider will attend.

End Point:

- A 2 hour Timed Knowledge Test to assess the essential underpinning knowledge including maths and technical compositing knowledge.
- A 6 hour Synoptic Competence Activity to demonstrate the Apprentice's ability to work independently.
- A Portfolio of work demonstrating the Apprentice's best achievements against the Standard. The Portfolio will be marked by the independent assessor from the independent Assessment Organisation and will be expected to include:
 - Evidence from day to day real work activities
 - A reflective blog
 - The results of an employer set synoptic project conducted in the studio by the employer in real time demonstrating the ability to work within a team in a real work environment.
 - Any personal projects which have been completed during the Apprenticeship
- A structured Interview with an independent assessor from the Assessment Organisation – exploring the contents of the Portfolio and the reflections of the Apprentice on their progression through the Apprenticeship.

Learning and On Programme Assessment

The Apprentice learns new skills at work, and through formal training provision. The learning is applied to tasks set by the employer. Employer appraisal of each completed task is followed by the reflection and the cycle repeats. The overall progress of the Apprentice is assessed at periodic points through an Appraisal ideally with the provider in attendance. The Apprentice’s reflection, learning and progress is contained in their portfolio.



End Point Assessment

The Apprentice progresses to the End Point Assessment when their employer indicates they are ready to achieve the required standard.



The Apprentice is deemed by the employer to be ready for end point assessment

On Programme

Appraisals

The Apprenticeship will typically take two years to complete so an Apprentice is unlikely to be in a position to undertake the End Point Assessment before they have completed 18 months. This will ensure they have the opportunity to develop all areas of the Standard. The Apprenticeship therefore needs a robust process of on programme formative assessment to ensure that the

Apprentice makes good progress towards the End Point Assessment and that they are able to produce work of a sufficiently high standard. This will ensure they can attest to the required level of knowledge, skills and behaviours.

The approach to on programme formative assessment is based on normal performance management processes experienced by employees in the industry where an individual appraisal system is used to provide feedback and guide professional development. The Apprentice will be expected to compile a Reflective Blog as part of their Portfolio throughout their Apprenticeship which will support them in preparing for, and reflecting on, their Appraisals. It is suggested that these take place quarterly and are recorded by the Apprentice in the Reflective Blog. This should be in addition to regular monitoring, guidance, and support offered by the training provider and employer.

Apprentices will be encouraged to develop and maintain examples of their work throughout their Apprenticeship. Apprentices will be supported by the training provider, to select the best pieces of work to be included in their Portfolio.

End Point Assessment

This will typically take place in the last 3 months of the Apprenticeship using four assessment methods:

- Timed knowledge test *
- Synoptic competence activity *
- Portfolio
- Structured interview

*** Will require invigilation.**

Timed Knowledge Test

The Timed Knowledge Test will ensure that the Apprentice possesses the ability to apply knowledge with regard to the maths, programming and computer science elements of the Standard. 2 hour test papers will be developed and managed by the Assessment Organisation. This assessment method has a 'pass' only grade, with no 'distinction'. The pass mark will be established as part of the process of appointing the Assessment Organisation but it is likely that this will be in excess of 50%. In order to 'pass' the Apprentice must demonstrate a high level of knowledge in the following areas of the Standard:

- Databases
- Maths
- Software design
- Scripting
- Computing

Synoptic Competence Activity

The Synoptic Competence Activity reflects a typical business related activity and is designed to test the Apprentice's practical skills, knowledge and behaviours in a controlled environment.

The purpose is to ensure the consistency of assessment of Apprentices, irrespective of their particular workplace and it must therefore be completed outside of day-to-day work pressures. This activity should not take longer than 6 hours.

The Synoptic Competence Activity and pass criteria will be set by the Assessment Organisation in consultation with the lead employer group and assessed by the independent assessor (appointed by the Assessment Organisation) who will make their own judgement on the quality of the work. This assessment method has a 'pass' criteria only (i.e no distinction). To meet the 'Pass' criteria an Apprentice will be expected to break down a Brief into a prioritised list of tasks and their dependencies. The designed solution should meet the Brief but be simple enough to be realistically achievable in the time allocated. The result should be a demonstrable working solution, which passes a number of test cases designed by the Apprentice. It is not expected that the result caters for all 'edge cases' but should cater for the most common of situations or inputs.

An example of an activity is given below:

Take a number of directories containing image sequences. Convert those images to a set resolution, file format and colour space. Then create QuickTime movies to a set standard from each image sequence.

Maximum Time Allowed: 6 hours

The Assessment Organisation will ensure that the framework for the Synoptic Competence Activity is appropriate for all sizes of VFX studio and that appropriate assessment guidance including descriptors for 'pass' and 'distinction' is provided. The Activity will be conducted in a 'controlled' environment. The requirements for the 'controlled' environment will include a quiet room, away from the normal place of work, with dedicated workstation and access to all the required equipment. [This could take place on the training provider's premises]. An invigilator from the Assessment Organisation will be present to ensure authenticity of the Apprentice's work.

Portfolio

In the Portfolio, the Apprentice will present evidence from real-work activities including an employer set project, their Reflective Blog and any personal projects completed during the Apprenticeship. It will showcase their very best work, enabling them to demonstrate how they have applied their knowledge, skills and understanding in a real-work environment to achieve real-work objectives.

The employer set project, which will typically take place over a one week period, will be designed to enable the apprentice to demonstrate that they can:

- Gather requirements
- Write a specification
- Design a solution
- Develop the tool
- Verify the tool through testing and user feedback
- Document the tool
- Review and plan refinements

The Apprentice's performance, as they are undertaking the employer set project, will be monitored by their employer, who will provide a report for inclusion in the Apprentice's Portfolio. The Apprentice will also comment on their own performance in their Reflective Blog.

The Portfolio will contain:

- A 2-3 minute Showreel (video compilation) of completed tasks. The tasks included in the Portfolio should be those that have been agreed between employer, training provider and the Apprentice and should contain tool demos, show the workflow and explain the use of the tool.
- The Reflective Blog – it is suggested that this takes the form of a report per on-programme piece of work completed. It must include the Apprentice's reflection on their performance in the employer set project. The Apprentice may want to take notes more regularly for their own self-assessment and in order to inform these reports but these will not be assessed. The Reflective Blog will serve to confirm the authenticity of their achievements and support them to prepare for, and to perform well at, the interview.
- The employer report on the Apprentice's performance in the employer set project.
- Any other materials that the Apprentice, with support from the training provider, wishes to be assessed e.g. personal photography, drawings, tool demos or other videos.

Employers and training providers will assist the Apprentice to develop their Portfolio to ensure that it is complete, that it covers the totality of the Apprenticeship Standard and has been completed to a satisfactory standard. Wherever possible, this will be hosted on an electronic platform. It may have to be contained within the employer's systems for security purposes. The Assessment Organisation will provide a Portfolio contents guidance document.

The completed Portfolio will be assessed by an independent assessor from the Assessment Organisation who will make their own judgement on the Apprentice's application of knowledge, skills and their work behaviour (see also *Graded Assessments* below).

Structured interview

The interview represents the culmination of the End Point Assessment and is a structured discussion between the Apprentice and their independent assessor, focusing primarily on the Portfolio but referencing the entire Apprenticeship. It covers what the Apprentice has done and how they have done it, reflecting on their performance throughout the Apprenticeship and where they might have approached things differently. This enables this element of the End Point Assessment to include a broad range of skills and behaviours, such as critical thinking and problem-solving, internal and external relationships, communication skills and business/commercial understanding.

The Timed Knowledge Test, Synoptic Competence Activity and the Portfolio will have been assessed prior to the Interview. The Interview does not provide the independent assessor with an opportunity to revise their grading of the other End Point Assessments.

A structured brief with assessment criteria will be developed by the Assessment Organisation, as part of the assessment materials, for the independent assessor to support the Interview discussion. This will ensure that consistent approaches are taken and that all key areas are appropriately explored.

Ensuring Independence

Independence and impartiality are achieved through assessment of all the End Point Assessments and grading being undertaken by an independent assessor appointed by the Assessment Organisation. The Assessment Organisation will be sourced from the Register of Assessment Organisations. Neither the employer nor training provider will play any part in the assessment beyond on programme formative assessment.

Delivering consistent, reliable judgements

The assessment methods described above are designed to produce assessment outcomes that are consistent and reliable, allowing fair and proper comparison between Apprentices employed in the VFX industry regardless of the size of the studio.

The Apprenticeship Standard defines what is required in terms of knowledge, skills and behaviours. The approach puts the Standard at the heart of the assessment process, ensuring that judgments on occupational competence are consistent and that there is standardisation and comparability between employers.

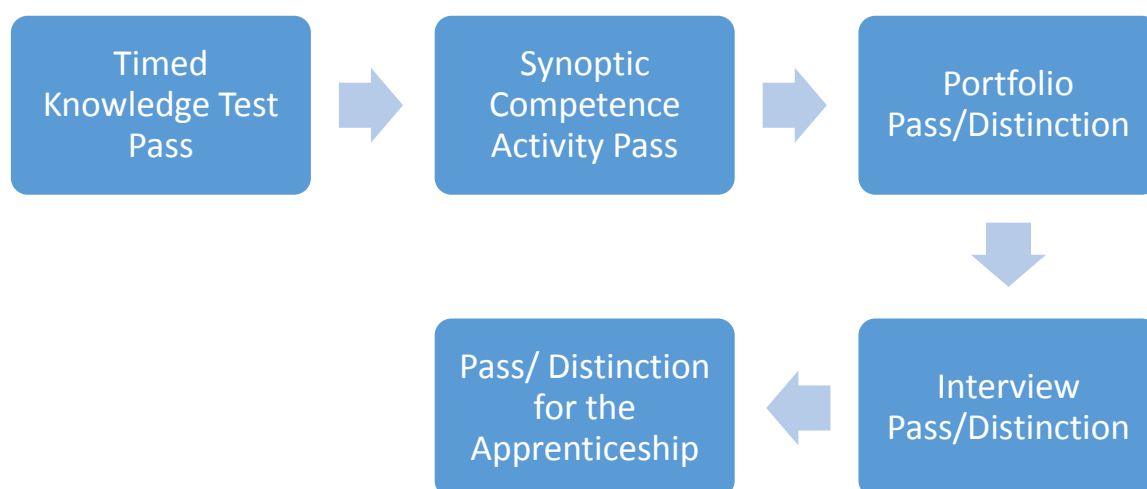
Assessment organisations, who should demonstrate experience in the industry, will develop specifications and guidance documents for the tools, materials and techniques to be used in assessment including pass marks for the Timed Knowledge Test, pass criteria for the Synoptic Competence Activity and pass/distinction criteria for the Portfolio and Interview. Independent assessors who will be appointed by the Assessment Organisation should have credibility within the Sector. This will be evidenced by substantial industry experience, of which at least 12 months should be within the last 3 years to ensure current and relevant sector knowledge and understanding. These measures will provide the necessary confidence that those undertaking assessment have the necessary skills and industry knowledge to make reliable judgements. Given that the estimate of Apprentices for this Apprenticeship is 50 per year and the demographics of the employers, we consider that there will be sufficient qualified assessors.

Delivering accurate, valid judgements

The assessment process has been developed specifically against the Standard and is designed to test the totality of the Standard. The combination of assessment methods in the final end point assessment ensures that the assessment of each Apprentice is based on their performance and reflects accurately the quality of their work and the application of skills, knowledge and behaviours specified in the Standard. Taken together, the components of the End Point Assessment build a cumulative picture of performance against the Standard. The application of grading at 'pass' or 'distinction' without recourse to 'merit' supports consistency of judgement and ensures that pass grade is of a high standard in itself. This also adds clarity for employers to understand the value of the Apprenticeship apropos their recruitment processes for vacancies.

- The Timed Knowledge Test provides consistency and comparability.
- The Synoptic Competence Activity gives the Apprentice the chance to demonstrate that they can apply the knowledge and skills they have learned in controlled conditions, without the conflicting pressures often present in everyday work environments. This provides a relatively high degree of consistency and comparability, increasing the accuracy of the assessment decision.
- The Portfolio is based on a number of real-work and personal projects which, taken together, cover the totality of the Standard, and demonstrates the application of knowledge and competence in the work environment. The Portfolio may also contain any relevant personal projects in which apprentices have been engaged during their apprenticeship. Full guidance on the expected components of the Portfolio will be available to training providers.
- The Interview with an independent assessor allows the Apprentice to demonstrate how they have planned and carried out their work. This again increases accuracy and validity by providing the assessor with an opportunity to assess depth and breadth in the application of underlying knowledge, skills and behaviours.

- The Independent Assessor will have marked and graded the Timed Knowledge Test, the Synoptic Competence Activity and the Portfolio before the Interview with the Apprentice. This ensures the independence of each End Point Assessment method, that the Apprentice is fairly judged on each and that they are neither advantaged nor disadvantaged by grade polishing in the Interview.



Graded Assessments

Independent assessors will grade the Apprentice, using all the information gained in the End Point Assessment. The table below will be used to calculate the final grade of Pass or Distinction. To receive a Distinction the apprentice will need to pass the Timed Knowledge Test, the Synoptic Competence Activity and receive Distinction grades in the Portfolio and Interview assessments.

Please note: there is no Distinction grade available for the Timed Knowledge Test or Synoptic Competence Activity. The Apprentice can achieve a Distinction grade for the Portfolio and Interview only. Industry practice is such that knowledge, understanding and essential competence serve to *support* the end product and it is here that evidence of distinctive work is displayed; hence the identification of the Portfolio as one of the end point assessment activities suitable for grading at Distinction. Also, the Distinction is designed to recognise the small proportion of apprentices who are seen as outstanding employees, regularly going beyond what is required to be competent in the role and seen as having greatest potential for the future. Thus, to achieve a Distinction, the apprentice will need to demonstrate a higher level of performance across the full range of knowledge, skills and behaviours; hence in order achieve an overall Distinction, the Apprentice must be awarded a Distinction grade for both Portfolio **and** Interview. ***The Portfolio must be graded before the Interview***

takes place. This avoids the potential for grade polishing thus supporting the consistency and reliability of judgement.

Timed knowledge test	Pass	Pass	Pass	Pass
Competence Activity	Pass	Pass	Pass	Pass
Portfolio :	Pass	Distinction	Pass	Distinction
Structured interview	Pass	Pass	Distinction	Distinction
Apprenticeship Award Grade	Pass	Pass	Pass	Distinction

Pass

To gain a **Pass**, apprentices must have, in the judgement of the independent assessor:

- Obtained a pass mark in the Timed Knowledge Test.
- Obtained a pass mark for the Synoptic Competence Activity
- Produced a Portfolio that covers the skills, knowledge and behaviours specified in the Standard and shows that their work is at the expected level of quality.
- Undertaken an Interview with an independent assessor and demonstrated work and behaviours at an expected level of quality.

Distinction

To be awarded a **Distinction**, apprentices must have, in the judgement of the independent assessor:

- Obtained a pass mark in the Timed Knowledge Test.
- Obtained a pass mark in the Synoptic Competence Activity.
- Produced a Portfolio that covers the skills, knowledge and behaviours specified in the Standard and shows that their work is of an outstanding level of quality. *
- Undertaken an Interview with an independent assessor and demonstrated work and behaviours at an outstanding level of quality.*

*Apprentices will be provided with pass requirements and grade descriptors for each End Point Assessment as part of the guidance materials supplied by the Assessment Organisation and will be advised by the training provider throughout their Apprenticeship as to what is required of them to achieve a Distinction.

Industry will support the Assessment Organisation to produce detailed criteria and exemplars for assessing Pass and Distinction criteria for each end point assessment activity. Areas to consider when defining the Distinction grade will include:

- High level of attention to detail.
- Going above the minimum required to fulfil the brief.
- Consideration of future changes, designing in flexibility into the working scripts and setups.
- Engagement from other members of the team and understanding how their work will be used by other team members.
- Producing and suggesting multiple options that fulfil the brief, before refining to the final solution.

Affordability and sustainability

The costs and practicality of assessment have been an important consideration in the development of this assessment approach, not least because of the number of smaller businesses who employ apprentices in this role. Above all it is important that each aspect of the assessment adds value to the employer whilst enabling the Apprentice to demonstrate his/her achievement across the Standard, playing to their strengths. Cost effectiveness has been incorporated in a number of ways:

- Employers will be required to co-invest in the training and assessment and so it is vital to develop an approach to assessment that adds value to them. Thus the nature of the assessment methods are reflective of standard industry working practice.
- The pragmatic combination of assessment methods ensures breadth, validity and reliability.
- The involvement of the employer in defining work projects for the Portfolio reduces the need for multiple visits by the independent assessor.
- Formative assessment through regular on programme appraisals before the end point assessment reduces the requirement for any additional qualifications and associated awarding organisation costs.

The costs of assessment per apprentice are estimated as follows:

- assessment of Portfolio 3.5 hours
- Invigilation and assessment of Timed Knowledge Test 3 hours
- Invigilation and assessment of Synoptic Competence Activity 7 hours
- Structured interview and application of grading 1.5 hours

The estimate therefore is that the cost of assessment should be no more than 15 hours per Apprentice. (Note: there is no qualification attached to this apprenticeship Standard). We estimate that assessment will cost 10-15% of the overall cost of the Apprenticeship.

The intention is that the same approach to assessment will be used for each Standard for the VFX industry, thereby providing a cost effective and sustainable approach.

Quality Assurance and Quality Control

Training providers and the Assessment Organisation will be required to demonstrate appropriate quality assurance arrangements in respect of support for the Apprentice on programme and for the End Point Assessment respectively.

We are actively assessing the potential for either an employer led approach to the external quality assurance of the Apprenticeship, or the feasibility of working with Ofqual to determine and carry out appropriate policy, procedure and practice that can accommodate more than one assessment organisation. Assessment organisations who wish to deliver against the Standard will need to be on the SFA Register of Assessment Organisations.

Where there is more than one Assessment Organisation, guidance from industry to inform the development of assessment guidance documentation will be made freely available to each and all. The Assessment Organisation will make assessment guidance and grading criteria available to independent assessors, providers, individual employers and Apprentices.

Manageability and Feasibility

The Sector is represented by a growing network of actively involved employers across the VFX industries collaborating to create and drive up the skills necessary to accelerate the growth of the industry in the UK.

Implementation Plan

The approach to development and implementation will continue to be informed by close consultation with training providers and assessment organisations. Industry will work closely with all those involved in the training and assessment to learn any early lessons, to identify any required remedial actions and to share best practice across the delivery of this apprenticeship and others within the VFX industry. Illustrative Guidance Documents will be produced by the Assessment Organisation for each of the End Point Assessments. The lead employer group will ensure that these are appropriate, cover the Standard effectively and offer sufficient supportive guidance and clarity for provider and Apprentice.

