



The Sector Skills Council  
for Science, Engineering and  
Manufacturing Technologies

# **Common Requirements for National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ) in the QCF**

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## Background to NVQs

The Review of Vocational Qualifications in England and Wales (RVQ) Working Group report in April 1986 recommended the introduction of NVQ's to address weaknesses in the then current systems of vocational qualifications. Amongst the weaknesses it identified were:

- no clear, readily understandable pattern of provision as well as considerable overlap, duplication and gaps in that provision
- many barriers to accessing vocational qualifications and inadequate arrangements for progression and transfer of credit
- assessment methods biased towards testing of knowledge rather than skill or competence
- insufficient recognition of learning gained outside formal education and training
- limited take-up of vocational qualifications.

The Review also recommended that:

*'the Government should establish a National Council for Vocational Qualifications (NCVQ)'.*

The purpose of the National Council for Vocational Qualifications was to establish National Vocational Qualifications. The concept of a standard of competence was fundamental to NVQs and the report further recommended that:

*'The NCVQ should establish a clear focus for national action to secure specification of standards of competence.... by effective and appropriate industry bodies'.*

The National Council for Vocational Qualifications (NCVQ) was established in the autumn of 1986. NCVQ's NVQ Criteria and Guidance from 1995 states that.

*'At the heart of an NVQ is the concept of occupational competence; the ability to perform to the standards required in employment across a range of circumstances and to meet changing demands. NVQs are first and foremost about what people can do. They go beyond technical skills to include planning, problem solving, dealing with unexpected occurrences, working with other people and applying the knowledge and understanding that underpins overall competence'.*

This is the context in which this regulatory framework is developed to operate in addition to the *General provisions of Regulatory arrangements for the Qualifications and Credit Framework 2008*. The NVQ is not a general qualification, it is a particular type that operates in a specific context – the workplace – and relies upon specific provisions and requirements unique to a competency based qualification.

In 1993 NCVQ developed and published the Awarding Bodies Common Accord.

*'The Common Accord was drafted .....in order to set out assessment and verification processes which would offer the necessary quality in relation to all NVQ awards. It emphasises the coherence of the NVQ framework to make it easier for users of NVQs to understand the system and seeks to improve the cost effectiveness and credibility of NVQs'.*

The Common Accord was intended to be applied flexibly within its main principles, but subsequently, following the establishment of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority with formal regulatory powers, it was adapted to become the mandatory NVQ Code of practice. This document reflects the principles articulated in the Code of Practice while seeking to capture the intent of the QCF for a more flexible qualifications framework and at the same time responding to the UK CES requirement for “a new, lighter touch and fit for purpose Code of Practice”<sup>1</sup>.

## **Purpose of this document**

At a meeting chaired by Ofqual on the 5<sup>th</sup> May 2009, called as a component of the ongoing discussions into the place of NVQs in the QCF, that organisation placed responsibility with the community of SSCs and SSBs to develop the required guidance to underpin the NVQ brand in the QCF. Ofqual indicated that they were not prepared to sanction formal regulation at this stage in the development of the QCF, with such decisions left until a review of operations of the framework to take place at a later time.

In conjunction with this development is the obvious necessity to gain agreement from all parties to use this document as the basis for requirements of qualifications using the term NVQ in the title, in the QCF.

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<sup>1</sup> *Simplification of Skills in England: Expert advice to government on simplification of the English post-compulsory skills system for employers*, UK CES, October 2008

## **Additional requirements**

### **1. *Qualification titles (links to QCF clauses 1.18 to 1.21)***

- 1.1 Each qualification title submitted for accreditation in the QCF that purports to be of the type NVQ must be presented in a standard format that identifies clearly that it is an NVQ.
- 1.2 Any qualification submitted for accreditation with NVQ in the title must apply the title defined by the relevant SSC/B.

### **2. *Relationship with NOS***

- 2.1 Qualifications using the title NVQ are based upon National Occupational Standards (NOS). For any qualification purporting to be of the type NVQ the following standards must apply:
  - a) There must be a direct relationship between NOS and all Units in the qualification.
  - b) They must be based entirely and only on NOS developed by SSCs/SSBs.
  - c) They must attest to competence in an occupational role (where competence is defined as the ability to apply knowledge, understanding, practical and thinking skills to be effective in work: these skills will usually include problem-solving, being flexible to meet changing demands and the ability to work with or alongside others).
  - d) They should be made up of units that are shared.

### **3. *Rules of combination (links to clauses 1.23 to 1.27)***

- 3.1 Any qualification purporting to be an NVQ must conform to the following guidelines:
  - a) Rules of combination must be that determined by SSC/Bs.
  - b) Qualifications of the type NVQ covered by this requirement:
    - i. must consist of entirely competence based units that conform to the requirements of clause 2.1.
    - ii. must be based upon units recognised in the QCF.
  - c) No organisation is permitted to submit a qualification under a different title that has the same units and rules of combination as an NVQ.

#### **4. *Assessment and quality assurance (links to clauses 5.5 to 5.10)***

4.1 NVQs are a type of qualification that reflects the unique needs of the workplace. Over the period of their use the principles, practices and requirements surrounding the assessment and quality assurance have evolved to reflect a range of varying needs. The principles outlined in this document seek to reduce any perceived burden attached to this process and to remove any inappropriate requirements from the process.

4.2 Additionally Awarding Organisations are encouraged to make use of naturally occurring quality assurance and monitoring systems where they exist in workplace assessment environments.

4.3 Assessment methodologies of qualifications using the title NVQ must implement the assessment strategies developed in partnership by the relevant SSC/Bs and Awarding Organisations. This document will be published separately and will include requirements for assessment and verification of SVQs. The specified assessment strategies must enable the qualification to attest to competence in the workplace typically they will incorporate the following requirements:

- a) Application of the specified skills, knowledge and understanding to standards required in the workplace.
- b) Specification of the type and amount of evidence to be collected for the purpose of assessing competence.
- c) Identification of any aspects of the assessment of NOS that may be/need to be simulated.
- d) Clarification of the extent to which simulated working conditions may be used in assessment and of any required characteristics of the simulations including definitions of what might constitute realistic working environments.
- e) Specification of the occupational expertise of assessors and verifiers.

4.4 Units used in qualifications with the title NVQ may reference the requirements of Assessment Strategies in the QCF Unit specification without requiring full duplication.

#### **5. *Assessor Requirements (links to QCF clause 5.2)***

5.1 The principles of assessment for qualifications using the title NVQ reflect the unique nature of a workplace competency based qualification where the accumulation of

evidence towards recognition requires both a formative and summative elements and dictates the need for the application of methods suited to the individual, environment and competency being assessed. It is the application of knowledge and skills that is then assessed in the workplace that makes NVQs unique - in other qualifications the application is implied rather than visible and required. It is expected that the assessment of qualifications will be underpinned by arrangements that reflect the principles outlined below:

- a) Assessment must be carried out by competent persons who hold, or are working towards a suitable qualification. By default this is the Assessor units A1 and/or A2 (and by implication legacy D32/33 unit) but may be an appropriate equivalent as defined in the assessment strategy for that qualification or family of qualifications.
- b) Assessors must have sufficient and relevant technical/occupational competence in the Unit, at or above the level of the Unit being assessed
- c) All Assessors are expected to be fully conversant with the Unit(s) against which the assessments and verification are to be undertaken.
- d) Unqualified Assessors must have a plan to achieve the relevant assessor qualification as defined in the Assessment Strategy within the timeframe specified.

## **6. Verifier Requirements (links to QCF clause 5.2)**

6.1 The principles of verification for qualifications using the title NVQ reflect the unique nature of a workplace based qualification. The verification process has been established to replicate the equivalent quality assurance (QA) functions that operate in academic qualifications, undertaken by examiners and moderators. It is expected that the awarding of qualifications will be underpinned by QA appropriate to workplace based delivery. At a minimum this should reflect the principles outlined below:

- a) Internal verification must be carried out by competent persons who hold, or are working towards a suitable qualification. By default this is the Internal Verifier unit V1 (and by implication legacy D34 unit) but may be an appropriate equivalent as defined in the assessment strategy for that qualification or family of qualifications (qualifications outlined in 5.1 are also highly recommended).
- b) IVs must have sufficient and relevant technical/occupational familiarity in the Unit(s) being verified.
- c) External verification must be carried out by competent persons who hold, or are working towards a suitable qualification. By default this would be the External Verifier unit V2 (and by implication legacy D35 units) but may be an appropriate

equivalent as defined in the assessment strategy for that qualification or family of qualifications (meeting the requirements outlines in clause 5.1 are also highly recommended). EV's are members of an Awarding Organisations staff or agents, who must have no connections with the Centre that would risk a loss of objectivity.

- d) EVs must have sufficient and relevant technical/occupational understanding in the Unit(s) being verified.
- e) All IVs and EVs are expected to:
  - i. be fully conversant with the standards and units against which the assessments and verification are to be undertaken.
  - ii. have an appropriate level of understanding of Awarding Organisation systems.
- f) Unqualified Verifiers must have a plan to achieve the relevant verifier qualifications as defined in the Assessment Strategy within the timeframe specified.

6.2 Where the provisions of clause 4.2 are implemented, audit programmes undertaken should seek to ensure that the QA and monitoring intent of clause 6.1 and associated referenced documents is achieved in naturally occurring systems.

## **7. Assessment Environment**

7.1 Evidence should be obtained from the real working environment. However, in certain circumstances, simulation of work activities may be acceptable. Where this is considered necessary, assessors must be confident that the environment replicates the workplace to such an extent that competencies gained will be fully transferable to the workplace. In this case assessors must clearly identify those aspects of the workplace that are critical to performance, and make sure that they have been simulated satisfactorily and in accordance with the requirements of clause 4.3.

7.2 Units that may not be assessed by simulation will be defined in the assessment strategy for the qualification or family of qualifications. Where simulation is involved, assessors must obtain agreement with their IV and EV before assessing candidates.

7.3 There must be an appropriate evidential audit trail of assessment activity that reflects the qualification being assessed. Where appropriate, guidance will be provided in the assessment strategy for the qualifications or family of qualifications.

## **8. Awarding Organisations**

8.1 Awarding Organisations must put in place a risk management methodology for qualifications using the title NVQ. This methodology should contain as a minimum the following features:

- Risk profiles.
- Risk banding characteristics.
- Risk assessment methodologies for each risk band.
- Risk avoidance strategies and activities.
- Risk mitigation activities.
- Performance management and monitoring programme.
- Sanctions provisions.

It is expected that these arrangements will reflect the risk characteristics and mitigation requirements of sectors, families of qualifications and individual qualifications outlined in the applicable Sector Qualifications Strategies and Assessment Strategies for the sector.

8.2 As outlined in clause 4.2 where naturally occurring quality and monitoring systems can be used to achieve the intent and outcomes of these QA arrangements every effort should be made to incorporate these systems, where this supports a suitably rigorous implementation and encourages integration into organisation culture and practices.

8.3 External monitoring of centres may be undertaken either through external verifier visits to centres or suitably constituted high level audit processes designed to ensure the integrity and effectiveness of naturally occurring QA and monitoring systems.

8.4 External monitoring of centres must include systems to ensure there is no conflict of interest.

8.5 The frequency of external monitoring activities should reflect an appropriate risk management methodology for a qualification of the type NVQ. The exact frequency, duration and character of these activities will reflect the centre's performance, taking account of:

- Risk profile of the centre type.
- Risk characteristics of the centre.
- Risk banding of the centre.

- Performance management and monitoring requirements.
- Risk mitigation characteristics.