

## Training and accrediting vocational assessors

**Exemplar:** UK

### Overview

The UK have for some years had a set of qualifications for those assessing achievement towards vocational qualifications. These have evolved over the years and are no longer a regulatory requirement but remain commonly adopted by college and training providers as providing a standard for those involved in vocational assessment. They focus on good practice in the process of assessment.

### Context and background

In 1986 the UK established a system of National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) in England, Wales and Northern Ireland and Scottish Vocational Qualification (SVQs) in Scotland. NVQs and SVQs are competence-based qualifications based on National Occupational Standards (NOS). NOS were set by Sector Skills Councils whose role was to work with employers to establish a framework of skills and knowledge required by employees in particular job roles. NVQs were designed to be assessed in the workplace, to accredit employees and apprentices. They were also delivered in Colleges where they were assessed in 'realistic working environments' (RWEs), such as college restaurants, hairdressing salons and workshops.

The introduction of NVQ assessment in the workplace meant that large numbers of workplace supervisors were drawn into competence assessment and that occupationally competent peripatetic assessors were appointed by independent training providers to assess on employer premises. Although occupationally competent these staff were not competent in the skills of assessment and a range of qualifications were developed to fulfil this need. The original qualifications included:

- D32 (later A2): Assess candidate performance (assessing from direct observation)
- D33 (later A1): Assess candidate performance using different forms of evidence (assessing from a broader range of assessment activities)
- D34 (later V1) Internally verify the assessment process (providing quality assurance and standardisation within the college or training provider)
- D35 (later V2) Externally verify the assessment process (providing quality assurance on behalf of the awarding organisation).

The quality of NVQ delivery was supported by the 'NVQ Code of Practice'<sup>1</sup>, this established a set of rules for the operation of NVQs. It included the requirement that assessors be occupationally competent at the level they were assessing and either hold the appropriate qualification in assessment or be working towards it and achieve it within 18 months of commencing an assessment role.

With the introduction of the Qualification Credit Framework (QCF) in 2008 a broader range of vocational qualifications were established based on NOS. The traditional requirement for 'assessor and verifier qualifications' were in many cases extended to the new QCF qualifications, either through the 'Assessment Strategies' of SSCs or the individual

requirements of Awarding Bodies. The assessor qualifications above were replaced by a new range of qualifications:

- Level 3 Certificate in Assessing Vocational Achievement (CAVA).
- Level 4 Award in the Internal Quality Assurance of Assessment Processes and Practice
- Level 4 Award in the External Quality Assurance of Assessment Processes and Practice.

The regulatory framework supporting NVQs and the NVQ Code of Practice were withdrawn in 2015 and the QCF was replaced by the replaced by the 'Regulated Qualifications Framework' (RQF). However, many Awarding Organisations and colleges continue to use these assessment qualifications for training and accrediting their staff. There is much evidence that the qualifications are seen as a standard for assessors<sup>3</sup> and are a requirement of employers when hiring vocational assessors<sup>4,5</sup>.

## Description

The **Level 3 Certificate in Assessing Vocational Achievement**<sup>2</sup> is comprised of three units:

- Understand the principles and practices of assessment
- Assess occupational competence in the work environment
- Assess vocational skills, knowledge and understanding

In addition to being taken as a Certificate, units 2 and 3 can be taken individually with the first unit to achieve 'awards'; they have also been incorporated into the Level 4 Certificate in Education and Training, formerly known as CETLS, which is used to train teachers for the Lifelong Learning sector.

**Understand the principles and requirements of assessment** is used as a standard to provide and evidence the candidates underpinning knowledge/understanding of the assessment process. It requires the assessor to understand the range assessment methods and how to plan assessment to ensure validity, authenticity, fairness and reliability; how to involve learners in assessment, making reasonable adjustments for those with disabilities while maintaining validity; how to make assessment judgements about the sufficiency of evidence to meet assessment criteria; how to manage assessment information; what constitutes good assessment practice and how assessment is quality assured. The learning for this unit is delivered in face to face workshops or through online/e Learning courses.

**Assess occupational competence in the work environment** is used to assess the competence of assessors in using assessment methods, making decisions on occupational competence and keeping assessment records within a workplace setting. This is generally assessed through a portfolio including at least four records of the candidate conducting assessments and at least one of these must be observed by an assessor.

**Assess vocational skills, knowledge and understanding** is designed to assess competence in carrying out the assessment of vocational skills, knowledge and understanding outside of the work environment e.g. in classroom and workshop settings. Candidates are required to plan and prepare assessment activities, carry out assessments, provide feedback and maintain assessment records. This is generally assessed through a portfolio including at least four records of the candidate conducting assessments and at least one of these must be observed by an assessor.

## Impact / effectiveness

It would seem self-evident that the training of assessors should impact on the validity and reliability of the assessment process. However, there is little empirical evidence of the impact of assessor training on either the validity or reliability of assessment due to a lack of research.

There are two quality dimensions of assessment to consider; validity and reliability.

Validity is the extent to which assessment measures, what it is designed to assess; in the case of vocational qualifications based on the NOS, the skills required for competence the workplace. The fact that competence assessment is on-the-job and against clear criteria set down as a result of the functional analysis of occupations by Sector Skills Councils<sup>6</sup> suggests that it is inherently valid. However, there is an inherent weakness in the process in that competence is broken down into performance criteria and as a result assessment can become a fragmented tick-box activity. To be valid vocational assessment needs to be holistic, based on the full performance of a meaningful work function.

The role of the assessor in ensuring validity is interpreting the standards and assessment criteria to identify competent performance in a meaningful unit of activity. Assessor qualifications accredit assessment practice, the process of assessment, assuming prior vocational competence; thus they do little to contribute to ensuring validity, other than raising the assessor's awareness of its importance if assessment is to be meaningful.

Reliability is the extent to which;

- a) an assessor is consistent with their assessment decisions over time and between candidates
- b) the assessment decision would be the same with one assessor as it would be for another assessor given the same candidate performance.

There is an inherent issue in the assessment of work-based learning: because evidence is naturally occurring and assessment evidence will be diverse<sup>6</sup>. The assessor's role is to identify whether there is sufficient evidence to meet the assessment criteria, despite candidates performing tasks in differing circumstances e.g. different plant, equipment, materials, products and customers. An approach to avoid this and increase reliability is to specify the assessment task but if this approach is taken and assessment evidence is not naturally occurring, there is a danger of loss of validity.

A further approach is to create 'assessment communities' where there are shared values, purpose and practices in assessment. Creating an assessment force who have been through the same training programme achieves this to some degree.

The Internal Verification and External verification processes further encourage shared agreement on the sufficiency of evidence. In the best examples, there are 'standardisation meetings' where assessors actively consider the interpretation of the standards, assessment criteria and the sufficiency of evidence. However, in most cases this stops short of joint consideration of exemplar samples of assessment performance.<sup>6</sup>

Reliability in competence-based assessment is generally measured in terms of the closeness of ratings by independent assessors or between assessors and verifiers; 'inter-rater reliability'. Despite the inherent theoretical reliability issues these studies reveal high

levels of inter-rater agreement and thus it would seem that competence-based assessment by trained assessors is reliable.

### Future development

The apprenticeship system is in the process of revision in the UK. There is an attempt to increase the direct involvement of employers in the funding of apprenticeships, setting apprenticeship standards and the assessment of apprentices on completion of their training. There will be an end-point assessment, which in many cases will take the form of a 'trade test' conducted by an independent assessment body. It is as yet unclear how assessors will be trained and what quality assurance will be put in place. What is clear is that employers will play a larger role in assessment.<sup>8</sup>

College programmes are also undergoing change, new Technical Level qualifications increase end-point assessment and require greater synoptic (holistic) assessment.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/371279/2006-12-15-qca-06-2888\\_nvq\\_code\\_of\\_practice\\_r06.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/371279/2006-12-15-qca-06-2888_nvq_code_of_practice_r06.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <http://qualifications.vtct.org.uk/finder/qualfinder/1Record%20of%20Assessment%20Book/AG30202.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <https://nationalcareersservice.direct.gov.uk/job-profiles/qcf-assessor>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.indeed.co.uk>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.totaljobs.com>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.cambridgeassessment.org.uk/Images/109712-how-can-nvq-assessors-judgements-be-standardised-.pdf>

<sup>7</sup>

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/578871/2011-03-16-on-the-reliability-of-results-in-vocational-assessment.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/578871/2011-03-16-on-the-reliability-of-results-in-vocational-assessment.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/487350/BIS-15-632-apprenticeships-guidance-for-trailblazers-december-2015.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/487350/BIS-15-632-apprenticeships-guidance-for-trailblazers-december-2015.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/2018-performance-tables-technical-and-vocational-qualifications>