



# INSIDE TVET

NATIONAL VOCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS (NVQs) are part of the world wide attempt to make qualifications, and, education and training systems more relevant to the needs of employment, as well as more accessible and flexible to suit the needs of all workers.

First developed in Britain, they have now become a key part of the qualifications' systems in Australia, New Zealand, Canada, parts of Africa and the Middle East, and right here in the region, Barbados, Trinidad and Tobago and Jamaica. Important to an understanding of NVQs, is an understanding of why they were developed in the first place.

## Why were NVQs invented?

A review of Vocational Qualifications in Britain in 1986 recommended the introduction of NVQs to address weaknesses in the then current systems of vocational qualifications. Amongst the weaknesses 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 up take of vocational qualifications.

The solution proposed was that a clear, coherent and comprehensive system of vocational qualifications should be developed that were directly relevant to the needs of employment and the individual. These NVQs should be a statement of competence clearly relevant to work and intended to facilitate entry into, or progression in, employment, further education and training and incorporate the assessment of:

- Skills to specified standards
- Relevant knowledge and understanding
- The ability to use skills and to apply knowledge and understanding to relevant tasks.

## How were NVQs developed?

In 1986, the National Council for Vocational Qualifications (NCVQ) was set up and it developed a framework of NVQs that consisted of five Levels and 11 occupational areas. The British government also funded the Industry Training Organisations (the equivalent of the local employer-led Industry Lead Bodies – ILBs) to develop the occupational standards on which NVQs are based, with Awarding Bodies responsible for developing the assessment and quality assurance arrangements to criteria set by the NCVQ. Locally, the aforementioned functions all fall under the responsibility of the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Council.

By 1994, another review showed that the majority of British employers were either using or expected to benefit from NVQs and that 40 000 managers were undertaking NVQs as evidence of lifetime learning.

It was suggested that in order to ensure that NVQs, and Scotland's equivalent, SVQs, remained up to date and continued to observe strict standards, the content and structure of all NVQs and SVQs would be reviewed by April



## Developments since 1996

After the 1996 reviews, there were a number of changes that impacted NVQ development and Vocational Education and Training (VET) in Britain:

- Standards-setting bodies (for example, ILBs) were encouraged to adopt a more flexible approach to the structure of an NVQ by having mandatory and core units
- Standards-setting bodies were required to develop assessment strategies for NVQs, recommending the external quality control of assessment, defining which National Occupational Standards (NOS) must be assessed in the workplace, the extent and characteristics of permitted simulation, and the occupational expertise requirements for assessors and verifiers
- Standards-setting bodies were required to sign-post key skills (also called core skills which include literacy, numeracy,

information technology and communication skills) to national occupational standards.

Reviews showed that by 1994, there were 500 NVQs covering 150 occupations, representing 80 per cent of all jobs in Britain. By the end of March 2001 just over 3.2 million NVQ certificates had been awarded

# Modern qualifications: NVQs explained

British National Qualifications Framework		
Level	Vocational	Academic
8	Vocational Diplomas	Doctorates
7	Vocational Diplomas, Vocational Certificates, NVQ 5	Master Degrees, Postgraduate Diplomas, Postgraduate Certificates
6	Vocational Diplomas, Vocational Certificates	Bachelors Degrees, Graduate Diplomas, Graduate Certificates
5	Vocational Diplomas, Vocational Certificates, NVQ 4	Diplomas of Higher Education, Diplomas of Further Education, Foundation Degrees, Higher National Diplomas
4	Vocational Diplomas, Vocational Certificate	Certificates of Higher Education
3	Vocational Diplomas, Vocational Certificates, NVQ 3	A-levels, AVCE
2	Vocational Diplomas, Vocational Certificates, NVQ 2	GCSE (Grades A – C)
1	Vocational Diplomas, Vocational Certificates, NVQ 1, Basic Skills	GCSE (Grades D – G)
Entry	Entry-level Certificates, Basic Skills	

1996. Gordon Beaumont subsequently undertook this review.

## The Beaumont Review

The review found widespread support for the concept of NVQs amongst employers with over 80 per cent considering competence-based standards right for vocational qualifications. The Review report identified areas for further development which included:

- Greater clarity and detail in the specifications of knowledge and understanding
- Ensuring assessment was linked to appropriate training programmes and that external assessment was derived from the independence of the assessor from the candidate.

with 60 per cent of the total being at Level 2 and 19 per cent at Level 3. It was estimated that around 12 per cent of the national workforce had attained an NVQ.

However, the level of penetration was not uniform across industrial sectors; approximately 75 per cent of certificates were awarded to those in engineering, providing business services and providing goods and services. In the three months ending 31 March 2001, nearly 1.8 million candidates were working towards an NVQ. NVQs were an essential component of the new Modern Apprenticeship schemes which impacted the up take at Levels 2 and 3.

Efforts have subsequently turned to increasing the interest in NVQs at Levels 4 and 5, where so far the majority of NVQs awarded have been NVQs in management.

There have been considerable efforts to rationalise the provision of NVQs and bring coherence to the British system of vocational qualifications, including a much needed framework of competence based qualifications. The National Qualifications Framework developed by the Qualifications Curriculum Authority (QCA), particularly the introduction of regulated vocationally-related qualifications, is part of efforts to help take forward the 1986 aim for a coherent and comprehensive system of vocational qualifications.

The primary purpose of the national qualifications framework (NQF) is to create a coherent classification for NVQs and to facilitate transfer and progression, both within areas of competence and between them.

The areas of competence within the NVQ framework result from an analysis of work roles and provide the initial organising structure for competence-based qualifications. Further refinements to the system are being made as the qualifications are developed and routes for progression/transfer are identified.

To find out more about changing qualifications systems including NVQs, interested persons can visit the following websites:

<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/students/guides/UnderstandQuals.asp>

[http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/EducationAndLearning/QualificationsExplained/DG\\_10039029](http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/EducationAndLearning/QualificationsExplained/DG_10039029)