TECHNICAL AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING (TVET) COUNCIL

NVQB User Guide

Contents

About this guide

About this guide

This publication serves as a general introduction to the National Vocational Qualification of Barbados (NVQB) – hereafter referred to as NVQ(s) – and as a specific guide for organisations or candidates interested in enrolling in the NVQ programme.

It tells what's involved in putting NVQs in place, explains the various options available and informs of the potential benefits of NVQs to organisations and their staff.

If you are interested in NVQs, or think you might like to know more, this guide will tell you all you need to know to make an informed decision about whether NVQs are right for you, whether you are part of an organisation or looking for an avenue of professional development.

CHAPTER 1

What are NVQs?

National Vocational Qualifications – NVQs – are work-based qualifications that assess someone's competence (i.e. the skills, knowledge and understanding they have) in a work situation and certify that the individual can perform the work role to the standards expected in employment.

NVQs tell you exactly what someone who is competent in an occupation **can** do. This means that anyone who has an NVQ for their occupation is competent, and has a way to prove it.

NVQs are based on national occupational standards of competence drawn up by Industry Lead Bodies. The standards describe the level and breadth of performance that is expected of anyone working in the industry or sector which the NVQ covers.

NVQs were introduced in the United Kingdom in the 1980s as part of a drive to improve the skills of the British workforce. They are recognised throughout the UK, across Europe, and worldwide.

Within the region, NVQs were introduced in Jamaica in the 1990s, in Trinidad and Tobago in 2000, and will be piloted in Barbados in 2004. They are also in the process of being developed in St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

Industry Lead body
An industry lead body – or lead body – spearheads the development of occupational standards. The lead body for each industry, or sector, is made up of people from the industry who represent various employment interests, e.g. employers, trades unions, and professional organisations.

NVQs are also designed to improve people's skills. They focus on the job-related skills and knowledge people need in work. By working towards an NVQ, your staff may well be able to improve or broaden their job competence.

NVQs:

☆ Equip someone to do a job and provide him or her with transferable skills which are relevant to many occupations

☆ Respond to the current and future needs of business and industry

☆ Are available to people of working age, and at any stage of their career

☆ Can be built up gradually over time

☆ Can be achieved at the place of work, or a training institution

☆ Encourage people to progress to further qualifications

☆ Do not require candidates to take time off work to do them – NVQs can be done during the course of their normal, day-to-day work

CHAPTER **2**

How NVQs work

There are no formal written exams – people doing NVQs collect and submit evidence, usually from their work. The evidence a candidate for an NVQ collects is assessed against the standards of competence the NVQ is based on.

The occupational standards, which are developed by the industry lead bodies, are grouped into units of competence. Each unit of competence comprises a number of elements, which describe the tasks people have to do to be able to perform in the area of work the unit covers. Performance criteria describe the level of competence that has to be achieved, and range statements detail the circumstances and applications in which the task covered by the element has to be performed.

On the next page there's an example from the NVQ in **Food and Drink Service Level 2**. Although the units and elements will be different in each NVQ, the form the qualification takes is always the same. This example lists the units making up the NVQ, then breaks down the last unit into its elements, then gives the performance criteria and range statements for the final element.

The structure of an NVQ

Qualification Title: Food and Drink Service Level 2

Qualification Structure: Four (4) Mandatory Units + Three (3) Optional Units

To achieve the full NVQ Level 2, seven (7) Units of Competence must be achieved by completing the four (4) Mandatory Units plus three (3) of the seven Optional Units.

Mandatory Units

0000001 Create and maintain effective working relationships
0000002 Maintain customer care
0000003 Maintain a safe and secure working environment
0000004 Prepare and clear tables and service areas

Optional Units

0000005 Maintain payment point and handle cash and non-cash
         payments
0000006 Prepare and serve bottled wines
0000007 Provide a table or tray service
0000008 Provide a buffet service
0000009 Provide a silver service
0000010 Provide and maintain a counter/take away service
0000011 Take and serve beverage orders

▼

Elements for Unit 0000011 (i.e. **Take and serve beverage orders**)

1 Take beverage orders
2 Place and pick up beverage orders
3 Serve beverages

▼

Performance criteria for Element 3 (i.e. Serve beverages)

3.1 Customers are served without delay in a polite and helpful manner at all times in line with service style

3.2 Beverages served are consistent with orders and meet customers' requirements

3.3 Service items are clean, undamaged and of the appropriate type

3.4 Unexpected situations are dealt with effectively and the appropriate people informed where necessary

3.5 All work is prioritised and carried out in an organised and efficient manner in accordance with safety and hygiene regulations and organisational procedures.

▼

Range statements for all performance criteria
(This element covers, but is not limited to, the following situations)

1. Table and Service Items to include:

   · table linen, crockery, cutlery,
   · silverware, glassware, trays
   · ashtrays, napkins, table decorations
   · condiments, promotional items

2. Unexpected situations:

   · Customer incidents
   · Equipment faults
   · Short staff

3. Regulations

   · Legislation
   · Manufacturer
   · Supplier

The five NVQ levels

NVQs cover five levels of competence, from entry-level staff at Level 1 through to senior management at Level 5.

Level 1   Entry Level

Recognises competence in a range of varied work activities performed in a variety of contexts. Most work activities are simple and routine. Collaboration with others through work groups or teams may often be a requirement. Substantial supervision is required especially during the early months, evolving into more autonomy with time.

Level 2   Skilled Occupations

Recognises competence in a broad range of varied work activities performed in a variety of contexts, some of which are complex and non-routine. Some responsibility and autonomy. Collaboration with others through work groups or teams and guidance of others may be required.

Level 3   Technician and Supervisory Occupations

Recognises competence in a broad range of complex, technical or professional work activities performed in a wide variety of contexts and with a substantial degree of personal responsibility and autonomy. Responsibility for the work of others and the allocation of resources are often a requirement. The individual is capable of self-directed application, exhibits problem-solving, planning, designing and supervisory capabilities.

Level 4   Technical Specialist and Middle Management Occupations

Recognises competence involving the application of a range of fundamental principles and complex techniques across a wide and unpredictable variety of contexts. Very substantial personal autonomy and often significant responsibility for the work of others and for the allocation of resources, as well as personal accountabilities for analysis, diagnosis, design, planning, execution and evaluation.

Level 5   Chartered, Professional and Senior Management Occupations

Recognises the ability to exercise personal professional responsibility for the design, development, or improvement of a product, process, system or service. Recognises technical and managerial competencies at the highest level and includes those who have occupied positions of the highest responsibility and made outstanding contribution to the promotion and practice of their occupation.

CHAPTER 3

For employers:

Deciding whether NVQs are for you

Aassuming that you are interested in NVQs, you have two decisions to make on the basis of what you have read and heard so far.

First, you have to decide which NVQ(s) you are interested in. To find out what NVQs are available, you can check with the TVET Council either by calling **435-3096** or by emailing **office@tvetcouncil.com.bb**, or by visiting our website at **www.tvetcouncil.com.bb.**

Second, you have to decide which members of your staff you think might benefit. The way to do this is by matching the standards the NVQ is based on to the job descriptions of your staff members.

What's involved in putting NVQs into practice?

Once you have decided whether NVQs are for you, and which ones are relevant to your organisation, there are three things you should consider when you are thinking seriously about putting NVQs into practice. They are:

I   your organisation, its people and other resources
II   the need for training and development
III   assessing candidates for the NVQ(s)

A fourth consideration, of course, is the cost and value for money of offering NVQs - we will consider this later (see chapter 7). The first three issues will probably arise as you go about setting up your NVQs, though perhaps not in the order in which we list them here. You will be able to deal with them as they arise.

Things to consider when putting NVQs in place:

☆ **Your Organisation**

You will have to think about:
- gaining the commitment of key people
- identifying your existing resources
- gaps in your resources and how to fill them
- applying to the TVET Council for approval to offer NVQs
- providing a central contact (i.e NVQ co-ordinator) to communicate with   the TVET Council
- registering candidates with the TVET Council

☆ **Training and development**

You should think about:
- identifying training and development needs
- identifying who the likely NVQ candidates are
- planning the development and assessment of NVQ candidates
- designing a staff development programme, or re-designing your existing programme
- introducing candidates to the programme
- offering training and development if necessary

☆ **Assessment**

You will need to think about:
- enlisting the support and help of the people who put the NVQ into practice: assessors and internal verifiers
- training assessors and internal verifiers
- carrying out assessments
- recording the assessors' judgements
- notifying the TVET Council of assessment results
- external verification arrangements

This may seem like a lot of things to think about, but, you can deal with most of these issues as and when they arise, and there is always help and advice available from the TVET Council. In the rest of this section, we will look at and explain these issues in more detail.

Your organisation

Gaining the commitment of key people

The success of any NVQ programme depends on gaining the commitment of senior people in the organisation.

Responsibility for the programme should be taken by a senior person who can allocate the resources the programme needs, and who can persuade others of the need to invest the necessary time, effort, and money. They should also be able to motivate the staff that is going to be doing the NVQs.

You will need to have a clear and convincing rationale for the NVQ programme, whether it is that the NVQs you are offering will act as a framework for your in-house training, that having NVQs will bolster your public standing by acknowledging the competence of your staff, or any of the other variety of reasons for doing NVQs.

Identifying existing resources

The resources that may be needed for an NVQ programme include:
• people and physical resources needed for training and development
• training for assessors and verifiers
• the work time taken by assessors and verifiers
• the work time taken by candidates for the NVQs
• the work time taken by your organisation's NVQ co-ordinator

You may well find that you are already carrying out some or all of the processes required for offering NVQs. This is especially true if your organisation is already involved in some other quality control programme such as ISO 9000.

Gaps in your resources and how to fill them

Looking for an external partnership is one very useful way of filling resourcing gaps:

☆ You can augment your training and development system by combining with one or more other employers to pool your training and development resources to offer NVQs to your staff, or, by forming links with training providers.

☆ You can buy-in training for assessors and internal verifiers and you could also consider using the expertise of another employer's assessors and internal verifiers.

Applying to the TVET Council for approval to offer NVQs

To offer NVQs, you have to apply to the TVET Council for approval – we are responsible for ensuring that the organisations offering our awards comply with certain minimum quality criteria.

There are two aspects to the approval process:

☆ **Initial approval** - to be approved as a centre that can offer our qualifications, your organisation will have to show that it has what it needs to be able to offer NVQs. It has to have assessors (or access to assessors) and internal verifiers, a central TVET Council contact person, and various other elements of the TVET Council quality framework in place before it can start to offer NVQs to its staff.

☆ **Approval to offer a particular NVQ** - here, you have to demonstrate that you have the staff, learning and assessment resources, and equipment needed to offer the NVQ or NVQs you are interested in.

You can apply for both kinds of approval at the same time. Once you have initial approval as an NVQ approved centre, you can seek approval to offer as many particular NVQs as you want without having to seek initial approval again.

Providing a central contact to liaise with the TVET Council

We ask all organisations offering NVQs to nominate someone as a central contact (i.e. your NVQ co-ordinator). It is this person's job to:

- be responsible for liaising with the TVET Council
- guarantee the quality of the programme
- maintain links with all the organisation's assessors and internal verifiers
- ensure that all assessors and internal verifiers are adequately trained
- Register candidates with the TVET Council – i.e. submit candidates' details to the TVET Council.

Training and development

Identifying NVQ candidates

The first thing you will have to do is ask for a copy of the standards for the NVQ (or NVQs) you are interested in – the TVET Council will be able to advise on how to do this – then match them to what your organisation does. More specifically, you should be able to match them to what certain individuals in your organisation do (whether they work in customer service, manufacturing, personnel, or some other section of your organisation).

Remember that:

- NVQs are suitable for people of all ages and at all stages of their careers
- there are no entry requirements for NVQs
- each NVQ relates to a specific occupation, so you may well be looking at either a number of different NVQs, or just one specialised part of your workforce.

You may well have candidates who are at different levels of competence to begin with:

- highly experienced candidates may be able to come forward for assessment almost immediately.
- other candidates may need more experience, or more training and development.

It is important to make sure that the candidates you choose, and who express interest in doing an NVQ, will be able to make full use of the assessment opportunities, and any training and development they need.

Identifying training and development needs

This is the first stage of the process of delivering the NVQ to your staff.

What you have to do is match the standards to the job role and skills profile of each individual candidate. The way to do this is to compare the list of tasks (elements and performance criteria) in the standards with the tasks (say in a detailed job description) that an individual does in his or her daily work. It will be helpful to consult the individuals concerned and their line managers.

What this will give you is an idea of the readiness of each individual for the NVQ, and an indication of the extent to which they:

- should be able to gain evidence of competence for particular elements through their normal work
- will need some job development (e.g. expansion of job role, secondment)
- will need some training and development.

Some points to bear in mind

- **As we have said, NVQs are not training programmes. They set the standard of competence to be achieved by candidates, but do not specify the kind of training needed to achieve this standard.**
- **Some experienced people may need only very minimal or no training before being assessed.**
- **However, many people are likely to need some kind of training before they can be successfully assessed for an NVQ.**

Planning the development and assessment of NVQ candidates

It is usually the best policy to draw up an individual assessment plan for each candidate. This is best done by the assessor for the NVQ (who could be one of your own staff) and the candidate. When you are drawing up the plan, you could use:

- the results of the matching exercise described in the previous section, 'identifying training needs'
- the candidate's job description
- NVQ support material and assessment guidance provided by the TVET Council.

In general, though, the plans should set (flexible) target dates for achieving development aims and being assessed for units, identify training needs, and areas where the candidate needs more experience.

Offering training and development (if necessary)

Training and development can take many forms, e.g. an employer's own training and development programme, a formal college course, or training and development from another training institution.

Other methods of staff development that can be used include secondments, on-the-job coaching, small group learning, projects, distance learning, and open learning. You may well find that the NVQ or NVQs you are interested in fit in very well with your existing staff-training programme.

Assessment

Assessors...

An assessor is likely to be a supervisor or manager. Assessors need to be competent in the area of work covered by an NVQ, and in assessment.

Their role is to:
- work closely with the candidate to identify opportunities for gathering evidence of the candidate's competence

- agree assessment plans with the candidate

- assess the evidence against the standards on which the NVQ is based

- make judgments about the candidate's competence

- keep assessment records

- provide feedback on their judgements to the candidate

- Liase with the candidate's manager and/or trainers, and with the internal verifier.

...and internal verifiers

An internal verifier's job is to make sure all assessors in an organisation are assessing to the same standards. They need to be competent in the area of work covered by an NVQ, and in verification.

Their role is to:
- sample the assessment records kept by the assessors to monitor the consistency of their assessments

- countersign assessment records kept by assessors

- observe a sample of assessments to monitor their consistency

- support the assessors by offering guidance and advice

- operate systems to standardise assessment

- act according to agreed procedures where disputes between candidates and assessors arise, and where there's an appeal against an assessment decision.

A TVET Council External Verifier will be able to advise you on these roles.

Assessors and internal verifiers may need continuing support and training. This could be to help them deal with issues like these:

- how assessors can combine assessment with their normal work roles
- the problems that can arise when making evaluative judgements about colleagues
- the need for continuing development for assessors during periods when they have no candidates to assess
- how to build confidence in assessing unfamiliar or rarely – encountered situations.

Carrying out assessments

NVQ candidates are assessed against the standards on which the NVQ is based – the performance criteria and the range statements.

There are four stages to assessment:

- the assessor decides how the candidate should be assessed
- the candidate generates evidence of competence with the assessor's help
- the assessor makes a judgement about the candidate's competence on the basis of the evidence
- the assessor records this judgement.

The assessor then has to make one of three possible judgements:

- the candidate is competent
- the candidate is not yet competent
- the evidence is insufficient to make a judgement.

Recording the assessor's judgements

A careful record needs to be made of:

- the assessor's judgement about the candidate's competence
- the evidence on which that judgement is based.

This is so that all the assessor's decisions can be verified – an important part of the TVET Council quality assurance framework.

Notifying the TVET Council of assessment results

You can choose whether to notify the TVET Council each time a candidate has achieved a unit making up an NVQ, or after all the required units have been achieved.

Each unit is registered on the candidate's record of achievement, a cumulative record which is updated annually. Once all the necessary units have been achieved, the candidate is issued with an NVQ certificate.

Other issues

Designing and running an assessment appeals procedure

If NVQ candidates disagree with an assessment, they must have the right to appeal. To meet the TVET Council's approval requirements, you must have an appeals procedure.

All candidates should be informed of the grounds on which they can make an appeal, and of the internal procedures for doing so.

It is important to keep full records of each assessor's judgements, and of all the stages of an appeal.

Allowing TVET Council systems verifiers and external verifiers access

TVET Council systems verifiers and external verifiers ensure that assessors across the country are assessing to the same standards.

How often systems verifiers and external verifiers will visit you depends on several factors, including your experience in delivering nationally – recognised qualifications.

External verifiers are subject-specialists whose job is to make sure that the NVQs in their subject area are being assessed to the same high standards.

Systems verifiers make sure that centres delivering NVQs have the systems they need to operate effectively.

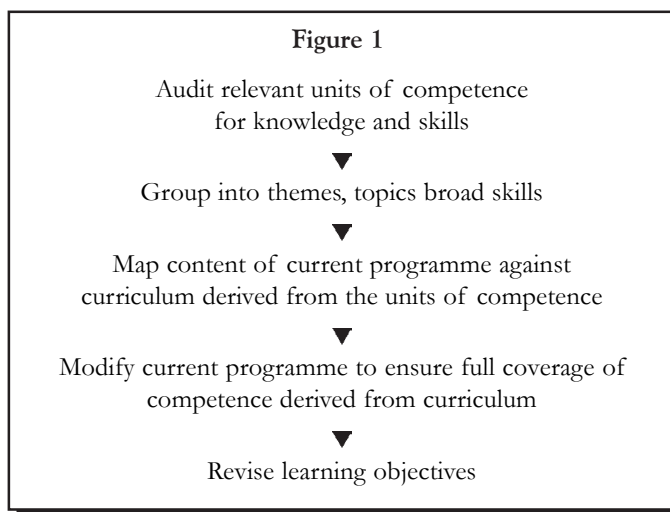**CHAPTER 4**

For training providers:

Developing training programmes using occupational standards

A fundamental principle of NVQs is that they should be assessed in a realistic working environment. You may tackle the need for a realistic working environment by restricting the NVQs you deliver to occupations for which you already have a suitable training environment.

Alternatively, you may also offer courses which are related to national occupational standards, but, which prepare students for employment rather than aiming to enable them to acquire competence in all aspects of the job.
This can be done either through modifying the existing curriculum or designing new curriculum from the Occupational Standards.

Modifying existing curriculum

This is the least resource-intensive approach. Learning objectives may be re-written to place more emphasis, for example, on the application of knowledge in work contexts or to include the development of higher level or more complex skills. The steps taken to align an existing curriculum to 'fit' the standards for a selected occupational role are summarised in figure 1:

Figure 1

Audit relevant units of competence
for knowledge and skills

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Group into themes, topics broad skills

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Map content of current programme against
curriculum derived from the units of competence

▼

Modify current programme to ensure full coverage of
competence derived from curriculum

▼

Revise learning objectives

Designing new curriculum from the standards

This involves building up the curriculum from the knowledge and skills contained in the units of competence relevant to the occupational role. This is appropriate especially where the match between the standards for a particular work role, and the objectives and content of an existing learning programme was poor.

Things to consider when using standards in teaching and learning:

- A fundamental decision needs to be taken as to whether or not the training programme is aiming to enable students to be fully competent in the occupational role

- A subsequent decision is the allocation of teaching between the classroom and the practical training or work environment.

- New teaching materials may need to be developed to support the development of competence – these would take as their starting point the workplace functions and tasks as laid out in the standards

- Subject teachers should be thoroughly familiar with current working practices in industry

- Training linked to occupational standards favours experiential approaches to teaching over more traditional didactic methods

- Practical work experience provides the context in which learning of theoretical principles and concepts can be tested and integrated

- Occupational standards-based training can empower students since they now have clearly defined and detailed targets to achieve in the form of units of competence. This should help them both to assess their own learning needs and to take charge of their own learning

Please see chapter 6 for information on assessment methods.

CHAPTER 5

For candidates:

NVQs are qualifications that show you are competent to do your job to nationally recognised standards. This is something you might be interested in for a number of reasons:

- to give yourself a definite career goal to work towards
- to prove your competence to your employer
- to prove your competence to a prospective employer
- most importantly, to prove to your clients that you are someone who is competent and can be relied upon.
- they offer recognition of the skills you already possess and use in your day-to-day work
- there are no entry qualifications
- NVQs are especially suitable for employees undertaking on-the-job training in their place of work, but they can also be taken at a training institution.

The role and responsibilities of candidates

What do you have to do?

As mentioned earlier, to gain a NVQ you must demonstrate your ability to carry out work activities:

- to the standards shown in the Performance Criteria
- in the situations given in the Evidence Requirements
- while applying the Knowledge and Understanding

You will need to be assessed at work by a qualified assessor who may use a variety of methods to do this. The assessor will then write reports about the assessment and these will need to go in a

- **Portfolio of Evidence**

with other evidence that you may have produced while demonstrating the competence.

The assessor may assess you through a number of methods – here are just a few and each assessor will have their preferred methods.

Observation

Your assessor may want to observe you at work. He/she can then witness the competencies you are claiming. Unfortunately, the assessor isn't always around when you have the 'difficult customer' and you may need other types of evidence for the more complex situations.

Assessor Discussion

Your assessor may want to discuss a particular situation with you and ask you questions about what happened. This discussion could be taped as evidence or the assessor could write an assessment report about it. A discussion alone is not enough – you will also need to show the assessor other evidence. This could be in a filing cabinet or on the computer screen or elsewhere. It could also be in your portfolio. Your assessor will need to see this to check your story. Your assessor could also ask a witness to describe the situation to corroborate your story – this is called a Witness Testimony.

Case Study

Your assessor may ask you to write about a specific incident that they feel demonstrates skills and knowledge, which matches the NVQ standards. Your assessor will then read this to get an understanding of what happened. He/she will then probably want to ask you questions based on the case study. Again, you will have to show other evidence to go with the case study to prove that the events took place. Both the case study and the assessor's written report about the questions (or a tape recording) will go in your portfolio as pieces of evidence.

What is a Portfolio?

Your Portfolio is personal to you – everyone has their own ideas about what a portfolio should look like – you will develop your own ideas. Here's a list of what most portfolios usually contain:

Cover/Title Page

to include your name, title and level of the NVQ, candidate registration number and contact details.

Contents Page

probably the last page you will complete before submitting your portfolio. Doing it last will allow you to shuffle contents as and when you develop your portfolio.

Background Section

Your personal details – CV detailing information about your current role and responsibilities, where your own part of your organisation fits into the whole company (an organizational chart, if you have one, will help)

People who helped you

names and roles of those who have supported you towards achieving your NVQ

Evidence Section

clearly cross-referenced items of evidence

Evidence Matrix

a summary chart showing how your evidence matches the standards – use this to avoid unnecessary duplication of evidence. This is because one piece of evidence will often relate to more than one Element or Unit. By using this cross-reference matrix you will avoid the need to spend hours at the photocopier. Your assessor or training provider may have assorted forms for you to use in portfolio building.

What about Evidence?

Evidence is simply **your** proof that **you** meet the requirements of the NVQs. It is:

- the physical items you show your assessor, and/or
- what your assessor observes you doing at work, and/or
- your responses to questions your assessor may put to you

You must always make sure that your evidence is:

Valid – does your evidence match what is being assessed? What we are saying here is that you must ensure that your evidence specifically relates to the Performance Criteria.

Authentic – your evidence must be about you

Current – it is no good putting forward evidence saying you solved customer problems 10 years ago – what about now? In addition to this you will have to show that your evidence is:

Sufficient – you will need to provide enough evidence to convince your assessor of your competence.

So just think VACS!

When judging your evidence your assessor can make three decisions:

- that you are competent
- that you are not yet competent
- that there is insufficient evidence

This means there is no pass/fail situation to worry about. If you are not yet competent or you have insufficient evidence you have the opportunity to continue with the qualification to develop further. Your assessor will help you plan for this.

Where do you find the evidence?	
your behaviour and skills	what the assessor sees when observing you at work
written work	reports, letters, projects, assignments
your feedback	letters from customers, performance appraisals, statements from colleagues, managers, supervisors, witness testimonies
your records	personal development plans, learning logs, file notes, case studies, coaching plans, assessment plans, training events
recordings of you at work	taped conversations, video recordings
your completed and marked learning exercises	Quizzes/tests (e.g. product knowledge), questionnaires
evidence from others who witnessed something happening	Witness Testimony – either written or verbal or a signature on a storyboard
your answers to questions your assessor asks you	Written/audio/taped assessor records

Portfolios and Evidence

Your assessor will give you guidance and support on evidence issues and portfolios, but here are some common principles that will help:

- is the portfolio easy to read?
- is the sequence of presentation logical and helpful?
- does your portfolio have a helpful index?
- does your portfolio contain irrelevant padding?
- have you followed the rules of VACS?
- it is not necessary to keep copies of all your evidence in one place i.e. in a portfolio.
- if you choose not to keep a portfolio (i.e. you keep evidence of competence where it is naturally located, for example in a filing cabinet, desk, etc), a Record of Assessment must be kept which shows the evidence produced, the assessment decision and where the evidence is located.
- some people prefer to keep a portfolio as a living record of their achievements. This can then be updated and used as you wish even after you have achieved your qualification. Some take their portfolios to job interviews or to appraisal or feedback sessions with a line manager.
- others find them to be a paper chase. The choice is yours. Be guided by the advice of your NVQ advisers.
- where paper-based material is presented for assessment, you should avoid the inclusion of reference documents, training materials or any other evidence that does not demonstrate your competence. This advice goes back to VACS – is the evidence valid? Does it relate to the requirements of the NVQ? Or is it just unnecessary padding?

If you are interested in pursuing an NVQ, whatever you decide to do, consider where are you going to get your evidence.

CHAPTER **6**

Assessment methods

A very wide range of methods can be used to assess NVQs. Any method used has to generate evidence of competence as defined by the standards on which the NVQ is based. In other words, the assessment method must measure the candidate's performance against each performance criterion and in each part of the range statement. The standards will also specify the kind of evidence required.

Because NVQs are designed to prove that candidates can do certain things, the methods of assessment used most are generally direct observation of their performance, and examination of the products they produce in the workplace.

Direct observation in the workplace by an assessor, or by another competent person, is a very important method, but for some NVQs, assessors can also directly observe candidate's performance during:

- simulations (most standards will say whether these are appropriate)
- skills and proficiency tests
- role play

Direct observation can be supplemented by these sources of evidence:

- video/audio recording of performance
- evaluation of work products
- answers to written and oral questions
- case studies
- projects and assignments
- witness testimony
- personal interviews

Direct observation in the workplace

Directly observing candidates' performance in the course of their work is a useful method of assessment, and wherever possible, it should be used to assess the units and elements making up an NVQ.

For employers, it can also be cost-effective, as it does not involve taking candidates away from the workplace.

Direct observation involves more than just passively watching the candidate. An assessor has to know exactly what he or she is looking for. A checklist is a useful way of making sure the assessor can relate the candidate's evidence to the standards.

Assessors also need to be aware of when a candidate's activity is likely to produce evidence of other performance criteria as well. Finally, they need to be familiar enough with the standards to be able to decide when a candidate's performance has met the relevant performance criteria, and to devise adequate methods of recording the evidence produced.

For NVQs at levels I and II, it will often be possible to assess candidates largely on the basis of performance at work. It may, though, sometimes be necessary to supplement this with observation of their performance in areas that are not part of normal work. This might involve organising a secondment to another department, or setting the candidate special tasks.

For NVQs at levels III, IV and V, where more complex performance is required, direct observation of performance in the workplace will probably offer only partial evidence of competence. At these levels, simulations, role play and other methods will probably need to be used, as well as secondments, and setting special tasks.

Assessors undertaking direct observation in the workplace need to ensure that they are as unobtrusive as possible. They should take into account the extra pressures arising from the fact that the candidate knows he or she is being assessed.

Simulations, skills and proficiency tests, and role plays

This group of assessment methods also involves direct observation. However, in this case, the candidate is performing not in the workplace, but in simulated workplace conditions. Assessors should make sure that assessments of this kind are as life-like as possible. Simulations have to comply with the standards on which the NVQ is based, and with the lead body and awarding body's requirements.

This type of assessment method is particularly suitable for trainees and students who have limited access to a real workplace.

Simulations can include activities which might take months to arise naturally in the workplace, or which are too expensive, or too dangerous, to carry out in a real-life situation.

Using written and oral questioning

Questioning is a very important part of virtually any assessment. It will often be necessary to prove that the candidate is competent. In particular, it will help the assessor to be sure that the candidate knows why he or she is doing something, as well as being able to do it.

Questioning can also help to elicit information about how the candidate would perform in unusual or unexpected situations. When the products of a candidate's work are being assessed, questioning can also reassure the assessor that these are genuinely the candidate's own work.

Written or verbal questions will often be needed for the assessor to infer that candidates can transfer their competence to other contexts.

Assessors should take care not to use 'leading questions' which indicate to the candidate the answer he or she expects. 'Open' questions, that require the candidate to give a fuller reply than just a 'yes' or 'no' answer, are better than 'closed' questions. Assessors should be aware that, while there is sometimes a straightforwardly 'correct' answer to a question, at other times, no such answer is possible. The purpose of questioning in these cases is to encourage candidates to explore alternatives and discuss options.

It is important that questioning should be used to support performance evidence and not instead of it.

Other sources of evidence

☆ **Video/audio recording of performance:** In certain circumstances, it is impracticable for an assessor to be present when a candidate is performing a particular activity. In such cases, it may be possible to make a video or audio recording of the activity, which the assessor can examine later.

☆ **Evaluation of work products:** In some cases, an activity required for an NVQ will result in a product (a marketing strategy, a word-processed document, a loaf of bread). In these cases, the assessor can judge the candidate's competence by examining the product.

It is important that the assessor should have proof that the product is the candidate's own work, such as a note of authentication from a line manager or supervisor.

☆ **Case studies:** Generally designed by an assessor, a case study should outline a real or hypothetical scenario relevant to the area of competence to be assessed. The scenario may be presented in written form, or visually, for example as a video.

Candidates are asked to analyse the scenario, answering written or oral questions to demonstrate their competence, and their underpinning knowledge and understanding. It is important that any case study should be both realistic, and carefully matched to the relevant units or elements of the NVQ.

☆ **Projects and assignments:** A project or assignment is a practical or theoretical exercise or investigation that requires the candidate to plan and implement a strategy, and present the products of the exercise, or the conclusions of the investigation, for assessment. It is important that projects and assignments should be both realistic and carefully matched to the requirements of the NVQ.

☆ **Witness testimony:** It will probably happen that assessors are not present just at that moment when candidates are using their skills at work. In these cases it is sometimes appropriate to make use of witness testimonies, that is, to ask a person who was present to testify to the candidate's competence.

Such testimonies could be made verbally to assessors, or could be written in a short note. A list of witness names needs to be produced with contact numbers so that assessors, internal verifiers and external verifiers can speak to them if required.

It should be remembered that witnesses can only comment on the performance of the candidate in their work role, they are not able to comment on the performance of the candidate in relation to the requirements of the standards – this is the responsibility of the assessor.

☆ **Personal interviews:** This is probably one of the oldest and best-known methods of eliciting information from a candidate. It may be an appropriate way of assessing personal competence, such as a candidate's personal and interpersonal skills. Again, though, it should only be used in conjunction with other methods of assessment.

Other Issues

Assessment on demand

In general, an assessment should take place as and when the candidate is ready for it. However, assessments should only rarely be opportunistic, as, for example, when an assessor witnesses a candidate coping with an irate customer.

Most assessments can and should be planned ahead of time. Intermittent but predictable tasks can be planned for, and periods when it will not be possible to assess can also be identified.

There are no hard and fast rules about how long the assessment of any element or unit should take. For the assessor and candidate, however, it is clearly reasonable to bring the process of assessment to a conclusion at some agreed point, and assessors need to beware of the dangers of over-assessment.

Integrating assessment

The assessor should also bear in mind the importance of gaining an overall picture of the candidate's competence. Many performance criteria have links with others in the same element or unit, or in a different one.

Assessors and candidates are encouraged to undertake assessments that can provide evidence of several performance criteria and/or elements at once, rather than assessing performance criteria piecemeal. As well as avoiding the dangers of over-assessing candidates, this approach ensures that assessments are meaningful, and reflect real-life work roles.

Providing feedback to candidates

Once enough assessment has taken place for the assessor to make a judgement about the candidate's competence in a unit or element, it is very important that this judgement should be clearly explained to the candidate. Time should be set aside for feedback and deciding what steps to take next, whether to collect more evidence, to plan another assessment, or to arrange for further training and development for the candidate.

CHAPTER 7

The costs of NVQs

Introducing NVQs shouldn't involve you meeting excessive costs. In fact, an NVQ programme should provide a cost-effective way of encouraging staff development, offering increased efficiency, higher productivity, and improved staff morale.

Because they focus on assessment in the workplace, NVQs don't involve candidates spending a lot of time away from their work. As we have said, it may also be the case that your existing training, development, and assessment functions can be adapted to NVQs.

For some employers, particularly small companies, cost-effective solutions may be found by setting up partnerships with training providers, or with a consortium of other employers.

What are the costs?

There are two types of cost: direct and indirect.

Direct costs

The direct costs of offering NVQs could include fees relating to:

- centre approval
- registration and certification for each candidate
- external verification

For further information about the direct costs, please contact the TVET Council.

Indirect costs

The sort of indirect costs you might incur in offering NVQs include:

- the human and physical resources needed for training and development
- training for assessors and verifiers
- work time taken by assessors and verifiers
- work time taken by candidates during induction, training and development, assessment, and planning
- work time taken by the person whose job it is to liase with the TVET Council (the central contact) or NVQ co-ordinator.

TVET Council contacts and information

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