

### 0701 - MECHANISMS FOR THE ANTICIPATION OF SKILL NEEDS

The UK's Qualifications Frameworks (see section 2) include vocational qualifications – National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) and, for Scotland, Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs). The introduction of the UK-wide Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) in 2002 heralded the intention on the part of government that the anticipation of training and qualifications needs should be driven largely by labour market needs: what skills balance is likely to be needed in future? How may occupational profile changes lead to new training qualifications/needs? How best can the needs of employers be met? Traditional labour market forecasting techniques have been refined and more holistic approaches are being adopted.

NVQs and SVQs are vocational qualifications based on National Occupational Standards developed through a process of functional analysis, now led by the Sector Skills Council (SSC). Standards are specified in the form of units, aggregated to meet qualifications needs of specific occupations, which are identified by a parallel process of occupational mapping. SSCs are required to take into account future labour market requirements. The recent shake-up of sectoral arrangements aims to improve their capacity for undertaking labour market analysis in anticipation of emerging sector skill requirements.

In England, the Treasury has moved towards placing a requirement on government departments to evaluate as well as implement all major initiatives. Evaluation is now frequently included in the development plans, with international tendering for major evaluations. Routine monitoring of qualifications is undertaken by the QCA. The SSCs and awarding bodies respectively review the labour market need and uptake of qualifications. The amount of data in the system is increasing, with national databases increasingly being refined by the DIUS. This allows routine monitoring of trends in the system, as well as the uptake of specific qualifications. The renewal of qualifications admitted to the national qualifications framework is determined by a 're-accreditation cycle' in which qualifications are subject to review on an agreed cycle - typically 3 years. On average, new qualifications are developed over an 18 months' cycle.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children Services and Skills (Ofsted) is responsible for appraising and reporting to Government on the quality of training provision; this is done through visits to training settings and can include commentary on the performance of specific initiatives and reforms.

Relevant labour market data comes from a variety of national sources including the Labour Force Survey (LFS) and the Annual Employment Survey (AES), and from national, regional or sectoral surveys, and skill audits. Strong emphasis is now placed on identifying and planning skill development programmes to meet local labour market needs. Quantitative methods include mechanistic/extrapolative techniques, behavioural/econometric models, surveys of employers' opinions and skills audits. Qualitative approaches include Delphi techniques, case studies, focus groups and holistic modelling approaches, such as scenarios. The Skillsbase database provides a wide range of labour market information.

In Scotland, Futureskills Scotland (which is managed by Scottish Enterprise in collaboration with Highlands and Islands Enterprise) conducted an annual survey in 2003 to provide evidence about skill shortages, skill gaps and training, based on information from more than 3,000 Scottish workplaces. The Analytical Services Division of the Scottish Executive's Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning Department manages a programme of research in support of policy development in further and higher education, vocational education and training and lifelong learning. For the corresponding agencies in Wales and Northern Ireland, see Section 3.1.

### 0702 - BRIDGING PATHWAYS AND NEW EDUCATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS

The UK's VET system is largely outcomes-based. Training providers have flexibility to plan learner-centred delivery systems to meet users' needs. The same qualifications are offered in both the initial and the continuing VET and the flexibility offered by the

outcomes approach has been greatest in providing adult learners with access to individually targeted learning and assessment. Young people, increasingly since the advent of apprenticeships, tend to follow more standardised learning programmes.

The modular or unit structure of N/SVQs and most other vocational qualifications provides a high degree of flexibility, opening up possibilities for modular delivery and credit transfer. The number of people gaining individual units, often through job-focused in-company training, is increasing in some sectors. Many providers of education and training use mixed mode delivery, incorporating elements of conventional and open or distance learning.

Since 2002, the reform of vocational qualifications (VQ) has been implemented across the UK. The vision was that a flexible, responsive and easily understood VQ system to meet individual and employment needs should be in place by 2010, with a unit-based credit framework by 2007. The QCF (England) has been tested and trialled. This phase of the vocational qualification reform was externally evaluated and is currently with the ministers awaiting decision for national roll-out (mid-2008).

The QCA, a government agency, in partnership with the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), the UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES) and the relevant bodies in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, is responsible to DCSF/DIUS for implementing qualifications reform in England (and for certain vocational qualifications, in Wales and Northern Ireland also), through mechanisms such as the design of the review of national framework and the criteria for inclusion, and the approval of awarding bodies. .

Candidates may be awarded qualifications on the basis of accreditation of prior learning (APL) evidence alone. In practice this has proved difficult because of the substantial requirements for verification. However, the availability of direct access to assessment for those able to show that they have sufficient learning to be assessed without having to follow a complete learning programme is another factor contributing to flexibility. The possibility of recognising prior learning is being considered to be incorporated into the developing the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) for England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Scotland has adopted 'Guidelines for the Recognition of Prior Informal Learning' as part of the arrangements for the SQCF.

In Scotland, the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) was established by a partnership of national bodies: the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) through its Scottish Office, the Scottish Qualification Authority (SQA) and Universities Scotland, supported by the Scottish Executive and other stakeholders in the HE sector. These bodies are known as the Development Partners.

These frameworks' developments will facilitate transfer and accumulation of qualifications and credits across the four nations of the UK. The work to align the qualification frameworks in the UK with the ETF is underway.

In England, three National Skills Academies (NSAs) were launched in 2006. Led by employers but with Government support these aim to encourage excellence in vocational education at national level, operating as world class centres of excellence in training for their occupational sectors. The intention is to establish twelve by end 2008.

At regional level employers, education and training providers and government agencies come together to develop coordinated approaches to skills issues through Regional Skills Partnerships, and at local level Local Aimhigher Partnerships bring together partners to develop and coordinate initiatives to widen participation in higher education, including vocational routes.

#### **STRATEGIES TO BRIDGE DIFFERENT TYPES AND LEVELS OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING**

Governments in England have sought to bridge the gap between general education and vocational training by achieving parity of esteem between different types of qualifications. Achieving this remain elusive, and is a major policy drive for the current review of 14 to 19 curriculum (introduction of new Diplomas, in particular) and

qualifications and for the review of the national qualifications framework. The existing national qualifications framework defines three pathways in which a clear relationship was traced between three separate types of provision – traditional general education provision, school and college-based vocationally related education, and work-based vocational provision. The new framework contains a number of lines based on areas of knowledge, skills and competences, blurring the line between general and occupational, and encouraging transfer and mixed learning programmes

This policy has encountered a number of problems, and increasingly public policy has recognised a need to enable young people to be able to choose learning programmes combining elements of general and vocational education rather than having to follow one learning pathway to the exclusion of others. Currently a major review of vocational qualification is under way across the UK. Working in partnership with LSC, UKCES, and the regulatory and funding agencies for Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland, QCA is developing a joint programme of work to improve the vocational qualifications system to ensure it meets future needs. In Scotland, reforms such as the new credit-based qualification framework are designed to achieve a more unified approach to different types of education and training. The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) merges general and vocational pathways by highlighting routes for progression. The framework is designed to widen educational opportunities and encourage 'parity of esteem' for academic and vocational qualifications. It makes the qualifications available more understandable and show their relative value.

Creation of comprehensive national framework of outcome-based qualifications, coupled with Foundation Degrees' proliferation, aim to help bridge the academic vocational divide and ease vertical transition.

### **0703 - RENEWAL OF CURRICULA**

In the UK, NVQs and SVQs are largely based upon national occupational standards, or statements of the outcomes to be achieved to meet the requirements for certification. These are mainly developed by Sector Skill Councils (SSCs), which are employer-led bodies and normally include trade unions representatives on a minority basis together with representatives of relevant professional bodies and training organisations from the sector.

Because curricula are not usually nationally prescribed (the assessment requirements for qualifications normally being independent of delivery), curricula tend to be developed mainly by the organisations providing the education and training, for example by colleges, training organisations and employers at a decentralised level. However, for programmes such as modern apprenticeship, SSCs are increasingly involved in developing and disseminating curriculum models.

#### **THE PLACE OF BASIC SKILLS AND KEY COMPETENCES IN THE LEARNING CULTURE**

Key or core skills units are available at all levels of the NQF and SCQF in communication, number, information technology, problem solving, working with others, and developing own learning/skills. Key skills units in communication, number, information technology, problem solving, working with others and developing own learning skills are available at all levels of the NQF. They may be certificated as freestanding key skill qualifications. Key and core skills were widely seen as a potential bridge between different types of qualification provision and are a compulsory element of all modern apprenticeship programmes. Implementation of key skills programmes and assessment remains problematic.

Where students learn in a school-or college environment, securing sufficient direct experience of workplace learning and the professional competences and identities that are learnt this way is often a difficulty. A new framework of specialised diplomas is being developed in England, and workbase learning is to be a clear feature of these new qualifications.

In Scotland, key or core skills units are available at all levels of the NQF and also in the national qualifications and higher national qualifications with the SCQF. Numeracy, information technology, problem solving and working with others can be gained at different levels up to and including SCQF level 6.

## INTEGRATION OF NEW METHODS AND TECHNOLOGIES INTO CURRICULA

NVQ and SVQ criteria required national occupational standards to reflect the ability to respond to new technologies and innovations in working methods and forms of work organisation. This reflects the high degree of emphasis placed on facilitating flexibility and mobility in employment and ensuring that qualifications do not become out-dated too quickly. Standards for vocational qualifications are generally reviewed at 3 to 5 yearly intervals.

Curricula must be based upon the standards, and it is a matter for VET providers to ensure that curricula are kept up-to-date in line with industry requirements. In practice the close relationship between providers and employers is often assumed to ensure that training delivery keeps pace with industry requirements, although there is some evidence that training tends to follow, rather than lead, innovative practices in industry.

The SCQF assists in making clear the relationships between Scottish qualifications and those in the rest of the UK (QCF in England, in particular), Europe and beyond, thereby clarifying opportunities for international progression routes and credit transfer.

The Scottish Further Education Unit supports key developments and innovations in teaching and learning in the further education sector in Scotland. In England the Quality Improvement Agency (QIA) provides a base for developing and disseminating best practice and innovation to the Learning and Skills Councils and to the further education sector. Both place strong emphasis on engaging professionals with the outcomes of research, and creating a research culture that meets practitioners' needs.

The National Grid for Learning, and National Grid for Learning Scotland, seek to use ICT to the maximum to raise standards and achievement, extend opportunity, create a highly ICT literate workforce and to ensure that ICT learning opportunities are of a high standard.

There is a growing use of ICT and elearning in VET in the UK scores quite highly in most of the European and international comparisons in this regard.