



Qualifications and
Curriculum Authority



AWDURDDO
CYHWYSTERBAU,
CWRICW, WYRAC ASESU
CYHRU
QUALIFICATIONS,
CURRICULUM &
ASSESSMENT AUTHORITY
FOR WALES

Comparability study of NVQ assessment practice (Lifting and Transferring units)

April 2004

© 2004 Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA); Awdurdod Cymwysterau Cwricwlwm ac Asesu Cymru/the Qualifications, Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales (ACCAC)

Reproduction, storage, adaptation or translation, in any form or by any means, of this publication is prohibited without prior written permission of the publisher, unless within the terms of licences issued by the Copyright Licensing Agency. Excerpts may be reproduced for the purpose of research, private study, criticism or review, or by educational institutions solely for educational purposes, without permission, provided full acknowledgement is given.

The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority is an exempt charity under Schedule 2 of the Charities Act 1993.

Qualifications and Curriculum Authority
83 Piccadilly
London
W1J 8QA
www.qca.org.uk

Archived Content

Contents

Executive summary.....	2
Introduction to the comparability study	2
Comment on sample of centres.....	2
Summary of findings	3
Detailed findings	4
Methodology	4
Candidates.....	4
Approved centres.....	5
Centre profile by awarding body	5
Awarding body and centre type results.....	6
Assessment arrangements	7
Quality of evidence	8
Strengths	10
Weaknesses	11
Conclusion	14
Issues for consideration by the NTO successor bodies/Plant Rationalisation Project.....	14
Issues to be addressed by the awarding bodies.....	14
Appendix 1: Lifting and Transferring units – QCA centre sample	16
Appendix 2: Glossary of awarding bodies.....	17

Executive summary

Introduction to the comparability study

This comparability study is part of the regulatory authorities' ongoing programme of quality assurance monitoring of National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs). The study examined the consistency and quality of assessment practices associated with the Lifting and Transferring units. These units are part of the Specialised Plant and Machinery Operations level 2 (Lift Truck) NVQ as developed by the Plant Rationalisation Project and are used as optional units in a variety of other NVQs. The awarding bodies offering these qualifications are Construction Industry Training Board (CITB) in association with City & Guilds (C & G), City & Guilds (C & G), Edexcel, Epic Training Limited (EPIC), EMTA Awards Limited (EAL), Lantra, London Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LCCI), now Education Development International plc (EDI), OCR Examinations Board and Qualifications for Industry (QFI).

This comparability study commenced in July 2003 and concluded in January 2004. A team of three scrutineers, including one team leader, each having expertise in NVQ assessment and appropriate industrial experience, was recruited to examine assessment practices across college, employer and training provider centres approved to offer NVQs that include the Lifting and Transferring units (either as mandatory or optional units).

The team inspected candidate evidence and interviewed candidates and assessors in 50 centres. Data collection was based on a common instrument provided by QCA. The methodology used in the study reflects the current external verification system, which requires the external verifier to judge the quality and consistency of assessment decisions and practice.

This report summarises the findings across the 50 centres and will be made available to the national training organisation (NTO) successor bodies/Plant Rationalisation Project and the awarding bodies which offer these NVQ units. Each awarding body was asked to respond in writing to the report, indicating how they intend to address any issues of concern highlighted by the study.

Comment on sample of centres

The original intention was to construct a representative sample of centres to visit, matched against the number of centres approved by each awarding body and the spread across the different types of assessment centre. However, the make-up of the final sample of 50 was dictated by the fact that only 51 centres were identified as being active in the delivery of the Lifting and Transferring units, having at least three active candidates and not having been visited recently in connection with other activities carried out by the regulatory authorities. These 51 centres came from a total of 161 identified as approved by awarding bodies to deliver these units, and from which forms requesting information on their use of Lifting and Transferring units were received. (See Appendix 1 for a full breakdown of the centre sample data.)

A further point of interest is that in the 50 centres in the actual sample, 16 centres had five or fewer candidates registered. This indicates that the current use of these NVQ units is restricted to a relatively small number of centres, some of which, however, do have large numbers of registered candidates (seven centres had 100 or more candidates, including one with 668).

Summary of findings

A judgement was made as to whether the evidence provided in the candidate portfolios sampled met the requirements of the national occupational standards on which the Lifting and Transferring units are based. The team of scrutineers agreed with the assessment decisions for 74 per cent of the candidate evidence examined, and disagreed with the assessment decisions for 26 per cent of the evidence examined. The agreement rate of 74 per cent falls within the upper quartile when compared with agreement rates from other comparability studies carried out by the regulatory authorities across the sectors.

Strengths

The following were identified as strengths in some of the centres visited:

- effective assessment systems and practices in the majority of centres
- well-planned and well-documented assessments available in most centres
- well-designed awarding body documentation, resulting in well-structured portfolios of evidence
- effective candidate support, especially for those with special requirements
- use of full-time peripatetic assessors to provide ample assessment opportunities for candidates
- in centres delivering the Specialised Plant and Machinery Operations (SPMO) (Lift Truck) NVQ, well-qualified and enthusiastic assessors.

Weaknesses

The following were identified as weaknesses in some of the centres visited:

- lack of authentication on much of the evidence provided
- insufficient evidence to meet the requirements of the national occupational standards in some portfolios
- poor referencing of evidence to the national occupational standards
- lack of internal verification throughout the assessment process and lack of recorded feedback to assessors
- question sheets on underpinning knowledge showing no evidence of assessment or authentication
- inconsistent standards of external verification across centres and awarding bodies
- 'padding' or inappropriate evidence in portfolios, such as safety policies, brochures, blank company documents and other documentary evidence not directly referenced to candidate performance
- lack of recorded feedback to and from candidates, following assessment activities
- confusion in some centres between training and performance evidence
- in those centres delivering Distribution, Warehousing and Storage Operations level 2 and Retail Operations level 2 NVQs, use of assessors without the appropriate occupational experience or qualifications.

Detailed findings

Methodology

The team of scrutineers visited 50 approved centres across England and Wales; no active centres were identified in Northern Ireland. The visits took place between July and December 2003. The comparability study examined the consistency and quality of assessment practices associated with the Lifting and Transferring units used in the following NVQs:

- Specialised Plant and Machinery Operations level 2
- Distribution, Warehousing and Storage Operations level 2
- Retail Operations level 2
- Site Logistics (Construction) level 2.

The two units examined were:

- Operate Specialised Plant and Machinery to Performance Requirements (Lifting and Transferring)
- Lift, Transfer and Position Loads.

Although the original intention of this study was to concentrate solely on the lift truck application of these units, the scrutineers visited a small number of centres where the only candidate evidence available actually applied to cranes, telescopic handlers and extracting and excavating machinery. As the evidence requirements were of an essentially similar nature for these units as for the lift truck application, this evidence was included in the data collected.

At each approved centre the scrutineers examined the assessment evidence of up to three candidates. They interviewed the candidates' assessors, the internal verifiers and centre coordinator, as necessary, to explain and clarify the systems of assessment and verification used in the centre. The scrutineers were required to make technical judgements on the validity, authenticity, currency and sufficiency of evidence examined. They were required to record whether they agreed or disagreed with the assessment decisions of the candidates' assessors. It is important to note that where the scrutineers were unable to agree with assessment decisions, this was because the evidence reviewed did not meet fully the requirement for validity, authenticity, currency and sufficiency that applies to any NVQ. The reason for disagreement was commonly due to lack of authentication or insufficiency of evidence.

Candidates

The team was asked to interview up to three candidates at each of the 50 approved centres visited: a maximum of 150 candidates. The actual number of candidates interviewed, however, was 106; this was due to some candidates being unavailable on the day for various reasons, but predominantly due to shift work patterns of warehouse staff and the remote site working of those employed in the construction industry.

Table 1 shows that the candidates taking these units were predominantly male, and in the 19+ age groups. They were mainly in related, full-time employment.

Table 1: Candidate profile

Profile	Percentage
Male	96
Female	4
Age 16–18	6
Age 19–24	44
Age 25+	50
Related employment	92
Unrelated employment	0
Unemployed	8
Full-time employment	95
Part-time employment	5

Approved centres

Table 2 shows the types and numbers of approved assessment centres participating in the study and indicates that the majority were training providers. The structure of the sample reflects the small numbers of centres delivering the two Lifting and Transferring units that were active and had a minimum of three candidates. (See Appendix 1 for a full breakdown of the centre sample data.)

Table 2: Approved centre profile

Centre type	Number
Training provider	39
Employer	7
College	4

Forty training providers were identified as suitable, of which 39 were included in the sample.

Centre profile by awarding body

Table 3 shows the number of centres visited relating to each awarding body. Of note are the small numbers of active centres available to visit for Lantra, EPIC and LCCI. No Edexcel or QFI centres were available to visit. Awarding bodies recently accredited to offer NVQs that include the Lifting and Transferring units were in the process of approving centres and could not, therefore, contribute significantly to the sample.

Table 3: Awarding bodies

Awarding body	Number of centres visited
OCR	18
CITB/C & G	12
EAL	10
C & G	8
Lantra	2
EPIC	1
LCCI	1
QFI	0
Edexcel	0

Number of centres visited adds up to 52 centres rather than 50 because two centres were each working with two awarding bodies.

Awarding body and centre type results

Awarding body

Table 4 compares the percentage agreement rates between the awarding body and the scrutineers for each awarding body. In this comparability study it should be recognised that the results are affected by the small numbers of centres representative of some awarding bodies.

The results in Table 4 indicate little difference between the four awarding bodies with a valid sample of centres visited. The slightly lower rate of agreement for the CITB/C & G centres is due to the confusion in some of these centres between training and performance evidence (see also under 'Weaknesses', below).

Table 4: Agreement rates by awarding body

Awarding body	Agreement rate %
OCR	71
CITB/C & G	58
EAL	75
C & G	71
Lantra	100 (one centre only)
EPIC	100 (one centre only)
LCCI	75 (one centre only)

Centre type

Table 5 compares the percentage agreement rates for each centre type. The large variation in centre type numbers in the sample must be considered when comparing these agreement rates.

Table 5: Agreement rates by centre type

Centre type	Agreement rate %
Training provider	65 (39 centres)
Employer	86 (seven centres)
College	83 (four centres)

NVQ title and unit results

Of the sample of 50 centres visited: 32 were delivering the SPMO NVQ, 17 the Distribution, Warehousing and Storage Operations NVQ, and one delivered both NVQs. Three centres delivered the Site Logistics (Construction) NVQ, all at level 2.

The team of scrutineers was asked to identify whether the evidence they examined met the requirements of the national occupational standards. The team examined 140 portfolios, looking at evidence that had been assessed in both completed NVQs and those only partially completed.

The agreement rates by NVQ title for the two units covered by this study are shown in Table 6. These figures show the level of scrutineer agreement with the assessment decisions, based on evidence inspection and interviews with candidates, assessors and internal verifiers. Where there was a disagreement with an assessor's decision, this was due to the scrutineer judging that the evidence was inadequate in relation to the validity, authenticity, currency or sufficiency of the evidence presented.

These results indicate that there was little difference between agreement rates by NVQ title and unit and therefore no particular problems were identified that were specific to any of these NVQs or

Comparability study of NVQ assessment practice (Lifting and Transferring units)

units. It should be noted that the Site Logistics (Construction) results are based upon just three centres.

Table 6: Agreement rates by NVQ title and unit

NVQ title	Unit	Agreement rate %
SPMO level 2	Operate Specialised Plant and Machinery to Performance Requirements	73
SPMO level 2	Lift, Transfer and Position Loads	79
Distribution, Warehousing and Storage Operations level 2	Operate Specialised Plant and Machinery to Performance Requirements	77
Distribution, Warehousing and Storage Operations level 2	Lift, Transfer and Position Loads	81
Site Logistics (Construction) level 2	Operate Specialist Plant and Machinery to Performance Requirements	100
Site Logistics (Construction) level 2	Lift, Transfer and Position Loads	100

Assessment arrangements

Assessment process judgements

The scrutineers were asked to record what assessment arrangements were in place in the centres they visited in terms of when and where assessments took place (ie the frequency of assessments and whether these were on-the-job at the candidate's place of work, or in a training/assessment centre), who was involved and how the assessment was conducted. They were then asked to comment on the effectiveness of the process. Their findings and observations are recorded below.

- Awarding body documentation was used in 88 per cent of the centres visited. Where it was not used, the centre-devised alternatives were judged as being adequate in all cases.
- Assessment planning, including evidence collection and assessment opportunities, was judged as being effective in 89 per cent of cases examined.
- It was judged that 81 per cent of the candidates interviewed understood their role in the assessment process.
- The qualification was judged as being relevant to the candidate in 97 per cent of the cases examined.
- The level of the NVQ was judged as being appropriate for 100 per cent of the candidates interviewed.
- The time allocated to complete the NVQ was judged as being appropriate to the candidates' requirements and ability in 99 per cent of cases. The average time taken was 10 months, but this varied widely from two weeks in one case to two years in another.

Comments on assessment process

The majority of centres were providing good access to assessment, using peripatetic or in-house assessors to conduct on-the-job observations of performance at the candidates' places of work. The peripatetic assessors visited on average once a month, but in cases where the time taken to complete the award was short, the candidates were assessed at least weekly and in one case daily. Situations where all assessments were carried out on the same day were judged as

Comparability study of NVQ assessment practice (Lifting and Transferring units)

unacceptable practice by the scrutineers. It was considered that this practice did not allow a judgement of the candidates' ability to perform to the national standards consistently over a period of time.

A few centres, especially those also engaged in delivering certificates of competence based on skill tests at the end of one-day training sessions, were confusing training with the assessing of workplace competence. Some centres actually brought candidates into the training centre to carry out assessments as evidence for the NVQ, which, although carried out in a well-replicated warehouse situation in one case and a well-replicated rough terrain area in another, were judged to be simulation.

The majority of evidence presented was in the form of reports on the observation of performance plus work records. Witness testimony was used, but in a surprising number of centres, candidates were not using this evidence opportunity. Assignments were used in only a very few cases. The Lift Truck Operator's Certificate of Basic Training was included in portfolios in the majority of cases, but in all instances this had been obtained before the assessment of on-the-job competence commenced.

There was no record of oral questioning in many portfolios, even though, when interviewed, candidates confirmed that they had been questioned orally as part of the observation of performance. Written questions were used in the majority of cases as an effective method of assessing underpinning knowledge. However, where awarding body set questions were used, these were sometimes not assessed, with wrong answers being left uncorrected. In many cases the assessor had not authenticated the answered question papers.

Quality of evidence

Tables 7A and 7B show the profile of evidence examined by the scrutineers, together with quality judgements made on that evidence. The profile column of each table indicates the percentage use of that type of evidence in the portfolios examined. The quality judgements were made in terms of:

- validity – whether the evidence is relevant to what is being assessed
- authenticity – whether the evidence is produced by and attributable to the candidate
- currency – whether the evidence is up to date (as required by the awarding body)
- sufficiency – whether there is enough evidence (as required by the awarding body).

Table 7A: Profile and quality of evidence – Operate Specialised Plant and Machinery to Performance Requirements (Lifting and Transferring) Unit

	Profile %	Validity %	Authenticity %	Currency %	Sufficiency %
Work records	77	99	75	99	88
Observation	79	100	96	100	88
Witness testimony	56	87	96	99	87
Assignment	9	100	75	100	100
Oral questioning	51	100	100	100	94
Written questioning	76	98	88	98	89
HSE Basic Certificate	69	100	100	100	100
Other – mainly photographs	44	84	79	95	84

Table 7B: Profile and quality of evidence – Lift, Transfer and Position Loads Unit

	Profile %	Validity %	Authenticity %	Currency %	Sufficiency %
Work records	73	99	75	100	85
Observation	80	91	96	99	86
Witness testimony	64	89	93	99	89
Assignment	10	100	71	100	100
Oral questioning	56	100	95	100	97
Written questioning	84	99	90	99	91
HSE Basic Certificate	85	100	100	100	96
Other – mainly photographs	50	83	86	94	86

The above findings indicate that the main area of concern is the authenticity of evidence, shown by the lack of assessor, candidate and witness signatures on documentary evidence.

The other area of concern is sufficiency of evidence. Scrutineers noted the 'thinness' of the evidence presented in some portfolios, particularly in terms of the number of observations of performance, and the timescale over which the sustainability of competent performance was judged.

The scores for validity of evidence are generally high, but are down to 89 per cent for witness testimonies, as some testimonies were of too general a nature. The percentage for the 'Other' category was also relatively low. The 'Other' category mainly involved photographic evidence, which often was not referenced to the candidate or to the performance criteria of the standards.

Comparability study of NVQ assessment practice (Lifting and Transferring units)

Some good practice examples were, however, observed: pro-forma evidence sheets were available for mounting the photographs, with spaces to enter a description of how the photograph related to the candidate's performance evidence and for witness and candidate signatures.

The tables indicate that there are no problems relating to currency of evidence.

Strengths

The scrutineers observed a number of strengths.

Effective assessment systems and practices in the majority of centres

The majority of centres visited ran well-organised and well-resourced assessment systems that gave effective access to assessment for their candidates. Candidates' progress was generally well tracked. Nearly all observations of performance were conducted at the candidate's place of work on a regular basis. Candidates at these well-run centres were inducted effectively into the NVQ process and understood their role.

Well-planned and well-documented assessments available in most centres

In the majority of centres the assessment programme was well planned, with regular assessment opportunities. Following most assessment sessions, the candidate was briefed as to the next stage and a further visit was arranged, although this was not always recorded on the assessment documentation. Documentation, however, was generally well designed, with a complete and comprehensive record of the assessment process. Most of the candidates interviewed were entirely happy with the way they had been assessed and those still to complete their NVQs were aware of what stage they were at in the evidence-gathering process.

Well-designed awarding body documentation, resulting in well-structured portfolios of evidence

Documentation produced by the awarding bodies in the form of guidance documents and candidate packs was used by most centres. This documentation was generally of a high quality and was effective in guiding the candidate into producing well-structured portfolios of evidence.

Effective candidate support, especially for those with special requirements

All candidates interviewed by the scrutineers reported effective support from their assessors and assessment centres. Some excellent examples of extra support being given to those candidates with special requirements were identified. The most common examples were candidates with low-level literacy skills being assisted with the documentary evidence by their assessors on a one-to-one basis. For many candidates, the award of the SPMO (Lift Truck) level 2 NVQ was their very first achievement of any qualification. In some cases this spurred candidates on towards the achievement of further qualifications, especially the Distribution, Warehousing and Storage Operations level 2 NVQ, where the Lifting and Transferring units could contribute towards this NVQ via accreditation of prior learning.

Use of full-time, peripatetic assessors providing good assessment opportunities

A high proportion of the centres visited used full-time, peripatetic assessors to carry out the workplace assessment visits. This provided good assessment opportunities on a regular basis. No examples were identified of candidates being held back by having to wait for assessors to be available. Other centres had in-company qualified assessors, who provided the same high-quality level of assessment opportunity.

Well-qualified and enthusiastic assessors in centres delivering the SPMO (Lift Truck) NVQ

In all of the centres visited that delivered the full SPMO (Lift Truck) level 2 NVQ, the assessors used were instructors in lift truck operation and therefore had the necessary technical qualifications. The scrutineers were also very impressed by the general level of enthusiasm to

deliver a high-quality level of assessment service to their candidates. Where weaknesses occurred, the faults were not due to any lack of commitment by the assessors, but lay with the guidance they had received from their external verifiers.

Weaknesses

The scrutineers also observed a number of weaknesses. Attention to these would improve the quality of assessment practices.

Lack of authentication on much evidence produced

The major cause of the scrutineer team's disagreement with 26 per cent of the assessment decisions examined in this comparability study was due to lack of authentication. Much of the evidence was otherwise of an acceptable standard, but due to this lack of authentication did not meet the requirements of *The NVQ code of practice 2001* (QCA, 2002) and therefore should not have been accepted as evidence by the assessor, internal verifier or external verifier. Many cases were observed where a piece of documentary evidence:

- had not been signed by the candidate to authenticate it as his/her work
- had not been signed by an expert witness as an independent authentication that it was the candidate's work
- had not been signed by the assessor to indicate that he/she had authenticated it as acceptable evidence.

Insufficient evidence to meet the requirements of the national occupational standards

The second most common reason for the scrutineer team's disagreement with assessment decisions was that the evidence presented was insufficient to meet the national occupational standards. Some portfolios contained insufficient evidence to cover all of the performance criteria listed in the standards for the Lifting and Transferring units. One cause of this insufficiency related to the amount of observation of performance evidence present and the timescale over which the practical competence was judged. Five cases were identified where either all observations had taken place on one day, or just one observation was presented as sufficient evidence. To demonstrate the level of competence to achieve an NVQ, candidates must show that they can sustain practical competence over a period of time. These five portfolios did not demonstrate this.

Poor referencing of evidence to the national occupational standards

Many portfolios contained sufficient evidence of an acceptable quality, but this was not referenced to the national occupational standards in any way. This was evident particularly in observation of practical performance reports. These were often of a very general nature and did not refer specifically to the performance criteria at all.

Witness testimonies, where used, did not always relate directly to the performance standards of the NVQ. One example of this stated: 'The candidate is competent at working at this company'. Witness status sheets, containing example signatures of witnesses, were missing from many portfolios.

Lack of internal verification throughout the assessment process and lack of recorded feedback to assessors

In the majority of portfolios examined, there was no indication that any internal verification had taken place during the assessment period. Any internal verification that had taken place appeared to be of a summative nature. The reason for this lack of formative verification was explained, in interviews with internal verifiers at the centres visited, as being due to the short timescale in which these units were often completed not matching the longer timescale of planned internal verification sampling at their centres. There is obviously a need for centres delivering these units to allow for this short timescale when drawing up internal verification sampling plans.

Question sheets on underpinning knowledge not marked or authenticated

During this comparability study, the scrutineers observed many examples of question sheets, supplied by the awarding bodies as a means of assessing the candidates' underpinning knowledge, being completed by the candidates but not being assessed or authenticated. The result was that, in some cases, incorrect answers were included as part of the presented evidence. In many cases, the question sheets had not been authenticated by the candidate as his/her work, or by the assessor that he/she had examined the answers and accepted them as evidence of underpinning knowledge.

Inconsistent standards of external verification

In 13 instances, the scrutineers found that serious weaknesses in the quality of evidence presented in candidates' portfolios had not been picked up during recent visits by the external verifier. More seriously, examples were found where the guidance given by the external verifier did not accord with the national standards for the NVQ in question, or did not agree with the awarding body guidance. In a few cases, where there had been a recent change of external verifier, the centres complained about the inconsistency of the guidance received. One example relates to the inconsistency in the qualifications for assessors demanded by awarding bodies, covered elsewhere in this report (see paragraph on delivering Distribution, Warehousing and Storage Operations and Retail Operations NVQs, page 13). In this case, the advice to the centre – that the assessors should achieve the Lift Truck Operator's Certificate of Basic Training in order to assess the Lifting and Transferring units – did not accord with their awarding body guidance that qualifications to the standard of an accredited instructors' certificate should be achieved.

'Padding' in portfolios, such as safety policies, brochures, blank company documents and other documentary evidence not directly referenced to candidate performance

In some portfolios examined by the scrutineers, 'padding' in the form of irrelevant company documents was present. Safety policies, company operating procedures and blank examples of company documentation were common examples. In all cases there was no indication of how this related to the candidate's performance, or that the candidate used or adhered to the content of these documents. One centre visited actually had a 'master portfolio', in which all generic company documentation was kept. Individual candidate portfolios then had a general statement that all candidates were conversant with, and adhered to, the content of these documents, but without any direct or specific references to their competency in this respect having been observed or assessed. Other portfolios contained many irrelevant certificates of training achieved by the candidate.

Lack of recorded feedback to and from candidates, following assessment activities

The scrutineers observed a general lack of any recorded feedback in the assessment documentation present, to or from the candidate, following assessment events. In interviews with the candidates it was often apparent that effective verbal feedback had been given, but that this had not been recorded. On some of the awarding body pro-forma assessment sheets provided, there is no facility for recording such feedback.

Confusion in some centres between 'training' and 'performance evidence'

In a few centres visited during this study, confusion was apparent between performance evidence (as per the requirements of the national standards and the current code of practice (*The NVQ code of practice 2001*, QCA, 2002) and evidence that training sessions had taken place. This occurred in centres which until recently were only engaged in delivering short courses of training, at the end of which successful completion of a short test of competence led to the award of a basic certificate of competence. Some of these centres reported that they had been advised by their external verifiers that evidence of such training could now count for up to 70 per cent of the evidence required for a full NVQ at level 2.

In those centres delivering Distribution, Warehousing and Storage Operations level 2 and Retail Operations level 2 NVQs – use of assessors without the appropriate occupational experience or qualifications

A problem was identified concerning the availability of suitably qualified assessors to assess the Lifting and Transferring units, in centres using these as optional units in other NVQs. Inconsistent advice had been given to these centres concerning how they could overcome the problem of having generic assessors in the area of Distribution, Warehousing and Storage Operations and/or Retail Operations who do not have the specific skills or qualifications relating to the operation of lift trucks. Some had been advised by their external verifiers that the acquisition of the Lift Truck Operator's Certificate of Basic Training was sufficient, even though this does not agree with the relevant awarding body's guidance in this area, which states that an accredited instructor's qualification must be held. Some centres had managed to buy in the necessary expertise when required; others were using assessors with no qualifications or experience in lift truck operation. Many centres, especially in the retail operations sector, do not offer this option to their candidates because of this requirement for specifically qualified assessors, thereby denying their candidates access to these units.

Conclusion

Assessment practice was judged to be effective in 74 per cent of candidates' evidence, and a number of key strengths were identified. Nevertheless, there were weaknesses in a number of areas – assessment, internal and external verification and awarding body practices. The agreement rate can be taken as indicating that the majority of centres are delivering good assessment practice to the required standards, but that with attention to the weaknesses indicated, the standard could be further improved and acceptable practice could be delivered in all centres.

A possible role for the NTO successor bodies/Plant Rationalisation Project in ensuring that the consistency, quality and effectiveness of the assessment processes are improved is suggested below.

Issues for consideration by the NTO successor bodies/Plant Rationalisation Project

The NTO successor bodies/Plant Rationalisation Project should provide further clarification and guidance on:

- the qualifications and industrial experience required by assessors carrying out assessments on the Lifting and Transferring units. Awarding body guidance is not consistent in this area and varies from an insistence on the requirement that the assessors 'be qualified instructors registered by a recognised authority' in this field, to having 'three years' relevant operating experience'. Some awarding bodies state that 'assessors will be required to provide evidence that they at least meet the standards for instructors set out in the HSE ACOP' – this begs the question as to how assessors provide this evidence. Instances were found of assessors qualified to assess on the Distribution, Warehousing and Storage Operations NVQ, but having no lift truck operation experience. They were advised by their external verifiers to attend a course for the Lift Truck Operator's Certificate of Basic Training in order to be able to assess on the Lifting and Transferring units
- the minimum number of observations of on-the-job performance required and the period over which these should occur. This would address the issue of candidates being observed just once or all assessment taking place on one day
- the assessment of underpinning knowledge. Currently this varies between a comprehensive set of questions provided by the awarding body, and an acceptance of underpinning knowledge having been covered during the Lift Truck Operator's Certificate of Basic Training course.

Issues to be addressed by the awarding bodies

The agreement rates for the awarding bodies with a valid number of centres visited were very similar and therefore the issues raised apply equally to all organisations. It is recommended that these issues are addressed by:

- ensuring that adequate training is given to all assessors and internal verifiers concerning the quality of evidence that is acceptable. The report shows that the majority of assessment systems were at least adequate to meet the required standards, but that the actual evidence presented in many candidates' portfolios lacked quality in terms of sufficiency and authenticity and was not always referenced to the national occupational standards
- ensuring that all internal verifiers are aware of the requirement for formative as well as summative internal verification. Internal verifiers should demonstrate that they understand the need to authenticate the actual evidence in candidates' portfolios that has been internally verified, to allow for quality checks on this internal verification to be made by external verifiers and other external auditors

Comparability study of NVQ assessment practice (Lifting and Transferring units)

- ensuring that question sheets on underpinning knowledge, where these are supplied by the awarding body, are assessed and authenticated, by providing space on these sheets for recording feedback and signatures
- arranging for standardisation training sessions for all external verifiers who verify NVQs using the Lifting and Transferring units and generally take steps to improve the quality of the external verification process
- encouraging the recording of feedback to and from candidates following assessment events, by providing the facility to record such comments on any pro-forma assessment recording sheets supplied
- ensuring that those centres moving from delivering short training and competence certification courses to assessing competence for NVQs receive the necessary training, to avoid any confusion in these roles. Statements of clarification need to be issued urgently to counter the guidance that some centres have had from their external verifiers that the certificates awarded from these short training sessions represent 70 per cent of the competence evidence required for the award of an NVQ in Specialised Plant and Machinery Operations at level 2.

Appendix 1: Lifting and Transferring units – QCA centre sample

Forms requesting information on the use of the Lifting and Transferring units were sent out to assessment centres that were identified from awarding bodies' lists as delivering the following NVQs:

- Specialised Plant and Machinery Operations NVQ level 2
- Distribution, Warehousing and Storage Operations NVQ level 2
- Retail Operations NVQ level 2
- Site Logistics (Construction) NVQ level 2.

Total number of forms received back	161
Suitable centres (ie those that were currently delivering the Lifting and Transferring units)	51
Centres not to be visited (due to them being visited recently by QCA on other matters)	18
Centres with fewer than three candidates (three being the minimum number of candidates required by this study at each centre visited)	92

Breakdown of the 161 centres by awarding body

	Suitable	Fewer than 3 candidates	Do not use
C & G	8	12	3
CITB/C & G	13	58	0
OCR	18	9	6
EAL	10	4	6
Lantra	2	0	1
EPIC	1	2	1
LCCI	1	1	0
Did not say	0	6	1
Totals	53*	92	18

* Number of suitable centres adds up to 53 rather than 51 because two centres were each working with two awarding bodies

Breakdown of the 161 centres by type of centre

	Suitable	Fewer than 3 candidates	Do not use
Training providers	40	65	10
Employers	7	16	0
Colleges	4	11	8
Totals	51	92	18

Appendix 2: Glossary of awarding bodies

- City & Guilds (C & G)
- Construction Industry Training Board (CITB)
- Edexcel
- EMTA Awards Limited (EAL)
- Epic training Limited (EPIC)
- Industry (LCCI)
- Lantra
- London Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LCCI), now Education Development International plc (EDI)
- OCR Examinations Board (OCR)
- Qualifications for Industry (QFI)