

# What are NVQs

## What does an NVQ involve?

National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) are competence based qualifications. By gaining an NVQ it shows that you can do the work for which the award has been given and do it to the National Standard. It will show your abilities in three areas:

- You can carry out your work in most usual situations.
- You can carry out your work in a variety of situations.
- you can carry out your work with understanding

Gaining your NVQ will give you a nationally recognised qualification. It will not only make your skills more transferable but demonstrate your flexibility in using them. There are no barriers to stop you from gaining your NVQ; prior qualifications are not required and age, gender, language or disability will not stop you, providing you can carry out the work to the national standard.

NVQs are developed at 5 levels ranging from straightforward (level 1) to very complex (level 5). You normally enter at the level which you are working in your job, so if you were to take a level 3 NVQ there would be no need to do levels 1 & 2 first.

The tasks listed in an NVQ reflect those of a typical job. You may not do exactly what some tasks require therefore to undertake some kind of training may be necessary before you are assessed. This could be a course, on the job training or coaching and mentoring.

Your NVQ can only be achieved through your demonstration of your skills. You cannot fail your NVQ; you will either be competent at the tasks you are doing or not yet competent. There is no very competent or nearly competent; competence exists or does not yet exist. If you could not show competence then you will need to gain training or further work experience until you feel you can meet the national standard.

If you undertake a traditional course and exam you will gain a lot of knowledge but only be tested on a fraction of what you have had to learn. With an NVQ there is no "formal" exam, however you will need to satisfy all the requirements before you will be deemed competent.

## How can NVQs help me?

NVQs offer something for everyone by taking away the barriers that have stood in the way of learning in the past. How have we achieved this?

- NVQs are open to people of all ages - from school-leavers to people who are reaching retirement age.
- You work towards an NVQ at work - the important thing is that you show you can meet the standards.
- You can work at your own speed - there is no time limit for achieving an NVQ.
- You can work towards your NVQ all at once, or you can take it in stages.
- You don't need any particular qualification to accomplish an NVQ.

We believe that everyone should be given an opportunity to learn and develop, and as such we are committed to Equal Opportunities, and helping people with physical disabilities, sight or hearing problems, or learning difficulties. We can provide and arrange for a wide range of support to suite every candidates needs. .....

## Is it all theory?

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No! Many people are put off learning due to the traditional old-style qualifications, where theory used to be more important than the ability to show competence. They have memories of sitting behind a desk for hours having to take written exams to prove what they knew.

NVQs change this idea by making practice as important as theory. They are about doing a job to agreed standard and not just passing exams. In line with this you have the opportunity to learn while you work.

NVQs give you the opportunity to prove yourself against the National Standards; this is done by carrying out tasks at work, taking part in professional discussions or workshops, completing workbooks or topic papers or working on a small project. If you already have the relevant skills and knowledge, these can count towards your qualification.

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#### **Will it help my career advancement?**

There is no doubt that having the right qualifications helps you obtain the right job and makes you a more attractive prospective employee. NVQs offer you a chance to develop and show your knowledge and skills, and improve your career prospects.

If you're just starting work, NVQs can demonstrate the skills that you are developing.

If you've been in a job for a while, NVQs can improve your chances of promotion by showing your employer what you can do.

If you're changing jobs, NVQs can be evidence for a new employer that you have the right skills and experience.

If you're going back to work after a career break, NVQs can include previous experience and achievements.

Employers all over the country now recognise the value and importance of NVQs. Many companies now use NVQs to ensure that their employees have the skills and knowledge to meet the company's business needs and are working to the same high standard. This means that whatever you decide to do in the future, holding an NVQ Qualification can open new doors for you.

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#### **How often will I have to leave work?**

Never! To achieve your NVQ you will collect evidence that shows your competency. This needs to be presented to your assessor who will build your portfolio for you.

A portfolio contains the record of activities, evidence and assessment that supports your claim of competence. Those evaluating the portfolio will be comparing the evidence you have produced against the performance criteria, ranges and knowledge requirements of the standards.

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#### **Will I have to do much work at home?**

No! To achieve your NVQ you will be assessed and observed in the workplace to show competency. In some cases there may be some workbooks or topic papers that need to be completed, but again your Assessor will work with you in your workplace to complete these.

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#### **Who is involved in the NVQ process?**

The Learner - the person undertaking the NVQ.

The Assessor - the assessor is responsible for judging whether or not you are competent by assessing your evidence. Assessors will have occupational expertise directly relating to the

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NVQ they are assessing. They will also work with you providing any support you need in completing your NVQ.

**Expert Witness** - an expert witness will support and confirm that any evidence you produce meets the standards for your NVQ.

**Internal Verifier** - the internal verifier ensures that you have been properly and fairly assessed and confirms the assessment decisions made by your assessor. The Internal Verifier will have relevant industry experience.

**External Verifier** - the External Verifier represents the Awarding Body and ensures that the course meets the necessary requirements to award your qualification. The External Verifier will have relevant industry experience.

**Awarding Body** - the Awarding Body sets the standards and requirements for your qualification and awards your certificate upon the successful completion of your qualification.

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#### **What are NVQ Units?**

An NVQ consists of several units; some are mandatory and others optional. What units you must achieve to gain the qualification will be explained in your introduction section. The decision on what units you will work on is made by both you and your employer.

A unit describes what you are expected to do in particular aspects of your job. Each unit consists of an introduction or overview that briefly describes the requirements and what you should be able to do, the standards you will need to meet, and the knowledge and understanding that you should be able to demonstrate.

Typically units will be sub-divided into elements that describe in further detail the abilities, skills and knowledge you should possess.

Each Unit/element has a set of performance criteria that specify the outcomes that you have to achieve in order to demonstrate competence.

Derived from the standards, Knowledge and understanding shows what you know about your job and is considered essential for competent performance.

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#### **What is evidence?**

What you do in your everyday work will provide the majority of evidence towards your NVQ. Although there are many kinds of evidence (see below), performance evidence is seen as the main source for judging your performance against the standards.

**Observation** You will be assessed through observation in your workplace when the opportunity presents itself. For example you could be observed loading goods or dealing with customers.

**Learner statements** A personal statement that details how you carry out the activity you are claiming competence for.

**Case study** A report on an actual event/task that you participated in.

**Work products** The actual outcome of what you did. This could include the product itself, reports and descriptions, drawings/sketches, authenticated photographs and documentation.

**Professional Discussion or Workshop Activities** A discussion with your assessor that gives you the opportunity to talk about your understanding of your job, to explain how your evidence

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proves competence.

**Witness Testimony** A witness testimony is a statement from a colleague, team member or manager that confirms they saw you or have seen you, carry out the activity you are claiming competence for.

**Questioning, Workbooks and Topic Papers** You could be asked oral and/or written questions to confirm that you possess the necessary knowledge and understanding associated with competent performance.

**Historical Evidence - Accreditation of Prior Achievement (APA)** Past evidence of work, courses, NVQs etc can provide some evidence as long as it is authentic, relevant, sufficiently varied to cover the range and shows your competence is current.

Most activities will provide evidence for more than one unit/element. For example Health & Safety occurs in many units throughout your NVQ and therefore any evidence towards this may be suitable for more than one unit.

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