



**Scottish Vocational Qualifications
Internal Assessment Report 2015
OPITO and Oil Related Awards**

The purpose of this report is to provide feedback to centres on verification in Scottish Vocational Qualifications in this subject.

SVQ awards

General comments

A major contraction of the offshore oil and gas sector has occurred during the period August 2014 to July 2015. This has been caused by the considerable drop in crude oil prices from \$100 a barrel in August 2014 to \$50 in July 2015.

Although this has resulted in redundancies and a reduction in the numbers of candidates, assessors and verifiers, the need for SVQs remains. There is still a legal requirement for Duty Holders to assure the competence of the overall workforce and SVQs are one method by which this assurance can be demonstrated. The requirement applies to contractors as well as to their own staff.

The range of SVQs remains very much the same and these together with the number of centres, in brackets, are:

- ◆ G8LY 21 SVQ Processing Operations: Hydrocarbons Level 1* (4 centres)
- ◆ G8M8 23 SVQ Processing Operations: Hydrocarbons Level 3 * (7 centres)
- ◆ G8M7 23 SVQ Processing Operations: Hydrocarbons (Control Room) Level 3* (3 centres)
- ◆ GD0J 23 SVQ Processing Engineering Maintenance (Instrument and Control) (4 centres)
- ◆ GD0G 23 SVQ Processing Engineering Maintenance (Electrical) (2 centres)
- ◆ GD0H 23 SVQ Processing Engineering Maintenance (Mechanical) (2 centres)
- ◆ G8M3 22 SVQ Well Services: Coiled Tubing Level 2 (1 centre)
- ◆ G8M0 22 SVQ Offshore Deck Operations Level 2* (2 centres)

*Several SVQs are under review and to allow for this the lapse dates have been extended to 31 January 2017.

Given the number of QAMS criteria verified, few non-compliances resulting in recommendations for improvement were raised and this was consistent with the considerable length of time some centres had been approved to deliver the awards. The verification team raised recommendations for improvement when appropriate and these were generally seen as adding value to the delivery of the awards by the centres. A fair number of examples of good practice were noted.

Although there were no sanctions placed on centres as a result of verification, procedural holds were placed on two centres unable to meet the Visit Plan criteria.

Many of the approved centres contribute to and support the development and review of the Units on industry work groups and therefore have a clear and accurate understanding of the requirements.

The vast majority of centres verified are well experienced in running SVQs and so have a clear, accurate and common understanding of the requirements relating to the National Occupational Standards (NOS) and SQA's quality requirements.

Several centres hold 'away days' for their assessment and verification teams, although austerity measures have caused these to be curtailed and localised.

The verification practices that have been adopted ensure broad ranging discussions. The queries raised by centres with the Qualification Verifiers provide a good insight into the level of understanding the centres have of the requirements.

The Qualification Verifiers have commented on the effectiveness of the standardisation processes and this has led to a perceived incremental improvement in the quality of delivery on a year-by-year basis.

Despite centres having multiple sites and the requirement to deploy many personnel, centres have again shown that they fully understand the requirements relating to the technical expertise of assessors and internal verifiers of SVQs.

Unit specifications, instruments of assessment and exemplification materials

The assessment sites for centres are remote and are either offshore or at secure gas and oil receiving terminals that process the hydrocarbons. Many centres have multiple assessment sites where standardisation and the assessors' familiarity with Unit specifications, instruments of assessment and exemplification are critical to the assessment process. Many processes are used to ensure assessors achieve a good common understanding of the requirements and these may include, but are not be limited to:

- ◆ continuing professional development (CPD) activities supplemented by appraisal schemes and personal development plans
- ◆ standardisation meetings (which take many forms and include focused 'away days' for assessors and verifiers; face-to-face meetings with mentors, lead verifiers or individuals dedicated to the competence management system; and videoconferences and mailshots — but much of this has been subject to austerity measures)
- ◆ in-house intranets
- ◆ websites (eg SQA, OPITO, Oil and Gas UK, HSE, DECC)
- ◆ participating in industry work groups reviewing national occupational standards (NOS) and qualification frameworks
- ◆ formal briefings on the latest assessor and internal verifier practices
- ◆ guidance issued by the centre, SQA, OPITO, Oil and Gas UK and other bodies and institutions
- ◆ case studies

Many of the centres have been assessing the SVQs for a considerable period of time and this has provided the opportunity for assessors to gain a great deal of experience in these. Also, it is not unusual for assessors to work with SVQs, Customised Awards and within competence management systems (CMS) that may, or may not, be externally approved and audited. This provides them with additional knowledge and experience.

Evidence Requirements

Generally, centres have a good understanding of the Evidence Requirements. The Evidence Requirements for the SVQs for Processing Operations: Hydrocarbons are not as transparent as they could be. This is because the standards are described as functions and not as tasks. The functions are applied to a considerable number of hydrocarbon processes and systems and the awards demand that candidates undertake a given number of these covering several groupings of activities. This is to ensure that for the Level 3 SVQs that there is a realistic balance between hydrocarbon processing and non-hydrocarbon processing activities. Some centres have experienced difficulties determining and recording the split in activities. In all cases the Qualification Verifiers have been able to provide the necessary guidance needed for centres to meet the Evidence Requirements.

The on-going NOS review process has resulted in standards being written that are task based. This has totally clarified the Evidence Requirements with regards to tasks involving processes and systems. The sector continues to strongly support this approach.

Administration of assessments

Legislation applying to the offshore oil and gas industry demands that companies demonstrate the competence of their workforce. Moreover, and perhaps more importantly to them, it satisfies their business needs. Reduced staffing levels have impacted on this.

Although the method of competence assurance is not prescriptive, the delivery of SVQs is seen to be one way of assuring workforce competence. To this end, assessment and internal verification processes tend to be robust and well recorded. Internal and external audit processes demand that relevant evidence is maintained and appropriately retained. Competence assurance relates to both trainees such as those following the OPITO managed Upstream Oil and Gas Industry Technician Training Scheme (UOGITTS) and deemed competent people. Routes to qualifications have been developed to cater for both of these types of candidate. Centres have also been aided by formally documented guidance provided by SQA and OPITO.

Internal verification is robustly followed as it is seen to be akin to internal audit leading on to management review. These are two of the essential components of an effective quality management system.

General feedback

The Qualification Verifiers are normally able to interview a mix of candidates, assessors and internal verifiers at the centres. Due to work patterns such as two weeks on, two weeks off, meeting individuals at the centres is not always possible. Except for the college-based candidates, others work in an offshore environment and may reside well away from the centre. Often the centre Co-ordinator is an active assessor and/or internal verifier and so feedback at this level can be taken from one person.

Candidates are provided with feedback. This is not always well recorded and regularly appears as a recommendation for improvement. Feedback is generally given on a continuing basis due to the offshore working environment where the candidate and assessor work closely together and oral feedback is provided throughout the assessment process.

Feedback from candidates is normally positive and this is a good reflection on all involved (SQA, OPITO, centre staff, assessors, internal verifiers, supervisors, line managers and peers).

Access to assessment is dependent on work patterns and shifts. The need to assure the competence of individuals is a prime driver in ensuring access to assessment is equitable and fair.

Areas of good practice

The Qualification Verifiers have cited many examples of processes adopted and implemented by centres that they consider being industry good practice. This is indicative of the continuing improvements that are taking place.

The use of electronic portfolios is continuing to gather pace and most allow for remote online access to internal verifiers and Qualification Verifiers. The evidence is similar to that which can be seen in paper-based portfolios. This is achieved through scanning of documents and hyperlinks. As it gives access to all recorded information in one location this is most useful where centres have global assessment sites. In some cases provision has also been made for oral and video recording.

Other examples of good practice have been brought about by the deployment of personnel dedicated to the competence management systems. These people visit sites regularly to support assessors and candidates alike. They mentor assessors and candidates and therefore contribute to the overall standardisation processes.

Investment by the colleges in their process simulators used to deliver the Level 1 SVQ for Process Operations: Hydrocarbons that supports the UOGITTS continues to grow. Equipment ranges have been increased to more accurately replicate the workplace. Consideration has also been given to the use of hydrocarbons within the process loops so as to more closely align with the working environment.

The industry is increasingly using internal audit and management review processes to monitor the outcomes of third party audits. Registers of non-compliances and action tracking are now commonplace and the results of SQA QAMS events are now regularly being included. This ensures that results are disseminated to all relevant people.

Specific areas for improvement

There were several areas for improvement recognised by the QVs. These were:

- ◆ ensuring that evidence contained in electronic portfolios receives the same broad levels of sign-off as for paper-based portfolios
- ◆ that more evidence of interim internal verification is required
- ◆ that more consideration is given by centres to the evidence requirements surrounding the stated processes and systems for the Processing Operations: Hydrocarbons SVQs
- ◆ that better methods for referencing evidence to the standards are considered