



Internal Assessment Report (2009): Highways Maintenance and Road- building (SVQ level 2)

Sector Panel or SSC:

ConstructionSkills

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

SVQ Awards

Titles/levels of SVQ Awards verified

G88T 22: Highways Maintenance (level 2)

G89C 22: Road-building (level 2)

General comments

The greater proportion of award uptake by centres and candidates is *G88T 22: Highways Maintenance*, which encompasses the day-to-day road maintenance activities conducted by roads authorities. This is comparable with *G89C 22: Road-building* which deals with very specific civil/roads occupational areas. This includes road studs, pavement marking, machine lay concrete and bituminous paving either in a new build or established road maintenance situation, where the established road maintenance situation is particularly pertinent to seasonal road surface treatment operations.

The relatively lower candidate numbers for these two awards, comparable with other construction awards, is due mainly to the low staff turnover of the direct labour force. They tend to be long serving, and many have been certificated in previous years to satisfy the then Scottish Office and now Scottish Government road maintenance tender requirements regarding the qualifications of the workforce.

Confusion surrounding the award title of 'Highways' within the Highways Maintenance award needs to be understood. The term 'highways' comes from the Highways Acts and is the legal term in England and Wales, whereas in Scotland, that same award activity is conducted by a 'roads authority'. This is because in Scotland, that which is generally referred to as the public thoroughfare – the road, footway, footpath, etc – comes under the Roads (Scotland) Act 1984, which defines the legal term of 'road'. Therefore we have 'roads authority' for Scotland, with the expectation that the award title would be 'Road Maintenance'.

The compromise that Scotland makes in participating in a 'highways' titled award is to appreciate that SSC/Bs, which are charged with setting the award structures for industry, are usually England-based, where there is a tendency for them to be referred to in English terms. As such there is a continued need for centres in Scotland to be aware of the differing terminology and Acts used across borders, especially when setting candidate knowledge evidence gathering test papers and assessments for solely or predominately Scotland-based candidates. However, it is important to note that it is only the terminology and aspects of Acts and agencies like SEPA that are different in name, with very little difference being noted in function.

It is highly likely that the very good centre quality assurance compliance and candidate Unit/award success that has been noted in these award areas to date, is due to the fact that the award is being taken up by dedicated roads authorities and roads authority-affiliated centres. This is to cater for, in the main, roads authority direct labour force personnel. This meaningful relationship (and the unique assessment opportunities from that relationship) results in the roads authorities having a relevant awards provision for the work force.

The only problems experienced in the past were centres making a Highways Maintenance level 2 award application for candidates, where:

- ◆ the majority of the Units required for the Highways Maintenance award structure had been gained from a previous construction award event
- ◆ Units of the same title and Unit number had been gained in a construction site and certificated under a construction award
- ◆ that activity did not include candidate assessment being made in a roads context, with the distinct lack of specific roads authority-related or specific working methods, Acts and procedures that are the requirement of *G88T 22: Highways Maintenance*

However, following a period of discussion with such centres, a more robust evidence gaps/cross matching assessment process is now used. This reduces considerably the instances of candidate cross-award area assessment gaps being noted as an issue at IV or EV events. Also, the likelihood of construction to highways cross-awarding is now being picked up and rigorously discussed at initial centre approval events.

The majority of centres are aware of an imminent NPA provision in roads maintenance, with the possibility of a further NPA in road-building being proposed. They support and welcome this initiative and provision.

The VG 349 group commitment to participate in and conduct robust approval, external verification, post-approval and development events, has now resulted in centres being well educated in the requirements of the SSC Assessment Strategy, SQA's Assessor's Guidelines and candidate guidance and portfolio documents. This benefits the centre in terms of award understanding, quality assurance compliance and client satisfaction.

Advice on good practice

The relationship that centres have with a roads authority is key to centres being able to comply with the SSC Assessment Strategy, SQA quality assurance and award requirements. This includes shared agreements to access high capital cost equipment, road work sites and materials for the conduct of teaching, practice and assessment for these two award areas.

Additionally, centres have used the SSC Assessment Strategy to guide the selection of centre staff, and SQA's Assessor's Guidelines and candidate guidance and portfolio documents to influence the development of assessment devices and strategies. This has resulted in a uniform assessment approach being adopted among centres, and an excellent record of quality assurance compliance being noted.

As there are still a good proportion of candidates being progressed through the OSAT route, there is still a need for primary Assessors to be skilled in aspects of accreditation for prior learning (APL), witness testament, direct and indirect (diverse) evidence gathering and collating skills. With these they will be able to present candidate evidence for final Unit/award certification.

Integrated Unit assessment is still the most robust and economical method of setting assessment opportunities for candidate evidence gathering events, and is practiced by most centres.

EV reports indicate that, in the main:

- ◆ Centres have well defined Assessor and Internal Verifier selection procedures in place, where they are meticulously selected to comply with SSC assessment, SQA and award requirements.
- ◆ Centres encourage staff to participate in meaningful Continual Professional Development (CPD).
- ◆ Centres employ and use award areas occupationally, specifically (IV) V Unit or D to V crossover competent staff, with the ability to conduct meaningful IV auditing and compiling reports, with a particular focus on standardisation among Assessors.
- ◆ Candidates, when questioned, have a good understanding of the Unit/award area they were participating in. This, along with reference to other indicators and centre records, is good evidence that meaningful induction and individual candidate skills match analysis are being conducted.
- ◆ Discussions with centre Assessor and Internal Verifier staff tend to confirm that they have been well chosen and have developed into their respective individual and/or dual Assessor/Internal Verifier roles.
- ◆ EV and IV awards and Units sampling tends to be wide ranging in Units and activities witnessed/audited, thus giving a sound bases from which to make quality assurance statistical assumptions.
- ◆ Candidate records and centre documentation are well ordered and easy to audit.
- ◆ Centres manage the shared access and resource agreements they have with their roads authority partners/clients very well.

Areas for further development

As an ongoing development point, the very variable winter maintenance standalone Unit provision within the present *G88T 22: Highways Maintenance*, and previous awards for Scotland, has been noted. Preliminary discussions are taking place with trunk and roads authorities and interested parties to suggest a more up-to-date and appropriate industry requirement Unit and perhaps award area.

The availability of information, documentation and events to help centres understand the imminent NPA provision in roads maintenance, and how it can relate to a Modern Apprenticeship that centres would identify, is a high-priority development need.

The proposal of a further NPA in road-building will require the time, commitment and co-operation of key occupational staff from the trunk and roads authorities to ensure its development meets the need of the roads industry.