



SVQs

A User's Guide

SVQ

SVQs — a user's guide

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About this guide

This is a guide for employers who are thinking of offering Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs) to their staff. It tells you what's involved in putting SVQs in place, and explains the various options open to you. If you are interested in SVQs, or think you might like to know more, this guide will tell you all you need to know to make an informed choice about whether SVQs will be right for your organisation, and what will be involved in offering them to your staff.

We are assuming that you know what the potential benefits for your organisation of offering SVQs to your staff will be. If you haven't already done so, we suggest that you read our *SVQ handbook* first, for a more general introduction to SVQs.



1

SVQs — what they are ... and what they are not

SVQs are badges or benchmarks of competence. Their purpose is to show that someone who achieves an SVQ really can do the work the SVQ covers, and can do it to a standard of competence which has been defined nationally. These standards are the same as the ones NVQs — equivalent qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland — are based on. The main differences between SVQs and NVQs is that SVQs take account of Scotland's distinct legal, education, and enterprise systems.

To make sure that the qualifications are worthy of the high value that employers are increasingly placing on them, SVQs are given formal recognition by the Scottish Qualifications Authority. This 'formal recognition' goes a few steps beyond endorsement — which is a similar idea — and involves SQA taking active steps to make sure that SVQs are relevant and credible qualifications. One of SQA's most important jobs is to make sure that high standards of quality in the delivery and assessment of the qualifications are maintained at all times.

One important thing you have to remember is that SVQs are not training programmes — they are qualifications which recognise competence. They do not specify the way people doing the qualification have to become competent — just what they have to be able to do to get the SVQ. Of course, if you choose to offer SVQs to your staff, you will probably find that some of them need some form of training before they can be judged competent, but the qualifications don't limit the sort or quantity of training you can offer, or say that there has to be any at all.

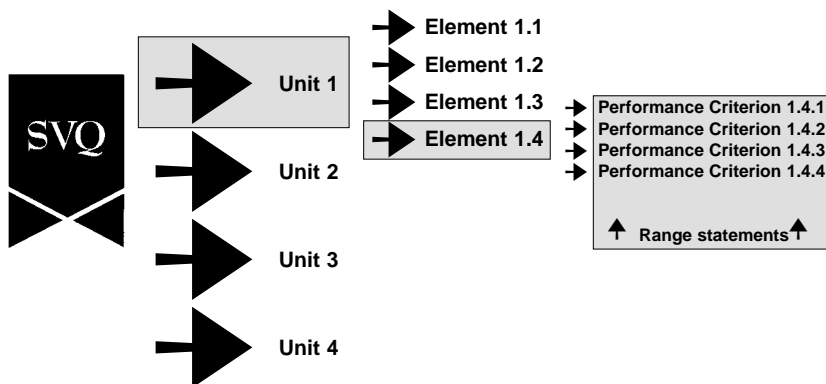
- ◆ You can also use SVQs as a framework for your in-house training programmes. There is more about this later on.

How they work

There are no formal written exams — people doing SVQs collect and submit evidence, usually from their work. SVQs are based on standards of competence, which specify the skills and the knowledge and understanding a person needs. The evidence a candidate for an SVQ collects is assessed against the standards of competence the SVQ is based on.

The standards are broken down into Units, each of which covers one part of the work involved in the area the SVQ covers. Units are further broken down into Elements, which describe the tasks people have to do to be able to perform in the area of work the Unit covers. Performance Criteria describe the level of competence that has to be achieved, and range statements detail the circumstances and applications in which the task covered by the Element has to be performed.

On the next page there's an example from the SVQ in Providing Financial Advice at level 3. Although the Units and Elements will be different in each SVQ, the form the qualification takes is always the same. This example lists the Units making up the SVQ, then breaks down the last Unit into its Elements, then gives the Performance Criteria and range statements for the final Element.



The diagram on page 4 puts this into context.

The structure of an SVQ

Units

- B1V0 04 Gather information needed to provide financial advice
- B1V1 04 Analyse information necessary to provide financial advice
- B1V2 04 Advise on and progress financial solutions
- B1V3 04 Contribute to the maintenance of a healthy, safe and effective working environment
- B1V4 04 Establish potential client/customers
- B1V5 04 Review client/customers' financial arrangements
- B1V6 04 Respond to compliance related complaints
- B1V7 04 Implement financial services sales plans

B1V8 04 Maintain business relationships

Elements for Unit B1V8 04

- 1 Create and maintain external working relationships
- 2 Enhance productive working relationships with colleagues

3 Enhance productive working relationships with immediate manager

Performance Criteria for Element 3

- 3.1 Immediate manager is kept informed in an appropriate level of detail about activities, progress, result and achievements.
- 3.2 Information about problems and opportunities is clear, accurate and provided with an appropriate degree of urgency.
- 3.3 Information and advice on matters within the given area of responsibility are sought from the immediate manager.
- 3.4 Clear proposals for action are presented to the immediate manager at an appropriate time and at the right level of detail.
- 3.5 Where proposals are not accepted, the reasons are considered and alternative proposals are put forward.
- 3.6 Where there are disagreements, efforts are made to avoid damaging the relationship with the immediate manager.
- 3.7 Where appropriate, ways of improving the relationship with the immediate manager are sought.
- 3.8 Activities are performed in a helpful and willing manner.

Range statements for all Performance Criteria

Manager is kept informed:
during course of day to day working;
at specific times;
in formal written communications.

2

Deciding whether SVQs are for you

You have two decisions to make, assuming that you are interested in SVQs, on the basis of what you have read and heard so far.

First, you have to decide which SVQ or SVQs you are interested in. With over 600 to choose from, there are bound to be SVQs which are relevant to some areas of your business. There are various ways to find out what SVQs are available: the SQA publishes a quarterly *SVQ Update* which lists all current SVQs; or you could talk to one of our Customer Relations Managers. You can also find a database on the SVQ website at www.sqa.org.uk. You can search it by title, level or subject area.

Second, you have to decide which members of your staff you think might benefit. The way to do this is by matching the standards the SVQ is based on to the job descriptions of your staff members.

What's involved in putting SVQs into practice?

Once you have decided whether SVQs are for you, and which ones are relevant to your organisation, there are three things you should consider when you are thinking seriously about putting SVQs into practice. They are:

- ◆ your organisation, its people and other resources
- ◆ the need for training and development
- ◆ assessing candidates for the SVQ(s)

A fourth consideration, of course, is the cost and value for money of offering SVQs — we will consider this later (see section 5). The first three issues will probably arise as you go about setting up your SVQs, though perhaps not in the order in which we list them here. You will be able to deal with them as they arise.

❖ **Your organisation**

You will have to think about:

- ◆ gaining the commitment of key people
- ◆ identifying your existing resources
- ◆ gaps in your resources and how to fill them
- ◆ applying to SQA for approval to offer SVQs
- ◆ providing a central contact to communicate with SQA
- ◆ registering candidates with SQA

❖ **Training and development**

You should think about:

- ◆ identifying training and development needs
- ◆ identifying who the likely SVQ candidates are
- ◆ planning the development and assessment of SVQ candidates
- ◆ designing a staff development programme, or re-designing your existing programme
- ◆ introducing candidates to the programme
- ◆ offering training and development if necessary

❖ **Assessment**

You will need to think about:

- ◆ enlisting the support and help of the people who put the SVQ into practice: assessors and internal verifiers
- ◆ training assessors and internal verifiers
- ◆ carrying out assessment
- ◆ recording assessors' judgement
- ◆ internal verification
- ◆ notifying SQA of assessment results

Don't be alarmed if this seems like a lot of things to think about — you can deal with most of these issues as and when they arise, and there is always help and advice available from SQA. In the rest of this section, we will look at and explain these issues in more detail.

Your organisation

Gaining the commitment of key people

The success of any SVQ programme depends on gaining the commitment of senior people in the organisation.

Responsibility for the programme should be taken by a senior person who can allocate the resources the programme needs, and who can persuade others of the need to invest the necessary time, effort, and money. They should also be able to motivate the staff who are going to be doing the SVQs.

You will need to have a clear and convincing rationale for the SVQ programme, whether it is that the SVQs you are offering will act as a framework for your in-house training, that having SVQs will bolster your public standing by acknowledging the competence of your staff, or any of the other variety of reasons for doing SVQs. (See the SVQ handbook for some of the many advantages of the qualifications.)

Identifying existing resources

The resources that may be needed for an SVQ programme include:

- ◆ people and physical resources needed for training and development
- ◆ training for assessors and verifiers
- ◆ the work time taken by assessors and verifiers
- ◆ the work time taken by candidates for the SVQs
- ◆ the work time taken by the central SQA contact

You may well find that you are already carrying out some or all of the processes required for offering SVQs. This is especially true if your organisation is already involved in some other quality such as ISO 9001:2000, or Investors in People.

Gaps in your resources and how to fill them

Looking for an external partnership is one very useful way of filling resourcing gaps:

- ❖ You can augment your training and development system by combining with one or more other employers (this has been done successfully, for instance, in the Aberdeen area where a number of construction companies have banded together to pool their training and development resources to offer SVQs to all their staff) or by forming links with colleges and training providers — we have a number of case studies showing various ways in which companies have approached this problem.

- ❖ You can buy-in training for assessors and internal verifiers from colleges and training providers, one of whose functions is to offer these services to employers. You could also consider using the expertise of another employer's assessor and internal verifiers.

Applying to SQA for approval to offer SVQs

To offer SVQs for which SQA is the awarding body, you have to apply to us for approval — we are responsible for ensuring that the organisations offering our awards comply with certain minimum quality standards.

There are two aspects to the approval process:

- ❖ **Initial approval** — to be approved as a centre which can offer SVQs, your organisation will have to show that it has the potential to offer our qualifications. It must have a management structure and processes which will underpin and support the delivery of the qualifications. These processes will include:
 - ◆ management of information
 - ◆ management of resources
 - ◆ management of staff involved in assessing and verifying internal assessment
 - ◆ management, induction, support and guidance of candidates
 - ◆ internal verification process
 - ◆ appeals process and procedures

- ❖ **Approval to offer a particular SVQ** — here, you have to demonstrate that you have the staff, learning and assessment resources, and equipment needed to offer the SVQ or SVQs you are interested in.

You can apply for both kinds of approval at the same time. Once you have internal approval as an SVQ approved centre, you can seek approval to offer as many SVQs as you want without having to seek initial approval again.

To help you with your approval application, we will send you an approval ‘starter pack’, which contains all the forms you will need to fill in and a guide to the process.

Providing a central contact to liaise with SQA

We ask all organisations offering SVQs to nominate someone as a central contact.

It is this person’s job to:

- ◆ be responsible for liaising with SQA
- ◆ guarantee the quality of the programme
- ◆ maintain links with the all the organisation’s assessors and internal verifiers
- ◆ ensure that all assessors and internal verifiers are adequately trained
- ◆ submit candidates’ details to SQA

Registering candidates with SQA

Each SVQ candidate needs to be registered with us — the approval ‘starter pack’ contains the forms you will need and instructions for registering candidates.

Training and development

Identifying SVQ candidates

The first thing you will have to do is ask for a copy of the standards for the SVQ (or SVQs) you are interested in — the Helpdesk (0141-242 2214) will be able to advise on how to do this — then match them to what your organisation does. More specifically, you should be able to match them to what certain individuals in your organisation do (whether they work in customer service, manufacturing, personnel, or some other section of your organisation).

Remember that:

- ◆ SVQs are suitable for people of all ages and at all stages of their careers
- ◆ there are no entry requirements for SVQs
- ◆ each SVQ relates to a specific occupation, so you may well be looking at either a number of different SVQs, or just one specialised part of your workforce

You may well have candidates who are at different levels of competence to begin with:

- ◆ highly-experienced candidates may be able to come forward for assessment almost immediately
- ◆ some highly-experienced candidates may be able to gain parts of an SVQ through the accreditation of prior learning (APL), a process by which someone's previous experience can be taken into account
- ◆ other candidates may need to gain more experience, or undertake more training and development

It is important to make sure that the candidates you choose, and who express interest in doing an SVQ, will be able to make full use of the assessment opportunities, and any training and development they need.

Identifying training and development needs

This is the first stage of the process of delivering the SVQs to your staff — it is described more fully in the *Assessor's Guidelines* and *Assessor's Support Notes* SQA publish for some SVQs.

What you have to do is match the standards to the job role and skills profile of each individual candidate. The way to do this is to compare the list of tasks (Elements and Performance Criteria) in the standards with the tasks (say in a detailed job description) that an individual does in his or her daily work. It will be helpful to consult the individuals concerned and their line managers.

What this will give you is an idea of the readiness of each individual for the SVQ, and an indication of the extent to which they:

- ◆ should be able to gain evidence of competence for particular elements through their normal work
- ◆ already have such evidence
- ◆ will need some job development (eg expansion of job role, secondment)
- ◆ will need some training and development

Some points to bear in mind

- ❖ As we have said, SVQs are not training programmes. They set the standard of competence to be achieved by candidates, but do not specify the kind of training needed to achieve this standard.
- ❖ Some experienced people may need only very minimal training before being assessed.
- ❖ Some experienced people may be able to gain parts of an SVQ through accreditation of prior learning (APL) — there are more details on page 18.
- ❖ However, many people are likely to need some kind of training before they can be successfully assessed for an SVQ.

Planning the development and assessment of SVQ candidates

It is usually the best policy to draw up an individual assessment plan for each candidate. This is best done by the assessor for the SVQ (who could be one of your own staff) and the candidate. When you are drawing up the plan, you could use:

- ◆ the results of the matching exercise described in the previous section 'identifying training needs'
- ◆ the candidate's job description
- ◆ SVQ support material and assessment guide

Again, there is more about drawing up assessment plans in the *Assessor's Guidelines* and *Assessor's Support Notes* published by SQA for some SVQs, and in the *Guide to Assessment and Quality Insurance*. In general, though, the plans should set (flexible) target dates for achieving development aims and being assessed for Units, identify training needs, and areas where the candidate needs more experience.

Offering training and development (if necessary)

Training and development can take many forms, eg an employer's own training and development programme, a formal college course, or training and development from another training organisation.

Other methods of staff development that can be used include secondments, on-the-job coaching, small group learning, projects, distance learning, and open learning. You may well find that the SVQ or SVQs you are interested in fit very well with your existing staff training scheme.

Assessment

Assessors ...

An assessor is likely to be a supervisor or manager. Assessors need to be competent in the area of work covered by an SVQ, and in assessment. They should hold, or be working towards, the relevant assessor qualifications.

Their role is to:

- ◆ work closely with the candidate to identify opportunities for gathering evidence of the candidate's competence
- ◆ agree assessment plans with the candidate
- ◆ assess the evidence against the standards on which the SVQ is based
- ◆ make judgements about the candidate's competence
- ◆ keep assessment records
- ◆ provide feedback on their judgements to the candidate
- ◆ liaise with the candidate's manager and/or trainers, and with the internal verifier

... and internal verifiers

An internal verifier's job is to make sure all assessors in an organisation are assessing to the same standards. They need to be competent in the area of work covered by an SVQ, and in verification. They should hold, or be working towards, the internal verifier qualification.

Their role is to:

- ◆ sample the assessment records kept by the assessors to monitor the consistency of their assessments
- ◆ countersign assessment records kept by assessors
- ◆ observe a sample of assessments to monitor their consistency
- ◆ support the assessors by offering guidance and advice
- ◆ operate systems to standardise assessment
- ◆ act according to agreed procedures where disputes between candidates and assessors arise, and where there's an appeal against an assessment decision

Assessors and internal verifiers may need continuing support and training. This could be to help them deal with issues like these:

- ◆ how assessors can combine assessment with their normal work roles
- ◆ the problems that can arise when making evaluative judgements about colleagues
- ◆ the need for continuing development for assessors during periods when they have no candidates to assess
- ◆ how to build confidence in assessing unfamiliar or rarely-encountered situations

Carrying out assessments

SVQ candidates are assessed against the national occupational standards on which the SVQ is based.

There are four stages to assessment:

- ◆ the assessor decides how the candidate should be assessed
- ◆ the candidate generates evidence of competence with the assessor's help
- ◆ the assessor makes a judgement about the candidate's competence on the basis of the evidence
- ◆ the assessor records this judgement

The assessor then has to make one of three possible judgements:

- ◆ the candidate is competent
- ◆ the candidate is not yet competent
- ◆ the evidence is insufficient to make a judgement

Recording the assessor's judgements

A careful record needs to be made of:

- ◆ the assessor's judgement about the candidate's competence
- ◆ the evidence on which that judgement is based

This is so that all the assessor's decisions can be verified — an important part of the SQA quality assurance framework.

Notifying the SQA of assessment results

Forms for notifying us of a candidate's results are included in the 'starter pack' you get once you have been approved. You can choose whether to notify the SQA each time a candidate has achieved a Unit making up an SVQ, or after all the required Units have been achieved.

Each Unit is registered on the candidate's Scottish Qualifications Certificate (SQC), a cumulative record which is updated annually. Once all the necessary Units have been achieved, the candidate is issued with an SVQ certificate in addition to the SQC.

Other issues

Designing and running an assessment appeals procedure

If SVQ candidates disagree with an assessment, they must have the right to appeal. To meet the SQA's approval requirements, you must have an appeals procedure.

All candidates should be informed of the grounds on which they can make an appeal, and of the internal procedures for doing so.

It is important to keep full records of each assessor's judgements, and of all the stages of an appeal.

Allowing SQA systems verifiers and external verifiers access

SQA systems verifiers and external verifiers ensure that assessors across the country are assessing to the same standards.

How often systems verifiers and external verifiers will visit you depends on several factors, including your experience in delivering nationally-recognised qualifications.

External verifiers are subject-specialists whose job is to make sure that the SQA qualifications in their subject area are being assessed to the same national standards.

Systems verifiers make sure that centres delivering SQA qualifications have the systems they need to operate effectively.

3

Assessing SVQs

The principles of assessing SVQs

Having an SVQ is proof that an individual has the competence required to do a particular job, so the assessment of SVQs has to focus on what the candidate can actually do.

For candidates to achieve an SVQ, they have to generate evidence which proves that they can do what is specified in the standards making up the SVQ.

There are four aspects to assessing a candidate for an SVQ:

- ◆ deciding how you will assess a candidate
- ◆ gathering the candidate's evidence of competence
- ◆ making a judgement about the candidate's competence on the basis of the evidence
- ◆ recording this judgement

Generating evidence of competence

For every Element of every Unit making up an SVQ, there are evidence requirements which say what evidence has to be gathered to demonstrate the candidate's competence. There are three main types of evidence:

❖ **Performance evidence:** This is evidence that candidates can carry out the activities specified in each Element or Outcome. It can include:

- ◆ records made on the basis of observation by the assessor or by some other competent person
- ◆ work products
- ◆ evidence, in the form of answers to questions on the activities and products, that candidates know why they have done what they have done

❖ **Knowledge evidence:** This is evidence that the candidate has the underpinning skills and knowledge which ensure that:

- ◆ the candidate knows why activities are carried out in particular ways
- ◆ this skill could be transferred to different situations
- ◆ contingencies that are not amenable to observation or full simulation as part of an assessment could be dealt with

Knowledge evidence usually arises from responses to oral or written questions, case studies, candidates' own accounts of their activities, and witness testimony.

❖ **Evidence of prior learning:** This is evidence of the candidate's current competence derived from pre-existing sources, such as his or her prior work experience, training, and leisure pursuits. This can also be taken into account, if it can be seen to be relevant to the national standards.

Making a judgement about the candidate's competence

The third aspect of the assessment process is for the evidence to be judged. It has to be judged against the Performance Criteria in each Element. These specify the standards to which the candidate has to perform the activities described in the Element or Outcome.

To assess the candidate as competent in the activity specified by an Element, and to make sure that the candidate has achieved every Performance Criterion for that Element, in every context listed in the range statement, assessors will have to make judgements based on the evidence candidates collect to prove their competence.

Recording the judgement

The final step in assessment is for the assessor to make a careful record of his or her assessment decision about the candidate's competence. This is so that the assessor's assessment decisions can be verified both internally and externally.

It is also important that the evidence on which the judgement is based should be recorded, and carefully preserved. This is so that the assessor's assessment decisions can be monitored in internal verification.

One good way of recording evidence of competence is for candidates to develop a personal *portfolio*. A portfolio is a collection of different kinds of evidence, generally drawn from the candidate's day-to-day work, which can support his or her claim to particular competences required for an SVQ.

4

Assessment methods

A very wide range of methods can be used to assess SVQs. Any method used has to generate evidence of competence as defined by the standards on which the SVQ is based. In other words, the assessment method must measure the candidate's performance against each Performance Criterion and in each part of the range statement. The standards will also specify the kind of evidence required.

Because SVQs are designed to prove that candidates can do certain things, the methods of assessment most commonly used are generally direct observation of their performance, and examination of the products they produce in the workplace.

Direct observation in the workplace by an assessor, or by another competent person, is a very important method, but for some SVQs assessors can also directly observe candidate's performance during:

- ◆ simulations (most standards will say whether these are appropriate)
- ◆ skills and proficiency tests
- ◆ role play

Direct observation can be supplemented by these sources of evidence:

- ◆ video/audio recording of performance
- ◆ evaluation of work products
- ◆ answers to written and oral questions
- ◆ case studies
- ◆ projects and assignments
- ◆ log books
- ◆ personal interviews
- ◆ responses to questionnaires

It is also possible for candidates to put forward evidence from pre-existing sources such as previous work experience, training, or leisure pursuits. The process of assessing this type of evidence is called the accreditation of prior learning, or APL.

Direct observation in the workplace

Directly observing candidates' performance in the course of their work is a useful method of assessment, and it should be used wherever possible to assess the Units and Elements making up an SVQ.

For employers, it can also be cost-effective, as it does not involve taking candidates away from the workplace.

Direct observation involves more than just passively watching the candidate. An assessor has to know exactly what he or she is looking for. A checklist is a useful way of making sure the assessor can relate the candidate's evidence to the standards.

Assessors also need to be aware of when a candidate's activity is likely to produce evidence of other Performance Criteria as well. Finally, they need to be familiar enough with the standards to be able to decide when a candidate's performance has met the relevant Performance Criteria, and to devise adequate methods of recording the evidence produced.

For SVQs at levels 1 and 2, it will often be possible to assess candidates largely on the basis of performance at work. It may, though, sometimes be necessary to supplement this with observation of their performance in areas which are not part of normal work. This might involve organising a secondment to another department, or setting the candidate special tasks.

For SVQs at levels 3, 4 and 5, where more complex performance is required, direct observation of performance in the workplace will probably offer only partial evidence of competence. At these levels, simulations, role play and other methods will probably need to be used, as well as secondments, and setting special tasks.

Assessors undertaking direct observation in the workplace need to ensure that they are as unobtrusive as possible. They should take into account the extra pressures arising from the fact that the candidate knows he or she is being assessed.

Simulations, skills and proficiency tests, and role plays

This group of assessment methods also involve direct observation. However, in this case, the candidate is performing not in the workplace, but in simulated workplace conditions. Assessors should make sure that assessments of this kind are as lifelike as possible. Simulations have to comply with the standards on which the SVQ is based, and with the lead body and awarding body's requirements.

This type of assessment may be particularly suitable for trainees who have limited access to a real workplace, but it should be noted that SVQs are workplace qualifications, and should normally be assessed in the workplace.

Simulations will normally cover activities which might occur infrequently in the workplace, or which are too dangerous to carry out in a real life situation.

Using written and oral questioning

Questioning is a very important part of virtually any assessment. It will often be necessary to prove that the candidate is competent. In particular, it will help the assessor to be sure that the candidate knows why he or she is doing something, as well as being able to do it.

Questioning can also help to elicit information about how the candidate would perform in unusual or unexpected situations. When the products of a candidate's work are being assessed, questioning can also reassure the assessor that these are genuinely the candidate's own work.

Written or verbal questions will often be needed for the assessor to infer that candidates can transfer their competence to other contexts.

Assessors should take care not to use 'leading questions' which indicate to the candidate the answer he or she expects. 'Open' questions, that require the

candidate to give a fuller reply than just a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answer, are better than ‘closed’ questions. Assessors should be aware that, while there is sometimes a straightforward ‘correct’ answer to a question, at other times no such answer is possible. The purpose of questioning in these cases is to encourage candidates to explore alternatives and discuss options.

It is important that questioning should be used to support performance evidence and not instead of it.

Other sources of evidence

- ❖ **Video/audio recording of performance:** In certain circumstances, it is impracticable for an assessor to be present when a candidate is performing a particular activity. In such cases, it may be possible to make a video or audio recording of the activity, which the assessor can examine later.
- ❖ **Evaluation of work products:** In some cases, an activity required for an SVQ will result in a product (a marketing strategy, a word-processed document, a loaf of bread). In these cases, the assessor can judge the candidate’s competence by examining the product.

It is important that the assessor should have proof that the product is the candidate’s own work, such as a note of authentication from a line manager or supervisor.

- ❖ **Case studies:** Generally designed by an assessor, a case study should outline a real or hypothetical scenario relevant to the area of competence to be assessed. The scenario may be presented in written form, or visually, for example as a video.

Candidates are asked to analyse the scenario, answering written or oral questions to demonstrate their competence, and their underpinning knowledge and understanding. It is important that any case study should be both realistic and carefully matched to the relevant Units or Elements of the SVQ.

- ❖ **Projects and assignments:** A project or assignment is a practical or theoretical exercise or investigation which requires the candidate to plan and implement a strategy, and present the products of the exercise, or the conclusions of the investigation, for assessment. It is important that projects and assignments should be both realistic and carefully matched to the requirements of the SVQ.
- ❖ **Log books:** It is possible to assess parts of some SVQs on the basis of log books completed over time by the candidate. The log book can be used to record the candidate's performance, progress, experiences, and feelings. It can provide a useful source of supplementary evidence for an SVQ but assessors must be confident of the authenticity of the evidence it provides.
- ❖ **Personal interviews:** This is probably one of the oldest and best-known methods of eliciting information from a candidate. It may be an appropriate way of assessing personal competence, such as a candidate's personal and interpersonal skills. Again, though, it should only be used in conjunction with other methods of assessment.
- ❖ **Responses to questionnaires:** As another supplementary form of assessment, the questionnaire can be used in a similar way to the personal interview.
- ❖ **Accreditation of prior learning:** Accreditation of prior learning, or APL, is a way of giving credit for the learning a candidate has achieved in the past. This learning may have been gained through formal or informal training, other development activity, or on-the-job experience. For candidates to gain credit for their competence through APL they must be able to prove that this competence is still current.

Assessment on demand

In general, an assessment should take place as and when the candidate is ready for it. However, assessments should only rarely be opportunistic, as, for example, when an assessor witnesses a candidate coping with an irate customer.

Most assessments can and should be planned ahead of time. Intermittent but predictable tasks can be planned for, and periods when it will not be possible to assess can also be identified.

There are no hard and fast rules about how long the assessment of any Element or Unit should take. For the assessor and candidate, however, it is clearly reasonable to bring the process of assessment to a conclusion at some agreed point, and assessors need to beware of the dangers of over-assessment.

Integrating assessment

The assessor should also bear in mind the importance of gaining an overall picture of the candidate's competence. Many Performance Criteria have links with others in the same Element or Unit, or in a different one.

Assessors and candidates are encouraged to undertake assessments which can provide evidence of several Performance Criteria and/or Elements at once, rather than assessing Performance Criteria piecemeal. As well as avoiding the dangers of over-assessing candidates, this approach ensures that assessments are meaningful, and reflects real-life work roles.

Providing feedback to candidates

Once enough assessment has taken place for the assessor to make a judgement about the candidate's competence in a Unit or Element, it is very important that this judgement should be clearly explained to the candidate. Time should be set aside for feedback and deciding what steps to take next, whether this be to collect more evidence, to plan another assessment, or to arrange for further training and development for the candidate.

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The costs of SVQs

Introducing SVQs shouldn't involve you meeting excessive costs. In fact, an SVQ programme should provide a cost-effective way of encouraging staff development, offering increased efficiency, higher productivity, and improved staff morale.

Because they focus on assessment in the workplace, SVQs don't involve candidates spending a lot of time away from their work. As we have said, it may also be the case that your existing training, development, and assessment functions can be adapted to SVQs.

For some employers, particularly small companies, cost-effective solutions may be found by setting up partnerships with training providers, or with a consortium of other employers.

What are the costs?

There are two types of cost: direct and indirect.

Direct costs

The direct costs of offering SVQs are the fees payable to the awarding body.

These are:

- ◆ approval fees
- ◆ registration and certification fees for each candidate
- ◆ verification costs

The fee payable for each SVQ varies according to the number and level of the Units but there is a complete listing of registration and certification costs in the SQA quarterly the *SVQ Update*. You can get more information about fees from SQA's Helpdesk: 0141-242 2214.

Indirect costs

The sort of indirect costs you might incur in offering SVQs include:

- ◆ the human and physical resources needed for training and development
- ◆ training for assessors and verifiers
- ◆ work time taken by assessors and verifiers
- ◆ work time taken by candidates during induction, planning, training and development and assessment.
- ◆ work time taken by the person whose job it is to liaise with the SQA (the central contact)

SQA contacts and information

SQA Helpdesk — your first port of call for general enquiries about SVQs:
0141-242 2214

The publications mentioned in this booklet are:

- ◆ *SVQ handbook* (publications code DD122/3, free)
- ◆ *Guide to Assessment and Quality Assurance for Training Providers and Employers* (publications code A0842/2, free)
- ◆ *SVQ Update* (publications code DD078, free)

To order any of them, or a copy of our publications list, please contact our Sales Section on 0141-242 2168.

If you have access to the worldwide web, you can also visit the SQA website:
www.sqa.org.uk







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SVQ

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