

TEC/CCTE Activities to Promote National Vocational Qualifications

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CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Background to the Study	
1.5 Methodology	
2. SUMMARY	3
2.1 TECs	
2.7 NTOs	
2.13 Partners	
2.17 Customers	
3. RECOMMENDATIONS	5
4. TEC ORGANISATION AND STRATEGY	6
4.1 TEC Organisation	
4.7 TEC Promotion and Support Strategies	
4.13 Funding	
5. NTO EXPERIENCES OF PROMOTING NVQs	11
6. PARTNERS	13
6.5 The Partnership with Business Link PBAs	
6.7 The Government Office Perspective	
7. CUSTOMERS	15
7.1 The TEC Audience	
7.4 Barriers to the Implementation of NVQs in Companies	
7.14 Employer Experience of the NVQ System	
8. EVALUATION	19
Annex 1 - Organisations Involved in the Study	22
Annex 2 - The Study Team	23
Annex 3 - TEC Partners	24
Annex 4 - QFAD Publications	25

1. INTRODUCTION

Background to the Study

- 1.1 National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) play a major part in fostering lifelong learning amongst the adult population. They are promoted to employers and individuals in the course of Training and Enterprise Council or Chamber of Commerce Training and Enterprise (TEC/CCTE)¹ activity in support of the major training programmes. However, there is activity outside these programmes which directly or indirectly promotes NVQs. There are variations between localities as to the extent, methods, and funding sources for these activities.
- 1.2 The focus of the study was to identify activities which promoted NVQs but which were outside the marketing of the main directly funded programmes such as National Traineeships and Modern Apprenticeships. The study aimed to find out:
- what TECs were doing; and
 - to identify and publish good practice so that TECs and others could improve the promotion of NVQs.
- 1.3 The study was conducted alongside, and is complementary to, work being done by the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) to work with National Training Organisations (NTOs), to develop college-based best practice, and to produce NVQ case studies and other information material.²
- 1.4 The study was carried out before the publication of the White Paper, “**Learning to Succeed: a new framework for post-16 learning**” (Cm 4392, June 1999). The findings of the study will be relevant to TECs, Government Offices and their partners during the period of transition to the new post 16 arrangements, and will also be of interest to the new Learning and Skills Council and its local arms.

Methodology

- 1.5 The study fieldwork was undertaken between February and May 1999. Thirteen TECs were interviewed to obtain information about:
- TEC promotion of NVQs;
 - funding structures;
 - the barriers to promoting NVQs and suggestions for overcoming them;
 - evidence of partnership working;
 - the role of Business Link personal business advisers (PBAs);
 - TEC evaluation of effectiveness.

1. Throughout this report references to Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs) also refer to Chambers of Commerce, Training and Enterprise (CCTEs).

2. Priority for preparation and publication was given to an accompanying Good Practice Guide, **TEC/CCTE Activities to Promote National Vocational Qualifications**, DfEE, October 1999.

- 1.6 The study TECs were invited to identify companies and organisations with whom they had worked on the promotion of NVQs outwith the main programmes. As a result, interviews were conducted with twenty-seven employers, a school learning centre, a Local Education Authority (LEA), an employers' federation and a business school. It was clear that most TECs were concentrating on the promotion of NVQs within companies.
- 1.7 The employers interviewed ranged from those having a single owner/employee to one employing over 6,000. There were national and multi-national companies from both the public and private sectors. They were chosen to represent both manufacturing and service industries. The employer interviews were structured to obtain information about:
 - TEC help and support with NVQs;
 - employer experience of NVQs;
 - evaluation of effectiveness.
- 1.8 Two NTOs were interviewed in order to explore their approaches to the promotion of NVQs.
- 1.9 Discussions were also held with three Government Offices (GOs) in order to establish the priority given by them to the issue of promoting NVQs more widely.
- 1.10 Four training providers were approached to explore their success at promoting NVQs within the workforce as a result of their work in-company with Modern Apprentices and National Trainees.
- 1.11 Fifteen case studies were drawn up to illustrate good practice and written up in the Good Practice Guide (See *para 1.3 above*).
- 1.12 A list of the TECs, GOs and NTOs involved in the study is at Annex 1. The study team is listed at Annex 2.

2. SUMMARY

TECs

- 2.1 Apart from the main training programmes, TECs were marketing NVQs through the work of teams who variously dealt with Investors in People (IiP), lifetime learning, work-based learning, Business Link, business start-up, business support services, education business partnerships and customer relations.
- 2.2 The need to ensure that staff dealing with NVQs were trained and knowledgeable was a theme arising throughout the study.
- 2.3 Several TECs had made links between companies working towards Investors in People and implementing NVQs in the workplace, demonstrating that NVQ achievement made a valuable contribution to evidence for IiP accreditation.
- 2.4 In the main employers were satisfied with the service they were getting from their TECs. Employers all spoke of changes in the culture of their organisations as a result of their involvement with NVQ programmes. Usually they had adopted NVQ training systems as a result of identifying needs to improve delegation, adopt more efficient operating practices, have better management/staff communications or develop staff for succession planning.
- 2.5 Ad-hoc advertising and random distribution of promotional material directly to employers had limited impact, although targeted mailshots to address specific issues could be useful.
- 2.6 There were mixed views among TECs as to the value of funding isolated projects to promote NVQs, but some had been very successful.

NTOs

- 2.7 Only two NTOs were interviewed for the study, so the conclusions reached are indicative and not necessarily representative.
- 2.8 Promotional material aimed at employees was only successful if it was targeted. Face-to-face promotion was better, but had to be done by staff who knew what they were talking about and were credible.
- 2.9 NTOs also found it was better to concentrate on the benefits to the business of workforce development rather than promoting NVQs as such.
- 2.10 There were opportunities, with some businesses, to promote a range of NVQs, not just those immediately apparent to the sector.
- 2.11 Increasingly NTOs were working more closely in partnership with each other. The NTO National Council has recently set up a communications group with the aim of promoting NTOs.
- 2.12 Marketing was most effective when there was clarity about the target audience and when material was developed which was suitable for that audience.

Partners

- 2.13 Most TECs recognised that their NVQ activity required them to work through other partners. Some TECs were investing in their partnerships through joint project working and secondment of staff.
- 2.14 Employers saw TECs as useful at putting employers or organisations in touch with other partners in the community. Some TECs had made good use of employers on local working groups.
- 2.15 NTOs also spoke of the importance of partnerships, for example with employers and trade unions, in the introduction of standards based training into companies.
- 2.16 Business Links and their Personal Business Advisers can be an effective channel for the development of training to national standards within companies.

Customers

- 2.17 Most TECs targeted companies of all sizes, although some tended to concentrate on SMEs. TECs and NTOs referred to the significance of targeting the most senior person with responsibility, at least in the first instance, in order to ensure commitment and a consequent knock-on effect lower down in the company.
- 2.18 Employees knew little about NVQs; the concept of competence-based training to standards needed selling within the organisation.
- 2.19 People doing NVQs in the workplace liked the fact that the qualification was job related and assessed on the basis of what they did normally in the workplace.
- 2.20 Many employers were keen to develop experience in-house of developing NVQ programmes together with capacity to assess and verify qualifications because they felt more in control of the process and found it more cost effective.
- 2.21 Employers received their information about NVQs from a variety of sources including consultants, TECs, colleges, NTOs, DfEE, awarding bodies, from their work with IIP, training providers, trade organisations, trade unions, etc.
- 2.22 The following conclusions can be drawn:
 - TECs organise their promotion of NVQs in a variety of ways, but there is no indication that one way is better than another;
 - it is better to concentrate messages on the business benefits of workforce development rather than promoting NVQs as such, while being clear about the part played by the NVQ system within successful workforce development;
 - employers appreciate the help they receive from TECs in planning development needs, funding, and identifying training and assessment providers;
 - there are a variety of promotional tactics which can work depending on the needs of the audience.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 The recommendations are aimed at TECs and Government Offices, who were the main subjects of the study. However, they will also be relevant to the Learning and Skills Council, and its local arms.

3.2 It is recommended that TECs:

- review the training needs of staff who may be involved in the promotion of NVQs as part of workforce development;
- develop pro-active strategies for developing the workforce;
- maximise the contribution made by PBAs;
- identify the barriers to work-force development in individual companies and develop strategies to break them down;
- try to ensure consistency of contact between them and employers;
- consider ways in which soft information about local companies can be gathered;
- work with NTOs, local employers federations and training providers across sectors to promote work-force development. (Employers identified training providers as a significant source of information);
- help training providers to develop suitable approaches to in-company training;
- maintain support for companies beyond the initial contact, and on an on-going basis;
- consider the support they can give to on-site training needs analyses, accreditation of prior learning, assessment and the monitoring of training provider input;
- facilitate contact between employers, training providers and Further Education Colleges so that training and development specifications are clearly defined and delivered.

3.3 It is recommended that GOs:

- develop strategies which recognise the role of NVQs, qualifications, standards and workforce development in supporting economic and competitiveness goals;
- recognise the links between different initiatives from different funding streams and from different Government Departments which might be combined on the ground to achieve wider goals;
- identify what TECs and others are doing or could do to achieve these wider goals so that they can advise, encourage and support.

4. TEC ORGANISATION AND STRATEGY

TEC Organisation

- 4.1 Apart from the main training programmes, TECs were marketing NVQs through the work of teams who variously dealt with Investors in People (IiP), lifetime learning, work-based learning, Business Link, business start-up, business support services, education business partnerships and customer relations. One TEC appointed someone within their IiP team to take responsibility for NVQs, and the same TEC ensured that all IiP staff were knowledgeable about industry standards and NVQs and had access to the Qualifications Curriculum Authority (QCA) NVQ database. The need to ensure that staff dealing with NVQs were trained and knowledgeable was a theme arising throughout the study.
- 4.2 Several TECs had made links between companies working towards Investors in People and implementing NVQs in the workplace, and were able to demonstrate to employers that NVQ achievement made a valuable contribution to evidence for IiP accreditation. TECs had also made links between NVQs in the workplace and those companies having Modern Apprentices. Some TECs had combined these areas of their work organisationally. A few TECs still had dedicated staff dealing with NVQs.
- 4.3 Many TECs considered there were benefits in marketing all the TEC services to a company through one point of contact, producing a structured action plan for business development and calling on specialists from elsewhere in the TEC as required. Some TECs favoured a project team approach with staff from different teams working together with companies. This second approach found favour with the local employers interviewed.
- 4.4 Some TECs had lifetime learning strategies and were targeting specific sectors or companies, but this was not commonplace and most TECs seemed to react only when approached by employers about business problems. One TEC was concentrating efforts on NVQs for the 18-25 group, and two TECs said they were moving away from “hands on “ control of the various work-place training initiatives and were relying on the work of accredited training providers to give guidance to firms. Most TECs were assessing the impact of Individual Learning Accounts on work-force development, and there were mixed views about their usefulness.
- 4.5 In the main employers were satisfied with the service they were getting from their TECs. There was one complaint of administrative tardiness, and issues for a few employers about the constant re-organisation of TEC teams and staffing and the disbanding of teams which had seemed to work well.
- 4.6 The employers all spoke of changes in the culture of their organisations as a result of their involvement with NVQ programmes. Usually they had adopted NVQ training systems as a result of identifying needs to improve delegation, adopt more efficient operating practices, to have better management/staff communications or to develop staff for succession planning. In some cases their work towards IiP accreditation had prompted them to develop the work-force. In other cases interest was awakened by involvement in non-NVQ training necessary to meet industry standards e.g. food hygiene and health and safety.

TEC Promotion and Support Strategies

4.7 The TECs in the study were adopting various strategies for marketing NVQs outside of the main programmes, but there was little evidence of direct TEC involvement in NVQ development below management level. Some of the main lessons emerging were:

- marketing NVQs through ad-hoc advertising and random distribution of promotional material directly to employers had limited impact, although targeted mailshots to address specific issues could be useful. Overall it was more successful to sell the objective use of standards to improve efficiency and introduce NVQs as an additional advantage. One TEC mentioned using the need for business competitiveness as a starting point. This was also the conclusion reached by a CBI survey undertaken in 1997 which recommended that the promotion of NVQs should be linked with the promotion of other employer quality and training initiatives;
- the companies interviewed clearly appreciated the help they received in planning the support needed for business and staff development, establishing objectives, monitoring procedures and developing structures to evaluate performance. Some employers had difficulty mapping NVQ standards to job specifications and this was an area where TECs could make a valuable contribution. A recurring theme throughout the study was that standards had to be linked to the needs of individual businesses and their business plans;
- many TECs had concentrated on management and supervisory development and had introduced successful specific management development programmes which they either delivered and assessed themselves or delivered through intermediaries. These programmes were clearly popular with managers and had produced good results. One TEC also mentioned mounting a skills investment programme which required the achievement of NVQ units. Once managers started to see the benefits of improving their own competencies, they started to think of the benefits if their subordinates were also more competent;
- several employers had started down the road of NVQ development when someone significant in the company such as the managing director or personnel manager had changed. Other opportunities occurred when something important was happening in the business which threatened survival or performance e.g. product, design or market changes, or when the company wanted to reduce their dependence on external specialists. Some TECs were capitalising on these opportunities, and this reinforced the need for TECs to keep in close touch with what is happening in their business communities;
- other TECs looked for opportunities at key times in particular sectors. Examples of this were when new standards were introduced or when there were significant developments in a particular sector such as the introduction of new regulations in the child nursery sector. Although not happening on a regular basis such approaches were found to produce good follow-up interest;

- employers thought that TECs were more effective, and their advice more credible, when they had staff with business backgrounds. Employers thought it was important for TECs to maintain a supportive relationship with them beyond the initial enquiry. Some TECs saw value in close monitoring and support during the early stages of implementation and until the first NVQs were achieved, others remained in continual contact with companies. Some TECs referred to the importance of having staff dedicated to employer contacts and regular visits. There were champions for standards-based training in many companies interviewed. Their impact had been considerable in all cases, and it was important for TECs to build relationships with these people and provide additional support if they left the company.
- 4.8 Many TECs had supported employers in carrying out training needs analyses, competence audits and skills audits. TECs were useful in suggesting how these could be done and, in some cases, the TEC had contributed to the funding of the activity. TECs saw skills audits as a starting point for much wider business opportunities with employers. Most TECs had also supported the training of in-house assessors and verifiers in order to have a champion within the company. Several employers spoke of the value of training in-house mentors.
- 4.9 There were mixed views among TECs as to the value of funding isolated projects to promote NVQs. Some had been very successful and included:
- one-off projects to establish NVQs in specific occupational sectors. Sometimes these brought with them the requirement to disseminate good practice elsewhere in the sector. Successful TECs recognised the need to work with NTOs and specialist consultants who were looking at training needs in specific sectors. One TEC part-funded a successful project to develop support for a distance learning course in farming and to source computers for the use of participants. This had come about following an approach from an employers' group;
 - one TEC had identified a specific opportunity to train local school governors to NVQ level 4 in Management. This proved a rewarding experience for many of those involved and improved the level of skill brought to the task. Many of the governors involved were local business people who took the concept of NVQs back with them into their companies;
 - one TEC had introduced specific programmes to support and mentor young people who were disaffected by the education and training system. Another was introducing the concept of NVQ units through its Young Enterprise programme pre-16, and running specific NVQ pilot projects in some occupational sectors pre-16;
 - some TECs had set up support systems such as enterprise, learning support centres and local school-based multi-media centres. The multi-media centres were being used by the schools during school hours and could be used by the public, community groups and small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) at other times. Some of this use had been associated with the skills needed to acquire NVQ units. Another TEC had established learning stations in local libraries, and had provided personal computers in local companies to facilitate learning. By themselves none of these things resulted in the achievement of specific NVQs, but served to generate a learning environment which would facilitate NVQ achievement.

- 4.10 There were other ways in which TECs were supporting their employers:
- TECs were supporting work-force development by promoting good practice through networking appropriate businesses, and mounting workshops on training and assessment for company staff so that they could meet other candidates and share experiences;
 - many employers referred to their need for detailed and reliable information about the various local training consultants and providers locally. TECs were seen as the best source of this information. TECs did not always oversee the activities of training deliverers but, where they did, employers clearly appreciated the help given in monitoring and sorting out problems with delivery. TECs could play a major role in making introductions, helping with the planning and advising employers on specifications and contracting.
- 4.11 Some TECs took advantage of the opportunities offered by National Training Awards, local awards schemes, local TEC and business press, TEC training days and workshops for companies on specific issues such as business management to promote NVQs. One TEC was mounting “Know your TEC” events aimed at companies who were new or did not regularly use TEC services.
- 4.12 There had been a wide range of general support material developed to support activities like promoting NVQ awareness, management development, and partnerships in learning. There were also examples of specific material developed to help employers. One TEC had produced a guide for small businesses which helped them improve the development of their work-force, and another had produced a specific NVQ toolkit to help employers plan the vocational development of their workforce. The toolkit covered national standards, NVQs, the principles of assessment, the identification of training needs, the evaluation of training programmes, and the use of NVQs as evidence for an Investors in People award.

Funding

- 4.13 Although some initiatives to promote NVQs were self-supporting most TECs were helping their employers to some extent with funding either from dedicated budgets, reserves or from other budgets such as the TEC Discretionary Fund, Single Regeneration Budget (SRB), and Local Competitiveness budget. Some TECs were also accessing European Social Funding (ESF), but the bureaucracy associated with accessing this was clearly an irritant.
- 4.14 There were reports of very complicated contracting arrangements in order to access funding; an example being given of contracts having nine separate funding lines in addition to any funding the TEC may exceptionally make from efficiency savings:
- ESF2 funding for NVQs in the workplace for SMEs;
 - ESF4 funding for targeted skill training;
 - Individual Learning Accounts;
 - SRB funding for NVQs in the workplace for individuals and companies;
 - ADAPT for the development of a learning culture;
 - TEC Development Fund for development bursaries;

- European Regional Development Funds and Challenge Funds through the Centre for Competitive Manufacturing;
- IIP Management Development from Block 3 funding;
- Career Development Loans.

4.15 These funding lines brought with them a myriad of criteria and monitoring requirements which made the process slow and laborious. Clearly TEC staff had to be innovative to capture the funds available, and those TECs who had staff with bidding expertise were seen to have a positive advantage over those who did not.

4.16 Although levels of financial support were mixed, employers clearly appreciated the help. One TEC recommended that there was more impact if funding went to the employer and not to the training provider. There were examples of part or full funding of specific NVQs, payment of awarding body registration fees, payment of training for assessment skills in-house, financial support for the development of materials, and funding for skills audits/benchmarking. Some TECs took the view that employers valued the training more highly if they paid something towards it, and one TEC had found it more productive to pay only for achievements. One TEC had involved the Employment Service (ES) on the team advising a company. This had saved the company money in recruitment which they had then invested in training.

5. NTO EXPERIENCES OF PROMOTING NVQs

- 5.1 Only two NTOs were interviewed for the study, so the conclusions reached are indicative and not necessarily representative.
- 5.2 Both the NTOs interviewed invested more than TECs in direct marketing and promotion. There were some lessons to be learnt from their approach:
- promotional material aimed at employees was only successful if it was targeted. Face-to-face promotion was better, but had to be done by staff who knew what they were talking about and were credible;
 - the NTO experience was similar to that of TECs in that they found it was better to concentrate on the benefits to the business of workforce development rather than promoting NVQs as such. Things like business competitiveness, business survival, job assessment, enhanced recruitment, reductions in staff turn-over, fewer mistakes, less waste and improved profitability were all mentioned as things which focused the minds of senior staff in companies;
 - there were opportunities to promote a range of NVQs, not just those immediately apparent to the sector, within some businesses;
 - having persuaded employers of the benefits of training to national standards there was value in returning to first principles and explaining in plain English what standards based training was about and how NVQs were designed, structured and delivered. Many companies still did not appreciate that NVQs were based on industry standards. It was critical to avoid NVQ jargon;
 - it was important to emphasise the importance of the employer in the process, that training was competence based and on-the-job;
 - it was helpful to target things known to be barriers to recruitment when designing promotional strategies for young people, and to emphasise the acquisition of a recognised and worthwhile qualification;
 - real case studies were valuable promotion material, and benefited from being localised where possible so that companies could recognise the people involved;
 - it was important to keep up the dialogue once it was started, and to seek appropriate ways of doing this - newsletter, "specials", help-lines, internet web sites were all mentioned;
 - it was necessary to keep looking for new ways of updating training messages and keeping them fresh;
 - marketing was most effective when there was clarity about the target audience and when material was developed which was suitable for that audience. There was value in taking advice from groups who knew the audience, what would attract them, and how they could be reached;
 - the use of federation logos where possible lent credibility.

- 5.3 The NTO for Construction Occupations had also been able to promote NVQs through its initiatives to support on-site assessment and training.

6 PARTNERS

- 6.1 Most TECs recognised that their NVQ activity required them to work through other partners. Some TECs were investing in their partnerships through joint project working and secondment of staff. One TEC referred to operating a training providers forum, a higher skills task force, employer/provider networks, a manufacturing focus group (run by the TEC Chief Executive) and being part of a regional employment partnership. The same TEC had abandoned the use of sector networks because senior managers had stopped attending. Employers saw TECs as useful at putting employers or organisations in touch with other partners in the community. Some TECs had made good use of employers on local working groups. A list of the partners commonly referred to by TECs is at Annex 3.
- 6.2 NTOs also spoke of the importance of partnerships. Standards based training could not be introduced into companies unless employers and trade unions were committed to it and took ownership of its delivery. The promotion of standards had to be done in partnership with them. The credibility of NVQs was also enhanced by the support of trade organisations and federations who were other important partners.
- 6.3 Increasingly NTOs were working more closely in partnership with each other; sharing promotional material and experiences.
- 6.4 Despite TECs listing NTOs in their list of partners, it was clear that NTOs had a mixed interface with TECs. The NTO for electrotechnical occupations, such as electricians, saw their contact as little more than advice on demand about occupational standards; perhaps because of their limited resource. The NTO for Construction Occupations was developing strong regional relationships with key TECs who they hoped would take a “lead TEC” role in their area. They were marketing themselves strongly among the TEC network and were planning to sign up to a TEC/NTO protocol at the forthcoming TEC National Conference.

The Partnership with Business Link PBAs

- 6.5 Business Links and their PBAs can be an effective channel for the development of training to national standards within companies if their contribution is developed. Some TECs were still compartmentalised in their working and this limited their effectiveness. Partnership working was clearly stronger where there had been a merger of the TEC with the Business Link, and two TECs referred to regular operational meetings to discuss business issues. Mergers and re-organisations were taking place in several of the TECs involved in the study, and a common theme was the closer integration of Business Link with all other TEC business services. In some TECs the concept of partnership working was still developing with TEC staff starting to pick up on some of the NVQ leads being presented by PBAs. One TEC mentioned moving its iP and NVQ work to the Business Link in order to achieve closer integration, and develop a holistic approach.
- 6.6 TECs with no Business Link integration felt that PBAs concentrated too much on business planning and income generation in their dealings with companies at the expense of inputting information on national standards and NVQs. PBAs did not always have the knowledge or the competencies required to make the links between the business plan and the need for vocational training. One TEC spoke of plans to deliver training on national standards and NVQs to PBAs.

The Government Office Perspective

- 6.7 The study demonstrated that TECs were making and developing links between training to national standards and other regional initiatives such as the competitiveness initiative. GOs did not always understand these, or other appropriate links, and were not well-positioned to offer support to TECs or others.
- 6.8 Overall the GO role in the wider promotion of NVQs was limited, and their perceptions of what TECs were doing was not always accurate. This appeared due, in part, to lack of GO resource. None of the GOs interviewed were able to articulate strategies to encourage the promotion of NVQs outwith the main programmes and none were giving it a high priority. Some GOs were able to comment on the level of success being achieved by some of their TECs. There had been some steering group support given by London GO to a TEC running a project on behalf of the London TECs with DfEE funding. This project had hit difficulties due to TEC changes in staff, and the GO had been disappointed that progress had not been better.
- 6.9 One GO thought that, although NVQs worked well when employers delivered them, their promotion in the workplace suffered from a poor image which resulted from their delivery within some Government training programmes. Further work is needed to re-establish their value. Experience showed that employers did not always want the whole of an NVQ and there would be more take-up if there was greater flexibility in what could be supported. Another GO thought that the use of portfolios was time-consuming for people in the workforce, and that some advice about the critical content required would be helpful. The same GO felt that the NVQ jargon was unhelpful.
- 6.10 There was a GO view that the pressure for IIP performance and the increasingly stretching targets in that area might have discouraged the use of TEC resources on workforce development.

7. CUSTOMERS

The TEC Audience

- 7.1 Most TECs targeted companies of all sizes, although some tended to concentrate on SMEs. One TEC had commissioned selected training providers to target SMEs who had no commitment to competence based training, and who had not committed to Investors in People. Another TEC had mounted a specific project associated with competence based training which was targeted at potential Investors in People companies without an infrastructure. SMEs needed quick and inexpensive results in order to be persuaded; a view supported by one of the NTOs interviewed. One large employer thought that the needs of large companies tended to suffer to the advantage of the SMEs.
- 7.2 TECs and NTOs referred to the significance of targeting the most senior person with responsibility, at least in the first instance, in order to ensure commitment and a consequent knock-on effect lower down in the company.
- 7.3 A few TECs had either targeted the voluntary sector or planned to. Some mentioned unemployed people, disaffected and excluded young people, adults, colleges and training providers, and business schools as being among their client groups. Some had mounted regular awareness raising events about the work-based route to qualifications with school-leavers, parents and careers teachers. Others planned to target the Careers Service (CS).

Barriers to the Implementation of NVQs in Companies

- 7.4 The principle barrier to the implementation of NVQs in the workplace was lack of commitment by senior management:
- some were not interested in transferable skills because they thought they might lose staff;
 - some found it difficult to regenerate interest in NVQs because there had already been a history of failure. The reasons for failure were variously described as a mismatch between the NVQs offered and the needs of the individual, lack of support to overcome problems, and lack of support to take the project forward because the company had not involved the TEC;
 - some found resistance to replacing in-company training schemes with NVQ programmes. Long-serving employees of the company were not always persuaded of the need for change.
- 7.5 Every company had some sort of performance issue that senior managers were aware of but did not know how to tackle. Their main concerns included financial management, people management skills, managing performance, managing information, recruiting, selecting and retaining staff, and multi-skilling. All these issues had been addressed by TECs focusing on the needs of the business, providing an efficient service in planning development needs and helping to persuade the work-force of improved employment prospects and greater satisfaction.
- 7.6 Some companies worried about the assessment process. Some thought that assessors from competitors might learn trade secrets, others were concerned about inconsistency in forms of assessment, and the problems of portfolio gathering. One TEC reported that employers were sometimes deterred by the use of paper-based assessment

methods and that they had pump-primed some initiatives locally to investigate alternative methods of assessment.

- 7.7 Some firms did not see the relevance of the existing national standards for their industry and wanted to create their own. TEC advisers needed to explain the National Training Organisation approach to the creation of NVQs and to persuade firms that national standards were applicable to their area of activity. Some employers were only interested in unit certification and TECs needed to consider how they would support this.
- 7.8 Some employers had received unsatisfactory service from training providers, and this had turned them against NVQs. They and some TECs took the view that private training providers did not always have the skills and capacity required for training in-company. They were not always able to react to just-in-time training, and to tailor training to business needs. They also did not necessarily have the staff and resources required to carry the training through.
- 7.9 Further Education Colleges were popular with many employers and, in one case, the relationship between an employer and the local college had grown to the extent that most recruitment was taking place from college trainees. But some employers thought colleges did not support their trainees sufficiently, that they took too long to get people through to achievement and that they were not flexible enough to cater for the needs of the business. There were criticisms that many colleges still could not provide roll-on roll-off training.
- 7.10 One TEC had created area partnerships of employers, training providers and schools within a common sector area in order to promote better understanding, and it was clear that TECs generally could make a significant contribution to facilitating the setting up and monitoring of clear contract specifications.
- 7.11 Sometimes employers were put off by the costs involved; particularly by those associated with assessor training which were quoted as varying widely between private training providers and FE Colleges. Small employers found it difficult sometimes to afford their share of the funding.
- 7.12 Some employers were deterred by the time commitment they and their staff needed to give, and the impact of employee absence from the workplace. Training had to take place on-site, although pressures of work meant that, in some cases, candidates had to do the work in their own time at home, and one employer referred to people dropping out as a result.
- 7.13 Among unemployed people and school leavers the priority was sometimes the need to obtain a job, and this could create a barrier to achieving NVQ qualifications.

Employer Experience of the NVQ System

- 7.14 Many employers had developed their interest in training to standards through their commitment to LIP, and because they wanted to improve the concept of team working in their companies. One employer who was experiencing high turn-over and poor commitment among his own staff had identified quality work being done by a competitor whose staff had good team spirit and were committed to the company. This company was providing NVQ training in-house. Some of the messages coming from employers were:
 - employees knew little about NVQs; the concept of competence-based training to standards needed selling within the organisation. Some managers found this difficult to do because they did not understand the process of training, assessment and portfolio building;

- people doing NVQs in the workplace liked the fact that the qualification was job related and assessed on the basis of what they did normally in the work-place. One manager said *“I wanted to achieve something, and therefore the qualification was important”*;
- many employers were keen to develop experience in-house of developing NVQ programmes together with capacity to assess and verify qualifications because they felt more in control of the process and found it more cost effective;
- some employers thought that, if experience was bought in, there was a problem with lack of credibility in the eyes of the work-force;
- the selection of candidates was important. Many employers thought it better to work with volunteers than forcing people to participate. Once on the programme people needed support; a view supported by the NTOs interviewed. This support could come from within a group, a trainer, from a mentor or role model. One company referred to the use of the “buddy” system with the “buddy” coming from another part of the organisation;
- accrediting prior learning and experience was important both in terms of time and cost, but also so that participants were not put off by repeating things they already knew. In some industries where there was a lot of experience among the workforce, but few formal qualifications, the accreditation of prior learning (APL) was critical. The NTOs saw it as being successful only if were done quickly and cheaply;
- a professional company image was important. This was helped by better planning and improved contact between management and the shop floor. One employer said *“Can’t say we’ve grown because we’ve trained, but we would not have grown effectively without training”*. Another said *“We don’t firefight anymore, we plan”*.

7.15 There were particular demands on employers which opened opportunities for NVQ development:

- many employers were required to achieve certain levels of quality assurance by their customers e.g. ISO 9000. There was strong reinforcement for this view from the NTOs. Increasingly clients were asking contractors in the construction and electrical sectors to demonstrate the competence of their work-force before awarding contracts;
- staff needed to understand the implications of Health and Safety legislation and environmental standards and be able to adopt the necessary practices;
- there were increasing needs to improve customer care structures in order to compete. One employer said *“All the staff now work in the knowledge that everyone has a customer, even if it is their colleague waiting for them to complete a job”*.

7.16 Employers received their information about NVQs from a variety of sources:

- consultants;
- TECs. Some employers expressed problems with TEC jargon, although there was praise for some of the material produced to help employers;

- Colleges;
- NTOs;
- DfEE;
- Awarding bodies;
- from their work with liP;
- Training providers;
- trade organisations;
- Trade Unions. Reference was made to regional TUC/TEC initiatives which had resulted in the TU reps in some companies asking for more information;
- one employer spoke in praise of the NVQ database which he found useful for gaining information about NVQs.

8. EVALUATION

- 8.1 TECs tended to review performance and measure impact on an individual company basis, and there was considerable reliance on soft information. One TEC judged effectiveness in terms of the delivery of items specified in funding contracts, by the time taken for the participants to gain NVQs and for companies to gain liP status. In some cases TECs had set up independent evaluation with relevant reports, and many TECs were able to point to successful achievements resulting from their projects. In many cases the TEC Board received reports about developments within companies.
- 8.2 TEC plans for the future included:
- develop more programmes with Business Schools;
 - ensuring that NVQs at higher levels were available;
 - work more closely with the Careers Service;
 - make links with work experience;
 - develop strategies to avoid drop-out;
 - evaluate impact;
 - draw up local case studies.
- 8.3 Employers rarely undertook formal evaluation or cost benefit exercises except where they had been involved in particular projects where, typically, sessions would be evaluated by candidates and trainer, and the outcomes monitored against the TEC contract.
- 8.4 One employer thought that the cost of NVQ implementation was not expensive when set against the benefits. Employers quoted a wide range of achievements at all levels and in several sectors. There was also evidence that particular projects gave good results in a short period of time. Most employers thought that awareness of the value of training in the broadest sense had been improved.
- 8.5 There were positive examples of the added value achieved by workforce development:
- some sectors reported a lack of interest from young people, and it was felt that offering young people qualifications had improved recruitment. One employer said *“Training will be the key to future business survival”*. The acquisition of a worthwhile qualification was seen by the NTOs as a key promotional strategy for employees, and would be critical for job security among the existing workforce in some sectors;
 - training and development produced an informed and flexible workforce. One employer compared productivity between two peak periods and reported a saving of £50,000 between them with no loss of product quality and put this down to improved flexibility resulting from training;
 - staff had greater interest in their work resulting in lower staff turn-over. One employer reported a 50% improvement; another a reduction from 15% to 5%;

- some employers could point to improved profitability; even in sectors where there had been considerable downward pressure. This was a considerable benefit in the construction industry where on-site waste was reduced by having a more competent and committed workforce;
- several employers pointed to improved consistency of operation across their business, improving levels of performance and reductions in errors and re-work. One employer quoted a doubling of output with no increase in workforce. He said *“Along with commitment to Investors in People the NVQ has helped me and the rest of the team to build a more competitive and productive business”*. Another quoted a reduction in sickness days of 1000 days a year saving £12,000, and several employers mentioned reductions in accidents. One quoted a 50% reduction in accidents (bringing with it a reduction in the costs of insurance and employer liability);
- NVQ training had resulted in better organisation of management time and an improved use of delegation. One said *“Staff skills as well as working systems have improved as result of the NVQ5. This means that I can leave much of the day-to-day running of the business to the staff and concentrate on developing the business safe in the knowledge that they have the skill they need to do a first class job”*. Managers, particularly those in small companies, felt that their personal development led to them being better managers operating within better business structures. Companies who were working towards IiP recognition were able to use their NVQ work as evidence;
- employers listed a range of benefits gained by their staff from workforce training and development. Staff felt more valuable particularly when they worked in an environment where their role was secondary or subordinate to other employees. Attitudes and motivation increased. Staff could generate more ideas, do more to solve work problems and were more likely to take responsibility and seek promotion.

8.6 Employers listed a range of things they would like for the future:

- help with funding especially where there was no assessment expertise in-house;
- some simple jargon-free leaflets with simpler messages for staff and line managers which would demonstrate the benefits. This was very much in line with the experience of the NTOs;
- opportunities to network with people in similar situations so that they could share good practice;
- opportunities to get involved in other training eg equal opportunities and Health and Safety;
- more information about specialist local training provision e.g. dyslexia.

8.7 Employers thought TECs should:

- market their services more regularly to employers. Many employers felt that they did not know what the TEC could do for them. There was an example in the study of a TEC mounting regular “Know Your TEC” events for new companies or those who did not make regular use of TEC services;
- sell the business benefits of training, emphasise the way in which NVQs could be tailored to the need of the business and play down the theoretical approach;
- deal with individual company concerns, focus on employer need and deliver a competent, quick, coherent service;
- slim down the paperwork;
- avoid jargon;
- work in partnership and have a plan for individual sectors;
- develop a comprehensive package of financial support;
- clarify policies on Individual Learning Accounts;
- maintain communications about TEC organisational issues and provide a named contact;
- help employers to match their needs to appropriate NVQs;
- help employers to develop ways in which to capture the imagination of staff in terms of work-force development and progression.

ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED IN THE STUDY

TEC/CCTEs

Kent TEC

FOCUS Central London

The Link Group

Coventry and Warwickshire CCTE

Dudley TEC

Sandwell TEC

Leicestershire TEC

Hertfordshire TEC

Humberside TEC

ELTEC

Rochdale Borough Chamber

Stockport and High Peak TEC

County Durham TEC

GOVERNMENT OFFICES

Government Office for London

Government Office for the West Midlands

Government Office for the North East

NATIONAL TRAINING ORGANISATIONS

National Electrotechnical Training

CITB

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TEC PARTNERS

Colleges, HE institutions and other training providers

Providers of specialist support and guidance

Chambers of Commerce

Business Links

Education/Business Partnerships

The Careers Service

The Employment Service and partners in New Deal

Local Authorities

Business Area Strategic Partnerships

Enterprise Agencies

University for Industry

Employer groups

NTOs and Group Training Organisations

Business Schools

Voluntary bodies

TUC and local trade union branches

Regional networks of TECs

Adult guidance networks

Schools and LEAs

Professional bodies

Open Learning Organisations

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