

GNVQs

Evaluation of the Pilot of the New Assessment Model, 1997 to 1999

**A joint report by Ofsted
and the FEFC inspectorate**

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Introduction

Background

1 This report on the proposed revised general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) has been produced by inspectors from the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) and Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) from the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted).

2 The evaluation of the new GNVQ pilot focuses on its effectiveness in securing rigorous and consistent assessment and grading of students' work, and in reducing the burden of assessment to make it more manageable for teachers. The report also examines the impact of the new GNVQ on teaching and learning, students' motivation and the quality of students' work. The background to the introduction of the new GNVQs and a description of the pilot is given in annex A.

3 During the two years of the pilot, up to September 1999, a great deal has been learnt about the manageability of the various parts of the qualification. However, a number of problems require further attention. The pilot has been extended for another year to allow more time for preparation by awarding bodies, colleges, schools and teachers. Changes to GNVQs will take place in September 2000 at the same time as changes to other post-16 qualifications.

4 The inspectorates have made detailed recommendations to the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) and the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) on particular components of the new GNVQ assessment model. These recommendations have influenced the QCA's advice to ministers on the final form of the awards to be introduced in the year 2000 and resulted in significant changes. Inspectors' judgements about the overall assessment load on centres, for example, have resulted in the simplification of assessment requirements.

Evidence Base

5 Twenty-one colleges and 40 schools were visited for the survey of the new GNVQ pilot and over 1,250 college students and 600 school students were following the GNVQ courses involved. Inspectors paid regular visits to the colleges and schools during 1997-99 looking particularly at intermediate and advanced GNVQs, including key skills.

6 The views of staff and students on the appropriateness of the revised GNVQ and the quality of support received from the QCA and the validating bodies were sought. Inspectors observed teaching and learning, scrutinised a wide range of documentary evidence including teaching schemes and assessment plans, and undertook a detailed study of students' achievements.

7 Inspectors also attended standardisation training meetings for teachers and moderators, and scrutinised questions set for the vocational tests.

Main Findings

Organisation and manageability

8 The colleges and schools responded positively and successfully to the challenge of delivering the new qualification. Teachers have coped well with the changes which have been progressively introduced during the two years of the pilot. They appreciate that their views have led to significant changes.

9 The revised specifications for the new GNVQ have a straightforward structure. This has made it easier for teachers and students to understand what is required of them, produced a better balance between teaching and the supervision of assignments, and led to improved standards of work.

10 Although the vocational units provide students with clear guidance on the understanding and knowledge appropriate to

their level of study, some units cover too broad an area of work and others are pitched at too high a level. The assessment criteria for merit and distinction grades give insufficient emphasis to the quality of outcomes.

11 The externally devised 'set assignments' and 'benchmark assignments' provide useful templates for teachers in designing their own assignments. The benchmark assignments have successfully demonstrated to teachers the standards required in the vocational area. Benchmark assignments, however, are too long and contain too many tasks.

12 Specifications for the set assignments were poorly written and ambiguous and this led to problems of interpretation, particularly for moderators who had not been involved in writing them.

13 The original purpose of the advanced set assignment, to provide an element of external assessment of students' work, has been diluted. It is being used, like the intermediate benchmark assignment, to check on the accuracy of teachers' assessment.

14 The signposting of opportunities to develop key skills, which has been introduced into the vocational units, is helping teachers in colleges to integrate key skills and vocational work more effectively. There has been less evidence of this in schools.

15 The delivery of key skills, particularly information technology (IT), has involved colleges in substantial investment in extra staffing and equipment. In some colleges and schools, the demands for IT equipment for assessment have been difficult to manage.

16 A significant number of students in further education need considerable support in basic numeracy and language skills. Colleges are developing sound systems to identify students' learning needs and provide them with additional learning support.

17 Many colleges and schools have experienced high failure rates in key skills tests and set assignments. In some colleges, because of a shortage of specialist teachers, key skills were taught and assessed by vocational teachers who did not have sufficient specialist expertise to recognise what students need to learn. The pilot has led to an increase in specialist key skills teaching in schools. Too much time was being spent on key skills assessment and teaching in some centres, to the detriment of students' vocational studies.

Rigour and consistency in assessment

18 The revised assessment regime has succeeded in making the GNVQ qualification more rigorous. The assessment guidelines are clearer. The introduction of unit based assessment and grading is resulting in more accurate assessment by teachers.

19 The new vocational tests include a wider range of question types than the previous multiple-choice papers. However, they are limited in scope and the wording of some test questions is ambiguous. The intermediate tests are not equivalent to general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) standards, and the advanced level tests are not equivalent in demand to general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level). It is particularly important that the quality of these tests are improved in time for the full introduction of the new awards in 2000.

20 Grading procedures are explained more clearly and the recording of grades is simpler. The external marking and moderation of set assignments and benchmark assignments, coupled with portfolio moderation sessions with external standards moderators, provide teachers with useful feedback on grading. The procedures are also helping to develop greater consistency in grading across colleges and schools.

21 Students spend too much time preparing for, and sitting, the key skills set assignments. Some assignments also make too great a demand on resources. For example, the excessive use of computers in key skills assignments works to the detriment of students on other courses.

22 Too much time elapses between the date when students sit the set assignments and the date the results are received by centres. Sometimes students are notified that they have failed the assignments after the deadline for entering the next round of assessment, or leave college or school at the end of the course without knowing whether they have passed.

23 Many centres lacked confidence in the process of moderating standards in the early stages of the pilot because of perceived subjectivity in moderators' judgements. Feedback after moderation that had taken place in 1998 was not always sufficiently speedy, and confirmation of results took far too long.

24 Procedures for moderating standards improved in the second year of the pilot. Effective training of moderators and standardising of procedures generally ensured greater consistency of judgement.

Impact on teaching and learning

25 In the main, teaching in the pilot colleges is well planned and there is a good balance between theory and practice. Teachers of vocational units are well qualified and experienced. Practical work is carefully structured to meet the different abilities of students. Strong links with industry effectively support teaching and ensure that staff and students keep up to date with current developments. A particular weakness of some schemes of work, however, is that they are geared solely to meeting assessment criteria. In key skills, especially, this shifts the focus of teaching and learning away from the progressive development of students' skills

towards a narrow interpretation of what students need to acquire to pass the set assignments and tests.

26 Teaching in the pilot schools is generally satisfactory and often good, particularly in art and design, and business. There are some weaknesses in teachers' specialist knowledge in IT and in health and social care. The new assessment model is providing more time for the direct teaching of concepts and this is improving the quality of students' work. On some courses, however, teachers are adopting too mechanistic an approach by tackling assignments task by task.

27 The new assessment regime has increased the amount of attention paid to the teaching of key skills. The application of number test and set assignments has clarified the standards of work required for each level of achievement. The standard of some students' key skills work has improved as a result. The most effective key skills teaching is carried out by specialist teachers who work closely with vocational teachers to develop schemes of work and ensure that key skills are well integrated with students' vocational studies.

28 Though there have been instances of the effective use of communication, numerical and IT skills to support and enhance vocational assignments on GNVQ courses, the pilot arrangements for key skills have resulted in an increased amount of key skills evidence being produced which is separate from the vocational units. Key skills, therefore, have had too limited an impact on the quality of vocational work.

Quality of students' work in colleges

29 Most advanced level students develop good knowledge and understanding of their subjects. Teachers provide appropriate opportunities for them to work together to achieve a balance of practical skills and theoretical knowledge. In most vocational areas, students carry out research to demonstrate their understanding of

the subject. The majority of students who successfully complete their course of study progress to a further course of study in higher education or gain employment.

30 At intermediate level, most students produce work to an acceptable standard and demonstrate a satisfactory knowledge of their vocational areas. Many students use IT with confidence in their assignments. Most students work well in groups and they develop good communication skills. Much of the work relates well to the demands of the workplace.

31 On some courses, pass rates are lower than those achieved in previous years. Managers consider that this is a consequence of the difficulty of meeting the complex and diverse demands of the GNVQ, and particularly the need for students to pass each key skill at the same level as their main vocational area of study. To ensure that students who take part in the pilot are not penalised, the awarding bodies have agreed to take into account portfolio evidence when deciding whether students should be awarded the qualification.

Quality of students' work in schools

32 In the vocational areas, the majority of the new specifications have improved students' knowledge and understanding, and have encouraged greater analysis, synthesis and evaluation, particularly at advanced level. There were examples of cogently argued pieces of work in all areas. In advanced art and design some of the work was equivalent to the first year of a degree course.

33 There was evidence at advanced and intermediate levels of improved progress and achievement as a result of specifications which are clearer and more demanding. This was further helped by the exemplification of standards in the benchmark assignments.

34 At intermediate level, there were some examples of the specifications encouraging good analysis, but these were not frequent. Weaker

students tended to copy directly from sources without real understanding of the underlying concepts and issues.

35 At intermediate level, the benchmark assignment has encouraged the greater use of realistic vocational contexts. However, at advanced level, and in the single advanced award, there was sometimes insufficient first-hand vocational experience and too much reliance on secondary data.

Recommendations

36 In order to build on the achievements of the pilot the following issues should be addressed:

Specifications

- QCA should review the vocational units to ensure they are all pitched at an appropriate level and are consistent in the demands they make of students. The specifications should contain fewer and more general unit descriptors in order to encourage assessors to make an overall judgement of the students' work
- the criteria for the awards of merit and distinction should place more emphasis on knowledge and understanding and less emphasis on process skills
- QCA should ensure that those key skills which make an important contribution to the vocational work form an integral part of the vocational unit and are assessed, wherever possible, as part of the unit.

Assessment

- QCA should reduce the assessment burden on students and teachers, particularly on one-year courses, by continuing to reduce the amount of evidence required for each unit
- as a matter of urgency, the awarding bodies should improve the quality of test questions, match them more closely to the

specifications and make them more rigorous to ensure that standards are equivalent to GCSE and GCE A level, as appropriate. This will be particularly important if, in the future, some units are to be assessed by tests alone

- the awarding bodies should mark tests more quickly and inform colleges and schools of the results sooner
- QCA should clarify the purpose of set assignments, particularly in relation to their function as a form of external assessment.

Standards moderation

- QCA should give priority to monitoring moderation procedures to ensure that the standards set are appropriate and consistent
- the awarding bodies should ensure that feedback to centres is speedy, and includes constructive commentary on the quality of students' work
- awarding bodies should continue to encourage assessors and moderators to make judgements about the overall quality of students' work
- if set assignments are to remain part of the assessment model, awarding bodies should ensure that they are assessed and/or moderated by the same people who write them or by other specialists in the vocational area
- QCA should make the procedures for monitoring standards more manageable. Awarding bodies need to complete the process of moderation in good time so that students' awards are confirmed before they proceed to their chosen destinations.

Staff development and support

- QCA should ensure that the awarding bodies provide further staff development to make certain that all teachers are knowledgeable about standards. The

standardisation training for centre assessors provided by the awarding bodies during autumn 1998 should become part of the support to all centres taking up the new GNVQ award

- the awarding bodies should provide teachers with more guidance on the planning, teaching and assessment of vocational units. Teachers especially need support in designing tasks to help consolidate students' learning and bringing students to the point where they can tackle assessed assignments independently and in a shorter period of time
- the awarding bodies and schools should provide more subject-specific training for teachers of health and social care, and IT.

Part A: Assessment and Standards

Attainment and Progress in Colleges

Advanced award

37 The majority of work on art and design, business, IT and health and social care courses was of an appropriate standard. Most students displayed a sound understanding of their subject, developed the knowledge appropriate to their level of study and applied this effectively to their course work.

38 Much of the practical vocational work undertaken by students was completed thoroughly and competently. Students developed sound practical skills and applied them to a range of projects and assignments. Most of their work provided evidence of rigorous research and evaluation. Portfolios contained comprehensive notes and assignments that were well presented and showed students' ability to draw sensible conclusions from their work. Some portfolios were excellent, demonstrating high standards of knowledge and understanding.

39 Most portfolios of key skills work contained examples of well-organised and carefully presented pieces of work. There was often evidence of improvements in students' fluency and of increased confidence in their oral and written work. The more able students demonstrated considerable ability to analyse texts and express ideas clearly in speech and writing. However, some students were unable to organise ideas. Frequently, their language was inaccurate and their spelling poor. Standards in practical IT activities were generally good. Most students demonstrated improved IT skills and growing familiarity with a range of software. While some students achieved high standards in the application of number, a significant proportion struggled with numeracy.

40 Students were generally well motivated, hard working and interested in their studies.

They responded enthusiastically to well-designed assignments. Most understood the grading criteria used for assessment and were familiar with the procedures for claiming that they had satisfied the criteria.

41 For students completing their courses, pass rates were generally high and there were good rates of progression to related employment and higher education. In some colleges, retention rates for particular courses were unacceptably low when compared with those of other vocational courses in the same institution. Some of the less well-motivated students became disillusioned with the GNVQ pilot, finding the task of having to maintain their portfolio time-consuming and boring. Students who left their course early often identified this as a prime reason.

42 The ability range of students on GNVQ advanced courses is wide. Students who started their course with fewer than four GCSE passes at grade C or above tended to have considerable difficulty with some of the key skills, especially application of numbers. In the pilot, those colleges which applied higher entry requirements saw higher standards of achievement, and improved attendance and retention.

Intermediate award

43 Most students developed appropriate practical skills and knowledge of professional practice in workshops and studios. Assignments were well researched. Able students often researched beyond the levels expected of them. Many students showed an ordered approach to solving problems. Most portfolios contained useful, detailed records of students' skills and abilities. Some students kept excellent portfolios from which they could revise. A minority of students did not take sufficient pride in their work. Their files were disorganised and contained partial information.

44 The key skills work produced by some students was of a high standard. Most students demonstrated familiarity with a range of software and used IT effectively to present their work. In their written work, many demonstrated a good level of proficiency. However, a significant minority of less well-motivated students failed to achieve their full potential during their time at college. They had difficulty writing to the required standard, their grammar was weak and their numeracy skills poor.

45 Students who remained committed to their course and completed it, generally achieved the qualification. On some courses, pass rates and retention rates were high. On other courses, completion and pass rates were unacceptably low. Students with low levels of achievement on entering college often had difficulty, within the space of a year, gaining the knowledge and skills required to progress to an advanced level course.

Attainment and Progress in Schools

Advanced award

46 Standards achieved by students within their portfolio work were at least satisfactory. There were examples of good or very good work in all the vocational areas, but the best work was in business and in art and design. At pass level, the work in completed portfolios was broadly equivalent in quality to that of GCE A level grade E and the merit and distinction work was equivalent to higher GCE A level grades. In the majority of cases, the quality of work was comparable with that which could reasonably be expected from a student taking two GCE A level subjects.

47 In their portfolios, most students revealed good knowledge and understanding of the concepts and theories relevant to their vocational area. They made good use of

secondary data and there were some examples of original and well-conducted field research. Generally, data were analysed well and students drew clear conclusions and made sensible recommendations from the evidence they had gathered.

48 The average GCSE scores of many of the students starting these courses were lower than those of students on GCE A level courses, but most of them made good progress in gaining the knowledge and skills required in their vocational area. They worked well independently and in groups and learned to plan and organise their work effectively to meet deadlines. Their presentations were good and they discussed their work with confidence.

49 The standard of key skills work produced by students on advanced GNVQ courses was generally satisfactory, and in some cases good. Most students' oral communication was good and their written work was accurate and well presented. They generally used numerical techniques competently, and made effective use of IT to enhance the quality of their work. Much of the key skills portfolio evidence, however, was produced separately from the vocational work. Though there were some examples where key skills were effectively integrated with vocational work, the pilot arrangements generally resulted in a greater degree of separation than had previously been the case.

Single advanced award

50 The single award, comprising six vocational units, is proving to be popular. It attracted relatively large groups of students in most of the schools piloting the award. Students were either combining the award with two, occasionally one, GCE A levels, or with a double award GNVQ in another vocational area.

51 Attainment was satisfactory in health and social care and in business, with examples of good work in both subjects. In art and design, the work was good. In IT, work ranged from satisfactory to unsatisfactory.

52 When the work was satisfactory or better, students had a good understanding of the theoretical concepts associated with the vocational area they were studying, but their ability to apply these to suitable vocational contexts was often less good. Some students relied almost entirely on secondary research, such as information they found on the Internet.

Intermediate award

53 Generally, the quality of work in students' portfolios was at least satisfactory. Portfolios in all vocational areas, with the exception of IT, contained examples of good work and there was some excellent work in art and design.

54 In most completed portfolios, the work was comparable in quality to at least GCSE grade C and equivalent in quantity to four GCSE subjects. Portfolios, particularly at merit and distinction level, contained well-written reports which made use of a wide range of sources and successfully linked vocational visits to investigations required for the assignments. Students provided interesting and useful accounts of their vocational investigations, showed a good grasp of key concepts and provided some examples of good analysis.

55 Where work was less satisfactory, students had an insufficient grasp of the basic knowledge and skills associated with the vocational area. In some cases, the range of vocational applications was too limited, and there was too much direct copying from sources, so that students were unable to demonstrate their understanding.

56 In IT, progress was less than satisfactory. In art and design, progress was very good. The most effective progress was made by those students who tackled real tasks within a vocational context. On some courses, the majority of students had low levels of prior attainment, the most frequent GCSE grades were D and E.

57 The standard of key skills work at intermediate level was more variable than at advanced level, but most of the work was at least satisfactory. In some schools, the pilot specifications and exemplification of standards provided by the set assignments contributed to key skills work of a more consistently suitable standard than has been the case on previous GNVQ courses. Most intermediate students completed their key skills portfolios by the end of their one-year course, though a widespread lack of success on the set assignments meant that many were dependent on the awarding bodies' reconsideration of portfolio evidence to achieve the key skills units.

Teaching and Learning in Colleges

58 The quality of most vocational teaching and learning was good, and some was outstanding, particularly in practical subjects. Most teachers successfully adapted and developed their skills to meet the demands of the revised GNVQ. Further education teachers held appropriate assessor and verifier awards. Most teachers were well qualified, committed and experienced, and also had relevant industrial experience. Part-time teachers made a valuable contribution to teaching, bringing to the classroom up-to-date knowledge of current professional practice.

59 Most vocational lessons were well planned and effective. Many teachers used a range of imaginative teaching methods and showed considerable flair in designing topical projects with an appropriate blend of theory and practice. Teachers coped effectively with students' varying levels of ability and devoted much time and effort to helping students reach the required standards. Students responded well to vocational teachers who made theoretical work easier to grasp by placing it in a practical context. Classroom teaching was often enriched through educational visits and the involvement of visiting practitioners. This was particularly evident on art and design courses.

60 On a minority of courses there was insufficient planning of the time to be spent on each topic. The standards expected of students were not made clear and consequently they were not able to plan their work effectively.

61 There were many positive aspects to the teaching of key skills. The best lessons were well planned. There was a good balance of theory and practice and effective management of the learning process. In the main, however, teachers were more successful in developing students' practical skills than they were in developing students' key skills. Too much attention was paid to key skills in isolation, and too little to their application in a vocational context. Some teachers pitched assignments at too high or low a level. Colleges need to develop better strategies for teaching key skills to classes in which there is a wide range of ability. In many key skills lessons, poor timekeeping by students was common and absenteeism was high.

Teaching and Learning in Schools

62 The quality of most teaching was satisfactory or better, with occasional examples of very good teaching in art and design, and business.

63 The new GNVQ encouraged a better balance between the direct teaching of terminology and of theories associated with the subject area and the supervision of students working on their assessed assignments. Much more time was spent on the teaching of concepts before the start of the assignment and this made students' work more rigorous. Where the teaching was good, teachers showed a secure understanding of the vocational area, and made appropriate and imaginative use of vocational contexts. Teachers also made good use of support materials to set standards and guide assignment writing for the benchmark assignment.

64 On the single advanced award, teaching was generally satisfactory, with some examples of good and challenging teaching. In IT, some teaching was unsatisfactory. In the majority of subjects there was a good balance between direct teaching and the completion of assignments, but in IT there was insufficient teaching of concepts and skills before students started their assignment work.

65 At intermediate level in particular, the new units encouraged more effective use of first-hand vocational experience.

66 Where the teaching was barely satisfactory, there was a tendency for teachers to tackle the assignments on a task by task basis, aiming at only a narrow coverage of the unit specifications. Teachers did not attempt to write their own assignments but simply worked through the assessment evidence requirements with the students. There was also an over-reliance on a narrow range of texts and not enough use was made of primary sources and vocational contexts. Teachers need further specialist training in some vocational aspects of health and social care and of IT.

67 Where key skills work was undertaken by experienced vocational teachers, or by key skills specialists, it was usually satisfactory or good. The best practice occurred where vocational and key skills specialists co-operated in the production of relevant and suitably demanding assignments. In some cases, key skills opportunities were not fully exploited.

Curriculum Management and Planning in Colleges

68 There is still work to do to build parity of esteem for GNVQ as an alternative to GCE A level. Despite some hard work by colleges, many parents and students do not accept the claims of the equivalence of GNVQs and GCSE/GCE qualifications. Qualifications with broadly similar aims, such as Edexcel national

diplomas, remain a popular route into employment and higher education for some students. A few colleges in the pilot are replacing some of their GNVQs with such awards.

69 Despite the rapid pace of change, most GNVQ courses were well planned, carefully monitored and competently taught. The clearer course specifications and guidance documents were welcomed by teachers and students. However, the complicated structure of GNVQs continues to make it necessary for teachers to devote an excessive amount of time explaining to students the course structure, the assessment procedures and the demands the course will make on them as individuals.

70 The bureaucratic requirements of running a GNVQ course took too much time from teaching. The consistently late arrival of documentation and guidance from the awarding bodies hindered effective course planning and management. Although colleges worked hard to minimise disruption to students, the late notification of test results had an adverse effect on the quality of some students' experience.

Curriculum Management and Planning in Schools

71 In art and design curriculum planning was good. In other vocational areas planning was generally in its early stages and inspectors found several examples of poor planning, both at advanced and intermediate levels. The late arrival of materials gave teachers insufficient time to plan effectively, and some teachers attempted to adapt old materials without success. All schools completed some outline planning, but there was insufficient exploration of tasks and activities to support assignment work. There was insufficient evidence of integrated planning between teachers responsible for different units, and little joint planning by vocational and key skills specialists.

In a few schools, where three or four units were taught simultaneously, students were overwhelmed and confused by the workload.

72 Outside contacts for the benchmark assignment have been well planned and provided students with direct access to a wider range of vocational sources. However, on the advanced award courses not enough of the work was set in real vocational contexts.

Assessment and Grading in Colleges

73 Coping with the changing assessment requirements provided a significant challenge for teachers. However, most colleges had established effective internal verification processes and procedures. Arrangements for assessing vocational units were good. Internal verifiers routinely checked the rigour and consistency of assessment by sampling students' work. Increasingly, samples of work were being evaluated by more than one teacher, which encouraged more consistent marking across course teams. Generally, improved assessment and internal verification practices were creating more consistent standards.

74 The majority of vocational teachers were making accurate assessments of students' work and the standards they expected of students were generally consistent with the aims and level of the qualification.

75 The assessment of key skills posed problems, because evidence for key skills achievement might be drawn from both vocational and key skills work. Many teachers need guidance on ways of assessing key skills to ensure that standards are observed more uniformly. In some colleges, internal verifiers checked standards of key skills assessment in both vocational and key skills assignments. In others, vocational teachers sampled assessed key skills work. Inspectors found that the marking of specialist key skills teachers was

often more rigorous than that of vocational teachers who were teaching key skills.

76 The pilot encouraged students to be involved effectively in the assessment process. In most colleges there were well-established systems for continuously monitoring students' progress through individual tutorials. Students, in consultation with teachers, often set their own learning objectives and evaluated their achievements against agreed objectives. They valued the opportunity to assess their own progress. Log books kept by students recorded effectively the various activities undertaken. Action plans drawn up by students provided a focus for regular reviews of progress. Teachers usually provided adequate oral feedback on students' performance, although the quality of written feedback, including the degree of detail, varied far too much.

77 Teachers welcomed the new assessment arrangements and simplified systems for recording achievement, but felt that the recording of assessment still took too much time from teaching and learning.

Assessment and Grading in Schools

78 Teachers and students found the new assessment and grading criteria easier to understand and apply. Inspectors agreed with most teachers' assessment and grading decisions. There was rarely a difference of more than one grade. Nevertheless, in most of the vocational areas there were too many detailed descriptors outlining what students needed to produce in order to achieve a pass, merit or distinction; the frequent external testing and assessment of vocational and key skills aspects of the intermediate level award were over-burdensome for teachers and students.

79 Initially, in schools where several units were taught concurrently, assessment and grading was delayed until May or June. This

made it difficult for students to develop a full understanding of the nature of assessment, and students found it difficult to cope with the large amount of referred work returned at the same time. Teachers should give greater consideration to the timing of grading and assessment.

80 Schools welcomed the perceived increased rigour of the vocational tests and students responded positively. Nevertheless, some schools entered students for these tests before the appropriate unit had been tackled, which may partially account for the high failure rates in some of the tests.

Assessment Training

81 In autumn 1998, awarding bodies provided training sessions in assessment procedures for teachers from the pilot centres, to clarify the assessment requirements of the pilot units and to develop teachers' understanding of the standards of work required. Teachers were provided with the same type of training as the awarding bodies' standards moderators. Exemplar materials were carefully chosen by the chief standards moderators to illustrate the minimum standard of work required for a pass, merit or distinction. In general, these sessions were well organised and made a good contribution to setting standards.

82 Overall, teachers found these training days valuable. Despite the reimbursement of expenses by the awarding bodies, however, the level of attendance was sometimes disappointing.

83 Most assessment decisions reflected a good balance between the need to fulfil the assessment criteria and the need to recognise work of good quality. The chief standards moderators showed an appropriate willingness to award a good grade to work of good quality, despite the omission of a small amount of evidence. In one of the intermediate sessions in business, in contrast, there was an

overemphasis on checking for every piece of evidence. On a few occasions, the decisions of principal moderators were considered by a number of the teachers present to be too lenient. The teachers' view was endorsed by inspectors.

Standards Moderation

84 The benchmark assignments, set assignments and selected units of portfolio work, were externally moderated by the awarding bodies. Most of the moderators were subject specialists. Some were not.

85 In the first year of the pilot the moderation of standards was not consistent, either across vocational areas or between awarding bodies. In some cases, too much depended on individual moderators' interpretation of the assessment criteria. Some colleges and schools experienced difficulty in agreeing with moderators on what was valid and sufficient evidence. If a moderator decided that an assessor had misjudged one assessment criterion, then it led to all candidates from that centre moving from pass to fail or from distinction to fail.

86 Moderation activities were not always well timed and moderation dates were not always properly matched to the completion of courses. Arrangements to consider challenges to assessment decisions took far too long, and in some cases, students who had completed their studies in summer 1998 did not know their results until spring 1999. This major breakdown in planned moderation procedures meant that some candidates learnt that they had not passed their course until it was too late for them to do anything about it.

87 In the second year of the pilot, in order to avoid delays, extra moderators were employed. They were encouraged to come to a decision about the awards on the day of their visit to the centre.

Standards Training for Moderators

88 In the second year of the pilot a systematic programme for the training of standards moderators took place, both for set assignments and for students' completed portfolios. This training helped to ensure a more consistent approach.

89 The chief moderator and principal moderators from each awarding body, in each of the vocational areas, met to review and grade exemplar work to establish common standards and to illustrate borderline decisions. They then each trained their own teams of moderators using these exemplars.

90 The initial meetings between awarding bodies to consider the set assignments were well organised and led effectively by the chief moderators. The chief moderators worked with their moderator colleagues, discussing criteria and providing interpretations, in order to achieve a consensus. In several cases, their tasks were made more difficult because they were not the writers of the assignments. Some of the assessment criteria for assignments were so poorly written and imprecise that the chief moderator had to accept a wider interpretation of the standards required than may have been intended by the writers.

91 The subsequent meetings, at which chief and principal moderators from the three awarding bodies trained their teams, were also well organised. There was recognition that moderators and assessors needed to make an overall judgement on the quality of work before checking all the criteria. It was also recognised that some criteria were more important than others. There was a good awareness throughout of the need to set a standard and to illustrate marginal decisions. Any disagreements were fully discussed, but in the last analysis the chief or principal moderators applied the appropriate standard.

92 Most of the assessment and grading decisions reached at training meetings for moderators were sound. However, there were a few examples in business, health and social care, and IT, where decisions on the quality of work at pass level were too lenient. A series of meetings for the selection and training of moderators was held in May 1999. With the exception of the conclusions arrived at in health and social care, the assessment and grading decisions agreed by moderators at these meetings were generally sound.

Vocational Tests

93 Inspectors scrutinised a range of test papers from the January 1998 to June 1999 series, together with some mark schemes and students' scripts. In general, the tests were insufficiently demanding at both advanced and intermediate levels. The vocational tests at intermediate level were not of equivalent standard to comparable GCSE papers, and those at advanced level were not of a standard equivalent to GCE A level.

94 At intermediate level, questions were brief and highly structured, requiring only short answers from candidates. It was not always clear whether a single word or a more substantial answer was required. There were too few opportunities for extended writing, for discussion, and for differentiated responses from students. Test items were inconsistent in the depth of knowledge and understanding required. Some of the questions could be answered on the basis of common sense, and required no specialist knowledge. Other questions tested students' general numerical skills rather than their ability to apply these skills in the vocational area.

95 At advanced level, the tests provided a satisfactory means of assessing students' knowledge and understanding, and the ability to apply these to a specific context. However, there were hardly any requirements for students to

analyse, evaluate and provide extended answers. As at intermediate level, some questions could be largely answered on the basis of common sense alone. For example, in one health and social care test, students were asked simply to name two forms of discrimination. In some of the subject areas, for example business, there was some obvious repetition from one series of tests to the next. This gave candidates in the later series an unfair advantage.

96 Some aspects of the production and presentation of papers were unsatisfactory. For example, in a health and social care paper, a poor quality drawing did not adequately set the context for one extended question. In art and design, practical features, such as the small scale of paper used, and the unimaginative requirement that candidates work in a grid of small squares for the two and three dimensional language test, did little to encourage creative responses.

Part B: Vocational Studies

Vocational Studies in Colleges

Art and design

Attainment and progress

97 The portfolios of GNVQ advanced students demonstrated good levels of achievement. Some of the work was outstanding. It provided evidence of effort, progress, and good personal organisation skills. It also reflected the high standards expected by teachers. Many students displayed well-developed skills of analysis, problem-solving, visual communication and practical realisation. In art and design the range and quality of practical work often exceeded that achieved by art students at GCE A level.

98 Intermediate level students developed sound basic art and design skills. Most attained good standards in their practical work. They developed critical skills and were articulate when discussing their work. The standard of practical work achieved by many intermediate students was well above that required for higher GCSE grades.

99 Despite the good standard of students' art and design work, however, achievement rates for the first cohort of students who completed their courses in 1998 were lower than expected. Students achieved fewer merits and distinctions than their predecessors on the former GNVQ course. There was often a mismatch between the achievement of students in their vocational work and their results in key skills studies. External key skills tests caused particular difficulty. Standards of numeracy varied widely and were sometimes poor. Some students whose art and design work was worthy of a distinction, did not achieve their GNVQ because of their inability to pass application of number.

Teaching and learning

100 Most art and design teaching was energetic and imaginative. The aims and objectives of schemes of work and lesson plans were made

clear to students. Practical lessons were taught in a professional atmosphere which students enjoyed. There was an appropriate balance between practical and theoretical work.

Teachers encouraged students to explore and experiment with a wide variety of media. Students benefited from being introduced to a wide range of art and design specialisms. Many teachers were practising artists and designers whose expertise was used appropriately to relate students' college studies to current industrial practices.

101 Teachers used the flexibility and scope of the new vocational units to develop some exciting art and design projects. Students made the most of the improved opportunities to undertake work-related projects.

102 Where teaching was imaginative, vocational units provided good opportunities for students to develop both their practical and key skills. For example, in one college, GNVQ intermediate students worked on the production of a fashion show and end-of-year exhibition of their work. This encouraged them to apply their vocational knowledge and to develop the key skills of application of number and communication in imaginative ways. Some students built the catwalk and exhibition screens, some wrote the copy for posters and press releases, others designed and made garments for the fashion show. Teachers also made good use of benchmark and set assignments to strengthen the integration of key skills and vocational activities.

103 The best key skills teaching was carried out by specialist teachers, in close collaboration with their vocational counterparts, as an integral part of practical art and design projects. Art and design students were responsive to this approach because it illustrated clearly the need for key skills in a vocational context. In lessons where specialist key skills teachers failed to make such links, the students often became bored and disenchanted.

Business

Attainment and progress

104 Students' work was generally at an appropriate standard for the level of course. Portfolio building and assessment was well organised and many portfolios showed the results of good planning and careful presentation. Students regularly used specialist computers and a range of software to present assignments to professional standards.

105 In vocational assignments, students effectively related theory to business practice and were able to apply their knowledge and skills in the workplace. They made effective use of CD-ROMs and the Internet to research topics. Their vocational assignments often included relevant aspects of key skills. Some teachers, however, paid insufficient attention to business practice and too much attention to key skills. Many students experienced difficulty completing both their vocational and their key skills classwork in the time set. Some were demotivated by the amount of time devoted to gathering and presenting evidence and teachers reported that this led some intermediate students to decide against progressing to a GNVQ advanced programme or to leave the course early.

106 There was often a mismatch between students' achievements in their vocational coursework and their overall result. Results were poor for the first students to take the pilot GNVQ intermediate and advanced qualifications. However, the success rate improved in 1999. Students' achievements vary widely from college to college. Overall, pass and retention rates for the new GNVQ were lower than for those GNVQ courses not involved in the pilot.

Teaching and learning

107 There was much good teaching. Teachers addressed with vigour the task of introducing the new GNVQ qualification. Lessons were

carefully planned and related to detailed and well-structured schemes of work. In most lessons, teachers employed a range of appropriate and effective methods to encourage learning. Teachers were well qualified and used their commercial expertise to students' benefit. Aspects of business were illustrated by appropriate case studies. Students' experience of the world of work was often enhanced by visiting speakers and visits to local companies.

108 Teachers spent much time and energy developing procedures to ensure vocational studies were closely linked to the development of students' key skills. Students' business studies assignments were usually well integrated with their work on communication skills which were often taught by a specialist teacher who worked alongside vocational teachers. There were also good examples of vocational teachers developing students' key skills. In one well-planned lesson, taught by a business studies teacher, students used real data to analyse and produce costings for a new building project.

109 Teachers considered that the content of some units is too complex and demanding for the level of the course. Some had difficulty interpreting the specifications and were unsure about the depth of knowledge students are expected to acquire. Some are devoting more time to interpreting specifications and completing paperwork and less to teaching than under the previous GNVQ regime.

Health and social care

Attainment and progress

110 The standard of work was generally good. Students planned their assignments well. Their written work was good. Most made effective use of IT in the presentation of their work. Assignments included well-chosen case studies to illustrate theoretical aspects. Portfolios were presented in an attractive form. Most students developed a good understanding of the knowledge appropriate to their level of study.

111 Many students, however, were unsuccessful in external tests. Numeracy skills were generally weak and some students lacked the basic skills to carry out even simple mathematical exercises. At one college, only 13% of students on an intermediate course passed the application of number test at the first attempt. The specifications did not make clear to teachers the standard of work expected from students. Teachers and students saw as unfair the requirement to pass all of the key skills units as well as the vocational units to achieve the qualification. Some able students who achieved merit or distinction grades in their vocational work failed the qualification as a result of poor performance in their key skills.

Teaching and learning

112 In the first year of the pilot, the late arrival of specifications reduced the amount of time available to teachers to write and develop new schemes of work and lesson plans and/or assignments. This had adverse consequences for the quality of teaching. A significant minority of lessons, although satisfactory, were uninspiring. In the second year, the quality of teaching improved. Learning activities were more varied and more successful in holding students' interest. Schemes of work and lesson plans contained more clearly defined course and learning objectives. Inspectors observed some good teaching and learning, including effective group work. Teachers took careful account of ability levels within each class when teaching and preparing assignments. In most lessons they built on students' own experiences, using well-chosen case studies to reinforce and extend theoretical concepts. Work experience and equal opportunities issues were used to broaden students' understanding. Teachers' feedback on students' work was detailed and helped students to improve their performance.

113 Vocational teachers spent much time thinking of ways to develop key skills. Many developed imaginative ways of integrating the

key skills, of communication and IT, with students' vocational studies.

114 The teaching of key skills was often undertaken by specialist teachers, many of whom worked successfully with vocational teachers. However, some key skills teaching was aimed too directly at preparing students for external tests. Teachers found it more difficult to relate the teaching of number to the health and care contexts in which students were working. Many students started their courses with poor number skills and failed to develop an understanding of how the use of number related to work in health and social care and why they should acquire these skills.

115 Teachers made effective use of their close links with staff in residential homes, and with other care providers, to provide topical and realistic assignments. Although work experience is a notable feature of health and social care education, there remains no requirement for GNVQ students to have a work placement. Inspectors considered that where work experience was an integral and assessed part of the GNVQ course it enhanced vocational relevance and validity. Teachers considered that such work experience should be mandatory.

Information technology

Attainment and progress

116 Students demonstrated a good range of practical skills and made effective use of computers in researching and producing assignments. Most portfolios of evidence were well organised and presented. Vocational classwork and assignments indicated that appropriate standards were achieved.

117 Pass and retention rates for intermediate level courses were good. In one college, half of the intermediate group of students achieved a merit or distinction that enabled them to progress to the advanced course. Students' achievements on advanced courses were less

satisfactory. On one course, 33% of students left early and so failed to achieve the qualification. Colleges considered that they received insufficient guidance from the awarding bodies about the standards advanced students were expected to achieve. To gain a distinction students must reach a high standard across every aspect of their vocational and key skills work. The breadth and depth of achievement required for these grades exceeded that expected of GCE A level students.

Teaching and learning

118 The quality of teaching was generally sound. Lessons were well planned and there were detailed schemes of work. Vocational unit assignments effectively covered the essential knowledge which students needed to prepare them for employment or further study. Teachers used a suitable variety of teaching methods to sustain students' interest. Case studies were used to test students' ability to apply theory to practical problems. In many lessons, activity was divided appropriately between discussion, demonstration by the teacher and practical work. Students carried out their practical work competently and paid careful attention to matters of safety. The requirement for students to install hardware and operating systems and to configure networks, however, was too demanding of staff and students and involved an excessive use of colleges' IT resources. Teachers experienced difficulty in integrating some key skills, especially aspects of the application of number and communication, with work on the IT course.

119 Vocational teaching encouraged students to develop good practical skills. Teachers used realistic vocational assignments to help them acquire an understanding of commercial practice and to develop an appropriately rigorous and professional approach to their work. Good-quality learning materials and effective support enabled students to carry out practical activities at their own pace.

120 During the first year of the pilot, some teachers set students over-ambitious assignments and did not allocate enough time to allow students to complete the work. In the second year, assignments have been redesigned and students have completed these successfully. The content of some advanced level units was judged to be too detailed to be adequately covered in the available time. The advanced level tests expected students to have a high level of technical expertise too early in the course. The requirement for students to pass key skills units at the same level as their vocational studies to gain the full qualification took time away from teaching vocational units.

Vocational Studies in Schools

Art and design

Attainment and progress

121 Attainment in art and design ranged between satisfactory and very good. The quality of process and outcome of the best advanced GNVQ work surpassed that of GCE A level. Characteristically, good GNVQ advanced work had both breadth and depth, with a range of techniques and different types of research, including use of visual sources, annotated sketches and written commentaries. Good GNVQ students relished the challenge of the course and became skilled at researching and developing innovative projects which were relevant to current professional practice.

122 The best work showed students were acquiring a broad range of skills and knowledge in art and design as part of a well-structured course. They were engaged by the series of exciting and vocationally relevant assignments prepared by their teachers, and the intellectual curiosity they had developed over the course made them confident enough to generate their own assignments. The most able sometimes produced work of a depth unprecedented at sixth form level.

123 In the schools visited, most students' progress at advanced level was at least sound and often good in relation to their earlier GCSE performance. The new assessment model gave scope for more emphasis on the quality of work rather than superficial coverage of topics. Assignments often demanded research, communication skills and increasing autonomy on the part of students. The simpler structure of the new GNVQ assessment model also gave students more confidence in their ability to understand and control their own progress.

Teaching and learning

124 Teaching was predominantly good. Where teachers had a high level of expertise in the subject and previous experience of teaching GNVQ, teaching was often outstanding. There was a good match between the assignments designed by teachers and the new specifications.

125 Opportunities for teachers to provide vocational experience varied considerably. In some schools, teachers found difficulty in locating and exploiting professional art and design practice, and in giving students opportunities to meet and talk with designers and craftspeople. By contrast, in one rural school, students worked with a local artist and a national ballet company to design temporary sets for an outdoor performance in the grounds of a local stately home. Teachers rarely used professional practitioners to evaluate students' work.

126 The new assessment model has eased the burden of assessment significantly as well as making judgements more accurate. Teachers and students have a clearer view of progress made and of what remains to be done. The contextualised grading criteria were easier to use than those which applied under the old model. However, although criteria for merit and distinction grades were easier to apply, in some units these criteria lay outside the normal requirements for study of art and design.

Business

Attainment and progress

127 Achievement at advanced level was generally satisfactory. Most work was equivalent in depth and breadth to GCE A level. Many students made good use of specialist terminology, and the best used business terms precisely and accurately. Students' understanding of business theory was satisfactory. Most were able to explain concepts accurately in their own words. Assignments contained good explanations of concepts and the ways in which macro economic factors constrain business activity. Students' research skills were also good.

128 Students' ability to apply the theory they have learned to new contexts was generally satisfactory although, in some case studies, their answers were stereotyped. In the best work, students had the confidence to apply what they had learned to a real business situation. On the finance unit, one distinction level student adopted a distinctive approach by constructing a one-day training course for employees of the firm where she had undertaken work placement. Her work was thoroughly professional and she demonstrated and applied an excellent understanding of difficult financial concepts. One student analysed the effect of new technology on a firm making chocolate products. This was followed by a good discussion of how decisions would affect shareholders, employees and competitors.

129 Most students made good progress in their knowledge and understanding of business, in research and planning, and in meeting deadlines. In the best work, students demonstrated good evaluative and analytical skills. Where the work was less satisfactory, assignments showed little evidence of analysis and evaluation, secondary resources were overused, and numerical work was inserted without explanation.

130 Standards at intermediate level were generally satisfactory, and there were a few examples of good work. Whilst most students demonstrated some appropriate knowledge and understanding of business, the work frequently lacked substance and coherence, and contained little analysis and evaluation. In some of the work at pass level, students simply completed the work required of them without demonstrating sufficient knowledge and understanding of business theory. In the best work, students made good use of specialist terms and referred to primary and secondary data. Progress was generally satisfactory, although some students were held back by over-structured teaching.

Teaching and learning

131 Teaching was generally satisfactory and frequently good. The majority of teachers had appropriate business qualifications. Many also taught on GCSE and GCE A level courses and had a clear view of the standards required at both levels. Most teaching of business theory was good, and at advanced level students were sometimes encouraged to develop subject knowledge beyond the requirements of the unit specifications. There was a good balance between direct teaching and assignment work. When non-specialist teachers were used, students completed the tasks required but often demonstrated little knowledge of business theory.

132 The best work occurred when teachers consolidated theory teaching with suitable activities and tasks which included visits, visiting speakers and case studies. High-quality assignments were used to assess students' learning and to encourage them to apply what they had learnt to a suitable vocational context. Many of these assignments were structured in such a way as to provide guidance for the weaker students and stretch the brightest.

133 Weak teaching, often involving work based entirely on case studies and simulation, led to assignments which were bland and uninspiring. Some teachers simply expected students to collect evidence. They gave them little guidance on the choice of suitable vocational contexts and assignments provided little scope for analysis and evaluation.

Health and social care

Attainment and progress

134 The quality of students' work and the progress they were making improved during the pilot of the new assessment model. By the end of courses, work in portfolios was nearly always satisfactory, and often good. The format of the new assessment has encouraged a more holistic approach to the study of the units.

135 Where standards were good, portfolio work was firmly based in health and social care contexts. In some schools, staff made it a requirement that students carry out active research in local care organisations. They clearly benefited from this as shown in the quality of their final portfolios. Good-quality work was based effectively on scientific principles or set securely in current social science theory.

136 Work of low quality was characterised by shallow research and an over dependence on published texts which led to the presentation of disjointed pieces of work copied from these and other sources. There was little synthesis of ideas and a failure to understand relatively complex care demands. Even where work was judged to be good in some aspects, its overall worth was limited by excessive use of opinion, rather than well analysed research.

Teaching and learning

137 The teaching seen during the survey was usually satisfactory and often good. Teachers often carried out research on material in the

units to develop their own understanding and to provide a knowledge base. The training of many of the teachers engaged in teaching health and social care had provided them with knowledge specific to particular units only. For example, many were knowledgeable about child development but not some of the other units. Some teachers were not well enough informed about current research methodology, and this occasionally led to poor-quality work on the part of their students. Teachers' poor appreciation of the depth of knowledge required sometimes resulted in a failure to allocate sufficient time to particular areas of study.

138 Teachers have had difficulty in identifying the depth and breadth of study required from the unit specifications. Effective teaching was sometimes hampered by varying levels of detail in unit descriptions about what was to be taught. For some units there were descriptions of the processes that students were to engage in but inadequate identification of the knowledge to which the process was to apply. In planning, teachers found this variation added to the difficulty of setting the correct standard and in allocating resources and time to the teaching of units.

139 A few schools have benefited from being part of local education authority networks. A few have also engaged consultants to work with staff, or have invited visitors to speak to the students. Most professional development, however, has taken place within individual schools.

Information Technology

Attainment and progress

140 Standards of achievement vary widely, particularly at advanced level. Much of the work at advanced level was sound and comparable to GCE A level. In the best work, students were confident in applying knowledge and understanding to unfamiliar contexts. One student carried out a perceptive analysis of a


company's problem and devised a sophisticated solution that drew upon high level technical skills and knowledge. He explained cogently in a technical manual the working of the system, and evaluated its effectiveness. Most students made at least sound progress and some made good progress.

141 The small number of schools following the intermediate course made it difficult to generalise about standards achieved. Where teachers were familiar with corresponding GCSE requirements, standards were satisfactory and students showed suitable progress. Where teachers lacked appropriate subject expertise, work was often substandard. Students failed to develop real understanding or an ability to apply knowledge in different contexts.

Teaching and learning

142 Experienced teachers generally found the new specifications easier to implement, and the assessment criteria more straightforward to apply than in the existing GNVQ. The quality of teaching varied considerably. In most cases, teachers had an appropriate knowledge of the subject. Some of the best teaching was seen where subject specialists were already familiar with the depth and breadth demanded in GCSE and GCE A level courses. In one school, where GCE and GNVQ advanced courses ran in parallel, teachers drew on the strengths of each to the advantage of both. In another instance the teaching of both intermediate and advanced courses was carried out by non-specialists who were unable to interpret course specifications in sufficient detail, particularly at advanced level. As a result, students were not provided with the knowledge and understanding required to cope with some units.

143 The best teaching was firmly rooted in vocational experience. Here, students were required to work with real problems and materials, which widened their understanding of concepts and improved their ability to apply



knowledge to new situations. In contrast, some teachers provided few opportunities for such work, and their students' portfolios contained little evidence of applying knowledge, analysing problems or evaluating the success of solutions. Some portfolios were based almost entirely on hypothetical problems.

144 The quality of IT assignments was less satisfactory than in other vocational areas. Some students were simply given unit specifications and expected to plot their own course through them. The use of assignments to build up students' knowledge and understanding of essential concepts and key skills was underdeveloped.

Part C: Key Skills

General Findings

145 Teachers in schools and colleges found key skills assessment excessively burdensome, especially on one-year courses. Inspectors agreed with this view. Externally-assessed set assignments have taken a disproportionate amount of time, and in some cases have distorted students' learning experience, shifting the balance away from the vocational curriculum and separating key skills from vocational work.

146 The new arrangements have made key skills assessment more rigorous, and the work therefore more demanding. As a result, intermediate level students who had poor communication and number skills on entry found key skills work at the level of their main area of study too demanding. This was a particular problem in colleges.

147 Despite the difficulties encountered, some teachers welcome the increased rigour in the assessment of key skills. Set assignments helped teachers to achieve a clearer view of the standards required.

148 In the best practice, key skills teachers worked closely with vocational teachers to produce well-planned vocationally related assignments. To ensure consistent standards, vocational and specialist key skills teachers worked together to draw up mark schemes and assessment criteria.

149 Too often, individual key skills were taught separately from students' vocational studies, and specialist key skills and vocational teachers worked in isolation from each other. In colleges, many key skills teachers had difficulty selecting teaching methods and designing learning activities to suit the wide range of abilities in a class, so that all students were able to make effective progress.

150 Although there were comprehensive marking schemes and procedures to ensure consistency of standards, some college teachers

reported clear discrepancies between the achievements of students in their internally marked coursework, and the externally marked set assignments and the tests. In schools, the differences were less marked.

151 The standards achieved by students were in part determined by the experience, expertise, and expectations of their teachers. There were no regulations to determine the qualifications required of key skills teachers, or the experience they should have in relation to the key skills they taught. Not all key skills teachers were suitably qualified for the work they were undertaking. Few colleges and schools had sufficient experienced or trained key skills specialists to teach all of the key skills effectively.

Application of Number

152 The quality of work was generally satisfactory, though with quite significant differences between institutions, and sometimes between different vocational areas at the same centre.

153 When application of number was taught in a routine way, separately from intermediate level students' vocational studies, so that its context is similar to GCSE mathematics, it provided little incentive for many students to improve the numerical skills they already possessed. Where staff devised purposeful assignments, students were better motivated.

154 In schools, the specifications were usually largely covered by specially designed assignments, normally of good quality and appropriately set in a vocational context. Only occasionally was substantial evidence of numerical work drawn from the vocational assignments.

155 The new specifications have made portfolio requirements more manageable, but staff and students found great difficulty relating the performance criteria, and the statements of skills and knowledge, to the evidence requirements.

156 At advanced level, the teaching of application of number sometimes lacked breadth. The mechanics of calculation and data collection were over emphasised and opportunities to exploit numerical methods were missed. There was insufficient emphasis on analysis, deduction and prediction in many assignments.

157 In schools, test results were normally good. In colleges, results were more variable. Many students failed the set assignments.

Communication

158 Advanced level work was generally satisfactory. Students assembled a substantial range of evidence to meet the portfolio requirements. In the best work, students demonstrated the ability to use communication skills in a range of appropriately challenging assignments. The material was presented in a clear and relevant manner, with an awareness of structure and style, and vocabulary was varied.

159 Intermediate work was generally less than satisfactory. Much of the evidence in portfolios barely met the requirements of the new model. Students need more specific support with grammar, punctuation and spelling, and practice at re-drafting reports.

160 The use of specialist teachers for teaching and assessing communication skills contributed to successful outcomes, but collaboration between specialist and vocational teachers was not always effective. Where the vocational tutor was supported by an English specialist, students generally benefited from intensive support in the areas in which they needed to improve. In many cases, teachers were spending too much time dealing with the administration of the new model.

Information Technology

161 The revised GNVQ has resulted in greater awareness among teachers of the need to develop IT skills and to produce evidence of achievement. Most colleges and schools set aside specific time for this. Teaching was usually the responsibility of an IT specialist teacher.

162 The quality of work in schools was generally satisfactory. Students reached higher levels of attainment than under the previous GNVQ model, though this was sometimes within a fairly narrow range of tasks.

163 In colleges, the majority of students achieved good levels of skill in using hardware and software, and carried out practical work competently. Pass rates for students who had completed their course of study were good.

164 In schools, work was generally less well related to the vocational context than in the previous GNVQ model.

165 In colleges, IT work was increasingly well integrated with aspects of the vocational work. There was an appropriate balance of theory and practice which took account of students' abilities. Good learning materials were provided for practical work that enabled students to work at their own pace. In the best lessons, teachers provided a good range of activities which enabled students to work individually, in groups, and as a whole class.

Background to the Introduction of GNVQs and the New GNVQ Assessment Model

1 A major review of general national vocational qualifications (GNVQs) and how they are assessed and graded has been undertaken by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) in response to the recommendations in the *GNVQ Assessment Review*, the final report of the review group chaired by Dr John Capey, published in 1995.

2 A number of problems have been evident since GNVQs were introduced in 1992-93. The Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) inspectorate's surveys of GNVQs in 1993-94 and 1994-95, identified as weaknesses the unwieldy assessment system, inappropriate and unclear external test questions, poor teaching of key skills, inadequate internal and external verification, and some low completion rates by students. The Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) reports on the introduction of GNVQs in schools in 1993, and subsequent reports on standards of achievement in GNVQs in sixth forms (1994 and 1997) also identified weaknesses in the assessment and external verification system, and variations in standards across the vocational areas. The Dearing report, *Review of Qualifications for 16 to 19 Year Olds*, published in March 1996, identified the need for a new, more rigorous and manageable assessment regime for GNVQs.

3 The *GNVQ Assessment Review* report recommended that the assessment burden on GNVQ teachers should be reduced; administration and assessment should be less complex; quality assurance should be improved; and steps should be taken to encourage higher levels of motivation and achievement amongst GNVQ students.

4 In response to these recommendations, revisions were made to the unit structure and grading criteria, set assignments and new style

external testing were introduced, and procedures for recording of students' progress were simplified. These changes were introduced in 54 colleges and schools during 1996-97 and as a result, further changes were made.

5 The pilot of the fully revised GNVQ model began in September 1997. Eighty-seven colleges and schools volunteered to pilot the revisions proposed by the QCA in the vocational areas of art and design, business, health and social care, and information technology (IT). Some of the colleges and schools which had been involved in piloting the changes following the Capey review in 1996-97 elected to continue the pilot programme. The pilot covered part-one, foundation, intermediate and advanced level courses. Subject to a successful pilot and ministerial approval, it was intended that the new model would be implemented nationwide in September 1999.

6 A number of organisations are involved in the process of developing, delivering, awarding, and assuring the quality of GNVQs. The QCA accredits proposals for qualifications submitted by the awarding bodies. The awarding bodies approve centres, such as colleges and schools, which wish to offer GNVQs, assure quality through external moderation to see that candidates are being assessed properly, and award certificates. All three GNVQ awarding bodies are participating in the pilot, which is managed and monitored by the QCA.

7 The QCA briefed ministers for education and employment on emerging issues in June 1998 and made recommendations to the minister of state in October 1998 on the timescale of the introduction of the revised GNVQ. Its conclusions were informed by the findings of FEFC and Ofsted inspectors, by feedback from the awarding bodies and from colleges and schools involved in the pilot. A number of problems were identified that required further attention. As a result, the

government announced that the revised GNVQ units and assessment model for all GNVQ awards would be implemented from September 2000.

8 The government is committed to improving the rigour of GNVQs and to making them more attractive and manageable for teachers and students.

GNVQs

9 GNVQs were introduced in 1993 as an alternative to the general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) and general certificate of education advanced levels (GCE A levels). Aimed mainly at 16 to 19 year olds who wish to study full time, GNVQs are related to broad vocational areas such as art and design. They are intended to provide a general education as a preparation for employment or further study. There are three levels: foundation, intermediate and advanced.

10 Foundation level GNVQs are equivalent to four GCSEs at lower grades, intermediate GNVQs are equivalent to four or five GCSEs at grade A* to C, and advanced GNVQs are worth two GCE A levels. GNVQs are awarded by three examining bodies: Edexcel Foundation (formerly the Business and Technology Education Council or BTEC), the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance (incorporating City and Guilds of London Institute) and the OCR Examinations Board (including the former RSA Examinations Board).

11 GNVQs are available in 14 vocational areas: art and design, business, construction and the built environment, engineering, health and social care, hospitality and catering, IT, land and environment, leisure and tourism, manufacturing, media communication and production, performing arts and entertainment industries, retail and distributive services, and science. Many GNVQ students have opportunities to study for additional qualifications, such as language awards, GCSEs or GCE A levels, alongside their main course.

12 All further education colleges now offer a range of GNVQ subjects and most secondary schools with sixth forms also offer the qualification.

13 GNVQs are unit-based qualifications. They are assessed through a combination of continuous portfolio assessment by teachers, and tests which are set and marked externally. Students can gain a pass, merit or distinction grade for the course depending on their performance against set grading criteria.


The new GNVQ assessment model

14 The new GNVQ pilot includes:

- a new style of unit
- changes to grading
- a benchmark assignment (foundation and intermediate) and set assignments at advanced level
- a new style of external test
- revised key skills units
- key skills set assignments and an application of number test
- a new standards monitoring and moderation system.

15 The new style of unit is no longer divided into elements, making assessment in the new model unit based. It clearly sets out learning students must cover to produce the assessment evidence and assesses the student's ability to apply his/her skills, knowledge and understanding in a vocational context. It also contains contextualised grading criteria and is written clearly and addressed directly to the student.

16 Changes to grading include revised grading criteria, contextualised within each unit, having clearly defined descriptors for pass, merit and distinction. There has been a reduction in grading themes to two: that is 'learning skills' and 'quality of outcomes'. Each unit is graded and there is a new way of calculating the final grade using a points-based system. The portfolio evidence for each unit and each test



receives a grade, worth a given number of points. The points total is then converted into an overall grade.

17 There are benchmark assignments at foundation and intermediate levels, and set assignments at advanced level. These are externally set, internally marked and externally moderated. They are based on one unit at each level and cover all the assessment requirements for that unit, and are designed to take the student approximately 10 to 15 hours. They also contribute to grading in the same way as portfolio evidence for any other unit.

18 The new style external test comprises open-response rather than multiple-choice questions and covers a single unit. There are four unit tests at advanced level and two unit tests at intermediate and foundation levels.

19 Changes to key skills include revised key skills units and the introduction of three key skills set assignments, one for each key skill area. In addition, there is a separate application of number test and external moderation of key skills portfolio evidence.

20 A new standards monitoring and moderation system replaces the current external verification system. This requires centres to submit a specified sample of student work, including the benchmark and set assignment and the three key skills set assignments to the awarding body. The new arrangements include visits by standards moderators to centres.

Annex B

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