Chief Verifier Report

Retail NVQs Levels 1 – 3
Retail Skills QCF Levels 1 – 3

2011 – 2012

United Kingdom

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1. The qualifications and standards

This has been a settled year for centres despite the launch of a new suite in January 2012 as the changes are not dramatically different from the previous suite. In the main centres are familiar with the current NQF and QCF qualifications. Consequently the comments in the report are in many cases similar to 2010 to 2011 due to the stability of the qualification.

A. Good practice seen in centres during the year includes:

- an holistice approach to assessment in particular observation
- increased use of digital voice recorder for gathering candidate evidence including witness testimony, questioning and discussion
- introduction of recording of observations
- a clearer definition between professional discussion and questions/answers
- provision of a wide range of resources and work opportunities for apprenticeships
- development of own mock shops for knowledge training
- collaboration with shopping malls to contribute products for use in training
- setting up a shop windows, shops within Retail Academies, college shops offering real retail experinece while running on a profit and loss account
- improved sign posting of evidence to the workplace
- improved recording of standardisation activity
- CPD achieved through work experience and work shadowing

B. The main challenge for centres in 2011 to 2012 has been the continued harsh trading conditions for retailers meaning that qualifications/training are a low operational priority. The changes to funding, which is the life blood of most centres, has affected delivery by placing extra demands on achievement of targets, which does not always fit well with retailers needs and flexibility.

C. Analysis of 143 visit reports relating to 83 active centres shows guidance included:-

- the opportunities available for occupational updating to maintain competence
- best practice in the use of digital recording systems and e-portfolios to ensure effective and auditable tracking of assessment
- appropriate ways of capturing witness testimony (i.e. verbal questioning, digital recording)

- the need to complete matrices accurately (signature, dates and cross referencing) to assist with audit trail
- cost effective ways for the IQA to sample sign posted evidence
- the need to use good practice identified by EV for standardisation activity
- the need for standardisation for January 2012 QCF
- how to record credits to ensure ROC are met
- the range of resources available for CPD via websites such as Skillsmart retail, SOGA Hub, publications such as Retail Week, events and exhibitions

Assessment Team:	Findings: EVs have confirmed that centre teams are maintaining occupationally competence and upskilling to the QCF Assessing and IQA qualifications. Target dates have been set for unqualified team members to achieve the requisite qualifications in optimum time. Mentoring and countersigning is well documented.
Resources:	Findings: Resources specific to the award are varied including training programmes to develop knowledge and understanding; the technical certificate (VRQ), workbooks to assist with knowledge and understanding; recognised qualifications in H & S, Food Hygiene, etc; audio and digital recording equipment. Centres have produced resources, including initial assessment tools, for monitoring the credit achievement in line with the Rules of Combination and Guided Learning hours as required for the QCF. Centres have improved links with retailers to collaborate on development of training facilities and resources. In particular Skills Shop/Retail Academy and using own retail provision such as shops in colleges. Compliance with Health & Safety legislation has mainly been through use of specialist personnel and risk assessment of the workplaces. The main areas for development for centres are to ensure that CPD updating is fully and consistently recorded; to formalise staff development plans for their teams and to utilise standardisation activity to develop competence.
Candidate Support:	Findings: The quality of the induction process is ensuring candidates have all relevant information on the qualification, people and processes.

All centres are using an initial assessment / skills scan process to ensure candidates are on the correct qualification, level and to assist in identifying appropriate optional units. Many centres have adapted these to include the credits for each unit to ensure the minimums and rules of combination are met for the QCF.

A number of non retail environments have been identified and advise given to centres on the need to adhere to Skillsmart Retail`s Definition of a Retail Environment available on OCRs website.

Appeals procedures have been documented and interviews with candidates confirmed their understanding of the procedure. Many centres revisit the Appeals procedure when giving feedback to candidates, at review or through the IV interviews.

Assessment planning and review has consistently shown a holistic approach to assessment. Telephone and email is being used more for communicating with candidates (planning and feedback). This does not negate the need to record the assessment planning/feedback and centres have been made aware of this requirement.

The methods of assessment planning have met the needs of the candidate and the OCR Assessment Guidance. The main method of assessment has been observation, questioning, product evidence and increased use of professional discussion.

Assessors and internal verifiers regularly use alternative approaches to assessment i.e. digital recordings, video recordings, e-portfolios. Voice recordings do provide a valuable dimension to authenticity.

Centres have demonstrated an understanding of the need for the involvement of the line manager as required in Skillsmart Assessment Strategy. On rare occasions when the candidate does not have a line manager (i.e. owner/manager) centres have sought the advice of the EV which has ensured an appropriate approach.

Capturing line manager involvement (i.e. signature before signing off unit/s) has been discussed as e-portfolio packages do not always have this requirement built in to the system. Centres have to make the e-portfolio provider aware of the need for a line manager signature and request that this is built in to the system.

Unit certification is made available by centres but in general, due to the criteria set for funding, centres wait for full awards to be claimed.

Assessment and Verification:	**Findings:** Improvements continue to be noted in Internal Verification which, in general, meets the requirements of the Code of Practice. The table below shows that level 2 and 3B sanctions have been applied during the last 12 months, and the reasons for this:

Sanction level	Number of centres	Non-compliance topics
1	0	
2	1	• IQA planning not updated • IQA sampling insufficient
3a	None	
3b	2	• Candidate information inaccurate at the visit and in advance • Personnel not available in particular the IQA
4	None	
5	None	

The circulation of EV reports and feedback has been commented on as good practice. Centres have used intranets to circulate EV reports &/or have as an agenda item at team meetings.

The report is automatically sent by OCR to the named senior people. In a few centres, predominantly colleges, this has caused delays in circulation to the team who need to respond to actions raised by the EV. Centre servers reading the e-report as SPAM and not accepting it continues to be a problem for a small number of centres.

Management Systems and Records:	**Findings:** Centres have informed OCR., often through the EV, of changes to teams which may have an effect on the delivery of the qualifications. The importance of this timely communication is understood by centres, in particular for DCS approval to continue. Evaluation of provision, policies and procedures has been positively commented on by EVs. Centres are ensuring 3 way feedback – centre, candidate and line manager.

Assessment Summary:	Findings:
	Analysis of the selection confirms that centres have made portfolios available from all stages of assessment to facilitate the EV meeting OCR sampling requirements. In general the total numbers of candidates registered has matched the total number in the centre on the qualification. The QCF does not include the 10 week rule however centres should ensure assessment decisions on competence meet the requirements of assessment practice as set out in A1 and the new Assessing awards/certificate.

2. Sector Developments

If the economic climate was challenging last year it is even more so this year. The problem of low occupancy on the high street and of town centres being unattractive shopping environments is well documented. As is the impact on customer footfall of out-of-town destinations. Many well known names have gone in to administration, closed down or being bought out. In such stricken times one of the first areas of expenditure is training. Centres may be able to offer funded training however the potential disruption to already tight staffing levels does deter retailers from signing up to training programmes for NVQs.

The retail outlet – high street or internet based - is still the main means of getting products from manufacturer to market and the retailer needs qualifications that will enable their people to develop customer focused skills. With so much competition retailers need to differentiate their offer through niche markets and improved customer service. To do this their personnel need to be better equipped and this is where the NVQ/QCF qualifications offer recognition of skills, knowledge and competence. The dilemma for training providers is how to convince retailers that the qualifications are valuable and can be delivered with minimum disruption to the workplace.

Skillsmart Retail continues to work proactively with retailers and awarding bodies to lift the profile of retail. Skillsmart Retail has developed a range of units for knowledge and competence based qualifications within the QCF. OCR offers both knowledge and competence based qualifications and is developing support packages for Apprenticeship frameworks to help centres and training providers. The technical certificate is tested which is the preferred option for retailers, and is now on-line on-demand offering increased flexibility.

Skillsmart Retail is promoting the qualifications through sponsorship of retail events such as Retail Solutions and by collaborating on articles with retail publications such as Retail Week.