IMPLICATIONS OF COMPETENCE-BASED CURRICULA
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Report of Phase 1 of an FEU Project (RP495)

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Chippenham Technical College
Dorset College of Agriculture
East Birmingham College
Eastbourne College of Arts and Technology
Eastleigh College of Further Education
Fareham Tertiary College
Guildford College of Technology
Hastings College of Arts and Technology
Hendon College of Further Education
Henley College, Coventry
Hertfordshire College of Agriculture and Horticulture
Isle of Wight College of Arts and Technology
Kingston College of Further Education
Merrist Wood College of Agriculture and Horticulture
Newham Community College
Northampton College of Further Education
North Norfolk College
North-West Kent College of Technology
The Nursery Nurses’ College of Further Education
Otley College of Agriculture and Horticulture
Park Lane College of Further Education, Leeds
Peterborough Regional College
Southwark College
Sparsholt College
Tameside College of Technology
Telford College of Arts and Technology
Welsh Agricultural College
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Wirral Metropolitan College
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Writtle Agricultural College

Other organisations
Barbara Shelborn Associates
Business and Technician Education Council
City and Guilds of London Institute
Curriculum Advice and Support Team, Jordanhill College of Education, Glasgow
East Anglian Regional Advisory Council
Further Education Staff College
National Council for Vocational Qualifications
National Examination Board for Agriculture, Horticulture and Allied Industries
Nursery Nurses Examination Board
National Proficiency Test Council
Royal Society of Arts
The Training Agency (formerly the Manpower Services Commission)
West Midlands Advisory Council for Further Education
Yorkshire and Humberside Association for Further and Higher Education
This report describes the results of research carried out during the spring and early summer of 1988. The main purpose of this first phase of the project was to identify issues in the implementation of competence-based vocational qualifications with which the staff of further education colleges will increasingly have to deal.

The research suggests that whilst tutors are often eager to take up the challenge offered by competence-led curricula, there is still a need for further carefully targeted awareness raising and for staff to develop new skills. There is a necessity for appropriate curriculum development, staff development and institutional change to enable the new competence-led system to be successfully introduced. The case is made that, in order for this development to be managed effectively, the three essential aspects of the process of change must be treated as fully interrelated elements.

It soon became clear that the issues identified during this first phase of the project would benefit from a more intensive further investigation than had originally been intended. A series of projects supported by the Work-Related Further Education Development Fund of the Training Agency is currently providing further material to underpin Phase 2 of the project. It is expected that the outcomes of this phase will be available in the spring of 1990.

Geoff Stanton
Chief Officer
Further Education Unit
This document is a record of Phase 1 of the project and should be treated as an interim report: not all the information collected has been used.

It was felt important to produce this paper to disseminate information about, and influence, the processes we were examining. It is not summative.

The main aim of this phase of the project was to investigate key aspects in the implementation of competence-based curricula in four vocational areas in further education. Outcomes were to include:

• an analysis of the key aspects;
• an identification of the nature and extent of good practice in this field;
• an identification of the range of staff development and training needed.

We would welcome comment and criticism on the implications of implementing competence-based curricula. Your observations could inform continuing developments.

Phase 2 of the project will seek to:

• identify how far a co-ordinated strategy of curriculum, staff and institutional development affects the implementation of competence-led criteria;
• support attempts to turn theory into practice in launching this major programme.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Ian Haffenden
Alan Brown
## Glossary of Abbreviations

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ATB</td>
<td>Agricultural Training Board</td>
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<tr>
<td>BTEC</td>
<td>Business and Technician Education Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAST</td>
<td>Curriculum Advice and Support Team</td>
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<tr>
<td>CD</td>
<td>Curriculum Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>C&amp;G</td>
<td>City and Guilds of London Institute</td>
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<tr>
<td>CPVE</td>
<td>Certificate of Pre-Vocational Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>DES</td>
<td>Department of Education and Science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EARAC</td>
<td>East Anglian Regional Advisory Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>EAV</td>
<td>Examining and Validating</td>
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<tr>
<td>FE</td>
<td>Further Education</td>
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<td>FESC</td>
<td>Further Education Staff College</td>
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<td>FEU</td>
<td>Further Education Unit</td>
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<td>GCSE</td>
<td>General Certificate of Secondary Education</td>
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<td>HE</td>
<td>Higher Education</td>
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<td>HTB</td>
<td>Hairdressing Training Board</td>
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<td>ILB</td>
<td>Industry Lead Body</td>
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<td>IT</td>
<td>Information Technology</td>
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<td>LEA</td>
<td>Local Education Authority</td>
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<td>MSC</td>
<td>Manpower Services Commission (now the Training Agency)</td>
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<tr>
<td>MDF</td>
<td>Mutual Development Fund (now the Work-Related Further Education Development Fund)</td>
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<tr>
<td>NAFE</td>
<td>Non-Advanced Further Education</td>
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<td>NCVQ</td>
<td>National Council for Vocational Qualifications</td>
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<td>NEBAHAI</td>
<td>National Examination Board for Agriculture, Horticulture and Allied Industries</td>
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<td>NNEB</td>
<td>Nursery Nurses Examination Board</td>
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<td>NPS</td>
<td>National Preferred Scheme</td>
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<td>NPTC</td>
<td>National Proficiency Test Council</td>
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<td>NVQ</td>
<td>National Vocational Qualification</td>
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<td>RAC</td>
<td>Regional Advisory Council</td>
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<td>UBS</td>
<td>Unit-Based Scheme</td>
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<td>WBA</td>
<td>Work-Based Assessment</td>
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<tr>
<td>WMACFE</td>
<td>West Midlands Advisory Council for Further Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>YHAFHE</td>
<td>Yorkshire and Humberside Association for Further and Higher Education</td>
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This report is organised in the following sections:

SECTION 1
This provides a general context for the work. It includes:
- an outline of the project approach;
- a short background note to the discussions with college staff and others;
- a summary of the features of the new system of national vocational qualifications (NVQs);
- an initial delineation of the nature and scope of the changes being caused by the implementation of this system;
- a consideration of the medium-term implications for colleges.

SECTION 2
This outlines the general findings: many of the concerns of staff and their analyses of the effects of change were common in the four sectors examined – agricultural, clerical, hairdressing and caring. The section includes:
- perceptions of the nature of competence;
- consideration of the implications of NVQs for curriculum, staff and institutional development;
- consideration of changes in assessment procedures.

SECTION 3
This gives sector-specific commentaries from the four vocational areas (Appendix 2 gives a fuller commentary).

SECTION 4
This identifies the major issues which will need to be addressed in the future in:
- curriculum development;
- staff development;
- institutional development;
- workplace learning and assessment.

The reflections are grounded upon what is actually happening in colleges (Appendix 1 outlines how one group of college staff was involved in framing an embryonic college-wide response to the challenges presented by NVQs).

SECTION 5
This looks at:
- possible ways forward for the project, especially for Phase 2;
- more generally, the process of managing change.
1. THE GENERAL CONTEXT

PROJECT APPROACH

The aims of the project were to investigate:

- key aspects in the implementation of competence-based curricula (CBC) in four vocational areas in further education;
- the factors affecting the aims, design, implementation and evaluation of competence-based provision.

The vocational areas were chosen to reflect diversity in the extent to which their provision was already competence-based.

To achieve these aims, two sets of people were identified for interview (although there was some overlapping membership):

- those with an overview of national and/or regional developments;
- those more directly concerned with provision.

(A list of colleges and other organisations most directly involved in the research is given in the Acknowledgements.)

The first group was easy to identify, but identifying those concerned with delivery posed greater problems. Contacting colleges where significant developments were taking place could have meant identifying individuals or groups who were aware of and responsive to the implications of NVQs and were therefore very unrepresentative. Conversely there was not much point in spending a great deal of time in places where not much was happening.

In the event, the strategy adopted sought to balance contributions from both groups, and thus it was possible to build a more representative picture in the most economic way.

In colleges with significant activity in one of the chosen vocational areas, those with cross-college roles below departmental head (such as course co-ordinators), tutors and those with special responsibilities for curriculum development and/or staff development were interviewed.

In agriculture, discussions were also held with those responsible for management of the institution. In other areas, such managers were only seen if they were picked up in the national or regional trawl. A conscious decision was made to focus on those directly concerned with implementation, yet there is a clear need for further work on the implementation of competence-based curricula for those with institutional management responsibilities.

Visits to colleges to discuss particular vocational areas were also used to interview staff from the other areas where there was less activity.

The picture of both exceptional and unexceptional practice was supplemented by:

- attending seminars and other events on issues associated with the development of NVQs;
- interviewing those responsible for regional and/or national staff development activities;
- close liaison with FEU staff.
Thus impressions and intelligence about what was happening 'on the ground' were tested and underpinned by interviews with college staff with widely varying awareness, understanding and experience of the implications of introducing CBC.

The project looked at a full range of curricular issues, although in the interviews attention focused on:

- perceptions about the nature of competence;
- approaches to learning and teaching;
- teamwork in the curriculum development process;
- staff development;
- industrial liaison and involvement;
- assessment;
- moderation;
- access;
- credit accumulation;
- progression.

The outcomes of the first phase of the project were to include:

- an analysis of the key issues involved in the implementation of CBC;
- an identification of the nature and the extent of good practice in this field;
- the range of staff development and training needed for effective implementation.

BACKGROUND TO RESPONSES OF COLLEGE STAFF

It was not surprising that the reactions of college staff in the different vocational areas varied according to the imminence of major curricular change. Most staff were interpreting the changes mainly in terms of the effect on courses in their vocational area. This tended to produce a response of 'wait and see', with the expectation that changes to particular qualifications would be mediated by examining and validating bodies.

The medium-term implications were acknowledged, but the extent of change within FE over the last decade meant that most staff felt that immediate concerns were the most pressing.

Where broader issues were addressed, this was usually because college staff had been involved in national or regional initiatives, pilot projects, etc. It was still relatively unusual for a college to be framing a college-wide response, although this could be seen in embryonic form in some places.

NATIONAL VOCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS

The basic task of the National Council for Vocational Qualifications (NCVQ) is to establish a coherent national framework for vocational qualifications and to relate those qualifications to the standards required for competent performance in employment.

The NCVQ framework envisages in the first instance four levels to which vocational qualifications will be allocated. The levels of occupational competence will be defined by industry lead bodies. The provision of examining and validating (EVA) bodies will then be scrutinised and conditional approval will be given to those qualifications which meet the NCVQ criteria.
Briefly, a National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) must embody a 'statement of competence' which has to be achieved to employment-led standards before a candidate can receive an award.

An NVQ is composed of a number of units of competence, each one of which can be separately recorded and accredited. Each unit is itself sub-divided into elements of competence, to which are attached performance criteria. These criteria indicate the standards of competence to be achieved.

NVQs are expressed in terms of outcomes and will not mention content, modes of delivery, or how, where and when competence is developed.

The work involved in the development of employment-led standards varies between occupational sectors depending upon the type and pattern of existing qualifications. Industry lead bodies, some specially devised for the purpose, will play the decisive role in the establishment of agreed standards of competence, with support from the Training Agency.

The target date for approving vocational qualifications in all the main occupational sectors is 1991. This means that even in sectors where there is apparently little happening at college level, among EAV bodies, industry lead bodies and NCVQ itself plans are being made which will shortly have a major impact.

The most striking features, then, for the FE system as a whole relate to the breadth and depth of change which will be required. The number of staff who will be directly affected over the next three or four years will be greater than for the advent of the Business and Technician Education Council (BTEC), the Youth Training Scheme (YTS), and the Certificate of Pre-Vocational Education (CPVE) combined.

### MEDIUM-TERM IMPLICATIONS

#### COLLEGE STAFF ROLES

Where college courses seek to link explicitly with occupational competences, major changes are envisaged for college staff, who will have a much more strategic role in the learning and assessment process as a whole:

- students could spend less time in formal classes at college;
- links with work-placement providers will be pivotal;
- even where these links are long-established (e.g. caring and agriculture), the nature of the relationship will need to alter to meet new assessment requirements (see Section 4);
- delivery mechanisms and modes of learning may need radical review;
- supporting, monitoring and enhancing a system of work-related assessment will be key activities;
- colleges will need a policy and a strategy for:
  - the assessment of prior achievement;
  - provision for candidates taking units of accreditation at different times and speeds;
  - credit accumulation (since it cannot be assumed that individuals will restrict themselves to a single route);
- credit transfer (the crux will be how easy it is to transfer between awards by different bodies).

The changes in the relationship between college tutors and work placements is clearly of central importance. The identity of the major client groups, delivery mechanisms, and modes of learning may all require radical reassessment. Some possible ways in which this relationship may develop are discussed in Section 4. Allied to these issues, colleges will need to calculate the real costs of implementing such a system.

**STAFF DEVELOPMENT**

**The role of regional organisations**

Regional Advisory Councils (RACs), Regional Curriculum Bases (RCBs) and other bodies can help staff development, not only by promoting regional events, but also by co-ordinating and facilitating transfer of good practice between colleges.

There is a wide gap between what is promulgated at national level and the response which is made by individual colleges. Some national organisations have responded with regional seminars, but these are not a substitute for continuing and co-ordinated action at regional level.

Without a sustained programme there is a real danger that the disjunction between rhetoric and reality will widen still further. The August 1988 LEA Training Grants Scheme Circular cut staff development for colleges by 25%. However, it is likely that the 1989 Circular will identify training to develop teaching and assessment (including workplace assessment) of competence-based qualifications and elements of competence as a category for support for staff development.

**Funding**

The DES, the Training Agency, LEAs, national and regional bodies and the colleges themselves all have interests and responsibilities in this area. How to co-ordinate such provision and to ensure that staff development addresses the medium-term and strategic issues relating to CBC are themselves major issues.
2. GENERAL FINDINGS

Many of the concerns of staff and their analysis of the effects of change were common across the four occupational sectors. This section outlines the general findings.

PERCEPTIONS ABOUT THE NATURE OF COMPETENCE

College staff identified six distinct categories of competence.

ROLE

Three types of role-related definition emerged:
- ability to operate appropriately and independently within a limited area of skills, but not able to fulfil all the requirements of the job;
- a range of levels of worker: craft level, supervisory level, and so on;
- the expected performance of 'a competent mature adult worker'.

There was, however, the tendency to view competence in fairly limited terms of skills development and proficiency or performance and speed.

CRITERIA

Under this heading definitions of competence related to how you judge - e.g. 'can do it/can't do it' or 'has succeeded once' rather than 'is successful all the time'.

LEVEL OF SUPPORT

Here competence was defined in terms of three levels of support. The trainee could:
- not do the work and required supervision;
- partly do the work and was supervised periodically;
- do the work unsupervised.

This category was mentioned particularly in relation to hairdressing and clerical work.

THE TASK

Trainees were defined as competent if they could work to employer standards for specified tasks.

The college staff who defined competence in the above ways also held contrasting views on what is meant by a competence-based and competence-led curriculum.

A competence-based curriculum was seen:
- by unit-based schemes as one based on the skills and training specifications laid down by the industrial training body;
- by some departments (for example agricultural) as a curriculum based on the existing standards and tests administered by the National Proficiency Training Council (NPTC);
- by others as any curriculum that was student centred and/or skills based.

A competence-led curriculum was less clearly perceived. To many it raised concerns over the use of minimum standards and the division of responsibility between colleges and industry. However, as argued later, given clarification, the idea of a competence-led curriculum could have considerable merit in leading the process of curricular change.
The remaining two sets of responses emphasise the gulf between those who are aware of the latest developments and those with only a hazy idea of what is meant by competence.

PERSONAL COMPETENCE

Some staff felt that course teams should think in terms of producing competent people rather than occupational competence. Personal competence could then be viewed as incorporating:

- learning skills;
- personal responsibility;
- personal development.

It was felt that one of the key components—particularly for young people—should be their ability to ‘pick up the threads’ in future when their skills needed updating.

However, employers might take a different view, depending on their perceived needs: some might feel that their overriding need is for people to perform the immediate tasks, while others might be looking for a more flexible workforce, able at some future date to transfer skills, knowledge and experience and so reduce learning time and effort.

The concept of personal competence can be built into the ‘can do/can’t do’ criteria, by extending them to include ‘will do’—that is, by conveying the idea that competence goes beyond a technical assessment of whether trainees are able to carry out particular tasks, and by including a predictive element that they will be able to respond and perform in roles as a whole.

Another stage beyond ‘can do’ could be ‘can show or teach others’. Such skills relate most clearly to the role of the supervisor or workplace trainer but could also be required of other workers on occasion. Again, such a concern reflects the feeling that skills are required of some of the workforce so as to effect quickly a change in the skills of the workforce as a whole. Personal effectiveness and learning to learn are seen as integral to conceptions of occupational competence.

NO EXPLICIT DEFINITION OF COMPETENCE

In sharp contrast, some of those involved in implementing CBC treated the issue of competence as unproblematic.

Some commented that they used the definition given (by an EAV body, for example), but could not say what this was. They were treating the whole issue as a matter of ‘common sense’ or intuitive understanding and did not probe either their own or others’ thoughts on this. Hence they had no sense of having to explore some of the broader issues in order to establish how they applied to their area of work. This meant they would be unable to determine whether the implementation contradicted in any way the underlying aims and objectives. They were working with a very restricted model of curriculum development, and were perhaps not necessarily expecting any major change to affect them.

Others were aware of the plethora of opinions about competence and its definition, but felt that, where objectives and performance criteria had been spelt out, these could then be accepted as given.
There are widely differing perceptions of the nature of competence. The most comprehensive view relates to personal competence. Such an approach underlines the centrality of the individual in the process of vocational education and training (VET).

In itself, the diversity of opinions on competence can be viewed as indicative of the need for a much fuller programme of staff development – not to impose a single understanding of the nature of competence, but rather to get broad agreement upon the overall direction the curriculum should take.

In this sense, although it may seem a little pedantic, it is important that curricula should be competence-led rather than just be seen as competence-based. The latter term is too passive and reactive, whereas the former would indicate curricular change which has direction and purpose, and is itself a process, rather than a state which has or has not been attained. The curriculum should then be led by the broadly defined goal of personal competence.

**IMPLICATIONS OF NVQs FOR CURRICULUM, STAFF AND INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

Although it is convenient to make a distinction between the three areas of development, the division is artificial. Time and again the issues raised under one heading have implications for the other two. Indeed, although the starting-point for reviewing curriculum development for NVQs may be to consider how courses should be structured, delivered and supported, the paucity of such a limited approach should become readily apparent. A more fundamental and thorough-going review is required involving major changes in all three components.

**CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT**

Two factors were particularly significant in raising general awareness among college staff:

- active involvement of the college in national or regional development work – involvement in, for example, pilot projects often heightened awareness elsewhere in the college, though the extent to which this opportunity was built upon depended largely on the following factor;
- whether there was a clear institutional lead in making such connections – the lead could come directly from college management (often a primary factor behind the enthusiasm with which regional initiatives were picked up by different colleges) or from a specialist unit.

**Curriculum development units (CDUs)**

Among their functions such units should:

- gather intelligence about significant developments;
- offer support to departments/sections in working through the implications. (This support was particularly welcomed by staff in some vocational areas who had reservations about the initial approach being adopted by their industry lead bodies. A reassurance that the overall goal was to prepare people for change, by developing a flexible, adaptable workforce, helped to stiffen resolve for some not to focus exclusively on a skills-based curriculum.);
• help staff, in areas where some courses are now competence-based, to frame a response which takes account of consequent changes. (For example, CDUs might help in setting up processes to look at prior learning, open entry to and exit from courses and orientation phases to facilitate course choice.);
• help in bringing about change in the classroom. (It was felt that students may act as a brake on initiatives if they hold a conservative view of the learning process. In such circumstances there might be a temptation to seek to minimise the change to existing practices. The CDU could help the tutor to institute systems whereby students formulate personal action plans, and are given some responsibility for carrying these out. This could help break down expectations of students that they should be passive recipients.).

Course organisation

The effect of the new NVQs on course organisation was seen as profound. The more aware tutors recognised that college-wide responses to reorganising the curriculum would be required. These could include:
• providing industry liaison time, to ensure the essential involvement and integration;
• allocating staff time for the design, development, production and assessment of materials, as the modularisation of courses continues;
• developing the role of course teams in putting together programmes, providing support and guidance in the lecturers’ changing role, with increased student counselling responsibilities;
• facilitating increased specialisation rather than expecting any one lecturer to undertake all the duties that might be required;
• co-ordinating the management of resources within and across teams;
• providing flexible learning opportunities (such as open learning packages capable of independent study) leading to the development of resource areas and changing the face of conventional library provision;
• tackling the implications of continuous assessment replacing end-of-year examinations;
• introducing standardised courses across departments;
• reviewing staff:student ratios to accommodate changes in style and method of delivery.

(See also ‘Staff Development’ later in this section.)

The structure of courses will, then, require radical reassessment, not least because, for financial reasons, there will be pressure to increase rather than reduce staff:student ratios.

To some extent it may be possible to reconcile the competing pressures by having fewer teacher-based formal classes. Greater independent learning, coupled with the mixing of a number of groups/individuals working in the same room while a tutor acts as a common resource, may help offset the cases where a tutor has to work with very small groups or even individuals. In such circumstances the efficacy of staff:student ratios as a meaningful indicator of efficiency or performance could be questioned.
As already indicated, college staff expect the delivery of courses to be particularly affected by the introduction of NVQs and to require different skills of them, including more administration and assessment.

**Access and progression**

It was widely recognised by college staff that the opening up of opportunities for students would also require more flexible responses to entry, delivery and progression. These changes might include:

- the development of more ‘roll-on, roll-off’ courses, with students choosing an individualised package from a menu of core and option choices;
- a ‘pick-and-mix’ arrangement, with modularised programmes which are student-centred and based on flexible and open learning approaches;
- more open access for mature students;
- more intensive cost-recovery short courses for industry, to generate income.

While college staff could see the need to address issues associated with credit accumulation and transfer, to some extent they felt that they could not take full advantage of the opportunities for more open access and flexible provision for two reasons:

- the need for EAV bodies to agree on parity between different awards and to recognise all or part of each other’s qualifications, presumably with the backing of NCVQ;
- the cost, particularly in staff time, of such an overhaul. Without support, change was likely to proceed piecemeal over a relatively long time.

**Communication channels**

To facilitate the changes within the NCVQ’s requirements, effective communication structures will need to be created and maintained:

- within the college, between teaching departments and with college administration, in order to assist student progression within modular programmes;
- within the college, to integrate the marketing of courses;
- between college staff and their industrial counterparts.

With regard to this last point, a number of colleges are seeking to strengthen their industrial links either through the appointment of link officers with a staff development role or by encouraging staff throughout the college to build such links.

The sheer scale of the curricular changes that college staff envisaged as consequent upon the implementation of NVQs should highlight two critical issues, managing change (see Section 5) and evaluation.

**Staff development**

College staff in all four sectors considered staff development to be pivotal to the successful development and delivery of NVQs. However, many colleges also pointed out that the introduction of NVQs was often considered secondary to more immediate
concerns they faced, the most significant being the effect of the Education Reform Act on college survival and jobs. This wider context will have to be taken into account during the implementation of NVQs as it forms the environment in which staff recruitment and development will take place.

Staff recognised that they will have to look at a wider range of teaching and learning strategies than may currently be used, for example:

- more practical work, and open and individual learning replacing much formal teaching;
- team-teaching;
- cross-college mixed provision;
- student-centred learning;
- industrial involvement in the design, delivery and assessment of courses;
- a fuller integration of theory and practice in the development of practical assignments;
- the writing of learning programmes which enable the assessment of competence to a range of specified standards.

Even where such strategies may already be in operation the need for them to take place on a much wider scale was seen as having significant staff development implications. Indeed there was a concern that existing cells of good practice might not spread across colleges because of a lack of suitable arrangements for cross-fertilisation between departments, across sectors, etc. College staff indicated that substantial shadowing or work secondments would need to be organised and funded.

Development is needed for college and industrial staff alike, each needing to learn from the other, with mutual respect for each other's competences.

The introduction of NVQs is also likely to lead to the increased use of part-time staff, with relevant industrial or commercial experience to share, but perhaps without formal training.

Regarding curriculum design, delivery and assessment, it has been suggested that a clear structure and programme of continual professional development of staff is required. Staff themselves identified the following issues to be addressed in such a programme, the content of which would need to be extensive.

**Category 1:** those directly related to the implementation of CBC:

- clarification of the definition of competence and its implications in practice;
- updating, to include more frequent and detailed guidance and information about the implications of implementation;
- involving the workplace in the curriculum;
- helping and guiding the workplace in administration, assessment and certification;
- guidance in the theory, planning, course design and assessment of competences.

**Category 2:** wider issues which are clearly affected and/or made more urgent by the advent of NVQs, but are not wholly attendant on those changes since they relate to a much broader pattern of change in FE. The development of skills related to:
• team-teaching;
• resource allocation;
• marketing – both targeted at particular new client groups and integrated marketing across departments;
• use of information technology;
• approaches to student management;
• approaches to administration and record-keeping;
• an awareness of the need for contingent approaches to student-centred learning.

Category 3: skills required to support more flexible learning provision with the shift towards a more student-centred approach, and to develop specialised areas for individualised open learning:

• to support the design, packaging and development of open learning;
• to design programmes for individualised provision, menu and modular approaches.

The breadth and scale of the staff development suggested is vast and, following on from the arguments earlier in this section, it might be more useful to speak of competence-led staff development.* This would necessitate moving all staff from an awareness of NVQs to a more thorough understanding of their implications, and thence to developing the skills needed for the delivery of all aspects of CBC.

Alongside this, however, there will be a need to match staff development with the particular role requirements of different groups of staff. Such an approach would make most sense if it were conducted on an inter-college basis, and this would presumably require a degree of regional or local co-ordination.

This major theme of staff development is taken further in Section 4.

INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The research indicates that there are major implications for college-wide reorganisation and development as a result of the introduction of NVQs.

Demographic trends, coupled with the tighter financial constraints on colleges (see Managing a Changing FE Longman for FEU, 1988), are also giving greater impetus for change. The direction of change is not, however, the same in all cases.

Pressures and innovations

Some college staff considered that their institutions might respond to financial pressure and the degree of change required to implement NVQs by seeking to expand their 'A' level provision. It was felt that this route might be both more familiar and financially more secure. For example, the point was made that this might be one means of maintaining or increasing staff:student ratios, whereas changes to vocational qualifications might lead to

* This line of argument was followed by FEU and NCVQ in July 1988 in promoting their joint pamphlet Competence-led Staff Development.
moves in the opposite direction. In other words, although
attempts to deliver individualised learning might be worthy and
desirable on pedagogic grounds, in the short term they might
prove expensive.

Other colleges were a little bolder and are looking to diversify
their provision to new client groups and to include courses which
are income generating. Colleges need to cater for a wider range of
clients and therefore will need to develop wider marketing
strategies.

Thus a variety of pressures and innovations is leading to changes
in the client groups and how colleges will respond to client needs.
Where colleges are seeking a substantial slice of vocational
provision rather than adopting a ‘wait and see’ attitude to NVQ
developments, staff argued that the need for changes in college
organisation becomes clearer.

These changes may involve:

- a redefinition of the distinctions between full-time and part-
time courses;
- developing a redefinition of distinction of credit transfer within
  and between modularised programmes;
- more ‘roll-on, roll-off’ facilities, which require more
  individualised self-instructional materials, resource-based and
  open learning approaches, and hence more individualised
  student support, including guidance and counselling.

To enable these to happen and to develop competences effectively
and cheaply (as colleges will not be the sole agents involved in
such development), there will be a further need for a greater
integration of staff and resources and for the weakening of
boundaries between departments.

**Role changes**

Role changes will be required throughout colleges, whether
people’s responsibilities are for the organisation and deployment
of resources, or delivery, or both. Clearly those with a staff
development role will also need to review their responsibilities,
and the scale of change required will presumably require more staff
to undertake such a role.

The changes will require substantial staff development at all levels.
It is likely that senior staff will have increased responsibility for
staffing, marketing, salary negotiation and resourcing. Moreover,
comments were made that the attitudes of many senior staff
would need to be changed to turn the rhetoric of student-centred
learning into classroom practice. Further, new methods of
teaching will mean that a classroom head count becomes an
inappropriate measure of course success.

For teaching staff, role changes have already been outlined above.
In short, institutional changes will bring about an increase in part-
time staff and moves towards industrial training as opposed to
teaching, with full-time staff becoming course designers,
facilitators, material developers and assessors.

As stated earlier, there was a marked difference between those
staff who had been formally involved in considering the
implications of introducing NVQs and those who had not. The
latter often complained about a lack of information and communication about the effects on courses with which they were involved.

**Costs**

A number of respondents mentioned the tension between the type of changes required and attempts to reduce costs. They recognised that the cost of putting on new, flexible learning programmes is likely to be high in a number of respects. There will be significant costs associated with:

- a major staff development exercise to re-orientate staff and equip them with the necessary skills;
- the start-up costs of introducing such programmes (compare the experiences of the Open/Tech or the Open College, for example);
- the design of more individualised learning and the pursuit of greater industrial relevance.

Some of the activities undertaken in pursuit of these goals (for example, visiting trainees in the workplace) may not be formally recognised. Similarly, the assessment systems required to meet the NCVQ criteria are likely to be significantly more expensive than existing ones in most cases.

The whole issue of costs was one which alarmed many respondents. However, most of them were activity managers rather than staff with major financial responsibilities, and so this is an area which needs further investigation.

The impression given by activity managers was that many of the concerns of those with overall financial responsibility were with developing management information systems which could generate the type of performance indicators mentioned in the Joint Efficiency Study. Many of these indicators were looking backwards to an FE of five or more years ago. Indicators like staff:student ratios, average class size and exam pass rates will be very clumsy, if not inappropriate, in dealing with the type of FE system required of the 1990s.

**Summary**

When considering the implications of implementing CBC curricula for institutional development, it is important to look at other factors currently impinging upon colleges as organisations. It can then be seen that, according to one interpretation, a synergy is developing in:

- the need for colleges to seek new clients due to demographic change;
- the increasing emphasis upon adult learning – in continuing education, training and retraining;
- the requirement to open up access and delivery through the recognition of prior learning and the development of flexible learning;
- the reformation of vocational qualifications and the changes which that entails.

These changes could mutually reinforce one another in a dynamic way, but it is important that they relate to all college activities. For
example, mainstream activities should be flexible, rather than open learning being seen as a 'bolt on' to existing provision.

**Assessment**

Of all the changes NVQs are likely to bring about, it is their effect on assessment which is causing greatest anxiety. The following issues were raised:

- college involvement could be marginalised as a result of increased workplace assessment, although some clearly saw a new role in moderation and standards monitoring;
- workplace assessment is only as good as the workplace itself;
- training in workplace assessment is long overdue for both college and industrial staff;
- at present, workplace assessments are usually a measure of the tasks undertaken by the students, as opposed to the competences they use;
- the possible cyclical nature of a curriculum developed under ‘levels’, as against the linear and progressive nature of workplace learning;
- the extent to which assessment would cover depth and breadth of competence;
- uncertainty about whether and to what extent simulation in the college would be allowed as a means of assessing competence.

For college staff, the changes in assessment procedures will mean a move from externally assessed courses to more internal continuous assessment and moderation. Staff development was called for to aid the changeover from norm to criteria referencing for the assessment of competence.

**The Mode**

Overall it was expected that, in order to allow learning and assessment to complement one another, ideally moving in tandem, traditional block release would be replaced in many vocational areas by placements of one or two days per week. An alternative view was that the mode would be influenced by practical considerations relating to the ease – or otherwise – of getting work placements, and the preferences of the employers, rather than the 'ideal' requirements of learning and assessment. Indeed the sheer scale of the administrative load in seeking and organising work placements itself could become a major issue. Similarly college staff expressed doubts over whether it would be possible to find sufficient interested employers with the commitment required in the development, assessment and moderation of college-based provision.

As has already been indicated, it was felt likely that full-time provision, based largely in college, would probably need to develop more opportunities for learning and assessment off the job. It was also clear that the need for more flexible learning opportunities would lead to the provision of resource-based learning workshops, with drop-in facilities, enabling students to learn at their own pace. This facility might easily be linked to 'mixed mode' learning, where learners might combine, for instance, study by evening class attendance, attendance at resource-based learning workshops and distance learning.
Besides general worries about how assessment systems would operate in practice, staff raised a number of questions on technical concerns. For example:

- Would it be possible to combine assessment of skills and knowledge and approaches to working related to successful performance of a job – i.e. to record responses to deadlines, critical events, contingencies, etc., as well as to record the more routine aspects of performance?

- Would the performance criteria be based not only on outcomes, but also on the processes by which outcomes were achieved – for example, responses to clients/customers? Thus would statements of competence attempt to deal with aspects of roles and not just tasks?

- Would the assessment facilitate the delivery and development of broadly based competence, such that learners would be fulfilling a variety of roles as well as successfully completing vocational tasks?

College staff also felt that there was a danger that possession of knowledge might be undervalued. A knowledge component might require direct assessment given the unlikelihood of its being demonstrated through application: for example, a student might need to recognise the symptoms of certain animals’ illnesses before being able to respond appropriately.

Staff felt some consolation in that observation of performance constitutes the main, but not the sole, method of assessment in the new system, although again they would reserve judgement until they saw whether the system accommodated this in practice as well as theory.

While the specification of performance criteria represents a significant move towards criteria-based assessment, normative assessments still take place. That is, the new criteria have to be interpreted and judgements based upon them. However, who makes these judgements and upon what bases is critical to the overall success of the new system. Thus, the size of the task involved in securing regular and consistent workplace assessment should not be underestimated.

Indeed, a number of colleges involved in workplace assessment drew attention to the tendency of work placements to seek administrative convenience in accreditation arrangements: for example, countersigning, verifying, etc. on a single day, or making generalised judgements about a person’s overall competence, rather than recording achievement as it occurs.

This whole area needs further study and without effective moderation some college staff felt that they and others would have little confidence in the system.
3. A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE SECTOR-SPECIFIC FINDINGS

Appendix 2 contains further information on these findings, and more specific work will be carried out in Phase 2 of the project.

AGRICULTURE

Of the four vocational areas researched, agriculture was by far the most adequately prepared for the introduction of NVQs. This is because an integrated infrastructure has for many years linked workplace assessment to competent performance through the National Proficiency Testing Councils (NPTCs). Furthermore, the typical involvement of colleges in the administration and standard maintenance within local NPTCs means that mechanisms already exist for implementing NVQs.

Nevertheless, the effect of NVQs on this structure and on the provision of courses will need careful monitoring as many staff did not expect to change their course content but to rejuggle it into the new NVQ levels.

One of the greatest concerns here, as elsewhere, was the need to reduce the paperwork, particularly for workplace providers. Further, the NCVQ’s specification of no minimum or maximum period of time in training and/or on work experience raises questions about how to build a variety of conditions into the assessment, and about the value of a residential component. Passage of time and experience of different placements, conditions (including weather), etc. were felt necessary to give students exposure to at least some of the circumstances which they could meet in agriculture. Would possession of skills (especially in favourable conditions) be sufficient?

CLERICAL

Here the introduction of a CBC has taken place largely on two fronts.

- Prior to the NCVQ’s formal statement of levels, the Royal Society of Arts introduced its own definitions of levels (although it was always intended that these should accommodate NCVQ decisions rather than be seen as a pre-emptive strike). Thus a model existed in the clerical and administration sector early in the day, with continuing piloting of the first two levels. However, staff awareness of levels of any sort and of competence-based initiatives was patchy at the time of the research. Those involved in YTS often appeared best informed.
- The Administrative, Business and Commercial Group (ABC) document took some cognisance of the RSA work and set out the standards of performance that were to be incorporated into the first and second level qualifications in the new NVQ framework. The document was criticised for its limited approach to competence, but at the time of the research its effect at the grass roots was low.

HAIRDRESSING

A number of sector-specific issues were highlighted:

- the need to enable better and more trusting relationships between employers, who view each other as competitors;
CARING

While there are many major implications associated with the implementation of CBCs, the extent to which it requires a change in orientation among college staff should not be overestimated. Thus, staff associated with caring courses, such as those of the Nursery Nurses Examination Board, have always viewed their task as being to develop students’ competence in a role.

To this end, great emphasis is given to performance in work placements and the development of attitudes and behaviours appropriate to carers. This consideration of role even influences the initial selection process. Students are seen not so much in terms of how well they could cope with the course academically as in terms of their motivation and likely commitment to their future role: for example, how far they have already demonstrated a commitment to caring through previous activities, paid, voluntary or domestic.

To some extent caring may be a special case, but staff have never taken the view that vocational education and training in caring is about passing courses: the aim has always been the personal development of, mainly young, people so that they would make good carers. Competence in a role is central to that process.

The introduction of BTEC courses in caring – with students sometimes seeking entry to undergraduate courses via this route – may affect staff orientations in the future as not all entrants may be seeking a career in caring. Some of these new students may alternatively see their current course in terms of individual progression – a stage in their journey, not their ultimate destination. Either way, even with the decline in the population of young people, caring courses – particularly nursery nursing – still receive abnormally high numbers of applications.

One final comment concerns the quality of relationships which lie at the heart of caring. Scrutinising these and making judgements on approaches taken by carers can be very difficult, especially as different workers can have very different styles and patterns of relationship with their clients, without any one approach being seen as clearly superior.
The difficulty that various working groups have had and are having in producing competence objectives with clearly specified criteria of performance is perhaps testament to the difficulty in applying the new framework in this area.
This section not only draws together some of the main threads from the responses of colleges staff but also incorporates material from other publications and debates in producing a commentary on major issues involved in implementing CBCs.

The commentary has again been organised under the headings of curriculum, staff and institutional development. However, the issue of workplace learning assessment, including tutors' relationships with the workplace, both straddles and has major implications for these three major categories; it has therefore been given a sub-section to itself.

**CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT**

There is a degree of confusion in the field concerning the implementation of CBCs, and if staff are to have a clear understanding of, and a commitment to, the underlying aims and objectives of the new system, then they have to be given a lead.

**DEFINING COMPETENCE**

In particular, issues associated with the breadth of competence have to be addressed. Presumably the underpinning idea (the purpose of education) must relate to personal competence. Even if attention is focused primarily upon vocational outcomes, the arguments set out in the New Training Initiative about the need for a versatile and adaptable workforce would suggest that a range of approaches to learning need to be 'owned' by the learner.

Similarly, the ability to perform in a variety of contexts and locations would seem both to give learners some breadth of competence and to equip them with the potential for progression.

The argument needs to be taken further. In 1985 the then Manpower Services Commission was arguing that occupational competence 'also embodies the ability to transfer skills and knowledge to new situations within the occupational area and beyond to related occupations'. This seems sensible in that many young people will not remain in the industry they enter initially.

Equipping people to facilitate transfer and progression has implications for how levels of occupational competence are drawn in practice: assessment processes should be designed to ensure that these broader considerations are not neglected.

NCVQ has moved considerably in this direction, and appears more aware of the need to incorporate a more substantive knowledge component and to address the issue of transferable skills. The increasing collaboration of FEU, NCVQ and the Training Agency also holds out the possibility that a clear and consistent policy can be agreed and promulgated to facilitate the development of broadly based competence.

**MODERATION**

One key element of the quality control of the new curricula will depend upon the quality of the moderation procedures.

In accord with good practice elsewhere in the FE system, moderation should be used in a supportive role, not simply as a means to check standards. Where moderators themselves are
learning on the job, care has to be taken to ensure a common approach (the GCSE has shown the unease felt by practitioners when moderators are given little time and few guidelines to formulate their approach).

Time is required to enable moderators to explore ideas and attempt to reach consensus upon issues of interpretation, and to share experiences once the moderation process gets fully underway. Thus, initially, moderators—and any staff development programme—will have to communicate and interpret the underlying philosophy and to offer specific advice on matters like assessment.

Regional models have emphasised the importance of the relationship between moderators and individual centres: where centres were grappling with new CBCs, the number of visits and degree of support offered were both much higher than normal. This, however, has direct cost implications.

Traditionally, assessment and moderation have not been highly paid, although there has been no shortage of volunteers because it was seen as valuable experience in terms of career development. If moderation is to become much more widespread, some of its attraction—and exclusivity—may be lost.

One result may be that the duties of a moderator are more tightly circumscribed. If they become verifiers and countersigning officers, who will give the support about learning and assessment which traditionally has been part of the moderator's role?

The old system of moderation seemed in tune with the system of assessment as a whole, being geared to high reliability and low cost: unfortunately, validity was also low. Now a new system promises higher validity, but will it also require higher costs? Will people be willing to finance the type of moderation required, or will moderation procedures be adapted to fit cost requirements?

STAFF DEVELOPMENT

THE ISSUES

Staff knowledge and understanding of the implications of implementing CBC could almost be represented by a bipolar distribution. On the one hand there were those well-versed in what was happening or who were aware of the latest thinking of NCVQ, EAV bodies and the like, while on the other hand, there were those with only a very hazy idea of either the changes or their implications. Included in this latter group were some who had seen the initial outputs of industry lead bodies and were sceptical about both the value and the practicality of some of the proposals. As a result, they had paid relatively little attention to subsequent developments.

Presumably, as implementation of new curricula comes nearer in particular vocational areas, interest will surge, and mechanisms will be required to increase the number of people with a fairly full understanding. It would be unrealistic and disastrous to expect change to come about simply by knowledge filtering down and through the system.

If staff are not properly primed, they may carry on with existing practices, and the momentum for change will be lost. If, after the
heralding of the much-vaulted reformation of vocational qualifications, staff continue much as before, it will be much harder to institutionalise change later.

Similarly, an ad hoc approach to staff development risks enshrining any parochial views, with the spread of poor practice as likely as the spread of good practice. Not only might college staff fail to locate certain issues, but other people, especially those concerned with a national perspective, might be unaware of these shortcomings.

A coherent, comprehensive strategy for staff development must be placed alongside curriculum and organisational development as part of an integrated approach to introducing NVQs. Further, within this approach there must be scope for formative evaluation to check the effectiveness and direction of staff development in the light of overall goals.

**USING REGIONAL NETWORKS**

One possible way forward in promoting competence-led staff development would be to use existing regional networks as focuses for such a programme. The recent experience of the Yorkshire and Humber Education Association for Further and Higher Education (YHAFHE) and the West Midlands Advisory Council for Further Education (WMACFE) may be informative in this respect.

Both developed curricula (Tradec and Unit-Based Scheme (UBS) respectively), which, while open to all, remained strongest in their own regions. They were also certificated by City and Guilds as alternative routes for the delivery of schemes which were more genuinely national in practice. What is of interest here is that, in order to maintain their existence, they sought to make their provision align more closely with the requirements of NCVQ.

All EAV bodies involved with vocational education and training were at the very least re-examining their provision in the light of NCVQ, and many were seeking to give it an explicit competence base. What makes the two RACs particularly noteworthy is their regional dimension and how they were involved in trying to re-orient provision in colleges. That is, they have direct experience of a number of substantive issues involved in moving towards the implementation of CBCs and the process by which they sought to institutionalise change through their staff development programmes.

The first point to note is that they have included a wide range of FE staff in the whole implementation process. Secondly, both regions were involved in a number of interlocking projects and developments on implementing CBCs. For example, the Tradec schemes have introduced competence objectives and now pay greater attention to assessment. A development project on work-based assessment (WBA) has reported on the results of those changes, especially as Tradec has always sought to emphasise the importance of work experience.

Similarly, UBS, developed in 1984, has sought to fit the skill and training specifications laid down by the dominant training organisation in different occupational sectors and, latterly, by the industry lead bodies. These specifications are seen as the training
information base around which units are constructed, but a base which needs broadening beyond occupational concepts of competence to include transferable core skills.

It has been stressed how involvement in such development work can give people an edge in understanding the shape and direction of curricular change as a whole. The key, however, is the extent to which such potential advantages are realised for the benefit of staff other than those directly involved. Both RACs sought to capitalise on such advantages, but did so in different ways.

YHAFHE used its long-established tradition of curriculum working parties and moderation procedures associated with Tradec to perform, in addition, a staff development function. They coupled this with regional events when there was any issue of particular significance to raise or pass on.

This approach meant that information was spread quite widely among the colleges, although it was still piecemeal, and the base of those with some overall picture was still narrow.

So, intra-regional links, where these are good, could perform a valuable role, but their effectiveness is limited by the lack of a more coherent and comprehensive approach to staff development:

- the number of people reached by such haphazard means is likely to be small;
- there are numerous opportunities for misunderstandings as messages are transmitted around the system;
- there is the likelihood that messages will be 'locked up' in separate departments/sections, thus militating against a college-wide response;
- a mechanism is needed to translate what comes out of development projects into general practice, through a complementary staff development programme.

Ideally, this should be picked up in a regional staff development programme addressed to the implications of a competence-led curriculum. Only at a regional level is it likely that policy can be made clear and translated into consistent practice.

UBS is a much more recent development than Tradec and has sought from the outset to tackle major issues relating to competence and assessment. As a consequence, WMACFE has insisted that all staff involved with the scheme should take part in an initial two-day staff development programme.

Moderation is a key element of UBS, with college and workplace personnel cross-moderating each other's provision. Once again, then, moderation also performs a valuable staff development role as well as promoting integration. A commitment to continuing staff development is also seen as necessary to facilitate an effective interchange on practical problems 'on the ground' and responses to changes in policy at national level.

Irrespective of the future of these particular qualifications, it is the involvement and commitment that was harnessed by regional organisations which are of relevance here.

It is important that FEU and NCVQ have agreed on the need to promote a regional staff development and support service to
support the implementation of the NVQ framework.
Involvement at this level can bring significant advantages in
relation to cost, co-ordination and exchange of good practice. The
service is available via FEU and Regional Curriculum Bases,
although problems with funding the programme mean that the
form and scope of the activities to be undertaken are uncertain.

In any case, the RACs vary in the extent to which they are already
seen by individual colleges as focuses of significant activity,
including staff development. Thus, while the idea is sound, in
practice greater efforts will be needed in some regions to ensure
that the message gets through to staff at the requisite levels in the
colleges.

In conclusion, any programme of competence-led staff
development will need to take account of both the specific and the
more general issues highlighted in Section 2. It will need to
remedy the patchy understanding of the nature of competence,
but also be alive to the need to support the development of more
flexible learning provision. Any staff development programme
accompanying the implementation of competence-led curricula
should not be viewed in isolation, but should be placed in the
broader context of staff development policy as a whole.

INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The scale and breadth of the changes required in order to
implement NVQs successfully has been reiterated throughout this
report. It is apparent, then, that it would be futile to attempt to
meet this challenge with marginal changes to existing curricula,
along with a small dose of staff development. If colleges wish to
remain major providers of vocational education and training, they
will have to reassess their organisational aims, structures,
processes and resources to see if these align with what is required
for an effective implementation of CBCs.

However, the research showed that, even where self-scrutiny was
under way, the impetus was likely to be only marginally related to
the reformation of vocational qualifications.

The impact of the Joint Efficiency Study, the Education Reform
Act, changing relationships within LEAs, proposed mergers and
reorganisations, falling rolls, even the introduction of GCSE,
could all seem more pressing concerns.

Further, even if a review were to touch upon course provision,
colleges might choose to boost GCSE, ‘A’ level and higher
education access courses, arguing that demographic change will
mean good vocational prospects for young people if they follow
this route. Certainly they might regard it as prudent not to
become prematurely wedded to a system within which they are
unsure of their place.

Eventually, however, colleges will have to address the
consequences of the reformation of vocational qualifications. The
evidence suggests that many of them were hoping it would be
later rather than sooner, as most were not framing a college-wide
response to the implications of CBCs. There would appear to be
four principal reasons for this:
So much effort from the Training Agency and NCVQ has gone into stressing the vocational dimension that less attention has been paid to the wider implications. The very different approaches and rates of change in the different vocational areas were seen as further evidence that a sectoral approach was sufficient.

The amount of change the system as a whole has undergone in the last decade was seen as inhibiting: it was succinctly described as 'initiative fatigue'.

Uncertainties about overall direction, about the responses of particular examining and validating bodies and industry lead bodies and about how these would affect particular courses meant that many staff were going to wait until the changes actually arrived, or at least appeared in a more tangible form. (The response to the researchers of 'come back next year' was starting to give way, even over the short timescale of the interviewing period, to a thirst for information from those most directly affected, as the imminence of the changes in some sectors became apparent. Nevertheless, the attention of those with institutional management responsibilities was still mostly elsewhere.)

Getting course teams, departments or sections to consider the particular implications for them was seen as an ad hoc activity, which did not require commitment of resources.

The ethos of many colleges was seen as supporting the devolution of responsibility for change to course teams. Certainly this is necessary, but is it sufficient? Does not there need to be a mechanism whereby emerging issues can be considered at different levels in the college structure? Course teams may have responsibility but not authority. Their work will of necessity be largely reactive, operating within fairly narrow bands, even if the change within that particular band is marked and they can deliver a competence-based programme.

If provision is to be competence-led, a more thorough-going review is likely to be required, dealing with major questions of college policy and management.

The scale of the review that could be required is indicated by the example of one college where an ad hoc group of staff interested in NCVQ developments made recommendations to the Academic Board (see Appendix 2). The breadth of their proposals illustrates the chasm between what could be accomplished by course teams working alone and what could be achieved if a college-wide strategy were adopted.

The latter would require major changes in:

- course delivery (modularisation);
- marketing strategy;
- industrial liaison;
- clients (more emphasis on training trainers and assessors);
- organisation of staff and patterns of responsibility;
- enrolment procedures;
- credit accumulation and transfer;
- IT policy;
- staff development.
An interesting sidelight on these proposals is that, in the six months following the submission to the Academic Board, no action had been taken or even proposed. Again this raises issues about the management of change. There is a major difference between some far-sighted tutors being able to articulate the changes consequent upon the implementation of NVQs and the realisation of those changes (see also Section 5).

Some college managements might defend their refusal to go far down this road on the grounds that it is necessary to understand the environment within which they have to operate.

In particular, they may point to the inconsistency between attempts to improve the effectiveness of college provision and services on the lines suggested above and the way institutional performance is currently judged. Notwithstanding such arguments, institutions still need to consider what they can do within existing constraints to facilitate the implementation of competence-led curricula.

At the very least, such active consideration of policy should ensure that:

- a case is assembled as to what is required to bring about effective implementation;
- staff are given a clear indication of the overall direction of change;
- scarce resources are used to best effect (for example, staff development policy is viewed as a whole and activities undertaken interlock rather than compete).

WORKPLACE LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT

It is not appropriate to give a full exposition of all the issues that arose in relation to workplace learning and assessment as many of these will be taken further in Phase 2 of the project. Indeed the uncertainty about how they will operate in practice is one reason why there is so much project activity in this area. Whatever the detail of the systems which eventually do emerge, it has become clear that college staff will often have a critical role in the implementation process, particularly in relation to how they interact with work placements.

For instance, the WBA project came up with an important finding that tutors often viewed industry/workplaces in generalised terms, rather than looking at the particular workplaces associated with their students. Hence they were not always viewing the workplace as a learning opportunity.

The precise portfolio of work they undertake may vary according to the vocational area and the particularities of both college and workplace environments, but a range of possible areas in which they may become involved is given below:

- To plan/structure opportunities for learners to acquire necessary skills and knowledge and apply them at work placements: For example, learners may need to move between placements to get experience of different contexts - especially where placements can be very diverse, as in agriculture.
To facilitate the demonstration and accreditation of any competence acquired at the workplace. This may require not only assessment at the workplace, but also support in off-the-job learning and assessment. In particular, tutors could help learners build up a body of evidence, including the use of an agreed framework for recording performance, which could be used in the accreditation process.

To make connections between work experience and related knowledge. Practical experience should demonstrate a need for related knowledge - in hairdressing, the use of chemicals, in caring, cognitive development and so on. Skills can then be developed in a continuing and dynamic way. In practice, such integration can be difficult to achieve. For example, in agriculture, while allowance can be made for the season, unforeseen contingencies can mean the matching between the two components falls short of the ideal. Integration can still be a valuable tool. Needless to say, simplistic equations, such as off-the-job = knowledge and on-the-job = practical skills, should not be drawn.

To review the operation as a whole, including estimation of the real costs of the assessment system.

To help placement providers analyse their own training needs, so that they can support the learners at the workplace in relation to learning and/or assessment.

To help learners identify their particular training needs in relation to prior experience, current performance, placement opportunities and their chosen combination of units.

To identify approaches to facilitate learning and assessment at the workplace, for example, different types of emphasis, location, sequencing, degree of supervision, specialisation. (It is often necessary to build in opportunities for reflection so that learners can become aware of what they have achieved and make connections between different components of their programme.)

To encourage the recognition of experience at work as more than just the acquisition of competence in work tasks. That is, to consider and encourage employers and learners to consider the need for task management and the importance of learning to perform roles. This links with issues about transferable skills, learning to adapt to changed contexts/circumstances, and learning to carry out a variety of roles. Work experience can then be used to exemplify the need for a more catholic approach to learning.

To monitor learners’ overall progress and performance in different contexts and locations. Then, if necessary, programmes can be changed (for example, if a learning difficulty comes to light) and help given to ensure particular performances are recorded, especially if they will contribute to a unit of competence or other form of qualification.

To use feedback from learners to find about particular work placements rather than rely solely on a generalised view of activities at work. This can be a valuable means of updating staff.
PHASE 2 AND RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER WORK

Phase 1 of the project identified the fact that activities designed to enable the implementation of CBCs in colleges varies widely according to geographical location and vocational area. Work has been continuing on curriculum development, though invariably within a narrow definition (e.g. competence objectives, criteria of performance). Little attention has been focused on staff and institutional development as part of a co-ordinated approach to the management of change. Indeed, the absence of any strategic consideration is striking!

To forge ahead in developing one aspect and neglecting the others may throw the system as a whole off balance, and may indeed undermine progress even in that sector on which so much effort has been concentrated. If Phase 2 were to go ahead as originally intended (that is, to look at particular responses of colleges to specific issues identified as problematic in Phase 1), the situation could be exacerbated. The adoption of a broader perspective is required.

The new approach for Phase 2 is to apply to the Work-Related Further Education Development Fund (formerly the Mutual Development Fund) R&D projects our methodological frame for extracting key issues and putting them in a wider context.

The issues frame itself is predicated upon the assumption that effective change needs to be evaluated in the context of:

- the development of the curriculum;
- the continuing professional development of staff;
- the institutional and organisational arrangements of colleges.

Phase 2 then could look at the R&D projects, and the identification of any gaps in coverage, with a view to commissioning further work. The review could also look at what is happening in these projects in the light of developments elsewhere (e.g. NCVQ, Training Agency Occupational Standards Branch).*

MANAGEMENT OF CHANGE

Throughout this report the extent and magnitude of the changes required within colleges in order to implement CBCs has been emphasised. The need for these changes was readily identified by many respondents. However, by the very nature of the research, the interviewees were among the most aware of the full implications of the introduction of NVQs.

In any case, there is a world of difference between informed staff in a reflective mode being able to identify the changes required and the realisation of those changes in practice. In order to promote effective change, the change process itself has to be managed. If curricula are to be genuinely competence-led, then a process of curricular change has to be actively promoted and supported. How is this to be achieved?

* Phase 2 is now being funded by the Work-Related Further Education Development Fund and managed by FEU. It is due to report in 1990.
To effect translation of a major programme from theory to practice requires more than just dissemination of the underlying ideas: it also requires organisational change and system change.

At least in this respect many of the organisational and system changes required for the implementation of competence-led curricula complement or reinforce those required to support other developments, such as the move towards more flexible learning provision and the search for new clientele. However, this will not necessarily result in synergy; developments may be viewed in isolation, and effort and resources fragmented in wasteful duplication and/or competition.

There is a manifest need for a strategic approach to the implementation of competence-led curricula, presenting a clear picture of the type of provision to which people should be working, together with practical advice on how to move in that direction. Apocalyptic visions of the future rarely generate commitment, nor do they offer much help or guidance in the short term. Similarly, resource constraints and practical difficulties with implementation are inadequate excuses for inaction. In this respect the nature and quality of staff development become critical in generating a commitment to change.

Phase 2 of this project, then, will seek to:

- identify the extent to which a co-ordinated strategy of curriculum, staff and institutional development is instrumental in implementing competence-led curricula;
- provide information to assist in realising such a strategy, which will enshrine a broad approach to curriculum development in the implementation of NVQs within the FE system as a whole.
APPENDIX 1: ONE PROPOSAL FOR COLLEGE-WIDE RESPONSE TO NCVQ DEVELOPMENTS

At one college, an ad hoc group of staff interested in NCVQ developments argued for the adoption of a college strategy and ‘action plan’ to meet the challenge of NCVQ. They recommended that the strategy should be based on the following:

- Establish a liaison group to ensure that the LEA officers are fully briefed on NCVQ matters and take an active part in the development of the co-ordination of these matters across the Authority.
- Establish an adequate and accessible database capable of providing the sophisticated records of student achievement and credit accumulation envisaged in the NCVQ documents. (This item is particularly relevant since it will be a vital element in producing the information required in the Joint Efficiency Study.)
- Initiate an enrolment procedure which adequately reflects the need for the recognition of prior learning, credit transfer and credit accumulation and which recognises, in a structured way, the implication of student counselling, achievement testing, student profiles and the full range of modes of delivery and costing implied in the documentation.
- Initiate a marketing strategy to establish the college as the focus of NCVQ in the eyes of local industry.
- Initiate a college-wide review of IT provision and a process of continuing appraisal of the provision in the light of the competences in this field likely to be highlighted by the various industry lead groups.
- Establish the areas above as the main areas of staff development for the college, recognising the resource implications that this implies. Prioritise those areas requiring most staff development and, having done so, be more directive in implementing this staff development policy.
- Generate the ideas required to develop the procedures outlined above by reinforcing the work of some existing individuals or groups, or by establishing new groups and by allocating time and responsibility to these individuals or groups to perform the following tasks:
  - to establish a pool of expertise in competence-based learning and its implications for the curriculum;
  - to establish a marketing strategy to ensure that the college is in the forefront in the development of NVQs in local industry and commerce. This strategy may have to encompass the needs of industry and commerce with regard to:
    - training programmes for work-based assessors;
    - offering a consultancy service on assessment in the workplace;
    - the provision of simulated work experience in the college;
    - the integration of 'college'-based and 'work'-based experience.
  (This task could be divided between two groups).
  - to recommend the procedures to be adopted for enrolment, recognition of prior learning, credit transfer and credit accumulation;
to recommend the procedures to be adopted with regard to student counselling, achievement testing, student profiles and course tutoring;
- to recommend a suitable database system capable of dealing with the sophisticated demands described above, and the procedures required to ensure that the flow of information both into and out of the system will be sufficiently detailed;
- to prioritise the staff development implications relating to NCVQ and recommend the direction of staff development funding towards prescribed areas;
- to assess the resource implications of these recommendations.

- Appoint a NVQ manager and deputy who will be responsible for implementing the action plan. A suitable amount of time should be allocated for the execution of this task.
- Appoint an assessment co-ordinator and an assistant co-ordinator who will be responsible for implementing procedures for student counselling, achievement testing, student profiles, recognition of prior learning, credit transfer and credit accumulation. A suitable amount of time should be allocated for the execution of this task.
AGRICULTURE

In many ways the agriculture sector was the most advanced in its preparation for the introduction of NVQs. Yet, in having a well-established industry/college infrastructure, some resistance to change may result. This was particularly indicated in college staff responses to what was meant by, for example, competence. The replies here were often in the form of 'competence is related to the National Proficiency Test Council (NPTC) standards and tests'. Nevertheless, a range of definitions of competence were given, covering all the active categories referred to in Section 3 of the main report. It should be remembered that the idea of competence has been around for some time in this sector. Moreover, links with industry are well established, with the industry involved in course reviews and teaching on a part-time and exemplary practice basis. In addition, college staff are involved in the training of the NPTC assessors and the administration and operation of local NPTCs. Further, a body of competent workplace assessors already exists, although it was felt these might not wish to see their role expanded, particularly if this necessitated additional paperwork. Similarly, doubts were expressed about how many workplace supervisors would be willing to play an active role in the assessment process.

As regards the setting of standards, it was felt by some that the industry would have benefited from a more independent industry lead body than the Agricultural Training Board (ATB). However, the roles of the NPTC and the National Examination Board for Agriculture, Horticulture and Allied Industries (NEBAHAI) were seen as important as far as moderation was concerned. Although the standards had already been set for NVQ level one, it was expected that at least a further year would be required to generate a complete and acceptable set of standards to level two. Some concern was raised over whether these developments would lead to minimum standards being enshrined as normal practice.

Unlike the other vocational areas, there was, in general, a high level of management awareness of the changes taking place.

Furthermore, at the management level the initiatives were being viewed very positively as marketing opportunities. There was an expected increase in the provision of assessed and accredited adult education and retraining classes alongside new more practically oriented full-time provision. The use of open learning was expected, particularly in the development of introductory and bridging materials. While there were calls for staff development in new and appropriate teaching and learning strategies, the content of courses was not expected to change radically.

In this vocational area, as in others, there was some concern as to the effect 'roll-on, roll-off' courses would have on both the traditional three-term year and the students' personal and social development. It was considered important for students to have a peer group to whom they could relate - something with which more individualised programmes might dispense.
The administrative and clerical sector has traditionally relied mainly on various forms of college-based terminal assessments. Thus the move towards continuous and work-based assessment will rely heavily, in this sector, on increased staff awareness, development and training.

It is not surprising that definitions of competence in this sector tended to revolve around performance in terms of speed and accuracy as well as skills training. College staff in this sector seemed to possess a limited conception of what was meant by both competence-based and competence-led curricula. The former was related to skills in general and the latter to ideas of continual assessment.

Staff in colleges recognised the need for staff development in course design and open learning development and facilitation. This was seen as related to the probable move to more 'roll-on, roll-off' courses which would provide better access. Some saw a need for all courses to be modularised, providing a basis for a menu of 'pick and mix'. However, as in other sectors, concern was raised over the likely fluctuation of numbers if a 'roll-on, roll-off' programme became the norm.

With regard to curriculum development, some colleges saw the need to develop specialised areas in which to deliver competences and using a student-centred approach incorporating greater use of independent learning. This route also implied the need for college staff to become more generalist, with skills in student guidance, counselling, resource management and assessment. Time would also be required to generate materials.

Particular areas of staff development which were raised related to the need to liaise more with, and learn from, the workplace. Along with this, staff argued there was also the need for more specific training in IT, student management and less static classes, the creation of assessment proformas, administration and record keeping.

In relation to assessment, there was some concern over the impact of NVQ assessment recommendations. Traditionally, employers have expected colleges to train and assess students, and it was felt they would only respond if the paperwork was simple. This would result, it was suggested, in a lot more college staff time being spent in assessing in the workplace.

Overall, staff thought that a lot of work would be entailed in setting up the new system of vocational qualifications in colleges. There was also a perceived need to sell themselves more effectively in the workplace and involve commerce and industry more in course developments. Nevertheless, NVQs were, in general, considered a positive move which would provide greater motivation to students in the form of a clearer picture of where they were and where they were going.

College staff in hairdressing were generally well informed on the NVQ initiatives. In recent years, with YTS, course improvements and changes made by the City and Guilds, the teaching of...
competence had already begun to take place. The major concerns raised in this sector related to increasing workplace involvement, both in the provision of college courses and, more specifically, in workplace assessment and programme delivery. Competition within the industry was seen as the major problem, along with a range of uncoordinated professional bodies.

However, some colleges were making a great effort to overcome these difficulties. In particular, some were programming time for staff to spend on placements, developing better relationships and links. These often stemmed from YTS arrangements but had been found to be invaluable both to monitor and counsel students in the workplace and to check on the type and nature of the experiences being received. Staff were also able to use this time to overcome misconceptions about college staff and do some small-scale staff development regarding current commercial approaches and orientations. Hairdressing staff tended to define competence in terms of degrees of supervision.

The improved access that NVQ would create was viewed positively, and a wide range of both intensive short courses and courses for adults and (in some cases) for holiday-makers were being considered. Income generation was considered important for the future viability of hairdressing departments.

The use of staff from a range of departments in the provision of hairdressing courses was seen to be important. However, the reduced curriculum offered by the National Preferred Scheme (NPS) was a concern for some colleges. In addition, some colleges saw a possible reduction in interdepartmental co-operation at a time when it was most needed.

The staff development requirements mainly identified in this sector were those relating to more frequent and detailed guidance and information on design and timetabling of the new courses. Greater involvement with industry was called for by many in designing modularised courses. In relation to this, some colleges were not intending to introduce the NPS until it had had time to overcome its teething problems.

In summary, YTS had enabled a good relationship to develop between colleges and some employers. There still remained, however, role conflict, with college staff being viewed as 'experts'. The need to enable employers to recognise their own expertise and role in delivery and assessing competences was seen as necessary, but would take time. Greater initial involvement of employers with college staff, both in and out of the college, was considered essential.

College staff discussions on the implications of NVQs tended to rotate round the BTEC/NNEB courses. In this context, the potential of BTEC giving placement-based assignments (though with college-based assessment) was seen as a positive move, as it was felt that theory and practice were not linked in the NNEB courses. Further, the exam-based (NNEB) versus work-based divide was contrasted by some with the curriculum segmentation implied by the new NVQ framework against a need for more course integration.
Another issue highlighted by staff related to problems in distinguishing between the roles of learner and worker when students (from NNEB courses) were on work placement. Learners were frequently seen, and sometimes viewed themselves, as workers, not in any ephemeral, partial or training role but in the fullest sense. It was felt this could create major problems in getting assessment, accreditation, etc. carried out in the workplace. In theory, the relationship between college staff and the workplace could mean there is a substantial role for college staff in the accreditation process at the workplace. In practice, the conditions for observation may not allow that. So, while the integration of activities in the two spheres may seem attractive, the practical difficulties may be considerable. This was certainly the experience of a recent project on work-based learning in caring.

Moreover, whilst some college staff were involved in and aware of the wider issues of introducing competence-based curricula, caring was found in general to be behind the other vocational areas in its developments. There appeared to be only limited and selective involvement of the workplace in the design of courses, and little involvement in the delivery of the college-based programmes or assessment. With regard to the latter, it was recognised that both awareness raising and substantial staff development were required.

Indeed college staff involved in caring were particularly aware of staff development needs and raised many of the staff development issues highlighted in the main report.

Within the colleges, job fears and concerns were prevalent, with the need to 'shift staff attitudes' being recognised as a major block to the introduction of a more fully competence-based curriculum into caring. It was suggested that the use of team meetings for staff development was one of the best ways of addressing the issue.

The nature and scale of the problems in trying to develop a competence-led curriculum in caring influenced FEU to take a different tack from that adopted in other vocational areas, and it is currently supporting a separate development project in this area.
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Objectives

The objects for which the Further Education Unit (FEU) is established are to promote, encourage and develop the efficient provision of further education in the United Kingdom and for that purpose:

a) to review and evaluate the range of existing further education curricula and programmes and to identify overlap, duplication, deficiencies and inconsistencies therein;

b) to determine priorities for action to improve the provision of further education and to make recommendations as to how such improvement can be effected;

c) to carry out studies in further education and to support investigations of and experimentation in, and the development of, further education curricula and to contribute to and assist in the evaluation of initiatives in further education;

d) to disseminate and publish information, and to assist in the dissemination and publication of information, about recommendations for and experiments and developments in further education.

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