DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 391 081 CE 070 696

AUTHOR	Callender, C.; And Others
TITLE	National and Scottish Vocational Qualifications: Early Indications of Employers' Take-up and Use.
INSTITUTION	Sussex Univ., Brighton (England). Inst. of Manpower Studies.
SPONS AGENCY	Employment Dept., London (England).
REPORT NO	IMS-R-259; ISBN-1-85184-186-5
PUB DATE	93
NOTE	162p.
AVAILABLE FROM	BEBC Distribution, 15 Albion Close, Parkstone, Poole BH12 3LL, England, United Kingdom (45 British pounds).
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research/Technical (143)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC07 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Adult Education; Case Studies; Competence; Cost Effectiveness; *Education Work Relationship; *Employer Attitudes; *Employment Qualifications; Foreign Countries; National Surveys; *Personnel Evaluation; Questionnaires; School Business Relationship; Standards; *Student Certification
IDENTIFIERS	*National Vocational Qualifications (England); *Scottish Vocational Qualifications

ABSTRACT

A study examined British employers' adoption of National Vocational Qualifications and Scottish Vocational Qualifications (NVQ/SVQs) and the occupational standards underpinning them. Data regarding current/projected use of the NVQ/SVQs and their perceived costs, benefits, and difficulties of implementation were collected from the following: literature review; interviews with key organizations, Employment Department representatives, and selected major employers; telephone survey of 1,506 employers; and 50 case studies of employing organizations in 9 sectors. Although 75% of employers surveyed had heard of NVQ/SVQs, only 44% of firms with more than 500 employees and 6% of firms with fewer than 50 employees were using them. It was projected that approximately 78% of large firms and 14% of small firms would eventually use NVQ/SVQs. Use of NVQ/SVQs was highest in the construction and energy/water sectors. NVQ/SVQs were used mainly to provide initial training but were also used for retraining and certification of employees' existing skills/competencies. Barriers to using NVQ/SVQs included lack of employer support for the ideas underpinning the NVQ/SVQs and the NVQ/SVQs' poor presentation, inflexibility, and high cost of implementation. (Thirty-five tables/figures are included. Appended are the following: 20 additional tables of statistical information; questionnaire and discussion guide; list of organizations interviewed; and glossary.) (MN)

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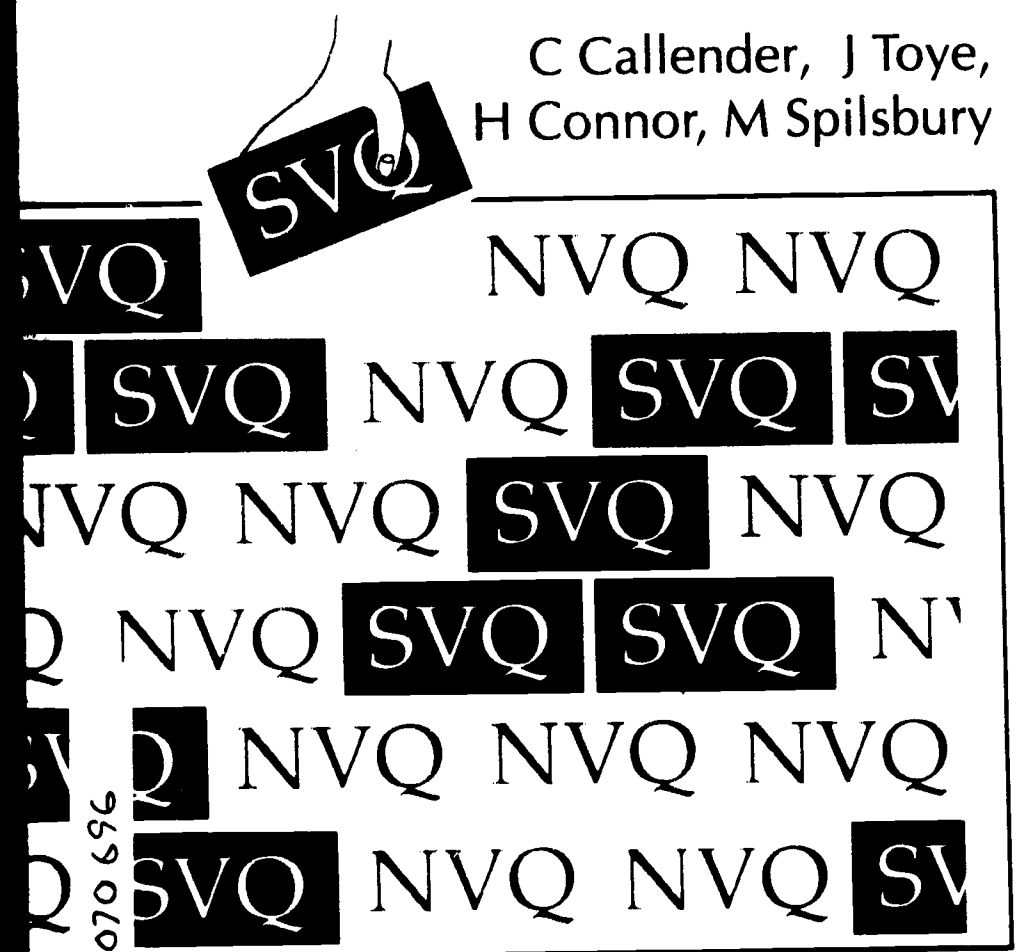

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INSTITUTE OF MANPOWER STUDIES

Published by:

INSTITUTE OF MANPOWER STUDIES

at the University of Sussex

Mantell Building
Falmer
Brighton BN1 9RF
UK

Tel. 0273 686751
Fax 0273 690430

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The case study volume is available separately from IMS.

The views expressed in this report are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the Employment Department.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 1-85184-186-5

Printed in Great Britain by College Hill Press Ltd

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Acknowledgements

This study could not have been successfully undertaken without the help of a number of people and organisations. Our first acknowledgement and thanks goes to the employers who participated in the survey and especially those in the case studies who gave up their time to discuss with us their implementation of NVQ/SVQs. Thanks are also due to the Lead and Awarding Bodies (see list in Appendix 2) who helped us in the initial stages to refine the research issues and identify possible case studies.

The main authors of this report would like to acknowledge the inputs of other IMS staff, notably Research Fellow Marie Strebler and Associate Fellow Alan Anderson who carried out some of the fieldwork and wrote some of the case studies, Phillip Vigor who contributed to survey analysis work and Emma Hart, our Team Administrator, who helped in the organisation of the case study visits and the preparation of this report.

The telephone survey was undertaken on our behalf by Research International and special thanks are due to Janet English who managed the project at their end. Finally, we are grateful to Steve Leman, Caroline Bicknell and colleagues in the Employment Department for the valuable inputs they made in steering the research project through the various stages.

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Executive Summary

Background

In 1986 the Government laid the ground for the introduction of National and Scottish Vocational Qualifications which represented a new national framework for vocational qualifications related to standards required for competent performance in employment.

This research was undertaken for the Employment Department and aimed to assess early indications of employers' take up and usage of National and Scottish Vocational Qualifications and Occupational Standards in Great Britain.

Objectives of the study

The prime objectives of this study were to gather information on early indications of employers':

- current and intended take-up and use of NVQ/SVQs and Occupational Standards and factors affecting these
- the nature of their usage, and
- perceptions of the costs, benefits and difficulties of implementation.

Research methodology

There were three main components to this study:

- a preliminary stage to help identify the key issues to be investigated
- a telephone survey of a nationally representative sample of over 1500 employers and covering over one million employees which gathered information on awareness and take-up of NVQ/SVQs and Occupational Standards, and
- 50 case studies of employing organisations in nine different Lead Body sectors which sought to explore experiences in using NVQ/SVQs and Occupational Standards.

The field work was conducted between March and June 1993. Most of the information obtained related to NVQs rather than SVQs.

Current take-up of NVQ/SVQs and Occupational Standards

While 75 per cent of employers in the survey had heard of NVQ/SVQs only a relatively small number had started using them. However, take-up varied significantly by size of firm: 44 per cent of firms with over 500 employees were using NVQ/SVQs compared with six per cent with fewer than 50 employees. Take-up also varied by sector and regions but to a much lesser extent.

For the economy as a whole we estimate approximately five per cent of firms are using NVQ/SVQs. This rises to about 6 per cent when those using Occupational Standards **instead of** NVQ/SVQs rather than in addition are included.

Another estimated 22 per cent of firms intend or express interest in using NVQ/SVQs, and about 72 per cent of firms are interested neither in NVQ/SVQs nor Occupational Standards.

When take-up is estimated by reference to the number of employees within the firms which are using NVQ/SVQs and/or Occupational Standards, approximately 28 per cent of employees are covered. This is because larger firms are more likely to be users.

Employers tended to introduce NVQ/SVQs in the first instance to only one part of the business. When they had some experience on this basis, they might extend NVQ/SVQs to other areas.

Future take-up of NVQ/SVQs

The take-up of NVQ/SVQs is likely to increase in the future. According to the survey, the vast majority (89 per cent) of employers currently using them intend to continue to do so. The number planning or intending to use them in the future is somewhat higher than the number already using them. The projected take-up among large firms (with over 500 employees) is 78 per cent and for small firms (under 50 employees) it is 14 per cent. However, despite this projected growth, the current user base among very small firms suggests that take-up is likely to remain low there for some time yet.

Use of NVQ/SVQs and Occupational Standards

The survey showed a similar pattern of usage of NVQ/SVQs to that indicated nationally by NVQs awarded to date, with those in Providing Business Services being the most widely used.

Construction and energy and water were the two industrial sectors (SIC) with the highest proportions of survey respondents using NVQs. However, cross-sectoral NVQ/SVQs were the most widely used especially those relating to Business Services and Engineering.

Employers mainly used NVQs to provide initial training for new recruits but also used them to retrain existing staff and to accredit staffs' existing skills and competences. They tended to use them in

their entirety rather than selecting out particular Units and the most popular NVQ/SVQs were at Level 2.

Participation levels and density rate

In most surveyed organisations using NVQ/SVQs only a small number of employees were involved — for over half, less than ten — although a few very large organisations had a much higher number. On average 29 per cent of those for whom the main NVQ/SVQ was relevant, were said to be working towards this NVQ/SVQ. Of these 35 per cent had achieved a full NVQ/SVQ and a further 29 per cent had achieved some Units.

Information sources on NVQ/SVQs and employers' understanding

Employers', especially small employers', lack of awareness, information and understanding of NVQ/SVQs inhibited take-up. A third of non-users had obtained information compared to eight out of ten users. Employers gained information mainly from local organisations such as TECs and colleges, and the majority considered it helpful.

Factors affecting take-up and usage

Numerous factors were identified in the study which affected employers' take-up and use of NVQ/SVQs and Standards. No one factor, however, can be singled out because in reality they acted in conjunction with each other. Together these factors point to the actions required to encourage and increase take-up and use.

Key factors encouraging take-up

- Endorsement of the ideas underpinning the NVQ/SVQ Framework

Half of all employers in the study using NVQ/SVQs believed that they would aid staff development and performance. A further half were attracted to them by the fact that they were related to vocational competence-based training and were nationally recognised qualifications. In other words, on the whole these employers across different industrial sectors were content with both the Occupational Standards and the qualification *per se*. They perceived them as relevant to their needs and were optimistic about the benefits they would reap.

- Training culture and National Training Initiatives

Those employers most likely to embrace NVQ/SVQs and to see their advantages were those with a strong training culture developed in advance of NVQ/SVQs and Occupational Standards. They also often participated in other National Training Initiatives, like Investors in

People: an involvement which was yet another manifestation of their training culture. Such employers were found in all industrial sectors and, with a few exceptions, were large.

- Youth or Employment Training

Employers' involvement in these schemes varies and is to some extent industry specific. Twice as many survey respondents who were involved in these schemes were using NVQ/SVQs as those who had not. This was partly because training towards an NVQ/SVQ is a condition of YT/ET funding. However, involvement in YT/ET had raised awareness of NVQ/SVQs and had had a knock-on effect on provision for others, *ie* 78 per cent of those who were working towards NVQ/SVQs were **not** youth or employment trainees.

- Public funding

The availability of public funding affected the likelihood of employers using NVQ/SVQs and also helped explain the pattern of take-up between sectors and which Level of NVQ/SVQs were being used. The evidence about employers' attitudes towards public funding was mixed. While three-quarters of all survey respondents agreed to the statement that the costs of NVQ/SVQs should be shared between government and employers, much smaller proportions (below 30 per cent) mentioned financial incentives when asked what would encourage their organisation to introduce or extend their use.

- Sector specific factors

In certain sectors specific factors helped explain why employers had adopted NVQ/SVQs, such as legislation or new employment initiatives (*eg* Project 2000 in the NHS).

Key factors discouraging take-up

- Lack of support for the ideas underpinning NVQ/SVQs and lack of conviction in the potential benefits

Some non-users across all sectors remained unconvinced of the principles underpinning NVQ/SVQs or of their relevance. Others were unswayed by their potential benefits — at least one in five wanted to see the benefits before introducing them. Some did not think training and qualifications were necessary. In addition, some believed that NVQ/SVQs lacked credibility and had not gained currency as the accepted standards within their industry.

- No legal requirement to implement NVQ/SVQs

Neither the achievement of Occupational Standards nor NVQ/SVQs are mandatory and hence there are no statutory incentives for employers to act or penalties for not acting.

- Contents of Occupational Standards

The contents and nature of the Occupational Standards discouraged some employers, in particular their poor presentation and lack of flexibility. In some sectors investigated through case studies they were not seen as relevant to the workplace because they were either too narrow and occupationally specific or were too broad and generic. About one fifth of survey respondents thought NVQ/SVQs were too narrow, and a slightly lower proportion that they were too broad.

- Existing training provision and qualifications

Nearly a third of non-users across sectors in the survey were content with their existing training or qualifications. They saw no added value to NVQ/SVQs but only additional costs.

These findings are important because they suggest that employers' non-use of NVQ/SVQs does not automatically mean a lack of commitment to training and qualifications.

- Lack of financial assistance and perceived high costs

The lack of financial assistance and the perceived high costs of introducing was a further barrier to take-up.

Difficulties of implementing NVQ/SVQs

Once employers had decided to introduce NVQ/SVQs their implementation was facilitated by having: 'champions' within their organisation to promote NVQ/SVQs; personnel responsible for co-ordinating NVQ/SVQs; and the involvement of line managers. The key implementation difficulties they faced concerned finding the time to implement, training and assess – mentioned by over a quarter of the survey respondents – others related to assessment. In particular, they had problems over the lack of suitable assessors and the quality, scope, and nature of their training. More seriously, they experienced difficulties in organising assessment and creating assessment opportunities; using and understanding NVQ/SVQ terminology and concepts; and in using certain assessment methods, especially portfolio building.

Costs, benefits and impact of NVQ/SVQs on human resource management

The key costs just under a half of survey respondents incurred in using NVQ/SVQs were associated with the time and salaries of candidates, supervisors and assessors. The next main costs were training and materials, mentioned by two out of five. The main benefits reported by over a third were improved standards of performance and staff motivation mentioned by a further quarter. No major size or sector differences between employers in the costs or benefits were revealed. On the whole, however, employers were neither able to quantify the costs nor benefits in a comprehensive

manner, although they called on the benefits of NVQ/SVQs to justify their introduction. They saw NVQ/SVQs as particularly beneficial to employees while Occupational Standards were more beneficial to organisations.

The introduction of NVQ/SVQs had led to a net increase in the volume of employer training especially in those sectors which had no pre-existing qualification but any causal relationship needs to be treated with caution. NVQ/SVQs had helped to structure employers' training provision, identify training needs and focus training activities. The Occupational Standards were very helpful and provided a valuable baseline for employers. By contrast, NVQ/SVQs to date had had limited influence on organisations' human resource management, apart from in the area of training.

Conclusions

The research shows that there is a lot of support and enthusiasm for NVQ/SVQs and Occupational Standards, especially from large firms and 'committed trainers'. However, on the whole take-up is still low, especially in small firms. The reasons for this are numerous. They relate to a lack of awareness and understanding of NVQ/SVQs; questions over the contents of NVQ/SVQs; and concerns over the costs, benefits and difficulties of implementing NVQ/SVQs. Above all, the most decisive factor affecting take-up is whether NVQ/SVQs fit with companies' overall business needs and the extent to which companies incorporate (explicitly or implicitly) NVQ/SVQs into their human resource development or training strategies.

The research has highlighted a number of areas in which attention needs to be given to make improvements and to help develop and broaden the base of NVQ/SVQ take-up.

1. Introduction

This report is about British employers' take-up and use of Scottish and National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ/SVQs) and the Occupational Standards which underpin them. It is based on research undertaken by the Institute of Manpower Studies (IMS) on behalf of the Employment Department, which included a telephone survey of 1500 employers and 50 sector-based employer case studies.

1.1 Research aims

The research was intended to obtain and assess evidence of early indications of the use and take-up of NVQ/SVQs and Occupational Standards by employers. Its three main objectives were to describe employers' response to NVQ/SVQs and Occupational Standards by providing information on:

- their current and intended take-up and use
- the nature of usage
- the costs, benefits and difficulties of implementation.

In addition, the research would:

- establish the extent to which the level of take-up and usage is explained by factors such as sector characteristics, training and qualification factors and company characteristics
- evaluate the contribution of NVQ/SVQs and Occupational Standards to additionality and effectiveness in terms of:

— training provision and employee skills;
— recruitment, selection and promotion, the structure of occupations and organisation of work;
— savings, productivity, quality gains and safety.

1.2 Background to the research

1.2.1 Development of NVQ/SVQs and Occupational Standards

The Government White Paper of 1985, *Education and Training for Young People* announced a review of vocational qualifications. A subsequent Working Party report in 1986 concluded that a new

system should be sought to replace and simplify the pre-existing plethora of vocational qualifications which would contribute towards improving the skills of the workforce. This resulted in the creation of the National Council for Vocational Qualifications (NCVQ) which was to introduce a new framework for a nationally recognised vocational qualification system in conjunction with the Employment Department. The NCVQ introduced (and are continuing to introduce) a new system of National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) which is designed to establish a coherent national framework for vocational qualifications at different levels and to relate these qualifications to the standards required for competent performance in employment. In Scotland, SCOTVEC is establishing a similar range of Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs).

1.2.2 NVQ/SVQ design

An NVQ/SVQ is a statement of competence which should incorporate specified standards in the ability to perform a range of work related activities. The focus is on performance to a standard: skills, knowledge and understanding are relevant only in so far as they are applied in performance. This emphasis of performance (or competence) against a pre-determined standard contrasts NVQ/SVQs with many previous qualifications which put emphasis on tests of knowledge. Although many employees may require training to reach NVQ/SVQ standards, NVQ/SVQs are not themselves training programmes nor are they linked to a particular training programme.

Occupational Standards are designed by Lead Industrial Bodies (most commonly shortened to Lead Bodies or LBs). Lead Bodies are led by employers, so that the standards are relevant to industry's needs and reflect the reality of working life. Their creation is to counter criticism of previous qualifications, namely that they were irrelevant to industry's needs and were overly theoretical. If industry designs the standards, then they should meet the needs of industry.

1.2.3 Aims of NVQ/SVQs

It is hoped that NVQ/SVQs will help tackle a wide range of problems that the UK has been experiencing in the vocational education and training area and that they would:

- increase the take-up of vocational qualifications to ensure a better qualified workforce
- raise skill levels of the workforce
- broaden the scope of vocational qualifications and fill gaps in provision
- enhance the transferability and progression of skills both between and within occupational areas to cope with changing technology, work practices and organisational structures
- ensure that vocational training meets the needs of employers and is relevant to the needs of employment by enabling industry to set the standards of qualifications
- open up access to vocational training

- rationalise the system of vocational qualifications and provide a clearer path for progression from one qualification to another.

1.2.4 Early indications of take-up and use

When we began the research there was already a fairly high level of awareness of the NVQ/SVQ initiative, amongst larger employers at least. *Skill Needs in Britain* (1992)[1] reported that nearly two-thirds of employers had heard of NVQs, a level considerably above any other Employment Department initiative. This level of awareness did not vary much by sector or by region, but was much higher amongst larger employers. Despite this, the rate of take-up was relatively low with few companies taking part and few employees gaining access to NVQs. Awareness among the general public was also quite low: a Gallup survey in 1991 found that over 60 per cent of those asked had never heard of NVQs. There was a serious gap in knowledge about the extent of employers' and employees' involvement in NVQ/SVQs, except for those employers participating in LBs and pilot programmes.

1.3 Research methodology

The research comprised three main components:

- a preliminary stage, to focus the issues and refine the research design
- a telephone survey of 1,506 employers to collect information on awareness and take-up of NVQ/SVQs and Occupational Standards
- 50 case studies of employing organisations, covering nine sectors (where a sector is a Lead Body area of responsibility).

The **preliminary stage** was designed to enable the research to build on prior and existing work and available data sources, in order to obtain a fuller picture of the development of NVQ/SVQs. This was then used to inform the choice of sectors for the case studies and the survey questionnaire. This first phase included:

- a review of the available literature, previous research and available data sources relating to NVQ/SVQs and Occupational Standards
- interviews with key organisations (*eg* NCVQ, SCOTVEC, NCITO, CBI, TUC), representatives of the Employment Department, 16 Lead Bodies and some employers (see Appendix 3 for details of organisations contacted in the research)
- a half-day workshop with representatives from 11 major UK employers (see Appendix 3).

The main research issue which arose from the preliminary stage was the problem of dealing with Occupational Standards and NVQ/SVQs

[1] *Skills Needs in Britain*, 1992, IFF, London.

in the same research process. This arose in three areas: our very early findings indicated that whilst employers may be aware of NVQ/SVQs, they had a much less clear idea of what Occupational Standards were and how they relate to NVQ/SVQs. Secondly, some employers were using the Occupational Standards on their own without making the accreditation step to certification. Finally, the combination of the two in the same research process made the research tools more cumbersome than we would have preferred.

After consideration we decided to incorporate awareness and use of Occupational Standards as part of the main research programme, and not to undertake a separate study on the use of Occupational Standards only.

The **telephone survey** was used to collect information on awareness and take-up of NVQ/SVQs and Occupational Standards, and intentions with regard to future involvement, across a wide range of employing organisations. Interviewers asked to speak to the training manager, if there was one, or to the person who had responsibility for training. The interview included questions:

- to all respondents about their general awareness, understanding and interest in NVQ/SVQs and sources of information about them, as well as on their training provision
- to current users (the minority of respondents) on which NVQ/SVQs were in use and for whom, and factors affecting implementation, and
- to those using Occupational Standards only about their reasons for doing so and how they are being used.

The survey was conducted on behalf of IMS by Research International, a market research company with a specialist telephone research division. 1,506 employers were interviewed. Details of the survey methodology are given in Appendix 1, and the questionnaire contents are shown in Appendix 2.

The **case studies** of 50 employers covered nine sectors (a sector equating to a Lead body area of responsibility). The sectors were chosen in conjunction with the Employment Department on the basis of jointly agreed selection criteria. These criteria were related firstly to the nature of NVQ/SVQs in the sector and secondly to the characteristics of the sector.

The NVQ/SVQs in each sector had to be:

- fully accredited
- in operation for a minimum of two years, though not necessarily accredited or at all levels.

In addition the sectors had to:

- have a relatively high level of registrations of NVQ/SVQs
- cover both private and public sectors and include at least one sector which was a primary industrial sector
- include a growing part of the economy

- have a good spread of both large and small employers but not be dominated by either
- include sectors which have and do not have an existing qualifications framework.

The first set of criteria limited the choice of sectors considerably. The seven occupationally specific sectors chosen were:

- Bus and Coach
- Care
- Chemicals
- Clothing
- Glass
- Hairdressing
- Retail

Two cross-sectoral occupational sets of NVQ/SVQs were also chosen:

- Business and Administration
- Management (MCI)[2].

In each of the case study sectors interviews were undertaken with the Lead Body and usually with the sector representatives from both NCVQ and the Qualifications and ITOs Branch of the Employment Department.

Individual employers were identified mainly by two routes:

- Forty employers identified during discussions with the Lead Bodies, NCVQ or the Employment Department
- Ten respondents from the telephone survey who had indicated that they would be willing to take part in further research.

Details of the employing organisations included as case studies are given in Appendix 3.

In each of the sectors a spread of employers was chosen to reflect differing sizes of employers and differing activities within the sector. All the case study employers had some experience of NVQ/SVQs. Where it was appropriate and possible to arrange, two people were interviewed in each company:

- a person with key decision making responsibility for introducing NVQ/SVQs within the company: usually the Head of Personnel
- a person with responsibility for carrying out training and assessment.

[2] The Management NVQ has not been available in an accredited form for two years but it was considered of sufficient interest by both ED and IMS to warrant inclusion.

For smaller companies these two functions were often carried out by the same person and so only one interview was conducted.

A questionnaire which covered a baseline of information including the company size, structure, training policy and prior involvement with NVQ/SVQs, was sent to the company for completion prior to the interview (employers taken from the telephone survey did not receive such a questionnaire as this information had been gathered during the telephone interview). This freed the discussion to concentrate on the key qualitative issues, namely:

- why NVQ/SVQs were introduced
- which NVQ/SVQs were used, how and for which employees
- progress in take-up
- training and assessment
- difficulties in NVQ/SVQ implementation
- costs and benefits of using NVQ/SVQs
- wider impact on training provision and HR management
- desired changes to NVQ/SVQs
- use of Occupational Standards.

Further details of the discussion guide used in the interviews are given in Appendix 2.

1.3.1 Timing

The research was commissioned in October 1992. The preliminary stage ran from October to January 1993,with an interim report on this stage submitted in January 1993. The telephone survey was piloted in February and interviewing completed over March and April 1993. The case studies were undertaken between March and June 1993.

1.4 Report structure

The report describes the results of the research. The first three chapters concentrate mainly on the survey and cover both users and non-users:

- Chapter 2 provides an overview of awareness, interest and take-up of NVQ/SVQs and Occupational Standards amongst employers in general and between those with different characteristics, in terms of employer size, sector, and region.
- Chapter 3 focuses on how employers heard about NVQ/SVQs and the usefulness of employers' information sources. It also reports on the depth of employer understanding of NVQ/SVQs.
- Chapter 4 explores the reasons for employers' interest (or lack of interest) in NVQ/SVQs and factors which have affected take-up. Whilst only a minority of employers were using NVQ/SVQs, we

examine in some detail their motivations and call upon the case study evidence.

The following four chapters then focus more on the users and draw mainly on the case study evidence:

- Chapter 5 explores in more detail the use employers are making of NVQ/SVQs and Occupational Standards, including views on the appropriateness of Occupational Standards, and the use of Occupational Standards independently of NVQ/SVQs.
- Chapter 6 focuses on the number of employees participating in NVQ/SVQs, and issues of access to NVQ/SVQs and considers employees' attitudes.
- Chapter 7 discusses issues which affect the implementation of NVQ/SVQs, focusing particularly on the organisation of training and assessment.
- Chapter 8 looks at the wider scene, including the costs and benefits of NVQ/SVQs and their impact on HR management.
- Finally, Chapter 9 presents the summary findings and draws conclusions.

There are three appendices. Appendix 1 describes the survey methodology in detail, including some further tables which are not included in the main body of the report. Appendix 2 is a summary of the questions used in the telephone survey and case study interviews. Appendix 3 lists all the organisations that were visited in the research process: employers have not been identified by name, but described to give an indication of the range of sizes and locations. Separate sectoral reports have also been prepared and are included in a separate supplementary report.

The main focus of the report is NVQ/SVQs rather than Occupational Standards. This is because in the research we found a lack of use of Occupational Standards and in general, at this stage of development, employers' activities were concentrated on implementing NVQ/SVQs. The reader should also note that we use in the main the comprehensive term NVQ/SVQs in the report but most of the information obtained in the research related to NVQs rather than SVQs. While the survey and case studies included Scottish-based employing organisations, there was insufficient coverage of them in the samples to draw any comparative conclusions. Given some significant difference between NVQs and SVQs the research findings on NVQs cannot necessarily be extrapolated to SVQs.

2. Employers' Take-up of NVQ/SVQs and Occupational Standards

We start our presentation of research findings by giving an overview of employer response to NVQ/SVQs and Occupational Standards in this chapter. It presents key survey findings on whether employers had heard of NVQ/SVQs, and whether they were using NVQ/SVQs and/or Occupational Standards. The results are based on responses from 1,506 employers interviewed by telephone during March and April 1993.

The sample contained approximately equal numbers of employers across five size bands, so the views and behaviour of large employers are over-represented in the whole sample findings. Weighting according to the distribution of employees among different sizes of employers is used for a summary of the findings in order to correct this imbalance.

The chapter first presents overall findings and then draws comparisons between users and non-users of NVQ/SVQs in terms of employer size, sector and regional location. Further details about the survey and its design, are provided in Appendix 1, which also contains tables not included in the main body of the report.

2.1 Overall awareness and use of NVQ/SVQs

All respondents were asked first whether they had heard of 'new qualifications called National Vocational Qualifications....referred to as NVQs' (or in the case of employers in Scotland..Scottish Vocational Qualifications, *etc.*). In all, 75 per cent had heard of them. These were then asked whether they were using them. Twenty per cent of all respondents said they were and a further six per cent had plans under way. Thus among those who had heard of NVQ/SVQs about one third were using them or planning to do so.

The 379 respondents who had not heard of NVQ/SVQs were read out some basic information about NVQ/SVQs:

> 'Scottish/National Vocational Qualifications are being developed on a similar basis for all occupations, and are now available for most of them. Instead of being gained mainly by written examinations, these qualifications depend upon the candidate showing that he or she can do the various parts of the job competently. The candidate can be assessed in a realistic working environment, either by a special assessor or by the workplace supervisor'

Table 2.1 All respondents: use and awareness of NVQ/SVQs (unweighted data)*

Use of NVQ/SVQs	N	%**
Yes they are being used	310	20
Plans are under way	85	6
No they are not being used	732	49
Have not heard of NVQ/SVQs	379	25
Total	1506	100

Number of respondents: 1506

* A few tables in this chapter show data weighted by a method explained in Appendix 1, Section 1.1.7. All other tables are based on survey data which has not been weighted, and are marked as such to avoid possible confusion.

** Throughout the report rounding of decimals can lead in some cases to percentages totalling 99 or 101 per cent.

Source: IMS Survey 1993

— and asked how interested or uninterested they were in finding out more about them. Only one in three expressed interest, being outnumbered two to one by those who were uninterested (Table 2.2). However, the number (262) who both had not heard of NVQ/SVQs and were not interested in finding out more amount to only 17 per cent of the whole sample.

Table 2.2 Respondents who had not heard of NVQ/SVQs: interest in finding out (unweighted data)

Level of interest	N	%
Very interested	10	3
Fairly interested	107	28
Neither interested nor uninterested	36	9
Fairly uninterested	128	34
Very uninterested	94	25
Don't know	4	1
Total	379	100

Number of respondents: 379

Source: IMS Survey 1993

Table 2.3 Non-users/respondents who had not heard of NVQ/SVQs: anticipation of future use (unweighted data)

Future Intent	N	%
Very likely to use in the future	78	11
Probably will use	159	22
Neither likely nor unlikely	83	11
Probably will not use	230	31
Highly unlikely to use	139	19
Don't know	42	6
Not stated	1	0
Total	732	100

Number of respondents: 732

Source: IMS Survey 1993

The 732 respondents who had heard of NVQ/SVQs, but were not using them and had no immediate plans to do so, were asked how likely or unlikely they were to use them in future. In total, about one in three were likely to, compared to half who were not (Table 2.3).

2.2 Use of Occupational Standards

During the pilot stage of the telephone survey it became clear that there was confusion about the word 'standards', and that respondents were sometimes claiming to use Occupational Standards when they had something different in mind. For this reason questions about Occupational Standards were framed very carefully in the final version of the questionnaire; and it was decided in advance that if respondents who said they were using Occupational Standards could not identify the ones they were using they would be treated as if they were not users.

Non-NVQ/SVQ users were read the following statement and question:

> *'NVQs (or SVQs) are based on statements of ability to do the job, which are published by Lead Bodies. These statements can be used in their own right separately from NVQs (or SVQs). Are you using them?'*

Only 32 non-NVQ/SVQ users replied that they were using such statements, and 26 of them could give details of the Occupational Standards they were using.

Responding to a different question[1], 50 NVQ/SVQ users claimed they were using Occupational Standards not only in support of NVQ/SVQs, but also separately for other purposes. Of these 46 were able to identify the Occupational Standards they were using.

In total, therefore, 72 respondents, or just five per cent of the sample, satisfied the interview requirements for being users of Occupational Standards separately from NVQ/SVQs.

2.3 Summary of respondents' use, intentions and interest in respect of NVQ/SVQs and Occupational Standards

The level of use and interest for the sample as a whole in relation to NVQ/SVQs and Occupational Standards is summarised in table 2.4. This shows that the current user penetration figure of 22 per cent is likely to double in the future.

Table 2.4 All respondents: use, intentions and interest in NVQ/SVQs and Occupational Standards (unweighted data)

Use and Interest Categories	N	%
Users of NVQ/SVQs and/or OS	336	22
Planning to use NVQ/SVQs	85	6
Anticipate use of NVQ/SVQs	237	16
Interested in NVQ/SVQs	117	8
Remainder of respondents/no plans or interest	731	49
Total	1506	100

Number of respondents: 1506

Source: IMS Survey 1993

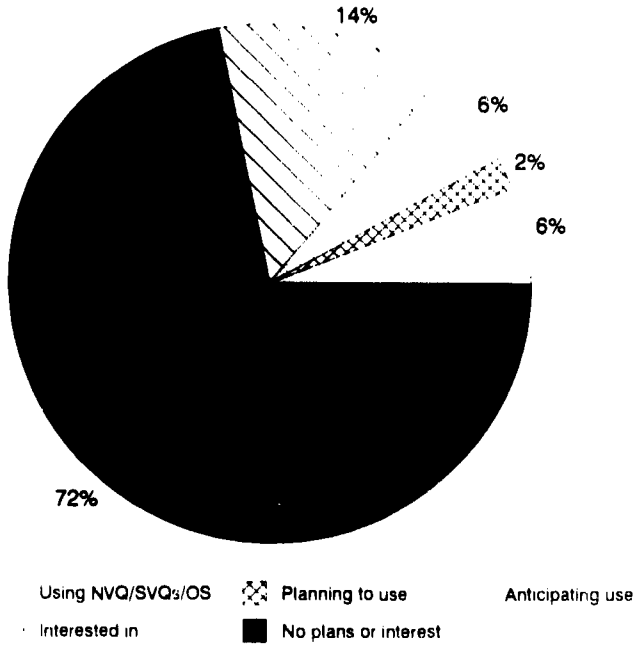
Because the sample over-represented large employers (see Appendix 1 Section 1.1) the figures of 22 per cent who are using NVQ/SVQs and/or Occupational Standards and 49 per cent who have no active interest in them may not reflect the actual level of interest in the

[1] 'NVQ/SVQs are based on published statements of the standards of performance required for each job called Occupational Standards. They have been drawn up by the Lead Bodies for each sector. These Occupational Standards can be used by employers as a means of raising standards of work performance through training, selection and appraisal, and can be used separately from NVQs. Are you using national Occupational Standards on which NVQ/SVQs are based, for any purpose other than in support of the NVQ/SVQs themselves?'

economy as a whole. By using weights to correct for the size imbalance we estimate that the level of use among all employers is around six per cent and that 72 per cent are not interested (Fig. 2.1). Using the same system of weighting, we estimate that 51 per cent of employers have heard of NVQ/SVQs as compared with the 75 per cent among survey respondents (*nb* Section 2.1)

Details of the weighting system used are shown in Appendix 1 Section 1.1.6.

Figure 2.1 Weighted estimate of employers' use, intentions and interest in NVQ/SVQs and Occupational Standards based on distribution of employees among different sized employers



Source: IMS Survey 1993

It is clear that the use of NVQ/SVQs and/or Occupational Standards is much lower on average across the economy than the sample survey suggests. Approximately five per cent of firms have implemented NVQ/SVQs and a few more (bringing the total to six per cent) are using NVQ/SVQs or Occupational Standards. However, in terms of coverage of employees the figure is much higher because of the distribution of employees across the size groups. The weighted figure for the economy as a whole is 23 per cent. When Occupational Standards are added in this figure increases to 28 per cent. Thus although the take-up of NVQ/SVQs and Occupational Standards is still low among employers, the potential workforce coverage of them is much higher.

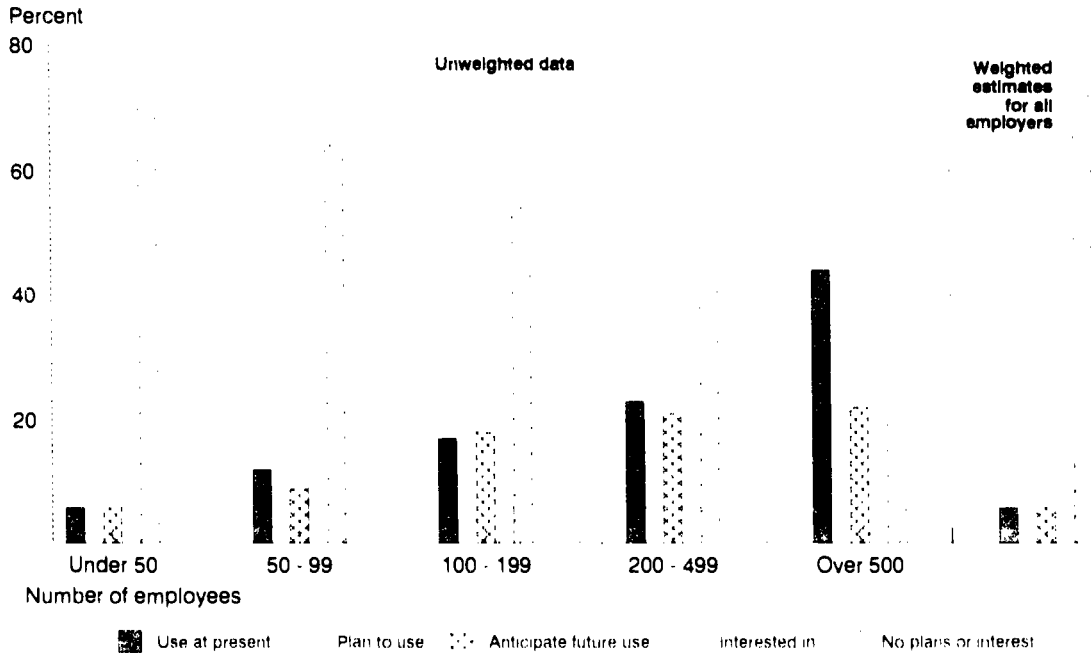
2.4 Characteristics of NVQ/SVQ users compared with non-users

Having presented data for the sample as a whole we now explore how various categories of employer differ in their use, awareness, understanding of and attitudes towards NVQ/SVQs.

2.4.1 Employer size

As would be expected from the results of the weighting exercise above, and as previous research[2] and experience have indicated, NVQ/SVQ usage is highest among larger employers (Fig. 2.2). Over 40 per cent of firms with over 500 employees were using NVQ/SVQs compared to six per cent of the very smallest category (less than 50 employees). Furthermore, while almost all of the large employers had heard of NVQ/SVQs, only half of those with under 50 employees had (Fig. 2.2)[3].

Figure 2.2 Use and plans for NVQ/SVQs and OSs by employer size



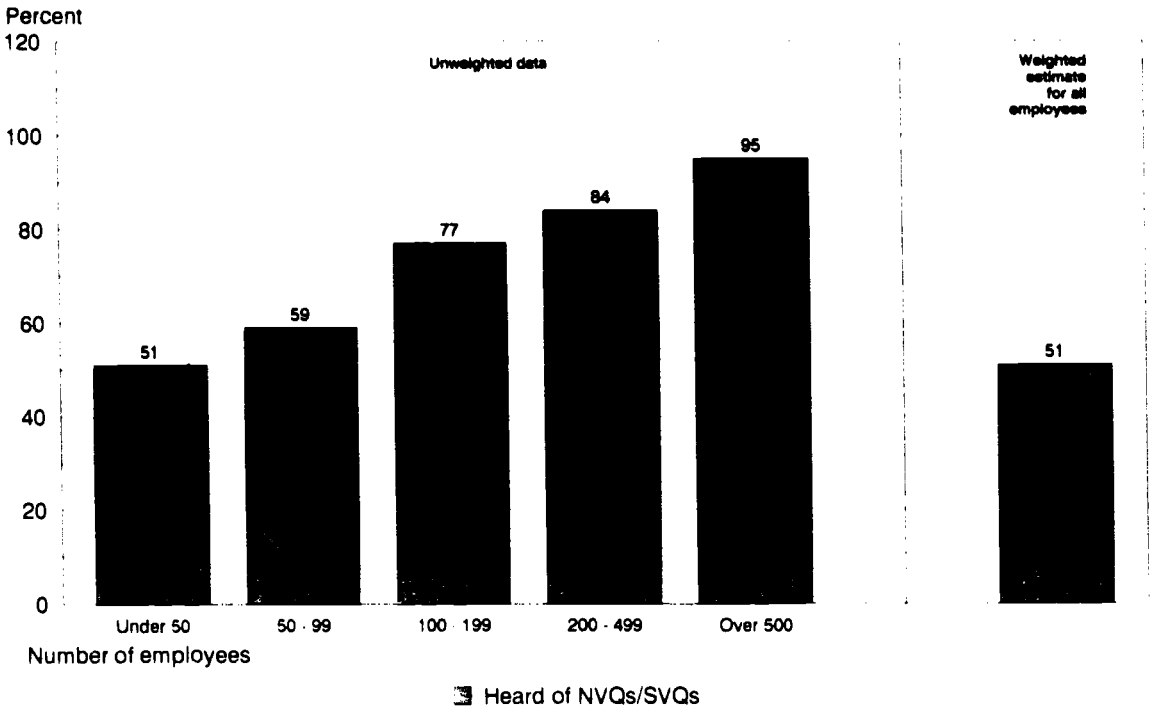
Source: IMS Survey 1993

Levels of usage, planned use and anticipation of future use of NVQ/SVQs all rise steadily as the size of organisation increases. However, higher proportions of smaller firms are interested in finding out about NVQ/SVQs, reflecting their lower level of awareness in comparison to large firms (Fig. 2.3).

[2] *Skills Needs in Britain*, 1992, IFF, London.

[3] Weighted estimates for the whole population of employers, previously explained in Section 2.3, are given as points of comparison in Fig. 2.2, 2.3 and 2.4.

Figure 2.3 Awareness of NVQ/SVQs by employer size



Source: IMS Survey 1993

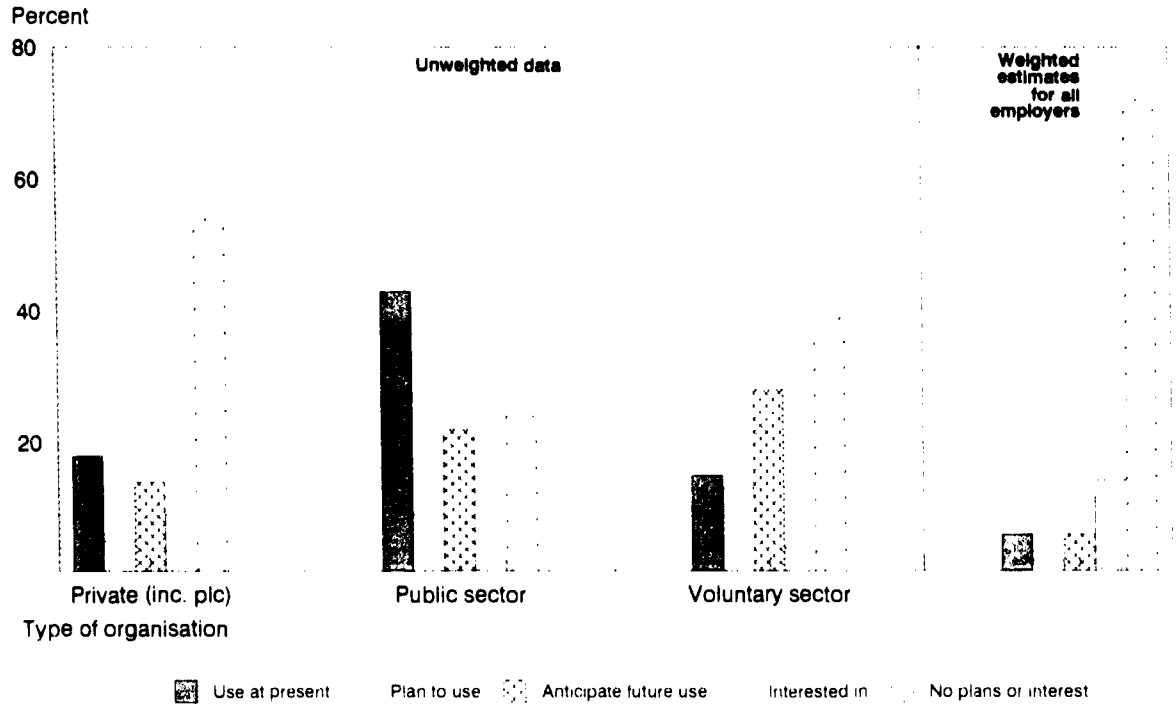
It is clear from these data that employer size co-varies strongly not only with NVQ/SVQ usage and future intentions, but also with awareness of NVQ/SVQs. The reasons for this will be complex and beyond the scope of the survey data to explain. But since the smallest category of employer — under 50 employees — accounts for more than 40 per cent of total employees in the workforce[4], lack of awareness and interest in NVQ/SVQs among small employers amounts to a severe restriction on access to NVQ/SVQs for a very large proportion of the workforce nationally. As will be seen later in this report, reaching small employers is a major challenge for Government, NCVQ and Lead Bodies.

2.4.2 Sectoral differences

Because the public sector has a reputation for doing more training than the private sector, it was expected that public sector respondents would include a higher proportion of users than the average (see Fig. 2.4). While 43 per cent of public sector organisations were currently using NVQ/SVQs and/or Occupational Standards and 31 per cent planned or anticipated doing so in the future, the corresponding figures for the private sector were only 18 and 19 per cent respectively.

[4] Bannock G, Daly M, (1990) 'Size Distribution of UK Firms', *Employment Gazette*, Employment Department, May.

Figure 2.4 Use and plans for NVQ/SVQs by type of organisation



Source: IMS Survey 1993

Since most public sector employers are large employers of 500 plus employees, the difference between private and public sector might be simply a function of employer size, so proportions of users in the private and public sectors were compared for this group of large employers. Within it the difference between the two sectors was much less marked: 42 per cent of large private employers were using NVQs compared with 57 per cent of large public sector employers. But the difference was still statistically significant — at the 0.05 level — implying that there is a real difference in usage between the private and public sectors.

Although the voluntary sector is below the private sector in NVQ/SVQ usage, it shows a higher level of interest overall than the private sector. However, sample numbers were very small and their results should be treated with caution.

We also investigated whether there was a relationship between industrial sector (SICs) and NVQ/SVQ usage and awareness. While there were marked differences between some sectors, there were no clear trends. The highest levels of usage in the sample were in construction (42 per cent) and energy and water supply (34 per cent) and the lowest (six per cent) in banking and finance (Table 2d in Appendix 1 gives further details of this breakdown). Such differences may reflect sector specific factors such as centralised training arrangements under the Construction Industry Training Board, or the importance of legal requirements such as health and safety in the water industry. Sectoral differences are considered further in Chapter

5 together with other information about take-up of different categories of NVQ/SVQs.

We investigated the impact of the gender composition of employers' workforce on users and non-users. While usage was similar for employers with less than 50 per cent female employees, some difference emerged at the top of the range. Forty one per cent of users had a female workforce of 70 per cent or more compared with only 32 per cent of non-users. These differences can probably be related to occupational gender segregation and the concentration of women in specific sectors like Retail and Care.

2.4.3 Regional variation

There was a possibility that use and awareness of NVQ/SVQs would vary by geographic location perhaps because of economic conditions and structures or levels of local dissemination of information about NVQ/SVQs.

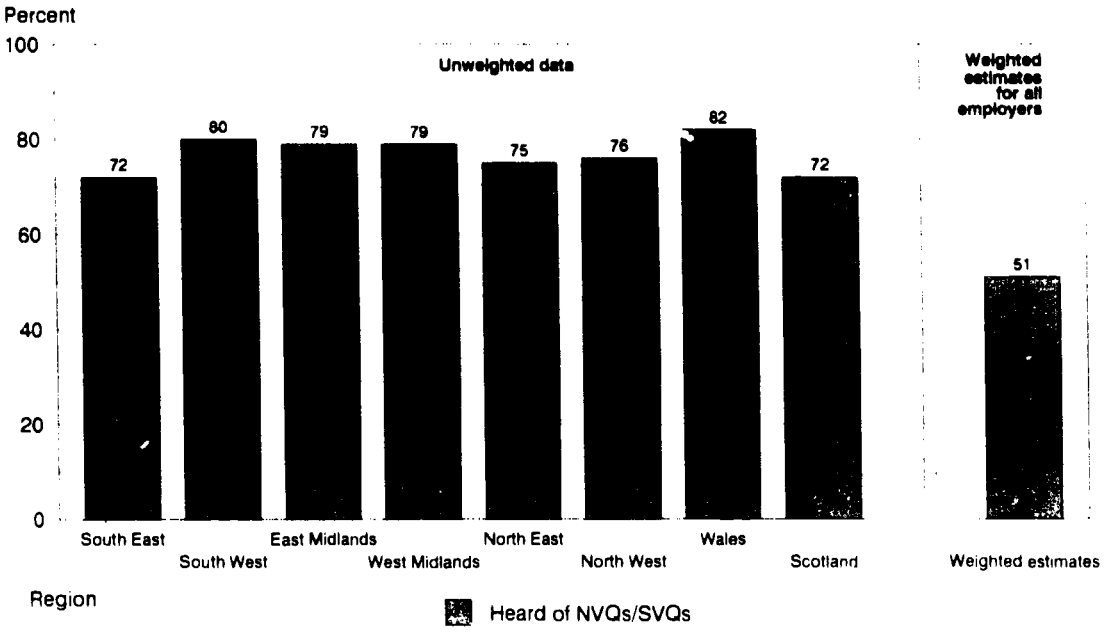
As Fig. 2.5 shows, there was little difference between regions in awareness levels. The lowest levels were found in the South-East and Scotland. These two regions also showed more marked differences from the average in take-up. In Scotland and South East England, NVQ/SVQ usage was recorded as only 12 per cent and 13 per cent respectively, compared with 33 per cent in the North West which had the highest regional penetration level. A number of factors are likely to explain these differences, most notably the sectoral variations between regions. For example, the South East has a much lower proportion of employees in the manufacturing sector and a much higher proportion in banking and finance (where NVQ/SVQ take up is quite low at present, see previous paragraph) compared to the national average.

The difference between Scotland and the rest of Great Britain may be similarly explained by sectoral differences and employer size. They may also be explained by the later start to the introduction of SVQs and the fact that there was no system of conditional accreditation for pre-existing qualifications in Scotland.

2.5 Summary

The survey showed one in five employers were users of NVQ/SVQs, but when this figure is adjusted to reflect the bias towards larger firms in the sample, usage is estimated to be much lower. We estimate about six per cent of UK firms are using NVQ/SVQs (and also Occupational Standards, in a small minority of cases). For a further 22 per cent plans were underway or employers had expressed an interest in using them. In all, 72 per cent of firms currently have no interest in using NVQ/SVQs or Occupational Standards. However, the proportion of total employees in 'NVQ/SVQ user firms' is much higher, 23 per cent, so the potential workforce coverage is higher than the current employer take-up figure suggests.

Figure 2.5 Awareness and use of NVQ/SVQs by region



Source: IMS Survey 1993

The main variable in employer awareness, use and interest in NVQ/SVQs was employer size, with level of awareness and use rising steadily with increasing size. Awareness and use was lowest among employers with 50 employees or less; this category of employer represents about 40 per cent of the total workforce. However, over half of the larger employers in the sample (over 500 employees) were currently using NVQ/SVQs or had plans to do so.

There was a slight tendency for users of NVQ/SVQs to employ more women than other employers, and there were variations in take-up by SIC sector and by geographic region.

3. Information Sources on NVQ/SVQs and Employers' Understanding

We now move on to examine in more detail some of the influencing factors on employers' use and take-up of NVQ/SVQs. In this chapter we focus on information provision and basic understanding of what NVQ/SVQs involve, for those who have at least some level of awareness of NVQ/SVQs. In the next chapter (Chapter 4) we discuss more specific issues which influence decisions to introduce NVQ/SVQs.

As in the previous chapter, most of the analysis presented here is based on the survey. It covers the 75 per cent of the sample who had heard of NVQ/SVQs (see Table 2.1) But we also include some views from NVQ/SVQ users in the case study interviews on the adequacy and quality of information about NVQ/SVQs.

The chapter starts with an overview of how employers heard about NVQ/SVQs and the perceived value of different sources, and then discusses differences between users and non-users, and between employers of different size. It then goes on to assess the accuracy of employers' understanding of NVQ/SVQs and whether or not any serious misconceptions existed.

3.1 Sources of information and how they are perceived

All survey respondents who had heard of NVQ/SVQs (1,'27) were asked to say how they had heard of them, namely, from what source. Some named more than one source, as shown in Table 3.1.

Locally based organisations, such as the TEC/LEC or FE college, were the most important source of information, followed by trade journals and the media. National organisations such as NCVQ and SCOTVEC, Awarding or Lead Bodies, were relatively unimportant.

It is a little surprising that Youth Training (YT) and Employment Training (ET) were mentioned as sources of information by so few, given that a high proportion of NVQ/SVQ users were participating in such schemes (see next chapter, Section 4.3). However, respondents might not have thought of YT or ET in terms of information sources even if it was because of them that information about NVQ/SVQs was obtained from a TEC or LEC.

The 'other' category includes a variety of sources such as direct mailshots, friends and relatives, other companies and job applications.

Table 3.1 Respondents who had heard of NVQ/SVQs: sources of information (unweighted data)

Sources	N	% of respondents
Youth and Employment training	68	6
TEC/LEC, college/university or other local organisation	406	36
Trade, sector, or professional body	212	12
Awarding bodies, NCVQ, SCOTVEC and other national bodies	120	11
Trade or professional journal	220	20
National or local press/radio/TV	204	18
Other sources	295	26
Don't know	37	3

Number of respondents: 1127

Source: IMS Survey 1993

Respondents were then asked whether they had taken any initiatives themselves to find out more about NVQ/SVQs, for instance by going to a meeting or seminar about them. Over half had taken such action, including some who had approached more than one organisation, as shown in Table 3.2 below.

Locally based organisations were by far the main type of organisation approached for further information. Other companies were the main source within the 'other' category, which otherwise was very varied. With the media omitted, a similar range of organisations were approached as those identified as information providers in Table 3.1.

The 599 respondents who could identify organisations which had been contacted were asked how helpful they had found the information and advice provided. The results showed high levels of satisfaction, with over 80 per cent finding it very or fairly helpful (Table 3.3). As the comments on the information and advice show (Table 3.4), there were few specific criticisms: ten per cent found it to be 'generally unhelpful' and nine per cent complained about the content of information received. In the case of the latter, some found it too general and not detailed enough while others complained about it being too complicated and difficult to understand. By contrast, 32 per cent commented on it being helpful and informative and 29 per cent found that explanations were good.

Table 3.2 Respondents who had taken action to find out more about NVQ/SVQs: organisations they approached (unweighted data)

Sources	N	% of respondents
Youth and Employment training	23	3
TEC/LEC, college/university, or other local organisation	427	64
Trade, sector, or professional body	221	33
Awarding bodies, NCVQ, SCOTVEC and other national bodies	172	26
Other sources	73	11
Could not identify organisation	67	10

Number of respondents: 666

Source: IMS Survey 1993

Table 3.3 Respondents who had taken action to find out more about NVQ/SVQs: helpfulness of information and advice received (unweighted data)

Level of helpfulness	N	%
Very helpful	242	40
Fairly helpful	250	42
Neither helpful nor unhelpful	57	10
Fairly unhelpful	31	5
Very unhelpful	12	2
No reply	7	1
All	599	100

Number of respondents: 599

Source: IMS Survey 1993

3.2 Quality of information and NVQ/SVQ take-up

It seems likely that non-users of NVQ/SVQs may have had a less favourable reaction to information and advice they received than users. The quality of information and advice received may help explain why some employers rather than others had used NVQ/SVQs.

Table 3.4 Respondents who had taken action to find out more about NVQ/SVQs: comments on information and advice received (unweighted data)

Comments	N	% of respondents
Helpful, informative, friendly service	194	32
Kept us informed, explained benefits, answered questions	176	29
Clear, concise, comprehensive information	92	15
Nature of services provided	40	7
Enabled us to go ahead	35	6
Other positive comments	46	8
Generally unhelpful	60	10
Too general, not detailed or relevant enough	35	6
Too complicated and not easy to understand	20	3
The goal posts keep being moved	3	0
Other negative comments	11	2

Number of respondents: 599

Source: IMS Survey 1993

Comparison of responses from users and non-users indeed shows there to be a difference: the 270 non-users who had contacted organisations for advice were less likely to say that the information they received was **very** helpful (31 per cent) than the 252 users (45 per cent). However, the proportions finding the information unhelpful were very similar -- seven and nine per cent respectively. Possibly of more significance is the fact that 81 per cent of NVQ/SVQ users reported seeking such advice, whereas only 37 per cent of non-users had done so (Table 3.5). However, there is no way of telling the extent to which this indicates a higher level of initial interest among users as compared with the extent to which the receipt of information encouraged use.

Responses from the smallest category of employers (under 50 employees), who are least likely to use NVQ/SVQs, were also looked at separately. This showed them to have similar views as the rest of the sample on the helpfulness of the information. More significantly, however, only ten per cent of small employers had contacted organisations in order to obtain information compared with 40 per cent for the whole sample.

To summarise, it would appear that the quality of information given may have some bearing on NVQ/SVQ take-up, but the impact is not very marked. What really makes the difference is whether or not employers seek such information and advice in the first place. This is particularly clear in the case of small employers.

Table 3.5 Users and non-users: helpfulness of information and advice received (unweighted data)

Level of helpfulness	% Users	% Non-users
Very helpful	45	31
Fairly helpful	37	52
Neither helpful nor unhelpful	9	10
Unhelpful	9	7
All making contact	252	270
% of total	81	37

Number of respondents: 522

Source: IMS Survey 1993

3.3 Understanding of NVQ/SVQs

3.3.1 Employers' awareness and views

We have reported on employers' perceptions of the information and advice they had received about NVQ/SVQs, finding that for the most part they found that advice helpful. The question then arises of whether employers' understanding of NVQ/SVQs is accurate. Do they appreciate the practical implications? Do they understand the benefits? Are there any serious misconceptions affecting a large proportion of employers?

Therefore, all respondents who had heard of NVQ/SVQs, including those who had not used them, were asked an open-ended question about what they saw as the main differences between NVQ/SVQs and previous types of qualification.

It is worth noting firstly, that 30 per cent of the respondents who were asked this question could not comment because they did not know enough about NVQ/SVQs. Moreover, four out of five of these respondents had not sought information and advice about NVQ/SVQs. Small employers (under 50 employees) were least likely to be able to comment (50 per cent).

Replies from the remainder have been classified as shown in the left hand column of Table 3.6 below, and placed in order of magnitude of responses. Here it appears that respondents' characterisations of NVQ/SVQs — as practical and vocational, competence based and conducted in the workplace, providing a national standard, and being flexible and transferable — are all highly appropriate. Of some concern, however, must be the emphasis put upon NVQ/SVQs as being suitable for the less academic and less able, particularly when

relatively few employers mentioned NVQ/SVQs' ability to provide opportunities for those without qualifications. However, the latter is a feature which would be expected to appeal more to employees than to employers. Overall, the replies represent a fair understanding of what NVQ/SVQs involve.

3.3.2 Comparisons between users and non-users

The levels of response in Table 3.6 are shown separately for users of NVQ/SVQs and non-users, in order to examine whether there is a difference in understanding between them. With three exceptions there is very little difference between NVQ/SVQ users and non-users in this respect. Users were more inclined to recognise the vocational and competence-based nature of NVQ/SVQs than were non-users. More users than non-users also believed that NVQ/SVQs were for the less academic and less able, but this was not statistically significant.

Table 3.6 Respondents who had heard of NVQ/SVQs and felt able to comment: perceived main differences between NVQ/SVQs and former types of qualifications (unweighted data)

Characteristics of NVQ/SVQs	N	Users of NVQ/SVQs %	Non-users %
Practical, vocational and relevant	335	48	39
Competence based and conducted in work place	293	49	30
Recognised national standards. Also recognised in the EEC	126	15	17
Flexible and transferable	116	16	14
Easier and less academic, for the less able	80	13	8
Wider opportunities for employees and those without qualifications	54	8	6
Other positive responses	41	5	5
Little or no difference	47	6	7
Complex and difficult. Too much bureaucracy	53	6	7
Other negative responses	68	9	8
Other neutral responses	54	6	7
Number of respondents: 789		N= 293	N= 496

Source: IMS Survey 1993

3.3.3 Responses to statements about NVQ/SVQs

An alternative approach to checking out respondents' opinions of NVQ/SVQs was to ask them to say whether or not they agreed with a series of statements about NVQ/SVQs, shown in Table 3.7.

Table 3.7 Respondents who had heard of NVQ/SVQs: responses to statements about NVQ/SVQs (unweighted data)

Statements	Agree %	Disagree %	Don't know or can't say %
NVQ/SVQs will raise standards because they reflect the needs of the job.	65	17	18
Gaining an NVQ/SVQ would help motivate many of my staff.	57	31	13
It is beneficial to have supervisors and first line managers carrying out assessment for NVQ/SVQs on the job.	72	13	16
NVQ/SVQs mean more time for training and assessment in the workplace and less in college.	75	9	17
NVQ/SVQs sound good in theory, but in practice it will just mean extra trouble and expense for employers	28	50	22
NVQ/SVQs need to be simpler so that employers and employees can understand.	48	28	24
Employers need direct help from outside experts in order to use NVQ/SVQs.	63	21	15
The cost of NVQ/SVQs should be shared between Government and the employer.	76	13	11
It is being able to do the job that counts – qualifications are irrelevant.	25	64	11
In my sector NVQ/SVQs are too narrow for the real requirements of the job	21	40	39
In my sector NVQ/SVQs are too broad for the real requirements of the job.	18	44	38

Number of respondents: 1042

Source: IMS Survey 1993

For each statement there were a number of respondents who were unable or unwilling to comment. This varied from 11 to 39 per cent, and was highest for the two statements about the breadth and narrowness of NVQ/SVQs, both of which demand most knowledge of NVQ/SVQs.

Amongst those willing to comment, there appears to be a reasonable level of understanding of NVQ/SVQs: the majority agreed with the first four statements, though the extent to which NVQ/SVQs would help to motivate staff had less support. On average, two thirds of respondents agreed with the positive statements and disagreed with the negative statements about NVQ/SVQs. But the majority agreed that NVQ/SVQs need to be simpler, that employers need direct help from outside experts in order to use them, and that the costs of NVQ/SVQs should be shared between government and the employer.

Views of users and non-users were compared (see Appendix 1 Table 3a). For the first four statements, which describe benefits generally

ascribed to NVQ/SVQs, users more frequently agreed than non-users. Similarly users were less inclined than non-users to agree with blanket negative statements about NVQ/SVQs, *ie* that qualifications are irrelevant to doing the job, and they will just mean more trouble and expense for employers.

For the statements which imply that changes need to be made in NVQ/SVQs or the way they are implemented, somewhat more users than non-users agreed, though only for the statement that employers need direct help from outside experts to implement NVQ/SVQs was the difference statistically significant. However, it is of interest that experience of NVQs increases the proportion believing that such direct help is needed.

The main difference between users and non-users on the issues of narrowness or breadth of NVQ/SVQs is that more non-users (half) felt unable to comment. Only one fifth of both groups agreed that NVQ/SVQs were too narrow, while 16 per cent of users and 20 per cent of non-users thought they were too broad. There was no relationship between views on breadth and narrowness and employer size.

The responses of the smallest employers (less than 50 employees), who are the group least likely to use NVQ/SVQs, were also separately examined (see Appendix 1 Table 3b). Here there was consistently less agreement with 'positive' statements about NVQ/SVQs, and higher agreement with 'negative' statements. However, there was less agreement about NVQ/SVQs needing to be simpler, about employers needing direct help, and about costs being shared with government than in the sample as a whole or for non-users as a group.

3.4 Case study findings

The interviews, undertaken as part of the case studies of NVQ/SVQ users, also revealed concerns about the poor quality of information in general on NVQ/SVQs. Many of them pointed to the lack of awareness and understanding of NVQ/SVQs among the general public as a major difficulty when trying to overcome the resistance from employees to take a 'new' qualification. In some cases, for example in Retail, a considerable 'selling' job had to be done by the employers to get it off the ground. One of our Retail cases studies had ceased using NVQ/SVQs (after a two year pilot) because of a lack of employee interest and understanding of the potential benefits, and another was considering pulling out because of, amongst other things, the efforts needed to get the right messages across. Another example, from the Bus and Coach sector, was that trade union representatives at local level were often suspicious of a company's reason for introducing NVQ/SVQs because they genuinely lacked knowledge of vocational qualifications.

The majority of interviewees, including some of the representatives of Awarding Bodies, felt that more marketing of NVQ/SVQs was

needed though opinions varied on how this should be done. Some suggested that more mass media attention was needed comparing, for example, the huge amount of attention given by TV and by the tabloid press to testing in schools and the National Curriculum to that written about the NVQ/SVQ system. Others, particularly those concerned with Management NVQ/SVQs (MCI) felt that enough general advertising had been done, and more practical help and guidance to managers who had not shown interest to date was required. A more flexible approach to providing the support needed for employers to link NVQ/SVQs with their organisational structure and needs was recommended for the Business and Administration sector; also highlighted was a need to communicate with key people within the businesses and a particular lack of adequate information about the availability of relevant NVQ/SVQs.

Problems for small companies were commented on. For example, it was recognised as being particularly difficult to get the right message to small firms with no training culture by a small ITO (*eg* Bus and Coach sector), especially if the trade unions were also taking no action. In Retail, the low awareness among small firms was partly due to the fact that the Retail LB had focused resources to date on getting NVQ/SVQs up and running in the large national chains and had only recently turned attention to some of the more specialised areas of retailing where most small firms are located. Many of these small firms belong to their own trade bodies (*eg* shoe retailers, health foods) which can add another layer of bureaucracy, and slow down the process of dissemination.

Not all interviewees had experienced poor quality of information. Companies in the Chemical sector, for instance, appeared to be very well informed about the complex situation regarding the development of Occupational Standards and VQ/SVQs, and the situation was similar among Glass manufacturers.

3.5 Summary

Among employers who had some level of awareness of NVQ/SVQs, the survey findings show that:

- employers got their information about NVQ/SVQs mainly from local organisations such as TECs and colleges
- those who sought and obtained information and advice had for the most part found it helpful.

Among employers which had heard but were not using NVQ/SVQs only about one third had sought and obtained further information, compared with eight out of ten users. Among small employers, only ten per cent had done so.

There still exists a lack of general understanding of NVQ/SVQs especially among small firms. Almost one in three of the sample were not able to say how NVQ/SVQs differed from other qualifications. Of the remainder, including users and non-users:

- there was reasonable understanding of what NVQ/SVQs involved, and about two thirds were favourably disposed towards them
- about one fifth of respondents said they thought NVQ/SVQs were too broad and one fifth said they were too narrow.

Overall, therefore, there was little evidence that information about NVQ/SVQs had been presented poorly to, or that serious misunderstandings about NVQ/SVQs existed amongst those who were aware of them. More significant is the fact that NVQ/SVQ users were twice as likely as 'aware non-users' to have sought first hand information about them. The problem then appears to be one of penetrating the market sectors, rather than the actual message.

Users were also somewhat more favourably disposed towards NVQ/SVQs than non-users, particularly small non-user employers in their views of NVQ/SVQs. But a majority of both NVQ/SVQ users and non-users (though less of the latter) believed change was needed: in particular, NVQ/SVQs should be simpler, and costs of NVQ/SVQs should be shared between the Government and employers.

Some interviewees in the case studies also commented on the poor quality of information, especially amongst the general public which was a constraint on getting NVQ/SVQs taken up by employees. There was also particular problems in getting the right message across to small firms in some sectors.

4. Factors Affecting Employers' Take-up of NVQ/SVQs

The reasons for employers' interest and use — or lack of interest — in NVQ/SVQs are explored further in this chapter by reference to survey and case study evidence.

As will be recalled from Chapter 2, the main factor distinguishing between NVQ/SVQ users and non-users is employer size. In Chapter 3 we found that another main difference between users and non-users was whether or not they had sought information about NVQ/SVQs from an external organisation. Here we compare attitudes towards NVQ/SVQs of those who had not previously heard of NVQ/SVQs with those who were aware but were not using them. We consider in some detail the factors which encouraged the minority of employers who were using NVQ/SVQs to introduce them and we report on the differences in training provision between users and non-users.

4.1 Attitudes of employers who have not used NVQ/SVQs

We can distinguish four categories of employers:

4.1.1 Not heard of NVQ/SVQs and not interested

In Chapter 2 we reported that among the minority of survey employers who had not heard of NVQ/SVQs (25 per cent of the sample), those interested in finding out more were outnumbered two to one by those who were not (Table 2.2). The reasons (unprompted) of those who were **not** interested are shown in Table 4.1. The most common reasons given for those who were not interested were that existing training provision or apprenticeships were satisfactory or specialist training was required. Just nine per cent gave being a small business as itself a reason for not being interested, and a similar proportion gave lack of time and money as the reason.

Employment size had a limited impact on the factors identified, with one exception. Twenty-three per cent of employers with under 200 employees reported that their lack of interest was related to their employment of graduates and trained staff whereas only nine per cent of employees with over 200 employees reported this factor[1]. This finding is consistent with the tendency for smaller firms to recruit trained staff rather than to train their own.

[1] The number of cases was too small to test the statistical significance of this difference.

Table 4.1 Respondents who had not heard of NVQ/SVQs: reasons for lack of interest in finding out more (unweighted data)

Reason	N	% of respondents
Provide in-house training/apprenticeships	71	32
Staff training in specialist fields	38	17
Not necessary	28	13
No recruitment plans/no staff changes	27	12
Small business	20	9
No time/money	19	9
Employ graduates/trained staff	13	6
Not relevant/necessary	12	5
Other negative responses	19	9
Like to know more	9	4
Don't know	2	1

Number of respondents: 222

Source: IMS Survey 1993

Table 4.2 Respondents who had not heard of NVQ/SVQs: reasons for interest in finding out more (unweighted data)

Reason	N	% of respondents
Relevant to company	41	35
Interest in training	18	15
General interest	18	15
Keep employees up to date with new	10	9
Useful qualifications	4	3
Other positive reasons	6	5
Not necessary/relevant	12	10
Provide training in-house	7	6
Employ graduates/trained staff	6	5
Not interested at the moment	3	3
Other negative reasons	2	2
Don't know	1	1

Number of respondents: 117

Source: IMS Survey 1993

4.1.2 Not heard of NVQ/SVQs and interested

Among this group, the 117 who were very or fairly interested, one third thought NVQ/SVQs would be relevant to their organisation. Smaller numbers said they were interested because of NVQ/SVQs' relevance to training, or expressed general interest (see Table 4.2). A few of these respondents gave reasons why they were **not** interested, the reasons being similar to those of the non-interested group.[2]

4.1.3 Heard of NVQ/SVQs but unlikely to use them in the future

Non-users who had previously heard of NVQ/SVQs were asked the reasons why they intended or did **not** intend to use them in future. The reasons for not using NVQ/SVQs (Table 4.2) were very similar to those already given by employers who were not interested in finding out more. Clearly there was a general perception that NVQ/SVQs were not relevant to employees who 'specialise', and there was also satisfaction with existing training schemes and/or qualifications. Resource problems and the effects of the economic recession were mentioned by a higher number of employers than on the previous question, but a similar proportion gave being a small employer as a reason for lack of interest.

Table 4.3 Respondents who had heard of NVQ/SVQs and are unlikely to use them: reasons given (unweighted data)

Reason	N	% of respondents
Not relevant/work is specialised	131	36
Existing training schemes/qualifications	115	31
Lack of resources/recession	59	16
Only employ trained staff/not recruiting	44	12
Not necessary/low priority	39	11
Lack of knowledge	37	10
Company too small	25	7
Not looking for qualifications	16	4
Other negative reasons	61	16
Don't know	7	2

Number of respondents: 369

Source: IMS Survey 1993

Employment size had little effect on the main reasons they reported, with one exception. More employers with over 200 employees (16 per cent) identified lack of information as an inhibiting factor than did

[2] Given the small number of respondents in this sub-group it is not feasible to disaggregate the responses by employer size.

employers with fewer than 200 employees (11 per cent). This finding is not consistent with the themes discussed in Chapter 3, nor is it statistically significant.

4.1.4 Heard of NVQ/SVQs and likely to use them in the future

Finally, among the fourth group, the 237 who were very or fairly likely to use NVQ/SVQs in future, the most common reason (28 per cent) was that NVQ/SVQs were nationally recognised and up to date, and the next most common reason (given by 21 per cent) was that they would help educate and train staff.

Table 4.4 Respondents who had not heard of NVQ/SVQs and who are likely to use them: reasons given (unweighted data)

Reason	N	% of respondents
Nationally recognised and up to date	67	28
To educate and train staff	49	21
Relevant to industry/company	41	17
Good idea	38	16
Beneficial to employees	25	11
Currently under discussion	25	11
Quality form of assessment	8	3
To be competitive	8	3
Other positive reasons	28	12

Number of respondents: 237

Source: IMS Survey 1993

4.1.5 The factors discouraging interest and use

The survey suggests that, on the whole, the reasons **against** finding out more or using NVQ/SVQs in future were more specific than the reasons given **for** interest. The latter to a large extent were simply 'approving noises'.

Overall, the survey shows that the key factors discouraging employers' interest and use of NVQ/SVQs related to employers':

- existing training and/or qualifications
- specialist work and specialist training needs, and
- perceptions of the relevance and necessity of NVQ/SVQs.

No systematic qualitative data were collected on employers' non-use of NVQ/SVQs because all the employers interviewed in the case studies were all using or about to use NVQ/SVQs. However,

information was collected on issues limiting employers' use of NVQ/SVQs, which will be discussed shortly.

A few large employers who were aware of NVQ/SVQs but were not using them were interviewed during the preliminary stages of the research (Appendix 3). Their views together with information gleaned from the case studies on discontinuation and future use, helps throw some light on the survey findings. However, the information needs to be treated with caution given the limited number of employers interviewed and the fact that they were atypical large employers.

The key reason employers were not interested in NVQ/SVQs was because they were quite content with their existing training provision. Often their training was already based on the idea of standards, competences, performance and assessment. Occasionally their training led to some form of qualification. They saw no added value to using NVQ/SVQs. All they could see was the opposite, an additional expense and the disruption of change. Indeed, the lack of economic imperative to introduce NVQ/SVQs was in its own right a major factor discouraging take-up.

These employers also did not see NVQ/SVQs as relevant both because of their existing training provision and because they did not particularly value NVQ/SVQ certification. Their main concern was high level employee performance and not whether their employees possessed a qualification. Both NVQ/SVQ registration and certification were considered an unnecessary expense and thus a barrier to use.

These issues are very important because they suggest that it **cannot** be assumed that the non-use of NVQ/SVQs automatically implies a lack of interest in or commitment to training. Indeed, the most common reason among survey respondents for non-use of NVQ/SVQs — educated and highly trained staff and specialised work — supports this idea. It was probably employers' perceptions about the inappropriate nature of NVQ/SVQs to meet their specialist training needs rather than a rejection of training that contributed to their non-use.[3]

For instance, in the Retail sector, competition with a recognised qualification or training in specialist areas such as pharmacy, raised questions about the benefits of making a switch to NVQ/SVQs. There was some criticism that NVQ/SVQs had largely been developed for big national chains, in particular the supermarkets, and did not deal adequately as yet with the job contents in specialist areas.

More robust evidence from the survey supports the idea that a rejection of NVQ/SVQs did not necessarily mean a rejection of training. While use of NVQ/SVQs should not be equated with provision of training, it was thought likely that employers with a

[3] This inappropriateness of NVQ/SVQs may possibly be related to the fact that relevant NVQ/SVQs were not yet available for some a finding shown in *National Vocational Qualifications: A survey of progress* (1993) Industrial Relations Services, London.

good record on training would be more likely to use them than others. For this reason survey respondents were asked what proportions of their workforce received on and off job training respectively.

There was some difference overall between users and non-users on this basis, with users providing training for a somewhat higher proportion of their workforce. The difference was more marked for on-job than off-job training. However, overall these differences were not very great.

These finding have some important implications for how NVQ/SVQs need to be promoted in the future and how they need to be made relevant for employers.

4.2 Factors which would encourage non-users' take-up of NVQ/SVQs

Respondents who had heard of NVQ/SVQs but had no plans to use them were also asked an open-ended question about what factors would encourage their organisation to introduce NVQ/SVQs (Table 4.3). The key factor identified by over one in five of employers was if it benefitted the organisation. This is a statement of the obvious. It does illustrate, however, the lack of perceived benefits accruing from NVQ/SVQs and echoes the point made in the previous section about the added value of NVQ/SVQs. Moreover, it suggests a very pragmatic approach by employers to their use of NVQ/SVQs.

Table 4.5 Respondents who had heard of NVQ/SVQs and had no plans to use: factors which would encourage introduction of NVQ/SVQs (unweighted data)

Factors	N	% of respondents
If it benefitted company/industry	159	22
Need more information and/or training	132	18
Financial help/incentives	126	17
When it becomes a legal requirement	101	14
If it raised standards	64	9
Internal factors	84	8
If it benefitted employees, or if they requested it	59	8
If NVQ/SVQs were simplified and made less bureaucratic	26	4
If they were recognised nationally and were used by others	31	4
Others	61	8

Number of respondents: 731

Source: IMS Survey 1993

The rest of the comments about what would encourage the use of NVQ/SVQs were rather more informative. The three most relevant and popular factors were: the need for more information and/or training, a desire for financial help, and an intention to act only if NVQ/SVQs became a legal requirement.

The level of response from those wanting financial help (17 per cent) and from those wanting NVQ/SVQs to be simpler (four per cent) contrasts with much higher levels of agreement to statements on the same subject (*nb* Table 3.7)[4]. Clearly the form of question influences the outcome. High proportions of respondents agreed to statements about the need for simplification and for government subsidy when given the choice of agreeing or disagreeing, but when asked to volunteer their own ideas about what would encourage take-up, these factors came to mind in only a few cases.

Factors influencing the smallest employers (under 50 employees) were compared with those for the rest of the sample. Small employers were less concerned about national recognition and raising standards than larger employers, and less concerned about needing information and financial help, while they were more likely to say that a legal requirement would be necessary before they would take action. However, none of these differences were statistically significant.

The relevance of the need for more information and/or training is demonstrated by the large proportion of respondents who had not themselves obtained information from an outside organisation (see Chapter 3, Section 3.2). In addition, a recurring theme in all the interviews with Lead Bodies (and among many case study employers) was the way in which the lack of information about NVQ/SVQs acted as a barrier to take-up (see Chapter 3). Not only were employers often ignorant about NVQ/SVQs but so too were employees (see Chapter 6, Section 6.4).

The proportion (17 per cent) of survey respondents who volunteered that a desire for financial help was a factor likely to encourage take-up was considerably lower than the proportion (75 per cent) of non-users who agreed to the statement that the costs of NVQ/SVQs should be shared between government and employers (see Appendix 1 Table 3a). It is not clear why there should be such a difference. However, the case study interviews although concerned with users, reiterated the importance of funding: an issue we shall discuss in greater depth below.

Information from the case studies also helps illustrate employers' desire only to introduce NVQ/SVQs if they became a legal requirement. For instance, in Hairdressing there were many who believed that *'only by making this a registered occupation will we make people serious about training'*. In some other sectors, such as in Care and insurance, there was a feeling that if regulatory bodies insisted on NVQ/SVQs as an indication of professional competence then employers would have to introduce NVQs.

[4] To avoid the possibility of the statements influencing responses to the open ended question, the open question was asked first.

The case studies also showed the current influence of legislation on actual take-up. In the Bus and Coach sector the pattern of NVQ/SVQ take-up can also largely be explained by legal requirements. A key reason why the bus drivers' NVQ/SVQ is being used is because it incorporates the Public Carrying Vehicle licence which is a statutory requirement. This is not the case with the vehicle engineering NVQ/SVQ which is used much less widely in the industry.

Legislation has indirectly played an important role in explaining the introduction and take-up of NVQ/SVQs in the Care sector. The 1989 Children's Act and recent Care in the Community, and Criminal Justice legislation have all laid down certain baseline standards for service delivery. The NVQ/SVQs have been aligned to these baseline standards and so although not compulsory are being used to meet the statutory requirements. Thus the owner of a small private nursing home had introduced NVQs because he thought it soon would become a requirement for registration under the Care in the Community legislation and thus a condition for receiving Local Authority funded patients.

Once again these factors that would (and have) encourage(d) take-up, and in part acted as barriers to take-up, have clear implications for any policies aimed at increasing NVQ/SVQ take-up.

4.3 Factors encouraging users' take-up of NVQ/SVQs

The 310 respondents who were using NVQ/SVQs were asked an open question about which factors influenced the decision to introduce NVQ/SVQs (Table 4.6).

Table 4.6 NVQ/SVQ users: factors which influenced the decision to introduce NVQ/SVQs (unweighted data)

Factor	N	% of respondents
Staff development and performance	133	49
External requirements	97	36
Training related	76	28
Vocational, recognised or national qualifications	58	21
Financial	29	11
Improve image compete in market	16	6
Other positive factors	49	18

Number of respondents: 270

Source: IMS Survey 1993

There was much more consensus among users in the survey about relevant factors than for any question previously reported on for non-users. Almost half reported that they had introduced NVQ/SVQs to improve staff development and performance. Over a third said that they had introduced NVQ/SVQs due to external demands which included reference to Youth Training, Government or TEC grants, college use of NVQ/SVQs, total quality management, Investors in People, and response to requests from ITOs/Lead Bodies to take part in pilot schemes. Financial factors — mentioned by only 11 per cent — also included reference to TEC funding for training plus comments such as *'cheaper than sending people to college'*. The number saying that image/market competition was a factor was very low.

Employment size again had some impact on the factors identified. It made no difference to the four most frequently mentioned factors, but there were differences — though only at the 0.1 level of significance — in the emphasis placed on these factors between large and small firms. Thus 52 per cent of employers with more than 200 employees mentioned staff development and performance compared to 44 per cent of employers with less than 200 employees. Similarly, larger employers attached greater weight to the fact that NVQ/SVQs were vocational, recognised or national qualifications than did smaller (25 per cent compared with 13 per cent) employers. The reasons for these differences are not obvious but may be related to the way in which these employers use NVQ/SVQs.

The case study interviews provided a wealth of information on how and why these factors influenced employers' decision to introduce NVQ/SVQs. For the sake of exposition these will be grouped together under separate headings.

4.3.1 Staff development and performance

The case studies illuminate what it was about NVQ/SVQs that users thought would improve their staff's development and performance. In particular, the fact that NVQ/SVQs and Occupational Standards are competence based was probably the main selling point for employers. The competence based approach meant that they were relevant to raising and maintaining standards of performance, which was a key consideration for some employers, while work based learning was thought to have considerable advantages over traditional college courses both because of its relevance and convenience. Another advantage of the competence based approach was that it was thought to contribute to the aim in some organisations of giving line managers more responsibility for their staff's training and development.

Employers using Management NVQ/SVQs and in the Retail sector seemed to be particularly aware of these general advantages, while in the Bus and Coach sector the use of engineering NVQ/SVQs and Occupational Standards was expected to contribute to multi-skilling. Use of explicit Occupational Standards — whether national or in-house varieties — was seen as having a valuable role in the achievement and maintenance of health and safety procedures within the Chemical industry.

Belief in the competence-based approach did not, however, mean that all enthusiasts accepted available NVQ/SVQs and Occupational Standards. Some — as reported in Chapter 5 (Section 5.5) — thought they should be delivered more flexibly via Units rather than whole NVQ/SVQs, while others, for instance in Glass and in one case for Management, preferred to use their own competence based qualifications or standards. Lack of acceptance of the Lead Body's generic Occupational Standards was leading to lack of take-up in the Glass industry generally, and low take-up to date in Chemicals was expected to improve once revised and more flexible sets of Occupational Standards and NVQ/SVQs became available. The issue of flexibly constructed NVQ/SVQs was particularly important among Chemicals companies employing engineers.

Most employers recognised the advantages to employees in having nationally recognised qualifications, though this would not be a sufficient reason alone for using NVQ/SVQs. Many believed that the fact of recognition of employees' experience was a motivating factor (see Chapter 8, Section 8.3), and that this had the potential to improve performance. Some thought they owed it to employees to provide a qualification. However, not all were convinced that the NVQ/SVQ as such added enough extra value to what the consistent use of Occupational Standards alone might achieve.

4.3.2 The role of YT and ET in take-up

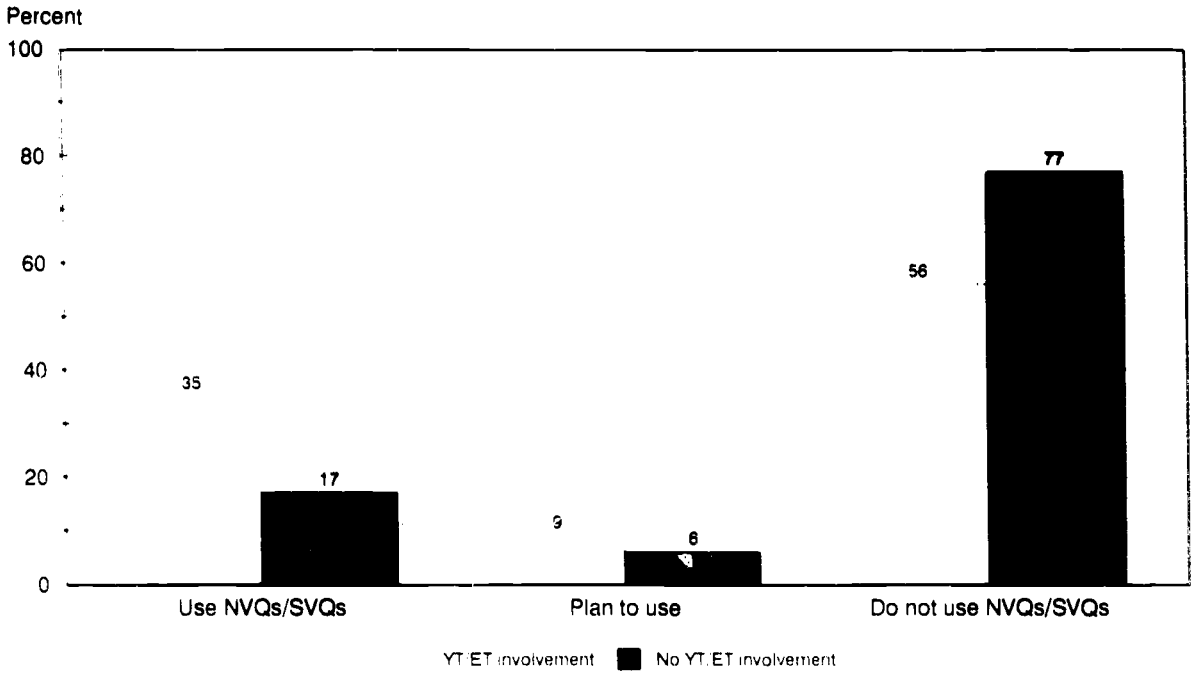
It will be recalled that two of the external factors identified by survey respondents which influenced their decision to introduce NVQ/SVQs were Youth Training and Government or TEC grants (Table 4.6). These two factors are interlinked.

In order to receive TEC funding for Youth and Employment Trainees[5] employers have to train them towards NVQ/SVQs and some of the funding they receive is output related. It is not surprising, therefore, that survey respondents identified YT and ET as a significant external factor influencing their decision to introduce NVQ/SVQs. Nor is it surprising that the case study employers with access to such funding, for instance for Business Administration, Clothing, Hairdressing and Retail NVQ/SVQs, saw it as a key factor affecting their use of NVQ/SVQs.

The importance of YT and/or ET was confirmed by other data from the survey. It was hypothesised that involvement in YT and/or ET would increase the likelihood of employers' use of NVQ/SVQs. Therefore questions were asked of all respondents who had heard of NVQ/SVQs about whether they had had Youth Trainees, Employment Trainees, or had been a Managing Agent for either during the last two years (Fig. 4.1)

[5] Since the study was undertaken Employment Training has been subsumed under the Government initiative 'Training for Work'.

Figure 4.1 Respondents who had heard of NVQ/SVQs: use of NVQ/SVQs and involvement with Youth Training and/or Employment Training (unweighted data)



Source: IMS Survey 1993

Of those organisations which had taken part in Youth and/or Employment Training within the last two years, 44 per cent were using or planning to use NVQ/SVQs compared with only 23 per cent who had not had such involvement, and this is highly significant at the 0.005 level.

The same relationship — between NVQ/SVQ usage and YT/ET involvement — was tested for statistical significance for different sizes of employer. The relationship **was** highly significant (at the 0.005 level) for employers with fewer than 100 employees, significant at the 0.025 level for employers with between 100 and 199 employees, but **not** strong for employers in the 200 to 499 category. However, the relationship was as significant for the largest category of employers (500 plus) as for the smallest.

Thus it appears that the existence of national training schemes, with funding related to trainees' achievement of NVQ/SVQs, has had a considerable impact on take-up, though how these arrangements interrelate with employer size is not clear.

Although the funding attached to YT and ET appears vital, other data from the survey and case studies suggest that YT and ET may have influenced employers' take-up of NVQ/SVQs in other ways. In other words, there was evidence to suggest firstly, that NVQ/SVQs are not just being used for YT and ET, and secondly, the use of NVQ/SVQs for YT and ET has had a knock-on effect on other training provision within companies.

The survey showed that 78 per cent of employees working towards their NVQ/SVQs were neither Youth nor Employment Trainees (see Chapter 6, Table 6.1). This finding suggests that NVQ/SVQ participation has extended well beyond Youth and Employment Trainees who within our survey sample were only a small proportion of all those involved in NVQ/SVQs.

The knock-on effects of YT are well illustrated in Retail. Here the main driving force had been YT both in meeting the costs of training and assessment and in helping the system to gain some momentum by raising awareness among employees. Once Youth Trainees were seen working towards their Retail NVQ other employees wanted to know why they were not getting such good training. These other employees where then enthused by NVQs and wanted to take them. The *'me too'* factor, therefore, helped to increase the use of occupationally specific NVQ/SVQs.

Employers' positive experiences of introducing NVQ/SVQs in occupationally specific areas and the expertise they gained in the process also led to them to introduce other NVQ/SVQs. For instance, in a Retail company, the person responsible for introducing the occupationally specific Retail NVQs was acting as an internal consultant for another manager who was introducing Business Administration NVQs. In this case the initial impetus behind NVQs had been YT.

This diverse take-up of NVQ/SVQs is important because it suggests that NVQ/SVQs are being used on their own merits and not just because they are a government requirement — a finding echoed by the our survey (Chapter 6 Table 6.1) and in other recent research[6]. Moreover, there was little evidence in the case studies supporting the idea that NVQ/SVQ's association with YT had affected NVQ/SVQ's image. For instance, case study employers believed NVQ/SVQs were equally appropriate for employees of all age groups and experience.

4.3.3 Funding issues

The importance of TEC funding for Youth Trainees' achievement of NVQ/SVQs has already been noted. It is worth expanding on funding issues because a good number of survey respondents specifically mentioned government funding and financial factors as influencing their decision to introduce NVQ/SVQs.

The significance of TEC funding for training towards NVQ/SVQs was clearly observable among some case study employers, particularly for Business Administration, Hairdressing, Clothing and Retail. Most of NVQ/SVQ usage in these sectors could be attributed to TEC funding for training. TEC funding was also sometimes available for pilots of NVQ/SVQs among established employees; among case studies of employers using Business Administration NVQ/SVQs, 4 out of 5 were receiving funding from TECs under one head or the other.

[6] *National Vocational Qualifications: A survey of progress* (1993) Industrial Relations Services, London, April.

Consequently, TEC funding for training towards NVQ/SVQs helps explain the level of take-up in certain sectors and not others. Similarly, it helps explain which NVQ/SVQ Level employers used. Usually TEC funding was linked to training for Level 2 and this helps explain why take-up was greatest at this Level — a finding also confirmed in the survey (see Chapter 5, Table 5.6).

The fact that it was necessary for large employers operating across wide geographical areas to negotiate with different TECs using different criteria was a complaint commonly made. In some cases this meant that action was slowed down, but in others that employers went ahead regardless, meanwhile bewailing the lack of a subsidy to which they thought they were entitled. One national Retail chain had employed an external consultant to do the negotiations with TECs on their behalf and would not have participated in NVQs otherwise.

A few employers in Hairdressing and Retail, but most of those using Business Administration, deplored the fact that TEC funding was available only for completion of whole NVQ/SVQs rather than Units. This was not just a funding issue, but was also based on the belief that use of Units would in some circumstances be both more appropriate to employers' needs and a better reflection of employees' competence than whole NVQ/SVQs.

In Clothing several employers pointed out how the funding arrangements extended unnecessarily both the duration of training and the time within which trainees could be awarded their NVQ. It was in the companies' interests to spread the YT training over two years so that they could get payments for the whole two years. It was not in their interests for employees to be awarded their NVQ before the two year period was up otherwise they would lose funding. Such a constraint brings into question the idea that NVQ/SVQ candidates can work at their own pace and be awarded their NVQ/SVQ accordingly.

Some employers, for instance in Care, only gained TEC funding for assessor training but they too were frustrated that TECs' policy on such funding varied.

Public funding not via TECs was also available to Social Services Departments in Local Authorities. The Training Support Programme is a government initiative which pays money directly to Social Services Departments (and the voluntary and private sector) to facilitate training across the board.

The importance of public funding varied across and within our case study sectors. Within Hairdressing the low levels of take-up of Level 3 were primarily because of the lack of YT funding. Many employers expected individuals to do it in their own time at their own cost which some were finding very difficult, on both grounds. One employer in Hairdressing was likely to stop using NVQs Level 2 for young people's training if the level of funding was further reduced.

In Clothing and Business Administration TEC funding was an important factor. In particular, a few employers in both sectors had gained TEC funding for re-training existing employees under the age

of 25 years. These people would not have had access to NVQ/SVQs without such funding. Similarly, public funding was extremely important in Local Authority Social Services Departments as it meant that money was earmarked for training. Thus within Care it had helped to establish NVQ/SVQs.

By contrast, in the Chemicals industry, public funding was rarely raised as an issue. The large companies in question were not major recruiters of YT-age entrants and in any case would be unlikely to be swayed in their decisions about training by such considerations.

4.3.4 Training culture and National Training Initiatives

The fact that NVQ/SVQs were training related was a significant factor impacting on 28 per cent of survey respondents' decision to introduce NVQ/SVQs. In addition, a sizable number of respondents reported National Training Initiatives as influential (mentioned as one of the external factors, Table 4.4).

The case studies reinforced the importance of these factors. They clearly showed that NVQ/SVQs were most likely to be used where they fitted with employers' wider training agenda and culture. This was most apparent in those companies which were participating in one of the many Government Training Initiatives like Investors in People or other quality initiatives like TQM or BS 5750. These initiatives have gone some way to reinforce a more 'training friendly' environment and culture. They have helped to put training higher on companies' agendas by offering a 'badge' which some companies believed may help their competitive edge.

For instance, three Chemicals companies had set targets related to National Education and Training Targets. All were companies with well developed training cultures and sophisticated training infrastructures. Similarly, the largest employer interviewed in the Glass sector had set the goal of providing 90 per cent of employees with an educational/vocational qualification by the end of 1994. Interest in contributing to national initiatives was also noticeable among employers using Business Administration NVQ/SVQs, who tended to be taking part in Investors in People.

Within these companies, therefore, NVQ/SVQs were part of a wider strategy which was primarily training driven (rather than qualification driven). There was no distinct causal relationship for instance, between NVQ/SVQs and Investors in People. Rather, these initiatives complemented each other, often reflecting an existing strong training culture.

Organisations with a strong training culture which pre-dated NVQ/SVQs and Occupational Standards were the ones most likely to embrace NVQ/SVQs and the positive training qualities they offered described above (section 4.4.1). Such employers were found in all sectors and, with a few exceptions, were large.

4.3.5 Other factors

Other factors which influenced the take-up of NVQ/SVQs emerging from the case studies included:

- The extent to which NVQ/SVQs fitted with companies' labour utilisation strategies.

In a few such cases a major re-organisation was a factor in the decision to use competence-based systems. Three employers in the Glass sector introduced their own competence based approach to enable them to create a flatter, multi-skilled and flexible workforce. A water company, a small print company and a local authority had decided to use Management NVQ/SVQs as part of re-training to develop a new management style. In the Care sector the introduction of Project 2000, which is primarily about the training and education of nurses, had led to gaps in labour power requirements on the wards. Thus NVQs were being used for training nursing auxiliaries to take over the work previously undertaken by student nurses.

- Sector specific influencing factors

The introduction of Project 2000 in Care was just one instance of a sector specific factor helping to explain the introduction of NVQs. Another factor, in Hairdressing, Retail and Care, was the fact that no equivalent qualification existed prior to the introduction of NVQ/SVQs. In addition, the entrepreneurial nature of the Hairdressing Training Board combined with its long term involvement with Youth Training had helped promote NVQ/SVQs for young people to employers who had their own training establishment or were accustomed to using colleges. Employers with training cultures in these sectors were convinced of the value of Occupational Standards and thought that insistence on qualifications would help improve the sector's image. NVQ/SVQs were also perceived to be important for recruitment in Hairdressing for school leavers only because careers officers knew about them. Similarly, they were considered an important recruitment tool in Clothing for recruits of all ages.

Similar considerations affected the Retail sector where NVQ/SVQs were expected to raise the status of the sector and attract recruits. NVQ/SVQs were also seen as providing a vocational and internal route towards management for entrants without academic qualifications. The fact that some household name retail companies had taken up NVQ/SVQs had helped promote NVQ/SVQs among large retailers generally.

4.4 Continuity and change

When survey respondents were asked whether they intended to continue using NVQ/SVQs the great majority — 89 per cent — said yes. Only five respondents said no, and the remainder, ten per cent, were undecided. The 35 who had decided not to continue or were undecided were asked their reasons. These were very mixed. The largest category — only seven respondents — had a variety of

objections to NVQ/SVQs including cost, time and difficulty; another six were waiting for the results of a pilot and another five were 'waiting to see' dependent on, for example *'whether the Government changes the system again'*; or NVQ/SVQs become more recognised; or staff show interest.

Similarly, most employers in the case studies intended to continue using NVQ/SVQs although one in Hairdressing may stop using them if public funding is further reduced. Similarly, in Retail one employer had withdrawn from YT because of the problems of negotiating funding across a number of TECs, thus putting the continuing use of NVQs for employees in jeopardy.

All users in the survey were asked what changes they would like to see to make it easier for employers to extend the availability of NVQ/SVQs to their employees. Here a larger proportion mentioned financial assistance than had occurred in response to previous questions.

Table 4.7 NVQ/SVQ users: their suggestions for extending the availability of NVQ/SVQs to employees (unweighted data)

Change	N	% of respondents
Financial assistance	72	28
Provide more information	53	21
Simpler language easier for employees	26	10
Easier to implement/in-house assessment	14	6
Provide more training	7	3
Eliminate some of the paperwork/bureaucracy	16	6
No changes necessary	36	13
Other	41	16

Number of respondents: 254

Source: IMS Survey 1993

Employment size did have quite a strong impact on attitudes towards the issues identified. First, a higher proportion of employers with less than 200 employees (24 per cent) believed that no changes were necessary compared with employers with more than 200 employees (ten per cent)[7]. This difference may be because smaller employers had tended to experience fewer difficulties in implementing NVQ/SVQs (see Chapter 7, Section 7.1). Secondly, fewer small employers (17 per cent) identified financial assistance compared with large employers (33 per cent). This may be related to their smaller volume of training and number of NVQ/SVQ candidates which reduced the overall

[7] All the differences reported in this paragraph are statistically significant at least at the 0.05 level

financial burden of implementing NVQ/SVQs. Finally, more small employers (14 per cent) than large employers (five per cent) wanted simpler language and changes that would make NVQ/SVQs easier for employees. The difference may be associated with differential access to information already noted among employers and the fact that small employers are less likely to have personnel with specialist knowledge of NVQ/SVQs, unlike larger employers.

Employers in the case study interviews reiterated all these issues. They also wanted greater flexibility in the way they could use and adapt NVQ/SVQs whereby they had a sense of ownership of national Standards. Many suggested that they wanted no further changes and especially no changes *'in the NVQ/SVQ goal posts'*. In other words, they wanted time to consolidate their NVQ/SVQ activities and no further changes that would disrupt that process.

4.5 Summary

In addition to employer size and whether employers had sought information about NVQ/SVQs from an external organisation, involvement in Youth or Employment Training was a factor which helped explain whether or not employers used NVQ/SVQs: twice as many survey respondents who had had such involvement were using them as those who had not. The prevalence of TEC funding both for Youth Training and in connection with pilots of NVQ/SVQs was illustrated by the case studies. Having to negotiate with more than one TEC was a problem for many large organisations. The question of financial assistance was a theme running through responses to all survey questions, but mentioned by less than one third of respondents.

Among non-users of NVQ/SVQs reasons for *not* being interested in learning more or using them were more specific than reasons in favour. Overall, the survey shows that the key factors discouraging employers' interest and use of NVQ/SVQs related to employers':

- existing training and/or qualifications
- specialist work and specialist training needs, and
- perceptions of the relevance and necessity of NVQ/SVQs.

What these factors suggest is that the non-use of NVQ/SVQs cannot be equated automatically with a lack of interest in or commitment to training *per se*.

The factors most likely to influence this group in favour of NVQ/SVQs included:

- greater benefits
- provision of more information
- financial assistance, and
- NVQs becoming a legal requirement.

Small employers were less concerned about information and financial assistance than other employers, but a fair proportion of them would introduce NVQ/SVQs only if they became a legal requirement.

Half of NVQ/SVQ users said their main reason for introducing NVQ/SVQs was to improve staff development and performance. A similar reason for possible future interest was mentioned by about one fifth of non-users.

Non-users were most impressed by the fact that NVQ/SVQs were nationally recognised, a consideration which was mentioned by users but was not a primary motive. Case study employers recognised the advantages to employees of having their skills and experience recognised through a national qualification, but this would not be sufficient reason alone for take-up as far as they were concerned.

It was clear amongst the case study employers that the competence based nature of NVQ/SVQs and Occupational Standards was what recommended them to employers as a means of improving staff development and performance. However, if their sector's Occupational Standards and NVQ/SVQs were regarded as inappropriate for their own organisation's needs, take-up would be depressed.

Many of the case study employers had a strong training culture developed in advance of their use of NVQ/SVQs and Occupational Standards, and some of these were also keen to contribute to national training initiatives.

In sectors where many employees previously had been unqualified, many of them women, such as Hairdressing, Retail and Care, Occupational Standards and NVQ/SVQs were seen as a means of demonstrating that standards were being raised and maintained. Use of NVQ/SVQs would help raise the sector's image and improve recruitment.

In conclusion, the key factors encouraging employers to introduce NVQ/SVQs were:

- NVQ/SVQs contribution to training and in particular, staff development and performance
- Youth and Employment Training
- public funding, and
- the organisations' training culture and National Training Initiatives.

All the factors both encouraging and discouraging the take-up of NVQ/SVQs have important implications for future policies aimed at increasing take-up.

5. Use of NVQ/SVQs and Occupational Standards

This chapter describes which NVQ/SVQs and Occupational Standards are being used and in which industrial sectors. We then explore employers' reasons for using Occupational Standards separately from NVQ/SVQs, and how employers' views about the appropriateness or otherwise of Occupational Standards for their industry affected level of usage of the Occupational Standards themselves and/or NVQ/SVQs. Finally, we assess how implementation issues could affect which NVQ/SVQs were used and the level of use.

The chapter makes use of survey results and case study findings.

5.1 NVQs in use

Survey respondents who said they used NVQ/SVQs were asked to name all NVQ/SVQs in use in their organisation up to a maximum of four. Their replies have been classified under the categories used in the NVQ Monitor[1] and are shown in Table 5.1. Column 1 shows the number of NVQs under each of those categories referred to by respondents. Total usage of each main category of NVQs (Column 2) represents the total number of mentions of each NVQ within that category. Column 3 shows the number of NVQ awards to date as recorded in the NVQ Monitor, June 1993.

The two information sources compared here differ mainly in time-scale, the NVQ monitor data summarising achieved NVQs since their inception, and the survey data referring to NVQs in use during February and March 1993. The results are fairly similar: NVQs within the category of Providing Business Services have the highest usage on both counts, Constructing and Manufacturing are in the middle of the range, and Transporting is one of the lowest. In general, service sector type NVQs are used more than industrial sector ones.

Usage according to the survey is high for Developing and Extending Skill and Knowledge compared with awards to date. This is probably explained by the relatively late arrival of Training NVQs combined with the role they play in qualifying people in connection with APL and as assessors of NVQs. It appears that the number recently starting to work for these NVQs is high.

[1] It is recognised that the NVQ Monitor has limitations and excludes Scotland. Consequently the following analysis in this section also excludes the 12 per cent of Scottish users. The overall analysis, however, should be treated with caution.

Table 5.1 NVQ/SVQ users: NVQ/SVQs in use (unweighted data)

NVQ Monitor Categories	No. of NVQs referred to in survey (1)	Total no. of uses (2)	No. of awards (3)
Tending animals and plants	4	11	6,072
Extracting and providing natural resources	2	11	1,489
Constructing	6	50	20,253
Engineering	12	78	22,912
Manufacturing	10	29	12,330
Transporting	2	2	1,130
Providing goods and services	10	66	94,788
Providing health, care and protective services	9	56	36,261
Providing business services	11	172	158,725
Developing and extending knowledge and skill	4	11	34
Other		35	D/K
Total	68	521	353,994
Number of respondents: 29			

Source: IMS Survey 1993 and The NVQ Monitor

Engineering comes out as the second highest level of usage among survey employers, but only fourth in terms of awards to date. This again may be explained by recent developments, namely, that a number of engineering NVQs have recently become available.

5.2 NVQ/SVQs in use within sectors

While there is a fairly direct relationship between some Lead Body sectors and Standard Industrial sectors, *eg* construction, other NVQ/SVQs such as Management, are cross-sectoral. Therefore it was hard to predict what the pattern of NVQ/SVQ awareness and usage would be within SICs. Indeed the findings (see Appendix 1 Table 5a) were very mixed. While usage within the finance and banking sector was low, consistent with take-up to date of finance NVQ/SVQs, construction was shown to have the highest usage overall, which was not consistent with the findings on NVQ/SVQ usage reported above. Energy and water, metal goods, and other services were also sectors with high usage.

It therefore seemed relevant to look at usage of NVQ/SVQs across industrial sectors. Full details for use of NVQ/SVQs are shown in Table 5b in Appendix 1. Table 5.2 shows the same results graphically.

From these it is clear that use of a range of NVQ/SVQs is to be found within all industrial sectors, with other Services, at the extreme, using NVQ/SVQs from all categories.

It was to be expected that Business Administration and Management NVQ/SVQs (within Providing Business Services) would be used by all industrial sectors, and that Engineering would also be considered to be cross-sectoral. According to these findings, NVQ/SVQs from within Manufacturing and Providing Good and Services are largely cross-sectoral too. Only Care NVQ/SVQs — Providing Health, Social and Protective Services — are found just in one sector, albeit a broad one.

5.3 Use of Occupational Standards

As was shown in Chapter 2 (see Section 2.2) 72 survey respondents described themselves as using Occupational Standards in their own right, either in addition to NVQ/SVQs or instead of them (see Table 5.3 and Table 5c Appendix 1 for information about those used *instead of* NVQs). In the remaining cases they were used both separately and in conjunction with NVQ/SVQs.

Respondents who said they were using Occupational Standards in their own right instead of NVQ/SVQs were asked why this was. Of valid responses from 19 respondents, 8 implied that Occupational Standards were being used in preparation for NVQ/SVQs. Eight respondents preferred Occupational Standards because they were simpler to use or less expensive. Only one respondent said that NVQ/SVQs were not suitable for their industry, and others mentioned specific purposes such as for the graduate programme or for job descriptions.

All 72 respondents who used Occupational Standards were asked whether they had adapted the Occupational Standards to meet the needs of their organisation. Nearly half of these (35) had done so, and some were doing so in more than one way (Table 5.4).

The same respondents were asked what purposes they were using Occupational Standards for. A few of them were using them for more than one purpose (Table 5.5).

The fact that the two most common uses of Occupational Standards were training-related is consistent with the finding that many respondents were using them in place of or in preparation for NVQ/SVQs.

All users of Occupational Standards except two, who had not yet decided, intended to continue using them.

Through case studies it was possible to investigate in more depth employers' reasons for use of NVQ/SVQs and/or Occupational Standards. The findings are consistent with those from the survey.

Table 5.2 Usage of NVQ/SVQs by SIC (unweighted data)

NVQ CATEGORIES

SIC	Number of users in SIC category	Tending animals and plants	Extracting and providing natural resources	Construction	Engineering	Manufacturing	Transport	Providing goods and services	Providing health, social and protective services	Providing business services	Developing and extending knowledge and skills	Other
Agriculture	4				■					■		
Energy and water	14		■	■		■		■		■		■
Extraction of minerals	11				■	■		■		■	■	
Metal goods	43			■	■	■	■			■	■	■
Other manufacturing	34				■	■		■		■		■
Construction	23			■	■					■		■
Distribution, hotels and catering	56	■			■	■		■		■		■
Transport and communications	4				■		■			■	■	■
Banking and finance	4									■		
Other services	112	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
TOTAL	306											

[illegible]

Source: IMS Survey 1993

Table 5.3 Usage of Occupational Standards by SIC (unweighted data)

NVQ CATEGORIES

SIC category	Number of users in SIC category	Tending animals and plants	Extracting and providing natural resources	Construction	Engineering	Manufacturing	Transport	Providing goods and services	Providing health, social and protective services	Providing business services	Developing and extending knowledge and skills	Other
Agriculture	1							■				
Energy and water												
Extraction of minerals												
Metal goods												
Other manufacturing	2				■					■	■	■
Construction												
Distribution, hotels and catering	6					■		■		■		■
Transport and communications	2							■				■
Banking and finance	2									■		
Other services	18	■		■	■			■	■	■		■
TOTALS	31											

Source: Employers, 31

Source: IMS Survey 1993

Table 5.4 Users of Occupational Standards who had adapted them (unweighted data)

Nature of adaptation	N	% of respondents
Used only the relevant parts	21	60
Added statements	18	51
Re-written in company language	16	48
Adapted in some other way	4	11

Number of respondents: 35

Source: IMS Survey 1993

Table 5.5 Users of Occupational Standards: purposes for which Occupational Standards were being used (unweighted data)

Purpose	N	% of respondents
Diagnose training needs	14	19
Training	14	19
Job description	11	15
To appraise staff	10	14
To raise standards	5	7
To assist recruitment	3	4
To develop programmes	3	4
Others	17	24

Number of respondents: 72

Source: IMS Survey 1993

Few of the case study employers were using or intended to use Occupational Standards only. The exception was in Chemicals where most companies had used only Occupational Standards to date. Chemicals were using Occupational Standards in part because of dissatisfaction with existing NVQ/SVQs and in part because of the costs associated with NVQ/SVQs. Moreover, the companies had adapted the Occupational Standards to fit with their specific company requirements. There was a likelihood, however, that some of the companies currently using Occupational Standards only would introduce NVQ/SVQs once the new NVQ/SVQs based on revised Occupational Standards had been fully accredited. Others would stay with Occupational Standards alone because of the costs of NVQ/SVQs.

The costs associated with NVQ/SVQs was also a factor for the probable use of Occupational Standards only in the Glass sector.

Although, as we will see below the generic Occupational Standards had not been well received within the industry.

One other case study organisation had explicitly chosen the use of Occupational Standards as opposed to NVQs: they had written and were using their own standards based on MCI Standards on the grounds that the time involved in portfolio building made NVQs impractical and too time-consuming. Other employers (for instance concerned with Business Administration) had not yet made up their minds, for similar reasons, whether to use of Occupational Standards and NVQ/SVQs to structure training extended to supporting certification permanently.

One organisation in the Care sector, a local authority Social Services Department, was hoping to use Occupational Standards in the near future. The intention was to use Occupational Standards and the ideas and principles underpinning them to develop baseline standards to meet the required standards demanded from legislation governing their work, such as the Children Act 1989 and the NHS and Community Care Act 1990. They wanted managers to use Occupational Standards as a tool for measuring the quality of service delivery. Assessment would not be accredited but would be integrated into the supervision process and help in work planning, identifying people's development needs, and monitoring the overall effectiveness of the team and team working. In other words, it was hoped that Occupational Standards would help define:

- the nature of the service required
- what people needed to do in their jobs, and
- who does what in their jobs.

It was intended to record the outcomes of supervision so that these could be used at a later date for Accreditation of Prior Learning and NVQs.

The main factors constraining the implementation of the Occupational Standards to date related to:

- resistance from managers
- the long consultation process required which involved over 7,000 employees
- convincing trade unions of their benefits

— factors not dissimilar from those constraining the introduction of NVQ/SVQs discussed in the previous chapter.

This Social Services Department was the only organisation in this sector with such explicit plans. Some others realised the potential use of Occupational Standards for instance in strategic planning and skills mix but had decided to concentrate on NVQs first. In these cases there was a belief that once NVQs were embedded and accepted by managers and the workforce alike, the Occupational Standards underpinning them could be used more extensively. Moreover, there was a belief among some employers that in order to get the changes required in their organisation accepted by employees, some

inducement or prize for employees in the shape of a qualification was required.

In Retail, a sector with virtually no history of vocational qualifications, the attraction of NVQ/SVQs was their ability to provide employees with a qualification as well as training. There was some evidence also of companies introducing the Occupational Standards for development or induction programmes as a preliminary to using the NVQ/SVQ.

In the Bus and Coach, Clothing, and Hairdressing companies investigated, the emphasis was entirely on NVQ/SVQs, and the possibility of using Occupational Standards separately in their own right appears not to have been considered. Although one Hairdressing company was considering dropping NVQ/SVQs because of their costs and using the Occupational Standards as a basis for their own certificate.

The lack of interest in these three sectors may in the long run act as a barrier to the take-up of NVQ/SVQs. As we saw among the survey respondents, the Occupational Standards were often being used as a lead in to using NVQ/SVQs. Thus there is a case for encouraging more employers to use the Occupational Standards, which are less costly to implement than NVQ/SVQs, as a way of encouraging the greater take-up of NVQ/SVQs.

5.4 Appropriateness of Standards

The employers who contributed to the case studies included a high proportion who had been closely concerned with the development of Occupational Standards, and tended to have strong views on the subject of their Occupational Standards' appropriateness.

In Chemicals there was general concern about the nature of the Occupational Standards developed to date, but nonetheless very different responses to the situation. One company was indifferent to the NVQ, as distinct from the concept of Occupational Standards underlying it, while another was so enthusiastic that virtually all staff had been registered. But three other companies were awaiting Lead Body revision to the Occupational Standards before deciding what to do about the NVQs, with the possibility that even then one of them would make use only of the Occupational Standards rather than the qualifications, which they saw as being primarily in the individual's interest. The new Occupational Standards were likely to give companies more freedom to 'pick and mix', and more options about the way the underpinning knowledge and understanding could be delivered. As a result NVQ/SVQ take-up could take off.

Employers in other sectors were also concerned about what they saw as lack of flexibility within NVQ/SVQs, and would have liked more discretion about which Units to use. Dissatisfaction with the mix of Units in the Hairdressing Level 3 NVQ — leaning too far towards the managerial and not enough towards technical skills — meant that some employers were encouraging people to go straight from Level

2 to Level 4. Employers felt that what was needed was a non-management Level 3.

Similarly in Care there was a desire for much greater flexibility in the NVQ Units. Like Chemicals there was a desire for the ability to 'pick and mix' the Units. This was particularly important with the Care NVQs which had been driven by Local Authorities and the NHS — organisations with rather different work modes. For instance, the contents of the NVQ in Direct Care Level 2 was considered too narrow to encompass all the competences required for community care such as personal care. Indeed, some employers were having to use Units from Level 3 NVQs to meet these needs although their staff were only being accredited for Level 2.

Some Business Administration Level 2 Units were rarely used within most organisations, and this was a factor contributing to uncertainty about the nature of future use. Moreover, it was costly and complicated to train people for Units that were perceived to be largely irrelevant to their everyday jobs. Thus an individual employee might achieve one NVQ plus Units from others.

An example was encountered within the Bus and Coach sector where one engineer was registered for five different NVQs, though only parts of each were relevant to that individual's work.

In Glass there was considerable dissatisfaction among employers with the generic Occupational Standards. The main criticisms were:

- that in trying to make the Occupational Standards generic they have been made too broad and thus contain elements which will not be used in the employers' workplace, and
- the generic Occupational Standards have been written in such a way as to be incomprehensible to anyone in the workplace and thus have to be translated into 'company speak'.

By contrast, the Occupational Standards being developed for Retail were seen as a good fit by employers and the system of choosing compulsory and optional units was flexible enough to meet the needs of mainstream retailers. Similarly, in Clothing the Occupational Standards fitted well with the realities of the workplace and this was demonstrated by the fact that some existing employees were taking NVQs without any additional training. Nor was the appropriateness of Occupational Standards an issue within the Bus and Coach industry.

Employers using Management NVQ/SVQs were for the most part pleased to use qualifications based on generic Standards. Their breadth was a particular advantage for the education of managers whose experience hitherto had perhaps been only within one organisation.

Concerns about the appropriateness of Occupational Standards, therefore, tended to be Lead Body specific. As was reported in Chapter 3 (see Section 3.3), such concerns are likely to apply to about one third of NVQ/SVQ users. The survey showed a divergence of

opinion: about one in five thought NVQ/SVQs were too narrow and one in six that they were too broad.

There was, however, a feeling amongst some case study employers that in general NVQ/SVQs needed to be more relevant to organisations' needs. In particular, there was a desire for NVQ/SVQs to be more 'customised'.

Similarly, there was mixed opinion among case study employers even within the same sector as to the extent to which the Occupational Standards and competences are too narrow or too broad[2]. Those suggesting they are too narrow think they are too occupationally specific and stress the way in which job knowledge and understanding is tending to be squeezed out by the emphasis on job performance. Such narrowness is unlikely to encourage multi-skilling or more flexible workforce. Those suggesting that they are too board think the Occupational Standards and competences are too generic and not directly relevant to the needs of employers and what people do in the workplace.[3]

The divergent opinions in part, can be related to the conflicting needs and skill requirements of different types of employers as well as the short term needs of employers versus the long term interest of individuals, the industry and the economy as a whole.

The differing perspective on the Occupational Standards reflect a long running debate about the focus of competences. Moreover they pose some taxing dilemmas for policy makers. They raise questions about, for instance, how the Occupational Standards were formulated, the role and composition of the Lead Bodies and the respective responsibilities of Awarding Bodies, Lead Bodies and the NCVQ. The only common ground appears that those on both sides of the debate want greater flexibility in the way in which NVQ/SVQs are 'packaged'.

The other key criticisms directed at the Occupational Standards related to:

- the lack of comparability of the Levels across the sectors whereby the work involved in, for instance, a Level 2 NVQ in Hairdressing was not considered equivalent or comparable to the work involved in for instance, a Level 2 in Chemicals. This is likely to be an issue in those sectors wanting greater transferability and for Lead Bodies (or their equivalent) in the future.

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[2] For comparison survey respondents' views on whether NVQ/SVQs are too broad or narrow (NB Chapter 3, Table 3.7) were analysed by sector (SIC), but no relationships emerged. For a more detailed discussion of these issues see Callender C (1993) 'Assessing NVQ Competences', *Skills Focus*, Issue 1, Policy Studies Institute, London.

[3] For more empirical evidence on this ongoing debate see National Vocational Qualifications: A survey of progress, Industrial Relations Services, London, April, 1993

- that some of the Occupational Standards demanded at Level 1 were considered of limited use given their low level while Level 3s were limited because of the strong emphasis on supervisory skills.
- concern about the overlap or potential overlap between MCI and other occupationally specific Level 4 and 5 NVQ/SVQs, especially in Business Administration.

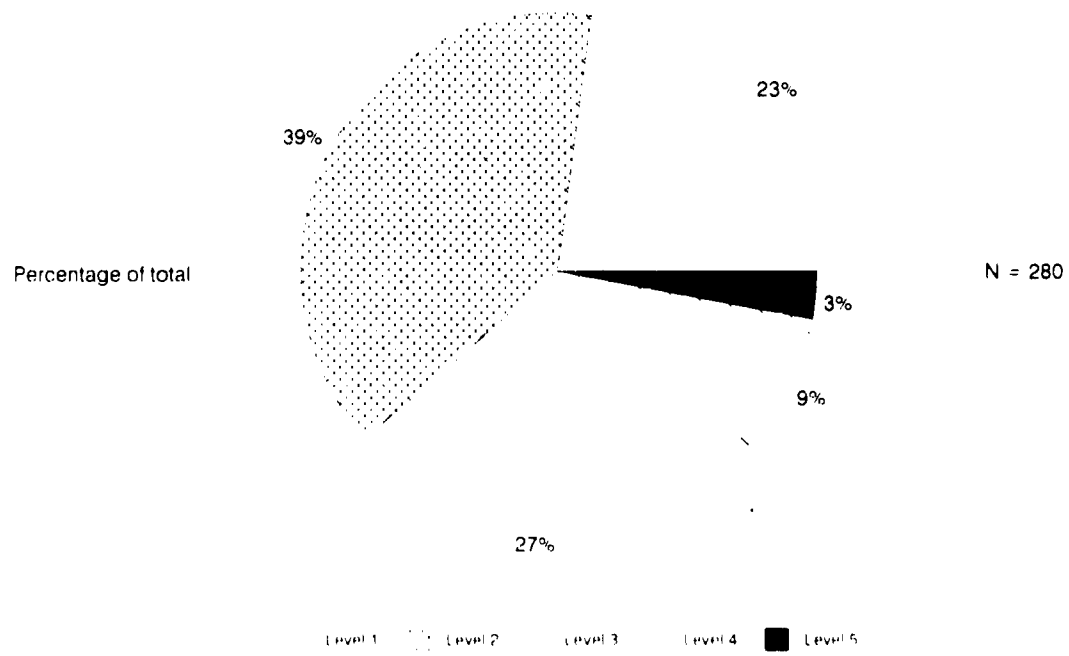
The overall effect of the problems with the Occupational Standards appears to be uncertainty in employers' minds about future action, with the case study evidence showing very different responses among employers about whether they would continue with NVQ/SVQs, use Occupational Standards only or adapt NVQ/SVQs or Occupational Standards to provide training on an in-house basis.

5.5 Levels of usage and implementation issues

5.5.1 The Level of NVQ/SVQs being used

The survey shows that the most widely used NVQ Level is Level 2 which is used on two out of five occasions (Fig. 5.1). Level 3 is the next most popular.

Figure 5.1 NVQ/SVQ users: Levels in use (unweighted data)



Source: IMS Survey 1993

These overall patterns of take-up may be related to the availability of NVQ/SVQs as those first developed were, on the whole, at Level 2. Also they may be associated with funding arrangements in some

sectors as already discussed in the previous chapter (see Chapter 4, Section 4.3.3).

The relatively low take-up of Level 1, however, may be a reflection of the value placed on this Level. Level 1 has been criticised for being too low level, failing to encourage higher standards, and for its lack of comparability with European vocational qualifications.[4] Indeed, some case study employers endorsed these views. For example, in Retailing a company criticised Level 1 as *'too basic, too demeaning for most staff'*, and in Hairdressing one large employer regarded it as *'too basic to pursue'*.

By contrast, others in Hairdressing thought Level 1 was an important breakthrough as it forged a real link between school and work. Thus the proprietor of one the smallest Hairdressing firms contacted planned to make Level 1 available to 60 youngsters by the end of 1994, while others have suggested that Level 1 plays a particular role for candidates with special needs.

The majority of both survey and case study employers, as we will see in the next chapter, were using entire NVQ/SVQs rather than just a few Units. However, as already mentioned, a very limited number of employers were using Units selectively but usually in addition to the main NVQ/SVQ they were training towards. Most intended to continue using full NVQ/SVQs but a few thought that they might become more selective in their use of Units especially if the NVQ/SVQ framework permitted such flexibility.

5.5.2 How NVQ/SVQs were being used

Employers used NVQ/SVQs in a variety of ways. The majority in the case studies were using NVQ/SVQs to structure their existing training provision or to introduce new training provision. For most employers this involved *ab initio* training for new recruits.

There were examples, however, of employers using NVQ/SVQs to retrain existing employees, for instance, especially in Care among nursing auxiliaries and care assistants. The majority of these employers were intending to make NVQs a job requirement for these posts.

In other sectors, like Clothing and Business Administration, a few employers also were using NVQ/SVQs to accredit the skills and competences of their existing employees. Often this required little or no additional training. In other words, they were using NVQ/SVQs as a type of informal APL (Accreditation of Prior Learning).

5.5.3 Other factors affecting usage

There was some case study evidence that employers' positive experiences of introducing NVQ/SVQs in one area and the expertise they gained led to the introduction of NVQ/SVQs in other areas. We

[4] Prais, S (1990) 'Qualifications out of line', *Training Tomorrow*, February.

have already seen (Chapter 4, Section 4.3.2), how, for instance, NVQ/SVQs in Retail which were initially prompted by YT had helped the introduction of Business Administration NVQ/SVQs.

There were other such examples in the case studies which were not prompted specifically by YT. They are useful because they give some indication of how the use of NVQ/SVQs can spread through organisations. For instance, in our case study companies using Business Administration NVQ/SVQs, their introduction had been a natural progression from the companies' use of other occupationally specific NVQ/SVQs. In one hospital the person responsible for co-ordinating the implementation of the Care NVQs was about to move to a newly created position and be responsible for introducing NVQs in Catering, Business Administration, and MCI. Thus, success in one area of NVQ/SVQs (usually occupationally specific) aided the introduction and wider usage of other NVQ/SVQs.

There was also some case study evidence that the characteristics of the workforce, numbers of employees and the content of different NVQ/SVQs might affect the nature and level of usage within an organisation.

Within the Bus and Coach sector, for instance, the NVQ for drivers was popular because it was easy to deliver: the PCV licence which drivers were obliged to hold went a long way towards delivering the NVQ. The NVQ was appealing because it gave recognition for training already done, and also offered an opportunity to carry out remedial training for bad drivers. Moreover, during periods when Bus and Coach driving schools had spare capacity, the carrying out of assessment for NVQ purposes was a good use of trainers' time.

While one Bus company was keen to use engineering NVQ/SVQs because they presented a means of introducing multi-skilling, the majority of Bus companies were less enthusiastic. The engineering NVQ/SVQ took longer to achieve — a year on average for Level 1 — and involved more resources than the driver qualification in terms of training and deployment of assessors.

The key factors limiting employers' more widespread use of NVQ/SVQs have indirectly been discussed in the previous Chapter and so will not be repeated here. Other issues are discussed in Chapter 7 on the difficulties employers faced in implementing NVQ/SVQs because all of these difficulties to some extent inhibited employers' use of NVQ/SVQs.

5.6 Summary

Survey evidence showed a similar pattern for usage of NVQs to that indicated by NVQ awards to date in England and Wales, with NVQs within Providing Business Services — eg Business Administration and Management — being the most widely used. NVQs within the categories of Construction and Manufacturing were also quite heavily used.

Of industrial sectors (SICs), construction, and energy and water, had the highest proportions of employers who were using NVQ/SVQs. However, NVQ/SVQs were to a large extent cross-sectoral, not just within Business Services and Engineering as would have been expected, but also within the NVQ/SVQ categories of Manufacturing and Providing Goods and Services.

Use of Occupational Standards separately from NVQ/SVQs was very much a minority affair, and most commonly were being used as preparation for NVQ/SVQs or because they were less expensive than NVQ/SVQs. Their main practical use was in connection with training. About half the employers using them adapted them in some way.

According to survey evidence, approximately one third of those using NVQ/SVQs believed they were too broad or too narrow for their industry. Case studies provided more detail on concerns of employers about the appropriateness of Occupational Standards set by their Lead Body, which for some sectors and employers made it hard to tell whether NVQ/SVQs, a mix of NVQ/SVQs and Units, or Occupational Standards only would be the pattern for the future. In other sectors, however, employers were satisfied with the Occupational Standards' and NVQ/SVQs' fit for their industry.

Most employers were using NVQ/SVQs at Level 2. They were using them to provide *ab initio* training for new recruits, to retrain existing staff and to accredit staff's existing skills and competences.

The content of different NVQ/SVQs, the nature of employees' experience, and the number of potential NVQ/SVQ candidates all could have an effect on which NVQ/SVQs were used and on how widely they were made available.

6. Employees' Access and Response to NVQ/SVQs

Previous chapters have been concerned with whether or not employers used NVQ/SVQs and/or Standards and, if so, how. Here we consider the numbers of employees directly participating in those organisations where NVQ/SVQs have been introduced, the conditions under which access was made available, and employees' response.

The chapter draws both on survey and case study evidence. Note that the survey evidence relates only to **one** NVQ/SVQ (including different Levels) for each respondent, the one which was most widely used within the organisation.

6.1 NVQ/SVQ participation among employees and trainees

6.1.1 Extent of participation

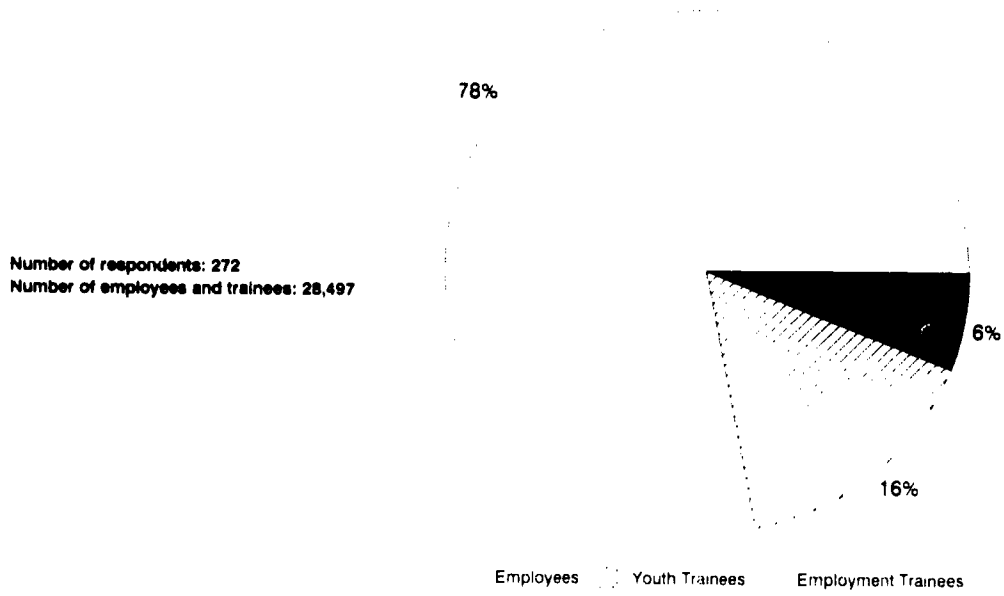
In the survey a total of 28,497[1] employees and trainees were working towards the main NVQ/SVQ being used by their employer. Thus on average, each employer had 100 employees working towards their NVQ/SVQ.

This average figure, however, hides considerable differences between employers. Over half the employers had less than ten employees and trainees involved in their main NVQ/SVQ and three-quarters had 35 or less employees and trainees involved (see Appendix 1 Table 6a). So we see that the overall average obviously is skewed by a few large employers with very large numbers of NVQ/SVQ candidates.

The concentration of employees and trainees working towards their NVQ/SVQ is also interesting to examine. One in ten people working towards their NVQ/SVQ worked in companies where less than 50 other people were taking NVQ/SVQs. However, two-thirds of employees and trainees were employed in companies where more than 500 of their colleagues were doing an NVQ/SVQ (see Appendix 1 Table 6b).

[1] This figure underestimates the total number of employees working towards their NVQ/SVQ because respondents who did not know how many employees or Youth Trainees or Employment Trainees were involved in NVQs have been excluded from this overall figure

Figure 6.1 NVQ/SVQ users: number of employees and trainees working towards NVQ/SVQs (unweighted data)



Source: IMS Survey 1993

The number of employees amongst the case study employers working towards an NVQ/SVQ in general were also low. An exception was a large Retail chain where 6,000 people had registered for NVQ/SVQs.

6.1.2 Type of participants

The survey showed that 78 per cent of the people working towards their NVQ/SVQs were employees, 16 per cent were Youth Trainees and six per cent Employment Trainees[2] (Table 6.1).

Employment size had no significant impact on the pattern of take-up between employees and trainees. The majority of employees (90 per cent) and trainees (76 per cent) were concentrated in companies employing over 500 staff. Employers with less than 50, employed 0.2 per cent of employees working towards their NVQ/SVQ and 2 per cent of trainees.

Interestingly, only 26 per cent of employers using NVQ/SVQs (N= 272) reported that they had no employees working towards their NVQ/SVQs. The remainder all had employees and either Youth or Employment Trainees working towards NVQ/SVQs. In other words, despite the fact that the vast majority of people involved in NVQ/SVQs were employees rather than trainees, employees were much more likely to be taking NVQ/SVQs alongside trainees.

[2] These figures need to be treated with caution. Trainees who receive a wage from their employers rather than just the YT allowance were likely to be considered employees rather than trainees by employers.

This finding suggests that whereas TEC funding had a considerable impact on the number of employers using NVQ/SVQ, its overall effect was to extend NVQ/SVQ participation well beyond Youth and Employment Trainees who within this sample were a small proportion of all those involved. It confirms the issue raised in Chapter 4 (Section 4.3.2) that YT and ET has had an important impact on the take-up of NVQ/SVQs especially amongst workers whose training is not TEC funded.

6.1.3 Penetration rates

Survey respondents were asked to give the number of employees within their organisation to whom their main NVQ/SVQ was relevant. The average number for the 278 employers who answered this question was 444. However, there was a considerable range in the number of employees for whom the NVQ/SVQ was relevant. A quarter of employers had less than 10 employees, and one quarter had more than 200. Indeed only 15 per cent of employers had more than the average (see Appendix 1 Table 6c).

If we take both the total number of employees for whom the main NVQ/SVQ was relevant (N=97,942) and the total number of people working towards that NVQ/SVQ (N=28,226)[3] we can calculate the NVQ/SVQ penetration rate. This amounted to 29 per cent. In other words, just over one in four people for whom the main NVQ/SVQs was relevant were actually working towards that NVQ/SVQ.

There was case study evidence that the NVQ/SVQ penetration rate was higher among a limited number of employers. For example, in Clothing there were several instances of a 100 per cent penetration rate whereby all sewing machinists had taken or were registered for their NVQ. In one hospital nearly all care assistants were registered and those who were not, had chosen not to participate. The penetration rate is likely to rise in the future especially in those companies that make working towards NVQ/SVQs an entry or job requirement.

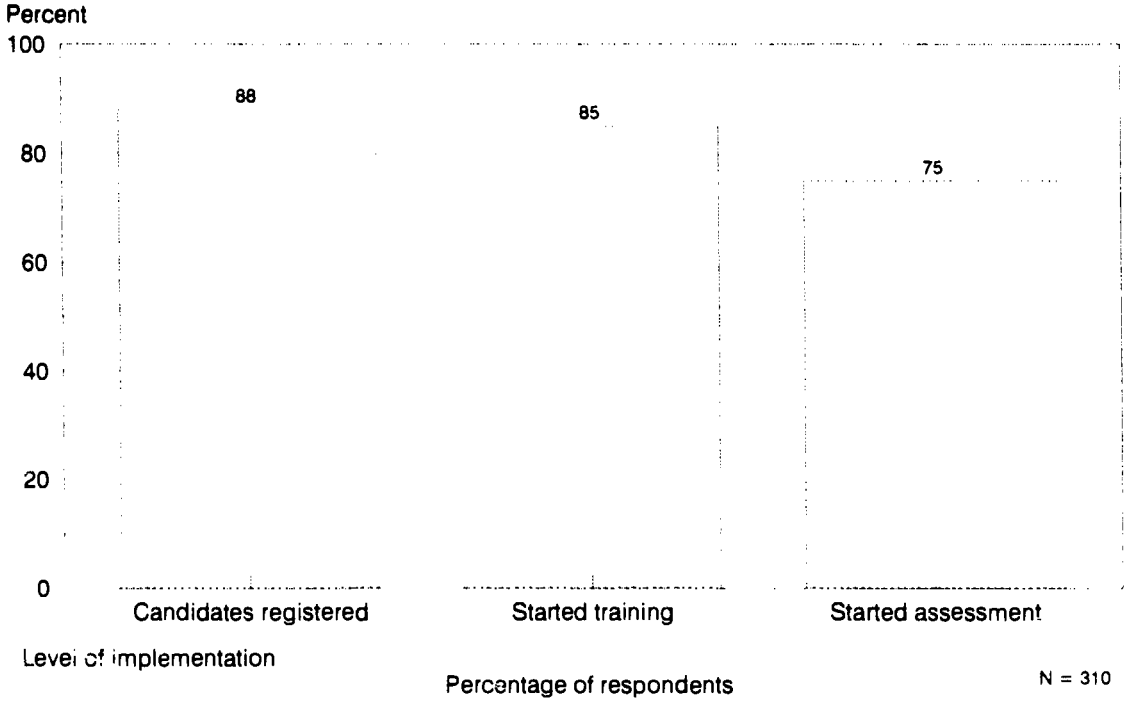
6.2 Progress on NVQ/SVQs among participants

The phrase 'working towards an NVQ/SVQ' covers the whole range of activity from registration only to the final stages of assessment. The nature and extent of implementation for groups of employees or trainees working towards the organisation's main NVQ/SVQ for each respondent is shown in Fig. 6.2.

Just three (nine per cent) of employers had not yet undertaken any kind of activity. Of the remainder only 12 per cent of respondents (38) had not yet registered candidates. Of these 31 intended to do so and two did not, with five respondents unable to say.

[3] This figure is lower than the one quoted in Table 6.1 because we have had to exclude respondents who did not answer the question about the number of employees for whom the main NVQ/SVQ was relevant.

Figure 6.2 NVQ/SVQ users: stages of NVQ/SVQ implementation (unweighted data)



Source: IMS Survey 1993

There were only slight differences by employer size: larger employers had made slightly greater progress in their implementation of NVQ/SVQs than had smaller employers.

Half of the survey respondents reported that at least one of their employees had been awarded a full NVQ/SVQ and the number of NVQ/SVQs awarded for these companies averaged 44. However, this average is skewed by the high percentage (82 per cent) of all awards going to employees in companies with over 500 employees. Thus the average number of awards in companies with over 500 employees was 79, but for companies between 200-499 employees it was 41, while for companies with less than 50 employees it went down to eight.

Of the 28,000 plus NVQ/SVQ candidates identified by respondents, 35 per cent were said to have achieved a full NVQ/SVQ and a further 29 per cent had achieved Units.

Companies with employees who had not yet gained a full NVQ/SVQ were concentrated in the middle size bands. Half of all the very small and very large companies contained employees who had not been awarded their NVQ/SVQ while the equivalent proportions for employers with 50-99, 100-199 and 200-499 were 71 per cent, 61 per cent and 31 per cent.

Thus progress in implementing NVQ/SVQs was reasonably advanced for these main NVQ/SVQs. It seems likely that less activity will have been underway for other NVQ/SVQs mentioned by respondents.

6.3 Employees' access

The case studies showed how access to NVQ/SVQs was dominated by new entrants to what had been 'apprentice' schemes or jobs. This was particularly the case among trainees qualifying for Youth Training subsidies in Hairdressing and Clothing where NVQ/SVQ registration was a funding condition. Employers had more discretion over which established employees they gave access to NVQ/SVQs and training funds.

Hairdressing employers for the most part were not offering the NVQ/SVQ Level 2 to established staff because most of them would have the pre-NVQ qualification. By contrast, some case study employers were registering all employees. For example, one small firm in the Bus and Coach sector, one company in Chemicals, and a few in Clothing had registered all the relevant employees but these examples were the exception and the total numbers involved were small. Others intended to make them available to all eligible employees in due course. But the majority were using a variety of criteria in the mean time to identify suitable NVQ/SVQ candidates.

In some organisations where potential numbers were below 30, for example among an organisation's Managers, an invitation had been issued to everyone who was eligible. In one case each volunteer was also expected to identify another person to act as his/her assessor. Even if numbers exceeded what was expected, the offer had been maintained. In other companies using Management NVQ/SVQs the initial choice was made in consultation with line managers of those whose training was regarded as a priority, either because of their personal needs or because of the impact improved performance was expected to have within the organisation. The same criterion was used in a Glass company for production workers who had a key role in the entire production process.

In addition to Youth Trainees, who were a major group for Business Administration in general, candidates for NVQ/SVQs were recruited either as volunteers via their line managers or as part of a policy of offering access to the NVQ/SVQ to new recruits during the induction period. Some employers took the view that the NVQ/SVQ would be less appealing and appropriate to experienced staff. Within the Bus and Coach sector some employers had made it obligatory for new recruits, and made efforts to persuade additional volunteers using such methods as Lead Body presentations, NVQ open days, and a 'Roll of Honour' for those achieving the NVQ. One company also offered a pay bonus. However, not all companies wanted volunteers, but instead wanted the best drivers to succeed in order to encourage others.

In Care some hospitals were making registration for NVQs obligatory for all new entrants for auxiliary and care assistant posts, and were hoping in due course to make NVQs an entry requirement. In one Social Services Department the demand for NVQs far outstripped the supply of places and funding. It had a potential pool of 3,500 direct care workers. So although it had a policy of open access it had had to restrict access. Consequently it had developed a set of selection

criteria which included being in a permanent post for two years and sponsorship by the line managers. Those who did not meet these criteria but wanted to take their NVQ/SVQ had to pay for themselves and were encouraged to get a discount through the tax system. This organisation also believed that by restricting access the cachet to the organisation and value attached to NVQs was enhanced.

In Retail some employers were making the NVQ/SVQ mandatory for new recruits, but for existing employees access depended upon the line manager's recommendation. Very large companies had a strategy for implementation across the organisation involving Youth Trainees initially, then piloting in a few stores for newcomers and some existing staff, followed by extension after additional assessor training to a larger number of stores and employees.

While in Retail there was no evidence of discrimination against part-timers, in practice their access was limited by their restricted working hours and the difficulty of getting experience of work different from their normal role (an issue discussed in more depth in Chapter 7, Section 7.4.3) A private sector care employer expressed doubts about her willingness to sponsor part-timers through an NVQ and their willingness and ability to fund themselves. However, this employer was exceptional as the vast majority of care workers, especially in Local Authorities were part-time and experienced no direct discrimination.

6.4 Employees' response to NVQ/SVQs

Employees in some organisations and sectors were reported to be more enthusiastic than others in their response to NVQ/SVQs.

6.4.1 Factors discouraging positive responses

Poor responses among individuals or groups of individuals can be related to the following factors:

- Employees' lack of awareness of NVQ/SVQs and the lack of perceived benefits.

This had contributed to a slow response especially in Retail. Indeed, in one company NVQs were dropped for this reason. This factor also helped explain why some older employees in the Care sector did not respond to the training on offer. Even in Bus and Coach, which is a heavily unionised industry there had been almost no demand from individuals, who as members of the public lacked knowledge about NVQs.

- Suspicion and distrust of NVQ/SVQs by trade unions

This had led to some non-response in sectors like Bus and Coach and Care. Trade unions were concerned about the way in which NVQ assessments might be used for disciplinary purposes. Perhaps more important were their anxieties over the industrial relations aspects of

NVQs especially regarding pay for those gaining NVQs and for assessors in recognition of their additional workloads. Very few employees in any sector gained any financial rewards from undertaking NVQ/SVQs. However, there was evidence from the case studies showing how consultation with trade unions, for instance in Glass, in advance of implementation appears to have eased their introduction.

- Lack of incentives

The lack of incentives in terms of pay and regrading was in itself a reason for slow take-up among some individuals. A minority of organisations paid bonuses on completion of NVQ/SVQs[4].

- Lack of public relations

Non-response among individuals can also be explained partly by the failure of NVQ/SVQ public relations machinery to target individuals. Much of the publicity material produced by the Lead and Awarding Bodies and the NCVQs to date has been aimed at employers rather than individuals.

- Expense and resources

Most but not all employers paid for their employees to take their NVQ/SVQs. For instance, as we saw in Chapter 4 (Section 4.4.3) few employers in Hairdressing supported individuals wanting to take Level 3. Consequently individuals had to pay their own fees and do the NVQs in their own time, which some were finding very difficult.

6.4.2 Factors encouraging positive responses

The factors encouraging positive responses among individuals were somewhat less clear cut than those discouraging positive responses.

- Consultation and communication

Consulting and communicating with employees tended to encourage positive responses. For instance, after extensive consultation in three Glass companies who had introduced their own competence based systems all reported favourable reactions after initial anxieties mostly in connection with assessment.

- Recognition of skills

[4] By contrast, the recent study of 171 firms *National Vocational Qualifications. A survey of progress. Industrial Relations Review and Report*, April 1993, shows that 20 per cent of firms linked attainment of NVQ/SVQs with pay. It is not apparent why the two findings differ, except that our finding is based on a smaller sample, *ie* the 50 case study companies.

Within the Bus and Coach industry enthusiasm varied. In some companies drivers were motivated by the opportunity to gain a qualification giving them recognition for perhaps 30 years' service. And this was a theme echoed in other sectors like Care.

- Internal company publicity campaigns

Examples of such activities were rare. However, bus drivers' interest was enhanced in one company by a major publicity exercise which resulted in more volunteers than expected. As a result a backlog of candidates waiting for assessment built up which dampened some of the original enthusiasm.

- Conditions of access

Employees' response to Business Administration NVQ/SVQs appeared to be higher in organisations which did not provide alternative training for this group of staff and had fairly open access. Response among managers offered access to MCI generally was more positive, with companies getting a good response to the offer and needing to use persuasion only occasionally.

- Mobility and career development

Within Hairdressing some individuals were working towards Level 3 without the support of employers because they (and their employers) thought the qualification would make them more employable elsewhere. Similar interest was expressed by some employees about Level 3 in Business Administration, though they were also unsure about whether work was available commensurate with the demands of the qualification.

6.5 Summary

In most organisations which were using NVQ/SVQs there were only small numbers of employees involved. For half the survey sample this totalled ten or less though in a few very large organisations much higher numbers were participating. On average 29 per cent of those for whom NVQ/SVQs were relevant were said to be working towards one.

Youth and Employment Trainees represented 16 and six per cent respectively of all those working towards NVQ/SVQs, suggesting that the effect of funding has helped extend NVQ/SVQs well beyond the funded categories.

The majority of survey NVQ/SVQ users had candidates registered and most of those candidates had started on relevant training and were being assessed. Thirty five per cent of candidates had achieved NVQ/SVQs and a further 29 per cent some Units.

The conditions on which employees had access to NVQ/SVQs varied. Some employers asked for volunteers, others selected individuals on whose progress they put a priority, or asked for recommendations from line managers, and others had made NVQ/SVQs mandatory for newcomers.

There was evidence of part-timers getting less access because of their working hours, the difficulties of getting experience of unfamiliar areas of work, and employer and employee concerns about the cost.

Reports about employees' response ranged between considerable enthusiasm and such little interest that one employer abandoned NVQs. The way in which employers introduced NVQ/SVQs may have been a factor.

7. Implementing NVQ/SVQs

In this chapter we concentrate on issues affecting the implementation of NVQ/SVQs drawing mainly on the case studies. The focus is the practical issues employers faced once they had decide to introduce NVQ/SVQs. We first discuss general difficulties survey employers experienced in getting NVQ/SVQs off the ground. We then explore these issues and others in more depth using information gleaned from the case studies. Next, we move on to examine issues related to training, assessment and verification.

7.1 Difficulties in implementing NVQ/SVQs

The survey showed that about an equal proportion of employers experienced some difficulties in implementing NVQ/SVQs as experienced no difficulties. A quarter of those reporting difficulties ranked them as giving them some or a lot of difficulty. (Appendix 1 Table 7a).

There were, however, some important differences by employment size: 55 per cent of firms with over 200 employees experienced difficulties compared with 27 per cent of firms with under 200 employees. Overall, the majority (82 per cent) of firms experiencing difficulties were large with over 200 employees.

The greatest difficulty employers experienced was finding the time to implement, train and assess NVQ/SVQs (Table 7.1) which was mentioned, in an open question, by over a quarter of all those reporting any difficulties. Another problem, reported by one in five, related to the quality of information and guidance received about NVQ/SVQs, an issue already discussed in Chapter 3. This impacted on a further obstacle, employers' understanding of NVQ/SVQs. Overcoming resistance to NVQ/SVQs within their organisations and costs were other important material factors.

Once again there were some differences according to employment size: 23 per cent of employers with less than 200 employees identified the lack of information as a difficulty compared with 13 per cent of employers with over 200 employees[1]. Eighteen per cent of small employers cited understanding NVQ/SVQs as an obstacle compared to only 11 per cent of large employers. These differences may be related to the survey finding in Chapter 3.2 and the fact that fewer

[1] Numbers were too small to test for significance.

small employers (under 50 employees) than large employers seek information and advice which would aid their grasp of NVQ/SVQs. Moreover, the case studies suggest that larger employers are more likely to have specialist personnel responsible for co-ordinating NVQ/SVQs who are often particularly knowledgable about NVQ/SVQs.

Resistance to the introduction of NVQ/SVQs was more of an issue for employers with more than 200 employees (12 per cent) than for small employers (five per cent). This difference probably can be related to the remit of decision makers' powers within organisations of different sizes and the need to convince more people in large organisations.

Table 7.1 NVQ/SVQ users who reported difficulties in implementing NVQ/SVQs: nature of difficulty (unweighted data)

Difficulty	N	% of respondents
Time to implement, train and assess	38	26
Lack of/unsatisfactory information and guidance	28	19
Overcoming resistance	23	16
Problems understanding	22	15
Cost	18	12
Administration/paperwork	16	11
Bureaucracy/red tape	12	8
Lack of staff to implement	4	3
People not heard of it	5	3
May not last or may change	6	4
NVQ/SVQ level not available	3	2
Carrying out assessment, eg inconsistency	6	4
Others	22	15

Number of respondents: 146

Source: IMS Survey 1993

Employers in the case studies reiterated these difficulties. Their concerns about the time involved in implementing, training and assessing NVQ/SVQs, and their understanding of NVQ/SVQs, will be discussed shortly in the relevant sections on training (7.3) and assessment (7.4). Finally, the resistance employers faced in implementing NVQ/SVQs is one of the key themes of the following section (7.2).

7.2 Practical steps to ease implementation

The case studies show that the implementation of NVQ/SVQs was eased by a variety of factors some of which were aimed at overcoming the difficulties employers identified in the survey and, especially, resistance to their introduction.

7.2.1 'Champions' in the organisation

The existence of a champion within the organisation to promote NVQ/SVQs was the most important factor facilitating their implementation and in overcoming resistance to their introduction. A large proportion of companies which had made particularly good progress had such champions.

The champions' key role was to win the support of senior and line management and professionals. Resistance was related to:

- a resistance to change
- NVQ/SVQs' lack of credibility
- the lack of perceived benefits of NVQ/SVQs
- concern over the practicalities and ease of delivering NVQ/SVQs
- a preference for more traditional types of qualifications, and
- satisfaction with existing training provision.

In the Care sector NVQ/SVQs' introduction was met with some resistance from professional groups including nurses, doctors and social workers. Consequently, 'champions' were especially important in this sector. This resistance focused primarily on the interface between NVQ/SVQs and existing professional qualifications and in particular, the threat of NVQ/SVQs to professionalism.[2] It occurred in this sector because it was the only sector we examined which had established professional qualifications (rather than vocational qualifications).

In the NHS, NVQ/SVQs lacked credibility largely because they lacked academic rigour compared with the professional qualifications and in contrast to the dominant training culture within the NHS. As importantly, NVQ/SVQs were perceived as a potential threat to nurses. In particular, there was uncertainty about whether the Level 3 NVQ/SVQs would deskill nursing, act as a cheap option for training, and allow entry into nursing *'through the backdoor'* and hence threaten nurses' jobs.

Within some Social Services Departments there was concern among social workers that by specifying standards NVQ/SVQs would make carers automatons and undermine their relationship with clients. Moreover, some social workers were threatened by the process of clarifying the exact skills required which demystified caring and

[2] One of the hallmarks of professions is the members' control over entry into their profession

hence threatened social workers' professionalism. In addition, like the nurses, social workers feared, according to one Director of Training *'that NVQ/SVQs would spawn an underclass of minimally trained workers'*.

The importance of a champion was well illustrated in the Bus and Coach sector. In one company some depots had taken up NVQs and others had not. The reason was that company decisions were left to functional managers and were not imposed on them by Chief Executives. The result was that some of the corporate enthusiasm for NVQ/SVQs was dissipated. As one training manager observed: *'until the top man says it will happen, it won't'*.[3]

These champions often had a formidable task. They had to convince managers and professionals of the need for NVQ/SVQs whereby NVQ/SVQs were placed on management's agenda and where applicable, integrated into their organisation's human resource strategies. Importantly, they had to be in fairly senior positions, ideally at Board or senior management level, so that they could influence their organisation's decision making process.

7.2.2 NVQ/SVQ co-ordination

The implementation process was facilitated when someone (usually in addition to the 'champion') in the organisation had overall responsibility to take forward NVQ/SVQs. Their role varied but included a variety of tasks, such as:

- convincing senior managers of the benefits of NVQ/SVQs for their organisation so they in turn could convince their staff
- communicating to line managers and staff about the practicalities of introducing NVQ/SVQs
- educating the workforce about NVQ/SVQs and raising their levels of awareness
- consulting and negotiating with trade unions and clarifying the industrial relations implications of introducing NVQ/SVQs especially regarding pay and the additional responsibility of assessment
- liaising with the Lead and Awarding Bodies and where applicable the TECs about funding issues — this could be quite an onerous task when having to deal with more than one Lead or Awarding Body. More difficult, however, was the task of negotiating funding especially if more than one TEC was involved (see Chapter 4)
- setting up the necessary frameworks and structures for introducing NVQ/SVQs including arranging assessor training, and working with line managers in recruiting and selecting NVQ/SVQ candidates, and organising assessment

[3] Decentralised decision making may not always depress take-up but could operate in reverse whereby NVQ/SVQs are embraced locally but not at the centre.

- developing NVQ/SVQ material often in the 'language' of the organisation and which was simpler than the NVQ/SVQ terminology, and
- acting as a support and point of information for managers using NVQ/SVQs and for assessors.

Some of these tasks were undertaken by managers rather than a special NVQ/SVQ coordinator but all were **vital** for the smooth implementation of NVQ/SVQs.

7.2.3 The role of line managers

There was a strong feeling that if NVQ/SVQs were to work then line managers had to take responsibility for their introduction and be actively involved in their implementation. This was particularly the case in organisations which traditionally had separate training functions.

For instance, in the Care sector, training has tended to be the responsibility of specialist trainers. Hence line managers saw the implementation of NVQ/SVQs as the responsibility of the training managers. Yet the line manager's role was important in facilitating NVQ/SVQs for example, in providing:

- an ethos to support NVQ/SVQ candidates
- role models of good practice, and
- workplace support including creating time for training and assessment.

In other words, it was considered important for managers to own the NVQ/SVQ process rather than the training department or equivalent. This was essential, for instance in Retail, if NVQ/SVQs were to get embedded into business and not be just an 'add-on'. Indeed, one Local Authority Social Services Department wanted all their managers to become assessors. In this way assessment would become an integral part of the line manager's job. As a result, managers would take greater responsibility for training their team and for facilitating NVQs. Moreover, they would be accountable for NVQs if there were problems.

7.3 Training

The design of NVQ/SVQs makes no assumptions about the nature of training. NVQ/SVQs are primarily concerned with outputs and performance rather than inputs. NVQ/SVQs neither stipulate how, where or when competences are developed nor the mode of training delivery and contents. Candidates do not have to undergo any particular programme of learning. In other words, NVQ/SVQs have severed the link between the training process and gaining a qualification.

Some employers used NVQ/SVQs to accredit employees' existing skills so led to little or no additional training. By contrast, others used

NVQ/SVQs to retrain or train up staff and thus needed a well structured training programme (see Chapter 5, Section 5.5.2.).

7.3.1 Delivery of training

Employers in all the sectors used a combination of on and off the job training, although the majority of training in Glass and Retail was on the job. However, the sectors varied in terms of where the training was undertaken. For instance, nearly all the training in Clothing, Glass and Retail was carried out in house. Separate training centres on employers' premises were most often used in Clothing and Bus and Coach. By contrast, colleges were most commonly used in Business Administration and Hairdressing where young trainees were given day release, while in Care and Chemicals there was an equal mixture of employer based and college tuition. External training was mostly used in companies using Management NVQ/SVQs.

Inevitably, where training was carried out had implications for who undertook the training. What is of particular interest is those sectors which undertook training on their premises but which used specialist trainers, such as Bus and Coach and Chemicals. As we shall see, the existence of such trainers had implications for assessment.

7.3.2 Factors explaining training delivery

The models for delivering training varied between and within sectors. They were affected by the following diverse factors all of which had some bearing individually or in combination on organisations' decisions about the organisation and delivery of their training towards NVQ/SVQs:

- The existing training infrastructure

This largely explains why, how and by whom training was delivered and organised in, for instance, Hairdressing, Clothing and Bus and Coach. All these sectors had well established training infrastructures which existed prior to the introduction of NVQ/SVQs. When NVQ/SVQs were introduced, NVQ/SVQ training was slotted into these structures. By contrast, in sectors like Care and Retail where no training existed in the past, new structures have had to be developed.

- The role of training

The role varied depending on what organisations hoped to achieve through their training. For instance, some companies using MCI had introduced the qualification to encourage a cultural change and to broaden the skills and competences of their managers. Hence they wanted the input of external experts to meet these objectives. By contrast, other companies wanted to accredit the existing competences of their managers and were concerned that these fitted with the overall demands of their existing jobs. Consequently, the training was primarily conducted in house by the managers' superiors.

- Accreditation of prior learning and informal accreditation

Some employers were using NVQ/SVQs to accredit employees' existing skills either formally through APL or informally. Under such circumstances little training was thought necessary. If a candidate lacked experience in a particular area, a common practice was to find a way of giving the candidate that experience by working alongside a colleague, taking on an extra responsibility temporarily, or carrying out a project.

- The type of employee

Which employees were being trained also influenced the training models. For instance, in Business and Administration training for young people and new entrants tended to be delivered by local colleges or training centres via day release. However, the training of existing employees needed a different approach. Their training needs were identified and gaps in knowledge and competences were met through workshops organised internally or via external providers.

- Whether the organisation was an accredited centre

The impact of this factor was most obvious in Care. Some hospitals had decided not to become an accredited centre and hence used the local college of nursing to provide training. Other hospitals believed that it was more cost effective to become accredited and hence provided training in-house. Similarly, in the Retail sector only the larger companies could become accredited centres and the smaller single outlet shops usually had to be associated with an umbrella organisation such as a YT managing agent or college to help develop their training in-store.

- The demands of production and/or service delivery

This affected training delivery in, for instance, the Glass sector where it was not seen as feasible to take people off the production line to train them.

- The nature and extent of 'underpinning knowledge' and the complexity demanded

Issues surrounding 'underpinning knowledge' largely explains the use of external training providers among organisations using MCI who felt that they did not have sufficient expertise or the time required for training in certain areas.

7.3.3 Training difficulties

Most organisations were content with their training arrangements although they did experience the following difficulties:

- Time constraints

As the survey showed the time available for training (Table 7.1) was the main difficulty facing employers especially small employers. The case study interviews showed that the difficulties revolved around creating the time to arrange and especially to carry out training particularly where NVQ/SVQ training did not replace existing training programmes. Particular difficulties were experienced when the personnel involved were not exclusively trainers but had other duties and responsibilities: a situation more often faced by small companies and those with devolved structures. Freeing up candidates for training was also problematic in some sectors especially where employees worked part-time or were atypical workers such as in Retail and Care.

- The support available for candidates

There was special concern for those with limited educational experience. In particular, some employers questioned the stress that NVQ/SVQs placed on individual study. They doubted the suitability of this learning mode for less academic or less able candidates. They were concerned about the emphasis it placed on individual motivation. As a result, some employers had introduced mentors or 'key workers' whose role was to encourage, support, and guide individual candidates.

- Quality of external providers

College provision came under criticism from those using MCI and in Hairdressing. For instance, a small employer adopting MCI had difficulty finding a suitable external trainer and assessment provider. Many of the courses on offer were considered very narrow and academic with too little knowledge and experience of management, and training methods which were not sufficiently interactive.

In Hairdressing the quality of many colleges was felt to be inferior to that of private sector based suppliers. Too much training was carried out away from the job and frequently by people who lacked real industrial awareness. Whilst some colleges were highly praised, there were complaints that too many were 'hi-jacking' the NVQ/SVQ system to do what they had always done. As one employer observed:

> 'The NVQ concept was something we all supported. But what has happened in practice is that a wall has grown up between the colleges and industry. As a result, in those areas which are highly dependent on college provision, the NVQs are based less and less on employer-driven, industry based standards in which we put such great faith for the industry.'

7.4 Assessment

The case studies suggest that assessment was the key implementation issue and posed a much greater challenge to employers than training.

Indeed, they highlight the real difficulties employers encountered in fulfilling one of the principles underpinning NVQ/SVQs, namely,

> As a general rule, assessment of performance in the course of normal work offers the most natural form of evidence of competence and has several advantages, both technical and economic. Alternatively, some form of simulation of the required performance may be required.[4]

7.4.1 Organising assessment

Just as training models varied to suit the differing needs of sectors and employers so too did the way in which assessment was organised. Most sectors used a combination of assessment methods in the workplace such as observation at work, verbal tests, written tests and portfolios. Those assessed in colleges or training centres relied on simulated work conditions and portfolios. On the whole, those sectors using colleges and external providers for training (*ie* Hairdressing, MCI, Business Administration) also used them for assessment purposes, with the exception of Care where nearly all assessment was conducted at the workplace.

The survey showed (see Appendix 1 Table 7.b) that employers were more likely to use their own staff (58 per cent) to undertake assessment rather than an external assessor (49 per cent) although in some cases employers were using both. Large employers (over 500) in particular, were most likely to use their staff (65 per cent) while small employers (under 50) were least likely to use external assessors (36 per cent).

These data cannot tell us whether external assessors were used at employer's premises or away from the workplace. Our case study material, on the whole, suggests the latter. In the Retail sector some employers were using contractors to undertake assessment at the workplace and smaller companies in particular were making use of managing agents with peripatetic assessors.

7.4.2 Factors explaining assessment arrangements

The differences in the way sectors and employers arranged their assessment can largely be attributed to:

- The way training was delivered

There was a strong tendency for assessment arrangements to follow training delivery. In other words, where training was delivered through external providers so was assessment and where training was delivered internally so was assessment. The main exception was in Care and this relates to the second factor determining assessment.

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[4] *Guide to National Vocational Qualifications* (1991) Employment Department/NCVQ, p. 21.

- The feasibility of simulating work conditions

In the Care sector the nature of the work meant that it was extremely difficult to simulate work conditions. In particular, an integral part of the work is the relationship the carer builds up with their client/patient. Such inter-personal and attitudinal skills form some of the NVQ Units and also underpin the more technical skills demanded. It was not considered possible, therefore, to assess these skills outside the workplace.

- The role of NVQ/SVQs

As already suggested earlier in this Chapter some employers were using NVQ/SVQs to accredit their employees' existing skills. Under such circumstances, there was a strong tendency to use internal assessors at the workplace.

7.4.3 Difficulties associated with assessors, their role and training

The main difficulties employers faced concerning assessment were related to assessors and the assessment process.

- Availability and selection of assessors

Selecting assessors was usually one of the first tasks most employers undertook when implementing NVQ/SVQs. Finding suitable in-house assessors was an issue for some employers.

In-house assessors' job titles and roles varied considerably from sector to sector. For instance, in Bus and Coach full-time special instructors were most likely to be used while in Retail, Glass and Business Administration supervisors and line-managers were most commonly used. Similarly, the level and extent of their experience of assessment prior to becoming an assessor varied enormously.

Selecting the 'right' sort of person with all the appropriate qualities was not always straightforward. In addition, the qualities demanded sometimes varied depending on the type of NVQ/SVQ.

Ideally assessors needed to understand the demands of the job and the NVQ/SVQ competences. They often needed additional qualities to fulfil their role which frequently went beyond just assessment. For instance, assessors repeatedly played an important part in supporting NVQ/SVQ candidates, encouraging and motivating them, and acting as mentors. Sometimes they were also the trainers, for instance in Bus and Coach or Hairdressing.

Sometimes this mixture of roles caused some confusion or conflict for assessors (and potentially candidates). Moreover, on top of these formal assessor responsibilities, assessors played other roles in the context of the candidate and their employing organisation.

The extent to which employers were sensitive to these issues varied considerably. For instance, some companies using MCI felt that

college staff responsible for training should be different individuals from those carrying out assessment. Indeed, one organisation used consultants specialising in NVQs for assessment to ensure that it was independent from the training given. Another organisation adopted a policy of not allowing assessment to be carried out by the candidates line-manager. By contrast, in some Care organisations, it was considered important that line-managers should assess NVQ candidate's because it was an integral part of their role.

- Specialist *vs* peripatetic assessors

Most in-house assessors assessed a candidate's entire NVQ/SVQ and these assessors had a broad knowledge of the NVQ/SVQ areas of competences. In a minority of cases, such as in Care or in college based assessment, specialist assessors would assess only certain NVQ/SVQ Units reflecting their areas of specialisation.

Peripatetic assessors were rare and were most often used where managing agents were employed to undertake both training and assessment, for instance in Retail. However, there were problems associated with deploying such assessors effectively and efficiently. For instance, the practicalities of arranging visits caused problems. More serious was that assessment was undertaken only during visits. Often several visits were required, and this was costly. In addition, the quality of assessment was brought into question as assessors rarely observed the on-going performance of candidates.

- Extent of assessor training

Training assessors was an important task for most employers. The number they could train had, in some instances, a direct impact on the number of people who could be registered for NVQ/SVQs.

Survey respondents who said that assessment would be carried out in-house by their employees (N=188) reported that training in assessment was being provided in 88 per cent of cases, not being provided in eight per cent, and otherwise not known or undecided. The case studies similarly showed a high level of assessor training, some of which was accredited and some of which was not.

The case studies suggested that the key issue affecting the number of assessors trained was resources, namely, time and money. They showed that some employers had been able to secure funding through their local TEC. The availability of such funding, however, varied from TEC to TEC and thus there was no consistent provision either between or within sectors.

- Training requirements for assessors

There was some confusion amongst employers also about the most appropriate training. All Awarding Bodies stipulate that assessor training is provided and some insist that assessors take their own assessor training courses (*eg* QEI). However, there was evidence that some employers had ended up paying double for assessor training.

For instance, they had paid for assessors to attend City and Guild courses only to discover that they were not acceptable by their particular Awarding Body.

Employers who were introducing more than one NVQ/SVQ were also confused by the varying criteria different Awarding Bodies set for both assessor training and assessment centres. While large employers with sites in Scotland had the additional tasks of having to adhere to the demands of both NCVQ and SCOTVEC.

Moreover there were complaints from some employers that the TDLB Standards were overly demanding, pegged at too high a level and were costly to meet.

- Quality of training

A somewhat worrying development was the apparent differences in the nature and extent of assessor training and hence its potential quality. The courses attended by assessors varied from anything from one day to five days. These differences cannot however be explained by the previous experience of assessors. There was no evidence to suggest that people with limited experience of assessing attended longer courses or vice versa.

7.4.4 Difficulties with the assessment process

- Time and creating assessment opportunities

As the survey (Table 7.1) showed, the time required to organise, co-ordinate and conduct assessment was a very real problem facing employers and a constant theme in the case studies.

The time involved in carrying out the actual assessment varied considerably both between and within sectors depending upon the demands of the NVQ/SVQ. For instance, in Bus and Coach the average assessor time per candidate for the NVQ Level 2 relating to Driver competence was about four hours but for the NVQ Level 2 relating to Vehicle Engineering competence it was five days. Thus the extent to which time was a major resourcing (and cost) issue and a potential constraint on take-up similarly varied.

Creating the time often demanded a flexible approach to staff utilisation. This was more acute for small employers with limited numbers of staff to cover while candidates and assessors were involved in assessment. It also posed a particular problem in hospitals where workloads could not always be planned ahead due to emergencies.

Time shortages and creating the opportunities for assessment were exacerbated by the working conditions of certain types of employees. For instance, atypical workers who worked irregular hours, such as part-timers in the Retail sector, could not easily be released from the shopfloor. Similarly people working night shifts in the Care sector had to be put on day shifts to accommodate the working hours of

assessors. In one Local Authority, special allowances were available to women who were normally prevented from working during the day due to domestic responsibilities.

Working conditions affected access to assessment in other ways too. For instance, in Care many candidates worked alone in people's homes. These fragmented working structures thus posed particular problems for assessment. Indeed, several within this sector criticised NVQ/SVQs for being based on a model of employment which had little relevance to the nature of their work. In particular, they highlighted the lack of on-site workbased supervisors and their atypical work environments which made observation methods of assessment impractical. They also drew attention to ethical issues about the appropriateness of carrying out assessment in the homes of patients who were often very ill or frail. Some felt that the assessment process was an infringement on people's privacy.

Given the shortages of time some employers relied upon candidates working in their own time to prepare evidence. This was particularly evident amongst candidates working towards their MCI and demanded considerable motivation. However, it also was the cause of some women dropping out of the Care NVQs. They simply did not have the additional time required, given their domestic responsibilities.

Another concern about the time involved in assessment was the way it detracted from training time. This was a particular concern in the Glass sector.

- NVQ/SVQ terminology and concepts

The terminology and concepts used within NVQ/SVQs were perceived to be a major issue inhibiting people's understanding of the standards and their assessment requirements and probably explains the survey finding reported above (Section 7.1, Table 7.1). This manifested itself in several ways. For instance, within Retail the language used in the NVQ/SVQ material was considered too complex and long-winded. Therefore, managers had to translate it into simpler 'user-friendly' language which reflected the language of the company. Similarly, in Business Administration the NVQ/SVQ terminology appeared daunting and therefore difficult to put across. In the Glass sector the emphasis on generic standards had meant that they were written in such a way as to be incomprehensible to anyone in the workplace and consequently had to be translated into 'company-speak'. By contrast, some employers using the MCI agreed that the language posed difficulties but also believed that having to grapple with it was part of the learning process and would help managers to understand what they had to achieve.

- Exposure to competences

The jobs of some candidates did not necessarily encompass all the competences demanded by their NVQ/SVQ. Hence special arrangements had to be made for both training and assessment. This was particularly true of Business Administration and Hairdressing Level 3.

- Methods of assessment

Building portfolios for NVQ/SVQs where evidence is largely paper-based and hence which only applies to some NVQ/SVQs seemed the most problematic. Portfolio building was often described as being time-consuming and difficult. For instance, in Retail and Business Administration it was difficult for some managers to grasp because it was outside of their normal experience. Some, however, found portfolios less of a problem once they understood what a portfolio entailed and might look like. A key criticism was that the Awarding Bodies were slow in providing the appropriate guidance.

Some candidates working towards MCI found it hard to recognise the need for collecting evidence on competences already proven. Several employers using MCI believed guidance to candidates on portfolio building was essential for the presentation of satisfactory evidence and called upon local colleges to provide this. Over and above these somewhat technical issues was the criticism, for instance, in Chemicals and Retail that the requirements of portfolios were excessive.

- Paperwork

The burden of paperwork was often cited as a difficulty that employers had to overcome. Once again the amount involved depended on the demands of the NVQ/SVQ. Some had developed quite sophisticated recording systems for logging assessment.

7.4.5 Factors affecting assessment related difficulties

The extent to which different sectors and employers experienced these problems can be related in part, to the following factors:

- Support of the Lead and Awarding Bodies

This varied considerably both between and within sectors. For instance, the Hairdressing Training Board has worked hard to iron out potential assessment problems. QFI and CAPITB in particular, had given their employers a lot of support in implementing NVQ/SVQ. So too had Glass Training Limited which felt it could ill afford any of its employers withdrawing from NVQ/SVQs given the small number of employers in their sector.

There were some very positive views about individual support and help received on specific issues. In some cases it was recognised that the Lead Bodies did not have the financial resources to provide the full back-up often required.

Despite these efforts not all employers thought favourably about these bodies. Both Lead and Awarding Bodies were criticised for: being remote; not giving enough support and help; being inflexible; continually 'moving the goal posts'; delays in forwarding documentation; being slow in issuing guidelines; and for self advertising rather than encouraging NVQ/SVQs.

- The existence of training infrastructure

Organisations with extensive experience of training and a familiarity with a 'mentoring approach', on the whole, found NVQ/SVQs easier to implement. Moreover, where experienced trainers existed they formed a convenient corps of assessors.

- Support networks for assessors

Several employers had developed support networks for assessors which gave them a forum for discussing any difficulties they experienced including interpreting the Occupational Standards and performance criteria. These networks also helped to ensure some consistency between assessors and were sometimes attended by internal verifiers.

Some of the difficulties employers are experiencing concerning assessors and the assessment process relate to the stage of NVQ/SVQ implementation within organisations. In particular, some can be attributed to initial 'teething problems' associated with introducing a new training, qualification and assessment infrastructure.

7.4.6 Assessment difficulties in the future

Over time employers will build up a stock of assessors although inevitably this stock will have to be renewed to take account of mobility and turnover. Thus problems associated with the availability of assessors and investing in their training are likely to diminish over time, although the costs of training assessors is likely to remain an issue (Chapter 8). Similarly, as NVQ/SVQs become more embedded and Lead Bodies mature, problems concerning the assessor training requirements are likely to decline. However, such an assertion is based on the assumption that no radical changes take place in the demands of assessor training. Yet there is some evidence from the case studies to suggest that assessor training may not be rigorous enough, which potentially undermines the credibility of NVQ/SVQs.

By contrast, the difficulties associated with the assessment process may be more long term. It is likely that the obstacles employers face in creating the time for assessment will continue. Similarly, unless there are changes in the requirements of portfolio building it is likely to continue to be considered an onerous activity.

The issues concerning NVQ/SVQ terminology and concepts are likely to improve as employers become more familiar with the terms and ideas. They are, however, likely to be a significant issue for new candidates and for employers wanting to implement NVQ/SVQs for the first time. The off-putting nature of the language should not be underestimated as it obscures employers and candidates' understanding of NVQ/SVQs. To some extent this issue can be alleviated by more readily available and accessible information as already suggested elsewhere.

Finally, many employers in the case studies suggested that their task of implementing NVQ/SVQs would be helped if there were no more changes in the contents of NVQ/SVQs and in the assessment requirements. The former may be difficult to satisfy if NVQ/SVQs are to meet the changing demands of employment. However, there is scope for consistency and standardisation in assessment requirements.

7.5 Verification

7.5.1 Organising verification

Most employers had some system of internal verification in place. However, some employers seemed to rely on the external verification from the Awarding Body.

7.5.2 Verification difficulties

The issues raised about verification were as follows:

- There was a lack of clarity about the verification process and its role. Verifiers were often unsure about what was involved in practice in checking the assessment process. Hence employers were unclear about what services they should be providing the verifiers.
- Identifying the most appropriate person to be nominated as an internal verifier was an issue in some organisations. In particular, some assessors were also internal verifiers which potentially led to conflicting roles.
- Visits from external verifiers were too infrequent.
- The consistency of standards of verification were questioned by some employers, especially those with nationwide sites who had had exposure to verifiers from different regions. They were particularly concerned about how external verifiers operated across assessment centres in different regions.
- Some employers believed that all external verifiers should be occupationally specific. For instance, people in the Care sector did not believe that an engineer was adequately equipped to verify in the Care sector.

The issues discussed above (section 7.4.3) about the conflicting roles of assessors raise some important questions about the objectivity and

independence of assessors. In turn, they potentially impact on the credibility of NVQ/SVQs within the workplace and within industry as a whole. Yet such issues do not appear to be addressed by verifiers.

The problems associated with verification and assessment and the nature of NVQ/SVQs (*ie* workbased) led some employers to conclude that it will be very important **where** an individual gained their NVQ/SVQ. Thus, contrary to the original hopes for NVQ/SVQs, the national exchange value of NVQ/SVQs may depend on where a person gained their NVQ/SVQ.

7.6 Summary

Once employers had decided to introduce NVQ/SVQs their implementation within the work place was facilitated by three factors:

- 'Champions' within the organisation
- NVQ/SVQ coordination, and
- the involvement of line managers.

The major implementation issues employers then faced were concerned with assessment. Although training towards NVQ/SVQs posed some problems such as, finding adequate time to train, support for trainees, and the quality of external training provision, these were minor compared with the task of assessment.

The main problems were related to:

- the lack of suitable assessors, the time involved in training assessors including issues about the quality, scope and nature of their training and their selection
- the assessment process and in particular, the time involved in assessing candidates and creating assessment opportunities; understanding NVQ/SVQ terminology and concepts; methods of assessment especially building portfolios; and the burden of paperwork generated by assessment.

Employers least likely to experience problems were those:

- with a strong commitment to training and a training-friendly environment
- with an existing training infrastructure, and
- who received help from their Lead and Awarding Body.

As important, some of the difficulties employers experience were related to the fact that NVQ/SVQs are still relatively new and in their early stages of development. Consequently, some of the difficulties are teething troubles and will decline with experience, whereas others are more integral to the current nature and format of NVQ/SVQs.

8. Costs and Benefits of NVQ/SVQs and their Impact on Human Resource Management

In this chapter we focus on the wider scene, including the costs and benefits of NVQ/SVQs and their impact or effect on organisations' human resource management. We call upon information from both the survey and case studies for issues concerning the costs and benefits but rely on the case studies for insights into the impact of NVQ/SVQs on organisations' human resource development.

8.1 The costs of NVQ/SVQs

8.1.1 Identifying the costs

As we saw in Chapter 4, the cost of introducing NVQ/SVQs was an important factor in helping to explain NVQ/SVQs take-up by employers. It should be noted however that employers only incur costs if they choose to pick up the tab; where they do not, then individuals are likely to be deterred by cost. The survey was able to identify these costs to employers by asking them an open question on what were the costs their organisation had to meet when using NVQ/SVQs. It showed that nearly half of the respondents considered the time and salary costs of candidates, supervisors and assessors as the key costs associated with using NVQ/SVQs (Table 8.1). Two out of five of the respondents mentioned training and materials and a further 27 per cent reported certification and registration.

Employment size had some impact on the issues identified. Employers with over 200 employees were more likely to identify the top four costs listed in Table 8.1 than were employers with less than 200 employees, who identified a variety of additional costs such as examination costs and college fees. A much higher percentage of large employers (24 per cent) than small employers (four per cent) mentioned the cost of assessor training. This can probably be related to these employers' greater use of internal staff as assessors (Chapter 7.4.1) and how employers of different sizes classify their training costs. The higher proportion of large employers (19 per cent) than small employers (nine per cent) identifying registration costs may be related to the numbers of employees taking NVQ/SVQs[1].

[1] These differences were not tested for statistical significance because numbers of cases were too small

Table 8.1 NVQ/SVQ users: costs met by organisations when using NVQ/SVQs (unweighted data)

Cost	N	% of respondents
Time and salary costs for candidates, supervisors and assessors	131	49
Training and materials	104	39
Certification and registration	72	27
Training assessors	49	18
Travel	20	7
Administration/paperwork	20	7
Development costs	4	1
None/none at the moment	23	9
Others	32	12
Don't know	41	15

Number of respondents: 269

Source: IMS Survey 1993

Employers in the case studies reiterated these key costs. They revealed that the most frequently mentioned cost reported by survey respondents (as shown in Table 8.1) were associated with:

- implementation — the time and salaries involved in convincing line managers, educating the workforce about NVQ/SVQs, briefing people about how NVQ/SVQs were to be implemented, and setting up the necessary frameworks and structures
- training — the time involved in candidates being trained by their supervisors and the resulting lost production
- assessment — the time involved in candidates being assessed; assessors' time including the necessary paperwork; lost production time of both candidates and assessors; and the time taken by candidates to collect evidence and build up portfolios.

Another 'cost' mentioned in the case studies was the impact of NVQ/SVQs on employee mobility. There was a real concern, especially amongst some Hairdressing companies, that employees' attainment of Level 3 would make them more attractive to other employers. But there were others who felt it was an obligation to their employees that they should meet. Similarly, a company using Business Administration perceived this 'cost' as a benefit. It believed that the nationally recognised status of NVQ/SVQs would help outplacement since employees were more marketable. Similarly, companies using MCI considered one of the benefits of NVQ/SVQs was their transferability.

8.1.2 Sector differences

The sector had little impact on the costs employers identified although the emphasis they placed on certain costs varied. For instance, in the Glass industry the development costs of NVQ/SVQs was a major consideration. These costs included staff time needed to convert generic Occupational Standards to usable workplace standards and to design vocational systems. These were primarily one-off costs and fell disproportionately on those companies pioneering the Occupational Standards. These costs, therefore, may be related more to the stage of NVQ/SVQ development within this particular sector rather than being sector specific *per se*.

Similarly, the start-up costs were greater in those sectors which were introducing new training and assessment infrastructures such as in Care and Retail. By contrast, they were less significant in sectors like Chemicals, Clothing, and Hairdressing which had well developed training infrastructures which pre-dated the introduction of NVQ/SVQs.

8.1.3 Calculating the costs

Few employers interviewed in the case studies were able to itemise and quantify the costs of implementing NVQ/SVQs in a comprehensive manner. Some had identified the more obvious costs such as assessor training, training materials, and registration and certification. But most were unable to assess the total costs because of:

- the nature of their financial data which were rarely comprehensive, and their accounting and budgetary procedures which tended to aggregate information on training costs thereby making costs difficult to identify
- the methodological difficulties of establishing comprehensive cost headings and allocating costs accordingly, and
- the practical difficulties of costing certain training costs such as staff time or lost production and opportunity costs.

Other employers had not even attempted such calculations, believing that it was not a feasible exercise given these difficulties.

Some training managers who had partially quantified costs had chosen not to reveal them for internal 'political' reasons. They felt that NVQ/SVQs might be at risk if the full costs were known within their organisations. Moreover, in line with broader strategic thinking they wanted to encourage the notion that training and NVQ/SVQs were an investment rather than a cost, and so gave more attention to trying to quantify the benefits.

A minority of employers, were doing some form of (often crude) cost/benefit analysis. For instance, in one company the future use of SVQs for managers depended on whether benefits in terms of employees' motivation could be measured in performance terms and justified in terms of costs. In Hairdressing, where the availability of public funding via YT was crucial, one large firm was actively

monitoring the cost/benefit equation of using Level 2 NVQs. The benefit of NVQs was slowly being eroded both in terms of the level of support and the nature and variability of TECs' outcome-related funding. If these trends continued, the firm may decide to use the standards alone, award its own certificate, but drop out of NVQs.

This lack of hard data on training costs is a familiar phenomenon. Nonetheless the perceived costs of implementing NVQ/SVQs remained a deterrent for some employers not already committed to the training.

8.1.4 Assessing the costs

There was mixed evidence from the case studies as to whether NVQ/SVQs represented a real increase in costs and whether the costs of NVQ/SVQs were unique to NVQ/SVQs or would have been incurred if another new qualification and training system had been introduced in its place.

For instance, an employer in Chemicals thought that assessment would involve little or no extra cost because:

- their assessor infrastructure was in place, trained and experienced
- their assessment processes had been honed-down to a fine art, and
- all employees were already assessed to the company's own Standards (which embraced but were more extensive than the industry Standards).

This employer concluded:

> 'whilst there is a major cost to this process, we regard this as an investment and we would be doing this anyway....So it comes down to registration and certification costs. In the context of what we are doing, that's peanuts.'

By contrast, another Chemical company which also had a well developed training structure and was committed to training had calculated that the costs of registration, assessment and certification for their entire engineering workforce would add upwards of £1 million to their training bill *'for no visible improvement in performance'* and hence were intending to use only the Occupational Standards.

In sectors like Care where new training systems for nursing auxiliaries had had to be devised, real additional costs were being incurred These costs, however, were not unique to NVQ/SVQs and were related to the development of a new training and qualification system. So in theory, the costs of NVQ/SVQs could be calculated net of training costs.

Overall there was a sense from the case studies that the costs of NVQ/SVQs acted as a significant barrier to take-up in all sectors. However, once individual organisations had decided to introduce NVQ/SVQs the extent to which costs were perceived as a major inhibiting factor varied considerably between employers. For instance, some employers in Chemicals had decided to only use Occupational

Standards because of the added costs of NVQ/SVQs. They took the view that those 'qualification' costs were properly the responsibility of individuals themselves. A few employers would have encouraged greater take-up if the costs had been less. This was well demonstrated in Bus and Coach where all interviewees were happy to seek NVQs for drivers whereas only two were interested in the more demanding and expensive engineering qualifications.

By contrast, as we have seen, some employers, once they had decided to adopt NVQ/SVQs, did not consider their implementation costs a major issue. These findings are supported by recent research[2] which showed that non-users of NVQ/SVQs were more concerned about the costs of implementing NVQ/SVQs than employers using NVQ/SVQs although the differences were not extremely marked.

8.1.5 The role of public funding

We have discussed at length in Chapter 4 (see Section 4.3.3) the significance of public funding and how its availability varied from sector to sector. It is important to note here, however, that the public funds received rarely covered the full costs of training. Moreover, in sectors like Clothing trainees were paid the going rate for the job. Hence the monies received for YT training represented only a percentage of their wage while the outcome related part was occasionally passed on to trainees once they achieved their NVQ.

8.2 The benefits of NVQ/SVQs

8.2.1. Identifying the benefits of NVQ/SVQs

Chapter 4 outlined some of the virtues of NVQ/SVQs which encouraged their take-up among employers. The survey asked employers who had used NVQ/SVQs an open question about what they saw as the main benefits of using NVQ/SVQs (Table 8.2). For just over a third of respondents it was improved standards of performance, for a quarter increased motivation of their staff, and for a further 18 per cent a nationally recognised qualification.

Employment size had little impact on the benefits identified although the emphasis varied slightly. Hence the benefit most frequently mentioned by employers with more than 200 employees was motivation while for employers with less than 200 employees it was that NVQ/SVQs were a nationally recognised standard.

Once again the case studies echoed the benefits reported in the survey and illustrated some of their dynamics. They highlighted benefits affecting both individual employees and organisations.

[2] *National Vocational Qualifications: A Survey of Progress*, (1993) Industrial Relations Services, London, April.

Table 8.2 NVQ/SVQ users: perceived main benefits of using NVQ/SVQs (unweighted data)

Benefit	N	% of respondents
Improve standards of performance	105	34
Motivation	76	25
Nationally recognised qualifications	57	18
Provides qualifications and recognition of skills	41	13
Relevant to job/industry	33	11
Provides assessment of progress	29	9
On-job training/less time away from work	25	8
Structured practically based training	24	8
Flexible workforce	12	4
None	7	2
Don't know	7	2
Others	62	20

Number of respondents: 310

Source: IMS Survey 1993

For instance, much of employees' enhanced motivation derived from increased self-esteem and the very real sense of pride they gained from achieving their NVQ/SVQ. For many, especially at Level 2 in Retail and Care, NVQs were an acknowledgement and recognition of their existing skills. For older candidates and women, in particular, in Bus and Coach, Clothing, and Care, NVQ/SVQs provided the first opportunity they had had of working towards and obtaining a qualification. Indeed, some companies recognised the importance of the event and held special NVQ/SVQ presentation ceremonies.

Employers recognised the way NVQ/SVQs contributed to employees' motivation in other ways too. Some had decided quite explicitly to opt for NVQ/SVQs rather than Occupational Standards alone because they believed employees were motivated by the opportunity to achieve a qualification and to have their competences recognised. For instance, this informed the decision of a company using MCI where significant proportions of its managers were not graduates. In other words, NVQ/SVQs were seen as particularly beneficial for individuals whereas Occupational Standards were more beneficial to organisations.

However, employers also attached considerable value to the Occupational Standards as such. Many commented on their usefulness, both in replacing previous standards and in relation to current needs. Though not always regarded as revolutionary, they provided a recognised valuable baseline for many employers.

There was some debate among employers about the impact of NVQ/SVQs on employees' work performance. For instance, in Bus and Coach, although drivers were very proud of their NVQ achievement none of them would claim to be a better driver as a result. It was working to Standards that, from the employers' perspective, made for better performance. Similarly, in Hairdressing, few employers thought that the quality of hairdressing would radically improve. By contrast, in Care it was believed that clients would receive better quality care.

There were similar debates about NVQ/SVQs' effect on productivity. For instance, one Retail company said that productivity during the piloting of NVQs had risen between 5-20 per cent. However, this company was exceptional in terms of its ability to measure such changes (see below Section 8.2.3). As we have seen other companies were much more sceptical (see Section 8.1.4). On the whole, the majority of employers hoped and believed that productivity would increase.

Other benefits to emerge from the case studies related to changes or improvements in training provision and these will be discussed later in this chapter. Benefits not directly related to training included:

- improvements in the efficiency of customer service which was especially important in the Retail sector
- reductions in turnover and absenteeism — one Retail company while piloting NVQs estimated that labour turnover had reduced by 12 per cent
- improvements in staff morale
- standardising the delivery of services in a fragmented organisational structure which was particularly relevant in Care
- improving relationships and communications between managers or supervisors and their staff especially where they are involved in assessment, whereby they had become closer to their staff and had gained deeper insights into the nature of their work and their performance, and
- improving the developmental experience of individuals becoming assessors.

8.2.2 Sector differences

There were no startling sector differences in the benefits reaped from NVQ/SVQs although certain benefits were more significant in some sectors than in others. For instance, in those sectors experiencing recruitment difficulties, such as Clothing and to a lesser extent Retail, NVQ/SVQs were believed to be a useful recruitment tool and a device for attracting recruits. In Hairdressing, it was believed that the real benefits of NVQ/SVQs would be longer term. They would result from the Standards-based career structure being developed and the extension of these systems to the majority of the industry, which is run by small proprietors/practitioners who do not recognise the importance of training and cannot (or will not) afford the time to find

out. In the short term, NVQ/SVQs were seen as one way of improving Hairdressing's 'image' problem.

8.2.3 Measuring benefits

Like the costs, very few employers had attempted systematically to measure the benefits of NVQ/SVQs. One company had commissioned a study to assess whether their Business Administration NVQ had led to improved performance and intended to appraise the performance of staff who had achieved their NVQ in a few years time. An employer in Retail had measured improvements during the piloting of NVQs but this company was exceptional. Some employers intended to set up some form of monitoring in the future.

Thus when employers talked of benefits in essence the majority talked about their perceived benefits rather than actual benefits. On the whole, they could not persuasively quantify the immediate, short-term benefits of NVQ/SVQs to the 'bottom line'. Although most agreed with the long term benefits claimed for NVQ/SVQs, these were not being measured either.

Some employers recognised the difficulties of accurately measuring the benefits of NVQ/SVQs due to:

- the lack of practical and satisfactory tools, in particular, the problems of identifying discrete criteria or indicators which were applicable to jobs and whose outcomes could be measured easily and isolated from the impact of other factors.

  For example, in the Glass industry it was difficult to link the introduction of NVQs to improvements in overall business performance because there were so many changes taking place in the industry. NVQs were just one of these changes and so it was difficult to assess their direct impact.

- organisational constraints such as the volume of training and the cost and time of a comprehensive evaluation.

Despite the lack of hard evidence, employers called upon the benefits of NVQ/SVQ to justify their introduction. Implicit in this justification was the notion of some cost/benefit analysis. For instance, one enthusiastic supporter in Chemicals commented:

> 'NVQs took a long time and cost a lot of money. I have continually had to demonstrate the benefits of this training and education programme (*sic*) to my Board. But I can do that, in terms of lower unit costs, improved quality, lower accident rates, higher staff motivation and greater flexibility.'

On the whole it was difficult for employers to judge whether the benefits accruing from NVQ/SVQs were unique to NVQ/SVQs or if they would have arisen had another training innovation been introduced. In general, it was too early for them to make definitive judgements.

8.3 The impact of NVQ/SVQs on training

8.3.1 Impact on the volume of training and number of people gaining a qualification

There was mixed evidence from the case studies about the extent to which the introduction of NVQ/SVQs had led to any changes in the amount of training undertaken by employers. In most of the companies in sectors like Care, Glass, and Retail, where NVQ/SVQs had not replaced an existing qualification, there had been a net increase in the number of people receiving training. Similarly, where employers had adopted NVQ/SVQs rather than Occupational Standards there had been an increase in the number of employees gaining a qualification. In these sectors entire groups of people were receiving training for the first time or were receiving much more extensive training.

In those sectors which had training or a qualification in place prior to the introduction of NVQ/SVQs the evidence was much more mixed and hence each sector has been examined in turn. In Chemicals almost all the case study companies had well developed training structures prior to the introduction of NVQ/SVQs and there was little evidence of increased training activity.

The Hairdressing companies interviewed were atypical of the industry as a whole because of the importance they attached to properly organised training and their commitment to training in contrast to the majority of small salons. In these particular companies there was little evidence of an increase in the volume of training where NVQ/SVQs have replaced the long standing City & Guilds competence-based training provision.

By contrast, in Clothing there was some evidence of increased training activity but only in those Clothing companies where existing employees had access to NVQs (primarily where public funding had been made available for non-Youth Trainees). The volume of training did not increase for new entrants as they had always been trained. However, both groups of employees had opportunities of gaining a recognised qualification for the first time.

In Bus and Coach, there have been long standing Ministry of Transport tests for Bus and Coach Drivers and Instructors. The NVQs incorporated these tests but went further than the statutory tests. As a result the training received in some companies, but not all, was more comprehensive. For instance, for drivers it included not only driving ability but also customer care, health and safety plus optional units relating to the type of service being practised. However, most existing employees who volunteered to take their NVQs received little or no additional training nor did instructors. Both groups were now able to gain a qualification whereas in the past none existed.

Companies using the Business Administration NVQ/SVQs reported an overall increase in the volume of training and employees' access. For instance, additional training had had to be provided to meet the

requirements of some NVQ/SVQ units. Employers using MCI also said that the amount of training had increased but the existence of the Standards programme and NVQ/SVQs was just one contributory factor among many which had helped to give training a higher profile in their organisation.

In nearly all the sectors, except amongst employers using MCI, the increase of training and those gaining qualifications had been primarily amongst those lower down the occupational hierarchy. This is borne out by the fact that, as the survey reveals, the majority of employees were involved in NVQ/SVQs Level 2. This development was particularly significant in sectors like Care where training opportunities in the past had been aimed primarily at professionals or managers such as, nurses or social workers. In other words, the introduction of NVQ/SVQs helped to redress an imbalance both in access to training and in the scope of training provision.

Thus we see that there have been some overall net increases in the amount of training undertaken by employers as a direct result of NVQ/SVQs, and especially in training for employees at the base of the occupational hierarchy.

The question of causality however, needs to be treated with caution. The introduction of NVQ/SVQs did not automatically lead to increases in training provision. NVQ/SVQs were being used by some employers to endorse and formalise their existing training provision. In other words, the fact that more people were getting a qualification did not mean that more people were being trained. Moreover, NVQ/SVQs did not necessarily lead to training — a finding in keeping with the logic and philosophy of NVQ/SVQs. NVQ/SVQs were being awarded on the basis of individuals' existing skills and competences without additional training. Finally, the amount companies spent on training may have risen without the volume of training increasing. For instance, the cost of registration increased the training spend but not training activity *per se*.

8.3.2 Impact of NVQ/SVQs on training provision

There was a broad consensus among many employers in all sectors that NVQ/SVQs had helped to structure training provision and to highlight gaps in existing provision. For instance, NVQ/SVQs had been used to identify training needs and to focus training accordingly. As a result training could be more accurately targeted. In turn this enhanced the credibility of NVQ/SVQ training.

There was little agreement, however, on the extent to which NVQ/SVQs had led to any changes in:

- the quality of training
- the training process, and
- attitudes towards training in their organisations; though since many were the 'training-committed' this is hardly surprising. However, they were hopeful that others — the non-committed — would follow their lead.

Those employers with well developed training structures did not believe, on the whole, that the quality of their training, their training processes and their company's attitude towards training had changed as a result of NVQ/SVQs. This was further supported by the fact that most had made relatively few changes in their training provision to meet the NVQ/SVQ requirements.

Many of these employers felt that NVQ/SVQs would complement rather than directly affect their training process, culture and procedures. It was market pressures that altered corporate attitudes towards training not NVQ/SVQs. NVQ/SVQs were perceived as a timely enabling mechanism for translating the changing attitudes into action.

By contrast, some employers perceived the competence based approach to training as a means of raising its quality. Employers in Care and using Business Administration NVQ/SVQs who were engaged in the process of developing their NVQ/SVQ training, in particular, believed that NVQ/SVQs had positively changed their organisation's attitude towards training and increased their commitment to providing high quality training. These benefits, however, tended to be restricted to a certain phase in employers' development of NVQ/SVQ.

The competence based approach of NVQ/SVQs had had a limited impact on training provision among, for instance, employers using the MCI. For example, one employer had developed a new in-house management development courses which was structured around the notion of competences. A few employers reported that their training records had improved as result of NVQ/SVQs' influence.

8.4 The impact of NVQ/SVQs on human resource management

Employers were asked in the case study interviews whether NVQ/SVQs were having any influence upon their organisation's:

- recruitment and promotion procedures
- staff appraisal and staff development
- use of TQM/Investors in People and other initiatives
- analysis of training needs
- analysis of skill needs, and
- use of labour and manpower planning.

Overall there was little evidence that NVQ/SVQs were yet being used systematically to enhance these aspects of human resource management.[3] The exceptions were TQM and national training

[3] A recent survey of 171 employers (*Industrial Relations Review and Report, op. cit.*) supports these finding but shows a more widespread use of NVQ/SVQs than our case studies. It showed that over half of NVQ/SVQ users never used NVQ/SVQs to help them in recruitment and selection; appraisal; organisation skill and training audits.

initiatives like Investors in People. As we have seen elsewhere in this report (Chapter 4) NVQ/SVQs were sometimes being used in conjunction with these training and quality initiatives. For example, one company in the Retail sector had recently been awarded Investors in People as a result of their NVQs achievements. However, on the whole, there was not a distinct causal relationship between NVQ/SVQs and IiP rather these initiatives complemented each other.

Evidence on the use of NVQ/SVQs for other aspects of personnel management was much more patchy. For instance, one hospital was using NVQ/SVQs as part of its reprofiling and skills mix exercise to help assess the proportion of trained to untrained staff and nurses required. One Bus and Coach company was intending to use NVQ/SVQs to help create a smaller more skilled and flexible engineering workforce. This is likely to be happening elsewhere in engineering.

Several organisations training towards Business Administration NVQ/SVQs were using them to derive recruitment criteria and as benchmarks for recruitment. A few of these employers were also recruiting on the basis of whether candidates had achieved their NVQ/SVQ. It is likely that the use of NVQ/SVQs in recruitment will become a greater issue for the future; at present numbers are too small and there is still a considerable lack of basic understanding of what they actually mean.

The case studies also highlighted how NVQ/SVQs were being used in other aspects of human resource management not cited above.

- A Bus and Coach company that was experiencing a reduction in staff levels was intending to build NVQs into its decisions about retention and disciplinary action.
- A Local Authority using the Care NVQs suggested that they had impacted on the organisation's equal opportunity policies. These NVQs which include issues about candidates's values had provided concrete and constructive examples of the operation of anti-oppressive policies in practice, rather than in theory as was the case prior to their introduction.
- A Retail company was using NVQs as part of their on-going process on improving human resources policies. For instance NVQs encouraged managers to examine their staff's performance more thoroughly and to find ways of improving their performance (although they were not using NVQs formally for appraisal).

The reason why employers were not using NVQ/SVQs more extensively in their human resource management may be related to the following issues.

- Research[4] clearly shows that some (especially small) companies do not have any explicit human resource management policies.

[4] Hendry C, Jones A, Arthur M, Pettigrew C (1991), *Human Resource Development in Small to Medium sized Enterprises*, Research Paper No. 88 Employment Department, London.

- In many organisations NVQ/SVQs remain in the domain of trainers rather than personnel departments or line managers. In other words, once middle and line managers become more involved in NVQ/SVQs and 'own' them, they may begin to use them more extensively and more imaginatively.
- Some companies feel that the standards are too structured and rigid to use for staff appraisal.
- Several companies recognise the potential for using NVQ/SVQs in their human resource management but are too pre-occupied with their implementation. In other words, once they feel NVQ/SVQs have bedded down they may be able to turn their attention to other NVQ/SVQ uses.

8.5 Summary

The key costs which just under a half of all survey respondents incurred in using NVQ/SVQs were associated with the time and salaries of candidates, supervisors and assessors. The next most significant cost reported by two out of five employers related to training and materials. No major size or sectoral differences in these costs were revealed. However, the case studies clearly showed how very few employers were able to itemise and quantify the costs in a comprehensive manner. They also suggested that the extent to which employers perceived costs as a major barrier to take-up and subsequent implementation varied considerably.

Over a third of employers in the survey reported improved standards of performance as the main benefit of NVQ/SVQs and a further quarter improved staff motivation. Employers in the case studies proclaimed a range of further benefits but there were few differences depending on their sector or size. Although very few of them had attempted to systematically measure or evaluate the benefits of NVQ/SVQs they called upon these benefits to justify their introduction. They saw NVQ/SVQs as particularly beneficial to individuals while Occupational Standards were more beneficial to organisations.

There was some evidence that the introduction of NVQ/SVQs had led to a net increase in the volume of employer training but any causal relationship needs to be treated with care. By contrast, there was little evidence as yet, to suggest that NVQ/SVQs had influenced organisation's human resource management.

9. Conclusions on Take-up and Implementation

The prime objectives of this study were to gather information on early indications of employers':

- current and intended take-up and use of NVQ/SVQs and Occupational Standards and factors affecting these
- the nature of their usage, and
- perceptions of the costs, benefits and difficulties of implementation.

There were three main components to this study:

- a preliminary stage to help identify the key issues to be investigated
- a telephone survey of a representative sample of over 1,500 employers and covering over one million employees which gathered information on awareness and take-up of NVQ/SVQs and Occupational Standards, and
- 50 case studies of employing organisations in nine different Lead Body sectors which sought to explore experiences in using NVQ/SVQs and Occupational Standards.

This concluding chapter draws together the main themes to emerge from all parts of the research.

9.1 Current take-up of NVQ/SVQs and Occupational Standards

While the majority of employers in the survey had heard of NVQ/SVQs only a relatively small number had started using them. Take-up varied significantly by size of firm: 44 per cent of firms with over 500 employees were using NVQ/SVQs compared with six per cent with less than 50 employees. Take-up also varied by sector and regions but to a much lesser extent.

For the economy as a whole we estimate from the survey that approximately five per cent of firms are using NVQ/SVQs. This rises to about six per cent when those using Occupational Standards instead of NVQ/SVQs rather than in addition are included.

Another estimated 22 per cent of firms intend or express interest in using NVQ/SVQs and about 72 per cent of firms are interested neither in NVQ/SVQs nor Occupational Standards.

When take-up is estimated by reference to the number of employees within the firms which are using NVQ/SVQs and/or Occupational Standards, approximately 28 per cent of employees are covered. This is because larger firms are more likely to be users.

9.2 Future take-up of NVQ/SVQs

The take-up of NVQ/SVQs is likely to increase in the future.

Thirty four per cent of large firms (with over 500 employees) plan or anticipate using NVQ/SVQs, bringing a total projected take-up among large firms to 78 per cent. Take-up is likely to increase among very small firms (under 50 employees), which is encouraging: some eight per cent had plans underway and/or anticipate future use, bringing the total projected take-up rate to 14 per cent.

9.3 Use of NVQ/SVQs and Occupational Standards

The survey showed a similar pattern of usage of NVQs to that indicated nationally by NVQs awarded to date with those in 'Providing Business Services' being the most widely used.

Construction, and energy and water were the two industrial sectors (SICs) with the highest proportions of survey respondents using NVQ/SVQs. However, cross-sectoral NVQ/SVQs were the most widely used especially those relating to Business Services and Engineering.

Employers mainly used NVQ/SVQs to provide initial training for new recruits but also used them to retrain existing staff and to accredit staff's existing skills and competences. Employers tended to use them in their entirety rather than selecting out particular Units and the most popular NVQ/SVQs were at Level 2 (see Chapter 5, Table 5.6).

Occupational Standards were most commonly used in an adapted form in preparation for NVQ/SVQs and for training, or because they were less expensive than NVQ/SVQs.

9.4 Participation levels and penetration rate

The survey identified a total of 28,497 employees and trainees working towards the one NVQ/SVQ most widely used in their organisation. Of these 35 per cent had achieved a full NVQ/SVQ and a further 29 percent had achieved Units.

In most survey organisations using NVQ/SVQs only a small number of employees were involved — for over half less than ten — although a few very large organisations had a much higher number participating. On average 29 per cent of those for whom the main NVQ/SVQ was relevant, were said to be working towards this NVQ/SVQ: a promising start.

9.5 Factors affecting take-up and usage and employers' perceptions of the costs, benefits and difficulties of implementation

Numerous factors were identified in the study which affected employers' take-up and use of NVQ/SVQs and Standards. No one factor, however, can be singled out because in reality they acted in conjunction with each other. Clusters of factors affecting take-up and use, therefore, have been identified demonstrating their complexity and interaction. Each cluster illustrates different thinking behind employers' non-use of NVQ/SVQs. They include some of the steps or processes employers may embrace when considering introducing and implementing NVQ/SVQs. In other words, they represent a hierarchy of **perceived** hurdles or deterrents which employers may think they have to overcome if they want to use NVQ/SVQs. They point to the actions required to encourage and increase take-up and use.

Lack of awareness

- Lack of awareness of Occupational Standards (and their potential uses) is a barrier to take-up in all firms but especially among small companies.
- Lack of awareness of NVQ/SVQs is an obstacle particularly among small companies and among individuals. We estimate that employers representing 46 per cent of the workforce are unaware of NVQ/SVQs.

Lack of information and understanding

- While employers who had sought information and advice about NVQ/SVQs for the most part found it helpful, those non-users who were aware of NVQ/SVQs reported in the survey that more information and training about NVQ/SVQs would encourage them to introduce NVQ/SVQs. Small employers in particular, identified the lack of information as inhibiting.
- Only one third of employers who were not using NVQ/SVQs had sought or obtained information on NVQ/SVQs compared with eight out of ten users.
- The information mainly came form local organisations such as TECs and colleges and it was considered helpful by the majority of respondents.

A general lack of understanding was evident among almost one in three of all survey respondents and especially among non-users and those who had not sought information.

Aware but no support in principle as they remain unconvinced by their conceptual framework, relevance, and benefits

- Non-users may not sympathise with the principles underpinning NVQ/SVQs. In the survey, fewer non-users than users fully appreciated the differences between NVQ/SVQs and former types of qualifications. Non-users were especially less inclined to recognise the vocational and competence-based nature of NVQ/SVQs (Chapter 3, Table 3.5).
- Non-users may be unconvinced of the relevance and necessity of NVQ/SVQs. These two factors were reported by nearly a half of non-users in the survey who had no intention of using NVQ/SVQs in the future (see Chapter 4, Table 4.2).
- Non-users may be unswayed by the perceived benefits and advantages of NVQ/SVQs. In the survey, far fewer non-users than users agreed with positive statements about NVQ/SVQs. In particular, less agreed that NVQ/SVQs would raise standards, help motivate staff or that managers and supervisors would benefit from their involvement in assessment (see Appendix 1 Table 3a).
- Prospective users may lack NVQ/SVQ 'champions' in the form of corporate leaders and employee representatives which were essential for users.
- Some non-users may be disinclined to train their employees. In the survey, they were somewhat less likely than users to provide on-the-job training.

Support in principle but no obligation or incentives to act

- Neither the achievement of Standards nor NVQ/SVQs are mandatory and hence there are no statutory incentives for employers to act nor penalties for not acting. Indeed, some non-users in the survey said that they would introduce NVQ/SVQs only if they became a legal requirement.
- Where there are obligations, for instance, as a condition of TEC funding for Youth and Employment Trainees, take-up has been positively affected. Some users in the survey identified YT and ET as an important factor influencing their decision to introduce NVQ/SVQ (see Chapter 4, Table 4.4).

  The survey showed that employers' involvement in these schemes increased considerably the likelihood of them using NVQ/SVQs (see Chapter 4, Table 4.5). It suggested their involvement had a knock-on effect on their other training provision and in raising awareness among their other employees who were not trainees. In other words, NVQ/SVQs were being used on their own merits and not just because they were a Government requirement which is a very positive development. However, significantly the initial impetus for NVQ/SVQs' use was associated in many cases with a requirement under YT and ET.

Content with NVQ/SVQs but concerned about the Occupational Standards per se particularly their presentation, flexibility, and relevance to the workplace

- Prospective users may be concerned that the Standards are difficult to understand and poorly presented. They also may be put off by their language and complexity. Even some users found the terminology and concepts used difficult to grasp and to implement in practice.
- Possible users may be concerned about the appropriateness of the Occupational Standards to meet their business needs. They may want greater flexibility in the way in which the Standards have been packaged into NVQ/SVQs. Some non-users believed that they need to be more buyer rather than supplier led.
- Employers may have mixed opinions as to the extent to which the Occupational Standards are too narrow or too broad (see Chapter 3, Table 3.7). Current users who suggested that they are too narrow, thought that they were too occupationally specific and thus too restrictive. By contrast, those users who believed that they were too broad thought they were overly generic and thus not directly related to their needs in the workplace. These differing perspectives may deter prospective users.

Content with the Standards but concerned about NVQ/SVQ qualifications per se, particularly their appropriateness, added-value, relevance, and credibility

- Some non-users who are interested in and committed to training may not see NVQ/SVQs as the most appropriate qualification or training vehicle. Their rejection of NVQ/SVQs did not necessarily mean a rejection of training.
- Non-users may be content with their existing training and qualifications, which already may be based on the idea of standards, competences, performance and assessment. They may not see, therefore, any added value to using NVQ/SVQs. Nearly a third of non-users in the survey who said they were unlikely to use NVQ/SVQs in the future reported that they were satisfied with their existing training scheme and/or qualification (see Chapter 4, Table 4.2).
- Employers' main concern is high level employee performance and some may not be interested in whether their employees possess a qualification. Thus more non-users than users in the survey agreed with the statement that 'it is being able to do the job that counts — qualifications are irrelevant' (see Appendix 1 Table 3a).
- Over a third of non-users who were unlikely to use NVQ/SVQs in the future saw their lack of relevance and their inappropriateness as issues discouraging take-up (see Chapter 4, Table 4.2). This is likely to influence prospective users too.
- NVQ/SVQs may lack credibility among some potential users. This is because they are considered by some employers: to lack academic rigour; to have squeezed out job knowledge; to make a limited contribution to vocational education; to threaten

professionalism; and have yet to gain currency as the accepted standard within their industry.

Content with NVQ/SVQs in principle but cautious about the outcomes, inputs and process in practice

- Some prospective users may be dubious about the outcomes and in particular the benefits accruing from the introduction of NVQ/SVQs. Indeed, one in five non-users in the survey singled out potential benefits as the main factor which would encourage them to introduce NVQ/SVQs (see Chapter 4, Table 4.3).

  By contrast, the main factor which influenced nearly a half of users to introduce NVQs was staff development and performance — which can be classified as a benefit (see Chapter 4, Table 4.4). The main benefits users specifically identified in the survey were improved standards of performance reported by over a third and staff motivation mentioned by a further quarter (see Chapter 8, Table 8.2). However, case study employers debated the impact of NVQ/SVQs on work performance and productivity.

  Users in the case studies recognised the difficulties of accurately measuring these benefits. They could not persuasively quantify the immediate, short-term benefits of NVQ/SVQs to the 'bottom line'. Yet they called upon the benefits of NVQ/SVQs to justify their introduction.

- Other outcomes prospective users may be concerned about include the impact of NVQ/SVQs on their training and human resource management. From users' experience such concerns would be invalid for the first issue but valid for the second.

  There was a broad positive consensus among users in all sectors that NVQ/SVQs had helped to structure training provision, identify training needs and focus training. Although not always revolutionary, the Occupational Standards were very helpful and provided a valuable baseline for employers.

  There was little agreement on NVQ/SVQs' impact on training quality, the training process and attitudes towards training as many users were already highly committed. In addition, there was little evidence that NVQ/SVQs were being used systematically to enhance employers' human resource management.

- Employers may be concerned about costly inputs associated with implementation, training and assessment. Half the users in the survey identified the main costs as those associated with the time and salaries needed for NVQ/SVQ candidates, supervisors and assessors (see Chapter 8,Table 8.1). A further one in five specified the costs of training and material.

Implementation costs

Users' experiences showed that some potential users may have to devote considerable resources to implementing NVQ/SVQs. For instance, they would have to spend time and money educating

their workforce and managers about NVQ/SVQs and how they were to be implemented.

Training costs

Given the nature of users' experiences, some prospective users may have to develop new training infrastructures and systems or adapt their existing ones. Others may have to create new training courses and materials although evidence from users on the impact of NVQ/SVQ on their training courses was mixed.

For many users, NVQ/SVQs had encouraged a net increase in the amount of training they undertook especially in training directed at employees at the base of the occupational hierarchy. Not all users, however, incurred additional training expenses or increased their volume of training. This was because some used NVQ/SVQs to endorse their existing training provision while others used them to accredit employees' existing skills and competences which required no additional training. Thus some potential users may have to absorb additional training costs, while others would not.

Assessment costs

Most users had had to set up assessment infrastructures and train assessors, which had cost implications. They had to absorb the costs of the time involved assessing candidates and the lost production time of both assessors and candidates. Most had chosen to pay for certification and registration which over a quarter in the survey identified as a key expenditure when using NVQ/SVQs (see Chapter 8, Table 8.1).

The costs of assessment, registration and certification had led a small proportion of employers to use Standards rather than NVQ/SVQs. These employers took the view that these 'qualification' costs were the responsibility of individuals themselves.

The extent to which users perceived implementation, training and assessment costs as a barrier to take-up varied considerably. However, the costs are likely to be a deterrent to those prospective users not already committed to training.

Employers thinking about using NVQ/SVQs would have to weigh up the respective costs and benefits of introducing them, just like users. They, like users, may encounter the familiar phenomenon of not being able to quantify the costs of implementing NVQ/SVQs in a comprehensive manner.

- Possible users may be concerned about how to meet these costs and about the availability of public funding.

  A few non-users in the survey believed that more financial help or incentives to meet the additional expenses incurred would encourage them to introduce NVQ/SVQs (see Chapter 4, Table 4.3). Financial concerns were not, however, the preserve of non-users. Over three-quarters of all survey respondents (both users

and non-users) agreed with the statement that the cost of NVQ/SVQs should be shared between Government and the employers (see Chapter 3, Table 3.6).

Public funding for NVQ/SVQs was one of the most significant factors influencing users to introduce them (see Chapter 4, Table 4.4). It played an important role in helping to explain both the pattern of take-up in certain sectors and which Level of NVQs were being used. Financial assistance has a significant role to play in future take-up. It was singled out by users in the survey as the most important change required to extend the availability of NVQ/SVQs to employees (see Chapter 4, Table 4.6).

Users, however, were often frustrated by TEC funding and in particular, by the varying criteria different TECs attached to obtaining these funds. Those considering using NVQ/SVQ may be faced with a similar hurdle.

- Prospective users may be wary of the difficulties and sometimes onerous processes involved in implementing NVQ/SVQs.

  There is a widespread general perception that NVQ/SVQs are complex and their language is off-putting. Indeed, about a half of all survey respondents agreed with the statement that 'NVQ/SVQs need to be simpler so that employers and employees can understand them'.

Implementation difficulties

In contrast to satisfaction among employers about information received in response to initial enquiries, difficulties over understanding NVQ/SVQs and unsatisfactory information and guidance **when implementing NVQ/SVQs** was mentioned by over a third of users in the survey (see Chapter 7, Table 7.1). Overcoming the internal resistance to NVQ/SVQs from line managers and professionals was another difficulty, as was encouraging positive responses from employees.

Potential users may also encounter these initial implementation difficulties. They, like users, would be able to surmount the internal resistance if they had 'champions' in their organisation to promote NVQ/SVQs and if they won the support of their line managers. If they designated or appointed a person specifically to take responsibility for co-ordinating NVQ/SVQs activities their smooth implementation would be facilitated.

Training difficulties

Once possible users have convinced their workforce of the virtues of NVQ/SVQs they may have to ensure their training system is in place. Users' experiences suggested that the main training difficulties they would face, although not considered a major hurdle, would be finding the time to train candidates and give them adequate support. Indeed, the most common difficulty users reported in the survey was related to the time to implement, train and assess (see Chapter 7, Table 7.1).

Assessment difficulties

Users' experiences showed that the most onerous process in implementing NVQ/SVQs was associated with assessment. They encountered practical difficulties with assessors, such as their availability and training. They were sometimes burdened by the assessment process in terms of finding time for assessment, creating assessment opportunities, and in using certain assessment methods. It is likely that most non-users would have to overcome these difficulties if they decided to introduce NVQ/SVQs.

Content with NVQ/SVQs provision, prepared to deal with them in practice but concerned about whether they fit within their overall business needs

- The extent to which NVQ/SVQs fitted with companies' overall business needs was the final decisive factor. This, above all, affected firms' readiness to take on NVQ/SVQs and their willingness to absorb any additional costs and difficulties arising from their introduction. It helped explain why NVQ/SVQs in particular where considered more appropriate than other qualifications.

  NVQ/SVQs' fit with business needs was usually driven by market pressures. It was more likely to be found in those companies which had incorporated NVQ/SVQs (explicitly or implicity) into their human resource development strategy, and training strategy in particular. This often manifests itself in terms of a strong training culture and a well developed training infrastructure.

  Organisations with a strong training culture developed in advance of NVQ/SVQs and Standards were the ones most likely to embrace NVQ/SVQs and the positive training qualities they offered. Such employers were found in all sectors and, with a few exception were large.

9.6 The way forward

The research shows that there is a lot of support and enthusiasm for NVQ/SVQs and Occupational Standards, especially from large firms and 'committed trainers'. But take-up is low in medium sized and small firms. The reasons for this are numerous. They relate to a lack of awareness and understanding of NVQ/SVQs; questions over the contents of NVQ/SVQs; and concerns over the costs and benefits. Above all, the most decisive factor is whether NVQ/SVQs fit with companies' overall business needs and the extent to which companies incorporate (explicitly or implicitly) NVQ/SVQs into their human resource development or training strategies.

There are ways of improving take-up by individual employers and helping to broaden the base of NVQ/SVQ use so that other companies can benefit from this valuable government initiative. This research has highlighted some of those ways.

Appendix 1: Statistical Information

This contains details of the survey methodology and some additional tables not included in the main text of this report.

1.1 The survey

1.1.1 Survey design

The survey was conducted via telephone interviews and conducted on behalf of IMS by Research International (RI), a specialist company in telephone surveying.

1.1.2 Sample frame

An initial sample of 6,000 organisations to be approached in the survey was selected by RI, mainly using the Dun and Bradstreet database. Deficiencies in using this source for public services were made up for by references to a number of directories to ensure a range of different kinds of public organisations were included. The sample design reflected the distribution of employment in each SIC sector of the UK economy. A double weighting needed to be given to Agriculture because the numbers employed in this sector were low and hence the sample chosen would not have statistical significance in the subsequent analysis. The organisations in each sector were then selected on the additional criterion that equal numbers should be in each of five size bands, the size of the organisations being measured by the numbers employed.

1.1.3 Questionnaire design

The questionnaire was designed in three parts.

- Part 1: General questions to be asked of all respondents
- Part 2: Questions specific to NVQ/SVQs and hence only to be asked of NVQ/SVQ users
- Part 3: Questions specific to Occupational Standards and hence only to be asked of Occupational Standards users.

For further details see Appendix 2, Questionnaire contents.

1.1.4 Pilot and main survey

Two pilot studies of a total of 30 organisations were undertaken prior to the main survey to test the feasibility of the questionnaire, and the length of time which would be required to interview different categories of respondent.

As a result of the first pilot a number of questions were re-phrased, hence the need for a second pilot test. A particular issue was the language used to convey what we wanted to cover, particularly around the area of Occupational Standards.

For both the pilots prior to the main survey, IMS researchers visited Research International, where they gave a general introduction to the interviewers about NVQ/SVQs and gave guidance on key terms used in the questionnaire. They also supplied a comprehensive list of current NVQ/SVQs available to help the interviewers identify specific NVQ/SVQs in use, and were available during the early stages of interviewing to answer queries in connection with the questionnaire.

Although initially the target sample was 2,000 interviews this had to be reduced to 1,500 to stay within the available resources. This was because more time was needed to complete each interview, and on average we achieved a greater penetration of users (*ie* where Parts 1 and 2 of the questionnaire were needed) than had been originally expected.

Research International contacted 4,545 employers from the sample frame, and 1,506 agreed to take part in the survey.

1.1.5 Nature of the achieved sample

Table 1a provides a breakdown of the achieved sample of 1,506 by SIC code and also by size of employer. The sample conforms closely in both aspects to the planned sample, but in some cases the organisations reported that their size and/or sector were different to that quoted in the source documents from which the sample was drawn.

Eighty six per cent of the sample was in the private sector, 11 per cent in the public, and three per cent in the voluntary sector. These proportions were very close to those specified in the sample design.

Table 1a Distribution of achieved sample by SIC and employer size

SIC CODE	-49	50-99	100-199	200-499	500+	Size not given	Totals
Agriculture	6	3	9	9	6		33
Energy and water	6	8	6	9	12		41
Extraction of minerals	7	12	9	11	5	1	45
Metal goods	33	35	34	30	30		162
Other manufacturing	30	31	29	35	33	1	159
Construction	16	11	11	14	14	1	67
Distribution, hotels and catering	71	65	69	54	61	3	323
Transport and communications	17	17	18	19	17	2	90
Banking and finance	27	13	19	22	25		106
Other services	75	60	59	92	177	16	479
Total	288	255	263	296	380	24	1506

Source: IMS Survey 1993

Table 1b Specification for target sample by number of employees

SIC code	Total Employment (%)	Under 50	50-99	100-199	200-499	Over 500	Total
Agriculture	1	24	24	24	24	24	120
Energy and water	2	24	24	24	24	24	120
Extraction of minerals	3	36	36	36	36	36	225
Metal goods	11	132	132	132	132	132	825
Other manufacturing	9	108	108	108	108	108	675
Construction	5	60	60	60	60	60	375
Distribution, hotels and catering	20	240	240	240	240	240	1500
Transport and communications	6	72	72	72	72	72	450
Banking and finance	11	132	132	132	132	132	825
Other services	32	384	384	384	384	384	2400
Total	100	1200	1200	1200	1200	1200	6000

Source: IMS Survey 1993

1.1.6 Statistically significant differences

Throughout the report comparisons are made between various sub-groups of the employer sample on such matters as level of NVQ/SVQ usage, attitudes to NVQ/SVQ *etc.*

The method used in each case was to compare the proportions of each sub-group, *eg* of employers with fewer than 200 employees and employers with more than 200 employees, using NVQ/SVQs or expressing a given attitude. The significance of apparent differences in level of response was tested using the chi-squared test. If the difference is statistically significant the level of significance (*eg* 0.05) is stated in the text.

1.1.7 Weighting

Because the sample is biased towards large firms it was necessary to undertake a weighting exercise in order to correct this imbalance and make estimates for the economy as a whole.

In order to equate the sample to national distributions by size band we looked for an appropriate matrix which gave the proportion of firms in the GB economy in the various employees size bands. Obtaining such a matrix which is reliable and up to date was not straightforward. In the end we found the best source was in a study conducted by Bannock and Daly in 1990 (see *Employment Gazette*, May 1990) which combined several sources of data at an aggregate level to obtain estimates of firms of different sizes and their employment distribution. This is shown in Table 1c.

Table 1c Population estimates: number of firms and employment

Size band	Number of firms (000's)	Share of total employment (%)
1-2	1579	9.7
3-10	663	16.1
11-49	184	16.7
50-99	20	6.9
100-199	14	9.9
200-499	8	11.9
500+	4	28.7
Total	2471	

Source: Employment Gazette, May 1990

We made use of these population data in two ways. Firstly, we applied the figures for percentage of take-up, intention, interest, *etc.*

to the number of firms in each size band in the population. This gave us an estimated number of firms in the population in each size band which were users, *etc.* We then summed these across the size bands to arrive at an estimate for the population (see Fig. 2.1, Chapter 2). Thus while 22 per cent of the sample were using NVQ/SVQs and/or Occupational Standards, the population figure was six per cent on average. This is a relatively crude estimate because it does not take into consideration variations by sector as well as size, but there is insufficient accurate information for the population to make this a worthwhile exercise.

All tables with the heading 'weighted estimates' have been compiled on this basis. All other tables with 'unweighted data' in the title are based on survey data.

The second way we used these population figures was to make an estimation of the number of employees covered by firms using NVQ/SVQs and or Occupational Standards. We derived weights for each size band based on the distribution of employees in the sample compared to that in the population. This showed that for the smallest category (under 50) we should have had 60.7 times more employees in firms in the sample if it was to reflect the population. The corresponding figures for the other categories in ascending order were 4.3, 3.0, 1.4 and finally 0.344 for the over 500 band. We applied these weights to the number of employees in the sample in firms in each size band which were using and not using NVQ/SVQs and or Occupational Standards. By totalling them we then derived percentages for the whole population. Thus while the survey showed that approximately half of employees covered by sampled firms were in firms that were using NVQ/SVQs, the population figure was 23 per cent. The combined figure for NVQ/SVQs and Occupational Standards was higher, 28 per cent.

1.1.8 Alternative weightings

The weighted figures shown in Table 2.5 — are in respect of all employers, including the very smallest.

If we exclude those with five or fewer employees, the estimates change as follows.

Table 1d Weighted estimate of employers' use, intentions and interest in NVQ/SVQs and OSs (employers < 5 employees excluded)

Use and Interest Categories	%
Users of NVQ/SVQs and/or OS	7
Planning to use NVQ/SVQs	2
Anticipate use of NVQ/SVQs	7
Interested in NVQ/SVQs	13
Remainder of respondents/no plans or interest	70
Total	100

Source: IMS Survey 1993

ie the changes are not very great.

If we exclude those with ten or fewer employees, the estimates change as follows:

Table 1e Weighted estimate of employers' use, intentions and interest in NVQ/SVQs and OSs (employers < 10 employees excluded)

Use and Interest Categories	%
Users of NVQ/SVQs and/or OS	9
Planning to use NVQ/SVQs	3
Anticipate use of NVQ/SVQs	8
Interested in NVQ/SVQs	14
Remainder of respondents/no plans or interest	66
Total	100

Source: IMS Survey 1993

This increases the proportion of users by 50 per cent and brings down the proportion with no interest by six per cent from the figures in Fig. 2.1, Chapter 2.

Awareness of NVQ/SVQs also varies according to categories of employers included as follows.

Table 1f Awareness of NVQ/SVQs: weighted estimates

	% who have heard	% who have not heard
All employers	51	49
Employers (< 5 employees excluded)	53	47
Employers (< 10 employees excluded)	55	45
Total	100	100

Source: IMS Survey 1993

Chapter 2: Appendix Tables

Table 2a Weighted estimate of employers' use and awareness of NVQ/SVQs

Use of NVQ/SVQs	%
Yes they are being used	6
Plans are underway	2
No they are not being used	43
Have not heard of NVQ/SVQs	49
Total	100

Source: IMS Survey 1993

Table 2b Weighted estimates of respondents who had not heard of NVQ/SVQs: interest in finding out

Level of interest	%
Very interested	4
Fairly interested	25
Neither interested nor uninterested	6
Fairly uninterested	34
Very uninterested	31
Don't know	1
Total	100

Source: IMS Survey 1993

Table 2c Weighted estimate of non-user respondents who had heard of NVQ/SVQs: anticipation of future use

Future intent	%
Very likely to use in the future	4
Probably will use	10
Neither likely nor unlikely	9
Probably will not use	31
Highly unlikely to use	41
Don't know	5
Not stated	0
Total	100

Source: IMS Survey 1993

Table 2d Use and awareness of NVQ/SVQs/Occupational Standards by SIC sector (unweighted)

SIC code	N	Currently use NVQ/SVQs and/or OSs	Plans under way to use NVQ/SVQs	Anticipate use of NVQ/SVQs	Interested in NVQ/SVQs	Remainder of respondents/no plans or interest
Agriculture	33	15%	3%	18%	15%	48%
Energy and water	41	34%	5%	10%	12%	39%
Extraction of minerals	45	24%	4%	7%	4%	60%
Metal goods	162	27%	5%	17%	7%	44%
Other manufacturing	159	23%	6%	17%	6%	48%
Construction	67	42%	1%	7%	3%	54%
Distribution, hotels and catering	323	19%	4%	14%	13%	50%
Transport and communications	90	12%	11%	17%	8%	52%
Banking and finance	106	6%	1%	11%	7%	75%
Other services	479	26%	8%	19%	5%	41%
All	1506	22%	6%	16%	8%	48%

Number of respondents: 1506

Source: IMS Survey 1993

Chapter 3: Appendix Tables

Table 3a NVQ/SVQ users and non-users: responses to statements about NVQ/SVQs (unweighted data)

Statements	% Agree		%Disagree		% Don't know/ can't say	
	User	Non-user	User	Non-user	User	Non-user
NVQ/SVQs will raise standards because they reflect the needs of the job	78	57	14	20	8	24
Gaining an NVQ/SVQ would help motivate many of my staff	73	47	20	37	7	16
It is beneficial to have supervisors and first line managers carrying out assessment for NVQ/SVQs on the job.	82	66	12	14	6	21
NVQ/SVQs mean more time for training and assessment in the workplace and less in college.	84	70	11	7	5	22
In my sector NVQ/SVQs are too narrow for the real requirements of the job	22	21	63	28	16	50
NVQ/SVQs need to be simpler so that employers and employees can understand	53	47	42	20	5	33
Employers need direct help from outside experts in order to use NVQ/SVQs	68	60	28	19	4	21
The cost of NVQ/SVQs should be shared between government and the employer	79	75	13	12	8	13
It is being able to do the job that counts – qualifications are irrelevant.	18	29	73	60	9	11
NVQ/SVQs sound good in theory, but in practice it will just mean extra trouble and expense for employers	26	32	67	40	7	29
In my sector NVQ/SVQs are too broad for the real requirements of the job	16	20	72	30	12	51
Number of respondents – users 330 Number of respondents – non users 732						

Source: IMS Survey 1993

Table 3b Small employers who had heard of NVQ/SVQs: responses to statements about NVQ/SVQs (unweighted data)

Statements	% Agree	% Disagree	% Don't know or can't say
NVQ/SVQs will raise standards because they reflect the needs of the job.	51	18	31
Gaining an NVQ/SVQ would help motivate many of my staff.	30	49	22
It is beneficial to have supervisors and first line managers carrying out assessment for NVQ/SVQs on the job.	56	15	29
NVQ/SVQs mean more time for training and assessment in the workplace and less in college.	62	7	31
In my sector NVQ/SVQs are too narrow for the real requirements of the job.	20	20	60
NVQ/SVQs need to be simpler so that employers and employees can understand.	35	18	47
Employers need direct help from outside experts in order to use NVQ/SVQs.	45	22	32
The cost of NVQ/SVQs should be shared between government and the employer.	70	13	20
It is being able to do the job that counts — qualifications are irrelevant.	32	52	16
NVQ/SVQs sound good in theory, but in practice it will just mean extra trouble and expense for employers.	33	28	39
In my sector NVQ/SVQs are too broad for the real requirements of the job.	26	19	55

Number of respondents: 148

Source: IMS Survey 1993

Chapter 5: Appendix Tables

Table 5a Use and awareness of NVQ/SVQs/Occupational Standards by SIC sector (unweighted data)

SIC code	N	Currently use NVQ/SVQs and/or OSs	Plans underway to use NVQ/SVQs	Anticipate use of NVQ/SVQs	Interested in NVQ/SVQs	Remainder of respondents/ no plans or interest
Agriculture	33	15%	3%	18%	15%	48%
Energy and water	41	34%	5%	10%	12%	39%
Extraction of minerals	45	24%	4%	7%	4%	60%
Metal goods	162	27%	5%	17%	7%	44%
Other manufacturing	159	23%	6%	17%	6%	48%
Construction	67	42%	1%	7%	3%	54%
Distribution, hotels and catering	323	19%	4%	14%	13%	50%
Transport and communications	90	12%	11%	17%	8%	52%
Banking and finance	106	6%	1%	11%	7%	75%
Other services	479	26%	8%	19%	5%	41%
All	1506	22%	6%	16%	8%	48%
Number of respondents: 1506						

Source: IMS Survey 1993

Table 5b Usage of NVQs by SIC (unweighted data)

SIC category	Number of users in SIC category	NVQ CATEGORIES: Tending animals and plants	Extracting and providing natural resources	Construction	Engineering	Manufacturing	Transport	Providing goods and services	Providing health, social and protective services	Providing business services	Developing and extending knowledge and skills	Other
Agriculture	4				2					2		
Energy and water	14		7	1		5		1		4		1
Extraction of minerals	11				3	5		2		8	1	
Metal goods	43			1	33	3	2			17	2	2
Other manufacturing	34				11	15		4		11		2
Construction	23			19	4					5		1
Distribution, hotels and catering	56	3			10	2		27		20		7
Transport and communications	9				5		1			2	1	4
Banking and finance	4									4		
Other services	112	8	2	14	4	2	2	20	51	68	10	11
Total	310	11	9	35	72	32	5	54	51	141	14	28

Number of respondents 310

Source IMS Survey 1993

Table 5c Usage of Occupational Standards by SIC (unweighted data)

SIC category	Number of users in SIC category	NVQ CATEGORIES: Tending animals and plants	Extracting and providing natural resources	Construction	Engineering	Manufacturing	Transport	Providing goods and services	Providing health, social and protective services	Providing business services	Developing and extending knowledge and skills	Other
Agriculture	1							1				
Energy and water												
Extraction of minerals												
Metal goods												
Other manufacturing	2				1					2	1	1
Construction												
Distribution, hotels and catering	6					2		4		2		1
Transport and communications	2							1				1
Banking and finance	2									2		
Other services	18	1		2	1			2	4	8	2	2
Total	31	1	0	2	2	2	0	8	4	14	3	5

Number of respondents: 31

Source: IMS Survey 1993

Chapter 6: Appendix Tables

Table 6a Distribution of employers by number of employees and trainees working towards the main NVQ/SVQ (unweighted data)

Number of employees and trainees working towards NVQ	Number of employers	Cumulative %
< 5	99	36.4
6–10	38	50.4
11–20	40	65.1
21–30	24	73.9
31–50	22	82.0
51–100	18	88.6
101–200	14	93.8
>200	17	100.0
Total	278	

Number of respondents: 278

Source: IMS Survey 1993

Table 6b Density of employees and trainees working towards the main NVQ/SVQ (ignoring those who could not answer all relevant questions) (unweighted data)

Number of employees taking NVQs	Total in category	Cumulative %
< 5	232	0.8
6–20	881	3.9
21–50	1584	9.5
51–100	1302	14.0
101–500	5650	33.9
501–2500	4433	49.4
>2500	14,415	100.0
Total	28,497	

Number of respondents: 272

Source: IMS Survey 1993

Table 6c Distribution of employer NVQ/SVQ users by size of group relevant to the main NVQ/SVQ (unweighted data)

Size of group	Number of employers	Cumulative %
>5	42	15.1
6–10	35	27.7
11–20	29	38.1
21–30	10	41.7
31–50	24	50.4
51–100	40	64.7
101–200	3[illegible]	75.9
201–500	[illegible]1	87.1
>500	36	100.0
Total	278	

Number of respondents: 278

Source: IMS Survey 1993

Chapter 7: Appendix Tables

Table 7a NVQ/SVQ users: extent of difficulty in implementing NVQ/SVQs (unweighted data)

Amount	N	% of respondents
A lot	36	12
Some	45	15
A few	65	21
None	155	50
I on't know	9	3
Total	310	100

Number of respondents: 310

Source: IMS Survey 1993

Table 7b NVQ/SVQ users: nature of assessors (unweighted data)

Origin of assessor	N	% of respondents
Within workplace	181	58
External to the work place	151	49
Other	23	7
Don't know	9	3

Number of respondents: 310

Source: IMS Survey 1993

Appendix 2: Questionnaire and Discussion Guide

a) Telephone questionnaire

Part 1: Subjects covered with all respondents

Background

- Activity of organisation
- Is organisation private, public or voluntary?
- Geographical region
- Number of employees
- Percentage of workforce which is female

General awareness of and interest in NVQ/SVQs

- Heard of NVQ/SVQs?
- Is the organisation interested in further information about NVQ/SVQs? Reasons?
- How did you hear of NVQ/SVQs?
- Has the organisation tried to find out more? From whom?
- What has been the main source of information?
- How helpful was the information and advice? Reasons?

Introduction of NVQ/SVQs

- Has the organisation introduced NVQ/SVQs?
- Is it likely to in the future? Reasons?
- What factors would encourage the organisation to introduce NVQ/SVQs?
- What are the main differences between NVQ/SVQs and previous qualifications?
- Question designed to establish whether respondent was using Occupational Standards.

Training provisions

- Involvement with Youth Trainees or Employment Training in the last two years?
- Does the organisation provide any training for its employees?
- What percentage of the workforce received on the job training in 1992?
- What percentage of the workforce received off the job training in 1992?

Part 2: Subjects covered with NVQ/SVQ users only

Organisation's use of NVQ/SVQs

- Which NVQ/SVQs are being used?
- At which level are they being used?
- How many employees and trainees are working towards NVQ/SVQs?

Questions asked in respect of only one NVQ/SVQ per employer

- Numbers registered, receiving training and being assessed
- Who is/ will be responsible for assessment?
- Do the assessors receive training for this purpose?
- How many employees, Youth Trainees and Employment Trainees are in the group to which the NVQ/SVQ is relevant?
- How many have achieved the full NVQ/SVQ/Units only?

Implementing NVQ/SVQs

- What factors influenced the decision to introduce NVQ/SVQs?
- Costs
- Main benefits
- Difficulties in implementing NVQ/SVQs? What were they?
- Does the organisation intend to continue using NVQ/SVQs? Reasons?
- What changes would make it easier for employers to extend the availability of NVQ/SVQs to their employees?
- Is the organisation using Occupational Standards for purposes other than in support of NVQ/SVQs?

Part 3: Subjects covered with Occupat.onal Standard users only

General

- Why use only Occupational Standards?
- Which OSs are you using?
- Have you adapted the OSs to suit your organisation? How?
- What purposes are the OSs being used for?
- Do you intend to continue using OSs in the foreseeable future? Reasons?

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b) Case study interview discussion guide

1. Introduction

What are your organisations' key activities?

What is your role in the organisation?

In which ways have you personally been involved in NVQ/SVQs?

2. Why did your organisation introduce NVQ/SVQs?

- impact of external influences
- when NVQ/SVQs introduced
- who decided to introduce
- who responsible for implementing
- what issues arose when considering introducing
- why NVQ/SVQs and not OSs

2a. Why did your organisation *not* introduce NVQ/SVQs?

- impact of external influences
- who decide
- what problems/issues arose with NVQ/SVQs

3. Which NVQ/SVQs are you using?

- why these NVQ/SVQs
- are others relevant? Why not using
- future changes

4. Which employees are using NVQ/SVQ?[1]

- *which type of employees — new recruits/existing employees*
- *how select employees*
- *how many staff taking NVQ/SVQs*
- *what proportion of staff in occupational area*
- *are NVQ/SVQs appropriate for employees of all ages*
- *future changes*

5. How are you using NVQ/SVQs?

- *full NVQ/SVQs/Units — reasons why*
- *future changes*

[1] Concentrating on sector specific NVQ/SVQs.

6. How would you describe a) your organisation's b) employees' progress in the take-up of NVQ/SVQs?

- what factors have encouraged take-up and use — internal/external
- what incentives for organisation
- what incentives for employees/individuals
- what factors have discouraged take-up and use
- what barriers for organisation/employees
  - contents — breadth, narrowness
  - flexibility
  - credibility — managers, organisation, industry
  - role of Lead/Awarding bodies (identify)
  - YT
- are factors specific to NVQ/SVQs
- will factors change over time
- intentions about introducing more NVQ/SVQs
- future take-up

7. How is your training towards NVQ/SVQs organised?

- method, location, who train
- why organised in this way? Problems?
- levels of satisfaction
- have alternatives been considered
- will changes be introduced

8. How is NVQ/SVQ assessment organised?

- how, where, by whom
- why organised in this way
- any problems — how resolved
- have alternatives been considered
- any special arrangement for certain staff
- will changes be introduced

9. What difficulties, if any, have you had in implementing NVQ/SVQs?

- any variation by NVQ/SVQ and Level
- difficulties specific to NVQ/SVQ or apply all VQs
- how can difficulties be overcome
- any organisation/person particularly helpful
- what single factor eased implementation
- anticipate difficulties in future

10. What are the costs of introducing and delivering NVQ/SVQs?

- what are the cost headings
- how quantified costs — examples, evidence
- are they actual/real or perceived
- variation by NVQ/SVQ and Level
- are costs unique to NVQ/SVQs or apply to any VQ
- how reduce costs
- where funds come from to cover costs
- investment in training — increase/decrease/stay same

11. What are the benefits of NVQ/SVQs?

- for organisation, for individuals
- are they actual or perceived
- example of benefits — evidence — how monitor/measure
- variation by NVQ/SVQ and Level
- unique to NVQ/SVQs or apply to any VQ
- what can be done to enhance benefits

12. Are NVQ/SVQs going to lead to any changes in your training provision and human resource strategies now or in the future?

- impact on training
- impact on employment practices/HR
- what hard evidence
- how monitor
- future impact
- have they considered using OS and not NVQ/SVQs

13. If you could wave a magic wand what changes to NVQ/SVQs would you like to be introduced?

- take-up and use
- information
- image

14. Occupational Standards

- why use and not NVQ/SVQs
- which use
- how use — if adapt
- difficulties using
- cost
- benefits
- effects on training and employment
- advantages OS compared NVQ/SVQs
- future intentions OS and NVQ/SVQs

Appendix 3: Organisations Interviewed

3.1 Introduction

This appendix lists the various national bodies, employers and case study employers interviewed during the research.

3.2 National bodies interviewed

3.2.1 Training organisations

City and Guilds
Employment Department
National Council for Vocational Qualifications (NCVQ)
National Council for Industry Training Organisations (NCITO)
National Training Task Force (NTTF)
Scottish Vocational and Educational Council (SCOTVEC)

3.2.2 Lead Bodies

Administration Lead Body
Building Society Association
Bus and Coach Training Ltd (BCTLTD)
Care Sector Consortium
Chemical Industries Association (CIA)
Glass Training Ltd
Hairdressing Training Board
Hotel and Catering Training Company (HCTC)
Institute of Chartered Secretaries and Administrators
Knitting and Lace Industrial Training Association
Local Government Management Board (LGMB)
Management Charter Initiative (MCI)
National Retail Training Consortium
Qualifications for Industry Ltd (QFI)

3.2.3 Employer representatives

Confederation of British Industry (CBI)
Trade Union Council (TUC)

3.3 Employers

- 7 Employers in the following sectors were interviewed during the initial phase of the research.

  Armed services
  Engineering
  Health and welfare
  Insurance
  Local government
  Retail
  Transport

- A workshop with 11 employers from the following sectors was also held.

  Banking
  Chemicals
  Civil Service
  Communications
  Finance
  Local Government
  Pharmaceuticals
  Retail
  Transport

3.4 Organisations interviewed for case studies

Table 3a Bus and Coach sector

Activity	Region	No. of employees
Metropolitan bus company	North West	4,000
Urban bus company	West Midlands	1,100
Urban bus company	North	2,200
Coach hire company	West Midlands	45
Urban bus company	South East	470
Urban bus company	London	1,200

Table 3b Business Administration

Activity	Region	No. of employees
Motor vehicle manufacturer	South West and West Midlands	32,000
National retailer	Throughout the UK	32,000
Regional council	Scotland	20,000
Manufacturer	South East	1,700
County council	East Midlands	17,500

Table 3c Care sector

Activity	Region	No. of employees
Hospital health authority	Yorkshire and Humberside	2,737
Hospital trust	East Midlands	1,800
Hospital trust	London	2,500
Local authority social services department	East Midlands	7,494
Private nursing home	East Anglia	47
Training consortium of social services department	South East	N/A

Table 3d Chemical sector

Activity	Region	No. of employees
Pharmaceutical manufacturer	East Midlands	20 (on chemical site)
International petroleum company	North	1,000 (on chemical site)
International petroleum company	South East	500 (on chemical site)
International petroleum company	Scotland	1,400 (on chemical site)
Chemical manufacturer	Yorkshire and Humberside	1500
Chemical manufacturer	North	420

Table 3e Clothing sector

Activity	Region	No. of employees
Clothing manufacturer	Yorkshire and Humberside	210
Two clothing manufacturers	Yorkshire and Humberside	500 (total)
Clothing manufacturer	North	176
Clothing manufacturer	South West	213
Clothing manufacturer	South West	63

Table 3f Glass sector

Activity	Region	No. of employees
Float glass manufacturer	North West	1,000
Glass container manufacturer	South East	2,000
Glass crystal manufacturer	South West	250
Manufacturer and installer of windows for the construction and automobile industries	South East	80
Consumer glass wear and specialist glass manufacturer	North	510

Table 3g Hairdressing sector

Activity	Region	No. of employees
Hairdressing salon	Yorkshire and Humberside	14
Main salon of a small localised chain	Scotland	80
Main salon of a small localised chain	London	100
Head office of a national chain of salons	Throughout the UK	1,500
Salon	North West	9
Salon	North	9

Table 3h Management

Activity	Region	No. of employees
District Borough Council	South East	700
Water company	South West	576
Freight transport company	Scotland	874
National electrical wholesaler	Throughout the UK	3,000
Manufacturer of fabric and other printed labels	East Midlands	90

Table 3i Retail sector

Activity	Region	No. of employees
High Street chain	Throughout the UK	50,000
National household goods group	Throughout the UK	10,000
Independent department store	London	400
Co-operative society	East Midlands	2,000
National chain of DIY stores	Throughout the UK	15,500
Department store chain	Throughout the UK	35,000

Appendix 4: Glossary of Terms

Accreditation	Approval by NCVQ/SCOTVEC of an Awarding Body and/or their awards, as part of the NVQ/SVQ framework.
Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL)	A process leading to the identification, assessment and certification of a person's vocationally relevant past.
Assessment	The process of making judgements, based on evidence collected, about individual competence.
Assessor	The individual responsible for measuring the competence of the trainee against the written criteria.
Award	A term used to describe what the individual receives on achieving an NVQ/SVQ.
Awarding Body	A group or organisation approved by NCVQ/SCOTVEC to provide NVQ/SVQ awards.
Certificate	The document which the individual receives from an Awarding Body. It provides evidence that an NVQ/SVQ, or units of competence have been achieved.
Element	The smallest 'chunk' of activity which can be credited towards the achievement of a unit of competence or an NVQ.
Lead Body	The body responsible for setting standards. These groups are predominantly employer led.
LEC	Local Enterprise Company. The body appointed to instigate, monitor and support local training initiatives in Scotland. It is made up, principally, of local employers.
MCI	Management Charter Initiative. The Lead Body responsible for the production of occupational standards for managers throughout all employment areas.
NCVQ	National Council for Vocational Qualifications. The body responsible for validating/accrediting standards/awards/Awarding Bodies in England and Wales.
NROVA	National Record of Vocational Achievement. The individual's record of training and experience received, along with recordings of awards and credits towards awards.

NVQ	National Vocational Qualification. An award accredited by NCVQ, incorporated into the NVQ framework. Evidence of competence in a given occupational area.
NVQ Framework	A national system, which places individual NVQs into their appropriate occupations and levels of competence.
Occupational Standards	Statements of the standards of performance required for jobs and published by Lead Bodies.
Performance Criteria	Indicate the standard of performance, and describe the activities relating to specific elements of competence.
Progression	Moving through the NVQ framework, either from one level to a higher level, or across occupational boundaries.
Provider	Training provider. Organisation or employer with primary responsibility for providing appropriate training to enable trainee learning.
Qualification	The formal recognition that the defined standard has been achieved.
SCOTVEC	The body responsible for the validation/accreditation of standard/awards/Awarding Bodies, in Scotland.
SVQ	Scottish Vocational Qualification. The equivalent, in Scotland, of the NVQ in England and Wales.
TDLB	Training and Development Lead Body. This body represents a cross-section of organisations and institutions in the training sphere. They are responsible for deriving standards for training and assessment.
TEC	Training and Enterprise Council. A body, mainly composed of local employers, appointed to instigate/monitor/support training initiatives in England and wales.
Unit	A 'chunk' of work activity large enough to be of value to an employer. It is capable of being certificated independently, and of constituting a credit towards an NVQ/SVQ award. It is comprised of a number of elements of competence.
Verification	The process of ensuring that the standard is being maintained, and that appropriate systems are in place.
Verifier	Individual appointed to ensure the maintenance of the standard, in keeping with the Awarding Body's requirements. Verifiers may be internal, officers of the Approved Assessment Centre, or external, appointed by the Awarding Body.

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