

NVQs

National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) have been developed to test individuals' competence in their jobs. They are based on National Occupational Standards which have been designed with the help of employers. All NVQs are divided into individual units. Each unit describes an area of an individual's job as well as the standard of competence required.

Most NVQs have both compulsory and optional units and the full qualification is achieved when the required number of units has been successfully completed. The wide range of available units means that it is possible to tailor the qualification to match an individual's job.

NVQs differ from traditional qualifications in the following ways:

- There are no formal entry requirements; learners are not required to have any prior qualifications to achieve the NVQ.
- Learners are principally assessed on their ability to do the job rather than by means of examinations.
- Assessment is via a portfolio of evidence.
- They can be gained in a variety of ways.
- They take account of previous experience.
- Individuals work at their own pace in accordance with an assessment plan agreed with their supervisor and their assessor.
- Assessment is generally undertaken at work.

Whilst a learner should expect to do a small amount of work in their own time it is generally possible to gather most of the evidence during working hours. Higher level courses such as management and courses with more technical content such as accounts require more study time.

Apprenticeships

Apprenticeships are no longer just for young people or for learning a trade. They cover most industry sectors and are available to employees of all ages (although there are some eligibility criteria in order to access government funding). Apprentices have contracts of employment and may start an apprenticeship after they have been in work for some time or may start a new job with the intention of joining an apprenticeship programme.

As well as doing their job an apprentice is supported by their employer and Damar to achieve a group of qualifications which, together, comprise an apprenticeship "framework". These always include an NVQ and usually also include:

- A technical certificate. This is assessed by way of an exam and tests an individual's knowledge and understanding of the core competencies covered in the NVQ.
- Key skills qualifications in literacy and numeracy. Assessed by way of an online exam and a portfolio of evidence, these ensure that a learner's literacy and numeracy meets the level required by their industry. Learners with good and recent GCSEs in maths and English may be exempt.

Additional training will often be required for the technical certificate and key skills. This is delivered in the form of training sessions at Damar (for which some day release is required) and 1:1 coaching in the workplace.