

SVQs



Measuring performance at all levels is one of the keys to success for growing businesses. Traditional financial measures alone are no longer sufficient. Measuring an employee's performance and the contribution they make to achieving goals is essential. SVQs (Scottish Vocational Qualifications) can help to do this.

This briefing outlines:

- What SVQs can offer your business.
- How to introduce SVQs.
- What is involved.
- How to use SVQs as effectively as possible.

1 The basics

1.1 SVQs are nationally recognised qualifications.

- SVQs are available for almost all occupations. For example, there are SVQs for customer service, training, small business management and so on.
- SVQs can be used in almost any business, of any size. For example, almost every business will have some employees for whom an administration or customer care SVQ might be suitable.
- SVQs are available at up to five levels. 'Level 1' represents performance at a basic level; 'level 3' is typically performance at a supervisory level; and 'level 5' is typically performance at senior level or higher.

1.2 SVQs are based on national **standards** of work performance. They provide measures for what an employee should be able to do, how well, and in what contexts and conditions.

- The standards are based on work performance, underpinned by knowledge. The usual way to achieve an SVQ is by demonstrating actual work performance which meets the specified standards.
- The standards are grouped into units. Each unit represents an area of work activity which is of value to an employer.

1.3 You can use the SVQ standards as a stand-alone **business tool**.

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Many businesses choose to use the standards alone initially, delaying the introduction of certification (see 1.4). You can use the standards for:

- Training needs analysis.
- Design, delivery and evaluation of training and development.
- Preparing recruitment specifications.
- Career development and succession planning.
- Continuously assessing and appraising performance.

Assessment is conducted in the workplace and is not necessarily tied to any specified training programme or time frame.

1.4 Introducing SVQ certification (the award of SVQs to employees) provides additional benefits.

- Managers and employees of all ages can achieve national recognition for competent performance. Individual units of SVQs can be assessed and awarded flexibly.
- You can use SVQ certification as part of a business-led performance management system, such as Investors in People.

2 Getting started

2.1 Select a priority area for action.

For example, you may want to improve training or appraisal, or to restructure roles for a particular group or department.

Selecting an awarding body

A Not all awarding bodies offer all **SVQs**.

- However, the same SVQ offered by different awarding bodies will be based on the same standards.

B **Costs** vary.

Ask the awarding bodies offering SVQs you are interested in for the costs of:

- Registration and certification (see 3.4).
- Approval as a centre (see 5.2).

C Some awarding bodies may be **known** to your managers and employees.

- Managers and employees may be more motivated by the prospect of an SVQ from an awarding body they consider to be prestigious.

- Identify a pilot group of managers or employees in the selected priority area.
- Contact your local business support organisation, trade association or college of further education to see what advice, support and funding they can offer.
- Contact any 'friendly' companies you know who are already using SVQs.

➔ Contact your local LEC or Business Gateway, for further information and advice on SVQs.

Start by thinking about your business needs, not by seeing what SVQs are available.

2.2 Obtain and review the standards.

- Check SVQ Update for details of all available SVQs and awarding bodies. SVQ Update is available from the Scottish Qualifications Authority at www.sqa.org.uk
- Contact the marketing department of the awarding body for copies of the standards for the SVQs which interest you.
- Check the unit and element titles in the standard against the job descriptions or role profiles of your selected pilot group.
- Select SVQs at a level which will be challenging to your employees. If the standards only reflect what the employees already do, the process of assessment might be demotivating and achieve little for your business.

2.3 Select assessment options.

- You may choose not to get involved in the formal SVQ process at this stage. You may want to test the use of the standards within your own appraisal and training systems (see 1.3).
- You may choose to use an external provider (see 4) to assess SVQs during the pilot and to help you develop systems.

2.4 Decide how much in-house SVQ expertise to develop.

Your pilot project will help you to decide the best way forward.

- You may choose to use an external provider in the long term.

If you plan to limit SVQ certification to a small group of employees, a good relationship with an external provider may be the best option.

- You may want to become an approved SVQ centre (see 5).

This will be cost-effective if you plan to introduce SVQ certification for large

numbers of employees. You may need external support initially to develop your in-house skills and systems.

3 Time and costs

3.1 Most time and money will be spent **starting** the pilot and developing systems.

- You will need a greater input if you want to become an approved centre (see **5**).

3.2 Training and development requirements will vary for each candidate.

The SVQ standards do not specify training programmes or time frames.

- Each candidate will need to be briefed at the outset.
- If you have selected challenging SVQs, initial assessment will identify the candidates' development needs.

3.3 Assessing SVQs does require some additional time input.

- If your managers become assessors, SVQ assessment should become an integral part of people management.
- You can use your own systems to minimise the paperwork. (See **Filing and records management**.)
You can purchase an off-the-shelf recording system or develop your own.

3.4 You pay registration and **certification** fees.

- Each candidate must be registered for an SVQ for at least ten weeks before an award can be claimed.
Registration fees are paid per person and depend on the level of the qualification and the awarding body.

- Certification fees are often additional.

Contact the appropriate awarding body for details of the fees charged. External providers may also charge you for training and development sessions and assessment.

3.5 SVQ quality control can be built into your own quality assurance systems.

- Internal verifiers (within your company or from your provider) ensure that individual assessors are consistent.
- An external verifier from the awarding body normally visits each approved centre twice a year to ensure consistent assessment across centres.

4 External providers

4.1 Identify **approved centres**.

The provider must be approved by your selected awarding body for the SVQs you wish to offer.

- Your local LEC may have a list of approved centres.
- Your selected awarding body will provide you with a full listing.

4.2 Check whether the provider will be suitable for **assessing** your SVQ candidates.

- Will the provider design assessment records to fit in with your own appraisal system?
- Will the provider assess your employees in the workplace?
- Does this provider require candidates to prepare large paper-based portfolios?

Those who do may be inflexible (see **6.1**).

SVQ jargon-buster

- SVQ — a Scottish vocational qualification, based on national standards of competent workplace performance.
- Portfolio — the compilation of evidence for assessment in a suitable form.
- Evidence — the results of observation, questioning or the review of outcomes of performance, used by assessors to judge workplace performance against standards.
- SVQ assessor — a qualified line manager, supervisor, or external provider who judges evidence produced by SVQ candidates.
- Internal verifier — a qualified line manager, supervisor or external provider who supports, advises and quality monitors assessment practice.
- External verifier — an individual employed by an awarding body to quality assure the assessment practice across approved NVQ centres.
- Approved NVQ centre — a company, college or private provider, approved by a national awarding body to offer specified NVQs.
- Awarding body — a national certifying body, approved to quality assure and certificate NVQs.

4.3 Check whether the provider is prepared to help you develop as an **SVQ centre** (if you plan to become one).

- Is the provider approved to train and assess your own internal assessors?
- Could the provider offer continuing assessment support if you chose this in the long term?

5 Becoming an SVQ centre

Many larger companies choose to become approved SVQ centres. As well as saving the costs of external providers, using your own managers and supervisors as assessors encourages them to take a greater role in managing the performance of their subordinates.

5.1 Select technically competent individuals to cover the necessary roles in the SVQ process.

You will need:

- Approximately one SVQ assessor for every six SVQ candidates.
- Approximately one internal verifier for every ten assessors.
- A centre co-ordinator to manage the registration of SVQ candidates and to request certificates.
This role is frequently undertaken by the internal verifier.

5.2 Prepare a submission to the awarding body for your company to be **approved** as an SVQ centre.

You will need to demonstrate that you have the required resources, structure and quality systems.

- The awarding body will provide a guidance pack on becoming an approved SVQ centre.
- The awarding body may charge an approval fee, as well as charging for any pre-approval advice given.
Check with your local office.

5.3 Train your assessors and verifiers.

They must have a clear plan for achieving the appropriate 'assessment' and 'verification' units.

- Typically it takes individuals three to six months to achieve the required units.
- The standards for these assessment and verification SVQs are available in the same way as for any other SVQ.
- Like other SVQs, training and development SVQs are assessed on work performance.

Your assessors and verifiers must already be carrying out these roles themselves in order to be able to assess you.

- Most companies choose to use an external provider to train the company's own assessors and verifiers.

6 Avoiding bureaucracy

One of the main criticisms of the SVQ system in the past has been that it is bureaucratic. This is easily overcome by adopting a business-led and not SVQ-led approach.

6.1 SVQ candidates do not have to produce huge amounts of **paperwork**.

- You do not have to use the assessment documentation provided by the awarding body, as long as your own systems are adequate to maintain an audit trail.
You must agree this approach with your awarding body.

- SVQ candidates do not have to produce a large paper-based portfolio of evidence. Evidence can take a variety of forms. The evidence will need to be organised in a suitable form.

- You can integrate SVQ assessment with your own company appraisal system.

A good external provider or consultant will help you to develop documentation which minimises the burden and which satisfies the awarding body.

6.2 You can use SVQs as **flexibly** as you want.

- You can introduce the standards without introducing the SVQ assessment and certification components.
- You can choose which units of which SVQs to use. Employees gain credit for the units completed.
- The SVQ system imposes no restrictions on the training programmes you use or the time frames candidates work to.

Candidates who can already demonstrate competence can even achieve an SVQ without any training, although they may need help in presenting evidence.

- You can incorporate the standards into your own company-specific standards, but you may not then be eligible for an SVQ.

Expert contributors

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Further help

There are other Directors' Briefing titles that can help you. These briefings are referred to in the text by name.

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