

Findings from the Review of Level 3 NVQ Diploma in Hairdressing Qualifications



March 2012

Ofqual/12/5139

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Executive summary

In 2011, the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual) carried out a thematic review of Level 3 NVQ Diploma in Hairdressing qualifications. These are regulated qualifications delivered by five awarding organisations that we regulate. These awarding organisations are: City & Guilds, EDI¹, ITEC, Pearson (formerly Edexcel) and VTCT. The findings from our compliance monitoring of these qualifications are detailed in this report.

We conducted this review as a benchmarking exercise to judge the performance of awarding organisations against the *General Conditions of Recognition* (Ofqual, 2011). We particularly wanted to determine if assessment and quality assurance practices and standards of learner performance are consistent within and across centres and awarding organisations.

Habia, the sector skills body in the industry, requires that essential knowledge and understanding is assessed through mandatory written question papers. Habia requires that these question papers should cover the full depth and breadth of knowledge, as detailed in its *Assessment Strategy for Hairdressing NVQs and SVQs* (Habia, 2009). Each awarding organisation has included units in its qualification that require mandatory written questions in accordance with this Assessment Strategy.

We found that the awarding organisations are interpreting the assessment requirements of the Assessment Strategy differently. Habia initially told us that it expected each question paper to assess the full depth and breadth of knowledge. We discussed our findings with Habia and again sought clarification about the requirements of its Assessment Strategy. Habia has recently confirmed its acceptance to the sampling of essential knowledge and understanding, as long as each knowledge statement is assessed in each paper and the full depth and breadth of knowledge is tested over time.

We identified a number of non-compliances relating to the setting and delivery of assessment that were common across awarding organisations. We found that the design of the mandatory written question papers does not adequately allow for the written assessment of each knowledge statement in each test, and for the full depth and breadth of knowledge.

We found that the effectiveness of the assessment of the essential knowledge and understanding is undermined by the chosen method of assessment. We found that multiple-choice assessments do not assess effectively the essential knowledge and

¹ EDI withdrew its qualifications in this sector in December 2011 after we had reported our findings individually to awarding organisations.

understanding requirements. The short-answer question papers, as offered by City & Guilds, provide learners with far greater opportunities to provide evidence of the essential knowledge and understanding.

We also found that the multiple-choice assessments provided by each awarding organisation contained some ambiguities and errors that were likely to disadvantage candidates.

We believe that consistency of assessment across awarding organisations would be improved if the Assessment Strategy were clearer and better defined. We, therefore, welcome the awarding organisations' intention to work collaboratively with Habia to review the units to ensure that they meet all the requirements of the National Occupational Standards and the Assessment Strategy. Habia has agreed that if it identifies a need for further development of the National Occupational Standards and/or the Assessment Strategy this work would begin in 2013.

Finally, we found that the process of external quality assurance for three awarding organisations was insufficiently rigorous to ensure accurate and consistent standards of assessment across centres. The effectiveness of the centre assessment, and the internal and external quality assurances of that assessment, was not always consistent. We had further concerns about the realism of some of the working environments and about the health and safety practices in some of the centres. Generally, we found that learners who were registered at centres that were training providers, rather than colleges or academies, demonstrated the highest standards of performance and provided the best evidence to support their achievement.

We have received assurance from each awarding organisation that it is taking action to address the specific non-compliances we have raised with it. We are seeking further assurance where actions are still to be completed.

Introduction

We are the independent regulator of qualifications, examinations and tests in England, and of vocational qualifications in Northern Ireland. Our work ensures that children, young people and adult learners get the results their work deserves, that standards are maintained and that the qualifications learners receive are correctly valued, both now and in the future.

Awarding organisations that offer vocational qualifications operate within a regulatory framework, which is set out in the *General Conditions of Recognition* (Ofqual, 2011) and in *The Regulatory Arrangements for the Qualifications and Credit Framework* (Ofqual, 2008).

We carry out a programme of monitoring activities to assess the performance of awarding organisations against these regulatory requirements.

The aims of the thematic review of the Level 3 NVQ Diploma in Hairdressing qualifications were to determine:

- if the qualifications meet the National Occupational Standards, and the evidence and assessment requirements defined in the Assessment Strategy
- whether standards of learner performance are consistent
- if the practice of both internal and external quality assurance is consistent within/across centres/awarding organisations
- if the qualifications are appropriately challenging to meet the requirements for level 3.

Background

The *Sector Qualifications Strategy for the Hair and Beauty Sector* (Habia, 2009) refers to the need to raise professionalism and esteem in the sector by establishing the new level 3 qualification as the recognised professional level for practitioners.

Habia is the sector skills body for the hair, beauty, nails, spa therapy, barbering and African-type hair industries in the UK. Its stated aim is to improve the quality of learning through Apprenticeships and National Occupational Standards.

The Level 3 NVQ Diploma in Hairdressing forms part of the advanced Apprenticeship framework for hairdressing and includes assessment of the National Occupational Standards. Habia states that:

National Occupational Standards are the basis of training in hair, beauty, nails and spa therapy and form the backbone of programmes such as NVQs, SVQs and Apprenticeships as well as industry related codes of practice. They are frameworks that describe what an individual needs to do, know and understand in order to carry out a particular job role or function in a particular industry. The aim of the Level 3 NVQ Diploma in Hairdressing is to allow the junior stylist to advance their creative and business skills.² (Habia, 2010).

At the time of the review in 2011 the qualification was offered by five awarding organisations: City & Guilds, EDI, ITEC, Pearson (formerly Edexcel) and VTCT. City & Guilds has the highest number of learners, VTCT has the next highest number of learners, and ITEC and Pearson only has a few centres each. EDI did not have any centres³.

The qualification is made up of a minimum of 58 credits within the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF), comprising four mandatory units worth 21 credits. The learner will then choose from two groups of optional units to make up the remaining 37 credits (see Appendix A for further details). The units for this qualification are all shared. Each unit has been developed by one awarding organisation but is available to use as part of any awarding organisation's Level 3 NVQ Diploma in Hairdressing qualification.

² Habia, 2010, viewed 25th October 2010: www.habia.org/index.php?page=1549,1555,1549,1

³ EDI withdrew its qualifications in this sector in December 2011 after we had reported our findings individually to awarding organisations.

Methodology

We carried out this work in three stages:

1. A review of unit requirements
2. A review of the mandatory written question papers
3. A series of centre visits.

Each stage was carried out by a team of four sector experts who we recruited and briefed.

Review of unit requirements

We asked the sector experts to judge whether the learning outcomes and assessment criteria for each unit, as specified on the Register of Regulated Qualifications⁴, covered the National Occupational Standards appropriately. Where the sector experts identified a gap, they were asked to provide evidence and justification for their concerns. We also asked them to judge whether the combinations of units were likely to lead to coherent and meaningful outcomes for level 3 practitioners in hairdressing, and whether the qualification content adequately reflected the level 3 descriptor⁵, as set out in the *Regulatory Arrangements for the QCF* (Ofqual, 2008).

The sector experts were then allocated a sample of the awarding organisations' unit specifications to review. Units were allocated to ensure that each unit was looked at by at least two different sector experts. The sector experts were asked to judge whether the awarding organisation's evidence requirements for the unit would be likely to lead to valid and reliable assessment, and whether the awarding organisation's evidence requirements were consistent with the requirements of Habia's Assessment Strategy. Where the sector experts identified any concerns they were asked to provide evidence and justification for their concerns.

Finally, the sector experts were asked to judge whether there were any differences in the evidence requirements made by different awarding organisations for the same units, whether guidance for assessors and internal quality assurers regarding the assessment process was clear, whether guidance for external quality assurers was clear, and whether they identified areas of concern having reviewed the sample of external quality assurance reports provided.

⁴ www.register.ofqual.gov.uk

⁵ p. 47, www.ofqual.gov.uk/files/Regulatory_arrangements_QCF_August08.pdf

At each stage of the review of unit requirements, the sector experts were asked to specify any areas of concern that warranted further exploration at centre visits.

Review of mandatory written question papers

The National Occupational Standards for hairdressing set out three requirements:

- Performance requirements – what you must do
- Range – what you must cover
- Essential knowledge and understanding – what you must know.

Within the Assessment Strategy for each unit, Habia further specifies a number of areas of essential knowledge and understanding that it states must be assessed by written questions. The essential knowledge and understanding that is not specified may be assessed by written questions, oral questioning, portfolio evidence or other means. The question-paper review, therefore, focussed only on the question papers for the essential knowledge and understanding requiring mandatory written questions.

Seven units include requirements to assess essential knowledge and understanding through written questions. We asked our sector experts to review these written questions. Our coverage plan ensured that at least two sector experts reviewed the question papers for each unit for each awarding organisation.

The sector experts were asked to map the questions to the essential knowledge and understanding to judge whether:

- the question papers provided sufficient coverage of the targeted National Occupational Standards
- the questions and mark schemes were clear and unambiguous
- candidates were likely to be advantaged or disadvantaged on any grounds other than their competence in the sector.

For multiple-choice assessments, the sector experts were also asked to judge whether there was only one indisputably correct answer to each question and whether there were any clues in the presentation of the questions as to the correct answers.

Centre visits

The aim of the centre visits was to judge whether the assessment process generates consistent outcomes by observing a sample of awarding organisation external quality assurance visits to centres.

We visited 21 centres. Eighteen of these were in England, with one each in Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland. We visited:

- ten City & Guilds centres, of which three were colleges, six were training providers and one was an academy (the awarding organisation had 331 approved centres⁶)
- nine VTCT centres, of which five were colleges and four were training providers (the awarding organisation had 96 approved centres)
- one Pearson centre, which was an academy (the awarding organisation had seven approved centres)
- one ITEC centre, which was a training provider (the awarding organisation had six approved centres).

Our visit sampling ratio was representative of the respective market share that each awarding organisation had in the sector at this level.

Our sector experts who were reviewing were asked to observe the external quality assurer's visit to the centre and were provided with a series of questions to ask learners, assessors, and internal and external quality assurers at appropriate points during the day. The sector experts were also provided with a list of concerns identified from the review of unit requirements that warranted further exploration at centre visits. Finally, the sector experts were asked to review any evidence of learner performance, such as live assessments or portfolios, to make judgements on the standards of learner performance.

⁶ The number of awarding-organisation-approved centres in this list was accurate as at May 2011.

Findings

We have collated and analysed the findings from each stage of the review. The following section sets out these findings.

Review of unit requirements

During this part of the review, the sector experts identified a number of areas that warranted further exploration at the centre visits. We only found one instance where concerns identified at the unit review turned out to be warranted. Our sector experts identified a potential concern about a unit (G22 Monitor procedures to safely control work operations) and we later found that a centre then struggled with the assessment of this unit in practice.

Review of mandatory written question papers

There are seven units that require mandatory written questions:

- G21 Provide hairdressing consultation services
- GH17 Colour hair using a variety of techniques
- GH18 Provide colour correction services
- GH22 Create a variety of permed effects
- GH23 Provide creative hair extension services
- GH24 Provide specialist consultation services for hair and scalp conditions
- GH25 Provide specialist hair and scalp treatments.

Habia requires that written question papers should cover the full depth and breadth of knowledge, as detailed in its *Assessment Strategy for Hairdressing NVQs and SVQs* (Habia, 2009). Awarding organisations have included units in their qualifications that require mandatory written questions in accordance with the Assessment Strategy.

Habia has confirmed its acceptance to the sampling of essential knowledge and understanding so that the full depth and breadth of each knowledge statement is tested over time, and where each knowledge statement is assessed in each test. However, we found that the design of many of the multiple-choice-question papers in this review does not allow for this depth and breadth of coverage. Awarding organisations omitted to assess each knowledge statement in each test and did not adequately assess the full depth and breadth of knowledge.

We also found that awarding organisations were interpreting the assessment requirements set out in the Assessment Strategy differently. Some awarding

organisations used a small number of items to assess the knowledge statements in each test. Contrary to the requirements set out in the Assessment Strategy, others used identical questions when testing the same knowledge statements in more than one unit. Others designed the assessment so that questions target some aspects of the knowledge range in one unit and different aspects of the same range in another.

The way the knowledge statements are written in the Assessment Strategy in a compound way, without the use of action verbs, is ambiguous. As a result, we also found that some awarding organisations were unclear about whether to assess just knowledge recall or recall and applied knowledge.

City & Guilds offers both short answer and multiple-choice-question papers as alternative assessments for the same units. Other awarding organisations only offer multiple-choice-question papers. We found that the question papers that provided the most comprehensive coverage of the essential knowledge and understanding were the short-answer question papers set by City & Guilds. These question papers were noticeably better at providing better opportunities for candidates to demonstrate their depth and breadth of the essential knowledge and understanding. Their multiple-choice-question papers sample each knowledge statement but do not have the same depth and breadth of coverage.

Centre visits

Each of the awarding organisations that we accompanied on centre visits provided some evidence of effective quality assurance of centre assessments. However, the effectiveness of the centre assessment, and the internal and external quality assurance of that assessment, was not always consistent. We had further concerns about the realism of some of the working environments and about the health and safety practices in some of the centres. Generally, we found that learners who were registered at centres that were training providers, rather than colleges, demonstrated the highest standards of performance and provided the best evidence to support their achievement.

The majority of the visits we observed were at City & Guilds and VTCT centres. Both of these awarding organisations had some centres where assessment practice was highly effective and standards of learner performance were appropriate for achievement. However, for both of these awarding organisations, we also visited some centres where standards of performance expected for achievement were insufficient to meet the requirements of the National Occupational Standards.

Each centre and awarding organisation is required to have procedures in place to carry out adequate quality assurance. Centres are required to appoint individuals to ensure accurate and consistent standards of assessment between assessors operating within a centre. They are known as internal quality assurers. Awarding organisations are required to appoint individuals to ensure accurate and consistent

standards of assessment, across centres and over time. They are known as external quality assurers.

Although there was evidence that internal quality assurers in some centres had a clear understanding of their role, carried it out effectively and addressed any issues relating to assessment, for both City & Guilds and VTCT there were some centres where the internal quality assurance process was not sufficient to ensure consistency of standards. The most common concerns were the lack of an appropriate sampling strategy or plan and inadequate or incomplete sampling of centre assessments.

The top layer of quality assurance is the awarding organisation's external quality assurer. The external quality assurer's role is to identify any concerns with the assessment process at centres and issue appropriate action points and sanctions, where necessary, such as the removal of a centre's status to claim certificates directly, to ensure consistency of assessment and verification. The centre visits provided evidence that awarding organisations' external quality assurers generally understand their roles and carry them out effectively through sampling of observations, learners' work and centre documentation. Where the external quality assurers identified concerns, they generally provided feedback and issued appropriate actions and sanctions to address them.

However, some external quality assurers failed to identify concerns regarding the assessment practice, and health and safety requirements. In some other instances, where external quality assurers did identify concerns, they did not provide the necessary feedback, actions or sanctions to address them. The most common areas of concern were a reluctance to address evidence of over assessment and the failure to address issues relating to the sampling by internal quality assurers. This led to inconsistent assessment outcomes and instances where standards of learner performance expected for achievement were insufficient to meet the requirements of the National Occupational Standards.

Next steps

We have reported our findings to each of the awarding organisations offering the Level 3 NVQ Diploma in Hairdressing. We asked them to provide us with an action plan, setting out how they intend to address our concerns and ensure compliance with the *General Conditions of Recognition* (Ofqual, 2011). The actions that we have agreed with each awarding organisation are set out below.

City & Guilds

City & Guilds is checking its question paper item banks to address the concerns we identified about specific items. It will confirm to us that it is assured that the full depth and breadth of essential knowledge and understanding is assessed over time through multiple-choice tests.

We asked City & Guilds how it is assured that its process of external verification is sufficiently rigorous to ensure accurate and consistent standards of assessment, internal quality assurance and standards of performance expected for achievement between centres.

City & Guilds has revised the structure that underpins how external quality assurers are managed, trained and standardised to improve the level of support provided to centres.

City & Guilds will remind its external quality assurers that specific health and safety and realistic working environment requirements must be met by centres. It will also ensure that its external quality assurers understand that each assessment location must be sampled.

City & Guilds will also ensure that sufficient guidance and events are in place to support the roles of both the assessors and internal quality assurers in centres. It will confirm to us what additional guidance it provides.

EDI

Since we reported our findings to EDI it has withdrawn its qualifications in this sector. As a consequence, EDI no longer has a requirement to address our concerns and ensure compliance regarding the design and quality of its mandatory written question papers.

Pearson

Pearson has reviewed its processes of centre approval and standards verification to ensure the non-compliances identified are fully addressed. It has introduced revised procedures and documentation, and external quality assurers have been informed of

these changes. External quality assurers have been directed to take appropriate actions where realistic working environments are insufficiently rigorous. We have asked Pearson to confirm to us how effective these changes are in improving the rigour of external quality assurance of assessment practice.

Pearson is reviewing its question-paper design and will revise those items that are not clear and accurate. It will also confirm to us how it is assured that the full depth and breadth of essential knowledge and understanding is assessed over time through mandatory written questions.

ITEC

ITEC has provided us with assurance that it has removed all the questions from its item bank that we found to be erroneous or ambiguous. It is conducting an internal review of question-paper design processes to identify and implement improvements. ITEC will confirm to us how it is assured that the full depth and breadth of essential knowledge and understanding is assessed over time through mandatory written questions.

VTCT

VTCT is checking its question paper item banks to address the concerns we identified about specific items. It is also conducting a review of question-paper design procedures to identify and implement improvements. VTCT will confirm to us how it is assured that the full depth and breadth of essential knowledge and understanding is assessed over time through multiple-choice-questions.

VTCT is also taking a number of actions to improve the rigour of external verification, which it believes will contribute to improved consistency of assessment and standards of performance expected for achievement across centres. These actions include further standardisation and training for external quality assurers, with particular emphasis on the requirements of the National Occupational Standards, health and safety issues, realistic working environment requirements, internal quality assurance and sanctions policy application.

Conclusions

We found that the design of units covers the content requirements of the National Occupational Standards adequately and provides learners with opportunities to demonstrate the technical skills and levels of creativity and innovation required by Habia.

But we also found that the effectiveness of the assessment of the essential knowledge and understanding set out in the National Occupational Standards can be undermined by the chosen method of assessment. Our review of the question papers for units requiring mandatory written questions suggests that these multiple-choice assessments are not the most effective method of assessing the essential knowledge and understanding. We have also found that the multiple-choice assessments provided by each awarding organisation offering this qualification do not allow for the written assessment of the full range of essential knowledge and understanding as set out in the respective units. The short-answer question papers, as offered currently by City & Guilds, provide learners with far greater opportunities to provide evidence of the essential knowledge and understanding because they test more depth and breadth.

Finally, we found that variations in the effectiveness of the quality assurance by both centres and awarding organisations suggest that the system does not currently ensure that standards of assessment are accurate and consistent between different assessors and centres.

We have received assurance from each awarding organisation that it is taking action to address the specific non-compliances we have raised with it. We are seeking further assurance where actions are still to be completed.

Appendix A

Scheme of assessment

To achieve the full qualification, candidates must complete four mandatory units totalling 21 credits and optional units to a minimum of 37 credits in order to give an overall total of 58 credits.

Only one unit can be chosen from option group 2 (all optional credits can be chosen from option group 1, if desired).

Mandatory units

GH16 Creatively cut hair using a combination of techniques - 8 credits (6 Competence 2 Knowledge)

G18 Promote additional services or products to clients - 6 credits (2 Competence 4 Knowledge)

G21 Provide hairdressing consultation services - 3 credits (1 Competence 2 Knowledge)

G22 Monitor procedures to safely control work operations - 4 credits (3 Competence 1 Knowledge)

Optional units: Group 1

GH17 Colour hair using a variety of techniques - 12 credits (8 Competence 4 Knowledge)

GH18 Provide colour correction services - 13 credits (8 Competence 5 Knowledge)

GH19 Creatively style and dress hair - 4 credits (3 Competence 1 Knowledge)

GH20 Creatively dress long hair - 5 credits (4 Competence 1 Knowledge)

GH21 Develop and enhance your creative hairdressing skills - 5 credits (3 Competence 2 Knowledge)

GH22 Create a variety of permed effects - 8 credits (5 Competence 3 Knowledge)

GH23 Provide creative hair extension services - 8 credits (6 Competence 2 Knowledge)

GH24 *Provide specialist consultation services for hair and scalp conditions - 5 credits (2 Competence 3 Knowledge)

GH25 *Provide specialist hair and scalp treatments - 7 credits (3 Competence 4 Knowledge)

Optional units: Group 2

G11 Contribute to the financial effectiveness of the business - 4 credits (1 Competence 3 Knowledge)

G19 Support client service improvements - 5 credits (4 Competence 1 Knowledge)

H32 Contribute to the planning and implementation of promotional activities - 5 credits (2 Competence 3 Knowledge)

*Note: G24 and G25 must be taken together.

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First published by the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation in 2012

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