The Roles of NVQ Internal Verifiers

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department for
education and skills
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Foreword and Acknowledgements

This is the report of a study undertaken for the Department for Education and Employment by the Centre for Developing and Evaluating Lifelong Learning in the School of Education, University of Nottingham. As it was originally conceived, it is broadly concerned with an investigation into the advantages to organisations when individuals within them are internal verifiers or assessors for NVQs, and the advantages that accrue to the individuals themselves. In the course of conducting the study the focus has been refined so as to be an investigation of the roles of the individuals concerned, in relation to the organisations for which they work, with a stronger emphasis on internal verifiers than on assessors. However, the diversity of NVQs, and the settings and contexts in which they operate, has meant that the work has often linked verifiers' work to that of assessors and others within their organisations, and it has been necessary to reflect the complexity of the relationships and structures within the organisations concerned. It has also been difficult to clearly separate the verifiers' roles from the operation of quality assurance within the NVQs themselves, although this study has not been designed as a commentary on this wider issue, which is well documented.

In presenting this report, we have attempted to reflect this diversity and complexity, and to illuminate some of the issues through small case study notes, drawn from the wide range of fieldwork undertaken by members of the CDELL team. This fieldwork was the central part of the study that began with a brief review of literature related to the area of the work and concluded with two focus groups designed to draw together the issues concerned. We are very grateful to the organisations and individuals that agreed to participate in the fieldwork and focus groups, and who responded most willingly to questions that deal with complex and difficult issues.

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Executive Summary

The purpose of the project

The project was concerned with the roles of internal verifiers (IVs) in relation to the organisations that employ them in connection with the operation of NVQs. It was designed to look at the tangible benefits that accrue to the organisations when their employees act as internal verifiers, and the benefits that accrue to the individuals themselves. The project was not directly concerned with issues of good practice in verification, although it was often impossible to disentangle these from the benefits.

The project considered the operation of NVQs in colleges, training providers and workplaces, in the construction, business, retail and engineering sectors. It had three aspects: a short review of relevant literature, extensive fieldwork, and focus groups. The fieldwork involved interviews in 36 organisations offering NVQs and 4 awarding bodies. The 3 focus groups involved in-depth discussions of the issues amongst 28 participants.

Findings from the study

The findings from the three aspects of the project are discussed together in this summary. Principal cross-references are to paragraph numbers, shown in brackets.

1   A depiction of the benefits deriving from the work of IVs cannot be readily resolved into a simple matrix, relating to occupational sector or mode of NVQ provision. However, it is possible to describe a series of benefits accruing both to the organisations in which IVs operate and to the individuals acting as IVs. These are most easily seen in relation to the premise that IVs yield greatest benefits to their organisations when internal verification is integrated into an explicit quality management framework (4.2).

2   It was apparent in centres that there was a constant reinvention of the role of the IV. Some of the diversity is represented in the fieldwork cases illustrated in section 2 of the report and discussed in more depth in the reports of the focus group discussions in section 3. However, despite the vast range of settings, modes of provision and occupational sectors involved in NVQ, it has been possible to identify an irreducible minimum set of conditions that will maximise the potential of IVs, both in terms of assured benefits to the organisation and to internal verifiers themselves (4.5, 4.18).

3   The integration of internal verification into a quality management framework occurs when organisations perceive and describe an explicit link between internal verification for NVQ and wider issues of quality assurance. Here, the organisation's quality objectives are centrally driven, adhering to planned product, training and inspection standards, for which individuals have explicit responsibility. The quality framework possesses a momentum designed to ensure maintenance of organisational standards, based upon the link between the specification and implementation of organisational standards, their monitoring, evaluation and amendment, leading into the evolution of the strategic plan (4.6).

4   The fieldwork and focus group outcomes enable the identification of six areas of impact through which the benefits deriving from the work of IVs might be described.

    • <u>Integration of assessment processes and training objectives</u>   Within a coherent quality framework, NVQs become elements of an organisation's strategic planning for the upskilling and professional development of its workforce or student body. IVs then assume a training management function, and their roles and responsibilities derive from the system characteristics, rather than simply from the requirements of internal verification. Specific enhancements to the IVs' role may then be identified (4.8.1).

- Quality in assessment   IVs are well placed to encourage continuous innovation in assessment forms, responding to developments within the organisation and sector. IVs benefit their organisations by balancing awareness of overarching strategic objectives with a sensitivity to the requirements of individual NVQs. Assessors' confidence in their IVs is greatest where they are able to identify a range of internal verification tasks, and IVs can enhance assessment quality by offering specific support (4.8.2).

- Resources   In order to function as a quality management resource to their organisations, IVs must also be adequately resourced in time, flexibility, authority and material resources; such allocations serve as a recognition of the value added by internal verification (4.8.3). Some organisations misappropriate notions of quality management by suggesting that internal verification is no more than a natural part of the job, not meriting additional time, leading to a diminishing effect upon IVs' confidence in their organisations' commitment to professional development and training.

- Professional development   One of the main benefits IVs offer to their organisations is in their roles as staff developers, and assessors and IVs operating within quality frameworks are confident about their range of staff development functions (4.8.4). Two 'cheap options' are better avoided: firstly, the "you'll do" practice in which staff are accorded internal verification duties because they already possess D34, and secondly, the utilisation of senior staff, on the grounds that they carry positional authority.

- Senior management support for IVs   This support flows from the broader commitment to quality management in the organisation as a whole, and includes the provision of resources. An understanding of the pivotal place of internal verification in quality assurance, and acknowledgement of the range of tasks undertaken by IVs, also serves to reinforce their organisational authority. Their training management role is maximised where their inside view of organisational training requirements is allowed to feed into the planning of staff development and training, with a range of specific benefits (4.8.5).

- Career enhancement   The IV's role is undermined where organisational recognition and career enhancement are denied. This results in a reluctance to undertake internal verification tasks, erodes IVs' confidence in their organisations' commitment to NVQ, and leaves IVs unconvinced that their organisational credibility is sufficient for their views to feed into wider quality contexts. IVs then feel that they are operating in isolation from the organisation's wider quality aspirations. IVs identify benefits, organisational recognition and job enrichment that are incentives to undertake verification duties, and maximise their input into wider quality assurance (4.8.6).

5   The report also includes some reflections on sector and organisational variants in relation to the differential status of NVQs among training providers, colleges and employers, with regard to sector-specific expectations of IVs. These are issues that warrant further research.

- The organisational status of NVQs   The status of IVs in an organisation will be largely dependent upon the status of NVQs, and there are broad underpinning factors relating to the embedding of NVQs within organisations, which necessarily impact upon the role and status of internal verifiers. Among training providers, for instance, NVQs will form part of the core business of the organisation, and they will prosper according to its quality, making quality assurance a pivotal issue. Colleges have a range of provision to fall back on, and NVQs may assume a greater or lesser profile, in comparison with other provision. Colleges can argue that a majority of academic staff time should be devoted to student contact and assessment, and IVs may struggle to achieve a distinct status.

However, the reputations of college programmes rests increasingly on their being able to guarantee 'key-skilled' graduates to a wide range of sectors.

Where NVQs constitute an integral strand of company investment in staff development, and where assessment and verification transcend narrow, mechanistic definitions of competence, IVs carry a sense of direct influence upon the candidates' contribution to the occupational sector as competent, accredited workers. IVs derive job satisfaction from a sense of progressing candidates within the sector (4.10 - 4.13).

- <u>The sector status of NVQ</u>   The nature of the relationship between an NVQ and the occupational sector (with some ambiguity about what constitutes an 'occupational sector') impacts upon the status of IVs. This results in a range of opinions concerning the credibility and status of the IV as the guarantor of sector specific standards (4.14). IVs may function viably in meeting the immediate requirements of the NVQ awarding bodies, but have the potential to contribute to wider quality objectives in production, inspection, staff development and training; however, insufficient senior management support will significantly limit these roles (4.16 - 4.17).

6 It is possible to identify a set of baseline conditions that form an irreducible minimum framework within which IVs impact beneficially upon the quality concerns of their organisations, and also feel adequately supported and professionally developed (4.19). These may be summarised as

- a coherent accreditation structure for staff operating as IVs

- NVQ provision incorporated into the organisation's strategic planning for learning and upskilling

- awarding bodies stipulating the set of tasks that IVs are expected to undertake

- reference to internal verification duties incorporated into IVs' job specifications

- organisations specifying the amount of time that IVs are expected to spend on verification duties

- IVs accorded time allowances or paid increments in recognition of duties undertaken

- organisations providing adequate resources

- organisations creating forums where IVs can raise staff training and development issues

- criteria for the appraisal or evaluation of IVs' performance.

1 Introduction

The purpose of the project

1.1   In its original form this project was designed to look at the roles of internal verifiers and assessors in relation to the organisations that employed them in connection with the operation of NVQs. From the outset, this was seen as a two-way process: there was to be an examination of the tangible benefits that accrue to the organisations when their employees act as internal verifiers, and of the benefits that accrue to the individuals themselves.

1.2   From a very early stage in the project, the emphasis of the work was refined so as to focus on the roles of internal verifiers. Of course, those who act in this role may have been, or may still be assessors, and some organisations enable individuals to work in both roles with different candidates. However, as far as this project was concerned, work with assessors and others was intended to illuminate the central issue, which was the work of the internal verifier.

1.3   There was clearly a need, at the outset, to be clear about what was meant by 'role' and what was meant by 'organisation'. There is a considerable literature on the processes of quality assurance and control for NVQs, the responsibilities of internal verifiers within this, whether these function as intended, and whether they deliver dependable assessment outcomes. It was not the purpose of this project to focus on these issues, although it is clearly difficult to discuss verifier roles without seeing these against their background. The focus of this work was seen to be slightly different, in that it would look at broader issues of roles in relation to the tasks undertaken, the conditions under which this work was done, the values that informed the way it was done, and the worth that was attached to it. In addition, the study was to look at whether verifiers perceived the position, and the tasks and responsibilities involved in it, to be personally rewarding, how their work was viewed by those who employed them.

1.4   Verifiers undertake their tasks for various types of organisation, and are employed to do so in various ways. The organisations may be colleges, private training establishments and businesses. Colleges and training providers may be involved in the general provision of training (that is, not directed to meeting the needs of any single employer), but businesses will usually be providing NVQs for their own employees, directed towards meeting their own human resource needs. However, this simple classification does not adequately describe the wide range of arrangements that exist between training organisations and businesses, for the provision of NVQs, and there is, of course, considerable variation in the size and diversity of colleges, training providers and businesses.

1.5   Consequently, it is not easy to provide simple classifications of the terms of employment of internal verifiers, and it will become clear later in this report that the verifier role is described in ways which range from the almost incidental (where the individual's principal responsibility is not verification), to those which are very explicit. Again, it is not possible to generalise simply by type of institution, although verifiers are almost always employees of either a college, a training provider or a business, or under contract to one of these. They may be full or part-time employees.

1.6   In this study we have attempted to describe benefits that may accrue to the individual and to his or her employer, in the course of verification. The 'benefits' do, in fact, turn out to range from the very positive to the somewhat negative, and we have attempted to describe and classify these. The benefits are also likely to be very varied and complex,

and might be identified, for example, as part of the value to the organisation of high quality training provision, as the development of specific or general skills, in terms of improved motivation and staff development. There may, of course, be various types of cost incurred in the operation of NVQs, and the use of internal verifiers, and the project seeks to identify these, and to balance these against perceived benefits.

1.7 Internal verifiers are normally part of a team of people who are concerned with various aspects of NVQ provision, which may relate closely to matters such as staff training, specific business or other teaching activities, or other assessment tasks. Their work as internal verifiers must therefore be put into the wider contexts in which they operate, and the project is concerned to identify the extent to which the various components of their roles are identified and rewarded. We clearly need to look at these issues from the perspectives of the verifiers and their employers, and from the viewpoints of others concerned in aspects of the verifiers' work. The range of such people will clearly vary from organisation to organisation.

1.8 In addition to the complex range of arrangements for managing verification and employing verifiers, there are also differences in the ways in which different NVQs operate. The study has been arranged so as to cover NVQs in four sectors: construction, business, retail and engineering, and it turns out that each of these also yields a wide range of practices.

1.9 It is clear that a better understanding of verifiers' roles is an important component of the description and exemplification of models of vocational training, and specifically of the ways in which NVQs can more efficiently and effectively meet the needs of businesses and individuals. At the same time it will be clear that simple generalisations about verifiers' roles will not adequately describe important differences that exist, and which must not be ignored. For this reason we are seeking, in this report, to illuminate something of the diversity of practice and perception that exists.

Structure of the project and report

1.10 In the light of the foregoing discussion of the project purpose, its work was structured in three parts. The team first undertook a short review of verifier roles, as discussed in the literature, and used this as basis for establishing the fieldwork. This review, in a revised form, forms the rest of this section. Section 2 is then concerned with the fieldwork, reporting its organisation and management, and discussing its outcomes.

1.11 Reports from a selection of the earlier fieldwork visits then formed the basis for the focus group discussions, which are reported in Section 3. Outcomes from the fieldwork and focus groups are then brought together in a discussion that consolidates the findings of the study, and points to further work that might follow.

Discussing the role of the internal verifier

1.12 Unsurprisingly, many comments upon and analyses of the benefits deriving from the work of internal verifiers take the form of asides appended to more general commentaries on assessor and verifier practice. In addition, commentators taking the trouble to address internal verifiers' functional benefits inevitably begin from the position that organisations have accepted the worth of NVQs, though perhaps with minor reservations.

1.13 Within this frame, it is possible to identify a large degree of confluence within the NVQ internal verifier literature, and to identify two broad themes. Firstly, advocates characterise internal verifiers as having the potential to resolve issues of ownership of

NVQ structures and ethos, ensuring NVQ's credibility with managers, assessors and candidates. This will be achieved by freeing NVQ structures from unwieldy bureaucracy and what is seen as 'artificial' implementation, both of which tend to be seen as the consequence of weak external understanding of the practicalities of the workplace.

1.14 Obviously, the present project will not be able to offer as brutal a distinction between internal and external management of NVQs as some of the commentators surveyed, but the notion that, via internal verifiers' work, centres can exert greater control over their NVQ development and integration, in terms of assessment validity and in terms of innovation, is a key one. This is a theme that is developed in a wide range of literature including Spilsbury *et al* (1994), Cotton (1999) and in various inspection reports such as Training Standards Council (2000). Cotton (1999) suggests that

> *"...assessment systems cannot be appreciated from the outside ...the spectator sees very little of the game. To appreciate the strengths and weaknesses of any system, the best observations are made from the middle of the team."*

1.15 Secondly, advocates suggest that internal verifiers can become practical expressions of the knowledge economy (cf. Ranson 1994, Fryer1997, Kennedy 1997, DfEE 1998, DfEE 1999) in two senses. First, they can encourage assessment management innovations that will emphasise candidates' knowledge and expertise over atomised, pedantic, mechanistic definitions of competence. Then, they can work to develop NVQ 'communities of practice' that are effective enough and reflexive enough to maintain standards, regardless of changes in circumstances and staff turnover.

1.16 However, whilst this all sounds very positive, it would be prudent to note recurring tensions within the NVQ discourse, arising because NVQs exist on a cusp between fundamentally differing views of work and training. Organisations (usually employers rather than colleges) that are keen on making NVQ valid and streamlined as regards day-to-day workplace practicalities may not all be equally receptive to the emphasis on the kind of reflexive, transferable skills and knowledge that might make their trainees over-attractive to other competing organisations. Internal verifiers may be more strongly affected by tensions of this kind, and their loyalties may be severely tested as a result.

1.17 The internal verifier is almost universally seen as a key figure in the conduct of NVQs. Ollin and Tucker (1994) regard the essential roles as ensuring that all assessors have necessary training (including obtaining assessor awards), facilitating assessors with information, materials and guidance to assess effectively, monitoring the quality of centre's assessments, liasing with external verifiers to ensure a clear, accurate flow of information between awarding bodies and assessors, and assisting assessors in ensuring equal opportunities within the assessment process.

1.18 Konrad (1998b) is also most assertive in insisting upon the central role of internal verifiers, regarding their work as

> *"... the main component of the quality assurance system and hence the area on which management processes should focus."*

Therefore, in his view, there is a direct correlation between the enhancement of the internal verifiers' role and the credibility and consistency of NVQ within organisations. For Konrad (1998b), the key flaw in NVQ's credibility is over-emphasis on *"narrow, mechanistic"* definitions of competence and behaviours at the expense of developing knowledgeable skills that will facilitate workers' expertise within the constantly

changing, developing high trust and high skills work context. Internal verifiers should ensure this by taking on the role of continuous innovation in assessment forms, in which, he asserts, QCA currently under-performs:

> *"...what is required to meet the highest standards of Quality is a clear leadership by those in executive positions in QCA, Awarding Bodies and in the Approved Centres."* *(Konrad, 1998b)*

1.19 In doing this, internal verifiers can redouble centres' ownership of assessment processes and, thereby, ensure that "the assessment of knowledge becomes more reliable and valid" (Konrad1998a). Failure to 'own' NVQ processes has been apparent in the lack of involvement of supervisors and managers as assessors and internal verifiers which, in turn, has exacerbated credibility problems attached to NVQ. Establishing internal verifiers as key players in training needs analysis, and the redefinition of internal verification as a leadership role, would break this credibility deficit cycle.

1.20 Konrad (1998a) also draws upon Lave and Wenger's (1991) *situated learning* theories (which have also formed the basis for the current work on the validity and transferability of NVQs; see Tolley & Murphy, 2000). Here learning is characterised as taking place within

> *"... a Community of Practice where expertise is shared, distributed and delivered among its members".*

Experts within the community will be responsible for supporting newcomers to the community, ensuring that the correct regulations and procedures are agreed, skills competencies are developed, attitudinal qualities are negotiated and that newcomers' willingness to learn is engaged. In immediate terms, internal verification needs to be redefined as an 'expert' role, taking the lead in sharing, distributing and delivering among assessors the skills, tools and attitudinal qualities that constitute assessment expertise. The consequent improvement in skills among the assessment and verification community of practice will ensure that those involved move from a position of *"legitimate peripheral participation"* to full participation in the community's socio-cultural practices, and so become an expert component in the wider community of practice of the centre, enhancing its knowledgeable skills.

1.21 In this view of professional development, existing professionals with their own vocational knowledge and skills become part of the assessor and verifier community of practice by a process which draws them, as newcomers to the community, into legitimate peripheral participation. If this process were successfully managed, then over a period of time the community in one assessment centre would achieve the improvement of its skills and, by linking into the wider community of practice of all centres, enhancing the knowledgeable skills of that community.

1.22 Konrad (1998a, b) also regards internal verifiers as inhabiting an expert role within the wider learning organisation (that is, the wider community of practice beyond the assessment and verification community), given that NVQs themselves may be regarded as a 'new technology' within a knowledge economy. Internal verifiers can sustain a community of practice capable of maintaining standards as circumstances (and staff) change, maintaining an up-to-date understanding of NVQ system. If they are also practising assessors, the interplay of roles should facilitate development of workgroup expertise and should promote the concept of knowledge skills within communities of practice. Verifiers can ensure ownership of record-keeping by a working group, which is often more important than formal uniformity across an organisation, in promoting

quality via transparent reliability and validity. The framework of NVQs should then become a basis for ensuring a learning organisation.

1.23   Konrad (1998a) also provides a critique of UK competence-based learning as being rooted in *"narrow and mechanistic"* definitions of competence and behaviours that underestimate extent to which expertise is reliant on knowledge skills, and the ways that workers organise their knowledge. The lack of involvement of supervisors and managers as assessors and internal verifiers has *"affected the validity and credibility of (NVQ) qualifications with employers"*. Internal verifiers should play key role in ensuring that *"the assessment of knowledge becomes more reliable and valid"*.

1.24   Others also see internal verifiers as key agents for change and development, so that the CBI, for example, see internal verifiers as playing a key role in ensuring that assessors, whose backgrounds may be entirely occupational, are supported in developing and assessing candidates' generic transferable skills (CBI, 1994), and Callendar *et al* (1993) see that the internal verifier's role makes them well-placed to contribute to analysis of skills needs and training needs. They may also facilitate dialogues between management and workers in relation to, for example, the development of training programmes.

1.25   Cook (1994) also stresses that the internal verifier's role should be seen as an essential part of the NVQ assessment team, but extends this to the view of the verifier as essential to the assessment *management* team. This team is responsible for matters such as centre policy monitoring and development, designing competence-based training packages and ensuring equal opportunities in relation to assessment processes.

1.26   Lester (1999) similarly addresses the issue of the credibility of NVQs among managers, trainers and candidates. He identifies "lack of knowledge and consistency" among external verifiers as resulting in artificial, fragmented, unimaginative forms of assessment that are detached from "the practicalities of the workplace". NVQ processes within centres consequently become bureaucratic and restrictive, making the role of the assessor less attractive, creating onerous tasks for candidates and increasing doubts about both time costs and validity among managers. Internal verifiers are in a position to counter such detachment by working closely with external verifiers and the awarding body to ensure a credible holistic approach to assessing competence in context, thereby *"making substantial improvements to quality assurance."*

1.27   Internal verifiers can also increase industry-based centres' ownership of NVQ structures and innovation, dealing with the situation where

> *" a significant minority exhibited surprisingly limited knowledge of both the principles of N/SVQ implementation and the range of methods available to use, particularly for assessment."*

This problem was exacerbated by external verifiers' lack of knowledge and consistency, resulting in unnecessary restrictions being placed on centres. As a result, there was often confusion, increased bureaucracy, atomistic assessment, and a reluctance to innovate (see also Beaumont, 1996; Eraut *et al*, 1996).

1.28   Miles (2000) also emphasises that it is incumbent upon internal verifiers to reduce NVQ assessment bureaucracy, encouraging innovation and rationalisation in collection of evidence, a key credibility sticking point (see also IVA, 2000). This perception concurs with Cotton's (1999) insistence on the need to dissolve the divide between internal and external influences on the management of NVQ assessment. Internal verifiers should collaborate with external verifiers to ensure validity of assessment processes (which

rests upon well designed systems) and reliability of assessment processes (which rests upon misinterpretation of systems). Again, therefore, the value of internal verifiers to organisations lies in their potential, through guiding and monitoring the work of assessors, to take a proactive role in developing NVQ design and interpretation. Moreover, internal verifiers can reduce NVQ bureaucracy for the assessor, and can encourage innovation and rationalisation in the collection of evidence. This will, in turn, make the assessor's role more manageable and attractive, as well as increasing NVQ credibility with managers and with candidates.

1.29 Cotton (1999), unsurprisingly, diverges from Lester (1999), in locating NVQ credibility problems with "unsound internal verification procedures" (and assessment practices) rather than detached external examiners/verifiers. However, she concurs with Lester's (1999) and Konrad's (1998a, b) insistence on the need for the building of coherent assessment system teams (reducing external/internal divides), in order to ensure NVQ credibility among candidates and employers.

1.30 The under-utilisation of internal verifiers is seen as an issue by QCA in its 1998 monitoring report (QCA, 1998). Under-utilisation is distinct from the issue of the lack of qualified internal verifiers: 77% of visited centres had qualified internal verifiers but only 50% of visited centres carried out internal verification processes that met QCA requirements.

1.31 The operation of internal (and external) verification in the early days GNVQ drew heavily on the model then in operation for NVQs. Although there has been some divergence in recent years, some of the conclusions from a survey reported in 1996 are relevant to the present discussion (Betteridge *et al*, 1996). The study identified four models of internal verification as it operated in the schools and colleges surveyed; these were 'the loner', 'the team' 'the visitor' and 'inter-organisational collaboration'. These models were not necessarily very stable, and often simply exploited a given set of circumstances in the most expedient way.

1.32 Usefully, the survey also identified the key indicators of a robust internal verification system. The report summarised these as

- manageability: time efficient, cost efficient and streamlined

- sustainability: capable of accommodating changes in the environment

- satisfaction, so that all involved had a positive view

- consistency, so that all involved had a clear understanding of their roles and the requirements of the qualification.

Crucially these factors interlock with manageability at the centre, and the report also set out a number of features against which to judge whether or not the process of internal verification was manageable. These required

- a clear rationale and expectations

- an overall internal verification policy which underpinned processes, roles, responsibilities, procedures and resourcing

- an implementation plan which clearly defined the internal verification process and procedures

- a holistic approach to internal verification and quality assurance

- an organisational structure which reflected rationale, policy and plan

- clearly articulated roles and responsibilities

- an effective communications strategy.

1.33 The report moved to a number of recommendations in the light of these indicators. Whilst these focused on the operation of GNVQs, they appear equally applicable to NVQs, although a much more powerful role for internal verification and for the IV has subsequently begun to emerge. In summary, the principal recommendations were that

- internal verification should be viewed in terms of processes, procedures and models, not as an individual role, that the approach to internal verification should articulate with the wider organisational approach to quality assurance, so that there should be a unified approach to internal verification, with an internal verification policy which identifies procedures, roles, responsibilities and resourcing

- management should have an awareness of the nature and expectations of the GNVQ qualification, and that roles and channels of communication should be agreed, and management and monitoring arrangements established

- organisations should select designated internal verifiers against agreed criteria and that there should be a clearly defined induction process for staff involved

- resource allocation must be explicit and realistic, and staff development incorporated into the management of internal verification.

2 The Fieldwork

Introduction

2.1   The fieldwork programme represented the core part of the study. It was designed around a large number of visits to organisations, to discuss internal verification roles with verifiers themselves, those who employ them and, where appropriate, those who work with them as assessors, trainers and candidates. In addition, the fieldwork was to include interviews with a number of awarding body representatives, and contacts with relevant NTOs and professional associations.

2.2   The choice of organisations was dictated by the need to meet a number of requirements. Further education colleges and private training providers were included, recognising that their activities were often very similar in relation to the operation of NVQs, and that many of them provided services to specific employers, rather than generally to the sectors in which they were working. Employers were heavily represented so that information could be gained from the four sectors in which the project was working (administration, construction, engineering and retail), and from enterprises of various sizes, with various training arrangements. The sample bias towards employers was deliberate, in an attempt to ensure that at least something of the diversity of approach could be identified and reported. One NTO was included. Whilst regional coverage was not a necessity, the organisations were to be located across the country.

2.3   The choice of awarding bodies was more restricted, but needed to include both the large unitary bodies and some sector-specific ones. The interest here was in speaking to representatives, such as officers with sector responsibility or external verifiers, so as to get a view that was informed by current practice rather than simply by policy statements.

2.4   In almost all cases a visit involved group or individual interviews with several people, and most organisations were able to provide several perspectives on the verifiers' role. Candidate interviews were rare, but there were useful contributions from assessors in a number of centres, and employers were normally represented by training managers or directors. Because of travel difficulties and the availability of individuals at the time of the fieldwork, and with some organisations operating on several sites, a number were visited more than once.

2.5   Visits were made to 36 organisations offering NVQs and 4 awarding bodies. More than 100 individuals were interviewed. The organisations were widely dispersed geographically with 17 being employer based and 19 being either further education colleges or private training providers (of which 2 were operated as industry-specific training centres). The interviews were generally conducted in relation to one or more of the four sectors (administration, construction, engineering and retail) although some of those interviewed also worked in and referred to experience in related areas.

Fieldwork instruments

2.6   Following the preparation of the initial discussion paper, the core team met to devise the fieldwork instruments. Four were created; these were for interviews with

- internal verifiers

- employers and their representatives

- others (such as assessors and candidates) concerned with NVQs

- awarding body representatives.

Although the instruments did not follow a single structure, they all dealt with the same range of issues, and used the same style. The text is shown in the Appendix, although the actual instruments provided spaces in which interviewers could write notes of the discussion. The awarding body schedule was rather simpler than the other three, as it was used only at the end of the fieldwork period, when the team members had become well rehearsed in the issues under discussion.

2.7 The first three of the schedules listed above incorporated scenarios, designed to stimulate discussion of particular issues. These can be seen as boxed text in the Appendix, but were printed on cards which were handed to the interviewees, who were asked to respond to the issues raised. Interviewers used these scenarios selectively, and they were not appropriate in a few interviews. For the most part, they seem to have generated useful discussion, highlighting important issues, but they did take quite a lot of time, and appeared to contribute to some very long interviews.

2.8 Information from the interviews was consolidated by the interviewers, who generated a detailed report of each fieldwork visit. The discussion below is drawn from these reports.

Outcomes of the fieldwork: classifying internal verification

2.9 Given the vast range of NVQs, the diverse settings in which they operate, and the large number of awarding bodies involved, it is hardly surprising that there are variations in the perceptions of the role of the IV, and in his or her relationships with the employing organisation. What was rather more surprising (and rather disturbing) was the extent of these variations, and the strong impression from both the fieldwork and focus groups that individuals and organisations that we spoke to had worked out the internal verification role for themselves. The solutions developed had regard for a number of considerations and constraints, of varying importance from organisation to organisation, amongst which may be that

- resource usage had to be reasonable in relation to the size of the organisation and its use of NVQs

- funding requirements have to be met

- there may be a requirement to operate within a broader quality management framework

- external quality audits and inspections will be imposed

- there is a need to satisfy an awarding body requirement

- there is a need to meet employment demands and to place successful candidates in employment

- an organisation must provide for expertise amongst its assessors and verifiers

- job satisfaction must be given to assessors and verifiers

- centres have obligations to candidates.

2.10 Simple classifications of the ways in which verifiers and their organisations balanced these considerations, and evolved appropriate roles, became impossible to construct; the variations are too complex and the issues are multi-layered. What also happened was

that the focus group discussions were very successful at disentangling some of this complexity, and we have therefore chosen to report those at considerable length in the next section. To also report all the details that emerged from the fieldwork would not create a better understanding of the issues that determine verifier roles.

2.11 We are, therefore, regarding the fieldwork reports as an opportunity to illuminate aspects of the verifiers' roles by presenting a number of examples of individuals and organisations that have approached these in different ways. In order to do this, we have created a very simple continuum which ranges across organisations

- with dedicated IVs

- where verification is an explicit part of a wider job description

- that decide *"you'll do for IV"*.

2.12 We have used this as a basis for developing a more detailed and complex typology that is illustrated here, and then discussed in Section 4. As a background we present below panels which attempt to describe the three points on the continuum, and present some common features and benefits of each; these relate to both the organisation concerned and to the individuals involved.

Dedicated internal verifiers

Here the internal verification process is carried out almost entirely by staff employed specifically as verifiers. It is not suggested that this is a model to which all organisations should aspire - clearly 'dedicated' verification structures lie at one pole of the continuum. However, it is worth examining some of the features and perceptions (among verifiers, managers and assessors) existing in organisations that regarded themselves as conscious of verification as a quality process, and as demonstrating this by offering verifiers full recognition within the organisation and by costing for verification as a quality assurance investment.

Common features and benefits of this approach

- Organisations perceive an explicit link between internal verification and quality assurance

- They regard internal verification as a training/management function, with verifiers facilitating training and development among assessors

- Verifiers regularly visit assessors but are also available 'on demand'. This level of support is facilitated by the organisation and is perceived as a benefit by assessors.

- Verifiers' principal responsibility is towards centres' assessors (and, thereby, candidates) rather than to awarding bodies.

- Verifiers are able to play an intermediary role. Assessors valued them as supportive team members and colleagues, while managers regarded them as part of quality line management. They are able to bring to light quality issues and shortcomings.

- Assessors are able to identify a clearly-defined range of tasks constituting internal verification. The range of tasks regularly undertaken by verifiers is viewed by assessors as proof of rigour. The sense that verification is rigorous across the organisation increases levels of confidence in NVQ among assessors, who do not then feel that they are working to a level and taking on tasks not demanded of assessors elsewhere in the organisation. Comparability of *rigour*, rather than of specific practices, is what is valued.

- Where organisations are multi-sited, internal verifiers are involved in cross-centre or regional quality committees. They see this as confirmation that their training and management input is recognised by the organisation's management. Assessors regard verifiers' involvement as representation of their training and assessment concerns.

- Assessors do not regard verifiers as surrogate assessors, but still as having a 'direct' relationship with candidates. Assessors prefer that the internal verification process encompasses observation of as high a proportion of candidates as possible, rather than working 'on trust'.

- Assessors express a preference for dedicated verifiers over 'combined roles'. They express suspicion over systems in which verifier and assessor roles are routinely combined, as this often produces incestuous buddy systems.
- Verifiers have a range of facilities, ranging from office space, admin support, and IT facilities to company cars for some peripatetic IVs.

Summary of this approach

At its most beneficial, internal verification is integrated into a quality management system, and the roles and responsibilities of the individuals derive from the characteristics of the system, rather than simply from the requirements of internal verification itself. There is a potential capacity for integrating internal verification into much wider contexts, and for linking together the operation of a number of NVQs, under a common structure, though with variations to suit particular needs. Thus, for example, the operation of professional development becomes more integrated, and the quality management systems provide for regular information gathering and review, and for system monitoring.

Although this is, in some sense, an ideal model, its satisfactory operation depends crucially on the operation of the quality management system of which it forms a central part. It is easy to see risks attached to the approach, so that the rigid imposition of a single approach may not equally suit all NVQs, and there is a risk that a considerable bureaucracy may evolve. The approach may also need to accommodate the requirements of number of awarding bodies.

Verification as an explicit part of a wider job description

Whilst the use of dedicated verifiers lies at one extreme of the continuum of verification structures, other organisations that tended to build verification into staffs' job descriptions, echo many of the features of the dedicated verifier model. In many cases the difference is a matter of organisational size, and the contribution of verification to total quality provision may be just as strong.

Common features and benefits of this approach

- The verifier's role is regarded as a training role. Verifiers work alongside senior trainers in developing assessors.
- Verifiers often define their training role as training of candidates, as well as assessors. This is apparent in the emphasis placed by many assessors in involving candidates directly in the portfolio verification process.
- Verifiers' training input is not just in terms of inculcating understanding of NVQ structures, but also focuses on development of an NVQ ethos and process among assessors.
- The verifiers regard themselves as having pro-active potential, particularly with regard to shaping organisations' approaches to portfolio-building. Innovations in portfolio-building (such as streamlined evidence collection, or movement towards 'paperless portfolios') are centred around a desire to
  - support candidates by creating candidate-centred, rather than paperwork-centred assessment forms
  - support assessors in utilising their occupational knowledge and skills, rather than submerging them in artificial assessment and paper-heavy evidence collection
  - create a distinctive 'work-based' NVQ form

  This pro-active potential is an important source of job satisfaction among verifiers.
- It also again raises the issue of verifiers' role in creating centre-ownership of NVQs and of creating priorities within this. That is, internal verifiers tend strongly to regard themselves as serving candidates first and organisations second, not as formatting organisations to fit the requirements of external verifiers or awarding bodies. Of course, they prize effective relationships with awarding bodies, and both they and assessors stress the importance of making the centre ready for external verifier visits, but the prioritisation of their 'internal' relationships seems to be central to their self-definition and job satisfaction and to their

definition of the benefits they offer to their organisations.

- However, 'centre ownership' is complicated by the time and credibility afforded to the verifiers' role in different centres. They stress that their quality assurance role only carries integrity if they had the power and discretion to make quality decisions that have the potential to affect centres' funding and accredited status (as by refusing to pass inadequate portfolios, or by reporting ineffective assessors, if necessary). Some organisations regard it as part of the verifiers' management and development function to raise quality problems within the organisation. Where the management/development function is not fully recognised, centre management might equate 'centre ownership' merely with rubber-stamping virtually all portfolios. In addition, some verifiers have doubts about how far managers understand the difference between assessors and verifiers.
- Internal verifiers regard their function as integral to organisational quality assurance, drawing job satisfaction from seeing standards of assessment rise and from organisational recognition of their contribution to quality.
- Verifiers have facilities such as office space, admin support and IT facilities.
- There is a specific time allocation for verification tasks, and there may be salary enhancement.

Summary of this approach

This model can equally operate under a system of total quality management, although it tends to be focused more closely around the requirements of specific NVQs than around the need to fit within a broader requirement. In that sense it may not attract such a high level of management involvement, and may not be monitored so closely, but has the benefit of operating close to areas of occupational expertise and responsibility, and is likely to be very responsive to developments within a sector. It also allows organisations that have many NVQs to operate each according to its own requirements.

In some settings, where the focus of the model is departmental rather than being operated within a total quality management system, there may be less success in marshalling resources, particularly in relation to staff development. In a large organisation there may be a limit to the consultation and sharing between occupational areas, and the relationship between quality in training and quality in the organisation as a whole may be less clear than where internal verification is operated in relation to an overall quality framework.

"You'll do for IV"

Experience as an assessor and possession of D34 may be seen to be sufficient reason for appointing someone as an internal verifier. It appears to be a consequence of an understanding of assessment (perhaps as part of a teacher's job) but not of verification, and the lack of connections between verification and the wider commitment to quality in the organisation.

Common features and benefits of this approach

- Assessment is seen as a natural component of teaching, and therefore not requiring special recognition. Verification is not distinguished from assessment.
- IVs feel that they were manoeuvred into a 'pen-pushing' role where organisations were not willing to pay for the real cost of verification. There may be a dependence on the goodwill of individuals, or verification is seen as a convenient component of personal development.
- Some organisations are wary of the possible effects of overt emphasis on internal verification upon management's relationships with staff. They seem to regard verification as a judgmental process.
- Some assessors might regard IVs as an external voice and might fear being undermined.
- Some organisations may define value added as maximising NVQ pass rates and define centre ownership of NVQs in terms rubber-stamping by IVs. Some private companies may not be able to afford to fail candidates. This implies that employers associate verification with costs at 'both ends' of the process.

- There may be complex arrangements where assessor and verifier roles alternate between individuals, perhaps in relation with tutoring. Buddy systems may operate.
- In some cases there is an ambiguous recognition of internal verification within organisations. On the one hand, responsibility for verification is said to be integral to being a modern manager; on the other hand, this is proffered as a reason for not recognising IV responsibilities within salary structures or job descriptions. Career enhancement via the gaining of D units, opportunities for networking and liasing with external bodies is sometimes thought to be reward enough.
- In some organisations - either for reasons of cost or role recognition/definition - there is little sense of IV as an ongoing process. IV was carried out via 'blitz' sessions.

Summary of this approach

Organisations may see this model as emphasising the greater importance of the assessor's role, with internal verification as a back-up process, and with the ultimate jurisdiction resting with the external verifier. The arrangement places the emphasis very firmly on localised arrangements for each NVQ, and is unlikely to operate within a total quality framework. However, that is not to say that resources will not be available, nor that staff development will not be undertaken, and verifiers may have considerable responsibility for initiating these, and carrying them through. There is a sense in which this is a minimalist model.

For the IV there is considerable autonomy, but perhaps limited job satisfaction, in that management recognition for the role may be limited, and there are probably few tangible rewards. In some settings they will probably be role flexibility and interchange with colleagues, and some verifiers will find this very satisfying.

Outcomes of the fieldwork: illustrating approaches to internal verification

2.13 The illustrations which follow do not explore all features of the continuum, but do illustrate a number of features of the typology that emerges from the three panels above. They broadly follow the order of the continuum as suggested in paragraph 2.11, but each illustration has characteristics that make it unique. There is no implied judgement about the acceptability of any of these illustrations, nor about whether the arrangements that have been made for internal verification are correct or not. They are each based on a single organisation (though we have concealed identities), a brief description of which appears at the start of the illustration.

2.14 The first illustration used staff as dedicated IVs. Within such organisations, these employees devoted their time wholly to verification tasks, their roles being formalised in their job descriptions. Interviewees working within organisations that operated the dedicated model were almost invariably convinced of its merits, stressing, in particular that it encouraged continuity in assessor-verifier relationships and a consistency of verification practice. Moreover, the dedicated model was usually valued because it ended assessor-verifier 'buddying', a practice in which employee A would verify employee B's programme, then the roles would be reversed as B verified the programme for which A was the assessor. This practice was not universally derided, with a significant minority of interviewees expressing the view that the counterpart familiarity generated by 'buddy systems' eased trust and communication between assessor and verifier. However, in those organisations that had adopted the dedicated system, buddying tended to be regarded (by assessors, verifiers and senior managers) with suspicion, as a less rigorous, somewhat outdated practice.

2.15 It should be noted that a number of interviewees who did not work in dedicated systems also advocated it on the basis that it removed incestuous buddy systems that might encourage verification of substandard practice. Often, though, employing dedicated IVs

was said to be unfeasible, due to relatively small NVQ programmes. Neither was the dedicated model universally regarded as an ideal practice. A number of interviewees suggested that dedicated IVs would find their sector expertise blunted, as they lost contact with current workplace innovations and everyday shop-floor practicalities (a criticism voiced also by, for example, Konrad 1998b; Lester, 1999).

2.16 Two additional points should also be noted. Firstly, the dedicated model was advocated by interviewees from across settings and occupational sectors but the dedicated model rarely, if ever, seemed to be operated in further education colleges, where the culture dictates that staff should always either teach or else have general managerial responsibilities. Secondly, a variation of the dedicated model was one, usually only practised in industry, in which dedicated IVs were bought in from training providers or colleges. However, as total quality management systems begin to develop in colleges and elsewhere, lead verifiers, having a broad and specific responsibility for quality assurance, appear to be emerging.

Illustration 1: a training provider with dedicated peripatetic IVs

Description

Illustration 1 (I1) is a training organisation with over 40 accredited centres in England and Wales. Its client groups are described as having *"special educational requirements"*. They range from socially disaffected young people to adults with learning disabilities. I1 offers a broad range of provision, primarily at L1 and L2, including NVQ Retail and NVQ Administration. I1 draws TEC funding but is an autonomous organisation.

In the past eighteen months I1 has introduced a team of Lead Internal Verifiers (LIVs). These are full time peripatetic staff (some covering as many as ten centres), whose time is devoted exclusively to managing internal verification. The LIV system supersedes the old structure, in which all of the organisation's IVs combined verification with other roles, although there are still around 30 part-time IVs operating in centres under LIV direction. I1 currently has 15 LIVs operating across different occupational sectors, all of whom possess D32, D33 and D34.

The initiation of the LIV structure followed I1's appointment of a national accreditation manager whose task, in response to concerns raised by external verifiers about I1's quality assurance, was to develop a cohesive assessment and verification structure across I1's multiple sites. While I1 had previously accredited its candidates via LCCI and OCR, with the initiation of its new national accreditation structure, it began to accredit exclusively via CGLI, regarding the latter as the only body able to meet its requirements. One centre manager rated I1 as having an *"exceptional commitment"* to quality, as indicated by the organisation's willingness to reflect upon and to develop its own practices.

The LIV job description specifies a 36 hour week. Around 75% of a LIV's week might be spent in the field, working from centre to centre; the remainder of the time sees the LIV working from his or her own office (centres also make office space available for peripatetic LIVs). Interviews suggested that LIVs visit each assessor in their catchment area once every two or three weeks, usually spending a full day verifying. In addition to immediate verifying tasks (e.g. observation of assessments; portfolio checking; assessment mapping), visits to centres include assessor support and the provision of training advice. Most of I1's assessors have a caseload of 15-20 candidates.

Perceived benefits of this system

A mixture of LIVs, part-time IVs and assessors were interviewed at three of I1's centres, and the following reflects the balance of benefits for the individuals concerned and for the organisation.

- All interviewees expressed a high degree of confidence in the new LIV system, valuing the fact that, as a dedicated system, it enabled LIVs to concentrate entirely on verification issues (it was felt that they had *"taken pressure off"* staff who had previously combined dual roles). Assessors and verifiers felt that the LIV system gave due prominence to the

importance of IV to quality provision. One centre manager said that the LIV system had been greeted with *"initial suspicion"* but felt that now I1 *"can't do without"* LIVs. Generally LIVs were credited with having made a huge difference to I1's quality systems, adding that, in the past, assessors in some centres had been prone to poor understanding of the Standards, while a few centres had not been verified at all.

- The dedicated system was preferred because it served to avoid the *"incestuous"* reciprocation of the 'buddy' systems that most interviewees had experienced as assessors in other organisations (and occasionally under the old I1 system).

- The peripatetic nature of the LIV system was regarded as enabling greater support for assessors. LIVs stressed the benefits of being able to identify models of good practice and to disseminate them among the centres within their catchment. Assessors referred to the LIVs' role in reducing a sense of isolation, particularly for assessors working in small centres. By offering advice based on their observation a number of centres, the LIVs were an important strand in making assessors feel part of a community of practice within I1. LIVs and IVs were involved in regional, as well as centre-based, QA committees.

- Internal verification was described by assessors and verifiers as a training/management role, rather than an administrative/checking function. While acknowledging that national standards had to be adhered to, interviewees stressed that the IVs' responsibility to support their centres' ownership of NVQ processes was more important than contriving to please EVs and the awarding body. In other words, LIVs were valued for playing a mediating role in achieving coherence between I1's local needs, deriving from its very particular candidate constituency, and national occupational standards.

- Assessors respected IVs' authority, as regards ensuring portfolios and assessments met NVQ standards, but placed great emphasis on IVs adopting a supportive, listening approach - being part of an assessment-verification team - and ensuring reciprocal relationships between centres and EVs/awarding bodies. One manager added that it was quite possible for excellent trainers to be poor assessors or verifiers. Therefore, in addition, to *"excellent occupational competence"*, it was essential for an effective IV to have a thorough understanding of NVQ processes and ethos, and to regard internal verification as an extensive process, not just signing off candidates.

- Managers also regarded IVs as part of the management team, their role being to bring to light quality issues and problems, rather than concealing them, in order to smooth the EV process.

- Both assessors and managers referred to the range of tasks carried out by IVs as being proof of the rigour of the process. IVs were valued because they did not confine themselves merely to checking off portfolios and there was general confidence among interviewees that portfolio/assessment standards had improved markedly because of LIVs.

- Material benefits associated with LIV role include senior trainer grade salaries and the use of company cars. However, most assessor interviewees said that IVs were probably not paid enough, given the extensive travelling and the expectation of being available for consultation by assessors outside normal appointment times.

- The response of one LIV, about to give up the LIV role and to return to working as an assessor at I1, was that the role was personally rewarding. She felt she had managed to contribute to the *"the whole of the NVQ process"* and to *"set certain standards"*. However, she felt that there was *"little variety"* in the role, and that it had involved *"a constant battle"* because of the rapid turnover of assessors.

2.17 The second illustration is of a training organisation where the quality management structures were tightly organised and managed, but where the role and status of the IV was not as strongly developed as in Illustration 1. As a result, IVs were semi-dedicated, in that their appointments and tasks were explicit, but where there was not a strong perception about how their activities contributed to the total quality assurance system. They are also peripatetic, and the illustration demonstrates the strength of a very coherent set of arrangements, strongly focused on small-team interactions.

Illustration 2: Semi-dedicated peripatetic verifiers

Description

Illustration 2 (I2) is a multi-site national training provider for the electrical industry, and has recently been accepted by City & Guilds for its MSQA scheme. It has IiP and ISO 9002. I2 employs full time training officers, working from many locations, and all of whom are assessors. Some are also IVs. The training officers work in teams, each with a team leader, and one (who has not been a verifier) has just been identified as the IV co-ordinator. Teams meet on a regular basis, and each assessor is likely to have around 100 candidates to look after. IVs may each work with 2 or 3 assessors. The system is supported by a comprehensive data information and tracking system, to which IVs have access, and assessors and IVs are supported by extensive national documentation. The training manager does not have hands-on experience in NVQs.

Candidates share their time between workplaces and colleges, and assessors follow them as far as possible, using witness testimony from managers and supervisors to supplement their direct observations.

I2 is clearly committed to the systematic development of a quality training provision, and to assessment quality. Its systems for training and assessing candidates are reckoned to be good, and there are clear lines of communication through the training officer team structure, linking to the manager and to the MSQA principal verifier.

Perceived benefits of this system

- The team meeting structure was clearly valued as an opportunity for resolving issues and ensuring standardisation of judgements. The IVs were assumed to have a role in leading this type of process, but did not have responsibility for ensuring that *"everything was right for the EV"*. There was disagreement about whether it was the assessor's or verifier's responsibility to see that candidates *"got their NVQs on time"*. Generally, IVs were seen by the NVQ co-ordinator to be in a supportive and encouraging role, rather than just being checkers. Checking, however, was seen to be a component of quality assurance.

- The system does not make a clear distinction between the assessor and IV roles. Nor does it appear to recognise distinctive aspects of verification, with the training officers feeling that verification had been 'bolted on' to their assessor role, with no specific time allowance, and no explicit mention in job descriptions, although there are requirements for the amounts of time that are to be spent in verifying. Those interviewed did not present a confident and consistent view of verification. Verifiers said that *"senior management saw them as training officers with no explicit value attached to the verification component"*.

- There was a generally acknowledged problem about direct observation of assessors by IVs, largely due to the logistical difficulties of making contact. Verification as an activity did not have a sufficient time allocation, and verification issues frequently got squeezed out of discussion at team meetings (which deal with a wide range of issues in training, assessment and verification) because of time. However, the prescriptive nature of the documentation, and the contacts in the team meetings, meant that verifiers could take many of the assessors' judgements on trust, and this was seen to be a major benefit.

- It was expected that IVs would observe assessors while they assessed candidates, and would link this to portfolio scrutiny. The documentation specified levels of sampling required, and there appeared to be a significant amount of informal contact between assessors and verifiers, which was valued.

- There was no clear view about whether IVs needed to have sector expertise, but the method by which individuals become IVs appeared to make this likely.

- The internal verification role was not viewed as career enhancement: they were valued but didn't have a particular status. The team leaders had the status. Those doing the verification work were more enthusiastic about giving more recognition to verification than those managing it.

2.18   Most centres visited during the fieldwork operated systems in which staff responsible for carrying out internal verification combined the IV role with other duties. This was almost invariably the case in further education colleges where the culture dictates that academic staff either taught or held senior managerial posts. The status given to internal verification duties in relation to other roles in these plural role settings was extremely variable. In further education colleges, in particular, a common complaint from IVs was that senior managers understood the concept of assessment, because it was embedded in traditional teaching and learning relationships, but struggled with the concept of verification.

2.19   However, this was not a universal experience; several of the colleges visited had taken measures to enhance the IV's role by, for example, emphasising the position of IVs within total quality line management structures (perhaps in relation to lead verifier appointments), producing quality assurance handbooks stipulating the IVs' duties, incorporating reference to the verification role into staff's job descriptions, allocating substantial time and resources to IVs, or paying for part-time IVs to supplement staff handling with large caseloads. The status of IVs within such organisations (which included business employers, as well as colleges) was akin to that of dedicated IVs in other organisations, and might be regarded, therefore, as a 'semi-dedicated' role, in that internal verification tended to be an explicit part of job descriptions.

2.20   It was often pointed out that the size or type of the organisation made dedicated job descriptions unfeasible, but that this did not imply lack of awareness of the pivotal role of verification within quality provision. It should also be noted also that a sizeable number of organisations operating this 'semi-dedicated' system were developing total quality management (TQM) systems.

2.21   The next illustration is interesting in that it is a college that is moving into a whole-college quality framework, of which internal verification is a key element. In that sense it is typical of a large number of colleges. It provides an example of an organisation that is transition from existing systems of verification to a much more centralised model, and where the benefits to the individuals and to the organisation may not yet match very well.

Illustration 3: a small general further education college (2500 FTEs)

Description

The NVQ provision in Illustration 3 (I3) includes Business Admin (at Levels 1-5, via LCCI) and Engineering (at Levels 2-3, via EAL). Over the past year the college has begun developing and implementing an overarching College Quality Framework. It is a sophisticated structure designed to create a quality loop based on a continuous link between specification of standards, implementation of standards, monitoring, review/ evaluation, and recommendations for amended stipulations. Quality assurance is, thereby, driven by what senior college managers describe as a *"feedback and feedforward"* impetus.

Internal verification is identified as an integral element of the College Quality Framework. In interviews senior managers, training development officers, centre managers and IVs all stressed that the college's quality objectives are internally-driven by its own common inspection and programme standards. The college, therefore, depicted itself as having progressed beyond the 'minimalist' approach of defining quality merely in terms of meeting the 'external' requirements of awarding bodies. The national occupational standards are, of course, incorporated into overarching college quality targets but regarded only as basic, bottom-line objectives; that is, the college would not regard its quality provision as failing were these the only criteria met.

I3 expects all IVs to have D32, D33, D34. The activities that I3 requires its IVs to undertake (regarding sampling, observing assessors, meetings with assessors, feedback to candidates, checking and signing-off portfolios) are stipulated in the college quality manual. I3 has a cross-college development and training manager who has extensive experience of working on NVQ programmes and, in particular, long experience of working as an IV. She has been instrumental in ensuring the integration of assessors and verifiers into the College Quality Framework, pressing consistently for adequate time to be given for assessment and verification duties. Consequently, I3 has a standard formula for calculating hours/ payments given to IVs, based upon number of assessors and number of candidates per assessor. Full time staff are given hours; there is also a small number of part time staff brought in specially to carry out internal verification of specific NVQ programmes, who are given payment.

Perceived benefits of this system

Interviewees offered a cohesive set of comments in relation to the definition of the IV's role and as regards the recognition IVs were afforded.

- I3's college quality manual stipulates IVs' tasks which are, essentially, supporting assessors, observing assessors with candidates, conducting minuted meetings with assessors, offering feedback to assessors and to candidates, sampling at least 10% of portfolios, signing off portfolios.

- All IVs were insistent that 'quality not quantity' was what they required, as regards portfolio evidence (*"I don't want the bumf, loads of leaflets; I prefer a thinner folder with quality stuff"*). Ultimately, they regarded streamlining of evidence collection as part of the process of 'assessing the assessors'. One IV said that, in this sense, internal verification is a management role, *"directing and advising colleagues on the way forward"* with regards to gaps in portfolio evidence, shortcomings in interpretation of Standards, as well on their training needs as assessors.

- Assessors and verifiers felt that, until recently, senior college managers had not appreciated the extent of the tasks undertaken by IVs, tending to see verification purely as an administrative task. Now this perception had largely been corrected and internal verification was valued as a quality process. The College Training Development Manager felt that verification was now *"very high on the agenda"*, as regards I3's quality provision.

- All the interviewees felt that I3's approach to quality was college-driven, with staff being concerned to meet college standards that far exceeded the 'minimum requirements' stipulated by awarding bodies.

- IVs felt that senior staff involved in the co-ordination of NVQs had fought successfully to persuade senior college management to recognise that internal verification is an ongoing all-year-round process that cannot be accounted for merely by offering a time allowance at the end of the year to enable a final portfolio blitz. Both IVs said that, as well as deriving personal satisfaction from verification work, they felt valued by the college.

- One interviewee was a practising welder, who was bought in by the college as a part-time assessor and verifier. He commented that he had initially felt unconvinced about NVQ, being *"a tradesman by background"*, and more familiar with *"old school .. apprenticeships"*. But he now felt that *"provided assessors and verifiers are doing their jobs properly, NVQ is as good as an apprenticeship"*.

- This interviewee strongly equated effective verification with occupational expertise. He felt that management recognised his authority as an IV because he was someone with 25 years' occupational experience. He said of his role, *"I look at it as a quality process now"*. He derived satisfaction from being able to confirm that a candidate *"has done enough work and knows enough about the job"*. He felt that he was supporting young people entering the industry in which he had worked 'hands on' for 25 years: *"They're at the beginning; I've put them on that first rung."* Thus he gained satisfaction from being part of a process that ensured both college and industry quality (*"You feel part of that team"*) and played an ongoing mentoring role (*"I'm still getting welders who I taught five years' ago coming in with problems."*)

- Interestingly, this enthusiasm for the role contrasted with that of his team manager, who remarked *"When I do (internal verification) it's just a bugbear."* However, the latter did value verification duties as another way of being able *"to check processes and practice"*

within his area.

- Speaking about the extent to which the extra work involved in internal verification should be recognised by the college, the College Training Development Manager felt that small increases in salary would encourage IVs in working outside of normal hours but that, in general, *"well paid, full-time"* college staff should view quality management as an *"accepted part"* of their job. She felt the college policy of paying part-time IVs and giving hours to full-timers was the correct one. IVs should view their role as part of heir professional development, enabling them to update and develop (multiple) skills.

- Regarding the enhancement of the role of IVs, the College Training Development Manager stressed that IVs *"must be credible"* and that, therefore, where staff were performing verification duties, it should be incorporated into their job descriptions. Awarding bodies should also lay down clearer criteria on the roles and responsibilities of IVs, stipulating attributes such as IT skills, organisational skills and Level 3 Key Skills as minimum requirements for those working as IVs. She did not feel that the new L standards stipulated explicitly enough the job skills IVs should possess; she felt that the NVQ process had to *"get away from awarding bodies giving the nod"* to below par internal verification and IVs.

2.22 At some point in the continuum, perhaps between the verifiers who have verification as a specific part of a wider job description, and the extreme of 'You'll do for IV' there are systems which depend on the insertion of internal verification into wider role, almost on a 'goodwill' basis. This model seemed particularly prevalent among the local authority centres that were visited. In such centres concepts of quality assurance were present at an organisational level but did not appear to approach the TQM model. Interviewees suggested that quality assurance was regarded by senior managers simply as 'part of your job', yet this did not imply a radical redefinition of employees' responsibilities, so much as a reliance upon the willingness of staff to engage with a necessary (but perhaps not very glamorous) activity.

2.23 The next two illustrations are both from local authority centres, where the approaches to internal verification differ in a number of respects, although both have clear 'goodwill' elements within them.

Illustration 4: A first 'goodwill' IV system

Description

Illustration 4 (I4) is of a local authority where the interviewees were working as IV and assessor for NVQs at levels 2-3 in Business Administration, Key Skills (levels 2-3) and Management NVQs at levels 3-4 (although this NVQ is about to be abandoned). They deal with between 20 and 30 candidates annually, and both have had many years of experience with NVQs and several years in their current roles.

The IV is employed full time as the Training Manager and his work as an IV takes about an hour of his time each week. The assessor is employed as a Training Officer, and assessment takes about 30% of her time. The authority uses a mixture of internal training provision and local training provider input in order to support its NVQs. Candidates are spread across some 30-40 workplaces in the authority, and the assessor is said to be 'very peripatetic'. The IV and assessor have adjacent offices, and so there is a good deal of informal consultation.

The authority has IiP status (of which it is proud, since not many local authorities have achieved it) and some departments have ISO and Charter Mark status. There does not, however, appear to be any total quality management framework that embraces NVQs and their assessment and verification, and the NVQ operation within I4 appears to be self-contained.

Perceived benefits of this system

In what appeared to be a well-oiled and tightly managed system for the conduct of NVQs, embedded within the training provision, the two interviewees referred to a number of perceived benefits in the approach that they used.

- The verification role is not specifically mentioned in the IV's job description, but is implied within the overall training manager responsibilities. He is regarded as a *"quality assurance agent"* within the authority, but there is no salary recognition or special time allocation for the internal verification role. The role does carry some status, but he feels that people generally regard it as a natural part of his overall responsibilities. However, he does find the role *"very rewarding"* in that it is part of a process of maintaining standards and a contribution to quality.

- At the same time, the IV did look forward to the time when the internal verification process might be *"less boring and less mechanical, with much less paperwork"*. He does look at every portfolio and more or less systematically samples individual assessment decisions. A portfolio might take 2-3 hours' work and the verification of a unit might take ½ an hour. He provides written feedback, supported by an oral de-briefing.

- The assessor was clear that getting the candidates through their NVQs was her responsibility; where difficulties arose she would consult with the IV in his role as training manager. Whilst is seems clear that the assessor and verifier do not take their procedures for granted, there is a degree of trust between them, based on extensive understanding of each others' strengths.

- The reduction, over the last few years, in the range of NVQs run by the authority, has meant that there are now fewer assessors. Even in the days when there were more, regular standardisation and consultation meetings had become fairly infrequent, because they were seen to be unnecessary.

- The assessor took the view that the authority's senior management was probably not aware of verification as a process, but was aware of the operation of NVQs. However, she said that candidates certainly were aware of the role, and saw it as valuable.

- Both the verifier and the assessor stressed the external verifiers' contentment with the methods that were being used, and the standards being applied. The IV was particularly pleased that the record keeping and general portfolio management was seen to be of a high standard, and this approval was probably the principal yardstick for judging whether the system was operating as intended.

Illustration 5: A second 'goodwill' IV system

Description

The 'goodwill' model of I4 bears comparison, for instance, with another local authority - Illustration 5 (I5). Six 'training officers' were interviewed. They were located within the authority's Central Training and Development Unit. All were experienced, full time staff who combined internal verification duties with other job roles (one was the local authority's sole full time assessor-verifier and was on a different, lower grade from other training officers). All of the interviewees had gained or were working towards their D32/ 33/ 34, either through formal internal training or via their local further education college.

The interviewees made a distinction between their internal verification roles, recognising that their concern had to be with the integrity of the national standards, as opposed to being driven by internal organisational targets and considerations. The internal verification function was contrasted with training officer or assessor roles, in which *"every establishment thinks they own you"*. However, they each admitted that it was sometimes difficult to remain detached enough to provide an *"external voice"*. On occasions, they suggested, the internal verification role came between the close relationships with colleagues that they had built up in training officer and assessor roles. They described the role in the following terms:

- as expert 'interpreters of the standards'
- as giving support to (and identify training needs of) assessors
- as ensuring correct NVQ procedures are followed

• as providing candidates with a fair deal

Perceived benefits of this system

Interviewees expressed substantial reservations about the level of awareness within the organisation of the distinctive role of the IV.

- Internal verification was not mentioned specifically in the job description, and no extra salary had been given; rather, it was felt that it would not lead to greater career enhancement.

- IVs were felt to have an *"anonymous"* role, necessary but not rewarding; at times not really understood by senior managers.

- They were unsure whether the role was valued outside the Central Training and Development Unit, as some managers were not familiar with NVQs and in some cases saw them as *"a cheap option"* through which to gain externally delivered qualifications. In some cases, operational managers would over-ride any training/mentoring activities in favour of operational demands.

- There was no policy decision for managers/staff to take management/supervisory qualifications; it was left to the enthusiasm or commitment of the individual.

- In a small number of areas, NVQs had been linked to Performance & Development Review, as part of authority policy, but this was not usual practice.

- Individual staff demonstrated a high level of personal commitment and enthusiasm to NVQs (*"I'm fanatical about NVQs"*). It was particularly felt that they helped women returning to education and done properly could help people to change lives and thinking.

- It was felt that there was no enhanced status for NVQs internally within the authority; they were not perceived as a positive force to change the organisation, even though sections had already gained IiP status, and were changing their working practices.

The interviewees suggested measures that they believed would enhance the role of the IV, leading to proper recognition of the contribution of IVs to the organisation's quality assurance. These referred both to organisational and national support/ development issues, and included the following points:

- The authority should have an explicit corporate commitment to quality, especially in light of Best Practice, IiP and Performance Management Review. Staff to be trained in basic supervisory, QA and management skills.

- It was felt that senior managers wanted the cheapest and quickest options in quality assurance and staff training, rather than necessarily the best). There should be increased time allocations for internal verification tasks, to ensure rigorous practice and to enable IVs to keep up to date with current NVQ assessment-verification practice.

- The authority should adopt the National Standards as a basis for Performance Review, as a tool for development and recruitment.

- There should be regular internal and external training for IVs, with national updates being given by awarding bodies/QCA, supported by local, regional and national networks, which will consider such issues as standardisation and provide exemplars of good practice. This would minimise isolation of practitioners, provide more opportunities for updating of skills and help to develop a truly national approach to verification practice.

- It was thought that external verifiers needed to have a greater practical understanding of the work place, rather than having expectations based on college provision (such as expecting to be able to see all candidates during an external verifier visit, regardless of work schedules).

2.24 Although there are no simple classifications, we can divide the 'You'll do as IV' cases into several categories. One is the college where there the need for an IV is met by allocating the duty to a suitably experienced assessor, without either a clear understanding of the difference between assessment and verification or any specific recognition for the tasks involved. This type of arrangement has been touched on already and is discussed further in the focus group report.

2.25 The two illustrations which follow provide a view of employment settings in which something like this type of approach obtains, though perhaps in not so extreme a fashion. In Illustration 6 the employer is a police force which uses the IVs as 'checkers' in an environment where it is not clear that an apparent commitment to quality actually relates to the processes of operating NVQ assessment and verification.

Illustration 6: using IVs as checkers

Description

Illustration 6 (I6) is a metropolitan police force that uses NVQs in customer care, administration and other areas, with candidates at any rank up to inspector, though the lower ranks appear to value these qualifications more as contributions to career enhancement. More senior officers tend to drop out *"when they see the amount of work involved"*, and *"realise that doing the NVQ doesn't help their career prospects very much"*. Qualifications are available to level 4, but most of those undertaken are up to level 3.

The NVQ centre (which is a desk in an open-plan office) has only one full time member of staff, who is the centre manager. She has been chief IV for 3 years with I6, and is responsible for signing off all assessments before they go to the external verifier. She is responsible for verifier and assessor training and conducts all the monitoring of their work. At the time of the interview there were 215 candidates, 40 assessors and 23 IVs.

The IVs are all part time, and have other jobs, either as police officers or as civilian staff. Assessors and verifiers are all volunteers; assessors have to do the work in their own time, but IV's (in theory) get time made available, though they have no office facilities. In fact, difficulties in arranging cover, or working round shift arrangements mean that verifying is also often done in IV's own time, and that meetings are difficult to arrange. IVs can claim mileage for their visits.

The four interviewed were

- a detective sergeant and training and development officer, responsible at the moment for developing driving standards; he has recently become an IV (having been an assessor), and spends *"a couple of hours a week"* on verification

- a member of the divisional human resources staff, with a personnel qualification, and an experienced assessor; spends *"a few hours a week"* on internal verification, but only has one candidate at present

- a principal personnel officer with a part-time post at two local colleges, quite unconnected with I6; has 3 candidates at present

- a personnel assistant with 4 years' experience with NVQs, and now doing D35; attends about 10 verification meetings a year, and spends *"a few hours a week"* on verification

Assessors and verifiers must have D units, and training is provided for working in the NVQ centre.

Perceived benefits of this system

A range of impressions emerged from the interviews, supporting the view that internal verification was managed rather formally, that the IVs worked under difficult conditions, and that their roles were largely confined to checking on the work of the assessors. In some ways it appeared like a self-contained structure, with its own quality systems, operating is isolation from the wider quality aspirations of the organisation; it was suggested that it was *"a forgotten corner"*.

- There is a strong view that senior management regards the NVQ centre as a convenient way of providing needed qualifications, without being at all aware of how it works. There was a view that NVQs are not *"embedded in the organisation"*. The role of the IV appeared not to be at all well understood, though it was felt that there was a management recognition that the assessors valued it. The organisation has a very high profile commitment to quality (with all the appropriate awards), and the NVQ centre (and verification itself) may simply be part of the required image.

- IVs are expected to fit the verifying work around other duties, which are seen to take

priority. When they become IVs it is agreed with line managers that they should have time freed up when necessary; this is seen to be rather a casual agreement. One IV tried not to do administrative work in 'work time', but visits sometimes had to be.

- IVs saw themselves as assessment managers, with the chief IV as team leader. There was a sense of being a team, with the possibility that small teams of one IV with 2 or 3 assessors might soon be set up. The IVs felt considerable personal loyalty to the chief IV, who was seen to be very hard working and effective in the role. Originally the IVs were seen as 'second assessors' but this has more recently evolved into the idea of the team leader role. The features that distinguished assessor and verifier roles did not seem especially clear. They certainly did not train the assessors (which was the chief IV's task), although some would like to have this role.

- There was a strong emphasis on fairness in the assessment and seeing that candidates got a 'fair deal'. It wasn't the verifier's job to ensure that candidates got their NVQs, except insofar that they gave feedback and advice. Some IVs saw their role as supporting the employer, but others wished to see themselves as mentors to the assessors, and they valued the personal relationships with assessors.

- The chief IV interfaces with the external verifier, whom most IVs don't see. Whatever information comes from the external verifier is fed back via the chief IV. Everything has to go through the chief IV, and she is seen as the person who will deal with all problems that arise. However, in their day-to-day work IVs manage their own schedules and make their own decisions. Most appear not to aspire to more responsibility (though one would like to be a dedicated IV), but some recognition would be welcome. There is a proposal that they get paid an honorarium of £100 for doing the job (similar to first-aiders) but there is concern from the chief IV that this might attract people who are only in it for the money.

- Adjectives that were though to describe the internal verification role included 'authoritative' (one IV preferred 'expert'), 'sympathetic' (but not to the point of depleting standards), 'somewhat meticulous', 'helpful' (in terms of feedback), 'diligent', 'focussed', and 'precise', but did not include 'forceful'.

- The IVs found the work personally rewarding, and the job was seen to be good in terms of relationships with others, and there was seen to be an element of personal development for the IVs themselves. However, the work added nothing to their career prospects, and carried no status within the organisation. They did acknowledge that they could resign from the post at any time.

2.26 The final illustration is of a case of contracted-out internal verification. A small minority of centres visited chose not to utilise their own employees as IVs but instead to buy in IVs from training providers, via colleges, or use freelance IVs. There were two main reasons offered for contracting out internal verification. Firstly, there were organisations with a logistical rationale: they argued that their candidate and assessor caseloads were too small to justify employing staff from within to take on verification duties. Secondly, there were organisations that felt that employing outside IVs was a further guarantor of quality, in that bought-in IVs would be independent of organisational loyalties and pressures to meet company throughput targets, and therefore better able to act simply as custodians of national occupational standards. The issue of whether in-company IVs were compromised was explored further in the focus groups.

2.27 Clearly, the practice of buying-in IVs relates, in some instances to the overarching issue of the 'ownership' of quality assurance. In other words, should quality assurance be largely determined by external regulation or can it be defined largely as an internal responsibility. In turn, assessors, verifiers and managers who were interviewed across sectors and settings, emphasised that internal responsibility for quality assurance only remained intact where organisations were prepared to invest staff training via structured

professional development programmes, and to allocate sufficient time for staff to conduct assessment and verification duties.

2.28 However, there was ambivalence expressed in some organisations, in relation both to choosing between in-company or bought-in IVs, as well as in relation to cost-benefit issues attached to training and resource allocation. Again, during the fieldwork, it became apparent that there was little consistent fit between particular sectors or settings and particular internal verification models. Neither could the approaches of individual organisations be regarded as static.

Illustration 7: contracted out internal verification

Description

A stark example of unstable internal verification practice was provided by a large engineering firm, commonly regarded as a 'world class' company, and which has a strong commitment to IiP. Currently, all of its NVQ programmes (with small exceptions) are run by external training providers, who take responsibility for both assessment and verification. However, the contracted-out system has been the result of a convoluted negotiation of approaches to staff training, to verification practice and to internal/external ownership of quality assurance.

In the late 1990's the organisation in Illustration 7 (I7) launched a Level 3 NVQ Administration programme via a local further education college. Around 50 staff were enrolled, with a view to gaining the NVQ and then becoming qualified assessors and verifiers. Some suitably qualified staff entered immediately for assessor and/or verifier units, in order to enable the organisation to develop its own assessment and internal verification structures as quickly as was feasible. Within a year I7 staff began practising as in-company assessors and IVs. However, after several months, college staff expressed concerns over I7 staff's assessments, citing liaison difficulties and also the fact that company staff were utilised as verifiers only on a volunteer basis.

Consequently, the college reassumed assessment and verification duties, with in-company staff offering informal *"mentoring"* support to NVQ candidates in some instances. Very soon after, I7 staff began to query the college's assessments, record-keeping and general management of the NVQ programme. The situation was unable to be remedied, and in 2000 assessment and verification was taken over by the current training provider.

Summary of issues

It should be remembered that one of the outcomes of these shifts in procedure is that there are currently a number of qualified assessors and verifiers within the organisation who no longer practice (although a small number operate as assessors in close liaison with the contract training provider). Interviewees suggested, however, that staff are content with the bought-in internal verification system, since they regarded assessment and verification as onerous tasks, given that in-company staff were never allocated time to carry out these duties. The training provider is confident of the contribution that IVs make to quality assurance systems. Despite the instability of past practice the Administration IV is regarded as having considerable status within the organisation, and is respected by candidates.

I7 might then be regarded as exemplifying ambivalent organisational attitudes to staff development and allocation of resources for quality purposes. On the one hand, its commitment to IiP was apparent in its considerable investment in the NVQ Administration programme, and its initial willingness to invest in the training of in-company assessors and verifiers. However, what followed can be regarded, at least according to information gained via interviewees (who included the organisation's Quality Officer) as a failed attempt to institute a goodwill model. The initiative was characterised by in-company assessors operating on a voluntary basis only and without the allocation of time or other resources. It is also generally agreed that, during the first attempt to buy in assessors and IVs, there were severe communication problems between the college and the employer, possibly indicating divergent 'academic' and 'real work' definitions of NVQ and of quality provision.

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3 The Focus Groups

Introduction

3.1   The focus groups were designed to provide a means of consolidating the findings from the fieldwork, identifying the main issues that had arisen, and discussing what actions and/or further work might follow. The original intention had been to hold two such groups, but information about the project had circulated to such an extent that sufficient participants were available to enable three to be held; one was in London and two in Nottingham.

3.2   Delays in completing the fieldwork meant that not all of the reports were available at the time that the focus groups were established. The agenda and discussion paper shown in Appendix 2 were therefore based on a limited range of returns, though these did appear to be reasonably representative of the range of organisations involved in the fieldwork.

3.3   Each focus group meeting was facilitated by one team member, and a record was kept by another. The records form the basis for the discussion that follows.

Outcomes of the focus group discussions

3.4   Three project focus groups were conducted: two at the University of Nottingham and one in London. These were held simultaneously in early February, towards the end of the fieldwork phase, and took as their agenda issues and questions deriving from interim analysis of the early fieldwork visits (October – December 2000). Attendees included representatives of organisations that had participated in project fieldwork, as well as others who were new to the project (with a slight bias towards the latter). In total, 14 employers, 9 training providers, 4 colleges and 1 representative of an awarding body participated. In advance of the focus groups, participants were supplied with the project code of practice (Appendix 2a) and the agenda of issues for discussion (Appendix 2b).

The role of the internal verifier

Should internal verification be seen as a dedicated role?

3.5   During the course of the field work centre visits, several fundamental variations in organisations' delineations of the IV's role had been encountered. These, in turn, impacted upon in-field definitions of the benefits deriving from the work of IVs. A key variable was whether organisations employed staff as dedicated IVs, whose sole job function was internal verification, or whether staff operating as IVs combined the task with other organisational duties. A related issue was whether organisations utilised their own employees as IVs or whether IVs were bought in from training providers or colleges. The focus groups emphasised the contentiousness of the dedicated function, regarding practices not only as pragmatic decisions, dependent upon the size or function of the organisation, but as impacting deeply upon:

- the capacity of IVs to operate independently of organisational training/ accreditation targets

- the ability of IVs to support assessors by disseminating good practice

- the ability of IVs to keep up to date with evolving occupational practices.

3.6 In the focus group meetings, both logistical and ethical arguments were offered against the employment of dedicated IVs from within. Some employers stressed that it was impossible to justify, in commercial terms, employing staff solely as IVs, there being an insufficient amount of internal verification tasks to constitute a dedicated job description. The experiences of focus group participants suggested that the majority of IVs undertake verification activities on a part-time basis, combining internal verification with other organisational roles (e.g. training, supervising, assessing). It was remarked that, where staff combined assessment and verification duties, their differing responsibilities with regard to each need to be tightly defined.

3.7 The proviso that dedicated IV job descriptions were often unfeasible due to insufficient workloads was not only voiced by small employers but by at least one major manufacturer, which chose to buy in internal verification from a training provider. However, the latter's objection to the utilisation of dedicated IVs was also informed by concerns about the independence of verification judgements made by employees of the company. This position was rooted in a definition of the IV as *"custodian of the Standards – that's all nothing else."* It was argued that the IV's sole concern should be to act as a guarantor of assessors' implementation of awarding body Standards, and that loyalties to company management or to individual colleagues had the potential to undermine independent judgement. In addition, the speaker claimed that his company regarded training providers as less dependable in their judgements than colleges, since even though the former were removed from company loyalties, their decisions were more likely to be influenced by the desire to maximise the speed of throughput for funding purposes.

3.8 The other major set of reservations about perceiving internal verification as a dedicated role centred upon the suggestion that staff whose time was entirely devoted to internal verification would lose touch with current occupational sector developments. This issue is discussed more fully in 3.4.1 – 3.4.6.

3.9 There were equally insistent arguments, from both employers and training providers, in favour of using dedicated IVs drawn from within the companies in which they operated. One IV from a training provider summed up a widespread feeling that, since "awarding bodies set the standards", external rigour was already embedded in the NVQ system. He noted also that if organisations were proven not to have adhered to national standards, they could lose funding (in some cases IVs might, he said, be held personally liable for fraudulently contriving to meet organisational targets). Insisting on external IVs, in addition to EVs, was an unnecessary step (*"I don't like the idea of IVs being external"*).

3.10 Numerically, confidence in the efficacy of dedicated IVs outweighed the contrary argument (although this should not be taken to imply that the majority of participants worked within organisations that use dedicated IVs). The pro arguments were not simply pragmatic expressions of the priorities associated with large organisational verification loads; as with the anti arguments, they were rooted in particular definitions of the benefits IVs' might provide for the organisations in which they practised.

3.11 In the focus group discussions three salient points emerged, in relation to the potential benefits of using dedicated IVs. Firstly, dedicated IVs were regarded as minimising conflicts of interest regarding the throughput of NVQ candidates, wherein the prioritisation of quality assurance might be undermined by the desire to maximise candidate throughput. (This view was prevalent among those who did not regard in-company IVs, in themselves, as particularly open to compromise.) Most participants had experienced, at some point during their involvement in NVQ, "buddy" systems of

assessment and verification. Although the fieldwork had revealed variations in the practices grouped together under the umbrella term, most focus group participants referred to reciprocal assessor-verifier relationships between employees of the same centre, often colleagues who had quite close working relationships (cf. 2.14).

3.12 Most participants were concerned that this approach generated an 'I'll sign your forms and you sign mine' culture, incommensurate with rigorous quality assurance. Dedicated IVs – even those directly employed from within the organisations – were regarded as being less 'incentive bound'. While it was acknowledged that even dedicated IVs might seek to 'protect' assessors who were unable to meet organisational targets, there was a general feeling that substandard assessments were less likely to be passed once IVs were freed from mutually dependent buddy relationship. Nevertheless, one GFE college was prepared to argue in favour of 'buddy' systems, regarding them as viable modes for organisations with small number of candidates, and adding that being subject to verification by others *"keeps IVs on their toes."*

3.13 A second perceived benefit to organisations was that, since dedicated IVs within large, multi-sited organisations often played a peripatetic role, they were able to disseminate good practice among different centres. This enabled IVs to offer an additional dimension of support to assessors, encouraging among assessors a sense of being part of a wider assessment/ quality team and reducing, for assessors in small sites, the burden of practicing 'in isolation'.

3.14 Thirdly, it was suggested that employing dedicated IVs (from within the organisation) was likely to create greater consistency and continuity in verification practices. It was argued by participants from across sectors that, as long as the role of the IV is not dedicated, their services will be provided intermittently and that, where internal verification is regarded by organisations as a minor, additional duty, a 'you'll do for IV' culture is likely to prevail, again leading to fragmented, ad hoc practice. The benefits of employing dedicated IVs were seen, therefore, as being guarantees of NVQ quality assurance but also as offering broader organisational benefits, in that they afforded greater organisational coherence and promoted, for assessors especially, a sense of working within a supportive environment.

What are the responsibilities of the internal verifier towards the different stakeholders, i.e. employers, assessors, candidates, awarding bodies?

3.15 Discussion of the viability of the dedicated internal verification model served, in turn, to reveal a variety of definitions of IVs' responsibilities to the network of stakeholders in NVQ quality assurance. Some participants tended to emphasise the support offered by IVs to their assessors, often suggesting a kind of 'mentoring' relationship; others argued that, as guarantors of national occupational standards, IVs were obligated only to the awarding bodies. It was not possible to equate definitions with particular sectors but implicit in the different emphases were divergent notions of the ownership of quality assurance: some participants depicting quality assurance as an 'externally-guided' process; others depicting it as 'internally-guided'.

Employers

3.15.1 There was unanimous agreement that the work of IVs was pivotal to NVQ quality assurance processes within industry and colleges alike (*"Internal verification is quality assurance; without the IV there wouldn't be any!"*). There was clear insistence that employers should respect IVs as key players in establishing and managing NVQ

quality assurance and that, therefore, employers should be willing to invest in proper training for their IV (whether or not their roles are dedicated).

3.15.2 The focus groups identified a series of benefits that might derive from this investment:

- By ensuring consistency among the organisation's assessors in the application of the relevant standards, IVs contribute to the validity and reliability of NVQ assessment and accreditation.

- IVs act as conduits between awarding bodies, employers and assessors, ensuring the flow of information, in relation to awarding body guidelines and amendments to national occupational standards.

- IVs play an important role in helping employers to understand how NVQs are linked to DfEE initiatives such as the Key Skills qualification, Modern Apprenticeships and the New Deal - *"they should be the workplace equivalent of the curriculum co-ordinator in the FE college"*.

- It was also suggested that IVs should take responsibility for promoting NVQ/ staff development, convincing senior managers that a business case can be made for NVQs (i.e., that NVQ training will aid the achievement of business objectives - *"To get an employer to take employees off the production line, they have to see the benefit of their having NVQs"*).

3.15.3 It was stressed that, in order to facilitate unobstructed, uncompromised operation by IVs, employers had to recognise that NVQs are built upon *national* occupational standards, to which each accrediting centre must adhere. Thus, while IVs are responsible for establishing viable quality assurance practices within organisations, employers should not expect to prescribe verification practices. It was acknowledged by some participants that IVs sometimes became recipients of conflict between employers and awarding bodies, as IVs attempted to *"translate EVs' recommendations into employer-speak"*. If employers regarded recommendations as petty, they often refused to allow time for assessors and verifiers to follow them up.

Assessors

3.15.4 The representative of one training provider described IVs as "the supportive mechanism for assessors". Other participants explicated this position, suggesting that IVs benefited organisations by providing training, guidance and support to individual NVQ assessors and, moreover, acting as assessment team leaders by planning and co-ordinating internal assessment and accreditation activities. By acting as a conduit between the EVs, the awarding body and the NVQ centre, IVs are able to ensure that information cascaded down to assessors and candidates. Ideally, they become the people to whom colleagues can refer for help and advice on all matters related to NVQs. In this light, IVs were defined by one speaker as *"the catalyst that draws assessment together."* Thus the IV's role should not be parochial – *"after all who wants to be concerned purely with IV and continually checking paperwork?"* .

3.15.5 Consequently, the most effective setting for the IV would be, it was suggested, as part of a team managing quality assurance, training and internal verification, in which the latter was not seen as simply 'jumping through hoops'. This definition of the IV's role was particularly apparent among representatives from multi-sited organisations that employed peripatetic 'lead' IVs whose role was not only verification of assessors' performance but co-ordination of practice among the verifiers (often part-time, non-dedicated) operating in each of the centres within their catchment area.

3.15.6 However, reservations were expressed as to how far IVs could and should be expected to function as a line of support for assessors. One of the representatives of a large industrial employer restated the view that the IV's role was solely to act as the guarantor of national standards and that under no circumstances should they extend their involvement to aspects of assessment that required expert knowledge of occupational practices. The IV should be an expert in verification but could not be expected, for instance, to be experts in engineering processes.

3.15.7 For this reason, the speaker suggested, the definition of IVs as being obligated to support assessors was problematic and might detract from the IV's overriding responsibility to the awarding body. Other employers offered a less strident take on the issue of the locus of the IV's expertise, arguing that an IV needs to be "technically competent but not an expert" in the field in which s/he is assessing. Participants also remarked upon the transferability of NVQ and internal verification experience, claiming that an effective IV's expertise lay principally in understanding the relationship between NVQ assessment structures and NVQ verification processes. Consequently, an expert IV would be a flexible practitioner capable of verifying an occupational area reasonably similar to his or her regular sphere, without having direct experience of that NVQ area.

Candidates

3.15.8 Focus group members afforded lesser priority to discussing relationships between IVs and candidates, than to discussing IVs' relationships with other stakeholders. However, it was remarked that IVs need to be able to relate to candidates sympathetically and should be prepared to give support and guidance to individuals, as well as ensuring that their NVQ assessments are valid and reliable. IVs should also interview candidates and undertake audits with them in order to make sure that they have been assessed fairly from an equal opportunities point of view. It should be noted that organisations varied considerably in their expectations of IVs' levels of contact with candidates: at one end of the spectrum, there were IVs who said that they never met candidates; on the other hand, there were IVs who set great store in observing the assessment of all candidates. Again it was difficult to equate particular practices with particular sectors.

Awarding bodies

3.15.9 It was stressed by almost all participants that IVs could only fulfil their quality assurance function if stakeholders recognised that IVs were responsible for assuring national occupational standards. Internal quality benchmarks - and, more pertinently, organisational training targets - must cohere with national requirements. Notions of centre ownership of quality should not become a guise by which to compromise national NVQ standards. As explained in the *Employers* subsection, a minority of participants were insistent that, in order to guarantee adherence to national standards, ties between employers and IVs should be severed with IVs being bought in from outside the company. Other participants, however, argued that a more *consistent* interpretation of national standards and awarding body stipulations was likely to be achieved by internally employed IVs. The latter point indicated an important definition of the IV's function in "resolving" the internal/ external ownership dichotomy: the notion that the IV's role in ensuring adherence to national standards concurs with the role of *interpreting* standards into the language of employers, supervisors and assessors. This may be regarded as the perception held by the majority of participants who did not regard internally appointed IVs as endangering nationally-

defined quality standards. As one employer commented: *"IV is more of a circular job, a continuous loop."*

Is the internal verifier an assessment manager? Is he or she a specialist member of a training team?

3.16   Most participants regarded internal verification as combining training, assessment management and administrative elements. It is a complex role and needs to be reconceptualised. For example, the IV who sees the role as being that of an assessment manager only is unlikely to take the training of assessors seriously. IVs need to be given the authority to guide and support assessors and candidates, in order to manage quality assurance effectively. Benefits to the organisation are maximised where IVs have a specialist role with responsibility for managing a quality assurance system with regard to NVQs. Their roles and responsibilities need to be clearly specified.

3.17   A number of participants remarked that, precisely because more organisations are recognising the importance of internal verification to quality assurance, there is increasing specification of the IV's role. It was suggested that consideration must now be given to the degree to which variations both in the verification role and in what constitutes successful quality practice are emerging from an increasing tendency to put the job of internal verification into job specifications and hence into personal appraisal plans and annual reviews (the services and industry both provide good examples of this practice). Echoing a concern voiced several times during the fieldwork interviews, it was suggested that greater clarification about the role and duties of IVs (and of their relationship to other pieces of the quality jigsaw) is needed at a *national* level.

How might the internal verifier fit into an organisation's provisions for quality? Are there differences here between the educational and workplace settings? Are there differences between occupational sectors?

3.18   The nature of this research project tended to encourage participation by individuals and organisations that prioritised quality assurance and had begun to perceive internal verification processes as integral to quality. Thus participants from all sectors were sometimes given to mild proselytising, depicting quality and internal verification as synonymous (*"without the IV, there wouldn't be any quality assurance"*) or to universal assumptions (*"all organisations are heavily into quality assurance"*). However, participants also offered specific comment on the location of IVs within organisations' quality provision, giving indications as to variations in function across sectors, each with its associated benefits.

3.19   In addressing this item, the London focus group drew stimulus from one participant's reflections on a report that he had produced some years before in collaboration with colleagues at the University of Brighton (Betteridge et al 1996). The report had identified a typology to describe how IVs fit into organisations' provisions for quality. The London group went on to offer its own typology, identifying four broad settings within which IVs worked and within which verification process operated.

- *The peripatetic* - dealing with a single area/subject across a substantial geographical spread. Within the focus groups there were, for instance, IVs working for multi-sited companies, who were required to operate at a series of centres within a particular catchment area. The London group regarded this setting as the least satisfactory in terms of enhancing the breadth of experience which they regarded as essential for high quality internal verification.

- *The in-company, in-house, workplace IV*. In this setting the IVs would almost certainly be employees of the company concerned, sometimes in quite senior positions. For example, within the focus groups there were IVs who were also board members.

- *The college based/private trainer based IV employed to work part time in a specific area with specific organisations*. IV work here would normally form part of a paid package of services provided to the organisation by a college or a private trainer and could involve the IV operating on single or multiple sites and with single or multiple organisations. The focus groups included IVs of this type, as well as representatives from companies that chose to employ such IVs.

- *The college or school-based IV*. These might form part of a quality team as at most FE colleges or work on their own in a school with responsibility for a single GNVQ at one or several levels; there are many points in between these two types.

3.20 The London participants considered that these different settings posed different challenges. For example, observation is a key feature in verification on an in-company onsite workplace setting. Any national arrangements for managing the verification process will need, therefore, to ensure that the training provision and arrangements for securing quality through verification are sufficiently robust to ensure that all candidates, whatever their setting, receive similar treatment. This raises issues concerning both the extent and the detail of the regulatory and training provision, as well as the question of whether *differences in the setting* are a more important quality issue for internal verification than *similarities in the process*.

3.21 In contrast, at Nottingham it was remarked that, whilst recognising that there are discernible differences between educational and workplace settings with regard to the circumstances in which IVs fulfil their role, the situation is changing rapidly. For example, in construction much of the training that was previously done in college workshops must now be done on site, so that the candidates gain a realistic knowledge of the workplace. It was also noted that the distinction between real workplaces and those simulated by colleges is becoming increasingly blurred. In theory, however, the role of IVs should not differ according the educational or workplace setting, or according to occupational sector; the processes should be the same and IVs should fit in with the overall framework for assuring quality. Nevertheless, in practice there are substantial differences. For example, in the workplace the IV has to negotiate access to assessors and candidates with the site manager, and has to be able to postpone observation if the time is not right (*"The IV must have a flexible attitude"*).

3.22 In other words, IVs have to learn to adapt their practices and procedures to the prevailing circumstances whether in a college, a training centre or the shop-floor. Similarly, with regard to differences between occupational sectors, it was argued that internal verification practices and procedures are generic across the sectors (as in the methods of sampling, following an audit trail, or a concern with quality wherever it might be found). Ultimately, participants suggested, if IVs are following the guidance provided by the awarding bodies and QCA then there should not be differences within or between occupational sectors.

3.23 Other noteworthy responses to this item included reassertion of the view that organisations should utilise IVs as widely as possible, developing quality frameworks in which IVs might, for instance, take responsibility for other aspects of quality assurance in HRD, as in Investors in People initiatives. The London group, meanwhile, raised the

question of how might one determine when the internal verification process has bedded into an organisation's quality structures adequately? Will fewer complaints, fewer staffing changes between EVs and a reduction in workload and paperwork constitute adequate evidence? If not what else might form valid criteria?

In what respects does internal verification contribute to the rigour of assessment? How is rigour achieved between centres?

3.24 Responses to this item inevitably strayed into micro issues of best practice but, at the same time, participants also restated macro definitions of the IV's function within quality assurance structures. Once again, the IV was defined as a *manager* of assessment and verification processes. For example, participants from across sectors asserted that rigour is achieved through co-ordination and that, consequently, there is need for a lead IV who co-ordinates assessment and verification processes and procedures. However, the feasibility of this model was once again dependent upon the size of the organisation.

3.25 A point made widely was that rigour of assessment has to be planned into the internal verification system (as, for example, in the number of times an IV samples the work of each assessor). The IV needs to sit with the team and draw up plans to sample candidates' performance/ assessment evidence. Weekly meetings with assessors are needed to work out such plans. In this context it should be remembered that meetings between IVs and assessors do not have to be formal: *"Every Friday I have an e-mail meeting with all my assessors. We have an agenda and everyone is expected to contribute."* It was also suggested that IVs should keep a logbook of their interactions with assessors (who in turn should do the same in their interactions with candidates).

3.26 Participants from across sectors stressed that achieving rigour is more than just about planning and co-ordination; it is about effective communication as well. The IV should encourage the sharing of experiences with and between assessors so that practices can be unpicked and analysed. This process of critical reflection on experience can contribute to the achievement of rigour. Many IVs, however, are not good at communicating with others and sharing experiences; this aspect of their role needs to be professionalised through training and development.

3.27 With regard to professional training of IVs, the London focus group raised queries about the likely impact of the new L Training Units upon the role of the IV. Most participants, regardless of sector, suggested that the new units would enhance the role of the IV but were vague as to precisely how the L units would achieve this end. Participants seemed uncertain as to whether the L units would be compulsory across qualifications. Moreover, there little concrete knowledge of the extent to which the new training units would proffer a standing definition of the IV's range of functions.

3.28 The focus groups were insistent in emphasising that the IV has responsibility for disseminating information and ideas to assessors, as well as controlling and managing the assessment process. Faults in the latter can be rectified through the actions of the IV. However, it was felt that the achievement of rigour between organisations and centres is primarily the responsibility of the EVs working under the aegis of the awarding bodies, which, in turn, are required to comply with QCA regulations.

3.29 The London focus group expanded its consideration of the IV's role in relation to the EV, and, in doing so, returned to the issues of how to balance 'internal' and 'external'

ownership of quality assurance. The group questioned whether there was sufficient clarity about the differences between checking the process, evaluating the 'judgement' and confirming the 'outcome', identifying three possible approaches to enhancing consistency and establishing rigour within internal verification. This issue arose at the meeting from a discussion about what virtually all of those present perceived as a gap between the IV and the EV or, in a more general sense, between the internal and the external aspects of the verification process. Some felt that the gap might be bridged by a Lead Verifier who (as in MSQA) is a requirement both to verify and to check the IVs, and to manage the whole internal verification process. Some employers, from both industry and the forces, argued for a centre co-ordinator: an arrangement which tends to be favoured by the services and industry but is not unique to them. The centre co-ordinator would provide the focal link between the centre and the EVs, the awarding bodies, the NTOs and the regulatory authorities, as well as with senior management on occasion. He or she could, in consequence, deal consistently and speedily with all relevant issues and difficulties. The problem currently was that some awarding bodies did not recognise the role of the centre co-ordinator, instead requiring their EVs to deal direct with named IVs. Several participants voiced dissatisfaction with this structural inconsistency.

Internal verifier relationships, tasks and resources

Is the internal verifier a member of an assessment team, the leader of an assessment team, or independent of the assessment team? Does verification benefit from being one of a number of tasks that an individual might undertake?

3.30 In the Nottingham groups many participants – including employers, training providers and college staff – expressed a preference (at least, in theory) for dedicated IVs. By contrast, the London group tended to advocate that IVs' understanding of the network of NVQ processes would be broadened if they undertook both assessor and verifier roles. In summary, the London group felt that IVs needed to be aware of the bigger picture and hence benefited from undertaking assessment and teaching/tutoring tasks, as well as being involved in verification and in line management responsibilities. Where this plurality occurs, IVs become embedded within the NVQ team. These teams will inevitably vary in size, the main determinant being the number of assessors involved. Pointedly, the London group argued that being a full time verifier not only limits one's horizons but also reduces one's promotion prospects.

3.31 Within the other two focus groups the more commonly held view was that combining verification with other NVQ-related tasks is only beneficial if the 'assessor - verifier' has sufficient time to fulfil a quality role which is growing in both its importance and the demands it places upon the individual worker. Internal verification is also developing into a more complex role because of its links with other aspects of quality, such as Investors in People. In other words, the multiple roles that an IV might fulfil only enhance status and practice if they are complementary roles, rather than the result of ad hoc staffing measures (an organisational failing exemplified by as one college assessor-verifier, who stated: *"I became the IV because I had D34, so I was told to do the job"*).

3.32 A series of issues and conditions were identified, in relation to the IV's operation within the context of the wider assessment team.

- IVs have a variety of relationships that they have to be able to manage effectively (with, for example, managers, trainers, assessors, candidates and EVs). Consequently, they have to be capable of leading an assessment team e.g. by planning and co-ordinating their own activities with those of others, holding meetings of assessors and giving out information.

- Much depends on the size of the organisation, so that, in small companies with few candidates, there will be no assessment team as such. However, with a large organisation which may have several hundred candidates, the IV will have to be a member of an assessment team, and leading that may be his/her major role.

- IVs need the support of their employers with regard to the time allocated to the role (e.g. 20% or more of their total workload). This can then be planned into their time management for the week so that the demands of their internal verification role can be reconciled with their other commitments.

- IVs need to bear in mind the problems of assessment which result from the context in which the candidates work, and with which the assessors have to cope – *"Their role has to be embedded within the organisation and not simply bolted on."* Similarly, IVs need to be on top of external matters such as the occupational standards and Investors in People. When seen in this context, verification benefits from being one of a number of *complementary* tasks that an individual IV might undertake.

- Where IVs are managers and have undertaken management training, they should have a greater understanding of the professional development needs of their employees as well as the requirements of the organisation. They are able, therefore, to contextualise the role of the IV and to see it holistically.

At what level of seniority within an organisation should an internal verifier operate?

3.33 Two avenues emerged in response to this item. Firstly, there was a literal take on the notion of organisational seniority, with participants discussing the position within the organisational hierarchy that an employee might hold in order to be elected to internal verification responsibilities. Secondly, there was consideration of the authority that resulted from operating as an IV.

3.34 The common assumption shared by the focus groups was that IVs need to be competent in the job and to have had relevant occupational experience in order to be credible in the eyes of NVQ candidates and their assessors. They also need to be in command of all aspects of the assessment process and its procedures. These qualities and attributes are not necessarily related to seniority within an organisation. To have been appointed as IVs, and to have acquired the necessary experience and qualifications, suggests that they have already achieved a degree of seniority within their organisations. If they have not reached a certain level of seniority, then IVs need to be able to speak to candidates and assessors with an authority which stems from their occupational competence and their knowledge of NVQ assessment. They must understand the functions of the job and have the ability to perform it competently. Seniority and the appropriate skills may go together, but not necessarily.

3.35 However, while IVs are often selected on the basis of their occupational competence - for being an authority in their field - in order to be an effective IV, they need much more than the 'positional authority' which comes from being given an 'official' status within the NVQ assessment system. They also have to have the necessary personal qualities and skills. The possession of such qualities, combined with their expertise, enables them

to exercise what might be called a 'personal authority' which bears little relationship to their position or level of seniority. In addition, it was remarked that if IVs are 'bought in' from a college or training provider, they need the support of someone from within the organisation who is sufficiently senior to be able to set up times for the assessment of candidates and meetings with workplace assessors.

Is it right to assume that internal verifiers will moderate assessments that have been made by assessors? Does this mean that verification should be seen as a full-time job?

3.36 One or two of the employers from industry expressed mistrust of any definition that appeared to locate the IV as a 'chief moderator'. They insisted that IVs should be expert only in guardianship of national standards and the assessment *process*; any intervention that required the IV to be expert in specific occupational procedures was regarded as blurring the IV's remit within the NVQ system.

3.37 However, the converse argument was more frequently put. Participants from across sectors said that it was fair to assume that IVs would be responsible for moderating assessments made by assessors – *"If (assessors) are not applying the correct occupational standards then the status of the NVQ qualification is weakened and loses credibility within the organisation."* It was added that the assessment audit trail must be rigorously followed by the IV so that, if necessary, it can be justified and defended. Action must be taken on any matters unearthed by the IV's scrutiny of that audit trail. Nevertheless, it was not thought that the extent to which IVs were involved in moderation tasks was a determining factor in whether internal verification should be designated as a full time role; organisational size and context were regarded as the paramount concerns.

In what ways should the internal verifier be seen to contribute to a quality culture within an organisation? What resources are needed if this is to be the case?

3.38 It was perhaps in response to this item that the greatest degree of consensus among participants emerged. The view that internal verification needs to be seen as an integral part of quality culture within organisations was widely expressed. It cannot be seen to contrast sharply with the concerns of the business for the quality of the goods it produces or the services it provides. However, if such integration is to be achieved, then it must be recognised that time allocation is important for the IV job role. In other words, support for NVQ assessment (of which internal verification is a part) must be seen as an essential component within a wider quality assurance system. This requires the provision of time and money, especially if the IV is peripatetic.

3.39 It was also repeatedly emphasised that organisations need to develop a holistic view as to how to develop and manage people, in order to deliver quality. The delivery of all aspects of NVQ assessment should be seen as an integral part of a total quality management (TQM) approach to organisational management. Such an approach requires commitment on the part of senior management; that commitment should be recognised by the achievement of Investors in People status.

3.40 Development time was also emphasised as a resource. One IV from a local council with long experience in quality provision was keen to point out that *"it takes time to develop as an IV; it can't be rushed. It usually takes about 12–18 months in current practice."*

Expertise and benefits

How does the internal verifier gain and maintain his or her expertise in the sector and in assessment? Are peripatetic verifiers, working for colleges or training providers, more likely to develop expertise in depth than those working within a single organisation?

3.41 This item yielded further discussion about the merits of dedicated IVs. Participants from both industry and further education colleges argued that, in order to keep abreast of sector developments, IVs needed to work in plural roles, rather than devoting their time wholly to verification. It was suggested by some participants that the dedicated IV role would produce an abstracted form of expertise, in which IVs knowledge of NVQ structures became detached from a genuine understanding both of new macro-developments emerging in their sector and of the 'micro' practicalities in the workplace. The perception that IVs need to 'keep their hand in' at an occupational level was one often expressed during the fieldwork interviews (cf. also Lester 1999; Konrad 1998a).

3.42 Participants in the London group from across all sectors discussed the best means of ensuring that IVs maintained expertise within their sector, concluding that there is a need for greater clarification and debate about the nature of the expertise required of (and required by) an effective internal verifier. Internal verification expertise should also be defined in relation to the expertise of required of and by EVs. The group queried whether the kind of sector expertise in question should be regarded as a 'essential', 'bottom-line' specification, a 'desirability' specification or a 'broad range general competency'.

3.43 A key factor relating to experience is the currency of IVs' sector knowledge and experience. Is it more important, for instance, for IVs to have up-to-date occupational competence (which may in the case of vertiginous sectors, such as e-skills, be difficult to maintain) than it is for the EV? What will be the implications for sector currency and the relations between the IV and the EV of the new arrangements being put in place by MSQA and Affinity for a small core of full time contract EVs? Other aspects of expertise appropriate to internal verification are assessment, detailed knowledge of the relevant standards and specifications, and understanding of the management of the system.

3.44 The London group also acknowledged that sector expertise could not simply be equated with expertise in occupational specifics (that is, the type of expertise expected of assessors). If the primary role of the IV is defined as maintaining the value of the standards, how this to be translated into concepts of 'expertise'?

3.45 In the Nottingham groups there was similar concern that IVs' expertise should not be defined entirely according to knowledge of occupational technicalities. Some training providers were anxious not to dismiss the potential for IVs to sharpen their expertise via the dedicated model. An IV from a training provider, that had within the last two years developed a cohort of peripatetic lead IVs, felt that operating at a number of different centres within the training organisation afforded him insights into new developments in practice and, simultaneously, allowed him to disseminate good practices across centres. This view was echoed by a representative of the forces who, similarly, felt that IVs' relationships with assessors in and of themselves served to keep IVs' sector understanding current, particularly via the mapping exercises undertaken in conjunction with assessors.

3.46 However, the Nottingham groups were not without concerns about the perceived danger of IVs becoming detached for the realities of the sectors in which they operate. A series of issues were identified in relation to the sector expertise and currency of IVs.

- It was suggested that IVs should carry a case-load as an assessor to ensure that they maintain their expertise in assessment. In order to have met the selection criteria to become IVs, they must have been able to demonstrate that they have achieved occupational competence.

- In order to perform effectively as an IV, those fulfilling the role do need to keep up-to-date with developments in their occupational sector. If the IV has another work role (e.g. managerial) then he/she will keep in touch automatically.

- There has been a suggestion that IVs should be required to renew their registration after a set interval (nurses have to do so every five years). However, it was noted that 'current competency' is something which is monitored by EVs when they make their visits. The system, therefore, already covers the maintenance of expertise.

- In recent years skills formerly seen as 'desirable' have increasingly become 'essential'. For example, initially, it was an advantage if IVs possessed serviceable levels of literacy, but the advent of the Key Skills qualification (with the importance which is now attached to IT as well as numeracy) means that IVs must need to upgrade their own key skills to Level 3/4. In this context, good communication skills (verbal and non-verbal) are still important to an IV, as are as the 'softer skills', such a facility for working with others.

- Peripatetic IVs compensate for their lack of "insider knowledge" about an organisation by the breadth and depth of their experience as assessors and internal verifiers. The IV can become very insular if he or she works solely within one organisation – *"If the IV is peripatetic, it is easier to ask awkward questions and not just to verify decisions made by the assessors."*

Is it in awarding bodies' interests to have expert internal verifiers? What should awarding bodies do to develop and support this expertise?

3.47 Despite the insistence of at least one employer that *"IVs tend to emerge rather than be engaged"* often coming out of the ranks of assessors *"who want to go further"*, there was a general feeling that, in fact, awarding bodies should be seeking to 'professionalise' both the IV and EV roles. It was remarked that where a qualified EV is in place then it may feasible to utilise as IVs staff on the basis of a proven occupational or assessment track record, rather than trained IVs who have expertise in relation to the NVQ system. However, it was suggested that simply drawing on 'old hands' in this way might not be a viable strategy in future (awarding bodies now seem to be moving away from this by, for instance, appointing retired head teachers as EVs). It was argued that awarding bodies *"need to revise the attitude that such people 'will do' simply because of they have had certain types of professional experience or have achieved a certain status."* This comment echoed other expressions of dissatisfaction of the 'you'll do for IV' culture, as well as reinforcing the view expressed in paragraph 3.35 that the qualities and attributes necessary to make an IV effective are not necessarily related to organisational seniority.

3.48 It was felt to be important, therefore, that EVs are selected correctly in the first place and that they have appropriate qualifications and attributes. The question of who monitors the EVs was raised and it was pointed out that IVs have a responsibility because they are asked to submit comments on their EVs for quality assurance purposes. However, QCA should ensure that awarding bodies respond to feedback from IVs.

3.49 A number of other actions were identified as being constructive measures for awarding bodies to take, in order to support the professional authority of IVs. They might send centres their verification guidelines, steer centres towards QCA documents, give centres access to information via a website, or provide training videos. In fact, several participants explained, an abundance of information of this kind is already in place. Awarding bodies should also be prepared to use their powers to take away centre status if it does not comply with the standards or regulations. EVs should be explicit in their judgements and the awarding bodies should act accordingly.

Can we describe the benefits (both in personal and career terms) that an individual should get from being an internal verifier? How far should employer recognise and reward internal verification as a role within the organisation?

3.50 While participants were unanimous in advocating the benefits deriving from IVs' work, repeatedly emphasising their pivotal role within quality provision, their own experiences of the personal and professional advantages of undertaking internal verification duties were extremely variable. Most regarded their contribution to quality provision, and thereby to candidates' prospects, with a degree of personal satisfaction but there were divergent views on whether taking on the role produced tangible benefits in terms of career progression. Similarly, organisations varied considerably in relation to whether they offered additional salary or allowed IVs time to carry out their duties. Practices were so diverse that it was impossible to equate a particular type of experience with a particular sector.

3.51 Several IVs, from across sectors, said they received no financial remuneration for their internal verification duties. In a number of cases the chief benefits were the 'perks' of being able to escape the office and meet people. In other cases there was the 'kudos' of being 'one up on the assessors' (who often were not formally recognised at all, merely being expected to assess candidates as part of their standard workload). Other IVs reported more tangible benefits: several were paid increments for their internal verification work. A small number suggested that experience as an IV might lead to an EV's job but this progression was not regarded as especially common, nor was it widely perceived as forming a major incentive to undertake the IV role.

3.52 IV participants from one of the services were confident about their organisational status, regarding themselves as having a high degree of authority within the quality system. On the other hand, while IVs within their organisation had 'kudos' deriving from being able to make decisions and to travel, it was sometimes regarded in the forces as *"a bit of a negative (role), a desk bound job."* For these IVs there was no career incentive either, since after a five year posting, jobs would be changed.

3.53 The most negative experience was voiced by a college IV who depicted himself as having had the IV's role imposed on him by a college with a 'you'll do for IV' culture. He admitted: *"I became the IV because I had D34, so I was told to do it. I was reluctant to do it , and can't see any benefit from it"*. He later added a complaint commonly voiced by college IVs during the fieldwork: that while senior college managers could grasp the more traditional concept of assessment, they were very vague about the role of verification:

> *"It seems like in commercial organisations IVs get paid for the job but in education the IV is not a paid role; you are just expected to do it. Most managers don't understand what internal verification is but they understand assessment."*

3.54 Nevertheless, other participants were able to draw upon their experiences, in order to identify benefits yielded by internal verification work. The key comments made in relation to positive personal and professional outcomes were:

- The benefits for the IVs are largely personal: there is a feeling of job satisfaction, as well as the satisfaction derived from seeing assessors and their candidates develop.

- Acting as IVs contributes to employees' personal and career development, as well as helping to build up their CVs. They develop their skills in conducting audits, keeping records, oral communication and managing meetings. In the process of doing the job they gain insights into their own strengths and weaknesses and what needs to be done to correct faults in their own practice.

- IVs benefit from 'job enrichment'. They become involved in the formulation and implementation of the business plans of their organisations, and gain insights into the workings of their organisations at all levels. IVs may have opportunities to sit on NTO steering committees, to network with others outside their organisations and to become familiar with training initiatives, such as the New Deal.

- Experience of being successful IVs enhances employability both within and beyond the organisation.

- Organisations should build the internal verification role into the job specification of those employees who become IVs and should be prepared to allocate time for them to fulfil their responsibilities, as well as remunerating them. In respect of the latter, even token rewards are better than nothing, although consideration should be given to the use of performance-related bonuses and incentive schemes for IVs.

3.55 As a broad closing comment, it should be said that the focus groups both echoed and unpacked many of the views expressed during the fieldwork interviews. What also became apparent was the caution that needs to be applied in identifying particular models of internal verification practice with particular settings (such as industry, service employers, colleges, training providers) or particular occupational sectors (e.g. administration, engineering, construction). This is largely due to the variables impacting across settings and sectors, such as the size and spread of the organisation, relationships with EVs and awarding bodies, and organisational attitudes to overarching concepts of quality assurance. It was remarked in at least one focus group that operational definitions of the IVs role were so diverse that the notion of enhancing the role became a conundrum. What, precisely, asked the speaker, are we looking to enhance?

4 Discussion

Introduction

4.1   The concluding discussion in this part of the report serves to consolidate the analysis of the roles of internal verifiers offered in Sections 2 and 3. As strongly conveyed in these preceding sections, one of the immediate lessons of both fieldwork and focus groups was that depiction of the benefits deriving from the work of IVs could not be readily resolved into a simple matrix, segmented along the lines of occupational sector or mode of NVQ provision. Nevertheless, it has been possible to extrapolate, from diverse practices and contexts, a series of benefits accruing both to the organisations in which IVs operate and to the individuals acting as IVs. In outlining these, this section of the report also points to common conditions via which internal verifiers' contributions are likely to be maximised.

4.2   The discussion offered here stems from the premise that internal verifiers yield greatest benefits to their organisations when internal verification is integrated into an explicit quality management framework. It begins by mapping the features inherent in quality-integrated approaches to internal verification, identifying six key areas of impact, including:

- Integration of assessment procedures and training objectives

- Quality in assessment

- Resources

- Professional development

- Senior management support for IVs

- Career enhancement

4.3   These are discussed in terms of their loop value. This is the means by which issues of, for example, resourcing and status impact upon or enhance the organisational contribution of IVs, and the senses in which enhanced IVs serve, in turn, to propel quality in relation to matters such as assessment and meeting training objectives.

4.4   Following on from this, the potential for enhancing the role of IVs is considered in relation to the differential status of NVQs among training providers, colleges and employers, and also with regard to sector-specific expectations of IVs.

4.5   Finally, the discussion returns to issues prompted by the multiplicity of practice and status uncovered during fieldwork. It reflects upon the constant reinvention of the role of the IV that was apparent in centres and considers whether, given the vast range of settings, modes of provision and occupational sectors involved in NVQ, it is possible to identify an "irreducible minimum" set of conditions that will maximise the potential of IVs, both in terms of assured benefits to the organisation and to internal verifiers themselves.

Internal verifiers: operating within a quality framework

4.6   Sections 2 and 3 of this report provide a sound basis for suggesting that the range of benefits generated by IVs is maximised when internal verification is integrated into a quality management framework and when organisations perceive and describe an explicit link between internal verification for NVQ and wider issues of quality assurance. The fundamental condition is that quality assurance within the company,

college or training provider operates within an overarching quality framework, in which the organisation's quality objectives are centrally driven, adhering to strategically-planned product, training and inspection standards, and with individuals having explicit responsibility for these. The quality framework possesses a momentum designed to ensure maintenance of organisational standards, based upon the link between:

- specification of organisational standards

- implementation of specified standards

- monitoring and evaluation of standards

- amendment of standards, feeding into evolution of strategic plan.

4.7 Consequently, the role of IVs as an arm of externally-driven awarding body standards (most crudely represented in the fieldwork by centres that relied on "blitzing" portfolios immediately prior to the EVs visit) represents only a bottom-line objective. While national occupational standards are, of course, incorporated into the overarching quality framework, they are merely one element of multiple criteria relating to quality in production, training, staff development and inspection.

4.8 The fieldwork and focus groups enabled identification of six areas of impact (evident across all of the occupational sectors and modes of NVQ delivery examined within the research project) via which the benefits deriving from the work of IVs might be described. These areas of impact frame the salient features of quality-integrated internal verification.

4.8.1 <u>Integration of assessment processes and training objectives</u>

Within a coherent quality framework, NVQ provision ceases to be atomised; therefore the role of the IV ceases to be atomised also. NVQs become elements of the organisation's strategic planning in relation to the upskilling and professional development of its workforce or student body. Consequently, internal verifiers assume a training/ management function, wherein their principal responsibility is to maximise the quality of training delivery and assessment via the support, guidance and professional development that they offer to assessors. In other words, as stated in 2.12, the roles and responsibilities of IVs derive from the characteristics of the system, rather than simply from the requirements of internal verification itself. It is in this sense that "centre ownership" of internal verification is realised, since IVs, although guaranteeing that organisational training objectives meet national standards, cease to be merely summative guarantors of portfolios' external verification worthiness, instead emphasising the IV's formative function as a guarantor of quality in training processes. Thus emerges a capacity for integrating internal verification into much wider organisational contexts and for the coalescence of a number of NVQs under a common structure. Specific enhancements will include IVs:

- inhabiting an intermediary role between assessors, who regard them as supportive team members or mentors, and senior managers, who regard them as quality managers

- contributing to organisations' performance management work plans

- being involved in cross-centre or regional quality committees

- feeling confident that bringing quality issues to light will earn a constructive management response, thereby being removed from pressure to conceal quality issues, in order to avoid EV scrutiny

- facilitating training and development of assessors, working alongside senior trainers, as appropriate

- developing an NVQ ethos among assessors, as well as inculcating understanding of NVQ structures

- working to create a distinctive work-based NVQ form, reinforcing the organisation's (and the sector's) ownership of NVQ.

4.8.2 Quality in assessment

Underpinning organisational training objectives within a quality management structure will be the aspiration of developing workers' expertise within a constantly evolving, high trust – high skills context. IVs are well placed to encourage continuous innovation in assessment forms, in a way that is responsive to developments within the immediate organisation and the sector as a whole (cf. Cotton 1999; cf. 1.14, 1.18, 1.22). Where an organisation operates a range of NVQs, therefore, IVs can benefit their organisations by balancing awareness of overarching strategic objectives with a sensitivity to the particular requirements of individual NVQs. Assessors' confidence in their IVs will be greatest where assessors are able to identify a clearly-defined range of tasks constituting internal verification. The range of tasks regularly undertaken by verifiers is viewed by assessors as proof of rigour. IVs can enhance quality in assessment by offering specific support to assessors, such as:

- having regular organised contact with assessors but also being available 'on demand' (a level of support and flexibility that must be facilitated by the organisation)

- defining the internal verification role as incorporating training of candidates, as well as assessors, involving candidates directly in the portfolio verification process, as appropriate

- shaping organisations' approaches to and innovations in portfolio-building and countering tendencies for NVQ assessment practices to become bureaucratic and restrictive

- helping assessors to support candidates by creating candidate-centred, rather than paperwork-centred assessment forms

- ensuring equal opportunities in relation to assessment procedures

- ensuring that the assessment of knowledge becomes more reliable and valid.

4.8.3 Resources

During the fieldwork and the focus groups, IVs and assessors were insistent that, in order to function as a quality management resource to their organisations, IVs must also be adequately resourced by their organisations, in terms of time, flexibility and authority, as well as material resources, such as office space. Perhaps the most pressing requirement is the allocation of time to complete the full range of verification duties; such allocations in themselves serve as a recognition of the value added by internal verification (3.38). A number of staff in colleges, local authorities were, for instance,

concerned that senior managers were far less clear about the role of verification than they were about assessment (2.23; 3.53 Illustration 4) and, therefore, failed to allocate IVs sufficient time to complete what was often viewed merely as an administrative task. It was also remarked, on occasion, that some organisations misappropriated notions of quality management, by suggesting that, in quality-aware environments, internal verification was no more than a natural part of the job and, therefore, did not merit additional time allocation (2.22). This had a diminishing effect upon IVs' confidence in their organisations' commitment to professional development and training, since it implied that senior managers regarded NVQ as a cheap certification option (2.22 Illustration 5). IVs were adamant that their role carried wider potential: to assure quality in assessment, to act as "mentors" to assessors and to contribute to the integration of NVQ into organisational training objectives. However, this required adequate resources, such as:

- hours given specifically for internal verification tasks e.g. candidate observation, portfolio sampling, contact with assessors

- facilities (ranging from office space, admin support, IT facilities etc. to company cars for some peripatetic IVs).

4.8.4   Professional development

Ollin and Tucker (1994) suggest that one of the main benefits IVs offer to their organisations is in their role as staff developers. Their contribution includes ensuring that all assessors have appropriate training (including obtaining assessor awards) and facilitating assessors with necessary information, materials and guidance. It also includes advising assessors on innovations in assessment formats, liasing with external verifiers to ensure a clear, accurate flow of information between awarding bodies and assessors, and assisting assessors in ensuring equal opportunities within the assessment process. Assessors and IVs operating within quality frameworks were confident about this range of staff development functions. IVs worked alongside senior trainers to develop assessors, adding the benefit of their occupational expertise and sector knowledge. However, the focus groups also stressed the issue of IVs' own professional development. Two 'cheap options' are better avoided: firstly, the "you'll do" practice, in which staff are accorded internal verification duties because they already possess D34, regardless of their willingness, their practical experience or the level of organisational support provided (cf. 2.24; 3.53); secondly, the utilisation of senior staff, on the grounds that they carry 'positional authority', regardless of the currency of their sector knowledge, their practical experience as IVs or their command of NVQ procedures (3.34, 3.47). One IV estimated that it takes a year to 18 months to develop expertise as a D34-holding IV. Expert IVs will possess a personal authority deriving from a combination of occupational understanding, D34 training and interpersonal skills. Consequent benefits include:

- IVs ensuring that assessors selected for their occupational experience are supported in developing ways to assess candidates' generic transferable skills

- IVs facilitating dialogue between workforce and management in relation to the development of training programmes

- IVs broadening their quality assurance remit via links with other strands e.g. Investors in People.

4.8.5   Senior management support for IVs

As indicated in 4.8.3 and 4.8.4, the benefits that IVs offer in terms of assuring quality of assessment, in terms of developing assessors' expertise and in terms of contributing to organisational training objectives are maximised via senior management support and involvement. These flow from the broader commitment to quality management in the organisation as a whole. Senior managers should provide time allocation and other resourcing. Precise understanding of the pivotal place of internal verification in quality assurance and acknowledgement of the range of tasks undertaken by IVs also serves to reinforce the organisational authority of IVs (Konrad 1998a). The training management role of IVs is maximised where IVs' inside view of organisational training requirements is allowed to feed into strategic planning of staff development and training (via IVs' links with senior trainers) and where their verification expertise is utilised to develop performance management work plans. Where senior managers perceive the IV's role not merely as an administrative task but as the management of assessment processes, a range of benefits may be yielded, such as:

- IVs contribute to analysis of organisational skills/ training needs

- IVs become involved in designing competence-based training packages

- IVs are allowed sufficient flexibility in their working patterns to carry out their full range of quality assurance tasks (e.g. workplace observations; centre or regional meetings)

- where IVs combine internal verification duties with other organisational roles, senior management support enables these roles to become complementary, rather than burdensome

- internal verification becomes embedded within organisational quality systems, as opposed to being a "bolt-on" feature

- IVs are able to take a lead role within the assessment management chain, liasing between managers, trainers, assessors, candidates.

4.8.6   Career enhancement

The data yielded by fieldwork and focus groups made apparent the substantial range of tasks involved in quality-integrated internal verification. Also apparent was the extent to which the role of the IV was undermined where organisational recognition and career enhancement were denied to IVs. This did not merely result in a reluctance to undertake internal verification tasks; it also eroded the IVs' confidence in their organisations' commitment to NVQ (2.25 Illustration 6; 3.53) and left IVs unconvinced that their organisational credibility was sufficient for their views to feed into wider quality contexts. In such situations IVs felt that they were operating in isolated from the organisation's wider quality aspirations. There was a range of benefits, forms of organisational recognition and job enrichment that IVs identified as providing incentives to undertake verification duties; more importantly, these also acted as incentives to IVs to maximise their input into wider quality assurance contexts:

- employers building internal verification tasks into the job specifications of staff acting as IVs

- employers allocating a sufficient amount of time to fulfil the full range of internal verification tasks (including centre or regional meetings), preferably according to a set calculation formula, rather than individual negotiation

- salary increments

- being accorded sufficient organisational authority to be able to make recommendations to senior managers regarding staff training requirements

- opportunities to contribute to the formulation and implementation of organisation's business plans (via training programmes, performance management plans)

- opportunities for IVs to extend their understanding of quality assurance and staff training e.g. by being involved in NTO steering committees; through involvement in initiatives such as Investors in People

- "CV enrichment" i.e. opportunities to develop skills in managing, organising, auditing, administering, record-keeping, chairing meetings etc., all of which enhance employability within and beyond the current organisation

- company provision of facilities, ranging from office space, admin support, and IT facilities to company cars for some peripatetic IVs

- 'personal' benefits, ranging from confidence in having enhanced the organisation's quality assurance; satisfaction gained from assisting the professional development of assessors and candidates; the advantages of peripatetic working.

Sector and organisational factors impacting on "enhancement" and status of IVs

4.9   While Section 4 of the report focuses principally upon benefits that appeared to cut across occupational sector, organisational type and mode of NVQ provision, final reflections are also offered regarding sector and organisational variants: firstly, in relation to the differential status of NVQs among training providers, colleges and employers; secondly, with regard to sector-specific expectations of IVs. The comments offered point to issues uncovered during the course of the project that warrant further research.

4.10   The organisational status of NVQs

Konrad (1998a) cautions that the lack of involvement of senior managers and supervisors as assessors and verifiers within the NVQ system has adversely affected the credibility of NVQ within many organisations. Senior managers may perceive in NVQ a convenient means of certificating staff (cf. 2.25 Illustration 6) but may remain unaware of how NVQ structures work and may also harbour reservations about the validity of the qualification; consequently, NVQ will not be truly embedded within the organisation and the role of IVs will be constrained, failing to yield wider organisational benefits in relation to quality assurance and staff training/ development. Since the status of internal verifiers in an organisation will be largely dependent upon the status of NVQs, it is useful to consider broad underpinning factors relating to the embedding of NVQs within organisations, which necessarily impact upon the role and status of internal verifiers.

4.11 Among training providers, for instance, NVQs will form part of the core business of the organisation. Training providers will prosper according to the quality of their NVQ provision, consequently the pivotal status within quality assurance afforded to IVs by e.g. Cook (1994), Konrad (1998b), Miles (2000) is likely to be non-contentious. While colleges are in a similar position, with NVQs a key feature of contemporary VET, they have a range of provision to fall back on, and depending upon size, catchment area and target markets, NVQs may assume a greater or lesser profile, in comparison with e.g. GNVQ or A-Level provision. Since colleges can convincingly argue that a majority of their academic staff time should be devoted to student contact and assessment, IVs may sometimes struggle to achieve a distinct status, with time allocated to internal verification duties being subsumed into general notions of non-contact time and the clarity of distinctions between assessment and verification becoming inconsistent.

4.12 As the fieldwork and focus groups illustrated, the status potential of IVs is, in a very definite sense, dependent upon the extent to which NVQ provision is integrated into a quality management framework. Where this is the case, the immediate requirements of NVQ assessment and verification cease to form an upper limit upon the IV's organisational role, which instead becomes an engine of broader quality and training aspirations; meeting the approval of the EV becomes merely one measure of the IV's organisational contribution. Where NVQs constitute an integral strand of company investment in staff development, and where assessment and verification transcend narrow, mechanistic definitions of competence, IVs may carry a sense of direct influence upon the candidates' contribution to the occupational sector as competent, accredited workers. The IVs will derive job satisfaction from a sense of progressing candidates within the sector (cf. 2.1 Illustration 3).

4.13 The experience of IVs might, therefore, cleave to the 'old' apprenticeship relationship. Furthermore the immediacy of the 'apprenticeship' relationship between, say, an engineering firm and the wider engineering sector may find its echo in the concern of FE colleges to turn out sector-ready graduates whose ability to file and to photocopy is guaranteed to be sector-correct. Similarly, the reputations of college programmes rest increasingly on their being able to guarantee 'key-skilled' graduates to a wide range of sectors.

4.14 The sector status of NVQ

This, in turn, raises the issue of the nature of the relationship between NVQ and occupational sector, the consequent impact upon the organisational status of NVQ and the influence upon the status of IVs. In the focus groups a range of opinions were expressed regarding the notion of the IV as guarantor of sector specific standards. For example, in some instances, IVs were proposed as NVQ experts whose understanding of NVQ structures was their principal form of expertise; it was suggested that IVs might even transfer across occupational areas (3.15.7). Elsewhere, IVs were depicted as guarantors of national occupational standards who should, under no circumstances, extend their involvement to areas of assessment that require expert occupational knowledge. Yet the question of what constitutes an occupational sector is somewhat ambiguous. A candidate gaining an engineering NVQ while employed in an engineering setting might provide an unproblematic example membership of an 'occupational sector'. However, can the same be said of an administration candidate employed by a police force? Will the administration IV in the police force possess

sector credibility in the same way as the engineering IV working in the engineering setting?

4.15   The data generated by the fieldwork and the focus groups identified organisational structures and behaviours likely to result in the under-utilisation of IVs as engines of quality assurance and to result in minimal job satisfaction for IVs themselves. In Section 2.12's typologies these were exemplified most starkly in the "You'll do" approach but the risk of under-utilisation was also apparent in the "goodwill" and "checkers" approaches depicted in 2.23 and 2.25. Within the terms of Section 4's discussion this diminishing of IV's potential derives from a failure to integrate internal verification into a quality management structure. Consequently, IVs operate in isolated from the organisation's wider quality aspirations. While they may function viably in meeting the immediate requirements of the NVQ awarding bodies (and it should be borne in mind that organisations' expectations as regards meeting awarding body standards vary enormously – at worst, implying portfolio blitzing prior to the EV's visit), IVs have the potential to contribute to wider quality objectives in production, inspection, staff development and training.

4.16   The under-utilisation of IVs (i.e. the diminishing of their quality assurance role) depicted in 2.12, 2.23, 2.25 carries a high-risk in terms of undermining organisations' quality aspirations. Interviews and focus group discussion suggest that insufficient senior management understanding of NVQ aims and processes, insufficient acknowledgement of the IV's role and minimal organisational support will increase the likelihood of:

- the efficacy of the organisation's internal verification systems being dependent upon the goodwill of under-resourced IVs, with internal verification operating unevenly across the organisation as a result

- IVs being unable to complete the full range of internal verification tasks, being limited instead to a pen-pushing role

- the 'quality' of internal verification being equated with levels candidate throughput, regardless of the effectiveness of candidates' skills and knowledge development (i.e. poor assessment practice being concealed from EVs because of the pressure to 'pass' portfolios)

- IVs being regarded as an 'external' force, mistrusted by managers and assessors

- IVs feeling unable to raise wider quality and training issues with senior managers, creating a breakage in the quality loop and a feeling among IVs of working in isolation

- doubts being created about the validity and reliability of candidates' accreditation

- IVs regarding their role as invisible within the organisation: a necessary but unrewarding responsibility

- IVs regarding the role as an additional burden, rather than as complementing their other duties within the organisation

- staff having to be coerced into the internal verification role and often relinquishing the role as soon as possible.

4.17   Rendering IVs invisible and under-resourced, isolated from wider organisational quality drives is a high risk approach for organisations concerned with quality in

training, accreditation and staff development. Paradoxically, though, many organisations opt for such limited commitment precisely because they regard it as a low risk strategy. This perception is informed by the determination, revealed in the experiences of several IVs encountered during the project, of some senior managers to appropriate NVQ as a cheap accreditation option. Minimal resourcing of IVs can be made to sit well with an 'every candidate must pass' culture. Again, it is apparent that the status of IVs and the potential to enhance their function is linked to the status of NVQs within the organisation. Transcending the 'low risk' illusion is one of the prerequisites for enhancing the role of IVs.

Minimum conditions for embedding the work of internal verifiers

4.18   The key challenge presented in analysing the data emerging from the Internal Verifier Project has been that the role of IVs is undergoing constant reinvention. This has been the overarching finding of the research and one of which those involved in assessment and verification seem well aware (cf. 3.55). This pluralism has been generated by the variables that cut across the key concepts that framed this research project at its outset: 'role', 'organisation', 'quality assurance', 'enhancement', 'benefits'. The perceptions and expectations of IV's role that exist among assessors, senior managements, candidates and IVs themselves are shaped by the contingencies inhabiting sector developments, modes of NVQ provision, definitions of quality assurance, notions of organisational status and staff development. In 2.12, for example, the "dedicated internal verification model" is referred to as, in some sense, an ideal model but there is no suggestion that it can be transferred across all organisational types. Similarly, models in which internal verification forms an explicit part of a wider job description, by their very nature, take variant forms across sector and organisational type.

4.19   Yet given all of this, we would still suggest that it is possible to identify a set of core, or baseline, conditions that form an 'irreducible minimum' framework within which internal verifiers can impact beneficially upon the quality concerns of their organisations and, in return, feel adequately supported and professionally developed within their organisations.

- There should be a coherent accreditation structure for staff operating as IVs (staff should, of course, meet the requirements of their awarding bodies, by being accredited with D34).

- NVQ provision must be incorporated into the organisation's strategic planning in relation to the upskilling and professional development of its workforce or student body.

- Awarding bodies should stipulate the set of tasks that IVs are expected to undertake; this should be reinforced by employing organisations.

- Reference to internal verification duties should be incorporated into the job specifications of staff who operate as IVs.

- Employing organisations should specify the amount of time that IVs are expected to spend on verification duties, taking into account variables (e.g. number of candidates attached to each assessor).

- IVs should either be accorded time allowances or paid increments in recognition of internal verification duties undertaken.

- Employing organisations should furnish IVs with adequate resources (e.g. office space, administrative support, IT facilities).

- Employing organisations should endeavour to create forums in which IVs can raise staff training and development issues with senior trainers.

- Appraisal or evaluation of IVs' performance should be set within criteria suggested by awarding body definitions of the range of internal verification functions; appraisal should not be predicated upon an expectation of 100% candidate throughput.

4.20   These baseline conditions have been extrapolated from the typology of internal verification models detailed in Section 2 and from the organisational experiences discussed in the fieldwork and focus group phases. IVs operating within a framework underpinned by these conditions may be regarded as being integrated into a wider organisational quality framework, possessing sufficient status and resources to assume an assessment management function. The role of the IV will be enhanced because it is defined in terms of the requirements of the organisation's overarching quality system and its aspirations, as regards production, inspection, training and staff development. However, the baseline conditions, themselves, are minimal enough to act as foundations for a range of organisational models and settings, the shared principle of these variants being that where the principal responsibility of the IV is to maximise the *quality* of NVQ training and assessment, the benefits accruing to the organisation and to the individual acting as IV will be maximised.

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Appendix: Instruments

a Fieldwork materials

The following fieldwork documentation is included in this Appendix.

- The fieldwork notes provided to each team member

- A code of practice, which was made available to every centre that was visited

- Four schedules, for interviews with
  - internal verifiers
  - employers
  - others concerned with NVQ assessment
  - awarding bodies

The schedules were produced with spaces in which interviewers could write notes. Where scenarios were used, these were included in the schedules and also printed on cards, which interviewees could read. In this Appendix the schedules are reproduced only in text form, and the scenarios are embedded in this text.

Fieldwork notes and code of practice

These notes are to assist team members conducting fieldwork for this project. The original project title referred to 'assessor-verifier roles' but the emphasis of the project is on internal verification, so we've dropped 'assessor' from the title. However, that doesn't mean that assessors are entirely excluded; see below for more information.

What documents do you need?

In addition to these notes you should have

- a background discussion of issues relating to this project (for your information); you may want also to refer to the project specification and/or our bid, but note that the scope of the project was subsequently reduced, so as to operate within a rather smaller budget of about £63, 000

- a code of practice (this can be given to respondents, and includes an explanation of the project)

- four schedules, covering issues for discussion with
  - internal verifiers
  - others working directly with NVQs
  - representatives of the employing organisations.

At a later stage we may need to add a schedule which can be used with representatives of other relevant organisations.

What is the scope of the project?

This project is being done for DfEE, and will be completed in February next year. Some desk research has already been done (and forms part of the basis of the background discussion that you have). We are doing the fieldwork during this term, and we will be reviewing outcomes with focus groups in the new year.

The project is being done in 4 NVQ sectors: retail, business, engineering and construction. We will deliberately include a number of organisations which operate some of these NVQs in public sector contexts. The work will primarily cover NVQs at levels 1, 2 and 3, although if there are special issues arising at higher levels, in any institution that you are visiting, these could be incorporated.

The emphasis of the project is clearly on the benefits that accrue to organisations, through having staff members as internal verifiers, and the benefits that accrue to those individuals. In this context the organisations are those that employ, or come into close contact with internal verifiers working on NVQs; these may be businesses or industries running their own NVQ programmes, or buying in external services, or colleges and training providers operating a range of NVQs. The individuals may be employed in a variety of roles, of which internal verification is only a part.

In addition to speaking to organisations and individuals directly involved in operating NVQs, we will be interviewing people in NTOs, awarding bodies, professional associations, QCA and elsewhere, who nay be able to illuminate the issues.

The project is not intended as a study of the processes of quality assurance and control, as operated by verifiers, although these issues will impinge on your discussions.

How will you access fieldwork centres?

We'll make initial contacts from the CDELL office, and then pass the names of centres or other organisations to you, so that you can make detailed arrangements. These will naturally vary from location to location, but we do need to cover as many interviews in one location as possible. To do that we may be able to cover several NVQs in one place, keeping generally within the sectors mentioned above. The categories of people that you will want to consider for interview are as follows.

Internal verifiers These are central to the project and will normally need to be interviewed singly, each for ½ - ¾ hour. They will come in many guises including college lecturers, peripatetic verifiers,

workplace supervisors, those contracted to training providers, and so on. It will be important to be clear who employs them as verifiers, as well as the wider contexts in which they might operate.

Assessors Many internal verifiers will also be assessors, so we don't need to interview many additional assessors. However, there is value in speaking to one or two who may be able to comment on the verifiers' roles. Interview time will normally not be more than ½ hour, and you could do small group interviews.

Co-ordinators There are several types: individuals may co-ordinate NVQ provision in colleges or training providers, or may have a wider training co-ordination role in an organisation. They may have a supervisory role in a business, incorporating NVQ provision, or they may supervise NVQ candidates on placement from colleges or training organisations. They will normally be responsible for internal verification as a specific role. You will probably need ½ to ¾ hour with co-ordinators, normally interviewed singly.

Training managers Sometimes these will be the same as co-ordinators, but you may find that larger businesses have managers with a general responsibility for training and/or wider staff development (perhaps including the provision of D unit programmes), of which NVQ provision is a part. They will be able to speak on policy issues on behalf of their organisation. Interview time normally ½ - ¾ hour.

Senior managers Only interview senior managers in any organisation if you feel that broad policy matters need further exploration. This might be when the discussion of roles raises issues about broader employment or quality assurance matters, outside the scope of individuals mentioned above. Interview time will normally be less than ½ hour.

Candidates Interview candidates, singly or in groups, when it's clear that they may give you additional information about ways in which internal verifiers operate. However, although they may be able to tell you something of the verification process, they may have very little to say about the wider roles of verifiers.

Those in other organisations It's almost impossible to categorise these: they will normally have sector responsibility in relation to training and/or the provision of NVQs (as in the awarding bodies or professional associations), a broader interest in the development of skills in the workforce (as in the TUC/unions, CBI/employer organisations, NTOs), or a regulatory or policy role (as in DfEE or QCA). Interviews may be with those with special knowledge of skills development, training or qualifications in the sector, or with policy-makers, and are likely to last for ½ - ¾ hour.

Using the schedules

We are trying out a slightly different approach in some of the schedules for this project. They are set out in the same way as in earlier project, but we have added in a number of scenarios that you may use to prompt discussion, and widen the scope of the interviewees' responses. These scenarios are also supplied on separate cards which you can give the interviewee to read.

You will need to regulate the use of these scenarios, so as to keep the interviews within reasonable time limits. In general, spend no more than 3-4 minutes discussing a scenario before moving on the more general questions and issues which follow it in the schedule.

We would be grateful for feedback on these scenarios; in particular we need to know whether they expand the scope of the interview, and enable useful issues to emerge.

What time is available for visits?

We've allocated a day per organisation, and you may need this in, say, a college, where there are many verifiers working across several sectors. Elsewhere, half a day will be more than enough. It's important to exploit as many interview opportunities in one place as possible.

How are reports to be done?

We have allocated half a day for writing up each visit, but you may need more for the largest organisations. You will see that the schedules all use the same main headings, and it will generally be

best if reports draw out the main issues under each heading, rather than report each interview separately. However, do use your discretion over this, perhaps by summarising main issues under the headings, but annexing details from individual interviews where these illuminate the issues.

<u>What are the deadlines?</u>

Please complete reports as soon as possible after a visit is completed. Please send reports, preferably by email, to John Wilmut and Paul Warmington. We will be reviewing progress with DfEE early in November, and would like to get a substantial amount of interviewing completed and written up before that.

<u>If there are problems?</u>

Jackie Last will be able to sort out problems over access to fieldwork locations. John Wilmut and Paul Warmington will deal with issues regarding the interviewing, and the use of the schedules. Contact details are

Jackie Last   0115-951-4496   jackie.last@nottingham.ac.uk
Paul Warmington   0115-951-4538   paul.warmington@nottingham.ac.uk
John Wilmut   01579-370736   jwilmut@compuserve.com

<u>Finally</u>...

Thanks for your help with this project. We'll be reviewing the outcomes either in December or January, and preparing for the focus groups. We may try to have a team meeting at that time, and we'll get in touch later about that.

The roles of NVQ Internal Verifiers

A study being undertaken for the
Department for Education and Employment by a team from the
Centre for Developing and Evaluating Lifelong Learning,
University of Nottingham

1   Introduction

This document presents a code of practice that is designed to clarify the purpose of this study, and spell out the procedures that the research team will adopt, so as to protect individuals and organisations participating in the project. The guidelines are presented as answers to questions that you might wish to ask.

2   What is the purpose of the research study?

The CDELL team in the School of Education at the University of Nottingham has been contracted by DfEE to look at the roles of NVQ internal verifiers. Specifically, this project is concerned with identifying the tangible benefits that accrue to organisations whose employees act as internal verifiers, and the benefits that accrue to the individuals themselves.

For the purposes of this project, the 'organisations' are those that employ individuals who, on a full or part-time basis, fill the internal verifier role. The organisations may be businesses that are operating NVQs internally, or training providers or colleges that provide NVQs as part of a general provision, or on behalf of specific businesses. The 'benefits' may be varied and complex, and might be identified, for example, as part of the value to the organisation of high quality training provision, as the development of specific or general skills, or as improved motivation and staff development. There may, of course, be various types of cost incurred in the operation of NVQs, and in the use of internal verifiers, and the project will seek to identify these, and to balance these against perceived benefits.

We recognise that internal verifiers are part of a team of people who are concerned with NVQ provision, and are usually also part of wider teams concerned with staff training, specific business activities, other teaching activities, or other assessment tasks. Their work as internal verifiers must therefore be related to the wider contexts in which they operate, and we need to identify the extent to which the various components of verifiers' roles are identified and rewarded. We will clearly need to look at these issues from the perspectives of the verifiers and their employers, and from the viewpoints of others concerned in aspects of the verifiers' work. The range of such people will clearly vary from organisation to organisation.

A better understanding of the realities of verifiers' roles is an essential part of an understanding of the ways in which NVQs can more efficiently and effectively meet the needs of businesses and individuals. This project will focus in detail on the activities, perceptions and views of the people most directly involved, and will operate in four contrasting occupational sectors.

3   Who are the members of the research team?

The research is being conducted from the Centre for Developing and Evaluating Lifelong Learning (CDELL) in the School of Education at the University of Nottingham. The research team at this Centre has particular expertise in assessment in NVQs in colleges, training providers and workplaces.

Overall direction of CDELL is provided by **Professor Roger Murphy**, and the manager for this project are **John Wilmut** and **Paul Warmington**. The fieldwork and focus groups involved in the project are also being undertaken by **Peter Burke**, **John Hamer, Henry Macintosh**, **Carole Mallia**, **Bob Rainbow** and **Harry Tolley**. **Jackie Last** is providing the project administration.

4   What will the research involve?

The research will have three main components. In the first instance we are reviewing reports of earlier work, so that we build on and don't replicate this. The main part of the research will then be the fieldwork in which members of the team will be conducting a large number of interviews in workplaces, training providers and colleges. We will also be speaking to representatives of organisations such as the NTOs, professional associations, awarding bodies and regulatory authorities, working within the chosen sectors. This fieldwork will be undertaken from October to December 2000.

The third stage will come in the new year, when we review the outcomes of the fieldwork in focus group meetings attended by representatives of all of those concerned with the operation of NVQs. The groups will also look at the main policy and other issues arising from the research, following which we will make our final report to DfEE.

The interviews in the fieldwork will be conducted using detailed schedules, covering the range of issues that we need to study. You are welcome to see copies of these schedules if you wish. Those attending the focus groups will receive, in advance, agendas and discussion papers that describe the issues to be considered.

5   How will the information collected be stored?

- Researchers will normally keep notes during discussions, using the schedules or agendas as frameworks. These will be retained as primary records, which are confidential to the research team.

- Team members may occasionally use tape recorders, but only with the permission of the interviewees or focus group members. The tapes will also be confidential to the research team.

- The records of the interviews will not be kept longer than is necessary for the purposes of the research.

- Each team member will write a summary report of each interview and focus group; these reports will also be confidential to the research team.

6   How will the information be reported?

- From time to time, the research team reports progress to DfEE, discussing all aspects of the project. All of these informal reports are likely to contain elements of description, interpretation and judgement.

- A final report will be produced at the end of the research. In the past DfEE has published some of the reports which it receives from research project teams, and most reports are circulated in full or in a summary form to interested individuals and organisations.

- Individuals and institutions involved in fieldwork and focus groups will not be named in formal or informal reports to DfEE or others, and no information provided to the research team will be attributed in the report.

7   Where can further information about the research be obtained?

If there is any further information that you need you can ask the team member who visits you or conducts your focus group, or you can contact Jackie Last at the CDELL office in the School of Education at the University of Nottingham (see above).

Schedule for use with internal verifiers

1 About the interviewee
a Ask the verifier to identify his or her role in relation to NVQs.
- Which NVQs and at what levels; identify the awarding body/bodies concerned
- Number of candidates being verified for each NVQ and level
- Number of years experience as a verifier
- Number of years experience of working with NVQs (in an assessor/verifier/other role)

b Ask who the verifier's employer is in relation to the verification role.
- Find out whether it's full or part time; if part-time, ask about the fraction (e.g. 40% of a week)
- Ask whether it's on a permanent or temporary contract
- Ask what other roles he or she fills in that employment
- If he or she has other employments, find out about these; it's important to establish how these relate to the employment of which verification is a part

c Ask about training and support for verification.
- Check on D units completed/being worked for
- Find out whether there's been any other formal training
- Ask what support is available: within the centre (perhaps through discussions or agreement trials) and externally (such as from external verifier/awarding body)

2 About the verification role: time and activities
a Identify the amount of time that the verifier spends in verification activity (as a fraction of each week)
- Make sure that this is distinct from time spent on related tasks such as assessment or training
- Is this all by prior arrangement or is the verifier available on demand?
- Get some idea of the amount of time that is spent on a single verification task. Or is the verification work grouped up into a block of time?

b Find out whether the verifier has a peripatetic role (that is, visiting a number of workplaces to see candidates)
If so, how many does he or she cover?

3 About the verification role: what's involved
a Get the verifier to describe what he or she does in verification.
- Does he or she check paperwork/check that assessors are applying appropriate judgements/ check candidates' performances in specific tasks
- What are the key things that he or she looks for? Are there certain skills that need to be developed in these NVQs, and which he or she looks for?
Try to get more than stock answers to these questions - we need to get insights into their priorities and the realities of the verification process. For example, find out how the assessor gets information about candidate performance - is it from actual observation or from what's written in the portfolio? How much does he or she take on trust? Is it actually a rubber-stamping exercise?

b Use ONE of the scenarios as a stimulus to open up discussion of the role of the IV. The interviewee's answer might give an insight into their own/ their colleagues' definition of the IV's role. Give the scenario card to the interviewee. Then move from the scenario to consider the list of roles below.

> **Scenario A**
> Senior management suggests that internal verifiers should contribute to the organisation's performance management work plans, alongside line managers and assessors.
> - Does this situation remind you of anything you have encountered in your role as an IV?
> - If so, briefly describe that situation. If not, could you envisage something like this becoming part of your role as an IV?

> **Scenario B**
> Your external verifier suggests that, in your role as internal verifier, you should be responsible for streamlining over-complicated collection of evidence procedures at your centre.
> - Does this situation remind you of anything you have encountered in your role as an IV?
> - If so, briefly describe that situation. If not, could you envisage something like this becoming part of your role as an IV?

Out of the discussion of the scenario ask the verifier to consider whether it would be right to describe him or herself in some of the following ways (there may be others)

- The verifier as an expert in the area concerned
- As an assessment manager or team leader
- As an independent guarantor of quality
- Ensuring the candidates get their NVQs
- Making sure that the candidates get a fair deal
- Supporting the assessors
- Training the assessors
- Making sure that everything's right when the external verifier comes
- Simply as a paper-pusher

Invite the verifier to add other perceptions.

c   Use Scenario C to open up discussion of the personal attributes that an IV should have, using the list of attributes below. Give the scenario card to the interviewee.

Scenario C
The external verifier has refused to ratify the centre's assessment results and has written to the awarding body recommending that the centre's accreditation should be withdrawn. One of the centre's IVs was aware that a fellow IV had been allowing poor quality assessments to stand, although the centre had gained a reputation for getting candidates through their NVQs

- Does this situation remind you of anything you have encountered in your role as IV?
- If so, briefly describe that situation. If not, could you envisage something like this occurring within your role as an IV?

Ask the verifier to develop a description of the personal attributes that an internal verifier has to have.
Prompt with words like 'forceful', 'authoritative', 'sympathetic', 'expert', 'diligent', 'meticulous'.
But also try to find out who's interests the verifier is seen to be serving.

4   Recognition of the role

a   Ask whether verification is a part of the individual's job description
b   Use the Scenario D as a stimulus to lead into a discussion of the extent to which the IV's function is recognised and valued within the organisation. Give the scenario card to the interviewee.

Scenario D
Your centre's senior management team has reduced the time available for IVs' responsibilities and, in particular, will not set aside time for standardisation meetings or allow staff to attend assessment training meetings run by the awarding body.

- Does this situation remind you of anything you have encountered in your role as IV? If so, briefly describe that situation.
- If not, could you envisage something like this occurring as part of your role as an IV?

How exactly is the verifier's value recognised by the organisation?
c   Does the verifier think that what he or she does is valued as a process?

- Or is it just making sure that the system delivers NVQs as required.
- Or ensuring no hassles with the external verifier.

Does the verifier's salary reflect an explicit recognition of the role?
Does the verifier get time set aside for verification?
What facilities is the verifier given?
d   Use Scenario E as a basis for discussing the levels of authority and autonomy that the verifier has within the organisation. Give the scenario card to the interviewee

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Scenario E
A number of your centre's assessors have complained about having to work outside their normal working times, in order to accommodate candidate assessments. In response, you negotiate time off in-lieu for assessors who have had to extend their working hours.

- Does this situation remind you of anything you have encountered in your role as IV? If so, briefly describe that situation.
- If not, could you envisage something like this becoming part of your role as an IV?

Ask the verifier to describe the
- level of authority that he or she possesses
- discretion that he or she has in assessment and other matters
- extent to which he or she is seen to mange the assessment provision

e Find out whether the verifier perceives that he or she gets rewards from the role.
- Does the verifier find it personally rewarding?
- Does being a verifier enhance career prospects? Ask for examples of promotions resulting (partly, perhaps) from being a verifier
- Does the role carry status within the organisation? Is the verifier seen as a team leader and/or an expert within the team operating the NVQs? Does this enhance career prospects?
- Ask whether the organisation appears to value the verification activity.
- Does the organisation have a visible commitment to quality in assessment (as such or as a clear part of a wider quality commitment, perhaps through Investors in People, or other quality badge)?

5 Aspirations

Ask the verifier how he or she would like to see the internal verifier role changed or enhanced. Depending on answers that you've already had, prompt with some of the following.
- Explicit recognition in a job description
- Better pay
- Less paperwork
- More support from colleagues/more support from the awarding body/external verifier
- Being able to work within a team
- Having greater control over the way NVQs are managed within the organisation/having more ownership of the process
- Having one's expertise recognised and valued
- Being seen as a key person in ensuring quality/ having a higher status within the organisation
- Being able to take initiatives over quality issues
- Having a role in training assessors and others
- Being able to manage NVQs or NVQ assessment
- Working in an organisation with a higher commitment to quality.

6 Other issues

Invite the verifier to add any further issues that he or she thinks are important.

Thank the verifier for his or her help with the research

Schedule for use with employers

1   About the organisation

a   Ask the interviewee to identify his or her role in the organisation.
  - Ask how long he or she has held this position.
  - Ask about relevant prior experience.

b   Ask for a description of the individual's role in relation to the operation of NVQs (some managers may have only a general knowledge of this - if so, please record this)
  - Check on the range of NVQs and the levels concerned
  - Identify the approximate number of candidates doing NVQs
  - Find out whether the operation of NVQs is an in-house matter, contracted out to a training provider or college (in the case of an employer), or a general institutional provision of services to other organisations (in the case of a college or training provider).

c   Ask how NVQs are managed within the organisation
  - Is there an overall co-ordinator?
  - Is there an explicit policy regarding the management of NVQs?
  - Is there an explicit commitment to quality in training/does the organisation have IiP or similar status?
  - Are assessors and verifiers full or part-time staff?
  - Are they permanent employees, or on limited contracts?
  - Ask what other roles they fill within that employment

d   Ask about training and support for undertaking NVQ activities.
  - How far does the organisation support individuals in training as assessors and verifiers?
  - What qualifications are assessors and verifiers expected to have?
  - What ongoing support/professional development opportunities does the organisation offer to its NVQ assessors and verifiers?

2   About the verification role: time and activities

a   Does the organisation identify the amounts of time that individuals should spend in NVQ verification activity (in relation to their other duties)?

b   Does the organisation identify tasks that a verifier should undertake. Are there any processes for checking that these are done properly?

c   Are there procedures for ensuring the general quality of NVQ assessment?

d   Does the organisation have any expectations about
  - the length of time that individuals should spend on doing NVQs?
  - the throughput of candidates on NVQ programmes?

3   About the verification role: what's involved

Use ONE of the scenarios as stimulus to lead into discussion of how the employing organisation perceives the role of the IV. Give one of the scenario cards to the interviewee. Then move from the scenario to consider the list of roles below.

Scenario A

Senior management suggests that internal verifiers should contribute to the design of the organisation's performance management work plans, alongside line managers and assessors.
  - Does this situation remind you of anything you have encountered in your role? If so, briefly describe that situation.
  - If not, could you envisage something like this occurring in your organisation?

Scenario B

After discussion within your organisation, it is suggested that internal verifiers should be responsible for streamlining over-complicated collection of evidence procedures at your centre.
  - Does this situation remind you of anything you have encountered in your role? If so, briefly describe that situation.
  - If not, could you envisage something like this occurring in your organisation?

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a   Ask the interviewee to explain the verification role in his or her own words. Do pin them down on exactly what they mean by the terms used; do record whether they're well-informed or not. Use the following prompts where needed.
  • The verifier is an expert in the area concerned
  • It's essential that a verifier keeps up to date with the latest workplace practices
  • The verifier is a manager of assessment, or an assessment team leader
  • The verifier provides an independent guarantee of quality
  • It's essential that the verifier ensures that candidates get their NVQs
  • A verifier must make sure that candidates get a fair deal
  • It's important for verifiers to support the assessors
  • Verification is one part of a wider role in training and supporting assessors
  • The verifier must make sure that everything's right when the external verifier comes
  • Verification is primarily a clerical task
   Invite the interviewee to add other perceptions.
b   Use the scenario as stimulus to open discussion of the personal attributes that an internal verifier should have, using the list of attributes below. Give the scenario card to the interviewee.

> **Scenario C**
> The external verifier has refused to ratify your centre's assessment results and has written to the awarding body recommending that the centre's accreditation should be withdrawn. One of the centre's IVs was aware that a fellow IV had been failing in his responsibilities and was allowing poor quality assessments to stand.
> • Does this situation remind you of anything you have encountered in your role? If so, briefly describe that situation.
> • If not, could you envisage something like this occurring in your organisation?

Ask the interviewee to suggest the personal attributes that an internal verifier has to have. Prompt with words like 'forceful', 'authoritative', 'sympathetic', 'expert', 'diligent', 'meticulous'. Ask whether the verifier is expected to be innovative and independent, or is a servant or organisational policy.

4   Recognition of the role

Use the scenario to lead into discussion of the extent to which the internal verifier's function is recognised and valued within the organisation. Give the scenario card to the interviewee.

> **Scenario D**
> Your centre's senior management team has reduced the time available for IVs' responsibilities and feels that it cannot set aside time for standardisation meetings or allow staff to attend assessment training meetings run by the awarding body.
> • Does this situation remind you of anything you have encountered in your role? If so, briefly describe that situation.
> • If not, could you envisage something like this occurring in your organisation?

a   Ask whether verification a part of individual's job descriptions
b   Do verifier's salaries reflect an explicit recognition of the role?
   Or is the role taken for granted?
c   Find out whether the interviewee expects that verifiers will get personal rewards from the role.
  • Is being a verifier likely to enhance career prospects? Ask for examples of promotions resulting (partly, perhaps) from being a verifier
  • Does the role carry status within the organisation? Is the verifier seen as a team leader and/or an expert within the team operating the NVQs? Does this enhance career prospects?
  • Would the organisation value verification experience in a job applicant?
d   Ask what benefits and costs the organisation places on verification.
  • Are verifiers seen to contribute more generally to the organisation? If so, in what ways?
  • Would verification be seen as an unfortunate penalty for being involved with NVQs? Is it seen as a cost overhead?
  • Does the organisation have problems in making verifier appointments? How are these managed?

5 Aspirations

Ask the interviewee how he or she would like to see the internal verifier role changed or enhanced. Depending on answers that you've already had, prompt with some of the following.

- Explicit recognition in a job description
- Better pay
- Less paperwork
- More support from colleagues/more support from the awarding body/external verifier
- Being able to work within a team
- Having more responsibility for the way NVQs are managed within the organisation
- Having their expertise better recognised and valued
- Being seen as key members of a quality assurance team
- Being able to take initiatives over quality issues
- Having a wider role in training assessors and others

6 Other issues

Invite the interviewee to add any further issues that he or she thinks are important.

Thank the interviewee for his or her help with the research

Schedule for others concerned with NVQ assessment

1   About the interviewee
a   Ask the interviewee to identify his or her role in relation to NVQs.
- What this is (eg assessor/candidates/co-ordinator)
- Which NVQs and at what levels; identify the awarding body/bodies concerned
- (for assessors etc) Number of candidates being assessed for each NVQ and level
- (for assessors etc) Number of years experience as an assessor/co-ordinator
- (for assessors etc) Number of years experience of working with NVQs (in any role)
- (for candidates) how long been doing the NVQ

b   (For assessors etc) Ask who the assessor's employer is in relation to the assessment role.
- Find out whether it's full or part time; if part-time, ask about the fraction (eg 40% of a week)
- Ask whether it's on a permanent or temporary contract
- Ask what other roles he or she fills in that employment
- Ask whether he or she does/has done any verification
- If he or she has other employments, find out about these; it's important to establish how these relate to the employment of which assessment is a part
- Check on D units completed/being worked for
- Find out whether there's been any other formal training
- Ask what support is available from (for example) the internal verifier or other assessors
- this section continues on the next page
- (For candidates) Ask whether they are employees or on funded courses or paying for themselves to do the NVQ

2   About the interviewee's experience of the verification role: time and activities
Identify the amount of time that the verifier spends in various sorts of verification activity
- Whether the verifier observes all candidates; find out whether this is in a training or workplace setting, and whether it would involve simulated workplace activity
- Whether the verifier simply looks at completed portfolios.
- Is this all by prior arrangement? Is it arranged with candidates or assessors? Is the verifier available on demand?
- Get some idea of the amount of time that is spent on a single verification task.
- How much discussion and de-briefing is there? Who with?

3   About the verification role: what's involved
a   Get the candidate/assessor/verifier to describe what tasks the verifier does in verification.
- Is it a matter of checking paperwork/checking that assessors are applying appropriate judgements/checking on candidates' performances in specific tasks?
- What are the key things that he or she looks for? Are there particular skills/knowledge/units that he or she looks at?
- Does the verifier check everything, or take a lot on trust?
- Is it just a matter of signing off or rubber stamping what the assessor has done

b   Ask the interviewee to explain the verifier's role. Use the following as prompts about verifiers, if necessary. For candidates, don't press this question too hard - they may not be able to respond.
- As an expert in the area concerned
- As a manager of assessment/as an assessment team leader
- As an independent guarantor of quality
- Ensuring the candidates get their NVQs on time
- Making sure that the organisation get good value for money
- Making sure that the candidates get a fair deal
- Supporting the assessors
- Training the assessors
- Making sure that everything's right when the external verifier comes
- Simply as a paper-pusher
Invite other perceptions.

c   Ask the interviewee to suggest the personal attributes that an internal verifier has to have. Prompt with words like 'forceful', 'authoritative', 'sympathetic', 'expert', 'diligent', 'meticulous'

4 Recognition of the role (This section is not for candidates)
Use ONE of the scenarios to lead into discussion of the extent to which internal verifiers' functions are recognised and valued within organisations. Give one scenario card to the interviewee.

Scenario A
Your centre's senior management team has reduced the time available for IVs' responsibilities and, in particular, will not set aside time for standardisation meetings or allow staff to attend assessment training meetings run by the awarding body.
- Does this situation remind you of anything you have encountered in your role? If so, briefly describe that situation.
- What issues does this raise for you, regarding the status of IVs within organisations?

Scenario B
Senior management suggests that internal verifiers should contribute to the design of their organisation's performance management work plans, alongside line managers and assessors.
- Does this situation remind you of anything you have encountered in your role? If so, briefly describe that situation.
- If not, could you envisage something like this becoming part of the IV's role?

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a   Ask whether verification should be an explicit part of an individual's job description
b   Does the interviewee think that what the verifier does is valued as a process?
    Or is it just making sure that the system delivers NVQs as required.
    Or ensuring no hassles with the external verifier.
c   Should the verifier's salary reflect an explicit recognition of the role?
    Or is the role taken for granted?
d   Find out whether the interviewee perceives that a verifier should get rewards from the role.
- Does it look as though the verifiers find the role personally rewarding?
- Would being a verifier enhance career prospects? Does the interviewee know of instances where this was the case?
- Does the role carry status within the organisation? Is the verifier seen as a team leader and/or an expert within the NVQ team? Would this enhance career prospects?
- Ask whether the organisation appears to value the verification activity.
- Does the organisation have a visible commitment to quality in assessment (either as such or as a clear part of a wider quality commitment, perhaps through Investors in People, or another quality badge)?

5 Aspirations
Ask the interviewee how he or she would like to see the internal verifier role changed or enhanced. Depending on answers that you've already had, prompt with some of the following, noting that some of these can't be answered by candidates.
- Explicit recognition in a job description
- Better pay
- Less paperwork
- More support from colleagues/more support from the awarding body/external verifier
- Being able to work within a team
- Having greater control over the way NVQs are managed within the organisation/having more ownership of the process
- Having their own expertise recognised and valued
- Being seen as a key person in ensuring quality/having a higher status within the organisation
- Being able to take initiatives over quality issues
- Having a role in training assessors and others
- Being able to manage NVQs or assessment for NVQs
- Working in an organisation with a high commitment to quality

6 Other issues
Invite the interviewee to add any further issues that he or she thinks are important.

Thank the interviewee for his or her help with the research

Outline schedule for interviews with awarding body representatives

We've asked awarding bodies to provide us with representatives for interview in connection with this project. Because the project is concerned with verification, we thought that external verifiers may be the best interviewees, but we may be offered chances to speak to officers as well.

If you are negotiating an interview, try to get either an external verifier (preferably in one of the areas of interest in this project: construction, retail, engineering or business) or an officer who is able to offer detailed knowledge of verification practices in one of these sectors. A representative who is able to do little more than state the awarding body's policies and practices in verification, without having insights into the internal verifiers' roles, will not be of much help to us.

The attached schedule is not as full and detailed as the other schedules that we have used, and we have not included any of the scenarios, which are more geared into centre than awarding body practice. Since you will have done some interviewing in centres, please feel able to flesh out any parts of this framework schedule by including issues that arose in using the other schedules.

1 About the interviewee
a Ask the interviewee to identify his or her role in relation to NVQs.
- As an external verifier/as an awarding body officer
- Which NVQs and at what levels
- Extent of experience (years, other awarding bodies, other qualifications)
- Whether he/she has worked as an assessor/internal verifier; what type(s) of centre

2 Expectations for internal verification
a Ask the interviewee to define his or her expectations of internal verifiers.
- Are they seen as key people within the assessment system? Are they indispensable?
- Define their role.
- Who are they responsible to?
- How much time are they expected to spend on verification (say, per candidate, per unit)?
- What actions should they perform in doing verification?

b Ask the respondent to try to characterise what's expected of an internal verifier. Suggest words and phrases that might be used:
- As an expert in the area concerned
- As a manager of assessment/as an assessment team leader
- As an independent guarantor of quality
- Ensuring the candidates get their NVQs on time
- Making sure that the organisation gets good value for money
- Making sure that the candidates get a fair deal
- Supporting the assessors
- Training the assessors
- Making sure that everything's right when the external verifier comes
- Simply as a paper-pusher

Is this different for colleges and workplaces?
Invite other perceptions.

c Ask the interviewee to suggest the personal attributes that an internal verifier has to have. Prompt with words like 'forceful', 'authoritative', 'sympathetic', 'expert', 'diligent', 'meticulous'

d Does the awarding body make recommendations or set requirements for the internal verifiers' role? If so, what are these?

3 The verifier and his or her organisation
a Should the role of internal verifier be a specific appointment? Should it have a specific time allocation? Should it have specific remuneration?
b Should the role of internal verifier be held in parallel with assessor and tutor roles? Should assessors and verifiers operate within a closed team?
c Is it up to the organisation to monitor the work of internal verifiers? Or should the awarding body do it?

d   Should sanctions be applied when verification is not seen to be satisfactory? Whose responsibility are those?
e   Find out whether the interviewee perceives that a verifier should get rewards from the role.
  • Does it seem as though most verifiers find the role personally rewarding?
  • Would being a verifier generally enhance career prospects? Does the interviewee know of instances where this was the case?
  • Does the role carry status within most organisations?

4   Awarding body responsibilities
a   What could awarding bodies do in order to support the internal verifier's role? Suggest: providing training, making the paperwork easier, providing employers with a better understanding of the role.
b   Does the awarding body expect its external verifiers to provide support to the internal verifiers in a centre? If so, what is the nature of that support and how effective is it?

5   Other issues
  Invite the interviewee to add any further issues that he or she thinks are important.

Thank the interviewee for his or her help with the research

b Focus group materials

Those who attended the focus groups were provided with the following agenda and briefing notes. Each of the meetings was facilitated by one member of the CDELL team, and the discussion recorded by another.

The roles of NVQ Internal Verifiers

*A study being undertaken for the
Department for Education and Employment by a team from the
Centre for Developing and Evaluating Lifelong Learning,
University of Nottingham*

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FOCUS GROUP MEETINGS

AGENDA

Welcome and brief introductions

Brief outline of the research and purpose of the focus group meeting

A brief outline of the whole research project is provided in the enclosed description. This will be amplified a little, and CDELL team members will be happy to answer further questions.

The emphasis of the focus group meetings will be on

- expanding and clarifying the descriptions of the roles of internal verifiers in relation to the organisations for which they work

- identifying areas of similarity and areas of difference between organisations and NVQs, and refining descriptions of the benefits that may accrue to the individuals and organisations concerned with internal verification

- looking forward to developments that might enhance the roles of internal verifiers.

Thus, the focus groups are designed as a forum for review and clarification of issues that have emerged from the research, viewed in the context of participants' own experience, together with some forward-looking discussion. The meetings are not intended to be simply a review of the processes of verification, nor a critical analysis of the operation of NVQs, except as these impact on the role of the verifier.

Issues for discussion

It may be helpful to read the notes attached to this agenda; they have been written as an interim summary of findings from the fieldwork, in an attempt to identify some of the main features of the verifiers' role.

The issues for discussion in the focus groups can be framed as a number of questions, to be viewed in the light of these notes. They are presented here under three headings.

The role of the internal verifier

1. Under what circumstances should internal verification be seen as a dedicated role? If this is to be the case, what would be the central responsibilities of the internal verifier towards the employer, to the assessors, to the candidates and to the awarding body?

2. Is the internal verifier an assessment manager? Is he or she a specialist member of a training team?

3. How might the internal verifier fit into an organisation's provisions for quality? Are there differences here between the educational and workplace settings? Are there differences between occupational sectors?

4. In what respects does internal verification contribute to the rigour of assessment? How is rigour achieved between centres?

Internal verifier relationships, tasks and resources

1. Is the internal verifier a member of an assessment team, the leader of an assessment team, or independent of the assessment team? Does verification benefit from being one of a number of tasks that an individual might undertake?

2. At what level of seniority within an organisation should an internal verifier operate?

3. Is it right to assume that internal verifiers will moderate assessments that have been made by assessors? Does this mean that verification should be seen as a full-time job?

4. In what ways should the internal verifier be seen to contribute to a quality culture within an organisation? What resources are needed if this is to be the case?

Expertise and benefits

1. How does the internal verifier gain and maintain his or her expertise in the sector and in assessment? Are peripatetic verifiers, working for colleges or training providers, more likely to develop expertise in depth than those working within a singe organisation?

2. Is it in awarding bodies' interests to have expert internal verifiers? What should awarding bodies do to develop and support this expertise?

3. Can we describe the benefits (personal and in employment) that an individual should get from being an internal verifier? How far should employers recognise and reward internal verification as a role within the organisation?

**Some notes based on fieldwork visits to
colleges, training providers and employers**

Centres with dedicated IVs

It is worth beginning with feedback from some training centres which operated 'dedicated' internal verification systems, in which the internal verification process was carried out almost entirely by staff who were employed specifically as IVs. It is not suggested that this is a model to which all organisations should aspire - clearly 'dedicated' internal verification structures lie at one pole of the continuum. However, it is worth examining some of the features and perceptions (among IVs, managers and assessors) existing in organisations that regarded themselves as conscious of internal verification as a quality process, and as demonstrating this by offering IVs full recognition within the organisation and by costing for internal verification as a quality assurance investment.

•   An explicit link is perceived between internal verification and quality assurance.

•   Internal verification is regarded as a training/management function, with IVs facilitating training and development among assessors (e.g. disseminating good practice; supporting assessors in being entered for qualifications; advising on assessment, portfolio and assessment practice)

- IVs regularly visit assessors (perhaps every 2-3 weeks) - but are also available 'on demand', outside scheduled visits; this level of support is facilitated by the dedicated internal verification model and is perceived as a benefit by assessors.

- IVs principal responsibility is towards centres' assessors (and, thereby, directly or indirectly to candidates) rather than to awarding bodies; this was a perception both among managers and assessors.

- Whilst up-to-date sector expertise was essential for an assessor, some did not see it as so important for the IV.

- IVs able to play an intermediary role: assessors value them as supportive team members/ colleagues; managers regarded IVs as part of quality line management, able to bring to light quality issues/shortcomings.

- Assessors were able to identify a clearly defined range of tasks constituting internal verification (such as observation of candidates' assessment, placement visits, checking of record-keeping); the range of tasks undertaken regularly by IVs was viewed as proof of rigour by assessors. The sense that internal verification was rigorous across the organisation seemed to increase levels of confidence in NVQ among assessors, who did not then feel that they were working to a level and taking on tasks to which assessors elsewhere in the organisation were not subject. Comparability of *rigour*, rather than of specific practices, was what appeared to be valued.

- Where organisations were multi-sited, IVs were involved in cross-centre/regional quality committees. IVs saw this as confirmation that their training/management input was recognised by the organisation's management; assessors regarded IVs' involvement as representation of their training and assessment concerns.

- Assessors regarded IVs, not as surrogate assessors, but still as having a 'direct' relationship with candidates; assessors preferred that internal verification process encompassed observation of as high a proportion of candidates as possible, rather than working 'on trust'.

- Assessors expressed a preference for dedicated IVs over 'combined roles'; they expressed suspicion over systems in which IV and assessor roles were routinely combined, as this often produced "incestuous" buddy systems. (One organisation was said to frown, in particular, upon centre managers taking on IV roles, as this was felt to create mixed motives when it came to passing candidates; others routinely encouraged this combination.)

Other centres with internal verification built into job descriptions

Obviously the previous examples lay at one 'extreme' of the continuum of internal verification structures. However, other training centres - that did not have dedicated IVs but who tended to build internal verification into staffs' job descriptions - echoed issues raised by the dedicated internal verification model.

- The IV's role was regarded as a training role. IVs worked alongside senior trainers in developing assessors.

- IVs often defined their training role as training of candidates, as well as assessors - this was apparent the emphasis placed by many assessors in involving candidates directly in the portfolio verification process.

- IVs' training input was not just in terms of inculcating understanding of NVQ structures but focused on development of an NVQ 'ethos' among assessors (as in encouraging precise assessment/record-keeping using portfolio-building to support reflective learning practice for candidates; use of observation and questioning as evidence sources).

- IVs regarded themselves as having pro-active potential, particularly with regard to shaping centres' approaches to portfolio building. Innovations in portfolio building (such as streamlined evidence collection, movement towards 'paperless portfolios') were centred around the desire to:

- support candidates - by creating candidate-centred, rather than paperwork-centred assessment forms

- support assessors - in utilising their occupational knowledge/ skills strengths, rather than submerging them in artificial assessment and paper-heavy evidence collection

- create a distinctive 'work-based' NVQ form

This pro-active potential was an important source of job satisfaction among IVs.

- It also again raised the issue of IVs' role in creating 'centre-ownership' of NVQs and of creating priorities within 'centre ownership'; IVs tended strongly to regard themselves as serving candidates first and centres second - not as "formatting" centres to fit the requirements of EVs/ awarding bodies. Of course, IVs prized effective relationships with awarding bodies and both IVs and assessors obviously stressed the importance of making the centre ready for EVs' visits but the prioritisation of their 'internal' relationships seemed to be central to IVs' self-definition/job satisfaction and to their definition of the benefits they offered to their organisations.

- However, 'centre ownership' was complicated by the time and credibility afforded to the IVs' role in different centres. IVs stressed that their quality assurance role only carried integrity if they had the power/ discretion to make quality decisions that had the potential to affect centres' funding and accredited status (i.e. by refusing to pass portfolios, by reporting ineffective assessors, if necessary). Some centres regarded it as part of the IVs' management/development function to raise quality problems within the organisation. Where the management/development function was not fully recognised, centre management might equate 'centre ownership' merely with rubber-stamping virtually all portfolios. In addition, some IVs had doubts about how far managers understood the difference between assessors and verifiers.

- IVs regarded their function as integral to organisational quality assurance, drawing job satisfaction from seeing standards of assessment rise and from organisational recognition of IVs' quality assurance contribution.

Ways in which IVs have regarded their contribution as being recognised

These have included

- working alongside senior training staff, either through formalised membership of senior training/ management teams or through regular on the job liaison

- internal verification being regarded as part of organisational policy of raising the profile and quality of NVQs across the organisation

- management perceiving internal verification in terms of value added potential, not as a drain on resources (IVs felt that they were manoeuvred into a 'pen-pushing' role where organisations were not willing to pay for the real cost of verification)

- management regarding IVs as contributing to 'centre ownership' of NVQ - defined by IVs as the tailoring of assessment and record-keeping processes to the 'local' organisational requirements, working patterns of the organisation, and to ensuring validity and consistency of rigour (rather than 'artificial' standardisation)

- hours given specifically for internal verification tasks

- facilities (ranging from office space, admin support, IT facilities etc. to company cars for some peripatetic IVs)

- salary recognition

Some managerial reservations about the IV's function

A number of issues emerged in discussions with managers.

- Some organisations were wary of the possible effects of overt emphasis on internal verification upon management's relationships with staff. They seemed to regard internal verification a 'judgmental' process; some assessors might regard IVs as an "external voice" and might fear being 'undermined'.

- Some organisations defined 'value added' as maximising NVQ pass rates and defined 'centre ownership' of NVQs in terms rubber-stamping by IVs. However, so far this has been a minority view among IVs, usually experienced in one or two centres/departments within a larger organisation.

- In some cases there was ambiguous recognition of internal verification within organisations: on one hand, responsibility for internal verification was said to be integral to being a modern manager; on the other hand, this was proffered as a reason for not recognising IV responsibilities within salary structures or job descriptions. Career enhancement via the gaining of D units, opportunities for networking and liasing with external bodies was sometimes thought to be reward enough.

- In some organisations - either for reasons of cost or role recognition/ definition - there was little sense of internal verification as an ongoing process. Internal verification was carried out via "blitz" sessions.

- One comment from an assessor who had recently moved from an industrial setting to a college setting was that some private companies cannot afford to fail candidates. This implies that employers associate internal verification with costs at 'both ends' of the process.