



**The Sector Skills Council for
IT • Telecoms • Contact Centres**

S/NVQ Qualification Structure for IT Users

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1. Flexibility of Qualifications

The need for a much more flexible approach to the design of qualification structures for S/NVQs has featured prominently in consultation responses. Flexibility of qualification design is required to match both the increasing diversity of job roles within the ICT sector and the diverse application and use of ICT.

One extreme suggestion was for a total 'pick-and-mix' approach using any available S/NVQ unit from any sector. The least change option suggested was simply for more flexibility within existing mandatory and optional unit structures.

Allowing complete flexibility of unit choice would pose considerable practical problems for the regulatory and awarding bodies. More importantly such unfettered flexibility would not produce coherent, relevant or comparable qualifications and is therefore rejected as a serious option.

There was substantial support for the concept of credit accumulation leading to an award. *A value based approach to the design of qualifications has been adopted.*

1.1 Sector-specific Units & Hybrid Qualifications

The diversity of application and use of ICT needs to be reflected by the availability of imported (sector-specific) units within qualifications. Currently only specified units can be incorporated within qualifications. *We propose to allow the inclusion of **any** unit which has been demonstrated to be relevant to the candidate's job role.*

The qualification structure currently under development is wholly within the e-skills IT User remit and therefore imported units are in the minority. However the need for hybrid qualifications is recognised and these will be the subject of further development.

1.2 Matching job profiles

The degree of flexibility within the choice of units must meet the needs of the potential users of the qualifications. The new IT Users S/NVQs are intended to be appropriate and manageable for people that use IT for different purposes in a wide range of work roles.

Using IT is not an occupational role in itself. However it is an occupational competence that applies to millions of workers across the large majority of industrial and business sectors. This includes many roles where using IT is central to daily activity.

Current qualifications implicitly assume that a candidate operates at a uniform level¹ across all aspects of their job. This does not reflect the reality that, for example, an overall level 3 role often includes some higher or lower activities. The ability to accommodate this in qualifications was seen as highly desirable, subject to some constraints.

¹ Throughout this document 'level' refers to the currently (September 2003) defined S/NVQ levels.

The NOS for IT Users have been developed to reflect the range and depth of competence that different people may need in their work roles.

The need for both 'specialist' (narrow) and 'generalist' (broad) awards has also been identified. These are not mutually exclusive and the *qualification structure incorporates both types of award.*

Allowing flexibility in the choice of units raises concerns as to the coherence, relevance and comparability of qualifications. However experience with the existing qualification structures has shown that it is very difficult to predict the combinations of functions which make up real job roles. In addition these combinations can be subject to significant change within the qualification lifetime.

1.3 Units for export to other sectors

The use of IT and communication technologies in all industry sectors has resulted in e-skills units being incorporated in qualifications developed by other sectors. The units used in this way, drawn from the current e-skills S/NVQs, were not specifically designed for this purpose. As a result, when used as single imported units, they tend to have a narrow focus on particular applications (e.g. word processing or spreadsheets) and miss the broader aspects of competent use of IT.

There was substantial support for the concept of developing transferable units with an increased breadth of coverage that would be suitable both for use within qualifications developed by other sectors and potentially as freestanding units for unit certification.

Five units have been developed to meet this need.

1.4 Different sizes of award

As previously noted there was substantial support for the concept of credit accumulation leading to an award. This approach could be used to define different 'sizes' of awards (e.g. the BTEC system of Awards (6 unit), Certificates (12 unit) and Diplomas (18 unit)) at the same level.

This concept has not been taken forward at this point.

2. Units

2.1 Format

A radical approach to the design of National Occupational Standards has been adopted in which Areas of Occupational Competence (AOCs) have been developed. These AOCs define competent performance in a discrete functional area and cover all applicable S/NVQ levels. Appendix A describes the format of an AOC.

Awarding Bodies will need to develop S/NVQ type units, which have clear assessable outcomes, from these AOCs. S/NVQ unit content can be derived from AOCs by extracting, **at the desired level**:

- the statement of competence;
- the knowledge and understanding to be applied;
- the skills and techniques to be exhibited; and
- the associated knowledge and skills components².

Differentiation between levels can exist in any or all of the parts of an AOC. For example components can have the same content at all levels (defined at level 1 or 2 say with higher levels referring to the lower level. In this case differentiation will be exhibited in the knowledge/skills statement or the statement of competence or both.

Alternatively a component may build content from level to level. As a specific instance 'working procedures' is just such a skills component which describes organisational practices for work on hardware & equipment. In this case the skills statement also provides level differentiation, the skills to be exhibited are described as:

- following specified **working procedures** (Level 1);
- following relevant **working procedures** (Level 2);
- providing technical advice to support **working procedures** (Level 3); and
- creating and implementing **working procedures** (level 4)

2.2 Unit Values

Unit values (UV) have been used to establish a value-based approach to qualification design. UVs are an internal mechanism designed to assist Awarding Bodies in developing S/NVQs. UVs do not, nor are they intended to, have any explicit relationship with any other external credit transfer or accumulation scheme. e-skills UK will work with the relevant authorities to agree the positioning within external frameworks of S/NVQs based on these standards.

The approach adopted is intentionally simple and UVs are not intended for general publication. UVs are intended as a straightforward mechanism for enabling a flexible qualifications structure while ensuring that all qualifications based on the new standards are of a similar 'weight' or amount of content.

² Any component content at lower levels must also be included. E.g. a level 3 unit must include component content at levels 1, 2 & 3.

A base value of 10, 20 and 30 has been established levels for 1, 2 and 3 respectively. Individual units have been assigned values according to amount of content on a small (UV = base value - 5), medium (UV = base value) and large (UV = base value + 5) basis. In other words, these UVs are purely based on the amount of content and do not relate in any way to the level of demand on the candidate which is determined by the S/NVQ level. A 'small' level 2 unit has the same UV (15) as a 'large' level 1 unit.

3. Qualifications

3.1 Qualification Titles

Level 1,2 & 3: S/NVQ for IT Users

3.2 Unit Value Requirements

To achieve a full IT Users S/NVQ candidates must achieve a minimum total of UVs. These are:

- 40 UVs for a level 1 qualification;
- 100 UVs for level 2; and
- 180 UVs for level 3.

3.3 Structural Rules

1. The level of a qualification is determined by the level of the mandatory unit
2. Each AOC can contribute to a qualification at one level only.
3. At least 50% of the unit value of the **optional** units must be achieved at the level of the qualification. These values (rounded) are as follows:
 - 15 for level 1;
 - 40 for level 2; and
 - 75 for level 3.
4. In addition qualifications must adhere to any relevant qualification framework³ criteria.

³ Credit and Qualification Framework for Wales (CQFW) www.elwa.ac.uk
National Qualifications Framework (NQF) www.qca.org.uk
Northern Ireland Credit Accumulation and Transfer System (NICATS) www.nicats.ac.uk
Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) www.scqf.org.uk

3.4 Unit titles and values

Unit titles	Unit values		
	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Make selective use of IT (Mandatory)	15	25	35
Use IT systems	5	15	25
Operate a computer	10	20	30
IT trouble-shooting for users	5	15	25
IT maintenance for users	5	15	25
IT security for users	5	15	25
Use IT to exchange information	5	15	25
Internet and intranets	5	15	25
E-mail	5	15	25
Word processing software	10	20	30
Spreadsheet software	10	20	35
Database software	10	20	35
Website software	10	20	35
Artwork and imaging software	10	20	35
Presentation software	10	20	30
Specialist or bespoke software	10	20	30
Evaluate the impact of IT	5	15	25
Sector specific unit ⁴	10	20	30

Units at each level will be differentiated by adding the level indicator as a suffix. (E.g. Databases 1, Databases 2 etc.)

4. Units for export

The following units have been created for export to other sectors:

General uses of IT

*Use IT systems

*Use IT to exchange information

Use IT software

Purposes for using IT

*Available for use in the IT User S/NVQ.

⁴ This can be an accredited unit from any suite of S/NVQs which is relevant to the candidate's job role. The UV of this unit is determined by the qualification level in which it will be used. Availability of these units is at the discretion of the Awarding Bodies. In this context 'sector' means an occupational sector as defined by the Skills for Business Network. For example, Administration, Management and Customer Service cannot be included.

Appendix 1. Areas of Competence

Examples and notes explaining the different parts of an area of competence (AOC).

<p>IT security for users</p> <hr/> <p>This is the ability to protect hardware, software and the data stored within an IT system. A level 1 job role is likely to involve:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • knowing about day-to-day security risks and the laws and guidelines that effect the use of IT; and • using simple methods to protect software and personal data (eg risks from the wrong people getting access to it, from viruses or from hardware not working properly). <p>In addition a level 2 job role is likely to involve:</p>	<p>Title Describes what the AOC is about.</p> <hr/> <p>A brief introduction to the activities or outcomes that are involved. Diagrams may be used to explain processes.</p>
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	<p>The competent person can:</p>	<p>This will involve applying knowledge and understanding of:</p>	<p>This will involve effective use of the following skills and techniques.</p>	<p>Statement of competence A grid is used to show the various levels (from 1 to 5) at which competence is defined. Not all levels will be defined for every AOC.</p>
Level 2	<p>Select and use appropriate methods to keep common security risks to a minimum.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What common security risks there may be. • How to restrict access. • What and how laws and guidelines affect the use of IT. 	<p>Protecting software and data in different ways.</p>	

A summary of what a competent person can do at a level.

A list of the key areas of knowledge and understanding needed to underpin competence.

A list of the skills and techniques for competent performance.

<p>Laws and guidelines What laws and guidelines affect people's use of IT.</p>		<p>Component title and a short description of the knowledge and understanding or skills and techniques to be covered at each level.</p>
<p>Level 2</p>	<p>What and how different IT activities are affected by laws and guidelines, such as storing names and address, downloading images from the Internet or sending inappropriate e-mails.</p>	
<p>Level 3</p>	<p>What other people need to know about the laws and guidelines that affect using IT. How to communicate with people about the laws and guidelines.</p>	

A list of items or short paragraphs that set out what needs to be covered at each relevant level.

**e-skills UK
1 Castle Lane
London
SW1E 6DR**

**Tel: 0207 963 8920
Fax: 0207 592 9138**

**E-mail: info@e-skills.com
Website: www.e-skills.com**