

Bus & Coach Buyer
Issue No. 831 Dated 02.09.05.

Feature Article – By Tim Barker, Managing Director

The NVQ in Transporting Passengers By Road

National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) and their North of the border equivalent Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs), have been with us for some years now. Over four million people in work have gained an NVQ in the last decade and a half. One of the major aims of vocational qualifications was to recognise existing or acquired vocational skills by means of nationally accredited certification. The qualifications would be roughly equivalent to other, more academic qualifications such as GCSEs or A levels. Thus the country would have a working population that could be measured in terms of qualifications and achievement both academically and vocationally. It would also make life easier for employers in judging a potential employee's job suitability. Until recently the take up of NVQs in the Bus and Coach Industry has been slow. This is starting to change however, as more and more operators are considering staff development issues. In particular popularity is rising in the take up of NVQs targeted primarily at drivers, such as the "Goal" or "Edexcel" Level II qualifications in Road Passenger Transport. This month's article will be looking at what a driver's NVQ consists of, how NVQs can benefit operators and the potential pitfalls of implementing NVQ training.

Drivers who are placed on NVQ programmes are often bemused by the form it takes. For many, particularly the older drivers, mention of training sends a shiver down their spines. They are instantly transported back to memories of their school days, an experience many did not enjoy! They are often pleasantly surprised to find that their subsequent NVQ experience is nothing like that and is in fact a very positive reintroduction to learning.

The backbone of most NVQ programmes is the "Portfolio." This is a document made up of the evidence gathered by the individual and his or her assessor which proves their levels of competence for particular units of the qualification. Each NVQ has a list of units which, when taken as a whole, will demonstrate that the driver has the competence to carry out the tasks required for that particular role. The evidence in the portfolio is basically the driver saying, "Yes, I can do that, and here is the proof."

So what does a typical driver's NVQ consist of? Most NVQs are a mixture of mandatory units and optional units. To be successful a trainee has to complete all the mandatory units and a minimum number of the optional units. The idea is that companies with sometimes widely differing operating roles can still be catered for in the overall qualification framework. The standard mandatory units will be along the lines of:

- Contribute to working relationships with colleagues.
- Contribute to health and safety in the working environment.
- Provide professional customer care.

The optional units will then be grouped and drivers will be required to complete a certain number of units from each group. At this stage the drivers with specific roles, such as transporting special needs passengers or international touring, can select the appropriate modules to suit what they do.

Units include areas such as:

- Prepare for the journey
- Drive passenger carrying vehicles safely
- Operate a passenger carrying service
- Process fares
- Receive and match fare payments to tickets
- Deal with difficult passengers
- Assist passengers with special needs
- Provide a transport service for passengers with special needs
- Deal with incidents and emergencies during a journey
- Transport passengers parcels and luggage
- Develop customer relationships
- Deliver reliable customer service
- Promote additional services and products to customers
- Sort out customer service problems
- Provide a secure transport service
- Driver passenger carrying vehicles abroad

Depending on the awarding body of the specific NVQ, there may be other units available or variations on the ones above. Clearly there is a broad spread of evidence required. Some evidence can be provided in the form of previous recognised qualifications (this is called APL or Accreditation of Prior Learning). For example units requiring evidence of being able to drive PCVs safely may be satisfied by producing the certification and course report from the Level II ASET Certificate in Defensive Driving course. Most evidence is provided by observation by the assessor and use of other evidence gathered from line managers, internal company sources and the like. The evidence is presented via the assessor to a verifier who ensures that it meets the requirements stipulated in the NVQ. If it does the driver is awarded the qualification.

NVQs provide a number of benefits to both the driver and the employer. From an individual's point of view, especially one with few academic qualifications, it is a formal recognition of their levels of skill and competence. It is also a source of considerable professional pride to achieve this recognition. It encourages individuals to consider other learning opportunities, which is not only a government aspiration for the workforce (called "life long learning"), it also helps employers raise the standard of their employees. Many employers use NVQs to help improve their productivity and competitiveness. As the original standards were drawn up largely based on employer requirements, an NVQ should be the best type of qualification to directly address their

needs! My own personal experience of successful NVQ programmes in companies is that they have a major effect in improving staff relations and help them focus far more on the organisation's business needs. When it comes to measuring the effectiveness of training, this can be a major plus. It is also worth mentioning when talking about costs and benefits that NVQs are incredibly good value for money! Many NVQs are completely funded and the vast majority are at least partially funded. In other words the Government will pay for, or help pay for, the development of your own drivers!

So, NVQs are beneficial to drivers and companies and are extremely good value for money. There are some pitfalls to watch out for however. While the qualifications as written down may look good and seem to address the needs of the drivers, those who carry out the assessment and verification duties are keys to the value of the whole exercise. These individuals are usually sourced from external providers, either private companies or colleges. If they play lip service to the work involved in preparing a portfolio, not only does it devalue the qualification, it also massively reduces the benefits that could have been obtained by both driver and company. Be very careful when you select a provider to deliver your NVQ programme. Ensure that they are as conscientious about their role as assessors and verifiers as you would wish your drivers to be about their roles as professional drivers. There are unscrupulous operators in the market who do little more than a paperwork exercise and walk away with the funding. You have been warned!

NVQs are here to stay. The Bus and Coach Industry is now realising that and is starting to look seriously at using them as a major tool in workforce development. There are many different types of NVQs aimed at all levels and roles in the Industry. I have only been able to give a brief introduction to the driver related NVQs. Further research on the applicability of NVQs to other aspects of your business would be time well spent. For general information on the qualifications you should initially speak to Go Skills or visit their website www.goskills.org. Good luck.

ENDS

Email – Specialist Training on enquiries@specialisttraining.co.uk

Email – Bus and Coach Buyer on bcbsales@busandcoachbuyer.com