



Ministry of
JUSTICE

National Offender
Management Service

Probation Qualifications Framework

Vocational Qualifications in Probation Practice

Candidate Guidance

1. Introduction

The Vocational Qualifications (VQs) in Probation Practice are nationally recognised qualifications which are located on the Qualifications and Credit Framework: a new framework for recognising and accrediting learning and development achievements in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. They will be available from 1st April 2010 and will replace the National Vocational Qualifications currently used in the Probation Service.

These qualifications have been created and will be maintained by the National Offender Management Service in liaison with Skills for Justice and City and Guilds. ([See Probation Qualifications Regulatory Framework 2010](#)). They are:

Vocational Qualification Diploma in Probation Practice at level 3
Vocational Qualification Diploma in Probation Practice at level 5.

The Awarding Organisation for these qualifications is City and Guilds.

2. Format and Structure of Qualifications

Although these qualifications are written in a different format to National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs), it is important to recognise that they are still based on the Community Justice National Occupational Standards (NOS) and will be assessed using NVQ assessment methodology.

The qualifications are written in a unit based format that specifies the *learning outcomes* which need to be met. Each unit has **level** attached to it which defines the degree of difficulty and a **credit** rating which specifies the notional learning hours required to complete the unit. This includes guided learning hours and time for private study, practical and work based learning and assessment activity. One credit is equal to 10 *notional* learning hours.

These qualifications are designed to be **flexible** and **balanced** in order to meet the needs of employers and reflect the job roles of candidates. They are **flexible** in that they do not prescribe a particular route for candidates but identify priority units which map against identified job roles. Mandatory units have been kept to a minimum in order to provide maximum flexibility. They are **balanced** in that they require units to be selected from each group of skills, identified as being the skills required by probation practitioners. These skills sets (with unit examples) are:

Skill Set	Example unit
Valuing Diversity	Promote equality and value diversity
Working with risk and protecting individuals	Assess risk of harm and the need for intervention
Tactical skills	Contribute to the quality of team working
Communication and managing information	Communicate effectively with people
Supporting individuals	Enable individuals to understand and address their difficulties
Technical skills	Assess individuals' offending behaviour and prepare reports

The format of these qualifications will be informed by the **Rules of Combination** which will take account of the credit and level rating of each unit and will be agreed with City and Guilds and Skills for Justice.

In the level 3 qualification there are currently thirty five units across the six skills sets, three of which are mandatory. Units must be selected from each of the skills sets, according to the Rules of Combination. ([See Appendix 2.1.1b in the Regulatory Framework](#))

In the level 5 qualification, there are sixteen units across the six skills sets, six of which are mandatory. Three of the units are at level 6 for this qualification. Twelve of the units must be combined to form a vocational qualification, according to the Rules of Combination. ([See Appendix 2.1.2b in the Regulatory Framework](#))

Candidates will be advised by their assessors as to the most appropriate combination for their role requirements.

3. Assessment of the Qualifications

Once registered with the Awarding Organisation and approved Assessment Centre an individual is recognised as a 'candidate' for the VQ. The candidate is assessed against the learning outcomes and assessment criteria contained in each unit which, in effect, describe the knowledge and standard of performance required of individuals in their work.

The Assessment Centre will allocate an approved assessor to the candidate. The assessor's role is to provide guidance and support to the candidate enabling fair access to assessment opportunities and procedures. The assessor makes judgements about the candidate's performance using *only* the criteria required in each unit. The assessment is based on evidence provided by the candidate being:

- **Valid** – assessed only against the appropriate learning outcomes and assessment criteria.
- **Authentic** – the candidate's own work.
- **Current** – evidence from past achievements must reflect they can still perform to the required standards.
- **Sufficient** – the amount of evidence needed to make a judgement.
- **Reliable** – the same assessment result should be obtained over time or by different assessors using the same evidence.

Stages of Assessment

It is important to recognise that candidates play a full part in the assessment process from beginning to end. The candidate is responsible for contributing to and participating in:

- ✓ assessment planning
- ✓ preparation for assessment
- ✓ demonstrating competence to meet learning outcomes
- ✓ receiving and responding to assessor feedback

- Planning

- Meet with the assessor and agree assessment plans which take into account the candidate's access to fair assessment and makes links with other relevant learning agreements, e.g. in relation to qualifications pathways.
- Access advice about the Rules of Combination and selection of optional units.
- Contribute to the identification of relevant assessment methods and types of evidence.
- Agree realistic deadlines for both formative (interim) and summative (final) assessment.

- Contribute to identifying potential evidence of previous experience and qualifications for Accreditation of Prior Learning/Recognition of Prior Learning.
- Preparation for Assessment
 - Respond to the assessor's advice about preparing for assessment. This might include the use of professional discussion templates.
 - Read and become familiar with the unit learning outcomes and assessment criteria.
 - Ensure arrangements for observation of work activities are in place.
 - Think of examples of practice and work product evidence which will demonstrate competence and usefully inform any professional discussion.
 - Make arrangements for accessing witness testimony evidence.
 - Keep in touch with the assessor in order to access advice and to agree any changes in the assessment arrangements (e.g. time and date of an assessment activity) which may be necessary.
- Demonstrating Competence
 - Comply with the arrangements set out in the assessment plan in terms of being available for assessor sessions.
 - Be observed undertaking a range of work activities, some of which will have been planned and others as opportunities arise.
 - Contribute to professional discussions in a clear and concise way using examples of real work activities.
 - Make available examples of documentary evidence ensuring agency and awarding body confidentiality protocols are met.
 - Retain documentary evidence in the workplace where it will be easily located for cross referencing against other units and verification purposes.
 - Clarify and explain how evidence from all sources demonstrates competence against the standards.
- Feedback
 - Receive verbal and written feedback from the assessor on a formative and summative basis.
 - Discuss feedback with the assessor in order to ensure a clear understanding of assessment decisions.

- Agree with the assessor plans to present additional evidence if learning outcomes are not met.
- Through all stages in the assessment process be pro-active in accessing assessor advice and guidance.

4. Further Requirements

- ❖ Confidentiality – It is not a requirement for candidates to complete and present a portfolio of evidence and assessment documentation. Documentary evidence of work activities will be retained in the candidate's work base where it will be easily accessible by the candidate, assessor and internal verifier. Both employing agency and Awarding Organisation confidentiality policies and procedures must be complied with to ensure sensitive data is protected and secured.
- ❖ Appeals and Complaints – The approved assessment centre will provide candidates with procedures for appeals against assessment decisions and submitting complaints about processes and procedures.
- ❖ Quality Assurance – Vocational Qualifications are quality assured using a wide range of methods established by the Awarding Organisation and assessment centre. The aim is to ensure consistency in assessment decision making and to improve assessment practice and procedures. Assessment decisions are verified by internal verifiers (appointed by the assessment centre) and external verifiers who represent the Awarding Organisation. Feedback from candidates is a crucial feature of the quality assurance process and a number of candidates will be selected to meet with internal and external verifiers for this purpose. Opportunities are also made for candidates' views to be represented on Assessment Boards (or equivalent mechanisms) which play a role in overseeing and approving assessment arrangements.