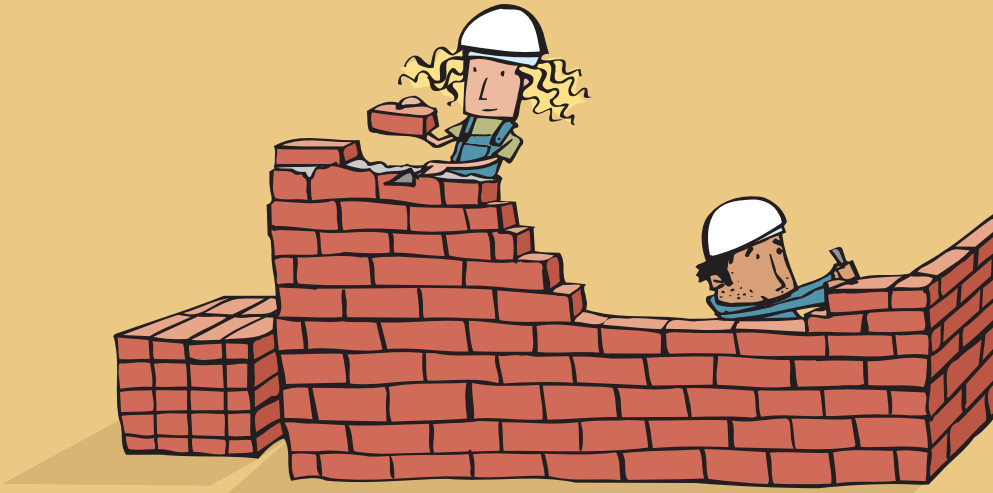
SVQ

# SVQs: a guide for employers



For an up-to-date list of prices visit the **Publication Sales and Downloads** section of SQA's website.

This document can be produced, on request, in alternative formats, including large type, Braille and numerous community languages. For further details telephone SQA's Customer Contact Centre on 0845 279 1000.

SQA is committed to using plain English. We will try to make our publications as easy and straightforward to understand as we can, and will try to avoid all unnecessary jargon. If there's any language in this document that you feel is hard to understand, or could be improved, please write to Editor, Publications Team, at the Glasgow address above or e-mail: **editor@sqa.org.uk**.

# Contents


**About this guide** 1
- About the Scottish Qualifications Authority 1
- About SVQs 2
- Accreditation — making sure SVQs do what they're supposed to 2
- How SVQs can benefit your business 2

**Are SVQs right for me?** 4

**How SVQs work** 5
- The five SVQ levels 5
- The structure of an SVQ 6
- How do people achieve SVQs? 7

**SVQs — the costs** 8
- Costs for the candidate 8
- Costs for the organisation 8

**The organisations involved in making SVQs work** 10
- The accrediting body 10
- The awarding body 10

**Putting SVQs into practice** 11
- What is involved in putting SVQs into practice? 11
- Your organisation 11
- Training and development 11
- Assessment 12

**Approval to offer an SVQ** 13
- Centre approval 13
- Qualification approval 13
- Access to your premises 13

**Doing the SVQ — generating evidence of competence** 14
- Performance evidence 14
- Knowledge evidence 14
- Evidence of prior learning 14

**Doing the SVQ — assessment** 15
- Assessment methods 16

**Making sure of the quality — verification** 19
- The Internal Verifier 19
- The External Verifier 19

**More information** 20

# About this guide

This guide is an introduction to Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs) for employers. It will help you find out what you will have to put in place to help your employees achieve an SVQ, and various ways of doing this.

## About the Scottish Qualifications Authority

The Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) is Scotland's national body for the development, accreditation, assessment and certification of qualifications other than degrees.

## About SVQs

A helpful way to think about SVQs is as 'badges of competence'. Their purpose is to show that someone who achieves an SVQ really can do the work the SVQ covers, and can do it to a standard of competence that has been defined nationally by industry.

SVQs are based on National Occupational Standards. SQA works in partnership with other organisations to ensure that National Occupational Standards (NOS) are relevant to the current and future needs of Scotland's

industry. National Occupational Standards are drawn up by the sector skills council or sector body for your industry, and tell you exactly what people have to do to prove their competence in an occupation. Each sector skills council is made up of people from industry — employers, trade unions, and professional organisations.

This means that if you have achieved an SVQ, you have a qualification that is a guarantee that you have the skills, knowledge and abilities you need in your occupation. Anyone who has an SVQ for their job is competent and has an internationally recognised qualification to prove it. This is a great advantage for individuals, and an even greater one for the organisation that employs them SVQs have been designed to improve people's skills. They focus on the job-related skills and knowledge people need in a competitive workforce. By working towards an SVQ, you will improve or broaden your job performance.

Of course, if an employer chooses to offer SVQs to members of staff, it is likely that some members of staff will need some form of training before they can be judged competent. SVQs do not, however, limit the sort or quantity of training the employer can offer, or say that there has to be any at all.

### Accreditation — making sure SVQs do what they're supposed to

To make sure that the qualifications are worthy of the high value that employers place on them, SVQs are given formal recognition by SQA. This 'formal recognition' called accreditation involves SQA taking active steps to make sure that SVQs are relevant and credible qualifications.

One of SQA's most important jobs is to make sure that high standards of quality in the delivery and assessment of the qualifications are maintained at all times.

### How SVQs can benefit your business

- They're a cost-effective, structured and measurable system of staff development, offering increased efficiency, higher productivity, and improved staff morale.
- They can make a major contribution to your organisation's bottom line by helping you ensure your workforce is well trained and has the up-to-date skills it needs to be competitive.

- They're recognised world-wide. This means that your staff can be seen as competent to the widest possible audience.
- Having been designed by your industry, you can be sure they meet the current and future needs of the industry.
- SVQs provide a ready-made framework for your in-house training programmes. There are qualifications for virtually all occupations, and for all levels of staff, from the very junior to the most senior.
- Offering SVQs helps you demonstrate your commitment to your employees. SVQs provide opportunities for both career and personal development, so this can improve motivation and enhance performance.
- You can use SVQs in recruitment — not only are they a recognised qualification, but you can also design a job specification by referring to the National Occupational Standards, because these list the skills and knowledge the person you recruit will need.
- They don't specify any kind of training programme or mode of study. This flexibility means that they are suitable for virtually all companies, whatever their current training arrangements.
- Being assessed in the workplace, SVQs can minimise the time people need to spend away from their work.
- Providing a structure for a whole range of human resource management functions, from appraisal and promotion systems to job expansion and multi-skilling initiatives.
- Providing a ready-made framework for quality initiatives such as Investors in People, Total Quality Management, and ISO 9001:2000.

Key points to remember about SVQs:

- They are not training programmes — they are qualifications which recognise competence.
- They don't specify the way people doing the qualification have to become competent — just what they have to be able to do.
- They can be used as a framework for your in-house training programmes.

# Are SVQs right for me?

We have already seen the many benefits that SVQs can offer to employers.

But how do you decide whether a particular SVQ (there are currently over 600) will be useful to your organisation?

The first step is to look, in some detail, at the SVQ you are interested in, to see how it meets your needs. The easiest way to do this is by matching the standards, upon which the SVQ is based, to the job descriptions of your staff members.

There are various ways to find out what SVQs are available: SQA publishes a quarterly ***SVQ Update*** which lists all current SVQs; or you could discuss your needs with a training provider or an awarding body.

There is a searchable SVQ database on the SVQ website at **www.sqa.org.uk**. You can search it by title, level or subject area.

Whatever methods you use, ask yourself:

- Does the SVQ cover the area of work I am interested in?
- Is the SVQ relevant to me or to my organisation's potential SVQ candidates?

Some jobs or individuals may cover just some of the Units or Elements making up the SVQ, but the greater the degree of match you find, the more relevant the SVQ will be.

# How SVQs work

### Level 1

Level 1 SVQs cover jobs which involve a range of tasks, most of which fall into a set pattern and don't change.

### Level 2

For a level 2 SVQ, candidates have to be able to show that they are competent in a range of varied activities, in a variety of contexts. Some of the activities will be complex, and the person will have some individual responsibility or autonomy. The job may also involve collaboration with others, perhaps through membership of a work group or team.

### Level 3

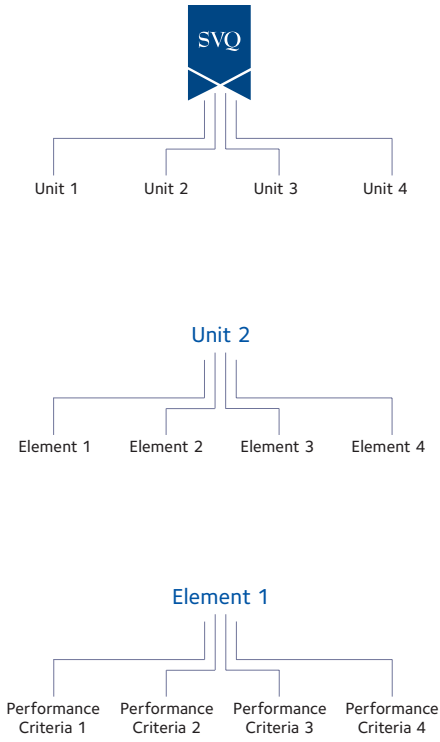
At this level, candidates have to perform a broad range of activities in a variety of contexts, most of which are complex and non-routine. They will usually be working with considerable responsibility and autonomy, and may have control or guidance of others.

### Level 4

Level 4 SVQs involve a broad range of complex, technical or professional work activities. They will be performed in a wide variety of contexts and with a substantial degree of personal responsibility and autonomy. People doing these SVQs will often be responsible for the work of others and for allocating resources.

### Level 5

This level requires candidates to demonstrate competence in applying fundamental principles and complex techniques across a wide and often unpredictable variety of contexts. Very substantial personal autonomy, and often significant responsibility for the work of others and the allocation of resources feature strongly; as do personal accountability for analysis and diagnosis, design, planning, execution and evaluation.




## The structure of an SVQ

SVQs are made up of Units. These Units break down a job into separate functions, reflecting all the different aspects of what you do in your work.

Units are normally made up of a number of Elements, although there are some single Element Units accredited. Elements break down the Unit into smaller tasks. There might be three, four or five Elements in a Unit. For every Element, there are Evidence Requirements which say what evidence has to be gathered to demonstrate the candidate's competence, including evidence of the candidate's knowledge and understanding.

Elements are made up of Performance Criteria, which are ways of setting the standard to which you have to be able to do the task described in the Element. (Sometimes, Performance Criteria have another name, such as Standards of Performance, but they all have the same function.)

You have to be able to meet all the Performance Criteria to complete the Element.

## How do people achieve SVQs?

SVQs are based on the idea of competence in a job role; they focus on what a person in that job role can actually do.

There isn't a formal written exam — people doing SVQs collect and submit evidence, usually from their work. The evidence submitted will normally be gathered as part of their normal work routine. Where they are unable to provide evidence (this can happen for a number of reasons), evidence can be generated by simulating working environments, in certain circumstances. Where this is the case the assessor (more on this person later) will arrange for simulation to take place.

The evidence collected is assessed against the standards of competence the SVQ is based on. To achieve an SVQ, candidates have to gather evidence that proves that they can do what the SVQ standards say they must be able to do.

Candidates can gather their evidence in any suitable way. We find evidence gathering tends to fall into three main stages:

- generate evidence
- the assessor looks at the evidence and makes a judgement about the candidate's competence
- the assessment judgement is recorded

The assessor is the person whose job it is to make sure that the person doing the SVQ is competent. The assessor is likely to be a supervisor, manager or a trainer.

# SVQs — the costs

Cost can be considered under two main headings; the cost to the individual and the cost to the organisation.

## Costs for the candidate

SVQs are a cost-effective way for individuals to achieve a recognised qualification. Costs will normally involve:

> the time needed to achieve the qualification

> where applicable, a contribution towards the cost of gaining the SVQ (but most employers meet all such costs)

## Costs for the organisation

Introducing SVQs shouldn't involve your organisation in excessive costs. In fact, an SVQ programme should provide a highly cost-effective way of encouraging staff development, offering increased efficiency, higher productivity, and improved staff morale.

Because they focus on assessment in the workplace, SVQs don't mean candidates spending a lot of time away from their work. It may also be the case that your existing training, development, and assessment functions can be adapted to include SVQs, which would minimise costs.

For some employers, particularly small companies, cost-effective solutions may be found by setting up partnerships with training providers, or with a consortium of other employers.

Experience has shown that SVQs tend to be cheaper and more cost effective than other types of training, but as an employer you can expect to incur:

**Direct costs** — for example, fees payable to the training-provider or awarding body. These may include:

> approval fees

> registration and certification fees for each candidate

> verification costs

**Indirect costs** — such as the costs of the resources required for training and development and to operate the system. The sort of indirect costs you might incur in offering SVQs include:

- the human and physical resources needed for training and development
- training for assessors and verifiers
- work time taken by assessors and verifiers
- work time taken by candidates during induction, planning, training and development and assessment
- work time taken by the person whose job it is to liaise with the awarding body

When estimating your costs it's a good idea to ask these questions:

- How would using SVQs link to your organisation's current and future objectives, policies and needs (eg changing job roles, organisational changes and introduction of new technology)?
- What are your current and future training and development needs likely to be?
- How would an SVQ programme link with your existing training and development programmes and costs?
- What sort of timetable are we talking about — would a phased introduction of the SVQ be most appropriate?
- What savings could SVQs bring to your organisation?
- What processes are you already carrying out — say as part of some other quality programme such as SQMS?

# The organisations involved in making SVQs work

## The accrediting body

SQA's Accreditation Unit acts as the accrediting body for SVQs in Scotland. The accrediting body for NVQs is the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA).

SQA's Accreditation Unit is responsible for recognising awarding bodies who wish to award SVQs and for accrediting proposals submitted by these approved awarding bodies to offer specific SVQs. Information on which awarding bodies are currently approved, and details of the SVQs that they have been accredited to award, can be found in the ***SVQ Update*** (DD078).

The Accreditation Unit performs a regulatory function by auditing all SVQ approved awarding bodies to ensure that they continue to meet the required standard. In addition, the Accreditation Unit will also conduct visits to a sample of each approved awarding body's approved centres to ensure that awarding body's systems are effective at an operational level.

## The awarding body

An awarding body is an organisation that has been approved by SQA"s Accreditation Unit for the purpose of certificating learners' achievements. An awarding body may be one or more organisations working in partnership.

The awarding body will:

- approve centres to offer SVQs
- register and certificate candidates
- ensure the quality of the delivery of SVQs issued in its name

# Putting SVQs into practice

**What is involved in putting SVQs into practice?**

Once you've decided on offering SVQs, there are four things you should consider:

> your organisation, its people and other resources

> training and development

> assessing candidates for the SVQ(s)

> cost and value for money of offering SVQs

The first three issues will probably arise as you go about setting up your SVQs (though perhaps not in the order they are listed here) and you will be able to deal with each of them as they arise. We've already looked at the issue of cost:

### Your organisation

You will have to think about:

> providing a central contact to communicate with the awarding body (the centre co-ordinator)

> gaining the commitment of key people

> identifying your existing resources

> gaps in your resources and how to fill them

> applying to an awarding body for approval to offer SVQs

> registering candidates with the awarding body

The centre co-ordinator's role is vital to the success of the programme. It is the centre co-ordinator's role to:

> assume responsibility for liaising with the awarding body

> guarantee the quality of the programme

> maintain links with the all the organisation's assessors and internal verifiers

> ensure that all assessors and internal verifiers are adequately trained

> submit candidates' details to the awarding body

### Training and development

Your staff may need some training and development to bring their skill levels into line with the requirements of the SVQ. Matching their existing skills to the standards will give you an idea of the training they require. These are the things you will need to consider:

> identifying training and development needs

> identifying the likely SVQ candidates

- planning the development and assessment of SVQ candidates
- designing and running a staff development programme
- introducing candidates to the programme
- offering training and development as necessary

Remember that:

- SVQs are suitable for people of all ages and at all stages of their careers
- there are no entry requirements for SVQs
- each SVQ relates to a specific occupation, so you may well be looking at either a number of different SVQs, or just one for a specialised part of your workforce

Also, you might have candidates who are at different levels of competence to begin with, and therefore:

- highly-experienced candidates may be able to come forward for assessment almost immediately
- some highly-experienced candidates may be able to gain parts of an SVQ through the accreditation of prior learning (APL), a process by which someone's previous experience can be taken into account
- other candidates may need to gain more experience, or undertake more training and development

**Assessment**

You will need to think about:

- recruiting and appointing assessors and internal verifiers
- training assessors and internal verifiers
- carrying out assessment and recording the assessors' judgement
- carrying out internal verification and recording internal verification decisions
- notifying the awarding body of assessment results
- ensuring equal opportunities
- designing and running an assessment appeals procedure

There is more on assessment later.

Don't be alarmed if this seems like a lot of things to think about. Your awarding body will provide relevant forms, guidance documents and, in most cases, a free initial approval visit. The initial approval visit is designed to assist you in gaining approval to offer SVQs and Workplace Core Skills Units.

# Approval to offer an SVQ

## Centre approval

Centre approval is part of the quality assurance process in place to ensure that organisations delivering SVQs, SVQ Units or Workplace Core Skills Units have the necessary resources and competence to deliver high quality qualifications.

All organisations will need to seek approval from an awarding body prior to being able to deliver SVQs, SVQ Units or Workplace Core Skills Units.

There are, broadly, two types of approval:

- your organisation seeks approval from an awarding body to become a centre in its own right
- your organisation forms a partnership with a local college or training provider

You could of course 'buy in' all the services you require from a training provider or college; in this case you would not need to become an approved centre.

## Qualification approval

Approval to offer a particular SVQ, SVQ Unit or Workplace Core Skills Unit, qualification approval, is normally carried out at the same time as centre approval.

If your organisation wishes to expand its qualification portfolio at a later date it may do so without having to re-apply for centre approval.

Only after your organisation has been formally approved may you register candidates for an SVQ, SVQ Unit or a Workplace Core Skills Units.

## Access to your premises

Providing access to the organisation's premises is a condition of SVQ approval. Once the centre co-ordinator has signed the approval contract the organisation is obliged to provide access to:

- the awarding body's external verifier(s)
- staff from the accrediting body (SQA's Accreditation Unit)

# Doing the SVQ — generating evidence of competence

For every Element of every Unit making up an SVQ, there are Evidence Requirements which say what evidence has to be gathered to demonstrate the candidate's competence. There are three main types of evidence:

## Performance evidence

This is evidence that candidates can carry out the activities specified in each Element or Outcome. It can include:

- records made on the basis of observation by the assessor or by some other competent person
- products of the candidate's work
- evidence, in the form of answers to questions about the activities and products, that the candidate knows why they have done what they have done

## Knowledge evidence

This is evidence that the candidate has the underpinning skills and knowledge that ensure that:

- the candidate knows why activities are carried out in particular ways
- this skill could be transferred to different situations
- areas of the candidate's work, that are not suitable to observation or full simulation as part of an assessment, could be dealt with

Knowledge evidence usually arises from responses to oral or written questions, case studies, candidates' own accounts of their activities, and witness testimony.

## Evidence of prior learning

This is also known as Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL). It is evidence of the candidate's current competence derived from pre-existing sources, such as his or her prior work experience, training, and leisure pursuits. This can also be taken into account, if it is relevant to the national standards.

# Doing the SVQ — assessment

Each candidate who achieves an SVQ has to generate sufficient evidence that proves that they can do what is specified in the National Occupational Standards. It is the role of the assessor to judge whether the evidence meets the standards.

The assessor is normally a member of the organisation's staff (such as the candidate's supervisor). However, in certain circumstances the assessor may be someone from outside the organisation.

Assessment is the process of seeing whether the candidate has the skills and knowledge they need to be awarded an SVQ. The assessor judges the evidence of a candidate's competence against the standards.

Briefly, the assessor's role is to:

- work closely with the candidate to identify opportunities for gathering evidence
- plan assessments with the candidate
- assess evidence provided by the candidate against the SVQ standards, and make judgements about the candidate's competence
- record the judgements on competence and keep the candidate's assessment records
- give the candidate feedback on these judgements, so that the candidate knows where their strengths and weaknesses lie

Once the candidate has generated and collected their evidence, the assessor has to make one of three judgements:

- the candidate is competent
- the candidate is not yet competent
- there is not enough evidence to make a judgement

**These are the only judgements the assessor can make.**

The final step in assessment is for the assessor to make a careful record of his or her judgement about the candidate's competence. All the evidence this judgement is based on will be preserved or recorded so that the awarding body can be sure the judgement is sound. Evidence-gathering is subject to quality assurance checks. The awarding body will then issue a certificate to say that the candidate has been awarded the SVQ.

Even if the candidate doesn't complete the entire SVQ, they can still get a certificate for those Units they do complete. And there's nothing to stop a candidate coming back and completing the SVQ at a later date.

## Assessment methods

A very wide range of methods can be used to assess SVQs. Any method used has to generate evidence of competence as defined by the standards the SVQ is based on. In other words, the assessment method must measure the candidate's performance against each Performance Criterion. The standards will also specify the kind of evidence required.

Because SVQs are designed to prove that candidates can do certain things, the methods of assessment most commonly used are:

### Direct observation in the workplace

Directly observing candidates' performance in the course of their work is a useful method of assessment, and it should be used wherever possible to assess the Units and Elements making up an SVQ. For employers, it can also be cost-effective, as it does not involve taking candidates away from the workplace.

**Simulations, skills and proficiency tests, and role plays**
This group of assessment methods also involve direct observation. However, in this case, the candidate is performing not in the workplace, but in simulated workplace conditions. Assessors should make sure that such assessments are as realistic and life-like as possible. Simulations have to comply with the standards the SVQ is based on, and with the lead body's and awarding body's requirements.

**Using written and oral questioning**
Questioning is a very important part of virtually any assessment. It will often be necessary to prove that the candidate is competent. In particular, it will help the assessor to be sure that the candidate knows why he or she is doing something, as well as being able to do it.

**Other assessment methods**
The assessment methods we've discussed so far may not always meet the needs of the candidate. Where this is the case the following assessment methods can also be considered:

- **Video/audio recording of performance:** in certain circumstances, it is impracticable for an assessor to be present when a candidate is performing a particular activity. In such cases, it may be possible to make a video or audio recording of the activity, which the assessor can examine later.
- **Evaluation of work products:** in some cases, an activity required for an SVQ will result in a product (eg a marketing strategy, a word-processed document, or a loaf of bread). In these cases, the assessor can judge the candidate's competence by examining the product. It is important that the assessor has proof that the product is the candidate's own work, such as a note of authentication from a line manager or supervisor.

- **Case studies:** a case study should outline a real or hypothetical scenario relevant to the area of competence to be assessed. The scenario could be presented in written form, or visually, for example as a video. Candidates are asked to analyse the scenario, answering written or oral questions to demonstrate their competence, and their underpinning knowledge and understanding.
- **Projects and assignments:** a project or assignment is a practical or theoretical exercise or investigation which requires the candidate to plan and implement a strategy, and present the products of the exercise, or the conclusions of the investigation, for assessment.
- **Log books:** it is possible to assess parts of some SVQs on the basis of log books completed over time by the candidate. The log book can be used to record the candidate's performance, progress, experiences, and feelings. It can be a useful source of supplementary evidence for an SVQ, but assessors must be confident of the authenticity of the evidence it provides.
- **Personal interviews:** this is probably one of the oldest and best-known methods of eliciting information from a candidate. It may be an appropriate way of assessing personal competence, such as a candidate's personal and interpersonal skills. Again, though, it should only be used in conjunction with other methods of assessment.
- **Responses to questionnaires:** as another supplementary form of assessment, the questionnaire can be used in a similar way to the personal interview.
- **Accreditation of prior learning:** Accreditation of Prior Learning, or APL, is a way of giving credit for the learning a candidate has achieved in the past. This learning may have been gained through formal or informal training, other development activity, or on-the-job experience. For candidates to gain credit for their competence through APL, they must be able to prove that this competence is still current.

Where other assessment methods are used, it is important that they are both realistic and carefully matched to the requirements of the SVQ.

# Making sure of the quality — verification

Verification is designed to ensure the quality of the SVQs awarded to a candidate.

There are two types of verifier that the candidate and the organisation can expect to work with: the internal verifier and the external verifier.

## The internal verifier

An internal verifier could be someone who works in your organisation and has been given the responsibility of ensuring that your assessments are being carried out in a way that satisfies the awarding body's quality requirements.

In brief, the internal verifier's role is to:

- sample assessments to monitor consistency of assessment
- observe a sample of assessments to monitor consistency of assessment
- provide support to assessors

## The external verifier

An external verifier is an awarding body employee — external verification is the next level of quality assurance. The external verifier will visit the organisation at agreed intervals to verify candidates' qualifications, so ensuring they are being assessed to national standards.

To make his or her judgement, the external verifier must have access to the evidence produced by the candidate. Physical evidence can be kept or, if the evidence is perishable or too large to store, photographs of the candidate with the evidence may suffice. (This depends on the SVQ and the national standards, and will need to be agreed with the awarding body beforehand.)

Whatever method is used, if the external verifier cannot get access to the candidate's evidence, he or she cannot confirm that the candidate is competent.

External verifiers can also prove to be an invaluable source of information for the organisation.

# More information

If you'd like more information about SVQs and how you or your organisation might be able to benefit from them, call our Customer Contact Centre:

Tel: 0845 279 1000
Fax: 0845 213 5000
E-mail: customer@sqa.org.uk

Or see our website: **www.sqa.org.uk**.

Published date: March 2006
Publication code: DD3133

**www.sqa.org.uk**

The information in this publication may be reproduced in support of SQA qualifications. If it is reproduced, SQA should be clearly acknowledged as the source. If it is to be used for any other purpose, then written permission must be obtained from the Publications Team, Customer Relations and Marketing at SQA. It must not be reproduced for trade or commercial purposes.

© Scottish Qualifications Authority 2006