

FAQ

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What is an NVQ?

A QCF Vocational Qualification is a nationally recognised qualification aimed at employees who can meet national occupational standards of competence in the specific field for which the qualification is awarded. Vocational Qualifications do more than assess what someone knows. They confirm that the owner of the qualification can apply their knowledge and skills in the workplace. Vocational Qualification are assessed differently to academic qualifications. There are no exams to sit. Candidates have to produce evidence to show how work activities were completed. This evidence is used to prove that the national occupational standards have been met.

What are national occupational standards?

National occupational standards define what someone is required to know and do in order to be able to carry out a particular piece of work. A process known as functional analysis is used to determine the activities to achieve the key purpose of a job. Standards for each of these

activities that are undertaken are then designed to cover all aspects of performance and are always presented in terms of outcomes. They set out the context, or range of conditions, in which particular work activities should be completed and therefore describe how competence should be demonstrated. They specify criteria that define the performance required and contain explanations of the knowledge and understanding needed to achieve the standard. National occupational standards for forecasters and observers have been developed with the help of professionals in the field and are now approved for use.

As an experienced forecaster or observer, why should I obtain a Vocational Qualification?

Achievement of the qualification is a nationally recognised statement about your competence as a professional forecaster or observer. It is only available to experienced practitioners who can demonstrate that they have and can apply the required skills and knowledge, which are set out in the national occupational standards. It is expected that all employers of forecasters and observers in the UK will move to using Vocational Qualifications as an indication of your proficiency. The qualification will increase your employment opportunities, within and outside the meteorological profession because every Vocational Qualification is approved and moderated against criteria that meet nationally recognised standards. Experience from other employment sectors suggests that as you go through the system of assessment you will learn more efficient ways of completing work activities. Through increased awareness employees understand more about what they do and how their actions can impact on the workplace. They learn how to solve problems and take on more responsibility, which gives them the opportunity to develop their careers.

My job is not the same as that of some other forecasters/observers. How is that reflected in a Vocational Qualification?

The activities carried out by a wide range of forecasters and observers have been identified by functional analysis. For each of these discrete activities national occupational standards have been developed and organised into units. The units have been classified as mandatory or additional. The mandatory units cover the common skills and knowledge that will be needed by all competent forecasters or observers, as appropriate. To obtain a qualification a candidate must meet the standards in all the mandatory units. Your competence in all the units gained will be recorded on a certificate.

What are the levels of the Vocational Qualifications for forecasters and observers?

There are 8 levels in the QCF framework. The **Diploma in Meteorological Observing is Level 3 requiring 66 Credits; the Certificate for a Meteorological Forecasting Technician is at Level 4 requiring 28 Credits; the Diploma in Meteorological Forecasting is at Level 5 requiring 85 Credits; the Certificate in Meteorological Broadcasting is at Level 5 requiring 13 Credits; the Award in Meteorological Briefing is at Level 5 requiring 9 Credits; and the Diploma in Flood Forecasting is at Level 6 requiring 50 Credits** These assignments reflect the 'weight' of the skills and knowledge, the range of contexts and the responsibilities and autonomy of an individual who is meeting the national occupational standards in the mandatory units.

What is in it for my employer?

The Met Office, the Royal Navy and private sector employers have all made a commitment to the success of these Vocational Qualifications. This commitment is demonstrated by the fact that they have all contributed funding, time and subsidised effort to develop the national occupational standards and qualifications. They have done so because they are convinced of the need for nationally recognised standards for forecasters and observers as a means of improving the quality of services provided by the industry as a whole. They are likely to use the standards as a basis for staff development. By focusing on outcomes, the awards have the potential to improve efficiency. In addition, qualifications gained during employment demonstrate an employer's investment in their staff.

How will I obtain the qualification?

Vocational Qualifications are all about demonstrating your competence in the work place. You will apply to an assessment centre, which will appoint a personal assessor. The assessor will help you understand the occupational standards and the system of assessment. The assessor will assess whether the evidence you have gathered demonstrates that you have met the national occupational standards. You will need to produce evidence to show how you

- completed particular tasks
- managed work activities
- responded to contingencies within the context of your job
- used your interpersonal skills.

Your assessor will make sure that your performance meets the specified standards in all the areas of work, or 'units', that are mandatory for the qualification and any additional units that you wish to offer.

Will I be reassessed for the qualification after a fixed period?

Not in order to retain the national qualification, unless there is a radical change in the national occupational standards. Vocational Qualifications are like a driving licence in this respect. Some employers or regulatory authorities may require reconfirmation of competence in particular areas of work, for example where safety is concerned and/or where there is concern that knowledge and skills may have become outdated. This is a matter for individual employers or authorities.

How much will it cost to obtain the qualification and who will pay?

The cost of registration for a Vocational Qualification is £95 plus VAT per candidate. This includes full Vocational Qualifications certification. If a unit certificate is required, an additional £20 is payable. It is thought likely that meetings and other contact between the assessor and candidate over a period of months will amount to a maximum of 4 working days. Some evidence of competence will be gathered in this way, but most will be collected during the normal course of work, requiring minimal additional effort from the candidate. Accounting for and recovery of these resource costs will be a matter for the individual assessment centres and employers. Because the employers want their staff to obtain Vocational Qualifications, it is expected that they will bear all the associated financial and resource costs.

How do I get on the programme?

By choosing and registering with an assessment centre. Generally you will make that choice based on convenience and cost. The centre will then register you with an awarding body. The awarding body will ensure that all assessment centres are proficient. If employers are bearing the costs of assessment, they may wish to direct employees to particular centres, but it is hoped that any such direction will recognise the value of cross-sector assessment in maintaining the quality of awards.

How many Vocational Qualification 'places' will be available each year?

It is unlikely that the total number of candidates undergoing assessment as forecasters or observers will exceed 50 per year. Initially at least, the throughput will depend upon the number of qualified assessors that are available to work with candidates. There may also be budgetary constraints in due course and, although the intention is to make assessment as unobtrusive as possible, individual employers/stations may wish to limit the number of their candidates undergoing assessment at any one time. Available evidence suggests that it is best to 'start small' and build up the programme as experience grows.

How will candidates be selected if there are more applicants than available places?

This is a matter for the assessment centres and the policies of individual employers in promoting the candidature of their employees. It is likely that there will be an element of 'first come, first served'.

How much time and effort will I have to spend in gaining the qualification?

Much will depend on your current standard of competence in carrying out the tasks set out in the occupational standards of the mandatory units and any additional units you wish to obtain. For an experienced observer or forecaster the effort required should be little more than that taken up by the assessment process, which is unlikely to exceed 4 working days plus 15 - 30 minutes spent occasionally on the job to gather evidence, spread over several months. Even experienced forecasters and observers may find that the occupational standards encourage some reappraisal of their knowledge and working methods. But the time spent on this is likely to be measured in hours rather than days, again spread over several months.

How were the national occupational standards developed?

The national occupational standards were developed by the consultants, Moloney & Gealy, under the guidance of practising forecasters and observers from the Met Office, the Royal Navy and the private sector. Most of the constructive work was carried out at two workshops held at the Met Office College. The first lasted for two days and gathered basic information about the work performed by forecasters and observers. The second refined and adapted the draft standards that were drawn up as a result. Then the draft national occupational standards were tested in pilot studies at six sites, selected to reflect the wide range of roles carried out by forecasters and observers. The results were appraised at a workshop involving the originators of the standards and those who had tested them. Finally, they were reviewed by the **Royal Meteorological Society**, involving all sectors of the industry, endorsed by the **Science, Technology and Mathematics Council (ST+MC)**, as the National Training

Organisation for the sector, and subsequently approved formally as national occupational standards. The whole process took a year to complete.

What is the role of the assessment centres?

Assessment centres handle registrations and assess the competence of candidates. In principle, any organisation can perform this function. However, a nationally accredited awarding body must approve a centre that wants to offer Vocational Qualifications in this way. An approved centre must demonstrate that it has in place systems designed to support you and meet a set of national criteria for assessment centres. These criteria are designed to make sure that centres have in place:

- a system of assessment which is fair and consistent
- a system of internal verification which is robust and guarantees that the national occupational standards are being adhered to when assessors are making assessment decisions.

In addition, centres must understand what forecasters and observers are required to do. Therefore, although technically possible, it is unlikely that local colleges of Further Education, who are assessment centres for some Vocational Qualifications, will have the necessary experience to seek approval for the assessment of Vocational Qualifications for weather forecasters, broadcasters and observers.

To fulfil their role each assessment centre will employ or appoint at least one **internal verifier** and one or more **assessors**. All have to demonstrate their competence against national occupational standards for their respective jobs. Initially, the assessors will be based at the assessment centres and will visit candidates at their workplaces. Individuals are being trained for this purpose. In due course, forecasters and observers who are candidates for Vocational Qualifications will have the opportunity to become assessors themselves. The necessary units for this are 'additional' in both the observer and forecaster qualification. They will then be able to act as assessors in their own right, working for but not based at an assessment centre.

What is the role of an awarding body?

In order to be nationally accredited, an **awarding body** must meet QCA's Common Code of Practice. When an awarding body has been able to demonstrate that it has in place systems and procedures which meet the above criteria it is able to award Vocational Qualifications.

Awarding bodies:

- develop assessment materials based on the national occupational standards for use by candidates and assessors
- develop systems of assessment to help candidates and assessors plan for assessment, gather and judge evidence of competence and reach decisions
- assist assessment centres to prepare for approval
- train external verifiers, who are employed to approve the appointment of assessment centres and monitor their quality assurance systems,.
- accept candidate registrations and requests for certificates from approved assessment centres
- award certificates to those candidates who have successfully met the national occupational standards.

The Royal Meteorological Society already has the CMet qualification. What

is its purpose?

The aim of CMet [2] is to provide a professional qualification in meteorology at a level similar to that of Chartered Engineer, which will assure clients and employers that individuals have reached a specified level of knowledge and experience. A Code of Conduct binds holders of the qualification. CMet aims to meet the need of customers of meteorologists, and the closely related disciplines of hydrology and oceanography, who have little knowledge of the subject. Communication skills, technical expertise, knowledge of current best practice, proven experience over about 5 years and probity, as defined in the Code of Conduct, are required explicitly of candidates.

Will my Vocational Qualifications help me to acquire CMet accreditation?

Members of the Royal Meteorological Society possessing a Vocational Qualification in forecasting should satisfy the knowledge, experience and judgement requirements automatically. Members in possession of the Vocational Qualification in observing would go part way to meeting these requirements. The Code of Conduct represents an additional commitment.

I am an amateur observer. Can I obtain the observer Vocational Qualification?

Yes, if you can demonstrate competence in all the mandatory units. If that is not possible, you may wish to register for and be assessed against the national occupational standards of a subset of the units. Competence can be demonstrated at any time and the units can be tackled in any order. Their achievement will provide personal satisfaction and help to assure those using your data of their quality. Certificates can be purchased from the Awarding Body to record the units that you have achieved.

Who does what?

Candidates

are those individuals who want to demonstrate occupational competence and receive credit for their achievements. They produce evidence to prove that competence against the national occupational standards. For this purpose they work with assessors using the assessment material produced by the awarding body.

Assessors

are those individuals appointed by an approved centre to assess candidates' evidence against the requirements of the Vocational Qualifications. They work with candidates to agree how evidence can be generated and then use the evidence to reach assessment decisions. Assessors ask the candidate questions and observe them whilst they are working.

Internal Verifiers

are individuals appointed by an approved centre to ensure consistency and quality of assessment in the centre. They have overall responsibility for assessment within a centre and therefore confirm assessors' decisions. They support assessors and are responsible for overseeing all the administration, which includes storing copies of all documentation and

communications with PAA\QSET, including registrations and certificate requests.

External Verifiers

are those individuals appointed by PAA\QSET to monitor approved centres and ensure the quality of assessment between centres. External verifiers have a dual role: in addition to making sure that centres are meeting national criteria, they also provide feedback and support which helps centres develop and improve their quality control systems.

Vocational Qualification Administrators

are, in some cases, appointed within a centre to be responsible for overseeing all the administration involved with running NVQs. This will include maintaining and storing records of candidate performance and liaising with PAA\QSET when registering candidates and requesting certificates.

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Links

[1] <http://test-accsys.rmets.org/our-activities/vocational-qualifications/organisations>

[2] <http://test-accsys.rmets.org/accreditation/chartered-meteorologist>