

Position Update for Project Controls Vocational Qualifications and Standards

June 2007

The following notes have been put together following a request by a Client Company for a current status report on the affairs of The Assessment Service Centre (TASC) and the NVQ programmes and a guide to new candidates on the scope and operation of our project controls assessment programmes.

Why Project Controls Qualifications?

The Project Control NVQ programmes are the most complete method of training for new entrants to the profession. The disciplines of estimating, cost engineering, planning and commercial support, or a mixture of these, are comprised of technical, personal and company procedural skills. These are best learned in the candidate's workplace as part of an employment package and engaged upon real work activities, which the competence assessment programmes are specifically designed to facilitate.

The growth of the requirement for project controls staff for development projects is continuing at an unprecedented pace and personnel with these skills form the "eyes and ears" of properly managed and successful projects.

Occupational Standards and Qualifications

The Project Control Standards together with the Level 3 and Level 4 Qualifications, were approved for use by Qualification Curriculum Authority (QCA) in late 2004 and are currently adequately representing the needs of the profession. The new Level 2 Standards were approved by QCA in early 2007 and the qualification structures are expected to be available in the summer 2007.

Launch seminars to industry will be held in London, the North West and the North East regions and are being organised by ProVoc, the vocational qualifications user group of the ACostE, in October 2007. Other organisations taking part include the British Chemical Engineers Contractors Association (BCECA) and the Engineering Construction Industries Training Board (ECITB).

The Assessment Service Centre

Based in Sandbach, Cheshire and operated as a "not for profit" independent business arm of the Association of Cost Engineers, it is administered by an Executive Committee of 5 Senior assessors and verifiers. They have the responsibility for the day-to-day management of business affairs and the

quality control of all activities, to the satisfaction of the ECITB's External Verifier and the ACostE.

The Executive Committee meet with the ACostE Board at four monthly intervals. This Board is comprised of 5 Directors for reporting and communication to the ACostE National Council and President. The principle purpose being to ensure that Association's business objectives are supported and that all areas of ACostE activity are properly co-ordinated.

Candidates

At the time of writing, after two years of operations TASC has registered or identified 200 candidates for either the level 3 or 4 Project Control programmes and 20 Certificates have been applied for from the ECITB.

New starts are averaging 7-8 per month and it is worthy of note that more than 50% are repeat business from existing clients. We are also aware that in some businesses these NVQs are seen as the basic requirement for the job and all new entrants are being placed upon a suitable programme.

Candidates have been registered from most business sectors including oil, petrochemical, gas, nuclear, utility, rail, construction, manufacturing, defence and aero-space organisations.

Assessors

All TASC assessors are fully experienced project control practitioners and mostly with senior management capability. TASC now has 18 assessors spread across the UK, especially around the principal business areas of the North West and Southern regions. All of our assessors are also required to be full members of the ACostE, as a measure of ensuring that they have had the desired level of responsibility and experience in their business life. This is also important as they will be required to support candidate's applications for ACostE Membership, on completion of their NVQ programmes.

To ensure that all assessors are trained in assessment practice to a common high standard, TASC has reached an agreement with the OUVS (Open University Validation Service) to become an Approved Centre to deliver the assessor and verifier A1 and V1 qualifications. It is intended for this service to commence in September of this year.

Benchmarking

Benchmarking project control team or departmental members is a growing area of business for TASC. This service provides a cheap and easy to deliver advice to management on the strengths and weaknesses of their personnel and assists in providing information on staff development needs to reach the next level of maturity. Costs of the benchmarking are deducted from the cost for any candidate subsequently placed upon a competence assessment programme.

Feedback

Industry feedback has identified the following points concerning the NVQ Standards and competence assessment programme in project control.

- a. Establishes the competence level of practitioners at Level 3 Intermediate of Level 4 Full Professional.
- b. Identifies areas of improvement or development in either personal activity or departmental responsibility.
- c. Raises the confidence levels of practitioners through greater understanding of the work-scope and exposure to all areas of responsibility relative to the level of qualification taken.
- d. Provides a specification for the recruitment of new personnel.
- e. Provides a scope for departmental / project personnel responsibility.
- f. Provides a work scope for the training and development of the new apprenticeship and graduate schemes.
- g. The requirement for a senior level Project Controls qualification to demonstrate responsibility and attract new entrants to our profession.

Future Training

1. Senior Level ACostE Qualification

A new Working Group of knowledgeable Directors and BCECA representatives has been formed to bring ACostE into a Chartered Institution such that a senior qualification can be offered to members similar to that of Chartered Engineer. If this is proved to be impossible then a new Certified Project Controls Engineer grade will be created with an entry option based upon the competence assessment programme currently being offered with additional professional input.

2. Junior Development programmes

Through the chairmanship of the ECITB two development programmes are underway for the training of new entrants to the profession.

a. Apprenticeship in Project Controls

An Apprenticeship scheme which will attract new younger persons and will be a three/four year course, during which suitable training will be arranged to provide initially a occupational evidence leading to a Level 2 Project Control NVQ and later at Level 3.

b. Graduate Training Scheme

A Graduate training scheme to accept Graduates into the profession and to provide a framework for their development leading to a level 3 Project Control NVQ .

Candidates for schemes a and b above are hopefully to be encouraged by the target for new entrants of a Chartered or Certified senior qualification. Thus all levels of maturity will be covered. These actions are being strongly supported and assisted by the ACostE.

3. Training for company staff in project control subjects

TASC has prepared a two day training course in Risk Management to be offered free of charge to clients who have demonstrated their continued support for the NVQ and have placed sufficient candidates on programmes to justify the expense of delivering this training. The courses are provided to give the underpinning knowledge for specific standards to candidates at their place of work.

It is intended that in the future we will create additional courses on the principal subjects, such as Planning, Cost Control and Estimating Techniques etc.

Richard Plumb
June 2007