Skill and qualification: the contribution of NVQs to raising skill levels

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Abstract:
This paper is an evaluation of the British system of National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) which focuses specifically on their capacity to increase the skill levels of the working population. It reviews the way that NVQs were designed and developed and argues that they are ill-equipped to encourage knowledge and skills, partly because they simply replicate the weaknesses which currently exist in the labour market and partly because of the qualifications’ own focus on observed workplace be...

High level skills – the skills associated with higher education – are good for the individuals who acquire them and good for the economy. The new QCF set out in 'Regulatory arrangements for the Qualifications and Credit Framework', August 2008, covers all levels from entry to 8. It incorporates the principles of units and credits and has agreed generic descriptors for each level (see the QCA and Ofqual web-sites, www.qca.org.uk and www.ofqual.org.uk). Unlike the QAA descriptors, the terminology of ‘awards’, ‘certificates’ and ‘diplomas’ within the QCF relates to the size rather than the level of the qualification. 1 Revised levels were not implemented for NVQs levels 4 and 5, and those currently in the NDAQ are listed at their original levels in the NQF. Skill is defined as utilisation of knowledge and problem-solving which requires the ability to use logical, intuitive and creative thinking and dexterity, method, material, tools and instruments. Competence is defined as utilisation of knowledge and skills in an area of work and/or learning by taking responsibility and/or displaying autonomy, determination and satisfaction in learning requirements, consideration of social and moral issues and responsibilities. TQF supports the processes for recognition of prior learning, helping clarify the meaning of the qualifications and make visible which learning outcomes are necessary to achieve the qualifications.

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