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**GNVQ Support
Programme**

The revised GNVQ

Teaching, learning and assignment writing

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Contents

Foreword

The revised GNVQ is being introduced into schools and colleges from September 2000. It will introduce changes that were recommended by the Capey review of GNVQ assessment and also by Sir Ron Dearing's review of all post-16 qualifications. The changes are designed to achieve two major objectives. First, to ensure that all GNVQs are easier to implement in schools and colleges. Second, to ensure that the assessment of GNVQs is rigorous and consistent.

This pack is part of the support provided through FEDA's GNVQ Support Programme. It is one of five packs designed to help tutors and managers implement revised GNVQ courses:

- Managing the revised GNVQ
- Recruitment, induction and progression
- Teaching, learning and assignment writing
- Assessing the revised GNVQ
- Key skills within the revised GNVQ.

Each pack is divided into sections which are subdivided into a series of topics exploring the management implications of the revised GNVQ.

Introduction

GNVQs are designed to develop active and investigative styles of teaching and learning. The best GNVQ programmes – in all subjects and at all levels – include a variety of teaching and learning approaches. By achieving a balance, tutors provide opportunities for students – at all levels of ability – to achieve to their full potential. Successful GNVQ courses provide students with opportunities to:

- gain a solid grounding in the vocational knowledge, understanding and skills required by the units
- develop research and study skills that can be used in different contexts
- gain first-hand experience of how organisations within their chosen vocational sector operate, and acquire skills relevant to working in that area
- learn effectively from tutor-led sessions, independently and through group activities
- apply their vocational knowledge, understanding and skills.

This pack is written to help tutors deliver effective teaching and learning programmes for their students. It is divided into three sections:

- Working with the revised units
- Designing teaching and learning programmes
- Developing student assignments.

Section 1 – Working with the revised units

The revised GNVQ units have been designed to help tutors provide coherent courses that are rigorously assessed. They preserve the active teaching and learning styles for which GNVQs have become known. Each unit specification (at all GNVQ levels) comprises four sections:

- 'About this unit'
- 'What you need to learn'
- 'Assessment evidence grid'
- 'Essential information for teachers'.

There is also guidance on key skills. The new structure is designed to facilitate a 'whole unit approach' and avoid fragmented teaching and learning.

'About this unit'

This section gives a brief introduction to the unit. It describes what the unit will cover and indicates links to other units in the specifications as well as possible progression routes. In some cases, links to other qualifications (NVQs, A-levels) are mentioned. The section also states what the assessment for the unit will be.

'What you need to learn'

This section is the starting point for planning teaching and learning programmes. It states clearly the vocational knowledge, understanding and skills that students must acquire to complete the unit.

By studying this section, tutors can plan teaching and learning activities that will enable students to gain the knowledge they need for the unit, whether for undertaking assignments or passing the external assessment. Starting from the 'What you need to learn' section, tutors can work out the best way for their students to learn, understand and be able to demonstrate their achievements by the end of the unit. Teaching and learning must be tailored to reflect the ways in which the unit is assessed, with preparation clearly needed for any external tests.

Are specifications for students?

The title of the section indicates clearly that it is written for students. Tutors should ensure that students are given a copy of the unit specification for each unit they are taking. This applies at all GNVQ levels. Giving them the unit specifications helps students to:

- get to grips with what they need to be able to do for the unit
- be more actively involved in their learning
- understand what they are expected to learn
- know what evidence they are required to produce for assessment
- understand how they can achieve each grade.

Students can also clearly see from this section that studying for a GNVQ is about active learning.

'Assessment evidence' grid

Each grid has two parts. The first part (the task bar) states what evidence students have to produce to meet the requirements of each unit. The second part states what students' evidence needs to show to merit a pass or one of the higher grades. (Advanced GNVQ units are graded on a five-point scale A–E: Intermediate and Foundation units continue to be graded using Pass, Merit and Distinction.)

Because the assessment evidence grid shows clearly what is expected, tutors can prepare assignments that enable students to perform to the best of their ability and secure the highest grade of which they are capable.

○ **Also see – Assessing**

Although each unit carries its own contextualised grading criteria, to achieve the higher grades students need to be able to:

- plan their work
- carry out work independently
- use sources of information
- show the breadth and depth of their understanding
- use specialist knowledge and the language of the subject
- produce high-quality work
- analyse and evaluate their own and others' work
- draw conclusions.

'Essential information for teachers'

This part of the unit specification is divided into three sections:

- teaching strategies
- assessment strategies
- resources.

The purpose is to inform tutors how to approach the teaching and assessment of the unit. The first part explains how tutors might cover the 'What you need to learn' section of each unit. The second part gives tutors guidance on the evidence students need to produce, reflecting the requirements of the 'assessment evidence' grid.

○ **Also see – Assessing**

Key skills

From September 2000, key skills are no longer part of the GNVQ qualification. Instead, a new, stand-alone key skills qualification is being introduced. This is available to all post-16 students – those taking GNVQs as well as those taking A-levels or other qualifications.

The 'Essential information for teachers' section indicates where opportunities exist to develop and assess key skills. The guidance refers to the three key skills that make up the key skills qualification:

- communication
- application of number
- information technology

as well as the 'wider' key skills of:

- improving own learning and performance
- working with others
- problem solving.

There are two types of key skills guidance:

- Keys to attainment: this means that achievement of a particular key skill requirement is considered **essential** for achievement of the vocational requirements of certain aspects of the unit.
- Key skills signposting: this indicates where opportunities **may** be created to develop and assess key skills achievements alongside the vocational requirements of the unit. It is for tutors to decide whether or not they take those suggestions on board when they are planning their GNVQ teaching and learning programmes.

Note that you may devise assignments with activities or tasks which create other opportunities for keys skill development and evidence in addition to those signposted.

○ **Also see – Key skills**

Section 2 – Designing teaching and learning programmes for GNVQ

Successful GNVQ courses require careful planning and preparation by tutors to provide students with a varied teaching and learning programme. This section highlights the issues all GNVQ tutors need to consider, whatever GNVQ level or vocational areas they teach.

A key feature of the revised GNVQ is that units are assessed either by portfolio evidence or by some form of external assessment.

Portfolio evidence is work that students produce during their course in response to an assessment activity (assignment) set by school or college tutors. Students' portfolio evidence is assessed by tutors. Samples of that work will be subject to standards moderation to ensure that the tutors' assessments align with national standards.

External assessment is externally set with externally marked tests or other activities devised by the awarding body.

The type of assessment used on a unit clearly has implications for the design of teaching and learning programmes.

Teaching unit specifications

The starting point for designing programmes is the unit specifications. It is important for tutors to be familiar both with the requirements for each unit they teach and with the specifications as a whole. By studying the unit specifications, tutors can understand:

- the demands the units make on students, as indicated by the verbs used in the assessment evidence grid
- the teaching techniques best suited to introducing students to the vocational knowledge, understanding and skills covered by the unit
- the teaching and learning materials needed to introduce the knowledge, understanding and skills to students
- the access students need to vocational settings to demonstrate and apply their vocational knowledge, understanding and skills in work-related contexts
- the resources needed – make use of free resources (CD-ROM, Internet, 'adopting a firm', local, national or international resources).

Patterns of delivery

Tutors can use their professional judgement to decide on the pattern for delivering units, which will vary according to:

- the nature of the units
- whether the unit is assessed by portfolio or external assessment
- the availability of staff with appropriate expertise to teach certain units
- fitting units around other activities such as work experience placements
- the model for delivery of all GNVQs offered within the school or college.

Centres piloting the revised GNVQ have adopted a range of approaches:

- a short teaching and learning phase followed by an assessment phase; students have a series of small teaching/learning and assessment phases within a unit
- two broadly equal teaching/learning and assessment phases within a unit
- students carrying out their own research over an extended period.

○ **Also see – Managing**

Planning

Whether teaching one-year or two-year courses, tutors need to plan their courses around certain 'fixed points' in the calendar:

- term dates
- time allocations for the GNVQ option blocks in the timetable
- dates of external assessments
- deadlines by which assessed portfolio work must be available for standards moderation
- work experience dates.

Working from these, tutors will be able to build into their own 'course calendar' other important dates, including:

- delivery of each unit
- deadlines for completing assignments (allowing time for assessment and reworking if necessary)
- visits to outside organisations or for hosting visits by speakers
- internal standardisation between tutors assessing work
- 'mocks' of external assessments.

○ **Also see – Managing**

Time allocations

A major consideration when planning is the time allocations for each unit. This determines what tutors can:

- teach during contact time
- expect students to learn from organised visits/trips or from speakers visiting the school or college
- expect students to learn through private study activities.

○ **Also see – Managing**

Teaching techniques

By studying the unit specifications, tutors can decide which teaching techniques will best ensure that their students acquire the required vocational knowledge, understanding and skills. required. The most frequently used techniques include:

Tutor input
Students receive knowledge, information and explanation from the tutor. Many tutors use this extensively at the start of each unit to introduce students to the key concepts and knowledge that they will need in order to understand the subject.

Student enquiry
Students acquire knowledge and information for themselves. Here the tutor's role is twofold. First, to provide relevant information and resources for the students. Second, to provide support and guidance on how to use them to achieve the learning objectives.

Creative work
Students have considerable freedom to explore and articulate their ideas. This technique is used more in creative subject areas such as Art and design, Media: production and communication, and Engineering. The tutor's role is to suggest possible approaches and alternatives, other factors to consider etc.

Experiential learning
Students are placed in situations, such as work experience, that provide opportunities for learning relevant to their courses. The tutor's role is to ensure students make the most of the situations – for example, by briefing beforehand with ideas of what to look out for and what to ask about. After the event, tutors may reinforce what has been learned by debriefing students and getting them to review and evaluate what has been learned.

Developing skills
Students are required to learn and practise particular tasks and skills required in the vocational area. Here, the tutor's initial role is to demonstrate the skills and explain what students need to consider when performing them. Thereafter, tutors offer advice and guidance on how students can develop and improve their skills.

Staffing

The nature of staff involvement varies between institutions. In some, one tutor may deliver the entire programme and write all the assignments. In others there may be a team approach: several staff are involved in delivering each unit in the programme.

The most important thing is to ensure that the roles of all staff contributing to a course are clearly identified at the outset. It is particularly important to establish:

- the expertise of staff in the vocational area
- links that staff have to businesses or organisations in the vocational area
- experience that staff have in teaching and assessing GNVQ or other vocational courses
- the contribution that staff teaching the vocational content are required to make to key skills teaching and assessment
- the contribution that specialist staff (from English/Maths/Information Technology departments) are required to make to key skills teaching and assessment.

Vocational relevance

GNVQs are designed to introduce students to a broad vocational area. It is essential that each GNVQ course relates as closely as possible to the world of work in that vocational area. Equally, it is vital that students have direct contact with employees and employers in real businesses and organisations outside the schools and colleges. A key feature of GNVQ is the way in which students are required to learn about the requirements of the vocational areas, and to demonstrate that they can develop real skills in the workplace.

Links to the workplace can be achieved through:

- vocational activity in the school or college (e.g. organising an event, involvement in Young Enterprise)
- inviting speakers into school or college from outside organisations
- vocational activity with a local business or organisation, such as a work experience placement, shadowing or a part-time job
- obtaining and reading literature produced by organisations operating in the vocational area (publications obtained via the Internet, promotional materials etc.)
- television programmes and other video resources.

Preparation for external assessments

The type of external assessment varies according to the vocational area and the nature of the unit specification. In some areas, it will be a written test or examination; in others, students will receive a case study about which they will be required to answer questions. Awarding bodies are responsible for devising the tests and will be able to provide more details.

Where a unit is externally assessed, tutors need to consider when their students will be entered for the assessment, and to prepare students for that. Centres adopt different approaches to this issue. Some choose to have regular internal tests to ensure that candidates are gaining the underpinning knowledge throughout the teaching of a unit. Others prefer to spend concentrated time at the end of a unit looking at tests, advising on how best to prepare for them and taking mock tests.

Monitoring students' progress

Staff in the schools and colleges that have piloted the revised GNVQs have emphasised the importance of monitoring students' progress throughout the course. If students are given the unit specifications and a calendar of key dates, they will be aware of what is expected of them. However, tutors need to keep monitoring their students' progress to ensure that they are keeping up with the course. This may be done as part of the tutorial time or may be built into vocational lessons. The important thing is that it happens regularly and that tutors:

● keep track of students' progress
● review work and provide detailed feedback on how students can improve their grades
● provide opportunities for additional support in areas where students experience difficulties.

○ **Also see – Managing**

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Section 3 – Developing student assignments

Good assignments are essential for successful GNVQ courses. Assignments are the vehicles through which the GNVQ style of learning and assessment come together for students. They need to be well thought out, and carefully designed to maximise opportunities for vocationally relevant activities.

Experience from all levels of GNVQ shows that good assignments allow students to apply their knowledge, understanding and skills and to demonstrate their achievements. Assignments must:

- be clear and accessible to all the students who take them
- reflect accurately the requirements for evidence as described in the unit specifications
- require students to use and apply their knowledge, understanding and skills in work-related contexts
- enable students to demonstrate their achievement in relevant, interesting and challenging ways
- provide opportunities for students to demonstrate the achievement required by the higher grades
- make use of resources available to the student – locally, nationally or internationally
- enable students to work in different ways – individually, in groups, by 'desk research' and by interviewing others
- provide opportunities for students to demonstrate relevant key skills achievements.

Writing assignments that reflect the unit specifications

In the revised GNVQ specifications, each unit has an 'Assessment evidence' grid. That grid states:

- what evidence a student has to produce
- what the evidence has to show in order for the student to achieve the minimum grade
- what the evidence has to show in order for the student to achieve the higher grades.

So the starting point for writing assignments is to look carefully at the assessment evidence grid. The language in the grid indicates exactly what is expected from students and therefore the types of activities that need to be included in assignments. The most frequently used verbs are:

identify	**list**
describe	**demonstrate**
summarise	**compare**
explain	**analyse**
evaluate	

These verbs are present in both the 'What you need to learn' section and the 'Assessment evidence' grid. This ensures that the evidence students must produce relates directly to what they are expected to learn.

Other factors to consider when writing assignments

Timing

When in the course should the assignment be taken? At the beginning of a course, more structure is likely to be needed to assist the student. Structure is crucial for student interest and success – at all levels of GNVQ and for all students, whatever grade they are aiming to achieve. Structuring assignments does not mean preventing students from achieving higher grades; it allows all students more opportunity to demonstrate their achievement to the full.

Structure

Students taking Foundation and Intermediate GNVQs will inevitably require more structured assignments than those taking Advanced. The type of structure varies by vocational area and according to the content of the unit. It may involve separating the 'baseline' requirements from 'pointers'. The former relate to evidence that all students must produce, while the later suggests ways in which students aiming for higher grades can demonstrate the more demanding requirements in their work. In some cases, this means combining tightly defined requirements with more open-ended tasks.

It is important to remember that, at all GNVQ levels, the assignments must allow students to demonstrate the achievement required for the higher grades.

How the unit is delivered

The design of an assignment will also need to reflect the delivery of the unit for which it is providing. For example, consider a unit delivered over a whole year, alongside other units. Its tutors might decide that students should complete the assignment in stages throughout the year, at the times when the teaching and learning of particular knowledge, understanding and skills take place. Another approach would be for students to carry out a major piece of work independently after a major 'block' of formal teaching.

Vocational relevance

Assignments should reflect the importance of vocational relevance and ensure that students investigate work-related contexts. This can be achieved in a number of ways. For example, students can visit an organisation working in the vocational area; a speaker from a relevant organisation can visit the school or college to talk to and be interviewed by students; or students can identify sources of information available on the Internet that can be downloaded and used as a case study of practice within the vocational area.

Key skills

Opportunities should be taken to provide students with activities that enable them to develop and, if appropriate, demonstrate their key skills achievements. The most important consideration is to include only the key skill requirements that are directly relevant to the content of the assignment. For example, in an assignment for Business that involves using financial information, 'application of number' may be covered; in an assignment for Health and social care involving talking to clients, 'communication (speaking and listening)' may be covered. In this way students will see that the key skills are relevant to the vocational knowledge, understanding and skills that they are demonstrating.

○ **Also see – Key Skills**

A standard format for assignments

It helps students if all assignments (including induction assignments) are presented in the same format – students then know what is expected of them. They soon learn the language and layout of the specifications. A consistent format will also help tutors to standardise practice across courses.

To illustrate what should be included in assignments, an example format is given below.

A title page

- the name and level of the GNVQ (e.g. Health and social care Intermediate)
- the number and name of the unit
- the title of the assignment
- the timing of the assignment (i.e. date set and date to be completed).

A description of the assignment comprising:

- a brief introduction to the assignment and what it involves, to set the scene for students;
- a clear indication to students of any requirement to use information from sources outside school or college and an explanation of how to obtain it
- a list of the materials students will either need to do the assignment successfully or are provided with.

The tasks to be completed – clear, unambiguous statements that tell students:

- what they have to do
- what they have to produce
- what they have to do to achieve all the available grades
- what they have to do to meet any key skills requirements.

What you need to hand in, comprising:

- a clear statement of what students need to hand in, in what form and when
- a statement of anything additional needed for students to attain higher grades.

Approaches to assignment writing

The style of assignment used will vary by GNVQ subject and according to the nature of each unit. However, in centres that have piloted the revised GNVQ, three different styles of assignment have been used. The difference lies in the way the tasks are presented to students.

Approach A – differentiation within tasks

Tutors write an assignment that provides opportunities for students to demonstrate the achievement necessary for all the grades available.

Students are required to complete all the tasks in the assignment. Parts of each task are designed to enable students to demonstrate the achievement needed to be considered for the grades available.

Approach B – differentiation by task

Tutors write an assignment that provides opportunities for students to demonstrate the achievement necessary for all the grades available.

The assignment includes a number of tasks. Certain tasks are indicated as necessary for students aiming for the higher grades. Students decide, with guidance from their tutors, which tasks they should complete.

Approach C -– differentiation by response
Students are given a scenario that tells them what they have to do – reflecting the 'What you need to produce' section of the unit specification.

Students are then given the assessment evidence grid and briefed by their tutors on what is expected in their response. Tutors emphasise what is needed in students' work if it is to be considered for the higher grades. Students decide how to structure their response.

Issuing assignments

The piloting centres have adopted different approaches to the timing of assignments:

- Some always give out the assignment at the beginning of a unit. It can then provide the focus for all the teaching and learning that will take place throughout the period allocated for the unit.
- Others prefer to give out an assignment after the initial teaching input, so that the students already have a grounding in the knowledge, understanding and skills.

Deadlines

Setting deadlines for students to complete their work is vital. It is also important to allow time for staff to review students' work in progress as well as assessing it after it is handed in. Students need to be given the chance to rework their assignments if necessary.

Reviewing assignments

It is good practice to review each assignment before it is taken, to ensure that it really will provide the opportunities needed. Reviewing first is particularly important if one tutor has written the assignment. Getting other tutors to look at it helps to ensure that it does what is required and avoids having to set supplementary activities to meet any shortfall in the evidence required. The following checklist can be used:

- Is it clear and readable for the group of students taking it?
- Does it only require knowledge, understanding and skills that students are required to demonstrate (as described in the 'What you need to learn' section of the unit specification)?
- Does it cover the requirements of the 'What you need to produce' section of the unit?
- Does it provide opportunities for students to meet the requirements for the higher grades?
- Have relevant opportunities to incorporate key skills been taken?
- Does it provide opportunities for students to demonstrate the vocational relevance of what they have learnt?
- Is it challenging and interesting for students?

○ **Also see – Assessing**