

website: www.qca.org.uk/ni

WWW



Qualifications and Curriculum Authority
2nd Floor, Glendinning House, 6 Murray Street, Belfast, BT1 6DN
Tel: 028 9033 0706 Fax: 028 9023 1621 E-mail: info@qca.org.uk
website: www.qca.org.uk/ni



website: www.qca.org.uk/ni

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P A R T N E R S H I P S
working together - a partnership approach to NVQs



A Partnership Approach To Energy Efficiency

The background

National Energy Action Northern Ireland (NEA NI) is a charity which develops policies and practices to tackle the heating and insulation problems of people on low incomes through improvements in energy efficiency.

NEA NI works in partnership with the public, private and voluntary sectors to increase comfort and reduce fuel bills for vulnerable people and to alleviate fuel poverty.

NEA's objectives are to:

- Identify the policies and practices to tackle fuel poverty.
- Increase public and political awareness of the problems of, and solutions to, cold homes.
- Identify and promote good practice in delivering energy efficiency services.
- Increase investment in energy efficiency.

- Develop energy efficiency education and training initiatives.

The Domestic Energy Efficiency Consortium (DEEC) in England promoted NVQs as a way of improving practices in the delivery of energy efficiency services. Their aims included developing and promoting standards for NVQs in energy efficiency, renewing and updating these standards to ensure that they are current, technically accurate and relevant.

NEA NI decided to continue the work of the DEEC by providing:

'A programme to support the implementation of NVQs in the energy efficiency sector in Northern Ireland, to increase the effective delivery of energy efficiency services and the provision of energy advice.'

The partnership


An NVQ Steering Group was set up and membership was invited from those who could be pro-active in implementation of NVQs in


Northern Ireland. The partners within the Steering Group included The Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE), the Construction Industry Training Board Northern Ireland (CITBNI), Eaga, DCI Energy Control, Bryson House, MPI and Homewarm.

The Steering Group established ways in which the partnership could be advantageous to maintain high standards within the sector by promoting and implementing NVQs in domestic energy efficiency. It was decided that a seminar should be held on 25 February 1999 to raise awareness of the energy efficiency NVQs, the way to implement them and the benefits to the sector.

The following 3 NVQs were promoted at the seminar:

- NVQ level 1 Installing Insulation
- NVQ level 2 Provide Insulation Services
- NVQ level 2 Provide Energy Efficiency Services.



 **Inclusion of Energy Efficiency NVQs within the Construction Skills Register**

CITBNI gave a presentation to the Steering Group on the purpose of the Construction Skills Register (CSR). In order to obtain a Skills Card employees with less than 5 years experience are required to achieve an NVQ relevant to their skill area. It was agreed that this could be a way to promote the Energy Efficiency NVQs. The CITBNI offers grant assistance to levy paying employers who wish to register their workforce, it was agreed that this could be used as an incentive to gain interest and participation from the energy efficiency sector. NEA NI agreed to work in partnership with CITBNI to develop this area.

Meetings were held with the Construction Employers Federation (CEF) and CITBNI to explore the feasibility of inclusion on the CSR for the energy efficiency sector in Northern Ireland. The CEF with the Trade Unions agree and administer CSR standards while CITBNI provide training and assessments for CSR.

This was an important and timely route to take, particularly in view of the fact that government tendering policy was moving in the direction of compulsory skill registration for construction based operatives.

By using the register:

- Clients are assured that the operatives on their site have received safety training and,

where appropriate, have stated levels of competence.

- Contractors gain recognition for the competence of their workforce, benefit from increased safety on site and achieve a competitive advantage when dealing with clients.
- Experienced operatives gain recognition of their skills and experience a safer working environment, enhanced employment prospects and access to training advice.
- Trainees will obtain recognition of their qualifications, a training assessment and enhanced employment prospects.

The proposal for inclusion of the energy efficiency sector on CSR proved to be very successful with NEA NI now being included as a partner organisation.

The core aim of CSR is to promote the use of NVQs throughout the industry. Each CSR skill category is based on an existing NVQ. This gives all registered operatives recognition of their skills and competences at a national level; although CITBNI provide the assessment services for the construction skills card in Northern Ireland, after further discussions with NEA NI they agreed that the energy efficiency assessments could be carried out through existing assessment centres.

This has proved to be an effective working partnership between CITBNI, CEF and NEA NI.

The NIHE reported to the steering group that they are committed to NVQs and recognise them as an important part of the Skills Register. From January 2002 the Housing Executive will place greater emphasis during the tendering process, to those firms employing skills registered operatives.

At an NEA NI presentation ceremony held at Phoenix Natural Gas the former Minister for Employment and Learning, Dr. Sean Farren presented a candidate with his CSR Skills Card stating that:

'Quality training must be done within the scope of recognised standards and these exist with National Vocational Qualifications. NVQs are first and foremost about what people can do. They go beyond technical skills to include planning, customer care, problem solving, dealing with unexpected occurrence and applying knowledge and understanding.'

 **The benefits**

The NVQ qualification enables advisors to give specific energy advice, helping individuals to alter their behaviour with a resulting improvement in the energy efficiency of their home. NVQs also help to ensure that a high quality of service is achieved in the delivery of energy efficiency practical measures.

NEA NI believes that tackling the problem of fuel poverty can best be achieved through adopting a holistic approach and they are committed to working through effective partnerships with others.