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## **Certificates of Competency, Licences & Vocational Certificates**

### **Vocational Qualifications Route to Certification**

Notice to Owners, Masters, Skippers, Deck and Engineer Officers and Ratings of Merchant Ships and Fishing Vessels, and those concerned with Maritime Training.

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#### **INTRODUCTION**

In the past, every Department of Transport Certificate of Competency (for Deck or Engineer Officer), Licence (for Marine Engine Operator) and vocational Certificate (for Efficient Deck Hand, Able Bodied Seaman or Motorman) has been granted on the basis of a candidate's completion of specified seetime, success in oral, and where appropriate, written or practical examinations, and the production of certain ancillary Course Certificates. In line with modern thinking and Government policy on competence evaluation, and in order to produce a more meaningful and accurate assessment of seafarers' ability to perform their professional duties, the Vocational Qualification (VQ) route to certification is being introduced.

This M-Notice outlines the concept and the procedures for the incorporation of VQs into the Merchant Shipping and Fishing Vessel certification systems alongside the existing system of Department of Transport Certificates and Licences.

#### **BACKGROUND**

- 1 For the safety of life at sea and the prevention of pollution, there has always been a need for every seafarer to have a level of competence that will enable duties to be carried out effectively and safely. The traditional method of testing competence is based upon completion of a minimum period of seetime

and success in oral, and where appropriate, written or practical examinations. Following successful examination, a Certificate or Licence is issued to testify that the seafarer is competent to serve at the level described by that Certificate or Licence.

- 1.1 As the requirement is for the seafarer to prove competence rather than academic ability, Vocational Qualifications (VQs) provide a more pragmatic method of evaluation, and are being introduced for seafarers.

#### **VOCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS (VQS)**

- 2 VQs may be described as statements of competence relevant to the roles performed by individuals in various areas of employment. The Merchant Navy Training Board (MNTB) and the Sea Fish Industry Authority (SEAFISH), on behalf of the merchant shipping and the sea fishing industries respectively, have analysed all the functions undertaken by seafarers of the Deck and Engineering disciplines in the Merchant Navy and Fishing Fleet and produced a detailed analysis of the work, the knowledge and skills required and the competences to be demonstrated by those proficient in the tasks involved. The various 'competences' are organised into units; a number of units together make a Vocational Qualification (VQ). Thus, VQ units are the 'building blocks' of a flexible qualification

system tailored to the needs of the industry and the attributes of individuals, using common components wherever possible. Where appropriate, units are transferable between qualifications in different industries and are nationally recognised. The concept of demonstrating competences is consistent with the 1995 Revision of the International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers, 1978.

2.1 VQs are 'awarded' to those demonstrating competence in all of the units which make up the VQ. VQs are arranged nationally in 5 levels, from

Level 1:-

"Competence which involves the application of knowledge in the performance of a range of varied work activities, most of which may be routine or predictable";

to

Level 5:-

"Competence which involves the application of a significant range of fundamental principles across a wide and often unpredictable variety of contexts. Very substantial resources feature strongly, as do personal accountabilities for analysis and diagnosis, design, planning, execution and evaluation."

2.2 A series of Marine Operations qualifications relating to seafaring has been accredited by the relevant bodies, the National Council for Vocational Qualifications (NCVQ) and the Scottish Vocational Education Council (SCOTVEC) at Levels 2, 3 and 4. VQs at Level 5 are still under development.

2.3 A series of VQs at different levels reflects the standards required by the present Certificates and Licences with the exception of the Merchant Navy Class 1 Deck Officer and the Merchant Navy Class 1 Engineer Officer (VQ level 5). The exact VQ units relating to each Certificate and Licence are still subject to consultation with the industry but this is not expected to cause any delay in the introduction of VQs.

2.4 VQs are awarded by 'Awarding Bodies' which for Marine Operations are SCOTVEC, who award Scottish Vocational

Qualifications (SVQs) in Scotland, and the Business & Technology Education Council (BTEC) who award National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. There is no difference in the standards of the equivalent NVQ and SVQ awards and candidates will be able to mix units of NVQs and SVQs to obtain the full award. The Awarding Bodies are responsible for ensuring the quality of the VQs and have guidelines and procedures to that end. The Awarding Bodies operate through a network of approved Assessment Centres. These may be colleges, shipping companies or other organisations which operate in accordance with the Awarding Bodies' procedures and have the capability to assess candidates' competence against the criteria or standards laid down in each unit.

2.5 All candidates for VQs must provide evidence of their ability to actually undertake the work for which they are seeking a qualification. This requirement includes evidence of satisfactory performance in the workplace as well as the demonstration of the associated underpinning knowledge.

2.6 The guidelines for the award of VQs state that they must be capable of being awarded independently of the mode or duration of any specific learning or training programme. In practice, most candidates will undergo some form of training. The advantages of VQs are that the type of training can be aligned more readily to the particular abilities of candidates, and evidence of levels of competence achieved outside conventional learning programmes (i.e. through actual experience in the working environment) can be assessed and counted towards the qualification.

2.7 Each VQ unit is granted upon the candidate proving to a qualified Assessor that he or she fully meets the requirements of that unit as specified in the documentation. In the shorebased model, it is customary for the Assessor to observe the candidate at work but, as in most cases this is impractical for seafarers, it is anticipated that the candidate will collect a 'portfolio of evidence' attesting to competence in specific tasks. This portfolio of evidence will rely heavily upon confirmation by senior officers that the candidate has undertaken the tasks satisfactorily. The candidate will attend an Assessment Centre

and the portfolio of evidence will be assessed against specific criteria for the award of the appropriate units of the VQ.

- 2.8 Assessment can take many forms including witnessing of actual performance, oral questioning, simulation and written tests. The choice of assessment method will be the decision of the Assessment Centre, but operating within guidelines laid down by the Awarding Body.
- 2.9 Where the Assessor considers the candidate is deficient in any area, recommendations will be made to rectify the situation. This can be in the form of further experience at sea, completing a training programme or any other appropriate means.

### **MSA INVOLVEMENT**

- 3 Although the VQ system has been developed by the industry with the assistance of the Department for Education and Employment, the MSA has been closely involved in all stages. The MSA is approving and will monitor the Assessment Centres, their Assessors and the VQs for acceptability towards the issue of Department of Transport Certificates and Licences.

### **AWARD OF CERTIFICATE OF COMPETENCY, LICENCE OR VOCATIONAL CERTIFICATE VIA VQ ROUTE**

- 4 A candidate for a Certificate of Competency or Licence who obtains the requisite specified VQ units, which may or may not be a complete VQ, has the minimum internationally required qualifying seetime, is medically fit and has paid the examination fee, will be granted entry to the Department of Transport Oral Examination. The Certificate of Competency or Licence will be issued following success in the Oral Examination.

- 4.1 The procedures for the award of vocational Certificates under the VQ system have yet to be finalised. These Certificates are currently awarded by bodies on behalf of the Department of Transport and little change is anticipated.

### **SPECIFIC UNITS REQUIRED**

- 5 The exact make-up of the units at the designated levels required for entry to the Department of Transport Certificate of Competency or Licence Oral Examinations and for the vocational Certificates is still subject to consultation. Once the relationships between VQ units and Certificates of Competency, Licences and vocational Certificates are finalised, a further M-Notice will be issued setting out the additional details.

### **ANCILLARY CERTIFICATES**

- 6 The ancillary Certificates currently required (First Aid, Fire Fighting etc) will eventually be subsumed within the relative VQ units so that specific 'Certificates', except where required to comply with IMO Resolutions, will not be mandatory provided that competence can be confirmed by assessment. It is anticipated however, that the majority of candidates will have successfully participated in relevant training programmes monitored by the MSA in compliance with IMO guidelines.

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