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**HEALTH AND SAFETY EXECUTIVE
AGRICULTURE INDUSTRY ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

**AGRICULTURE REVISITED INITIATIVE – STOCKTAKE ON VOCATIONAL
QUALIFICATIONS AND TRAINING**

Summary

The Agriculture Revisited initiative acknowledges the vital role that training and competence plays in farming health and safety, and recommends further actions in this area.

In light of the broader, complex and changing skills and training agenda, the work undertaken on health and safety vocational qualifications (VQs) by HSE's Agriculture Sector and progress to date, we have agreed with Judith Donovan to take stock of progress and review next steps, ahead of taking forward further work.

This paper sets out some of the background, wider challenges and possible options, and invites AIAC's views and input to the priorities on training and vocational qualifications.

Issue

1 To review progress with HSE's work on training and competences, consider changes in the wider training environment and specific recommendations in the Agriculture Revisited initiative¹, and to seek AIAC member's views on:

- the challenges and opportunities in this context, and
- the way forward.

¹ Future Plans for Tackling Health and Safety in Agriculture, Board paper HSE/08/24.

Background

2 HSE's Agriculture Sector has been developing an education, skills and competence project since April 2005. While training and skills are the core business of other government departments and agencies, there are broad statutory requirements in the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, the Management of Health and Safety Regulations 1999, and in other Regulations for employers to ensure the provision of information and training to employees, with a view to ensuring health and safety. There are also legal requirements for workers to hold certificates of competence in some areas.

3 The aim of the Sector project is to reduce the incidence of fatal and major injuries and ill health in the industry by tackling, through education and training, the industry's culture of unwise risk taking and by raising the skills and management competence of those working in the industry.

4 Working in partnership with AIAC members, particularly the NFU, LANTRA SSC and the union Unite, and supported by the two leading training and qualification awarding bodies in the land-based sector (City and Guilds NPTC and Lantra Awards), HSE has developed and launched a suite of QCA accredited vocational qualifications (VQs) tailored to the needs of farming and horticulture. These are summarised at annex 1.

5 AIAC members have been updated on the VQs through regular progress papers and presentations². For example, at the July 2008 meeting the challenges of encouraging uptake of the VQs were discussed together with funding, the demise of DEFRA's Vocational Training Scheme (VTS) and the shift to financial assistance from the Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) in England, and their counterparts in Scotland and Wales.

6 **The Agriculture Revisited initiative acknowledges the vital role that training and competence play, and recommends further actions in the area – as detailed in the box below. In light of the broader, complex and changing skills and training agenda, the work undertaken on VQs and progress to date, we have agreed with Judith Donovan to take stock of progress and review next steps, ahead of taking forward work in this area.**

Extract from Agriculture Revisited – action on training and competencies:

Competencies:

² AIAC papers (1) AIAC 070503 Development of Vocational Qualifications (VQs) in agriculture; May 2007 and power point presentation; (2) 07/10/03 Development of Vocational Qualifications (VQs) in agriculture – update paper 1, October 2007; and (3) AIAC 080303: Vocational Qualifications (VQs) in agriculture - Funding and marketing in 2008/09, March 2008.

a) **VQs** These are a brilliant idea and we need to back them more. We should be organising a big PR event for the first graduates this summer; we should be exploring the possibility of getting them sponsored, particularly for “best student” type prizes, and more importantly we should be finding funding streams to pay for the students via the Livery Companies and the Charitable Trusts.

We should also be partnering the Business Links and the LSCs, to get these promoted within the small business/skills sectors and we should be liaising with Government (and Government money) to develop the range.

b) **Other training** The converse of the college based VQs would be to create some Open and Distance learning, and here we must look at postal correspondence courses, particularly for the older farmer. We could also investigate developing a wives/children one and even a “whole family” correspondence course. Variation of the self assessment software tool could be useful here. Finally, we should look at the benefits of establishing some sort of academic “Institute” on farm safety and qualifications which would only need to be virtual, but might give more status and gravitas to the whole concept of competencies.

Argument

(a) Where are we now?

7 Overall, uptake of the VQs has been slow. Awarding bodies, HSE and other stakeholders have continued to carry out promotional activity. HSE has also pursued a range of other work in support of training. Highlights are summarised at annex 2.

(b) What do we want to achieve?

8 Our objectives remain as outlined in the background section of this paper, namely to facilitate a greater uptake of training and VQs in order to help up-skill the industry and reduce accidents and ill health.

(c) Assessing the bigger picture

9 In order to take stock of progress with the VQ work and to look at the wider context for H&S training in agriculture, we have undertaken a quick analysis of the potential strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (a ‘SWOT’ analysis).

Strengths:

- The skill's agenda remains a priority for government and specifically the agriculture sector.
- VQs are formally recognised and accredited and are eligible for funding by the Learning and Skills Council, thereby allowing colleges to claim funds to support their delivery.
- Clearly defined, industry-specific VQs, developed for the agriculture and horticulture sectors with learning outcomes agreed and supported by industry stakeholder groups.
- A range of bespoke learning materials have been developed to support VQ delivery through Lantra awards trainers (and others).
- VQ level 2 broadly accepted as desirable by colleges as it provides valuable learning for students before they undertake work placements.
- VQs are available from the two widely recognised and accepted awarding bodies operating in the land based sector.

Weaknesses:

- A poor training culture exists across the agriculture sector: widely acknowledged as an issue and much bigger than simply training required for health and safety purposes (supported by LANTRA SSC).
- Little or no real incentives for farmers or farm workers to seek to gain VQs or to undertake the training where achievement of the qualifications is not a mandatory requirement? Is there an elusive golden incentive?
- Complexity of the government skills' agenda, and current shift again in roles and funding provision, may be a further deterrent to an already reluctant audience, including training providers.
- Qualifications appropriate to agriculture which have been taken up in large numbers tend to have a specific statutory basis eg chainsaws, sheep dipping, fork lift truck, first aid. Generic health and safety training has a generic statutory basis and can be met by a number of means.
- LSC policy is not to fund qualifications from the public purse where there is a statutory obligation on employers to provide training, except where it would add to the overall learning aims (ie subsumed in another course).
- HSE has limited resources and leverage to create demand for VQs. Who might be better placed to do this?
- Still a potential short-fall in training materials on the market to support VQ outside of colleges. Lantra Awards provide training courses but City and Guild NPTC do not.
- Have we been too focussed on VQs at the expense of promoting training more generally?
- All colleges teach health and safety differently – some use an integrated approach, some prefer standalone modules. This means one size won't fit all on take up.
- Non availability of broadband in rural areas may impact adversely on the potential scope for e-learning tools. Are levels of IT skills amongst farmers and farm workers a barrier?

Opportunities:

- Growing global pressure on food supplies and pressure for self-sufficiency may require a more consistent and professional approach by farmers in the UK, with an opportunity to promote routes or levers for training.
- Changes to the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) in response to employer demands for bite-sized learning will significantly impact on the structure of qualifications in England, Wales and N Ireland: qualifications will be broken down into units; students completing units will get credits; sufficient credits will lead to the award of a certificate or diploma at different levels.
- Changes to funding routes with a shift towards the RDAs provides a fresh opportunity/incentive to influence uptake.
- RDAs funding includes money for up-skilling in agriculture to improve business and risk management and general competitiveness, where health and safety can make a contribution.
- RDAs appear to favour vocational training, with the aim of up-skilling the workforce, and this suits the current VQ package.
- The introduction of Specialist Diplomas for 14-19 year olds to be introduced in autumn 2009, will offer the potential to include VQ level 2 at the outset.
- The industry is embracing continuing professional development (CPD) and VQs can be included as a component of CPD schemes.

Threats:

- Economic down turn putting more pressure on farmers which may further reduce an already low priority for training.
- The farming population is older³ and ageing. While we can focus efforts through the colleges on a younger audience and those new(er) to farming to get them trained and qualified for longer term benefits, and pursue the skills agenda with those who are amenable, the older worker group remain a key part of our target audience for the foreseeable future and are potentially harder to influence/ less receptive. Put bluntly: even if full subsidies for training were available, would we get take up?
- The switch to units and credits may confuse or dilute uptake of H&S VQs, as students may opt to take only certain elements of VQ levels 2, 3 and 4.
- The awarding bodies are commercial organisations selling awards to make money; is the demand adequate to keep them supporting the VQ products?
- The nine English RDAs are all taking different approaches to training priorities and funding, as are their equivalents in Scotland and Wales. This implies a need to influence multiple bodies.

³ Oxford Strategic Marketing – Insight Fact Book

Question: Has this SWOT analysis identified the right issues? Are there other contextual challenges or opportunities that have not been identified in this paper that might impact on future activities?

(d) The challenge - what action is required in order to facilitate increased levels of health and safety training and uptake of VQs?

10 There are three distinct areas that require a targeted approach:

- (1) those new to the industry eg students.
- (2) those already in the industry eg existing farmers and workers.
- (3) stakeholders who can have an influencing or leveraging effect.

11 The proposals in “Agriculture Revisited” can be summarised as follows:

- (1) Promote uptake of our VQs, and further develop and promote our existing VQs as appropriate.
- (2) Explore routes to financial support for students (eg charities), and encourage reach to small firms through LSCs and local business links.
- (3) Explore potential for and develop Open and Distance learning materials, postal courses for the older worker and a ‘whole family’ package.
- (4) Explore potential for developing a virtual academic institute of farm safety and qualifications to give status and gravitas to competences.

12 And other options building on these include:

(i) Professional bodies and schemes within the agriculture industry that are keen to promote CPD may often require it as a condition of membership eg the National Register of Sprayer Operators (NRoSO) members who achieve the level 2 or 3 VQ certificate and/or attend a recognised training course can claim points towards their CPD. Other areas worth pursuing might include, for example, the Land Based Technicians Accreditation Scheme (aimed at manufacturers’ and dealers’ technical staff) and the Pig Industry Professional Register.

(ii) Work with the Insurance industry to facilitate formal recognition of their clients who have these qualifications has not been successful to date. Reduced insurance premiums had previously been identified as a driver for uptake but may now be of limited value in current climate.

(iii) A DEFRA initiated project on “Skills for Farming”, and the NFU-chaired skills forum held earlier this year may provide opportunities to promote the VQs more widely. We’d welcome NFU views.

(iv) Should an approach be made to the retailer network/supply chains to explore opportunities for them to exert their influence at farm level? Alternatively, it may

be more appropriate to focus specifically on working with some of the larger farming organisations or groups who may be receptive on training, who manage their own farms, and who could also act as benchmarks for the industry?

(v) Should a renewed effort be made on farm assurance schemes given that previous attempts have not been successful?

(vi) There are a number of charities that provide funding support for training, in agriculture. Some have a regional/geographical focus, and often require particular criteria to be met by learners in order to access funding (see examples at annex 2). Could an approach be made to these organisations in order to further promote awareness and/or encourage uptake and if so how given the multiplicity of bodies?

(vii) Messages to promote the business and health and safety benefits of training could be “piggy backed” onto the Agriculture Revisited publicity campaign at the appropriate time.

(viii) A more consistent and dynamic approach to promote VQs through publicity at SHADs could be made, in conjunction with local trainers, to include the use of stands and flyers. A consistent message running through all SHADs is the importance of training (generally) so with a large farming audience present, these events represent an ideal opportunity for local training providers.

(ix) The Agricultural Wages Board Order – Farm workers are paid by status/grade and have opportunities to advance if they have certain qualifications. Health and safety VQs were formally recognised in the last review of the Order. How should this be pursued as an incentive?

(x) Work to explore opportunities through the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Scheme (SAWS) made little progress. In light of the numbers of seasonal/migrant workers in the sector, should more be done to explore potential for VQs in this area and if so, by what means?

(xi) In the construction industry, a safety passport scheme has received wide recognition and acceptance. This is a voluntary industry initiative requiring basic training as a requirement for workers in this sector. Could such a scheme work in farming?

Question: Are there further options that AIAC members can recommend?

Action/ Recommendation

13 In conclusion: HSE has a good package of VQs and is having some success in take up, and is supporting other training in the sector. The picture for the industry overall is mixed, but there are certainly plenty of routes to support and promote further training, not least through the colleges and with new

students. There is much more that can be done to reach more widely into the sector, but the hardest challenge, as elsewhere, is likely to be with existing farmers and farm workers.

14 The reality is that HSE has limited resource, and therefore it cannot achieve significant gains without the support of others. Industry stakeholders such as AIAC have a good range of knowledge and expertise, and can either directly or indirectly support and promote the broad training agenda.

15 To help us achieve our objectives, members are requested to offer their views on these challenges, and:

- Identify other viable options and drivers for uptake of training and competence;
- Help prioritise actions and audiences to be pursued individually by AIAC members and HSE including the recommendations from Agriculture Revisited; and
- Provide a steer for the work of the re-constituted AIAC working group.

Contact

Alastair Mitchell
Agriculture and Food Sector
Email: Alastair.mitchell@hse.gsi.gov.uk
Tel 01905 743608

Rachel Russell
Injuries Reduction Division
Email: Rachel.russell@hse.gsi.gov.uk
Tel 020 7717 6464

Annex 1

Health and safety VQs in the agriculture and horticulture sector

<u>VQ</u>	GUIDED LEARNING HOURS	<u>CERTIFICATE TITLE</u>	<u>TARGET MARKET</u>
Level 2	20	Working Safely in Agriculture/Horticulture	Anyone working in the sector or about to join it
Level 3	30	Controlling Risks to Health and Safety in Agriculture/Horticulture.	Target market: supervisors, skilled employees, unit managers, union or worker safety representatives and farmers/growers who are self-employed or employing only family members
Level 4	30	Managing Health and Safety in Agriculture/ Horticulture	Farmers, growers, managers and owners of agricultural and horticultural enterprises with a management structure

Annex 2

Highlights of HSE's work to date on training and VQs include:

- Figures from the awarding bodies indicate the total number of student registrations received at 07/07/08 was 909 with the majority of these being at level 2
- Top students at levels 2 and 3 were invited to receive awards from Judith Donovan at the Royal Show this year, and this formed the basis of further promotional activity.
- HSE has supported the land based training organisation "Cultiva Limited" (formally the Elite Consortium) that works closely with five colleges in the land based sector to produce learning materials. This has enabled VQs to be taught in member colleges, with a successful pilot run last year it is anticipated that there will be a comprehensive rolling out in the current academic year. There are proposals for Cultiva to share these materials more widely with around 35 more colleges through the Landbased Colleges' National Consortium (LBCNC).
- HSE have pursued the incorporation of the VQs within other existing agriculture and horticultural qualifications such as Level 2 National Certificates and Level 3 Advanced National Certificates in agriculture and horticulture to ensure wider uptake. A decision is due later this year, with potentially 1500 more students likely to undertake the VQs each year if successful.
- HSE has worked with Lantra Awards to develop training materials in support of a one day course to support the Level 2 VQ.
- On going work with requiring input from HSE includes:
 - exploring opportunities with the English RDAs now holding budgets to subsidise the costs of training and award grants (a proportion of which is for upskilling the industry) and also with their Scottish and Welsh equivalents, (more below);
 - supporting updating of the question banks for the VQ assessments, model answers and other examiner guidance; and
 - exploiting marketing and promotional opportunities through the trade press, presence at the Royal and technical shows as part of routine agricultural communications plan for the year and through links with the agricultural college network.

In addition to the work on VQs, HSE has facilitated a range of other improvements to training and qualifications in the land based sector including:

- Revised workbooks on a range of H&S topics for use by LBCNC's members and for NVQs.
- Revised assessment criteria for certificates of competence on manual handling, sheep dipping and veterinary medicines.
- Led a working group for Lantra Awards to revise and update their courses on manual handling and safe lifting.

Charities and other support routes to fund training and education

(1) There are numerous charities around the country that support training and education. Many of them set out criteria that have to be met in order for applicants to qualify for funds to support learning/training eg resident or working in particular geographical areas or occupations.

The educational grants advisory service (EGAS) offers advice on funding for those studying in post-16 education in the UK but grants are also available for those in work.

Useful websites;

www.egas-online.org

www.scholarship-search.org.uk

www.support4learning.org.uk

(2) There are quite a few charities offering funds. Two regional agriculture examples are:

The Felix Cobbold Trust offers financial assistance to agric workers in Suffolk & East Anglia see www.felixcobboldtrust.org

The Chadacre Agricultural Trust offers grants to workers in Suffolk, Norfolk, Essex & Cambridge.

There is also a site listing an "A to Z" of all charities offering grants etc at the Agrifood Charities Partnership www.afcp.co.uk to enable applicants to identify charities that meet their needs

(3) Women and training

A Lantra SSC "pathways initiative" about raising skills & unlocking potential for women in agriculture, with funding available until Feb 2009 (England only).

Funding is available for training aimed towards supervisory or management positions & those areas requiring technical skills. Those who apply must be employed F/T or P/T or self employed within agric/hortic workplaces.

Applicants are required to submit £250 but are then entitled to receive up to £650 as a training grant. Might be able to encourage/support uptake of H&S VQs at level 3 and 4?