Occupational Standards and Competence-Based Qualifications for Professional Applied Psychologists in the UK

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The paper outlines the development of employment-led qualifications in the UK. These qualifications have been based upon a notion of competence at work, defined in terms of standards developed using a functional approach to occupational analysis. While initial developments focused on standards development and the design of qualification at "lower levels", there has been increasing interest in extending the approach to the analysis of higher level professional, technical and managerial occupations.

Keywords: Occupational standards, Professional standards, Competence, Applied psychology, Vocational qualifications.

The Development of “Employment-Led” Qualifications in the UK

Since 1981, the UK Employment Department (ED) has led the development of a national initiative to produce occupational standards covering all areas of work. These standards define "outcomes" (Jessup, 1991): the work-related performance criteria which need to be met in order for a person to be deemed "competent" in their occupation. Standards development within each occupational sector is led by a body representing all the key stakeholders: employers, employees, professional bodies, etc. These "lead bodies" are responsible for managing the development of standards, and the design of standards-based qualifications. The actual delivery of qualifications is carried out by one or more "awarding bodies."

Occupational standards are specified using a common format and a functional approach to job analysis (NCVQ, 1995). The occupational analysis procedure focuses on the definition of job functions and defines occupational areas in terms of key roles and job functions. These are specified as a set of outcome statements, each of which is defined by a set of performance criteria. National Standards conform to this common format, irrespective of the occupational sector. Outcome statements are grouped into "Units," which represent competence in a relatively free-standing area of work activity. Units are the building blocks used to construct qualifications.
The National Council for Vocational Qualifications (NCVQ) was set up in 1986, following the UK Government’s review of vocational qualifications, to provide a “hallmark” for qualifications which meet the needs of employment and to manage the delivery of a new type of qualification (NCVQ, 1991). The new qualifications were to be designated National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs). In Scotland the same remit has been given to the Scottish Vocational Education Council (SCOTVEC) and SVQs are their equivalent to NVQs. NCVQ defines criteria and gives guidance for the design of qualifications and accredits awarding bodies. By the end of 1995, NVQ/SVQ qualifications were available to 87% of those in employment. Of these, over one million people (4% of the workforce) now have NVQ/SVQs and a further one million are working towards them (Beaumont, 1996).

The NVQ/SVQ framework distinguishes five levels of qualification, from the most basic (defined as “competence in the performance of a range of varied work activities, most of which may be routine and predictable”) to the most complex. Level 5, the highest level defined within the NCVQ framework, is intended to encompass the professions and is described by NCVQ as follows:

Level 5: Competence which involves the application of a significant range of fundamental principles and complex techniques across a wide and often unpredictable variety of contexts. Very substantial personal autonomy and often significant responsibility for the work of others and for the allocation of substantial resources feature strongly, as do accountabilities for analysis, diagnosis, strategic design, planning, execution and evaluation.

The higher the level of qualification the more of the following characteristics it is likely to have:
- Breadth and range of competence;
- Complexity and difficulty;
- Requirements for special skills;
- Emphasis on the role of knowledge and understanding.

In addition, higher-level qualifications place an emphasis on the ability to:
- Undertake specialized activities;
- Transfer competences from one context or work environment to another;
- Innovate and cope with nonroutine activities;
- Organize and plan work;
- Supervise others.

Since 1991, there has been an increasing emphasis on expanding coverage in the technical, professional, and managerial areas, where the development of NVQ/SVQs is more complex and consultation often takes much longer. No sector of industry or the professions has backed away from this initiative—though some have followed it with more enthusiasm than others. It is also worth noting that this is not simply a British initiative. Though the details differ, similar national vocational qualification initiatives are being developed in other European countries, and outside Europe in countries like the USA and Australia.

While only 3% (7 out 249) NVQs were above Level 3 in 1991, the figure for the start of 1995 was nearly 10%: 73 out of 750 (Ellis, 1995). While most of these are at Level 4, we are beginning to see a steady growth of Level 5 qualifications (e.g., in Management, Accountancy, Forensic Science, Analytical Chemistry and Engineering, Design and Construction). We have also seen a considerable amount of work addressing issues relating to the nature of professional competence (e.g., Eraut & Cole, 1993), the links between higher education and professional bodies, and the design and delivery of such qualifications (e.g., Otter, 1991; Mitchell, 1992; Walton, 1994).

The BPS Applied Psychology Standards Project

In 1990 the British Psychological Society (BPS) expressed its willingness to participate in one of a small group of pilot studies examining the feasibility of developing NVQ/SVQs at the highest level (Level 5) in the NCVQ framework. At that time, very little work had been carried out on higher-level (Level 4 and 5) qualifications. In 1991, of the 249 NVQs then available only 7 were at Level 4 and none at Level 5.

During 1991/92, the BPS managed a pilot project funded by the UK Government’s Employment Department which aimed to provide an initial functional map describing the various occupational specialisms covered by applied psychology. The project was innovative in using repertory grid methodology to elicit practitioners’ constructs concerning the nature of their work as professional applied psychologists. The outcomes from the study, however, did not succeed in mapping and describing the functional competences of applied psychology. The description which emerged was fragmentary and was seen as failing to capture the essential psychological nature of the practice of applied psychology.
following this, a further workshop was held in 1993 to explore the methodological issues and problems raised by the first study. This workshop sought to specify appropriate ways to identify and represent the core features of the competence required to perform effectively as a professional applied psychologist.

Valuable lessons concerning methodology learnt from the first project and the follow-up workshop provided the basis for a set of recommendations as to how we should proceed. In particular, future work needed to provide adequate coverage of the functions performed by applied psychologists, take account of the breadth and depth of the knowledge base which informs practice, and capture the essential "psychological-ness" of the functions performed by applied psychologists. Thus, not only does the description of competence need to be complete (in terms of coverage), it also needs to discriminate between the practice of psychologists and that of other professionals working in similar areas.

The Applied Psychology Standards Development Project

In November 1993, a submission to the Employment Department (ED) was prepared requesting funding for a second attempt at developing a functional analysis of applied psychology. A Consultative Working Group (CWG) was established as the de facto "lead body" for standards in applied psychology.

It was important to the profession, to those employing psychologists, and to those who are recipients of psychological services that this group fully represented the broad range of employment interests relating to applied psychology. To this end, the BPS set up a Steering Committee, with the present author as Chair, consisting of representatives of all the applied psychology subgroups of the BPS. Each subgroup (Clinical Psychology, Counselling Psychology, Criminological and Legal Psychology, Educational Psychology, Occupational Psychology, Health Psychology, and Clinical Neuropsychology) is represented by one person on this Steering Committee.

This Steering Committee forms the BPS's representation on the CWG itself. The CWG also includes representatives of employers of psychologists, consumers of the services provided by psychologists, and other bodies with interests in the work of psychologists.

The Project's Aims and Objectives

There are three main stages in the development of NVQ/SVQs:

1. Development of the Standards: the functional mapping of the occupational sector and the specification of the occupational standards as Elements of Competence defined by assessable performance criteria, specifications of the range of variables to which the criteria apply and of the knowledge and understanding which is necessary for competence.
2. The design of qualifications from the Standards and specification of Evidence Requirements.
3. The development of Assessment Guidance and the piloting of qualification procedures.

These stages are the responsibility of the relevant lead body (i.e., the CWG). The third stage is carried out together with one or more awarding bodies. So far, the first of these stages has been completed and work has commenced on the second.

The project objectives for the first stage were:

1. To verify the scope of psychological occupations;
2. To analyze roles and function, in all their dimensions, of practitioner psychologists;
3. To clarify commonalities and specificities among the different applied psychology occupations;
4. To propose a framework of occupational standards, including performance criteria and range, for all areas of applied psychology;
5. To engage practitioners, their representative associations, their employers and consumers in the process of standards development and in validating the occupational standards;
6. To establish effective links with other related standards development projects; and
7. To inform practitioners about the concepts, benefits, and processes of standards setting and the potential benefits of NVQ/SVQs.

Work on standards development commenced in April 1994, and the first full draft of the standards was completed by the end of September 1995. The methodology used incorporated the following key features:

- Expert working groups (each of about ten people) were nominated by each of the BPS's specialist subsystems.
- Members of these working groups were used to form both inter-specialism groups (i.e., mixed) and specialist groups.
- Inter-specialism groups were used to develop standards which are generic to applied psychology.
The outputs generated by the working groups were structured by the project’s team of consultants to fit the standards format.

Specialist groups were then used to check those standards for “fit” to their specialism, and to develop specialist performance criteria and definitions of range of application where necessary.

The same cohort of subject area experts was used throughout the project to generate the standards.

This approach differed markedly from that adopted for the 1991 pilot project, which was cross-sectional rather than longitudinal in its sampling methodology. The current project also adopted an approach to functional analysis which worked from the identification of key purposes, through a breakdown of this into key roles, and then disaggregation of each key role into a set of subfunctions. The earlier project had tried using repertory grid techniques to identify functions.

Development of the draft standards was followed by a formal consultation process, during which individuals, subsystem committees within the BPS, and relevant outside bodies were invited to comment on the standards using a structured questionnaire. Feedback from this was used to revise the standards where appropriate and identify key issues for future resolution through further workshop activity.

The outcome of this process is a substantial document containing specifications of over 100 elements in terms of performance criteria, range of coverage, performance evidence, and knowledge evidence. These elements are grouped into 38 Units which, in turn, are grouped under six key roles. These are:

1. Develop, implement and maintain personal and professional standards and ethical practice;
2. Apply psychological and related methods, concepts, models, theories, and knowledge;
3. Research and develop new and existing methods, concepts, models, theories, and instruments in psychology;
4. Communicate psychological knowledge, principles, methods, needs, and policy requirements;
5. Manage the provision of psychological systems and services; and
6. Train and develop staff in psychological principles, practices, and services.

How Is Knowledge and Understanding Incorporated into Occupational Standards?

The concept of competence used in occupational standards, and which forms the basis for the specification of NVQ/SVQs, is defined as:

“The ability to apply knowledge, understanding and skills in performing to the standards required in employment. This includes solving problems and meeting changing demands” (Beaumont, 1996).

While it is recognized that one could not achieve competence without knowledge and understanding, standards are specified in terms of performance criteria which relate to outcomes. It follows that knowledge and understanding are not explicitly specified by performance criteria, as the latter are outcome statements.

While the importance of knowledge and understanding are widely acknowledged, a key issue in the formulation of occupational standards, and of related qualifications, is how to describe the knowledge and understanding required for competence within the format of a system which defines competence in terms of outcomes – rather than the inputs or processes which lead to or underpin those outcomes (Employment Department, 1993). A considerable amount of research has been carried out, in connection with the work on occupational standards development, on the problems of knowledge identification, specification, and assessment over the past 10 years (Mitchell & Bartram, 1995). In order to “unpack” the implications of the performance criteria for knowledge and understanding, methods of specifying knowledge and understanding as an adjunct to the standards have had to be developed. Such specifications serve two important functions:

• They ensure that the requirements for evidence of competence are clear and sufficient to ensure that the performance criteria are properly assessed.
• They help inform the learning and training processes which are needed for the development of competence.

A number of approaches to describing knowledge in occupational standards work has been developed. Building on the work of Mitchell and Bartram (1996), in the Applied Psychology project we are developing a classification model based on four main dimensions for representing the description of knowledge and understanding.
The first dimension distinguishes between three broad types of knowledge:

- "Knowing what": Data, facts, and information – knowledge of facts about things and processes, that enable a person to apply competences in a fully appropriate way.
- "Knowing how": Methods, techniques, procedures – knowing how to do things, how to apply techniques and procedures (e.g., how to analyze data, how to conduct an interview).
- "Knowing why": Theories, principles, models – understanding the rationale, the reasons why. This is particularly important in professional practice and one’s choice of methods and the interpretation of information may be driven by the theoretical perspectives which are being adopted. Awareness of this is an important part of a professional’s reflectivity.

"Knowing how" and "knowing why" also cover meta-cognitive skills: knowing how and when to apply principles, methods, techniques, and skills.

The second dimension concerns the extent, the scope, or coverage of knowledge:

- Domain knowledge is defined as knowledge which applies across more than one Unit of competence. It is also sometimes referred to as “over-arching” knowledge, as it provides the conceptual structuring which ties together the various elements and units of competence.
- Unit-level knowledge is that which is of relevance to only one Unit of competence.
- Element-level knowledge relates only to single outcome statements within a Unit.

The third dimension considers the extent to which the range of applicability of knowledge and understanding varies. It may be:

- Occupation-specific knowledge, relating to the whole sector (i.e., held in common by all applied psychologists);
- Role-specific knowledge, relating to a generic role within the sector (e.g., knowledge required for competence in clinical psychology which may not be required for competence in occupational or other areas of application); or
- Context- or job-specific knowledge, relating to an individual’s particular job (e.g., local knowledge acquired through organizational socialization processes).

For standards-based qualifications, we are directly concerned with the first two of these. While the standards do not directly address the last type of knowledge, they do so indirectly, through the fact that the performance criteria cover the need to acquire whatever context- and job-specific knowledge is necessary in order to operate at a competent level.

Finally, the fourth dimension focuses on the distinction between required and prerequisite knowledge. Prerequisite, or “enabling,” knowledge is that which would need to have been acquired to provide the underpinnings needed to embark on training and development designed to meet the competence standards. This corresponds to what the BPS describes as the “Graduate Basis for Registration.” This is the level of the Bachelors (Honours) degree in psychology, defined in breadth and depth as equivalent to the BPS Qualifying Examination. It is deemed to underpin all the standards, and to embody the core knowledge and skills and conceptual frameworks which enable the acquisition of higher-level knowledge and skills in applied psychology.

This classification provides a useful structure for specifying and describing knowledge within standards documents, which is sensitive to at least some of the complexity underlying the relationship between knowledge, understanding, and skills on the one hand, and competence at work on the other.

The Delivery of Qualifications Based on Occupational Standards

The Role of Awarding Bodies

NCVQ does not award qualifications itself. Rather, it accredits Awarding Bodies to do so. An Awarding Body may either be a single organization or a consortium. In order to be accredited by NCVQ as an Awarding Body, an organization needs to:

- Have adequate support from employers and providers of training;
- Have adequate marketing capability and plans to ensure optimum take-up of NVQs and Units;
- Demonstrate that adequate measures have been taken to handle any potential conflict of interests (e.g., where the Awarding Body is also a provider of training, or is a lead body);
- Show how it will provide national access through a network of assessment centers;
- Demonstrate capability in the range of assessment required; and
Defining and Assessing Competence for NVQ/SVQs

To define a qualification, it is necessary to draw from the standards those Units which together form a coherent whole and which relate to the jobs people do. That is done by: (a) selection of that subset of the units contained in the occupational standards which relate to the jobs in question; (b) specification of the limits (in terms of breadth) on how those functions are performed; and (c) a decision about the level of competence implied by the elements, performance criteria, and range statements contained in the Units.

Assessment within the NVQ/SVQ model is based on the concept of obtaining “sufficient evidence” for a safe inference of an individual’s competence to be made against the standards. Assessors both have to be competent in assessment procedures and have expertise in the relevant occupational area. The decision-making process is one of evidence accumulation, with the process continuing until the assessor is able to make a positive decision with a reasonable degree of confidence. This confidence is based on evidence which:

- Is of sufficient quality and quantity to minimize the chances of attributing competence to someone who does not actually meet the standards; and
- Satisfies the requirements for coverage of the occupational domain which are specified in the range statements attached to each element of competence.

Assessment of vocational competence recognizes that the best sources of evidence come from the practical and real demonstration of what has been learned. Hence the emphasis in assessment for NVQ/SVQs on the assessment of products and behavior in or close to the working environment. Recognizing that the best evidence of work assessment lies in the workplace is not a complete solution, as all working environments are different and the quality of judgment of individual assessors is likely, undirected, to vary considerably.

It is for this reason that clear criteria for assessment need to be introduced, and also a system of verifying that the assessments made are valid and conform to a national norm. This is achieved by providing training and guidelines for the assessors themselves (to standards defined by the Training & Development Lead Body), and by specifying in some detail what evidence must be obtained from candidates.

The Standards for assessment purposes are therefore written as a set of requirements for evidence collection:

1. Firstly the performance criteria, which tell the candidate what he or she is required to do to be competent to perform. However, competent performance in one set of circumstances may be insufficient for a judgment to be made that they can handle all similar situations as well. For example: Competence in the use of a sample of analysis of variance designs in the analysis of research data may only indicate competence in the use of analysis of variance. Competence in the use of factor analysis, structural equation modeling, etc., form part of a wider range of techniques for which it may be necessary to obtain further evidence.

2. So, secondly, the Standards specify the range across which performance is to be assessed. This is represented by a list of variables (such as “methods of statistical analysis”) with each variable being specified in terms of critical “range classes” (e.g., analysis of variance, multiple regression). Evidence that the performance criteria can be met must cover each one of these range classes if sufficient evidence is to be obtained. Within each range class, however, evidence can be sampled. For both practical and theoretical reasons, ensuring coverage of the range involves the use of questioning about relevant areas of knowledge to complement the evidence obtained from observation of performance (e.g., using a computer package to carry out some data analysis) and examination of products (e.g., research project reports).

3. So, thirdly and finally, the Standards specify the performance evidence and the knowledge evidence necessary to support judgments about the candidate’s competence across the range for a particular element.

Assembling Evidence of Competence

The Standards define how the candidate should perform, in what areas, and suggest what evidence should be collected. The task of assessment is to examine the evidence and make a judgment. Each candidate works with an assessor to plan the most cost-effective way of accumulating sufficient evidence of competence. However, it is the candidate’s responsibility to gather the evidence. This can come from current work activities or from material relating to past activities including periods of study.

The process may be summarized as:

- Identifying and assembling evidence that may be relevant for assessment purposes or arranging for the as-
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Assessment

• Assessor to be present if it is a process that is being assessed (the candidate does this but will probably first discuss it with the assessor);

• Judging whether the evidence of performance meets the standards described in the performance criteria across the range (the assessor does this when he/she judges that the candidate is ready);

• Deciding whether the evidence is sufficient to demonstrate that the candidate is competent to perform the activities being assessed, or whether more evidence is required;

• Deciding what additional evidence of the candidate’s knowledge and understanding of the activities assessed is required to ensure all the contingencies as listed in the performance criteria are covered; and

• Deciding what additional demonstrations or additional knowledge and understanding is required to reasonably infer that the candidate could, if required to do so, perform over the range of conditions specified in the range statement.

Data generated from one project by a candidate may provide sufficient evidence or source material to satisfy the assessment requirements of several of the elements within the Standards.

The Relationship Between NCVQ Level 5 and Professional Chartered Psychologist Status

In relation to current qualification procedures in applied psychology, the definition of NCVQ Level 5 competence and the requirements for BPS Chartered status are sufficiently close for the attainment of a Level 5 qualification in applied psychology to indicate the competence necessary for achieving Chartered status. Chartered status is normally attained after at least 6 years’ study and supervised practice, and currently defines the qualification level for professional psychologists.

While the requirements for Chartered status are not expressed in quite the same form or detail as NCVQ Level 5 (see above), they do include the requirement for a person to be able to function without supervision at a professional level of competence. Indeed, the Level 5 definition provides us with the potential to be rather more specific and clearer about what we mean by “professional competence.” In many respects, a well-designed competence-based qualification will provide a far more transparent link to the acquisition of practitioner competence within a profession, as the qualification rests on evidence of competence to practice in a real work setting. Links between traditional academic qualifications and entry into professional practice are far more difficult to justify as they tend to involve different and often conflicting sets of criteria.

Unit Accreditation and Its Relationship to Continuing Professional Development (or Post Qualification Training) Provision

One’s professional development as an applied psychologist starts, in the UK, from the foundation of the Graduate Basis for Registration (GBR: the criteria used by the BPS to accredit undergraduate degree programs) and develops through the acquisition of practitioner competence and a commitment to maintain that competence. At a point along that development path, we recognize that a person has reached a point at which they are competent to practice at a professional level without supervision. This is the point at which they can become registered as a Chartered Psychologist. However, development does not stop there. It continues for a number of reasons:

• To maintain a level of competence sufficient for unsupervised practice (i.e., to keep up with developments and changes in one’s own field);

• To deepen understanding and expertise in one’s specialist area of practice; and

• To broaden one’s coverage of applied psychology, either within one’s area of specialism or laterally into a new specialism.

The profession needs mechanisms to ensure both that people are only registered as applied psychologists when they provide sufficient evidence of competence to practice and of an ongoing commitment to at least maintain their competence throughout their professional career. It is, however, to the benefit of both individuals and the profession to encourage people to do more than that: to develop and extend both the range and depth of their expertise and the ways in which they can contribute to the development of the profession and society.

While it may be possible to outline general requirements for continuing professional development, by its very nature the detailed content will be idiosyncratic. It would be a rash individual who tried to plan the details of their lifetime learning and expect to stick to it for the next 40 or so years. In practice, Continuing Professional Development or Post Qualification Training (CPD) is opportunistic and affected by short-term goals. However, its cumulative effect is to define for each individual a developing profile of competence. While we may, for convenience, “fit” people into membership of particular
specialist divisions within the BPS and attach labels such as “occupational psychologist” or “clinical psychologist,” or attempt to specify new specialisms (such as sports psychology or health psychology), the diversity of individual profiles of competence will tend to increase and blur these distinctions as people develop through their professional careers.

Institutionalized CPD systems can provide a framework for describing and recording the achievements of lifetime learning, mechanisms for enabling access to learning opportunities, mentoring, sponsoring of training events, and so on. They may also provide the means whereby professional societies can stipulate the evidence they require of ongoing commitment to professional competence from those who seek to remain registered as practitioners.

NVQ/SVQ Units provide a useful “currency” for CPD, where CPD involves going beyond just maintaining current levels of competence. Where one is attempting to extend one’s range or depth of competence, acquisition of an NVQ/SVQ Unit provides a discrete means of formally recognizing this. The range of Units emerging from the current project, together with the variations in terms of knowledge and range associated with some of them, the development of specialist Units within psychology, and the availability of Units in allied occupational areas ensure that there is an extremely rich, diverse set of options for CPD.

While we would hope to see CPD systems accepting all sources of evidence of ongoing professional commitment, NVQ/SVQ Units will provide a particularly useful “currency” for this. They also provide a well-standardized means of describing individual profiles of competence or for specifying medium-term professional development action plans.

Conclusions

The Benefits of Developing Occupational Standards

The process of developing occupational standards for applied psychology has a number of significant benefits for the BPS, its members, and the public, other than as a basis for developing qualifications such as Level 5 NVQ/SVQs:

- Standards make explicit what it is that psychologists do that others do not and cannot do. Through the development of standards we will be able, for the first time, clearly to lay claim to certain areas of occupational expertise. At present, in many areas of practice (clinical, occupational, educational) we see market forces eroding our former domains. We cannot rely on academic qualifications and appeals to mystery and mystique if we are to defend our territory in the future.
- As a corollary to the above, standards provide a basis for informing others about what we are and what we do. They make explicit the competence we lay claim to.
- Standards are useful for self-assessment and for appraisal and the identification of development needs. Chartered psychologists are expected to operate only within their areas of expertise. Often, it is difficult for people to know whether they are doing this or not. Standards provide a basis for appraising one’s own areas of competence.
- By identifying areas in which we are not yet competent, standards provide a basis for Continuing Professional Development. When structured as qualifications, standards would provide a means of choosing between vertical development (i.e., the accumulation of further optional Units within a given specialism) and lateral transfer (i.e., the obtaining of the relevant mandatory and optional Units for a specialism other than one’s own).
- Standards provide the basis for judging the equivalence of qualifications from other countries. Issues of coverage are readily dealt with by mapping the areas covered by the other qualifications onto our standards.
- Standards inform the development of training courses and provide a basis for course accreditation criteria.

Applied psychologists work in the same occupational areas as many other professionals and nonprofessionals. As the current functional analysis is showing, what distinguishes us is not so much what we do, but rather our approach to dealing with issues, problems, and situations, whether they arise in relation to health care, the operation of organizations, education, or elsewhere.

While our great strength lies in the unique contribution we make through our ability to bring to a wide range of situations the particular perspective, approaches, and techniques of psychology, herein also lies our vulnerability. Superficially, many of the things we do could appear to be done by others. For example, occupational psychologists operate within the domains of management consultants, ergonomists, trainers, personnel professionals, counselors, and various others. As each of these groups develops its own occupational standards, so will increasingly large chunks of the occupational map be filled in with colors other than those of “psychology.”
The BPS is, insofar as Level 5 qualifications are concerned, at the front of the field. Its Applied Psychology project is one of a small group of pioneer "exemplar" projects. As such, we are in a position to help define and set the agenda for Level 5, to help ensure that professional qualifications actually do embody the critical features of professionalism, ethics, and values, and do reflect the key importance of the knowledge and skills associated with a particular "discipline." By working at the leading-edge of the field we have been able to influence and help set the agenda for Level 5 qualifications in the UK. As we move towards the end of the second phase of the project, the BPS will have to decide whether to proceed with developing and piloting formal standards-based qualifications. Whether or not we end up with NVQ/SVQs in applied psychology remains to be seen. However, the process of attempting to derive standards which "define" professional competence is a fascinating endeavor in its own right. It raise issues of central interest and concern for work and organizational psychologists, about the nature of professional work and professionalism and the degree to which we can capture such characteristics through methods of occupational analysis.

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