Glass Qualifications Authority

Centre/Organisation	Glass Qualifications Authority with RAC Autowindscreens
Programme(s)	NVQ L2 Automotive Glazing
Awarding Body(s)	GQA
Learner numbers	n/a
Contact details	Mick Clayton

Background

The Glass Qualifications Authority (GQA) is the specialist awarding body for the glass industries which covers all organisations involved in the use of glass from manufacturing to installation of double glazing to replacement windscreens. As a consequence many candidates are working in scattered workplaces such as windscreen replacement centres or on-site with glazing installation companies. For this reason, many sites may only have one candidate and managing this efficiently and effectively became an issue for GQA and for their partner companies managing the assessment and verification process.

How they started

In 2005, GQA began to investigate the use of PDAs for assessment. Their aim was to use them to capture evidence of performance both in the form of workplace competence and in confirming underpinning knowledge. Most candidates are taking one of GQAs specialist NVQ programmes either as part of an apprenticeship or train to gain programmes. GQA has invested in a bespoke software system that allows assessors to capture evidence on a PDA and to upload it to a central server using GPRS or 3G mobile technology. The system generates an electronic candidate portfolio, compiled by the assessor in conjunction with the candidate, using a PDA. The application can be pre-loaded onto the various types of PDA available and makes use of touch screen technology, giving an easy to navigate system with the optional upload to the web server while on location (i.e. on building sites or in automotive glass replacement centres) or via a cradle linked to a desktop PC or Laptop with an internet connection. All aspects of the Automotive Glazing qualification as detailed within the GQA candidate booklet are recorded on the system and are easily accessed by the assessor. Compilation of evidence through photographs and the evidence list is carried out as the assessment is carried out, with no requirement for paper or further activities after the assessment. All evidence and assessment decisions are time and date stamped with electronic signatures required at the beginning and end

of every assessment session using the PDA screen and stylus. The electronic portfolio can be accessed as a read only document by anyone with the relevant access privileges, giving portfolio viewing to the candidate, the assessor, the internal verifier and the AB as appropriate.

The system is built in such a way that upon evidence sign off, cross-referencing to the qualification requirements is automatically carried out. GQA worked with occupational experts to develop the evidence lists (ensuring full coverage of the job role) and carry out the cross referencing. In addition to the intelligent cross-referencing, assessors can also manually cross reference to the qualification requirements if they feel that, in the process of carrying out a certain activity, the candidate has also provided additional evidence that can be assigned to other criteria within the qualification.

The mobile system has an IV present function for sampling purposes, whilst remote sampling can be carried out by both IV and EV with all actions being recorded and available for reporting.

The server contains the full candidate portfolio, including details of previous visits, outstanding issues and other details of the programme being followed and the assessors are able to update their PDAs with this information prior to each visit. The uploaded information (shown below) is a direct copy of that captured by the PDA on-site, including images, signatures etc.

Progress to date

A trial of the system was undertaken during 2006/7. The first candidates completed their portfolio on the system but paperwork was also completed to provide a back-up. By the end of 2007/early 2008 some candidates had used the system to fully complete their qualifications with no paper back-up.

GQA is convinced that using the mobile technology will bring significant benefits to its operations and that of its centres. In particular its work to date suggests:

- Employers prefer the system because "down time" for employees is reduced
- Assessors prefer the reduced levels of paperwork
- The system is more efficient and needs less time overall for the assessment and verification process
- The system is safer to use in challenging locations where coping with paper is more difficult
- There is some evidence that candidates prefer this method of portfolio building and at least one example of a candidate who was not prepared to complete a qualification if they had needed to do so on paper

Next Steps

GQA has invested significantly in the system and are convinced that this will be the way forward for their centres.

They are now working with their centres to increase the number of users following the initial, successful trial project.