



**WASTE MANAGEMENT COMPETENCE IN  
A NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT**

## **A NEW APPROACH FOR DEVELOPED AND DEVELOPING COUNTRIES**

By

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The English dictionary describes “competent” as “having the ability or authority to do what is required” and competence as being competent. Using this simple definition in the context of waste management, how does an individual become competent? Knowledge and skills may need to be acquired and training has a role to ensure someone has the “ability or authority”. The other aspect is to know “what is required” and hence standards or benchmarks have to be established as a means of measuring and improving waste management performance.

### **DEVELOPMENT OF WASTE MANAGEMENT COMPETENCE IN THE UNITED KINGDOM**

The UK has pioneered the development of technical competence as part of waste management legislation issued in 1990 and 1994, to achieve consistent standards across the entire waste management industry in the UK. The Government established the Waste Management Industry Training and Advisory Board (WAMITAB) in 1989. One of WAMITAB’s early tasks was to develop a scheme for demonstrating competence, this comprised the preparation of operational (occupational) standards for managers of waste management facilities. The standards set out the technical competence requirements for managers by facility type, for example landfill sites, treatment operations, transfer stations, civic amenity sites accepting householder wastes and small incineration plants.

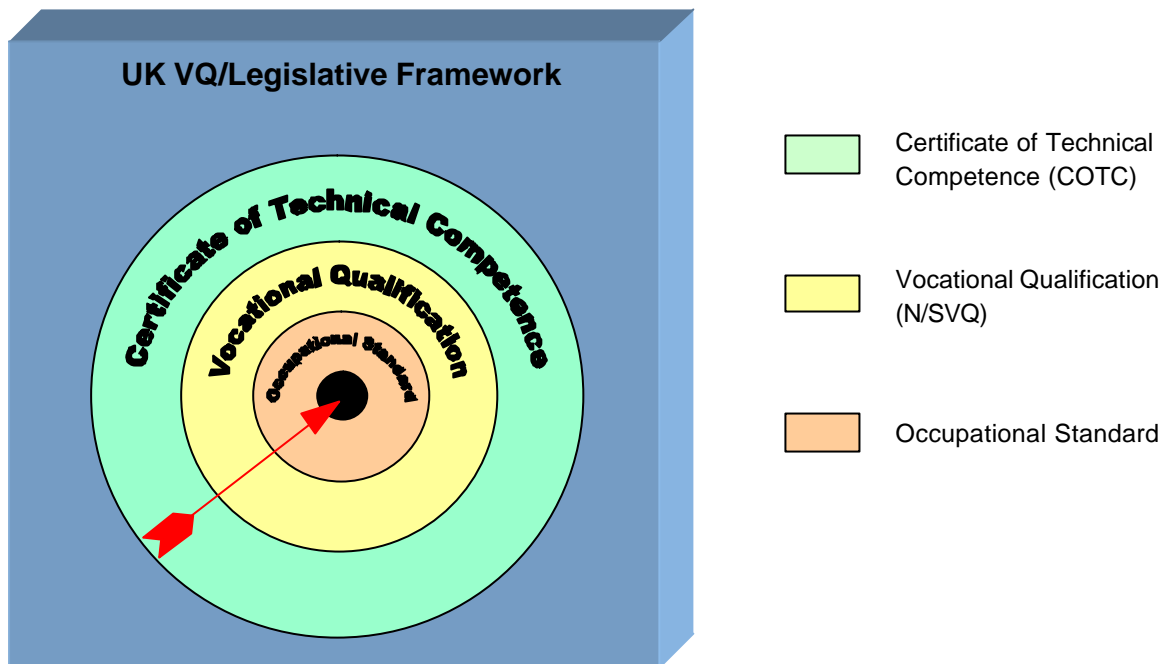
The occupational standard therefore represents “Best Practice” in the management of the facility and provides the means for ensuring that people have the ability (competence) to do what is required (occupational standard).

#### **Statutory Qualifications**

The structure of the standards is based upon the vocational qualification (VQ) system at Level 3 and 4, and managers achieving the vocational qualification are eligible for the award of a Certificate of Technical Competence (COTC), appropriate to the given type of facility. The COTC can only be issued by WAMITAB and provides evidence to the Regulatory Authorities that the waste management licence is in the hands of a technically competent person. Key elements of the scheme are illustrated in *Figure 1*.

#### **Non-statutory qualifications**

In addition to the statutory qualifications WAMITAB has now extended the range of qualifications and competence in the industry. Typically at N/SVQ Levels 1 and 2 these cover activities such as refuse collection, landfill, incineration and treatment.



**Figure 1 Components of the Framework for Demonstrating Technical Competence**

## **EUROPEAN AND INTERNATIONAL DRIVING FORCES**

European Waste Management Directives have the objective of setting and harmonising standards across Europe. Article 8 (a) (ii) of the Council Directive on the landfill of waste requires that an authority does not issue a landfill permit unless it is satisfied that:

*“the management of the landfill site will be in the hands of a natural person who is technically competent to manage the site, professional and technical development and training of landfill operators and staff are required;”*

Member States will therefore have to develop appropriate mechanisms to ensure compliance with this aspect of the Landfill Directive.

Developing countries often have comprehensive legislation but relatively weak enforcement and training regimes. There is therefore a need for waste management operatives to gain practical skills at an appropriate level, this will improve the competence of people and enable countries to move to a more controlled waste management regime. For most developing countries the European waste management operational standards are aspirational targets that will only be reached in a step-wise process which recognises the cultural/legislative characteristics and technical capabilities of the people concerned.

## **BENEFITS FROM A VOCATIONAL APPROACH TO GAINING COMPETENCE**

VQs are about competencies, this means they test someone’s ability to do a job, rather than how well they know the theory behind it. The key is therefore to develop meaningful occupational standards. People who are working towards a VQ are assessed in the workplace, not in the classroom or the examination hall. There is a range of benefits associated with a vocational approach, VQs can help employers to:

- Improve the organisation's performance;
- Develop an adaptable workforce;
- Motivate their employees;
- Show how they are committed to quality and want to "invest in people";
- Measure people's skills and experience;
- Find the right employees;
- Recognise people's achievements;
- Identify the training needs they may have and set training targets; and
- Choose the best type of training and assessment.

Having introduced competence as part of a statutory scheme for waste management licensing, employees in the industry can now see clear benefits in terms of skills, competence and employability. For those employees with practical skills the vocational qualifications put practice first and foremost.

### **MEETING THE NEEDS OF DEVELOPED AND DEVELOPING COUNTRIES**

The model for demonstrating competence relies on using the established VQ framework that has been developed in the UK since 1986. This VQ framework may not exist in some countries, although many are now showing an interest in developing similar frameworks. Even without the VQ framework the occupational standard can be used as the basic building block for improving waste management skills, countries will need to tailor the standard to meet local circumstances in terms of legislation, ability to cope with technology and training provision. Assessing local practices against an occupational standard provides a clear picture of where basic skills or knowledge are lacking, this information can then be used to develop appropriate training programmes to fill the gaps in understanding.

In developing countries, although there may be an aspiration to meet internationally recognised standards, the reality is that these can usually only be achieved in a step-wise process. The occupational standard can therefore be adapted to meet local circumstances and can provide a benchmark for waste management operations. The standards can be progressively improved as skills, experience and knowledge are acquired.

### **FUTURE ROLE OF WAMITAB**

WAMITAB is the Awarding Body for the UK waste management industry and is currently examining the feasibility of developing a European Competence Standard based on the UK model. The next step is to extend these ideas and practices to countries outside Europe. WAMITAB is a gold member of the International Solid Wastes association (ISWA) and has established a web-site that has become an important "window" to facilitate development outside the UK.

**Contact WAMITAB for information on any of the issues identified above:**

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The Waste Management Industry Training and Advisory (WAMITAB) was formed in 1989 and determines and advises on policy and standards of education, qualifications and training for employees in the Waste Management Industry. WAMITAB is an independent body, which works with the UK waste management industry on education and training issues.