

DMQ Newsletter

March 2008



Accredited Witness questionnaire

As you know, DMQ sent out a questionnaire to all Accredited Witnesses last year, to find out what they think of the system and how it might be improved. We would like to thank all those who took the time to fill out the questionnaire and return it, and in particular those who provided comments and suggestions on the DSC2 system. This newsletter describes the responses we received, and what we intend to do now.

The main results

We sent out 384 questionnaires, and 201 were returned. The key messages for DMQ are that most of you think the system works well, but there are some areas of dissatisfaction. Most AWs think that the standard of assessment is about right, some think the system is too difficult, others think it is too easy!

A few AWs are not Trained Hunters and should consider gaining that qualification. A significant number did not have a copy of the AW Guide, a new guide is available through your Assessor and changes to the DMQ website should help to make things clear. Over 70% of AWs can provide stalking opportunities but fewer than half of those who responded charge for completing a portfolio. We would like to make it clear that DMQ have no control over, nor do we gain any benefit from, any charges made by AWs.

Most AWs have regular contact with their sponsoring assessor but some AWs were unsure who their sponsor is or have had no contact in the last year. We would urge AWs to contact their Assessor or Assessment Centre to confirm that they still wish to remain in the scheme.

Most AWs check that candidates have spoken to their portfolio assessor, and brief candidates before a witnessed stalk. Some AWs do not keep notes of the stalks they witness although they are strongly advised to do so.

A number of additional questions were suggested for inclusion in the AW guide, and these will be incorporated in the next edition. There were numerous suggestions or questions on the DSC2 system. These covered paperwork, asking questions, the time witnessing takes, whether or not the same witness should be used for all 3 stalks, assessor and witness standards, level of candidate experience, quality control, and communication. The area that generated most comment was the time it takes to complete an individual cull record: most AWs take more than 1 hour to complete them; with about 30% taking more than 2 hours.

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DMQ website

The new DMQ website is now up and running :

www.dmq.org.uk

This Newsletter is compiled and edited by:

Peter Anderson

Drove Cottage

Low Road

Westmuir

Kirriemuir

Angus

DD8 5LN

01575 575792

deermanager@tesco.net

Signing the portfolio

In the latest version of the portfolio (Edition 5) we have tried to minimise the signing required. If all the PCs for an element have been witnessed, the witness can sign their name and the date once across the boxes for all of the PCs. Some AWs have their name and address pre-printed on labels to reduce the writing required in the sections where these details are required.

The number of questions

We have made clear in the v5 portfolio where questions need to be asked, and where they only need to be asked if required to provide supporting evidence for a PC. You do not have to record a question and answer for every PC, however there are PCs where a recorded question and answer is the most common, or only, way to gather evidence:

- PC1.2 must be a pre-stalk question;
- PC2.6 is nearly always a question since most deer are not wounded;
- PC3.4 must be a question if no abnormality was found; and
- PCs 4.3-4.5 may require questioning if the candidate is operating away from their own facilities, or have none and transport shot deer directly to a game dealer.

Many other questions might be asked during an outing but not all of them need to be recorded - they are simply used to give the AW confidence in the candidate's ability/knowledge. It has to be said, however, that the greater the number of questions that are recorded the stronger the candidate's evidence and the less an Assessor is likely to bother you for clarification.

Some AWs have pre-printed questions on labels, so that they can use whatever ones are appropriate for the circumstances of the stalk. We will provide a list of questions on the DMQ website so that you can download them and put them on labels if you wish.

Some AWs feel that questions covered in DSC1 and the Trained Hunter assessment do not need to be asked. However, candidates are given a random set of questions in their DSC1 assessment and may not have been asked, for example, "what is the minimum legal calibre for the deer we are stalking today?"

The size of the portfolio

DMQ decided at the start that Deer Stalking Certificate Level 2 (DSC2) should follow the National Occupational Standards, and be aligned with modules CU49 and CU50 in the Gamekeeping NVQ. This decision determines the number and content of Performance Criteria (PCs) in the DSC2 portfolio.

The number of witnesses

There were conflicting views here. Some AWs think that candidates should have the same witness for all 3 stalks, others believe that all stalks should be witnessed by an AW (and possibly different AWs). DMQ wish to ensure that there is access and opportunity for all, so we do not wish to place unnecessary restriction on who can (or cannot) witness for DSC2. However, to maintain standards, we do specify that the equivalent of at least one cull record must be completed by an AW. For the other cull records we will only accept Credible Witnesses i.e. holders of DSC2 who have sufficient experience or, for relevant PCs, an appropriate industry qualification.

Assessor questioning

Some AWs felt that the manner in which assessors asked questions appeared to raise doubts over the AWs skills and knowledge or that assessors gave different interpretations or had different approaches to their task. DMQ are clear that the role of the assessor is to help candidates demonstrate the necessary levels of competence. To do this they have to check that the evidence for all the PCs is current, authentic, relevant and sufficient to meet the standard. Assessors can only judge the quality of evidence from what they see in the portfolio and rely on both the candidate and witnesses to confirm that evidence and to fill in gaps. AWs can help in this by ensuring that the portfolio evidence that they contribute is as relevant and complete as possible, by keeping notes of outings and by being prepared to answer questions. At all times the aim is to ensure that the candidate has been given every chance to show competence, not to "catch" either the candidate or the witness out in any way. Deficiencies in evidence simply mean that the candidate will have to complete the relevant PCs again. Assessment Centres have regular assessor (and Internal Verifier) meetings, and DMQ hold Assessment Centre meetings, to discuss standards and assessor procedures.

Witness standards

A number of comments highlighted the difficulties Credible witnesses have as they do not have access to witness guidance nor have they been briefed.

To address this, we are going to publish guidance for all witnesses (and the AW briefing notes) on the DMQ website, where they can be accessed not only by AWs and Credible witnesses, but also by candidates.

There were suggestions for tighter monitoring of AWs, but the respondents may not be aware that there is monitoring at present – assessors are sent questionnaires for each portfolio. Where problems are brought to the attention of Assessment Centres, they are investigated and dealt with. If any problems are brought to the attention of DMQ, these are of course investigated.

It was suggested that AWs should be made aware of common mistakes, and of course we try to do that via Newsletters, briefings, and the website (including the FAQ section). We hope that publishing the witness guidance on the website will also help. The idea that there should be checks on AWs while they are witnessing was proposed. DMQ have considered this in the past but rejected it on the grounds of cost and practicality.

The role of the witness, in particular whether they can offer any assistance to the candidate, was raised. DMQ expect witnesses to do just that – witness against the DMQ standard. If a candidate does not perform a PC (or PCs) to the required standard, the witness should tell the candidate that the PC cannot be signed off and explain why. It is then up to the witness to decide whether to offer any training or advice – if so, it should be made clear to the candidate that the witnessing is over until the training is finished and that the relevant PC must be repeated under witnessed conditions i.e. with no further assistance.

Candidate standards

Many witnesses commented on the number of candidates who attempt DSC2 before they have gained enough experience to be competent. There were a number of suggestions including a minimum time period (or a minimum number of deer shot) between completing DSC1 and attempting DSC2. DMQ take the view that any such conditions are very difficult to apply, largely due to the highly varied experience of Level 1 candidates. It is the candidate's responsibility to judge when they are ready. We do advise candidates in the letter that accompanies the portfolio, and on the DMQ website, that they should gain some experience under the guidance of a competent individual before attempting witnessed stalks.

AWs should, of course, ask candidates about their level of experience before accepting them for witnessing. DMQ also encourage Assessors to provide DSC1 candidates with advice on this after they have completed their DSC1 assessment. We will also include some advice in the letter sent to candidates with their DSC1 certificate, and draw their attention to the schemes available to them to gain experience.

Charges for witnessing

A number of AWs wanted guidance on charging but this is a matter for individual witnesses to negotiate with prospective candidates. We do ask that any such charges are fair, that the candidate is made aware of any charges before they agree to undertaking a witnessed outing and that DMQ do not benefit in any way from such charges. Many AWs do not charge candidates for witnessing (though some seek expenses).

Some of your comments

“I do not think the system can be minimised, it must stay robust with a good dialogue between all concerned.”

“System is fine and to have it simpler and maintain standards might be the wrong way to go.”

“Please make it simpler – but make it 6 stalks.”

“I think the system is OK but I do find a problem if I am the last witness as a lot of questions have gone before me.”

“I think the current system is fine but please try and reduce the paperwork.”

“I feel the system is fairly good. The paperwork takes the time especially if the candidate has completed more than 1 stalk on the same day.”

“It's only an academic standard – experience seems irrelevant.”

“System is good but could do with being shorter.”

Quality control

AWs are key to quality control in the DSC 2 system. We are pleased to report that the vast majority of witnesses are competent, honest and fair. A number of witnesses that could not achieve the correct standards are now no longer accepted as witnesses. AWs are nominated by an assessor and should be regularly briefed by them, if this has not happened in your case you should contact your assessor or assessment centre.

Quality control procedures are built into the DSC2 system. Assessors have to satisfy themselves that there is sufficient, relevant, current and authentic evidence in the portfolio, usually contacting the candidate and each witness to help them confirm this. Each portfolio is checked by an Internal Verifier who ensures that the evidence is there and that the process has been followed properly. Each year every Assessment Centre has a visit from a DMQ External Verifier who checks that the DMQ standards and procedures are being complied with. In addition every candidate is given a form after their certificate has been awarded so that they can give free and frank feedback, the return percentage is very good.

Some AWs were concerned about how long it can be before they are contacted about a portfolio, others by

the time taken to assess and verify portfolios. As candidates have up to 3 years from the date of registration to complete their portfolio, it can take some time before the assessor sees a portfolio and makes contact with witnesses. This is a good reason for witnesses keeping their own notes (however brief) of witnessed stalks. The assessment and verification process requires contact with candidates and witnesses who may not be immediately available. Assessors and verifiers take holidays too, so the process following submission of even a straightforward portfolio can take up to 14 weeks. We have now made this clear on the website. The need for a common understanding between assessors, witnesses and candidates of what is required evidence for each PC was highlighted. To this end, DMQ encourage regular meetings between AWs and their sponsoring assessor. Some Assessment Centres bring AWs together for update meetings. We intend also to expand the FAQ section of the DMQ website, and in the Witness Guidance, to clarify what evidence is required.

Communication

This was the subject raised by most respondents, with most AWs looking for more direct communication from DMQ, with many suggesting a DMQ website. DMQ had been aware of the need to improve communication with all involved in DSC1 and DSC2 and so the website (www.dmq.org.uk) was developed. This went live after the questionnaire had been issued and we believe it addresses many of the criticisms. However we will continue to develop it to include other suggestions we have been given. For example, the website provides an opportunity to keep everyone informed of updates, changes (e.g. to DSC1 assessment) and matters of interest (such as Bluetongue or FMD). We have revised the old AW guide into a new DSC2 Witness Guide which we will publish on the website for candidates to see and all

witnesses to use. In that guide we will highlight any common problem areas. There are downloadable documents on the website that we will continue to update and add to. We are going to look into the potential uses and benefits of the suggestion that there should be a secure area on the website, which AWs could access via a password.

Many AWs asked for a regular Newsletter. DMQ issue newsletters such as this one when there is a need, and we will continue to do so as we know that some AWs do not have access to the Internet.

If you do not have access to the Internet and require a hard copy of the new DSC2 Witness Guide, please let your Assessor know, or you can complete and return the form below.

Request for a copy of the DSC2 Witness Guide

Send to: Please send me a copy of the new DSC2 witness guide.

DMQ Name AW number

Marford Mill

Rossett Address

Wrexham

LL12 0HL