

**National Occupational Standards**

# **Quality Criteria**

**with Explanatory Notes**

**UK Commission for Employment and Skills and the  
Alliance of Sector Skills Councils**

**Revised June 2011**

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## Introduction

National Occupational Standards (NOS) are statements of the standards of performance an individual must achieve when carrying out functions in the workplace, together with specifications of the underpinning knowledge and understanding.

NOS are *National* because they can be used in every part of the UK where the functions are carried out. NOS are *Occupational* because they describe the performance required of an individual when carrying out the functions in the workplace, ie in their occupation (as a plumber, police officer, production engineer etc). NOS are *Standards* because they are statements of effective performance which have been agreed by a representative sample of employers and other key stakeholders and approved by the UK NOS Panel.

These *Quality Criteria* have been developed by the UK Commission for Employment and Skills in partnership with Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) and other standards setting organisations<sup>1</sup>, the organisations responsible for developing, maintaining and implementing standards which specify the performance required of people in the workplace. Together with guidance publications and capacity and capability building activities, the Quality Criteria underpin the NOS Strategy 2010-2020, which places the responsibility for quality assurance of NOS firmly with SSCs and other standards setting organisations.

NOS provide UK-wide, demand-led, evidence-based benchmarks of competent performance which underpin vocational learning and development, apprenticeships and qualifications across all sectors, occupations and parts of the UK. They encompass the employability skills of self-management and organisation of work, thinking through and solving problems, working with others, communicating effectively and understanding the business.

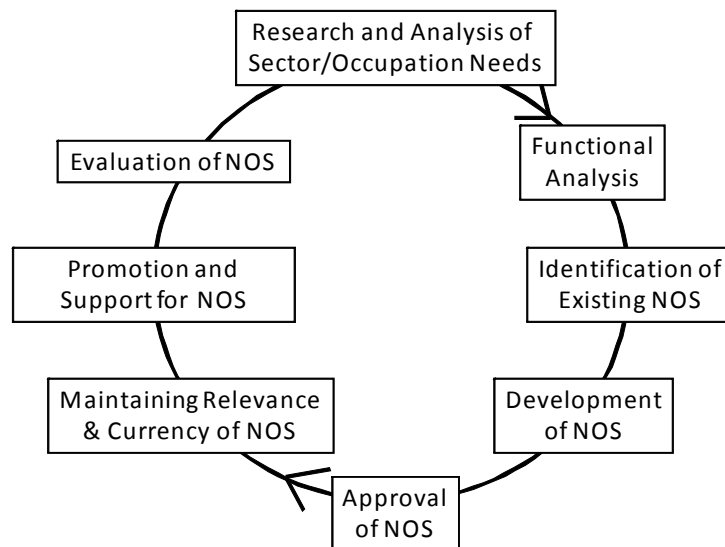
NOS are used by Awarding Organisations/Bodies (AO/Bs), Further Education (FE) and Higher Education (HE) institutions, professional bodies and private training organisations as benchmarks from which to develop programmes of learning and qualifications. They are also used by organisations to support human resource management and organisational development processes. In some sectors, demonstration of competence against NOS is required in order to run a business or practice a craft or profession.

These NOS Quality Criteria replace all previous criteria, guidance and quality assurance arrangements. They are designed to ensure the continuing availability of relevant, up-to-date NOS of consistent quality, accessible to users in a common format. They do not cover the development of vocational qualifications which is covered by guidance issued by the Qualification Regulators.

The Quality Criteria do not merely focus on what is required to produce quality NOS. Rather, they take a broader, whole-system approach designed to deliver the right NOS to meet the needs of sectors and occupations and ensure NOS are used effectively, both to develop the skills people need and to deliver significant business benefits, such as productivity, cost-reduction, profitability, quality, risk-reduction, safety and continuity of employment.

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<sup>1</sup> For brevity and consistency, the phrase "standards setting organisations" is used throughout this document to include all Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) and other standards setting organisations funded through the UK Commission for Employment and Skills.



**Figure 1: A Whole-System Approach to NOS**

The NOS Quality Criteria clearly state what standards setting organisations must do to ensure that quality NOS are available and that their full benefits are realised. Explanatory Notes are also provided to ensure common understanding and interpretation of the Quality Criteria. The Glossary clarifies the meaning of technical terms used throughout the document.

A complementary publication, *Guide to Developing NOS*, is also available and is designed to provide a sound basis for training and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) of those involved in the development, implementation and evaluation of NOS.

National Occupational Standards *for the Development, Implementation & Review of NOS*, specifying the performance required of staff and consultants working on NOS projects for standards setting organisations, were approved in September 2010. These NOS will assure individual competence in NOS development and implementation functions and will further underpin the integrity of the NOS system.

The NOS Database [www.ukstandards.org.uk](http://www.ukstandards.org.uk) has recently replaced the NOS Directory. . This Database simplifies the process of uploading NOS and enables NOS to be presented in a common format. This does not prevent standards setting organisations from marketing and presenting NOS in a format familiar to their industry/occupation through their own websites or systems.

The NOS Quality Criteria were introduced in April 2010. They are being kept under continuous review in the light of experience of using them and of changing circumstances. This document represents the first such review as of March 2011.

# 1. Responsibility for National Occupational Standards

## Quality Criteria

- 1.1 National Occupational Standards (NOS) may only be developed and maintained by recognised standards setting organisations.
- 1.2 Standards setting organisations are required to meet all the quality criteria for NOS.
- 1.3 All personnel working in the NOS system must be competent in the functions they are carrying out or be developing their competence under supervision.
- 1.4 Each standards setting organisation must report to the UK Commission for Employment and Skills on an annual basis to demonstrate its compliance with the quality criteria for NOS.

## Explanatory Notes

### Standards setting organisations

The development and maintenance of National Occupational Standards (NOS) is the responsibility of standards setting organisations. These include Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) and other pan-sector organisations approved by the UK Commission for Employment and Skills.

### Meeting the Quality Criteria for NOS

Standards setting organisations must have systems in place to ensure they consistently meet, and are able to show that they meet, all the quality criteria for NOS.

### Personnel developing NOS

All personnel, wherever they are working in the NOS system (see Figure 1, page 4), must either:

- provide evidence that they are competent against the relevant *NOS* covering the functions they are carrying out in the NOS system; or
- be working towards demonstrating their competence in the functions they are carrying out under supervision.

Personnel working on NOS projects are **not** expected to be competent in sector- or occupation-specific functions. Sectoral or occupational expertise will be provided by subject matter experts from the relevant sector/occupation.

### Annual Reporting

Standards setting organisations have responsibility to ensure they comply with the NOS Quality Criteria. They need to demonstrate their compliance in an annual report to the UK Commission for Employment and Skills which is accountable to governments across the UK for the overall quality of NOS. This annual report will replace previous project-by-project reporting arrangements.

If a standards setting organisation's annual report fails to demonstrate compliance with the criteria for National Occupational Standards, the UK Commission for Employment and Skills will agree a time-limited improvement plan with the standards setting organisation.

## 2. Analysis of Sector/Occupation Needs

### Quality Criteria

2.1 Each standards setting organisation must gather and maintain up-to-date UK-wide labour market information about the sector/occupation it covers.

### Explanatory Notes

#### Analysis of Sector/Occupation Needs

The standards setting organisation's Labour Market Information (LMI) should cover all four countries and should include:

- the size and profile of its sector/occupation, subsectors and geographical location of organisations and workers;
- the link between the sector/occupation and other sectors/occupations;
- key trends, developments and drivers within the sector/occupation;
- the types of occupations within the sector and anticipated changes in employment patterns;
- opportunities for progression and typical career routes;
- learning opportunities and qualifications within the sector/occupation.

Although this data may have been gathered for other purposes, it may be useful to present the information as an Occupational Map prior to NOS development.

2.2 Each standards setting organisation must identify, prioritise and make the business case for developing any new or revised NOS and/or support needed to implement NOS within its sector/occupation.

#### Business Case for National Occupational Standards

In order that a standards setting organisation can take informed decisions about how best to use the funds it has available for NOS development and implementation, each standards setting organisation should identify, prioritise and make an evidence-based business case for:

- developing new or revised NOS (see Sections 2-7);
- translating NOS into Welsh and/or other languages (see Section 5.21);
- providing support to promote and implement NOS (see Section 8);

in its sector/occupation.

2.3 Each standards setting organisation must ensure that its NOS are informed by a representative sample of

#### Key Stakeholders

NOS describe the standards of performance required in the workplace and must therefore be informed by consensus of

relevant employers from across the UK and take account of the needs of other key stakeholders.

a representative sample of relevant employers from across the UK as to what constitutes good practice.

NOS should also take account of the views of other key stakeholders, such as:

- trade bodies;
- professional bodies;
- trade unions;
- statutory bodies, including Qualifications Regulators;
- other standards setting organisations whose footprints cover sectors/occupations where the same or similar functions are carried out;
- awarding organisations/bodies;
- education and training providers

2.4 Standards setting organisations must publish their plans to review NOS or develop new NOS on the NOS Database.

### **Publishing NOS Development Plans**

In order that other standards setting organisations and other stakeholders may be aware of planned developments, standards setting organisations should publish on the NOS Database their intention to review their NOS or develop new NOS.

## 3. Functional Analysis

### Quality Criteria

- 3.1 National Occupational Standards must be derived from an analysis of the functions which have to be carried out in order to achieve the key purpose of the sector, occupation or area of work.
- 3.2 Functional analysis must start from a definition of the key purpose of the area of work.
- 3.3 Functional Analysis must identify all the functions which need to be carried out to achieve the key purpose and disaggregate these until discrete functions, which can be carried out by an individual, have been identified.

### Explanatory Notes

#### Functional Analysis of an Area of Work

National Occupational Standards must be derived from functional analysis – an accurate and detailed separation of the functions which have to be carried out in order to achieve the key purpose of the sector, occupation or area of work<sup>2</sup>.

Sometimes, the area to be covered by the functional analysis is a whole sector or occupation. Often, however, the focus is on a smaller area, such as a particular industry (eg printing), discipline (eg psychotherapy) or cross-sector area of work (eg civil contingencies).

#### Key Purpose

Functional analysis starts with a key purpose – a concise, yet comprehensive statement of what everyone involved in the area of work is working towards, the common goal that everyone is ultimately trying to achieve.

The development of an agreed key purpose ensures that the area of work being analysed is a coherent reflection of the thinking of all the stakeholders involved.

#### Disaggregated Functions at Various Levels

The functional analysis methodology asks the question: "what has to happen to achieve the key purpose?" in order to identify the functional key areas.

The functional analysis methodology then asks the question: "what has to happen to achieve the outcomes of these key areas?" in order to identify areas of competence.

The functional analysis methodology continues to ask the question: "what has to happen to achieve this outcome?" until discrete functions which can be carried out by an individual have been identified.

These discrete functions are indicative of the functions which need to be covered by NOS.

The functional analysis methodology should identify both

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<sup>2</sup> Fuller guidance on how to carry out functional analysis is provided in the *NOS Guidance* publication.



the *technical functions* specific to the occupation and *transferable functions* that apply to many occupations and make individuals employable in many sectors. Examples of transferable functions might include: plan and manage own work; work as a member of a team; communicate with stakeholders; take decisions; contribute to health and safety at work; contribute to improving quality.

- 3.4 The outcome of functional analysis is a 'functional map' which must show all the functions which need to be carried out to achieve the key purpose and the relationship between these functions.

### **Functional Map**

A functional map is a representation of the results of the functional analysis, showing the different relationships between the various functions identified.

The number of levels of disaggregation in the functional map will depend on the size and nature of the sector, occupation or area of work being analysed. Also, some parts of the functional map may need to be disaggregated to more levels than others.

## 4. Identification of Existing NOS and Common Functions

### Quality Criteria

- 4.1 Prior to the development of National Occupational Standards, work must be carried out to identify if NOS already exist, or are under development, which may cover the functions identified in the functional map.

### Explanatory Notes

#### Identification of Existing NOS

In order to prevent proliferation of NOS covering the same or similar functions and to maximise the transferability of competence from one sector to another, it is important that the standards setting organisation developing the NOS checks on the NOS Database, on other standards setting organisations' websites and, if necessary, directly with the standards setting organisation concerned to see if NOS already exist which may cover the functions identified in the functional map or whether another standards setting organisation is currently in the process of developing relevant NOS. In particular, these NOS may cover transferable functions, such as: plan and manage own work; work as a member of a team; communicate with stakeholders; take decisions; contribute to health and safety at work; contribute to improving quality.

Existing or draft NOS which are potentially relevant should be evaluated by the standards setting organisation developing the NOS and its stakeholders to see whether they do indeed describe the standard of performance required by the sector, occupation or area of work covered by the functional map. If they do, they may be imported or suitably tailored, with the agreement of the originating standards setting organisation (see Section 7). If the NOS are still in development, it may be possible to influence the content of the NOS so that they can be imported without any tailoring.

Where there are no existing or draft NOS which adequately describe a function, a new NOS may need to be developed to cover this function.

- 4.2 Prior to development of new or revised NOS, work must be carried out to identify and engage with other sectors/ occupations where the same or similar functions are carried out.

#### Identification of Common Functions

In order to prevent proliferation of NOS and to maximise the transferability of competence from one sector to another, it is important that the standards setting organisation developing or revising NOS identifies any other sectors or occupations where the same or similar functions are carried out.

The standards setting organisation should engage with standards setting organisations covering other sectors/

occupations where the same or similar functions are carried out to ensure that, wherever possible, a single common NOS is developed which meets the requirements of all contexts where the function is carried out.

## 5 Specification of National Occupational Standards

### Quality Criteria

5.1 National Occupational Standards must specify the standard of performance an individual must achieve when carrying out a function in the workplace, together with the underpinning knowledge and understanding.

5.2 National Occupational Standards must comprise the following *mandatory* components: unique reference number; NOS title; NOS overview; performance criteria; specification of knowledge and understanding; technical data<sup>3</sup>.

5.3 National Occupational Standards may also contain the following *optional* components: scope/range; values; behaviours; skills; glossary; links to other National Occupational Standards; external links.

5.4 Each National Occupational Standard must have a unique reference number comprising: an allocated prefix indicating the

### Explanatory Notes

#### National Occupational Standards

NOS should be derived from a functional analysis of the occupational area.

Each NOS should cover a single function which can be performed by an individual.

Whilst NOS may contain other components, it is essential that each NOS specifies the standard of performance an individual must achieve when carrying out the function in the workplace, together with the underpinning knowledge and understanding.

Compliance with these criteria will ensure that all NOS can be presented in a common format, whilst allowing considerable flexibility in their content and presentation to meet the needs of different sectors/occupations.

#### Mandatory Components

Every NOS must contain these mandatory components. This terminology is used for the purposes of consistency on the NOS Database.

#### Optional Components

Additionally, a NOS may contain one or more other components, at the discretion of the standards setting organisation developing the NOS.

These optional components may be called by various names in suites of NOS developed by different standards setting organisations for presentation to their sectors/occupations.

#### Unique Reference Number

Each standards setting organisation will be issued with a three-letter prefix for all its NOS. The standards setting organisation is then responsible for developing a unique

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<sup>3</sup> See the glossary at the end of this document for an explanation of terms.

organisation which has developed the NOS; a suffix indicating the position of the NOS in the functional map or suite.

suffix for each NOS indicating the position of the NOS in the functional map or suite.

- 5.5 Each National Occupational Standard must have a unique, concise title which clearly and accurately describes the function.

### **NOS Title**

The title of each NOS should be unique, ie there should not be another NOS with the same title. The title should be as concise as possible whilst clearly and accurately describing the function it covers<sup>4</sup>.

A NOS title should start with an active verb (eg "Encourage" not "Encouraging") which accurately describes the nature of the function, followed by the object of the verb (eg "innovation"). It may be necessary to add further information to the title to more closely define the context(s) in which it may apply (eg "in your area of responsibility").

In the Management & Leadership Standards, for example, *Encourage innovation in your area of responsibility* applies in a narrower context than *Encourage innovation in your organisation*.

- 5.6 National Occupational Standards must have an overview which clearly and concisely describes what the NOS is about and who it is for.

### **NOS Overview**

An overview is provided for information purposes only and should not be used for assessment purposes. An overview may therefore be amended without affecting the performance and/or knowledge and understanding demands of the NOS (see Section 6.2 on tailoring NOS).

The aim of the overview is to rapidly indicate to the reader what the NOS is about and who it is for. It should therefore be as clear and concise as possible and should not seek to provide a summary of the full content of the NOS.

- 5.7 5.7 National Occupational Standards must have performance criteria that clearly and concisely specify the standard of performance required when carrying out the function.

### **Performance Criteria**

Performance criteria answer the question: "what does an individual need to do or ensure happens in order to carry out the function to a satisfactory standard?".

Taken together, the performance criteria should be capable of distinguishing between satisfactory and unsatisfactory performance in the function covered by the NOS. Whilst mundane aspects need not be covered, the performance criteria should cover all the aspects which are critical to

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<sup>4</sup> See *Guide to Developing NOS*

carrying out the function to a satisfactory standard.

Each performance criterion must be achievable by a competent individual when they are carrying out this function.

Each performance criterion should start with an active verb in the second person singular and be able to follow the introductory phrase: "You must be able to...".

Each performance criterion should clearly and concisely specify what the individual carrying out the function needs to do or ensure happens and the standard of performance that is satisfactory.

Performance criteria also need to cover likely contingencies which may arise. For example, "when the query is outside your area of responsibility, refer it promptly to the relevant department". Clearly, an individual will only need to perform to a contingency performance criterion if that contingency arises, but, whether the contingency arises or not, they will need to know what to do in such circumstances. Contingency performance criteria, like the example above, sometimes have a conditional phrase or clause ("when the query is outside your area of responsibility") before the main verb ("...refer it promptly to the relevant department").

NOS are often divided into "sub sections" which describe various sub-functions identified in the functional analysis. For example, the function *Plan, organise, monitor and evaluate activities in your area of responsibility* may be divided into four elements, *Plan...Organise...Monitor...Evaluate...*

Performance criteria may be called by other titles (such as "Outcomes of effective performance", "Performance indicators" or "Performance standards") in suites of NOS developed by different standards setting organisations for presentation to their sectors/ occupations.

In the past, for some NOS, the performance criteria were contained in a separate document. This is no longer acceptable as they are mandatory components required in the NOS Template and for the NOS Database.

5.8 National Occupational Standards must have a specification of the knowledge and understanding an individual must possess in order to perform consistently to the required standard.

## **Knowledge and Understanding**

The specification of knowledge and understanding in a NOS answers the question: "what does an individual need to know and understand in order to perform this function consistently to the required standard?".

The specification should comprise only the knowledge and understanding which is essential for effective performance of the function covered by the NOS.

The level of detail to which knowledge and understanding is specified will depend on the nature of the function being performed and is the responsibility of the standards setting organisation developing the NOS to determine with its stakeholders.

Knowledge and understanding items may be grouped together in sections (eg consistent with the element titles or divided into different areas of knowledge, such as "legislation and policies" or "knowledge of the work context").

Knowledge and understanding may be called by other titles (such as "Knowledge" or "Underpinning knowledge and understanding") in suites of NOS developed by different standards setting organisations for presentation to their sectors/occupations.

For some NOS, the knowledge and understanding specification is contained in a separate document. This is permissible as long as:

there is clear reference to the separate document containing the knowledge and understanding;

it is made clear that competent performance requires an individual to *both* meet the performance criteria *and* possess the underpinning knowledge and understanding.

5.9 National Occupational Standards must contain the required technical data.

### Technical Data

Each approved NOS must have the following technical data<sup>5</sup>:

- the name of the standards setting organisation which has developed the NOS;
- the version number;
- the date the NOS was approved;
- the date by which it is anticipated the NOS will be reviewed (flexible in line with emerging sector/ occupation needs and priorities);
- the validity of the NOS, ie "current" – a NOS currently in use or "legacy" – a NOS which has been superseded, but which is still used within qualifications;
- the status of the NOS, ie "original" – a new NOS, or "tailored" – a NOS imported from another organisation's suite with minor amendments to make it relevant to the new context but without changing the demands of the NOS (see Section 6);
- the name of the originating organisation and the unique reference number of the original NOS;
- the occupations to which the NOS applies.

5.10 A National Occupational Standard may have statements specifying its scope or the range of variables that have a critical impact on the quality of performance required.

### Scope/Range

Scope or range should only be used where different circumstances or situations have a critical impact on performance. Scope or range should not be used simply to provide illustrative examples or clarify the meaning of a term or phrase (which can be done in a glossary).

Sometimes, in order to show they are fully competent, an individual needs to show that they can cope with all items in the scope/range. Example 1: a driver of an emergency vehicle would need to show they could handle all types of "Conditions: daylight, night-time, dry, wet, clear, foggy".

At other times, the individual may not need to show that they can cope with all items in the scope/range. Example 2: depending where they were based, a driver of an emergency vehicle may not need to show they can handle all parts of the scope/range "Road types: side road, main road,

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<sup>5</sup> For a detailed specification see the NOS Template on the NOS Database website



motorway".

The terms "scope" and "range" are used interchangeably in suites of NOS developed by different standards setting organisations for presentation to their sectors/occupations, although, technically, "range" specifies all the conditions which *must* be met (see Example 1 above) and "scope" indicates the different variables an individual *might* have the deal with (see Example 2 above).

5.11 National Occupational Standards may have specifications of the values that underpin the function and which an individual is expected to demonstrate when performing the function.

### **Values**

Examples of values include: "respect confidentiality, and inform individuals, families, carers, groups and communities about when information needs to be shared with others", "promoting equality, diversity and anti-discriminatory practice" or "good practice requires reflection and a continuing search for improvement".

How values are expressed in NOS is left to the discretion of the standards setting organisation developing the NOS.

5.12 National Occupational Standards may have specifications of the behaviours that an individual is expected to demonstrate when performing the function.

### **Behaviours**

Behaviours, as they are expressed in NOS, tend to be generic and transferable to a wide range of contexts; they often include behaviours linked to employability skills. Examples of behaviours include: "make time available to support others" or "clearly agree what is expected of others and hold them to account", "take timely decisions that are realistic for the situation".

How behaviours are expressed in NOS is left to the discretion of the standards setting organisation developing the NOS.

5.13 National Occupational Standards may specify the professional, technical, managerial and/or interpersonal skills required to perform the function.

### **Skills**

These may include the technical skills specific to the function described and/or employability skills transferable to a wide range of contexts. Examples of skills include: "analysing", "listening", "time management".

How skills are expressed in NOS is left to the discretion of the standards setting organisation developing the NOS.

5.14 National Occupational Standards may contain a glossary with explanations of the key words or phrases used in the NOS.

### **Glossary**

How the glossary is presented is left to the discretion of the standards setting organisation developing the NOS.

5.15 National Occupational Standards may indicate how the NOS links to other NOS.

### **Links to other NOS**

How the links to other NOS are presented is left to the discretion of the standards setting organisation developing the NOS.

5.16 National Occupational Standards may indicate how the NOS links to other documents and systems.

### **External Links**

NOS may indicate how the NOS links to other documents and systems (such as professional standards, codes of practice, pay and grading systems, collective bargaining agreements, licenses to practice, Core Skills and Key Skills).

How external links are presented is left to the discretion of the standards setting organisation developing the NOS.

5.17 Each National Occupational Standard must be specified in such a way that it may be used in every part of the UK where the function is carried out.

### **UK-wide Standards**

NOS are a UK-wide, not just a single nation's, resource. It is important that a NOS can be used in every part of the UK where the function is carried out.

Care should be taken to ensure that NOS align with legislative, regulatory, policy and institutional requirements in all of the UK nations to which they apply (in a minority of cases, NOS do not apply to all four nations or only apply to one nation). This may require the standards setting organisation developing the NOS to use generic terminology, rather than referring to specific laws, regulations or institutions.

5.18 Each National Occupational Standard must meet the requirements of all the sectors/occupations where the function is carried out.

### **Single standards to cover common functions**

Where the same function is carried out in more than one sector/occupation, NOS should be developed in consultation with the standards setting organisations covering the other sectors/occupations to ensure that, wherever possible, a single common NOS is developed which meets the requirements of all contexts where the function is carried out (see 4.2).

5.19 Each National Occupational Standard must specify current effective practice in the function as evidenced by research and agreed by representatives of the sector/occupation(s) involved.

### **Evidence-based Standards**

Standards setting organisations developing NOS should provide evidence to show that the NOS specify current effective practice in the function. This evidence may include:

- findings of research into effective practice in the function;
- outcomes of consultations or deliberations with a representative sample of employers, practitioners and/or subject matter experts to agree definitions of effective practice in the function;
- empirical studies of the effectiveness of the NOS, or drafts of the NOS, in practice.

5.20 National Occupational Standards must be free from direct or indirect unfair discrimination against an individual or group of individuals.

### **Standards Free From Unfair Discrimination**

Standards setting organisations must ensure that both the content and the wording of NOS are free from direct or indirect unfair discrimination against an individual or group of individuals.

5.21 The wording of each National Occupational Standard must be concise, clear and appropriate for the individuals carrying out the function.

### **Clear, Concise Standards**

Great care should be taken to ensure the wording of each NOS is as concise as possible and is clear and appropriate to the individuals who carry out the function. This may require specialist editing or a professional language review.

Consideration should be given to making the NOS available in Welsh and/or other native or foreign languages where there is evidence of demand.

## 6. Importing and Tailoring National Occupational Standards

### Quality Criteria

6.1 Where there is an existing NOS which accurately describes the standard of performance required of individuals when they carry out a function in the functional map, this NOS may be imported into a new NOS suite.

6.2 Where there is an existing NOS which accurately describes the standard of performance required of individuals when they carry out a function defined in the functional map, this may just be signposted rather than brought into the suite

6.2 Where a NOS accurately describes the standard of performance required of individuals when they carry out a function but the

### Explanatory Notes

#### Importing National Occupational Standards

Any existing NOS or NOS in development which potentially cover the functions in the functional map will have been identified (see Section 4).

Potential NOS should be carefully reviewed by the standards setting organisation and its stakeholders to see whether they accurately describe the standard of performance required of individuals when they carry out these functions in the context of the new sector/occupation.

If a potential NOS accurately describes the standard of performance required of individuals when they carry out the function and the language is clear and meaningful to those carrying out this function in the new sector or occupation, the potential NOS should be imported into the new suite without any amendments (ie all components – both mandatory and optional – are imported and the content remains exactly the same, without any changes to the wording, additions or deletions).

A NOS which has been brought in from another NOS suite without any amendments is known as an "imported NOS".

An individual who has demonstrated their competence in an imported NOS is also deemed to be competent in the original NOS, and vice versa.

#### 'Signposting' NOS in other NOS suites

Rather than bringing in NOS from other sectors, it is possible to 'signpost' to them. This means that the same process for checking the relevance of the NOS is adopted as above, but they are not incorporated into the suite of NOS as such. The advantage is that a suite of NOS will concentrate on the key functions that differentiate the industry from others, but signposting at the same time recognises the transferable competence demonstrated by employees in the industry

#### Tailoring National Occupational Standards

It is sometimes the case that a potential NOS from another suite accurately describes the standard of performance required of individuals when they carry out this function in

wording is unclear, ambiguous or not meaningful to those carrying out this function in the new context, this NOS may be tailored for use in the new NOS suite.

the new context, but the wording is (a) unclear or ambiguous or (b) not meaningful to those carrying out this function in the new context.

In these cases the NOS may be tailored for use in the new context as long as any changes made do not change the demands of the NOS in terms of the standard of performance or knowledge and understanding required<sup>6</sup>.

Examples of tailoring include:

- rewriting the NOS overview section to ensure that users in the new context understand what the NOS is about and who it is for;
- rewording performance criteria or knowledge and understanding items to make them more understandable to those carrying out the function, without changing the demands of the NOS;
- changing words which may have a specific meaning in one context but not in another (eg client/customer, service user/patient, product/service, business/organisation).

A NOS which has been brought in from another NOS suite and amended without changing the demands of the NOS is known as a "tailored NOS".

An individual who has demonstrated their competence in a tailored NOS is also deemed to be competent in the original NOS, and vice versa.

Changes to the title of the NOS are not permitted under the tailoring process. If the title needs to be changed it becomes a new NOS.

Also, if the changes made are so significant that they change the demands of the NOS, it becomes a new NOS.

6.3 NOS brought in from elsewhere may not be re-formatted.

### **Reformatting National Occupational Standards**

NOS brought in from elsewhere may NOT be reformatted. This was allowed in the past but since all NOS from April 2010 have had to be written using the same NOS template, for use in the NOS Database, this is no longer possible.

The only way in which NOS can be re-formatted is by employers and standards setting organisations for their own use and for publication on their own websites, providing that every component of the original NOS is retained and that

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<sup>6</sup> Fuller guidance on how to tailor NOS without changing the demands of the NOS is provided in the *NOS Guidance* publication.

the originating standards setting organisation agrees to the reformatting.

- 6.4 The originating standards setting organisation must be informed of any intention to import its NOS. Where tailoring is involved, the originating standards setting organisation must agree that the tailoring has not changed the demands of the NOS.

### **Process for Importing or Tailoring NOS**

A standards setting organisation considering importing or tailoring a NOS should inform the originating standards setting organisation at an early stage in order that any issues regarding the impact of proposed rewording on the demands of the NOS may be fully discussed and agreed.

Where the intention is to import a NOS (ie without any changes to the wording, additions or deletions), written (or e-mail) permission must be obtained from the originating standards setting organisation.

Where a NOS has been tailored for use in another sector or occupation, the originating standards setting organisation must agree in writing (or e-mail) that the tailoring has not changed the demands of the NOS.

The originating standards setting organisation should maintain a record of which of its NOS have been imported or tailored and by which standards setting organisation.

## 7. Approving and Maintaining National Occupational Standards

### Quality Criteria

7.1 After it has checked to ensure all relevant quality criteria have been met, the standards setting organisation must submit new and revised NOS for approval.

7.2 Standards setting organisations must keep their NOS under continuous review to ensure they are relevant and up-to-date, revise NOS which need revising and delete NOS which are no longer required.

### Explanatory Notes

#### Gaining Approval for NOS

Standards setting organisations are responsible for the quality of the NOS they develop and must have quality assurance systems in place. These will be monitored through the published Quality Assurance arrangements.

When the standards setting organisation is satisfied that the new or revised NOS meet all the relevant quality criteria in sections 3, 4, 5 and 6 of this document, the final version of the NOS should be uploaded to the NOS Database to enable approval by the UK NOS Panel.

Once approved, the NOS are freely available for employers, other standards setting organisations and stakeholders to use.

#### Maintaining the Relevance and Currency of NOS

Standards setting organisations are responsible for ensuring their NOS remain current and relevant for their sector/occupation(s).

Standards setting organisations should keep their NOS under review to ensure they continue to describe good practice in their sector/ occupation(s) and take account of any social, economic, technological or legislative developments.

Where NOS need revising, the standards setting organisation should plan to revise them in priority order as part of its business planning process (see Quality Criterion 2.2).

Where a NOS has been superseded by a new or revised NOS but it is still used in a qualification(s), it should remain on the NOS Database and the validity field should be changed from "current" to "legacy" (see Quality Criterion 5.9).

Where NOS are no longer required or have been superseded by new or revised NOS, the obsolete NOS should be deleted from the NOS Database.

## 8. Supporting the Implementation of NOS

### Quality Criteria

8.1 As part of its business planning process, each standards setting organisation should plan how to ensure NOS are used effectively by stakeholders in its sector/occupation for both skills development and business outcomes.

8.2 In addition to their NOS being available on the NOS Database, standards setting organisations may make their NOS, and products and services based on their NOS, available through their own websites and/or other media.

8.3 Each standards setting organisation must lead the promotion of NOS and/or NOS-based products and services to stakeholders in its sector/occupation in ways that are consistent with agreed overarching guidelines.

### Explanatory Notes

#### Planning the Implementation of NOS

NOS may be used for both skills development purposes (eg training and development, qualifications, apprenticeships, CPD) and to deliver business outcomes (eg productivity, cost-reduction, profitability, product/service quality, risk-reduction, safety and continuity of employment).

Each standards setting organisation should consider both these aspects in its business planning (see Quality Criterion 2.2).

#### Providing Access to NOS and NOS-based Products and Services

As a minimum, standards setting organisations must provide access to their NOS via the NOS Database.

However, standards setting organisations may also provide access to NOS in their sector/occupation format on their websites and make available a range of other NOS-based products, services and support to meet needs of the sector/occupation.

#### Promotion of NOS

The UK Commission for Employment and Skills will develop, in partnership with standards setting organisations and the Alliance of SSCs, overarching guidelines for the promotion of NOS.

To ensure messages are consistent and not conflicting, each standards setting organisation must ensure that its own promotional activities for NOS and/or NOS-based products/services are aligned with these overarching guidelines.



## 9. Evaluating National Occupational Standards

### Quality Criteria

9.1 Each standards setting organisation must gather information about who is using NOS and NOS-based products/ services for what purposes.

9.2 Each standards setting organisation must record feedback from users of NOS and NOS-based products/ services.

9.3 Each standards setting organisation must develop meaningful indicators and collect data to measure the impact of NOS and NOS-based products/services on skills development and business outcomes.

### Explanatory Notes

#### Gathering Information on the Use of NOS

The first level of evaluation is knowing who is using NOS and for what purposes.

This provides quantitative data to gauge the depth (what percentage of organisations are using NOS and NOS-based qualifications/products/services) and breadth (how widely they are using NOS, ie for what range of purposes and for which range of staff) of market penetration.

It also provides a database for gathering feedback on the NOS and developing case studies of how NOS are being used.

#### Recording Feedback on NOS

The second level of evaluation is gathering and analysing feedback from users on the NOS and NOS-based products/ services and using this feedback to inform changes and developments.

#### Evaluating the Impact of NOS

The third level of evaluation is measuring the impact of NOS on both skills development and business outcomes in the sector/occupation.

This involves establishing measures and working with users to quantify the benefits and costs of using NOS and NOS-based products/services.

Understanding the potential benefits and costs is essential to making the business case for the development and implementation of NOS and NOS-based products/services (see Quality Criterion 2.2).

## Glossary of Terms

<b>Term</b>	<b>Explanation</b>
<b>Alliance of Sector Skills Councils</b>	An organisation comprising all licensed UK Sector Skills Councils (SSCs), the employer-driven organisations that together articulate the voice of the employers of around 90% of the UK's workforce on skills issues.
<b>Awarding Organisation/ Body (AO/AB)</b>	<p>An organisation recognised by the regulators for the purpose of awarding accredited qualifications.</p> <p>In England, Wales and Northern Ireland they are known as Awarding Organisations; in Scotland they are referred to as Awarding Bodies.</p>
<b>Behaviours</b>	The behaviours that an individual is expected to demonstrate when performing a function.
<b>Competence</b>	See "Occupational Competence".
<b>Continuing Professional Development (CPD)</b>	The systematic maintenance and improvement of knowledge, skills and competence undertaken by an individual throughout their working life.
<b>Employability skills</b>	The professional, technical, managerial and/or interpersonal skills required to perform the function.
<b>Employee</b>	Any individual in employment , whether under a contract of employment, a volunteer agreement, self-employed or through a third-party supplier arrangement
<b>Employer</b>	An individual or organisation which deploys human resources, whether under a contract of employment, a volunteer agreement or through a third-party supplier arrangement, to achieve its objectives. Employers may include sole-traders, freelancers or professionals working in partnership.
<b>Function</b>	An activity necessary for achieving the key purpose of the sector, occupation or area of work, which can be carried out by an individual worker. Functions are identified through functional analysis and form the basis of NOS.
<b>Functional Analysis</b>	An analysis of the functions which have to be carried out in order to achieve the key purpose of the sector, occupation or area of work.

<b>Functional Map</b>	A representation of the results of the functional analysis, showing the relationship between the different functions identified.
<b>Glossary</b>	Explanations of the key words or phrases used in the NOS.
<b>“Imported” NOS</b>	A NOS which has been brought in from another NOS suite without any amendments.
<b>Key Purpose</b>	A concise yet comprehensive statement of the common goal that everyone involved in a sector, occupation or area of work is working towards.
<b>Knowledge &amp; Understanding Items</b>	Statements which together specify the knowledge and understanding an individual needs in order to perform to the required standard.
<b>Knowledge &amp; Understanding Specification</b>	The knowledge and understanding an individual needs in order to perform to the required standard.
<b>Legacy NOS</b>	A NOS which has been superseded by new or revised NOS, but is still used in qualifications.
<b>Mandatory Component</b>	A component which must appear in a NOS.
<b>National Occupational Standard (NOS)</b>	<p>A statement of the standard of performance an individual must achieve when carrying out a function in the workplace, together with a specification of the underpinning knowledge and understanding.</p> <p>NOS are <i>National</i> because they can be used in every part of the UK where the function is carried out.</p> <p>NOS are <i>Occupational</i> because they describe the performance required of an individual when carrying out the functions in the workplace, ie in their occupation (as a plumber, police officer, production engineer etc).</p> <p>NOS are <i>Standards</i> because they are statements of effective performance which have been agreed by a representative sample of employers and other key stakeholders and approved by the UK NOS Panel.</p>
<b>NOS Database</b>	The central database containing all current NOS, developed by all standards setting organisations.
<b>NOS Overview</b>	An overview which describes what the NOS is about and who it is for.

<b>NOS Title</b>	A title of a NOS.
<b>Occupation</b>	A specific type of work carried out by an individual as defined by relevant Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) codes.
<b>Occupational Competence</b>	The application of knowledge and skills to perform consistently to the standards required in the work context.
<b>Optional Component</b>	A component which may appear in a NOS, but which is not mandatory.
<b>Original NOS</b>	A NOS developed by a standards setting organisation without direct reference to any existing NOS.
<b>Performance Criteria</b>	Statements which together specify the standard of performance required when carrying out a function.
<b>Qualification</b>	An award made by an awarding organisation/body to demonstrate a learner's achievement or competence.
<b>Qualification Regulators</b>	Statutory organisations that are required to establish national standards for qualifications and ensure consistent compliance with them. The regulators for England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland are respectively: Ofqual, the Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (DCELLS), the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) and the Scottish Qualifications Authority's Accreditation Unit (SQA Accreditation).
<b>Range</b>	Statements specifying the range of variables that an individual may have to deal with in carrying out the function which have a critical impact on the quality of performance required (synonymous with "Scope").
<b>Reformatted NOS</b>	An imported NOS or tailored NOS which has been reformatted in order to present it in a format familiar to the new sector or occupation whilst retaining all the components of the original NOS.
<b>Return on Investment (ROI)</b>	The ratio of the money gained (benefits) on an investment relative to the amount invested (costs), expressed as a percentage.

<b>Scope</b>	Statements specifying the range of variables that an individual may have to deal with in carrying out the function which have a critical impact on the quality of performance required (synonymous with "Range").
<b>Sector</b>	An area of economic activity as defined by the Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) codes in a SSC's footprint.
<b>Sector Skills Councils (SSCs)</b>	Independent, employer-led, UK-wide organisations designed to build a skills system that is driven by employer demand.
<b>Sector Qualifications Strategy (SQS)</b>	A strategy outlining current and future needs for learning and qualifications in a sector/occupation and how these needs will be met.
<b>Skills</b>	The professional, technical, managerial and/or interpersonal skills required to perform the function.
<b>Stakeholder</b>	An individual or organisation with a legitimate interest in the NOS.
<b>Standards setting organisations</b>	Organisations responsible for developing, maintaining and implementing standards which specify the performance required of people in the workplace.
<b>Suite of National Occupational Standards</b>	Set of related NOS which cover all the functions required for a sector, occupation or area or work. These include licensed Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) and other pan-sector organisations approved by the UK Commission for Employment and Skills.
<b>Tailored NOS</b>	A NOS which has been brought in from another NOS suite and amended, with agreement of the originating SSC/SSC, without changing the demands of the NOS.
<b>Technical Data</b>	Each NOS must include certain mandatory technical data, such as: the name of the standards setting organisation which has developed the NOS; version number; the date of approval; the indicative date for review; the status of the NOS (original, imported, tailored); and, where the status is imported or tailored, the name of the originating standards setting organisation and the unique reference number of the original NOS. It may also include additional technical data, such as: the place of the NOS in a functional map; the occupations to which the NOS applies.

**UK Commission for  
Employment and Skills**

A social partnership of Commissioners from large and small employers, trade unions and the voluntary sector, with the mission to raise skill levels to help drive enterprise, create more and better jobs and economic growth.

**Unique Reference Number  
(URN)**

A unique number given to a NOS which comprises a prefix indicating the standards setting organisation which has developed the NOS and a suffix indicating the position of the NOS in the functional map or suite.

**Values**

The values that underpin a function and which an individual is expected to demonstrate when performing the function.

**Worker**

Any individual who is carrying out the function described in the NOS. The worker may be an employee, a formal volunteer or an informal worker (such as a family member or informal carer).

**Workplace**

Any location where the function described in the NOS is carried out. This may include formal workplaces (such as factories, offices, hospitals, construction sites, retail units), public areas (such as streets or open countryside) and private property (such as people's homes).