

Guide for Writing National Occupational Standards

Whenever anyone thinks about personal development, whether about their own or their colleagues', one of the first things they tend to consider is "what are the skills and knowledge that we have?" and "what are the skills and knowledge that we need?" Breaking down the skills, knowledge and understanding needed to undertake a particular task or job is often difficult. Recognising if a colleague or a job interviewee possesses those skills can be even harder.

National Occupational Standards (NOS for short) describe what a person needs to do, know and understand in their job to carry out their role in a consistent and competent way. Competence is defined as an individual's ability to apply skills, knowledge and understanding in the workplace to a standard agreed by employers. NOS are the building blocks for many UK-wide qualifications and for numerous professional or business improvement tools.

NOS are *National* because they apply to and are used across each of the four nations of the UK where the functions are carried out. NOS are *Occupational* because they describe the performance required of individuals to deliver functions of their occupations in their workplaces. NOS are *Standards* because they are statements of effective performance for the things individuals do and the outcomes they achieve, which have been agreed by a representative sample of employers and key stakeholders and approved by the UK NOS Panel.

NOS are not:

- Courses: they do not describe the detailed learning that is required
- Training programmes: they do not describe the development necessary to become competent
- Units: they do not describe learning outcomes or assessment requirements
- Qualifications: they are not placed into a qualification structure unless they have informed unit development
- Levelled: they are not developed according to qualification or other level based approaches

When developing NOS it is important to remember that the final product must be readable by anyone. It is important that you do not use long sentences and words which those using them will not understand.

Research

National Occupational Standards start their life through research into a sector/industry to identify the size and profile of the sector, the types of occupations, key trends and developments and opportunities for progression.

Functional Map

Once the research stage is completed, the next stage is to look at particular areas of work in the sector/occupation to identify the jobs and activities that you do as part of your job. You start by identifying the key purpose of the role which should relate to all types of people who work in the sector/occupation. The key purpose is the aim of the occupational area and must point to an outcome e.g. a restaurant owner needs people who can provide customers with food and drink.

Once the key purpose has been identified, the next stage is to find out what the broad functions/activities are to achieve the key purpose. For each of these you ask yourself *what needs to happen to achieve this activity*, e.g. prepare public area of the restaurant for service, establish and meet customer needs.

To arrive at the NOS then for each of these activities you ask yourself the question again *what needs to happen to achieve this activity*. So for the function, prepare public areas of the restaurant for service two NOS have been identified:

- Prepare the restaurant area for service
- Prepare tables for service

On completion of the above activities what is known as a functional map is produced which is then used to identify existing NOS or where none can be found which then become the ones to develop.

Using NOS from other Standard Setting Organisations (Importing)

Existing NOS should be used where ever possible, especially on activities which are transferable such as: business planning, working with others, communication, customer service. Using other NOS where possible increases the opportunity for transferability of the people in the workforce.

These existing NOS can be reviewed by the group working on the development as they understand what skills and knowledge are needed. They will look to see if the existing NOS describe the standard of performance required by the sector, occupation or area of work. If they do, they can be used by this industry.

You may choose to make some minor changes with the group to make sure the NOS actually relate to the industry; the overview can be changed or some small changes can be made to the performance criteria or knowledge and understanding. It is useful if you also include the Sector Skills Council or body who own the NOS so they agree with the changes.

Developing new NOS

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.

NOS should be written as concisely and clearly as possible, and be appropriate to the individuals who carry out the function. Where evidence is shown, they should also be translated into Welsh or other native/foreign languages.

NOS Title

The title of each NOS should be unique, as concise as possible whilst clearly and accurately describing the function it covers. The title should start with an active verb e.g. maintain health and safety in your area of responsibility.

NOS Overview

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

Performance Criteria

These should answer the question, what does an individual need to do or ensure happens in order to carry out the function to a satisfactory standard? You should be able to tell between satisfactory and unsatisfactory performance in the activity. It should cover all aspects which are *critical* to carrying out the activity to a satisfactory standard. Each performance criteria should start with an active verb and follow the phrase 'you must be able to...'

Knowledge and Understanding

This should answer the question, what does an individual need to know and understand in order to perform this function consistently to the required standard? The level of detail in the knowledge and understanding will depend on the nature of the function being performed, but should only contain that which is *essential* for effective performance.

NOS can also include the following:

Scope/range

This can be used where different circumstances or situations have a critical impact on performance. It should not be used to provide illustrative examples or clarify the meaning of a phrase. Using the example of providing customer service people may come across different types such as: customers who are, co-operative, difficult, with special requirements.

Values

Some bodies, in particular those relating to care occupations, like to include values that underpin performance and will often include a statement identifying the values e.g. provide an integrated, ethical and inclusive service, which meets agreed needs and outcomes of people requiring health and social care.

Behaviours

In some industries outcomes alone are not seen as enough and employers also feel it is important to describe the general ways in which individuals go about achieving the outcomes. E.g. you give people opportunities to provide feedback and you respond appropriately, you clearly agree what is expected of others and you hold them to account.

Glossary

Or key list of words and phrases, with explanations of the particular meaning of these words and phrases as they are used within the NOS.

Links to other NOS

This is useful as it shows how this NOS links with another NOS in the same suite or other suites.