



How to use **National Occupational Standards** to develop your workforce



National occupational standards can be an incredibly useful tool to assist you in developing your workforce.

National occupational standards have many uses and can assist you in:

Appraisals

Helping devise benchmarks for measuring your staff's performance

Recruitment

Helping you write job descriptions and person specifications

Training

Helping you to meet the training needs of your staff

Introducing standards

National occupational standards define the main roles and responsibilities within an area of work

National occupational standards or *standards* provide a clear description of what an employee needs to do to perform their job successfully. The standards consist of a detailed breakdown of the tasks, skills and knowledge need and describe effective performance within a job role, including any statutory or legal responsibilities.

National occupational standards offer a framework for good employment practice

The standards provide a framework of tried and tested good practice needed to perform different jobs effectively in the active leisure and learning sector. You can use the standards to compare your workforce's performance to these nationally developed benchmarks of good practice. The standards describe what needs to be achieved within a role and are outcome based rather than telling your workforce how to achieve your and their goals.

The standards have been developed over a number of years, by people who work within the industry, through a process of investigation, analysis and consultation with a wide range of people.

National occupational standards format

The standards are produced as a suite of units for each occupational area. The unit structure allows for easy identification of the relevant standards for a particular role.

National occupational standards have been developed for the majority of industrial and occupational sectors in the UK. There are standards that have been developed which focus specifically on key generic areas of competence including administration, management and leadership, and enterprise.

[The National occupational standards can be found on the SkillsActive website and the national database.](#)



The art of using the national occupational standards

Using standards in your appraisal process

The standards can be used as part of your appraisal process, to assist with setting objectives, to help with evaluating performance and identifying development needs. One of the advantages of using the standards is that it gives your staff a recognised good-practice framework to work towards, providing benchmarks against which performance can be objectively and fairly assessed and supporting further development of your staff.

The appraisal process

Appraisal processes can take many forms, however they should help establish:

- Objectives for your staff and also a review of objectives in response to changes in circumstances;
- The performance of your staff against objectives;
- Training and development needs in view of current responsibilities and career development.

The standards can be used at various stages of the appraisal process. A formal appraisal meeting is the opportunity to review performance, provide feedback and plan for development, and should form part of an ongoing management process including regular review meetings.



Using the standards as part of the appraisal process

A step by step guide

Step 1: Identify the standards relevant to the job role

- Identify any set of the standards that are relevant to the role, including any generic standards such as those for management and leadership, IT user skills and customer care that are relevant to the role.
- Once you have identified the relevant sets of standards, go through the list of units, using them as a checklist and selecting the units relevant to the functions of the job.

Step 2: Set objectives

An appraisal will only be effective if it compares performance to clear and agreed objectives. All objectives should be agreed and:

- **Specific** – objectives should be clear about what is required. The standards are useful here in defining exactly what should be required in order to perform a certain function effectively.
- **Measurable** – it must be possible to measure performance of any objective. The standards can help here in designing objectives that can be measured in accordance with agreed criteria.
- **Achievable** – objectives can be challenging, but they must be achievable and within the control of the job holder.
- **Time framed** – objectives need to be developed with specific time frames. Depending on the role, some objectives will be in the form of ongoing tasks central to the job throughout the year, others will be more time limited.

Step 3: Appraise performance

The appraisal meeting is an opportunity to review the set objectives and discuss how they have been achieved. The standards are useful here as they allow job holders to demonstrate their performance against objective measures (the statements within the standards), and can be used as a diagnostic tool to identify any improvements that could be made.

Step 4: Plan for the future

Having considered the previous year's performance, the appraisal should end by looking forward and setting objectives for the future, using the process outlined above.

Step 5: Assess training and development needs

A vital part of the appraisal process is to identify any training and development needs required. These needs may be identified as a result of measuring performance and establishing what additional training is required to meet existing and/or new objectives. If the standards are used as part of the job design and objective-setting process, they will provide a ready-made and extensive list of the knowledge, understanding and skills required for successful performance and therefore identify gaps in your staff's training needs.

Recruitment

Using national occupational standards when recruiting

The standards can be used as a basis for the recruitment of both employed and voluntary staff. The use of standards allows for a fair and effective recruitment process, with both candidates and employers clear about what is required.



Step by step guide to using standards for recruitment

Step 1: Identify the purpose of the job

Establish the purpose of the job - where it 'fits' within your organisation and suggest a job title. The job may have been created owing to people leaving your company and/or new services are needed and you don't have the current staff for the role you need.

Step 2: Identify relevant standards

Identify the main tasks and responsibilities of the job. The standards are a useful starting point for this.

- Identify the standards that are relevant to the job role, including any generic standards such as those for management and leadership, customer care or IT skills.
- Once the relevant set of standards has been identified, go through the list of units within each set of standards, using them as a checklist and selecting the units relevant to the functions of the job.

Step 3: List tasks and responsibilities

Look at the units in more detail and use these as a guide, together with other relevant information from the organisation such as previous job descriptions, input from current job holders and the specific requirements of the post, to develop a list of the main tasks for the job.

This list may include up to 15 tasks. Too few tasks, and the job description may not provide an adequate description of what is required, too many and there will be too much detail. There will be other tasks or functions included in the job on an occasional basis, therefore these need to be acknowledged as part of the job description.

Step 4: Develop a person specification

A person specification for the job should include the relevant knowledge and skills requirements for each of the units you have used from the standards, plus suitable qualifications and previous experience. The person specification should be detailed enough to ensure that applicants are suited to the role, but not so specific as to exclude potential candidates who might easily develop into the role. For this reason the person specification is often separated into those characteristics and skills which are essential and those which are desirable.

Step 5: Complete the job description

The job description should contain the remaining information that applicants need in order to decide whether the job is suitable for them. This could include the remuneration package, a summary of the terms and conditions, background information on the company and if relevant, the department in which the job is based. The job description should also include the title of the post to whom the job holder reports, and whether anyone reports to them.

Step 6: Write the job advertisement

The job description can then be used as the basis of writing a job advertisement. A typical job advertisement would contain:

- The job purpose statement, summary of key tasks and responsibilities;
- Brief description of employing organisation;
- Location;
- Salary or salary range, and summary of terms and conditions including length of contract, whether full or part-time, any unsociable hours requirements;
- Summary of knowledge, skills and experience required;
- Details of how to apply;
- Deadline for applications.

Step 7: Devise interview criteria and questions

The standards should also be used to prepare for the job interviews. Interview criteria and questions can be prepared which test the candidates' levels of experience, knowledge, skill and understanding against the requirements of the relevant standards. This competency-based approach allows for fair assessment of candidates against objective criteria and supports equal opportunities in recruitment practice.

Training

Using national occupational standards in developing your workforce

The standards can be used to support employees in identifying training and development needs, both to improve their performance in their current role, and to support their career progression.

Step by step guide to using standards to conduct training needs analyses

Step 1: Identify areas for development

Consider:

1. The work that is vital to your organisation, your workforce and individual employees.
2. Other work that an individual does that is important to your organisation.
3. The individual's future plans and aspirations – areas in which they hope to develop.

Step 2: Identify relevant standards

- Identify any sets of the standards that are relevant to the role, including any generic standards such as those for management and leadership, customer care and IT skills.
- Once the relevant set of standards have been identified, go through the list of units within each standard, using them as a checklist and selecting the units relevant to the functions of the job.

- Consider development needs too – are there areas of competence that need to be developed in order to build an individual's career? Use the standards in order to ascertain the relevant knowledge and skills needed to progress in the role.

Step 3: Assess competence

Consider each unit selected and assess how confident and competent the individual feels in each area. In the areas that need developing, look at the underpinning knowledge criteria for the unit and identify whether there are particular areas where knowledge and skills can be developed in order to support the individual's performance.

Step 4: Plan ways to meet training and development needs

Once it has been agreed as to which of the tasks from the standards the individual would like to meet, identify what training and development needs are required.

Step 5: Training and development plan

Once the training and development needs of your staff and entire workforce have been assessed and the ways to meet them have been identified, you can then produce a training and development plan for your organisation as well as prepare individual plans for each member of staff.

SkillsActive

Castlewood House
77–91 New Oxford Street
London WC1A 1PX

Telephone 020 7632 2000
Email skills@skillsactive.com
www.skillsactive.com

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