The Workforce Development Trust

Using National Occupational Standards

Toolkit for learning and development professionals

Introduction

Effective workforce planning, job role design and training are essential for any organisation striving to meet its goals and operate at its best. With the right structure in place, organisations can ensure they have the right people with the right skills in the right roles.

To achieve this, organisations need a clear and consistent framework that helps define the skills, knowledge and understanding required for each job role. So where should organisations start? By using National Occupational Standards.

National Occupational Standards provide a structured approach by outlining the performance criteria, knowledge and understanding required across job roles. This makes them an invaluable tool for supporting job role design, training and development and effective workforce planning.

This toolkit is designed to provide insight and guidance on how National Occupational Standards can be used by employers or training providers in training design to strengthen existing practices.

Find out more about National Occupational Standards in our explainer factsheet

Watch a short video about the National Occupational Standards for Resilience and Emergencies.

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What are the benefits of using National Occupational Standards?

National Occupational Standards (NOS) are developed by the industry, for the industry. For an organisation, adopting NOS can be transformative. They help create a well-structured workforce where everyone understands what's expected in their role. They also enhance training effectiveness by focusing on the right skills and knowledge and ensure the team's capabilities remain aligned with industry standards.

Using the standards offers several advantages:

- Aligns workforce capabilities with industry standards, ensuring consistency and quality across roles

- Provides a reliable framework for workforce planning, aligning recruitment and career progression with industry benchmarks

- Enables targeted and efficient training, addressing competency gaps and helping employees develop the right skills

- Embeds governance functions, supporting risk management and compliance

- Focuses on competence not just the task, promoting comprehensive skill development

- Offers an evidence base for inspectors and quality assurance for regulated industries

- Built by subject matter experts, ensuring relevance and reliability

- Consistency and standardisation, ensuring transferability and application of skills

What can National Occupational Standards be used for?

In the context of training design, NOS provide a consistent framework for supporting skills development, ensuring long-term sustainability and the alignment of training with organisational needs.

Training needs analysis: NOS help identify the skills and competences required for specific roles, guiding the design of targeted training programmes to address skills gaps.

Training design: NOS can be used to inform the content of training programmes by providing a clear framework of the required knowledge, understanding and skills. The standards can be used to develop learning goals, learning objectives and programme evaluation tools.
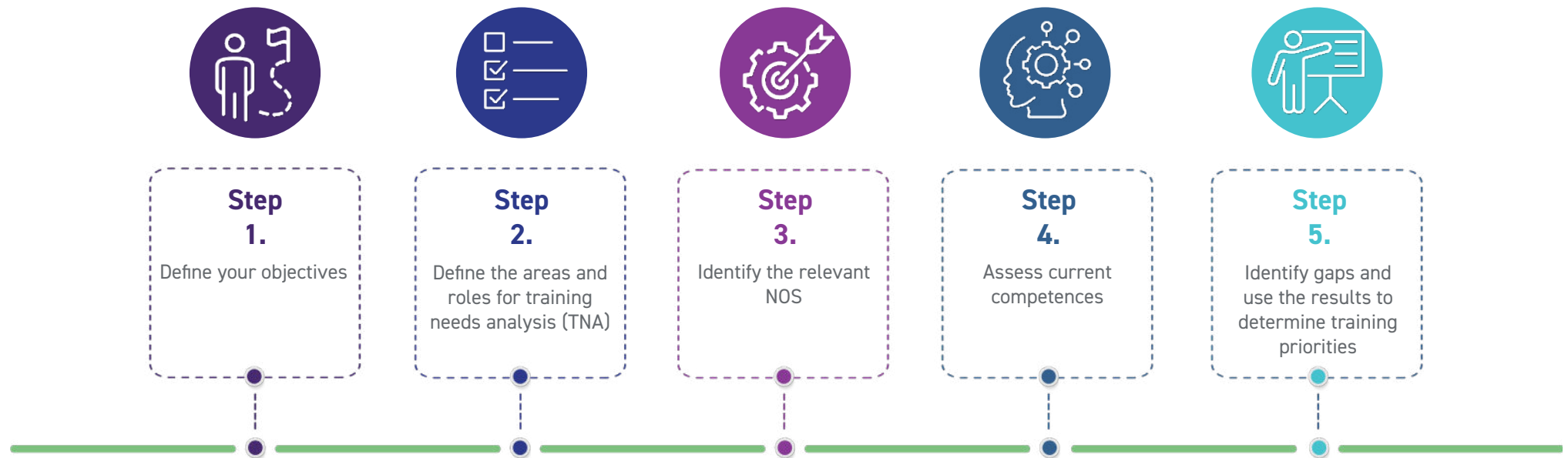
NOS can also support HR and workforce planning. Access our toolkit for HR and line managers for guidance on effectively integrating NOS into recruitment, employee development, and workforce planning.

Training needs analysis
Using NOS to carry out a learning needs analysis

- Learning and development teams and training providers can use the standards to gauge the skills of the workforce and use this information to set out training plans.

- Descriptors of best practice and competence can be used to create clear objectives for training and development, forming the basis of individual development plans or employee appraisals.

- Employees can use the standards to assess their current levels of skills and knowledge, allowing them to gauge their own development and career progression and to identify any training they may require.

- While NOS are not levelled, the same standards can appear across different roles at varying levels, depending on the context in which they are applied and the scope of a role. This enables employees to develop toward higher levels of competence.

- Training designers can use the standards in a mapping exercise to identify if their current training provision contains the skills and knowledge required by individuals to be competent in their job roles.

Step 1.
Define your objectives

Step 2.
Define the areas and roles for training needs analysis (TNA)

Step 3.
Identify the relevant NOS

Step 4.
Assess current competences

Step 5.
Identify gaps and use the results to determine training priorities

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Step one:
Define your objectives

The standards are built to be able to support your organisational and sector needs. To be able to apply National Occupational Standards efficiently, you first need to define your objectives in performing a training needs analysis (TNA).

Start by clearly defining the purpose of the TNA in alignment with the organisation's strategic goals and objectives. Understand the specific business priorities, such as new projects, regulatory changes or emerging industry needs. This ensures that the TNA accurately identifies the skills gaps that need to be addressed.

Step two:
Define the areas and roles for training needs analysis (TNA)

Based on the purpose defined in step one, choose the specific business areas or roles where you want to conduct the TNA. Identify the key tasks and responsibilities within those areas. This will help you focus on the relevant competences and performance criteria from the NOS, ensuring the TNA targets the most critical skills gaps.

Step three:
Identify the relevant NOS

Select the appropriate NOS for the identified role and tasks. To support you in this step, you can refer to the NOS mapping in the 'Building a stronger resilience workforce through National Occupational Standards' guide and search for NOS here. From the standard, you can pull out the relevant skills, knowledge and understanding required for the role.

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Step four:
Assess current competences

Evaluate the existing skills and competences within your workforce. Compare the current skill levels against the NOS requirements for each role to identify gaps in knowledge, skills and understanding.

Role:	
NOS: SFJCCAD2 Promote business continuity management	**Assessment**
Are you able to...	
1. Identify stakeholders who can contribute to or would benefit from support in business continuity management	
2. Collaborate with partners, stakeholders and specialists to develop advice and assistance on business continuity management	
3. Consider relevant risk assessments when developing advice and assistance programmes in line with organisational requirements	
Etc...	
Do you know and understand...	
1. Legislative and organisational policies and procedures relevant to your organisation for providing advice and assistance on business continuity management and sharing information	
2. The characteristics of organisational resilience and the purpose of business continuity plans and arrangements	
3. Business continuity management principles, culture and life cycle	
Etc..	

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Step five:
Identify gaps and use the results to determine training priorities

Once you've compared the current competences with the required NOS standards, identify the gaps in skills, knowledge and performance that need to be addressed. These gaps could be related to specific technical skills, broader competences or behavioural aspects that are crucial for job performance.

Next, prioritise the most critical gaps. Focus on the areas that will have the greatest impact on the objective outlined in step one. Once these priorities are identified, you can develop a focused training plan that addresses the most pressing skill gaps, ensuring the training delivers maximum value and aligns with both organisational and individual objectives.

Training design
Using NOS to develop employee learning

- Learning and development teams and training providers can design training against the competence statements to ensure that their employees have the skills and knowledge they need.

- The standards help identify and inform learning outcomes.

- Training can be structured using the standards to inform content and modular structure.

- The different levels of competency covered in the standards can be used to create progressive learning outcomes for those from junior into more senior roles, ensuring they have the appropriate level of competence according to their position in the organisation.

- The performance criteria can be used to inform a checklist to indicate when an employee will need upskilling or identify when they should begin a learner pathway, in conjunction with their job role description.

Step 1.
Identify your training objectives and scope
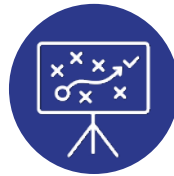
Step 2.
Map the different areas of competency and identify the applicable standards

Step 3.
Define the learning outcomes using the knowledge and understanding statements in the standards

Step 4.
Develop assessment criteria using the performance criteria statements in the standards

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Step one:
Identify your training objectives and scope

The NOS are built to be able to support your organisational and sector needs. To be able to apply the standards efficiently, you first need to define your training objectives.

- Objectives: Are you developing training to fix a skills gap, respond to a regulatory change, meet new organisational strategies, or support recruitment and retention plans? In any of these instances, you need to define the desired outcome.
- Determine which topics or roles the training will support and identify the target audience. This could include training for critical job functions, roles or service areas undergoing change, or broader organisational training, such as addressing changes in an HR policy on equality.

Step two:
Map the different areas of competency and identify the applicable standards

Collect the relevant standards based on your training objectives and the topics you aim to cover. Use the knowledge and understanding underpinning the identified NOS to inform the training

Whilst there are specific suites of NOS for Resilience and Emergencies, many general and supplementary standards apply across a wide range of roles and situations. Some of the most common general standards cover areas such as communication, health and safety, management and leadership and equality and diversity.

This helps keep the number of standards manageable and reduces the need to duplicate or create new standards for each business area or job role. In other terms, you might consider these to be transferable skills that apply across different sectors and roles.

You can view a mapping for resilience and emergencies NOS here and search the NOS here.

Step three:
Define the learning outcomes using the knowledge and understanding statements in the standards

Once you have the applicable standards, you can look at the knowledge and understanding statements to build out the learning outcomes for your training.

The level of information you take from the standards will be dictated by your training objectives. For example, if you're creating an awareness-level training programme, you may not need to cover all the detailed knowledge in the NOS. Instead, you could focus on outcomes like knowing where to find information or who to contact within the organisation.

In addition, you can add behavioural competences, such as communication, problem-solving or leadership skills. These may already be included in the standards but can also be informed by your organisational needs.

By taking the statements in the standards and applying it within your organisational context, you can make them specific to your required learning outcomes. For example, use the regulations, legislations, standards, policies and procedures that apply in your organisation in addition the statement.

For example, if you were building a business continuity awareness training course for managers and leaders, and your organisation is ISO 22301 accredited, you can add this information to qualify it in your organisational context. Using the statement from 'INSML011: Develop, maintain and evaluate business continuity plans and arrangements' you need to know and understand: the legal, organisational, codes of practice and policies relevant to your role and the activities being carried out, your learning outcomes might look like:

· Understand and be aware of regulatory requirements, including responsibilities under ISO22301 standard accreditation
· Be aware of and know where to find the organisational policies and processes related to business continuity

This step helps embed governance within all levels of organisational structure, supporting compliance and providing a framework for demonstrating good practice during inspections from regulatory bodies. Standards are built to facilitate any regulations, policies or procedures. There are a number of case uses of where this can apply in regulated industries, but equally, there are many ways that this applies to organisation specific standards, such as internal codes of conduct, HR policies, data protection policies and contractual agreements.

Step four:
Develop assessment criteria using the performance criteria statements in the standards

Once you have defined the desired learning outcomes, you should develop assessment criteria and formats that meet the needs of the training.

The performance statements within a National Occupational Standards indicate the competency required – your training should provide the knowledge and understanding to meet this statement, and your assessment should provide evidence that the individual can meet the performance criteria.

The assessment methods you chose will vary depending on the skills involved in the training, as well as resources available to training and learning and development teams.

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