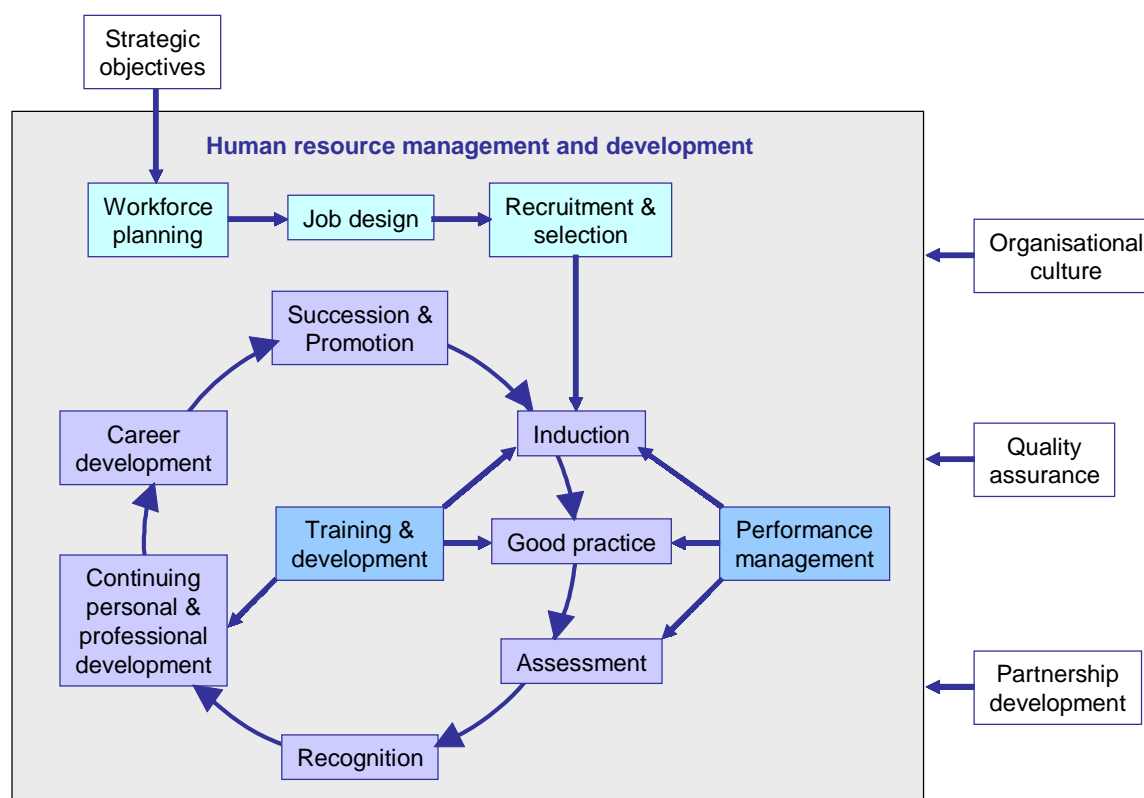


Using National Occupational Standards

A Brief Guide with Checklists

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National Occupational Standards can be used for a wide range of purposes throughout the human resource management and development cycle, as well as to support partnership development, quality assurance and the development of organisational culture.



National Occupational Standards can help plan the workforce needed to deliver an organisation's, or a partnership's, strategic objectives. The units in National Occupational Standards have been developed by analysing all the activities involved in delivering the key purpose of the sector and identifying the standards required to meet it. People's jobs can, therefore, be designed, and job descriptions created, taking account of both strategic objectives and individual competences. The units also list the knowledge and skills that workers need, so they provide a good basis for developing person specifications that can be used for assessing and selecting candidates during recruitment or for promotion.

National Occupational Standards can then be used throughout the human resource management and development cycle to

- identify what people new to posts need to find out and what skills they need to develop during their induction period

- provide workers with guidance on what is expected of them and a model of good practice when they are carrying out unfamiliar activities
- develop objectives with individual workers and teams and support them in improving their performance and achieving their objectives
- assess whether workers are performing to the required standards, and if not where the problems may lie
- identify learning needs, designing training and development activities and evaluating the impact of training and development on the individual worker's knowledge and skills, on their performance and on the achievement of strategic objectives
- recognise competent performance through feedback, certification or reward
- provide a clear framework so that individuals can plan, manage and evaluate their own continuing personal and professional development
- help individuals understand what is involved in new posts they might like to apply for, what competences they could bring to these posts, and what new knowledge and skills they would need to develop
- prepare individuals to take over from others when they leave or retire, and select the right individuals for the jobs.

Using National Occupational Standards will impact on organisational culture, as all workers work to a model of good practice and take personal responsibility for delivering a quality service in line with the organisation's quality framework. They also provide a common language for different organisations within a partnership to communicate with each other, negotiate, agree and understand each others' roles and responsibilities, to support each others' work and hold each other to account.

The following sections provide guidance on how you can use National Occupational Standards for these different purposes. They are not intended to be prescriptive, but to provide an outline that can be adapted to different situations.

Workforce planning

National Occupational Standards help you identify the activities that must be carried out to achieve your strategic objectives and plan the numbers of personnel and the competences they need to carry out these activities.

1. Clearly establish the strategic objectives your team, organisation or partnership has to meet. Ensure these are SMART – Specific, Measurable, Agreed, Realistic and Time-bound.
2. Identify from the National Occupational Standards which activities must be carried out in order to meet these objectives.
3. Estimate the number of people required to carry out each of these activities.
4. Identify the personnel available and the competences they have.
5. Allocate activities fairly to individual workers on the basis of their competence, capacity and opportunities for development.
6. Where personnel and/or their competences are inadequate to carry all the activities to achieve your strategic objectives, make the case for the recruitment of additional personnel or the development of additional competences within the existing team.
7. Where you are unable to obtain adequate numbers of personnel and/or their competences, renegotiate your strategic objectives so that they are achievable.

Job design

Closely related to workforce planning is job design – designing jobs that are attractive to personnel with the relevant competences, sustainable over time, and offer opportunities for development. The term “Job Specification” as used below comprises both the competence-based Job Description plus the specification of Knowledge, Understanding and Skills required.

1. Be clear about the purpose of the job – what will the job holder be expected to contribute to achieving the team, organisational or partnership objectives?
2. Identify from National Occupational Standards which activities the job holder will be expected to carry out.
3. List the relevant units of National Occupational Standards; this forms the basis of the job description.
4. From the units selected, identify the critical areas of knowledge and skills that the job holder will need to possess and list these.
5. Estimate whether you will be able to attract candidates who have the necessary knowledge and skills, are capable of carrying out the required activities competently over time and will be able to develop in the role.
6. If you are unable to attract suitable candidates, you will need to revise your job specification. This may mean also revising other people’s job specifications, and revisiting your workforce plans.

Recruitment and selection

The Job Specification, comprising both the competence-based Job Description and the specification of Knowledge and Skills required, is a vital component underpinning fair and effective recruitment, assessment and selection.

1. Check that the Job Specification is accurate and up-to-date and make this available to all applicants, together with access to the relevant units of National Occupational Standards, so that they can get a good understanding of the requirements of the job, judge for themselves whether they are suitable, and prepare to present their relevant experience in a positive light.
2. Establish your selection criteria. What knowledge, skills, qualifications and evidence of relevant experience do you require them to have? Which are essential and which are desirable?
3. Establish how you are going to assess candidates' knowledge, skills, qualifications and evidence of relevant experience. You may wish to use an application form and/or a curriculum vitae together with a letter of application to do the first sift. You may then want to see their qualifications, check references with current and previous employers and set tests or simulated activities to assess candidates' knowledge and skills. You may also want to hold interviews to verify information, probe areas of doubt and check that you have a common understanding of requirements and the candidates' ability to meet them.
4. Advertise, assess candidates and select and appoint the candidate(s) who best meets the Job Specification.
5. If you are unable to make an appointment, you may need to rethink the job design and revise the Job Specification.

Induction

National Occupational Standards can help people who are newly appointed to post to understand their roles and responsibilities and identify what needs to be in their induction plan.

1. Use the Role Profile (the list of National Occupational Standards relevant to the individual worker's role) to identify the activities relevant to the new role, and look at the units themselves to understand the standard of performance required and the underpinning knowledge and skills.
2. Identify those units where you are fully confident you can perform to the standard as described in the elements, and those units where you feel you need some training or development.
3. Use the Knowledge, Understanding and Skills section in each unit to identify precisely the knowledge and skills you need to develop. Make a note of these.
4. Agree with your manager how you are going to develop these knowledge and skills (sometimes you may need to go on a training course, at other times you may simply require a briefing on people, places and procedures, or support from a more experienced colleague in undertaking unfamiliar activities), and at what point in time you are going to check whether you now perform to the standard required.

Performance management

You can use National Occupational Standards to work with members of your team to help them perform to the standards required.

1. Make sure that each member of your team has an up-to-date Role Profile (the list of National Occupational Standards relevant to the individual worker's role) and access to copies of the units within their Role Profile.
2. Identify with each team member which units are critical to effective performance, and/or the units in which you would like to see an improvement in performance.
3. Ask the team member to assess themselves as to whether they consistently perform to the standard as described in the critical units. Also make your own assessment of the team member's performance in these units.
4. Discuss the team member's performance with them. Focus on the facts. Recognise occasions when they met the performance criteria and get them to acknowledge times when they did not meet them. Discuss and agree the reasons for this. It may be because they were unaware of what was required, or it may be because they lack some of the necessary knowledge and skills.
5. Agree what needs to happen to ensure the team member consistently performs competently (ie to the standard required). This may simply be the team member changing what they do; it may require some training or development to acquire new knowledge or skills; it may mean that you need to give them some coaching support and close supervision to guide their work.
6. Agree when you are going to reassess the team member's performance.
7. Provide the team member with the training, coaching, supervision and/or other type of support agreed.
8. At the agreed time, ask the team member to reassess their performance in the critical units, and ask them to think of specific examples when their performance met the criteria. Also make your own reassessment of their performance.
9. Again, discuss the team member's performance with them, focusing on the facts. Recognise and congratulate the team member on improvements in their performance and agree with them any areas that need further work.
10. Where appropriate, reward the team member for their performance.

Good practice guidance

At their simplest, the units in the National Occupational Standards can be used to provide guidance on how to carry out your work activities.

1. When you need to undertake a new or unfamiliar activity, identify the relevant unit(s) from National Occupational Standards.
2. Use the performance criteria to help you plan how to approach this activity.
3. Check that you possess the necessary knowledge and skills; if you do not, take appropriate action to acquire them.
4. Keep the relevant unit(s) to hand and consult them regularly as you are carrying out the activity.
5. When you have completed the activity, review what you have done and check that it was in line with the standard described in the unit(s). It is useful to carry out this review with your supervisor or a close colleague.

Training and development

National Occupational Standards can support training and development needs analysis, the design of training and learning materials, and the evaluation of the effectiveness of training and development interventions.

Training and development needs analysis

1. Identify the units of National Occupational Standards relevant to the work of those whose training and development needs are to be analysed.
2. Assess whether the workers perform to the required standard, or ask the individual workers to assess how confident they feel about their performance in the identified units.
3. Where workers are not performing to the required standard, or they are not confident about their performance, look at the knowledge and skills and identify any gaps.
4. Record any gaps in knowledge and skills – these are training needs that must be met.
5. Where appropriate, summarise the training and development needs for the group of workers as a whole, prioritise these and decide which should be addressed on a group, and which on an individual, basis.

Design of training and learning materials

National Occupational Standards specify the standard of performance required of workers and the knowledge and skills necessary for competent performance. National Occupational Standards, therefore, specify the corpus of knowledge and skills required, and provide learning objectives for specific training interventions and learning materials.

1. Identify the units of National Occupational Standards relevant to the work of the workers who need training and development. The combined knowledge and skills sections from these units specify the corpus of knowledge and skills the workers need.
2. Identify the specific units in which the workers need to develop their competence and express this as an *overall aim* for the learning programme in terms of the performance required. Eg: “Following the learning programme and a period of supervised practice, participants will be competent to enable people to recognise indications of substance misuse and refer individuals to specialists” (Unit AA1 in the Drugs and Alcohol National Occupational Standards - DANOS).
3. Use the knowledge and skills specifications within the unit to identify the *specific learning objectives* that need to be met by each training event or learning module. Eg: “At the end of this session/module, participants will know and understand:
 - the range of different substances and their effects
 - the range of different indications of substance misuse: physical, behavioural and information provided by the individual or from other sources
 - other factors which produce indications that may be interpreted as caused by substance misuse
 - ways of keeping your knowledge about substances and indications of substance misuse up to date

- how to investigate situations in order to make a reasonable judgement about substance misuse
 - sources of assistance about substance misuse
 - substance misuse specialists, and procedures for referring individuals to them
 - the range of actions you can take when individuals may be misusing substances, and how to decide what action is appropriate.”
4. Design the learning programme and individual sessions using appropriate media to ensure that the overall aim and specific learning objectives are met.

Evaluating the effectiveness of training and development

National Occupational Standards can help you to evaluate the effectiveness of training and development interventions at three different levels:

- knowledge and skills acquisition
 - individual performance
 - impact on achievement of strategic objectives.
1. Before commencing the training or development activity, clearly define the specific learning objectives as described in the section above. On completion of the training or development intervention, assess participants (using oral questioning, written tests, simulated activities etc) to check whether they have effectively acquired the knowledge and skills.
 2. Before commencing the learning programme, clearly define its overall aim in terms of the standard of performance required. On completion of the learning programme and a period of supervised practice, assess participants (using observation, reflective accounts, witness testimony, oral questioning etc) to check whether their performance now meets the required standard.
 3. Before commencing the learning programme, be clear how competent performance in these activities contributes to the achievement of the strategic objectives of the team, organisation or partnership and which strategic objectives would not be met if these activities were not carried out competently. Evaluate the contribution of the learning programme in delivering competent performance and therefore meeting the strategic objectives.

Assessment

National Occupational Standards can be used to assess both the performance of individual workers and the extent to which they possess the required knowledge and skills. The assessment may be for a number of different purposes, such as selection, identification of training needs, evaluation of the effectiveness of training, performance management, quality assurance or public certification.

1. Whether you wish to assess performance or knowledge and skills, you must first identify the units of National Occupational Standards relevant to the work of the workers being assessed. You should then decide whether the workers are to be assessed across the whole range of units, or just in selected units.

Tip. It is often useful to prioritise and select just those units which are critical to their performance.

2. Use the performance criteria in each element of the units to assess the workers' performance. The question you should seek to answer is *When carrying out this activity, does the worker consistently meet the performance criteria?* For example, in element AA1.1 in the DANOS standards, you would seek to answer the question *When recognising indications of substance misuse and referring individuals to specialists, does the worker consistently investigate situations sufficiently to allow them to make a reasonable judgement about whether individuals are using substances?* You would want to see evidence of this happening, which may be

- direct observation of the worker carrying out the activity, either in real or realistically simulated situations
- testimony of colleagues who witnessed the worker carrying out the activity, or of the patients who were the subject of the activity
- reflective reports by the worker describing the activities they carried out and their reasoning
- oral questioning of the worker to establish what they did and their reasoning.

Usually, a combination of evidence should be used to make a fair and safe assessment.

3. Use the knowledge and skills specifications in each unit to assess whether workers' possess the required knowledge and skills. By assessing a number of units together, it may be possible to eliminate duplication of knowledge and skills items that appear in more than one unit. The question you should seek to answer is *Does the worker know and understand how to apply these knowledge and skills?* For example, in unit AA1, you would seek to answer the question *Does the worker know and understand the importance of monitoring the situation regarding an individual's misuse of substances, and how to do so?* It may be possible to *infer* that the worker possesses these knowledge and skills through the assessment of their performance, or you may wish to supplement this with other assessment methods, such as

- written tests of knowledge
- demonstrations of skills under realistically simulated conditions
- computerised tests and simulations

- oral questioning of the worker to establish their knowledge and the extent of their understanding.

Recognition

National Occupational Standards provides a framework for the fair and safe assessment of workers' performance. Where workers consistently perform to the standards required, it may be appropriate to recognise this through confirming the workers in their posts, regrading them, providing certificates of competence (such as NVQs or SVQs), providing financial rewards, or a combination of these. The way competent performance is recognised will be a matter for local policy.

Continuing personal and professional development

Individual workers can use National Occupational Standards to manage their own personal and professional development.

1. Identify the units of National Occupational Standards relevant to your work, both currently and in the next 6-12 months.
2. Assess your own performance in each unit.
3. Prioritise those units in which you are not fully confident about your performance and which will be critical over the next 6-12 months.
4. Use the performance criteria to identify specific areas of your performance you wish to improve, and use the knowledge and skills sections to identify specific knowledge and skills you need to acquire.
5. Identify and seize suitable learning opportunities (courses, learning materials, working with people more expert than yourself, coaching from your supervisor etc) to help you develop your knowledge and skills.
6. Use the performance criteria to plan your work, guide your activities and reflect on your progress.
7. Reassess your performance at appropriate intervals and continue your personal and professional development.

Career development

National Occupational Standards can also help individual workers plan and take action to develop their careers.

1. Identify the units of National Occupational Standards relevant to your work.
2. Identify new career opportunities that you would like to apply for and identify the units of National Occupational Standards relevant to these posts.
3. Compare the new career opportunities with your current post and consider the similarities and differences. What experience do you have that could be relevant to the new post? Which of your current knowledge and skills could you bring to the new post? Is the new post within your grasp, or would it be too demanding?
4. If you believe the new post to be within your grasp, identify what new knowledge, skills and experience you would need in order to be successful in it. Plan to acquire the new knowledge and skills and gain the relevant experience – you may need help from your manager, human resources specialists or other colleagues in achieving this.
5. Apply for the new post, confident in your ability to meet many of its demands straightaway and all of its requirements once you have gained the necessary knowledge, skills and experience.

Succession planning and promotion

Organisations can also use National Occupational Standards to identify who is likely to succeed to a post when someone leaves or retires, and prepare them for their new role.

1. Identify the units of National Occupational Standards relevant to the post you need to find a successor for.
2. Identify those individuals in your team, organisation or partnership who have similar Role Profiles and compare their Role Profiles with that of the post you need to find a successor for. What are the similarities and differences? What new knowledge, skills and experience might they need to gain in order to be successful in the new post?
3. Plan to help suitable individuals develop the necessary knowledge and skills and find opportunities for them to gain the necessary experience, under supervision.
4. When the post becomes vacant, assess and select the most suitable candidate for the post (see the section on recruitment and selection above); don't forget to fill the post that the candidate leaves vacant!
5. Remember to provide adequate induction for the new person in post (see the section on induction above). Even though they come from the same organisation, their new circumstances will be different and they will need support in order to become truly effective in their new role.

Organisational culture

Using National Occupational Standards as a team, organisation or partnership inevitably has an impact on the culture of that team, organisation or partnership. The culture that develops is one of empowerment, reflection, and individual and collective commitment to delivering services to agreed quality.

Because National Occupational Standards clearly state the standard of performance expected of workers and the knowledge and skills required, workers are empowered to perform effectively and to take action to develop the knowledge and skills they required (see the sections on good practice guidance and continuing personal and professional development above). National Occupational Standards provide a framework to reflect on own and others' practice, to give and receive feedback designed to help improve own and others' performance so that services are delivered to meet the needs of service users.

Quality assurance

National Occupational Standards place responsibility for quality assurance firmly in the hands of individual workers. They know clearly the standards they are expected to work to and can check they are consistently meeting these standards. Their managers also have a framework to assess the performance of their team members and be assured they are competent to carry out the activities assigned to them with the minimum of supervision (see the sections on performance management and assessment development above).

National Occupational Standards supports all organisation quality assurance systems and can be formally linked to quality initiatives such as ISO9001:2000, Investors in People, PQASSO, EFQM Excellence Model and Clinical Governance.

Partnership development

National Occupational Standards offer a useful structure to support partnership development, because they provide a common language and an overall framework in which all partners can understand their own roles and other partners' roles in working towards a common purpose.

1. Working with all the partners, either individually or, better still, as a team, identify who is accountable for which activity in the National Occupational Standards and who is involved.
2. Discuss areas where there are gaps in the partnership's coverage and areas where there are overlapping accountabilities. Is it appropriate that there are gaps (it is not necessary for every partnership to cover the whole of the NOS area)? Are the overlaps in accountabilities appropriate or do these reveal duplication of activities and potential areas of conflict between partners? Is every partner clear about their own accountabilities and how these relate to other partner's roles.

Tip. It is often useful to invite an external person to facilitate this discussion which may touch on individual sensitivities and demand a certain amount of negotiation between the partners.

3. Require all partners to ensure that individual workers are consistently working to the standards described in the competences. Challenge each other on your performance and look for opportunities for joint training and development on areas of common interest.