

The National Occupational Standards Board

Prospectus for Funding for the United Kingdom's Standards Development Programme 2003 - 2004



Background

The National Occupational Standards Board's (the Board) primary role is to ensure that national occupational standards are world-class statements of the skills knowledge and understanding needed in employment. It oversees and supports the development of National Occupational Standards across the UK and has introduced a new strategic approach to funding national occupational standards through an annual bidding process.

Funds for national occupational standards development are collected quarterly from awarding bodies on the basis of a £10 levy on each Scottish and National Vocational Qualification certificate issued.

The Qualifications & Curriculum Authority and the Scottish Qualifications Authority provide staff and administrative support to the NOS Board to enable operation of the funding allocation process. However, the decisions reached on funding are made on behalf of the NOS Board and are not decisions of either the QCA or the SQA.

What is this Prospectus all about?

This prospectus invites bids from sector bodies on the basis of an annual plan for national occupational standards for the period 1 November 2003 – 31 October 2004. An estimated total of £3m, dependent on the levy fund, is available for this period and sector bodies are invited to submit their bids by 17 October 2003.

Section one	Provides information about the funding priorities and the procedures for dealing with applications
Section two	Details of the specifics about making applications for funding

The following sector bodies are eligible for funding:

- Sector Skills Councils (licensed SSCs, SSC trailblazers and SSCs in the development phase) recognised by the Sector Skills Development Agency SDA;
- Sector bodies including but not exclusively, former national training organisations and formerly recognised standards setting bodies who can meet the requirements in Appendix A concerning coverage, financial viability and probity, contracts delivery and continuing quality improvement.

Timetable for applications for 2003/2004 funding

In order to achieve the aim of providing a coordinated and accessible system a common timetable and funding application process is now in place.

- 23 rd July 2003 Prospectus and guidance for funding annual standards plan published
- 17 October 2003 Deadline for return of completed application forms
- Mid November 2003 Applicants informed of funding decision

How to submit a bid

All applications for funding are to be completed on the application form (template) appended to the "2003 -2004 Prospectus - a guide to tendering" and should cover:

- Project titles
- Background to the sector
- UK wide industry support for the annual standards plans
- Methodology
- Timetable
- Costs
- Financial breakdown
- Monitoring and evaluation

Applications for 2003/2004 funding

All applications, two paper versions and one in electronic format (email, floppy disk or CD) of the annual standards plan, should be sent to:

Programme Leader – Occupational Standards Delivery

Qualifications and Curriculum Authority

83 Piccadilly

London

W1J 8QA

Electronic applications can be emailed to: musanos@qca.org.uk
No submissions will be considered after **12 noon on 17 October 2003**

SECTION ONE: GENERAL INFORMATION

Priorities and procedures

Priorities

The priorities are:

- To develop national occupational standards to meet international best practice;
- To develop the Scottish and National Vocational Qualifications structure, signposting key and core skills and assessment strategies, as appropriate.

How much money is available from the Fund?

An estimated total of £3 million is available for allocation to standards development activity in the financial year 2003-2004. If total requests across all sector bodies exceed this amount, annual plans will only receive part funding or no funding at all even if the annual plans meet the criteria listed in section two.

Procedures

Application Form

All organisations can apply for funding using the application form (template). Please refer to the document "Funding Annual Standards Plans – July 2003" for details on how to complete the application.

Database

We shall record details of all application forms on a database. This will support the monitoring of funds and provide information about the allocation of resources to sectors.

Processing applications

- 17 October 2003 deadline for completed applications to be returned to central contact at QCA;
- application forms will be recorded on the database so we can track their progress;
- a confirmation receipt will be issued detailing your reference and contact persons;

- application forms will be assessed against annual eligibility to claim funding;
- applicants will be notified of the decision by mid November 2003.

Decisions

The decision reached by the UK co-ordinating group about each application will be communicated to the applicant in writing.

Payment of funding and contracts

If an application is successful, written confirmation of the funding will be made in the form of a contract. The funding contract will clearly state the amount, purpose and duration of the funding, the arrangements for payment, the monitoring and evaluation arrangements that apply; and the circumstances in which funding might be terminated. The contract will require successful applicants to ensure that the national occupational standards produced by their plans comply with the criteria for national occupational standards, the criteria for Scottish and National Vocational Qualifications, and the guidance for key and core skills signposting and assessment strategies.

The successful applicant will be solely responsible for correct project performance and compliance with contractual undertakings. The contract will provide for payment to be made on the achievement of specified milestones as detailed in the contract. All milestones must be achieved on time and to the quality expected at QCA and SQA. The failure to meet milestones on time and to the quality expected might result in payments being terminated, funds would be withdrawn from the whole project and reallocated to other plans.

Availability of outcomes from funding

Through its contractual arrangements with the Board and any subcontractors working on the standards, all sector bodies (licenced SSCs, SSC trailblazers, SSCs in the development phase and other sector bodies) must agree to, and ensure that:

- **the outcomes (national occupational standards, qualification structures and assessment strategies) must be available without charge for use by the awarding bodies and UK regulatory authorities in vocational qualifications accredited and approved by the regulatory authorities, or for use by higher education for qualifications in the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications.**
- **national occupational standards are available without charge for use by the Sector Skills Development Agency to create a freely available database of national occupational standards linked to relevant qualifications databases of the UK regulatory authorities.**

SECTION TWO: FUNDING AND SUPPORT

The annual standards plan will be viewed on the basis of:

- the extent to which the bids set out the information required under the criteria on pages 7-10;
- the clarity of that information;
- the extent to which those assessing the bid agree that the plans set out in the bid meet the applicants own descriptions and analysis of them in the bid and;
- the extent to which those assessing the bid are themselves reasonably satisfied that the plans have the features referred to under each set of criteria on pages 7-10.

All bids will be assessed against the above requirements. If the bids do not satisfactorily and clearly express these requirements then they will not be considered for funding.

Those bids that have addressed these requirements will then be considered for funding. We will consider bids for:

- a) work on the development of national occupational standards to meet international best practice;
- b) qualifications related activity;
- c) work on the development of national occupational standards to meet international best practice **and** qualifications related activity.

If applying for funding for work on the development of national occupational standards to meet international best practice **and** qualifications related activity and you get a low rating for the work on the development of national occupational standards to meet international best practice component of your bid then your bid will not be considered for funding – this is because we believe that strong qualifications can only be based on well founded research.

We have included a list of information which should be provided in your bid unless it is clearly not relevant to your particular bid (Pages 9-10). This information will be used as a basis for assessing the bids together with the criteria on pages 7-8.

Financial support

1 ***National Occupational Standards***

a) ***Work on the development of national occupational standards to meet international best practice.***

The criteria for national occupational standards have sufficient flexibility to allow occupational standards to be developed in a way that makes them suitable for uses other than qualifications. Sector bodies, when developing and revising their national occupational standards must consider the broader uses of standards within their sector and not allow the language and format of their standards to be constrained by their link to Scottish and National Vocational Qualifications.

The creation of the Skills for Business Network has, as one of its main drivers, the need to improve productivity of businesses within the United Kingdom. Benchmarking is used to describe a systematic process of comparing performance against the best in the world in order to match, and in time exceed, the acknowledged current best practice. Benchmarking can be done at the individual, organisational, or sectoral level. Benchmarking allows sectors to analyse and improve key business processes, eliminate waste, improve performance profitability and market share.

The Board welcomes funding bids, which ensure that national occupational standards reflect the needs of employers and encompass worldwide best practice. We will be particularly sympathetic to proposals that demonstrate a process of ongoing consultation and dialogue with the sector's members, using this evidence to effect incremental change to the standards where needed.

You need to demonstrate how your national occupational standards will match the broad description above and the standards programme prompts (page 9).

2 ***Qualifications related activity***

a) ***Scottish and National Vocational Qualifications structure***

Where there *is* an intention that the national occupational standards will be used as the basis for Scottish and National Vocational Qualifications, the sector body should develop a qualification structure for Scottish and National Vocational Qualifications, made up of mandatory and optional units, where possible to provide maximum flexibility.

b) *Developing assessment strategies*

Where there is a need to develop Scottish and National Vocational Qualifications, the sector body must provide an assessment strategy to complement the national occupational standards. This must enhance the quality assurance arrangements and be developed in partnership with awarding bodies in the sector.

c) *Signposting Key and Core Skills*

Key Skills (England, Wales and Northern Ireland) and Core Skills (Scotland) should be signposted into national occupational standards. Sector bodies should wherever possible consider signposting adult literacy and adult numeracy skills into national occupational standards for use in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

You need to demonstrate how your qualifications related activity would match the broad description above and the standards programme prompts (page 9).

Failure to address all issues may result in the funds not being allocated.

If, following assessment against the above criteria, the total funding requested in bids exceeds the resources that are available then we will allocate funds taking into account:

- Contribution to the Gross Domestic Product of the UK
- Impact on employment level in the UK
- Amount dispersed to predecessor body in the last five years
- Successful previous performance of predecessor body
- Internal capacity of the organisation to carry out the work in-house
- Urgency of the redevelopment of qualifications – if applying for qualifications related activity.
- Urgency of the need for the project – especially legislative requirements.

Standards Programme - information to be included in bids

1. Description of the annual standards plans and projects
1a. Contribution of the annual standards plan to workforce development and skills needs in the sector. Identify how the annual standards plan meets and/or links to the workforce development and skills needs for your sector. Identify which funding priorities it meets and include details of employer usage and evidence of the employer need for these projects. Demonstrate how you will engage employers, especially SMEs, in the work that will be completed in the annual standards plan.
1b. UK wide coverage. Identify how the annual standards plan will ensure effective UK wide coverage and how you will measure the effectiveness of this work UK wide.
1c. Subject matter and methodology for the project. Outline the activity you wish to undertake and set out a clear methodology for your activity. Explain how you will work with other allied industries, sectors, funders, interest groups, initiatives that is to say is this a coherent project or a one off project?

2. What will the standards plan achieve
2a. Outputs of your annual standards plan. Explain the main outputs of this annual standards plan and outline why these are realistic and achievable. Describe the biggest issue that funding this work will address.
2b. Long-term impact of the annual standards plan Annual standards plans must be able to demonstrate longer-term benefits as a result of the work undertaken. This will include details on how the success of the national occupational standards will be measured and the impact evaluated. Explain how you will measure the success of the national occupational standards in 6 months, 12 months and 3 years after completion.

<p>3. How will standards plan progress be managed to ensure objectives are achieved?</p>
<p>3a. Delivery and management of the annual standards plan Annual standards plans must set out a delivery plan, which is realistic and sets out milestones with clear deadlines to ensure that projects come in on time and to budget. Applicants should provide details for the strategy for managing data, finance and resources, and should identify how the plan will deal with any deviation from the delivery and how this will be communicated to QCA.</p>
<p>3b. Previous relevant experience your organisation has in delivering plans of this nature Outline the experience of your organisation in successful management of existing or inherited contracts, including any evidence of successful project management. Please provide evidence of projects that you have submitted that have delivered a quality outcome and were approved at the first bidding process.</p>
<p>3c. Demonstration of value for money Annual standards plans must demonstrate value for money for projects. This criterion will be used to ensure consistency across all sectors bidding for funding.</p>

NB. Resources available for allocation for standards development are limited and you may wish to prioritise the projects within your plan to help with any rationing that might be necessary.

Complaints about unsuccessful bids

The standards plans will be considered and evaluated at a two-day event in October. This will be recorded and documented. Funds will be allocated up to the £3 m resources available. If following confirmation of the decision you wish to complain about any decision not to allocate funds to your bid, the following process will apply.

Complaints against decisions will be considered where it is alleged that one or more of the following has occurred in relation to the decision about funding:

- a) That the decision making process has not been properly administered in accordance with published guidance and procedures;
- b) That the criteria have not been applied fairly and reasonably;
- c) That any formal conditions imposed on the grant of funding are unreasonable.

Complaints must be made formally to the QCA/SQA officer in writing within 10 working days of receipt of the decision letter.

What is a complaint?

For the purposes of this procedure a complaint is defined as a written expression of dissatisfaction or concern about the services related to the funding of annual standards plans, on one or more of grounds (a) to (c) set out above.

The following process will occur when a complaint is received:

- an independent group including members of the board will consider the complaint in 15 working days of receiving an application. The group will have no previous involvement in the decision- making process.
- The group will review the applicants' written complaint, together with the annual standards plan (i.e. its original bid) and the decision made on the basis of the scoring framework. It will decide whether any grounds of complaint set out above have been made out, i.e. whether proper process has been followed and a reasonable decision taken. They will not substitute their substantive view for the professional judgement of the original decision-makers.
- The parties concerned will be notified of the outcome of the meeting by letter within two working. The Group will publish its conclusions and underlying reasoning within 15 working days.
- Copies of the decision letter will be sent to the appellant and regulatory authorities.

Complaints not covered

The group will not consider complaints where the basis for the complaint is, or amounts to, the fact that the sector body disagrees with the substance of the decision. The group will not substitute its judgement on the substantive assessment of the bids for the professional judgement of the original decision-makers.

Successful complaints

A small reserve will be kept back from the funding pool to ensure that the Board can deal appropriately with complaints which are upheld. Where a complaint is upheld, it will be re-considered in light of the findings on the grounds of complaint. If following re-consideration it is decided that funding would be appropriate, funding will be allocated on the same basis as if the bid had received funding following initial consideration, to the extent that funds are available from the reserve. If there are funds remaining in the reserve following conclusion of the complaints procedure this will be allocated on a pro rata basis to any bids to which funds have been allocated but which have not received the full amount requested in the bid.

Organisations eligible for funding

A body will not be eligible for funding if it is not prepared to agree to the procedures referred to throughout this document, in particular the conditions as to the free availability of standards.

Subject to this position, we will contract with:

1. Sector Skills Councils (licensed SSCs, SSC trailblazers and SSCs in the development phase).
2. Sector bodies including, but not exclusively, former national training organisations and formerly recognised standards setting bodies who can meet the following requirements concerning coverage, financial viability and probity, timely contract delivery and a commitment to continuing quality improvement:
 - 1 there is a demonstrable and effective UK-wide (England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales) representation within the organisation;
 - 2 there is clear and strong support for the organisation's project proposal from employers and employment interests with a robust process for consulting with employers, including SMEs, in the sector or across sectors;
 - 3 the organisation is engaged effectively with learning providers, where learning providers are key users of the products;
 - 4 the organisation is financially viable and is not dependent on a single source of project income from the UK administrations, Scottish Skills Development Agency or Standards Programme;
 - 5 the organisation can demonstrate successful management of existing contracts, including well drafted project proposals;
 - 6 the organisation can demonstrate there is no conflict of interest between its proposed work on standards setting and other roles (e.g. awarding qualifications);
 - 7 the organisation builds constructive working relationships with all relevant awarding bodies offering related qualifications;
 - 8 the organisation can demonstrate its links with inspection agencies and funding bodies, where learning providers are key users of the system;
 - 9 the organisation has an ongoing communications policy with employers that demonstrates how it will continue to meet employer and employment needs to review the quality of national occupational standards;
 - 10 the organisation undertakes to demonstrate by means of an impact analysis

the effect of its national occupational standards on qualifications and on work based employment activities.