

SQA Accreditation

June 2013

Consultation on the use and value of National Occupational Standards - Scottish Stakeholders

Summary Report

Introduction

As a member of the NOS Governance Group, SQA Accreditation was asked to consult with Scottish stakeholders on the use and value of National Occupational Standards (NOS).

The consultation was open for response between 23 May and 10 June 2013 and 115 stakeholders were directly invited to respond via online survey or by return email. The focus of SQA Accreditation's consultation was primarily on the use and value of NOS by employers and training providers in Scotland. As a result, trade associations, professional bodies, SSCs and colleges were also invited to respond where appropriate. Responses from a number of 'other' organisation types were also received.

Response

A total of 60 responses to the consultation were received. Responses came from a variety of stakeholders in Scotland. Breakdown as follows:

Employer	Trade Association	Professional Body	College	Training Provider	Public Body / NDPB	SSC /SSB	Other
13	5	4	1	17	4	14	2

Please note that this report will focus primarily on the responses received from employers, trade associations, professional bodies, colleges, training providers and key public bodies/NDPBs. A consultation has already been undertaken by the Federation for Industry Sector Skills and Standards which gathered feedback from SSCs.

Key findings

Key findings from the consultation are:

- ◆ Although the majority of respondents to the survey were aware of NOS, the general feedback was that awareness of NOS is low among employers, professional bodies and trade associations as well as the general public.
- ◆ NOS usage would increase if they were more widely recognised.
- ◆ There is a general lack of promotion on the varying uses of NOS and promotional activity should be increased so that stakeholders recognise their value and uses.
- ◆ UK-wide system of NOS is important to stakeholders with some variation where appropriate.

- ◆ The level of detail in NOS is difficult to balance. Some stakeholders felt NOS were at an appropriate level of detail for their sector while others felt they were either too detailed or not detailed enough. Respondents valued the consistency of standards overall but some specialist job roles have alternative requirements which may vary across nations and may therefore require a different level of detail.

- ◆ The main uses of NOS are in:
 - Qualification development and Apprenticeship Frameworks
 - Training development and delivery
 - Recruitment and performance management
 - Career development and identification of skills gaps

- ◆ Particular strengths of NOS include:
 - They are nationally recognised standards of competence
 - Clear recognition of an individual's skills and competence, benchmarked across the four UK nations
 - Allows flexibility in qualification/training development while maintaining standards
 - Industry-led so meet sector needs (however this may not be case in all sectors)
 - Allows recognition and transfer of skills and competence across sectors and borders
 - Clear standards of competence for use in recruitment, job descriptions, identification of skills gaps in business and career development

- ◆ Potential areas for improvement of NOS are:
 - Both the development and review of NOS needs to be streamlined and more cost and resource efficient
 - NOS database website needs vast improvement to allow stakeholders ease of access to NOS
 - To ensure fitness for purpose NOS must be reviewed regularly, particularly in regards to a substantial change in legislation, but also to ensure they are kept up-to-date with technological advances being adopted by industry
 - The NOS language could be simplified
 - Involvement of SMEs in NOS development and implementation should be increased and encouraged to ensure NOS are appropriate for all in sector

Summary of Consultation

1. Are you aware of the existence of NOS?

Organisation Type	Yes	No
Employer	11	2
Trade Association	5	0
Professional Body	4	0
College	1	0
Training Provider	16	1
Public Body / NDPB	4	0
SSC/SSB	14	0
Other	2	0

Of the 60 stakeholders who responded to the consultation, only two employer organisations and one training provider were *not* aware of the existence of NOS.

There was a general feeling however that many potential users of NOS were not aware of them and that further promotion of NOS should be undertaken to widen awareness and ultimately usage of NOS.

2. If so, do you use them? How do you use them?

Organisation Type	Yes	No	Other
Employer	10	3	0
Trade Association	4	0	1
Professional Body	3	1	0
College	1	0	0
Training Provider	16	0	1
Public Body / NDPB	4	0	0
SSC/SSB	14	0	0
Other	2	0	0

54 respondents said that they use NOS and responses to this question reflect the variety of ways NOS are used. Examples of the use of NOS listed by respondents include:

- ◆ Informs qualification development and delivery by
 - Defining industry standards of competence (including UK-wide standards)
 - Underpinning vocational qualifications, including SVQs and other competence-based qualifications.
- ◆ Building blocks for Apprenticeship Frameworks
- ◆ Recruitment - tool for development of job descriptions and to identify skills requirements for job roles
- ◆ Training course development (including in-house training programmes)
- ◆ Training needs analysis of workforce
- ◆ Performance appraisal and to assess competencies of employees

It was also highlighted that some employers may not even be aware that they are using NOS in the above activities or that NOS is available for them to use in these ways.

3. Are you involved in the development of qualifications?

Organisation Type	Yes	No
Employer	9	4
Trade Association	4	1
Professional Body	3	1
College	1	0
Training Provider	14	3
Public Body / NDPB	4	0
SSC/SSB	13	1
Other	2	0

50 of the consultation respondents are or have been involved in the development of qualifications.

4. Are you aware of the role of NOS in underpinning the qualification system by describing minimum competence in occupations and job functions?

Organisation Type	Yes	No
Employer	8	5
Trade Association	5	0
Professional Body	4	0
College	1	0
Training Provider	16	1
Public Body / NDPB	4	0
SSC/SSB	14	0
Other	2	0

54 respondents were aware of the role of NOS in underpinning the qualification system by describing minimum competence in occupations and job functions

5 of the 13 employer organisations that responded were not aware that NOS underpinned qualifications by describing minimum competence in occupations and job functions.

5. Are you aware of the use of NOS in apprenticeship frameworks?

Organisation Type	Yes	No
Employer	10	3
Trade Association	5	0
Professional Body	4	0
College	1	0
Training Provider	13	4
Public Body / NDPB	4	0
SSC/SSB	14	0
Other	2	0

53 respondents were aware of the use of NOS in apprenticeship frameworks. Those who answered 'No' were either not aware of NOS in the first place or were familiar with NOS in SVQs but not in apprenticeships.

6. Do you participate in establishing NOS for your sector? If so, who do you work with?

Organisation Type	Yes	No
Employer	9	4
Trade Association	3	2
Professional Body	3	1
College	1	0
Training Provider	12	5
Public Body / NDPB	4	0
SSC/SSB	14	0
Other	2	0

48 respondents participate in establishing NOS for their sector and work with a relevant Sector Skills Council or Standards Setting Body.

Of the 12 that said they do not participate in establishing NOS for their sector, one employer said that they will be participating in this activity soon and two training providers said that they would like to be more proactively involved in NOS development.

7. What are the strengths of the NOS you have encountered?

The most common strengths of NOS cited by respondents were as follows:

- ◆ Nationally recognised standards for qualifications
- ◆ Allow for benchmarking against a national standard
- ◆ Recognition of skills and competencies
- ◆ Provide value to employees when they achieve industry standards
- ◆ Standards available to employers on which to build job roles/descriptions on
- ◆ Allow for clear articulation of learning outcomes
- ◆ Flexible
- ◆ Meet needs of sectors as industry-led
- ◆ Meets the needs of range of employers including SMEs (may not be the case in all sectors)
- ◆ Allows for the transferability of skill and labour

Responses from **employers, trade associations and professional bodies** reflect that they particularly value NOS for being UK-wide industry standards and providing standards that can be used for developing job roles, training provision and recruitment. Some also recognise that a key strength of NOS is that they give employees clear guidelines on the level of competence required and are a good sector-wide benchmark.

Responses from **training providers** highlight that the strengths of NOS they value are that they are based on work practices and developed by industry therefore are in the main representative of job roles in the sector, the competence standard required is clear, they are descriptors of good practice and are a useful tool for workforce development.

8. Are the NOS you are aware of at an appropriate level of detail?

Organisation Type	Yes	No	Other
Employer	9	1	3
Trade Association	2	1	2
Professional Body	3	0	1
College	1	0	0
Training Provider	13	3	1
Public Body / NDPB	2	1	1
SSC/SSB	14	0	0
Other	1	0	1

Response to this question was varied although the majority of respondents (45) stated that they felt that NOS *were* at an appropriate level of detail overall. Among those that felt the level of detail was appropriate, four respondents cited the recent review of NOS in their sectors as the reason. Other respondents recognised that within their sectors, the level of detail required in NOS could vary across job roles.

Employer organisations highlighted the following sectors as having NOS at the appropriate level of detail:

- ◆ Maritime
- ◆ Building Services Engineering
- ◆ Construction
- ◆ Oil and Gas
- ◆ Accounting and Financial Services
- ◆ Justice, Community Safety, Armed Forces and Legal Services
- ◆ Business and Administration
- ◆ Security
- ◆ Social Work, Social Care and Children's Services

Other respondents highlighted the following further sectors as having NOS at the appropriate level of detail, in addition to those listed above:

- ◆ Freight Logistics
- ◆ Hospitality, Transport, Travel and Tourism
- ◆ Health
- ◆ Land-based and Environmental industries
- ◆ Food and Drink

Some respondents elaborated on their answer:

"I believe the recent reviews are ensuring that the key job areas are captured in the NOS." (Employer)

"Yes and no. They are very 'open' in some areas but then very specific in others. I understand this is due to the vast difference in people delivering the qualifications, resources, sites available etc, but it can lead to some areas always requiring 'simulation' just to get the missing evidence." (Employer)

"NOS provide the required detail to facilitate credit rating and levelling against SCQF. This ensures that the sector can have confidence that the NOS are set at the right SCQF level and volume of study for individuals." (NDPB)

“In order to allow the derivation of various products from NOS, they must, by nature, be general or generic; too much detail may narrow the focus and reduce the flexibility of use. As long as the NOS state the minimum requirements of competence, skills and knowledge, they should have enough information for ‘subject matter experts’ to derive products, qualification units with a competent, trained and academic outcomes, with an appropriate level of detail. (Professional Body)

A smaller volume of respondents (6) stated that they *did not* think that NOS were at the appropriate level of detail. However, feedback was inconsistent with some respondents feeling that the NOS they were aware of had too much detail while others felt that they required more:

*“There is too much detail and not enough definition of skill and competence”
(Employer)*

“Sometimes not, and there are areas where NOS can be overly detailed to the minutia of detail whereas in other cases wide swathes of underpinning requirements are missed. I find this to be the case in, for example, equine dental technicians. My example here is that participants wanted to identify the trade name of the disinfectant they used to clean their instruments where this was not required and yet they did not seem to identify the importance of some underpinning knowledge such as the horse's gastro-intestinal anatomy which may be highly significant in terms of the way they do their job” (NDPB)

*“No they require a lot more detail of what is required to achieve competence.”
(Public Body)*

“The most common feedback is that parts of the aquaculture NOS is set at too low a level for the industry. There is a need for more advance Professional Development Awards or bespoke training packages, as well as for a greater range of on-line learning opportunities.” (Trade Association)

Of the 22 **employers, trade associations and professional bodies** that responded to the consultation, 14 felt that the NOS were of an appropriate level of detail and four felt that they were not.

Of the 18 **training providers and colleges** that responded to the consultation, 14 felt that the NOS were of an appropriate level of detail and three felt that they were not.

The majority of comments received reflect the opinion that regular review is critical to ensure that NOS remain up-to-date with industry needs.

9. Do the NOS you are aware of cover your sector adequately? Do they cover all the jobs within it?

Organisation Type	Yes	No	Other
Employer	11	0	2
Trade Association	2	1	2
Professional Body	1	1	2
College	0	1	0
Training Provider	11	3	3
Public Body / NDPB	1	3	0
SSC/SSB	9	0	5
Other	1	0	1

In general, the majority of respondents felt that NOS covered their sector adequately (36) but agreed that that did not necessarily mean that the NOS covered all jobs within it. There was also consensus that regular review of NOS was essential to ensure that the level of detail of NOS remain appropriate.

Of the 22 **employers, trade associations and professional bodies** that responded to the consultation, 14 felt that the NOS they were aware of covered their sector adequately.

Of the 17 **training providers** that responded to the consultation, 11 felt that the NOS they were aware of covered their sector adequately.

However, three training providers and the one college that responded to the consultation felt that NOS do not cover their sector adequately

Some respondents elaborated on their answer:

“Sector yes but as an organisation we specialise in other areas which are not covered.” (Employer)

“They do not cover all jobs but do cover about 95% of the jobs” (Employer)

“They cover the majority of trades, however, the OPITO in-house CMS has come in useful for jobs such as Materials Controllers, Lube Techs etc. which aren't as common in some sectors.” (Employer)

“They probably cover most jobs in the various sub sectors, Adequacy is subjective: i.e. they do excessively cover Health & Safety as a topic but do not cover Animal Welfare and Biosecurity at all well.” (Employer)

“Following recent reviews and work on establishing skill sets the NOS reflect the jobs within the social service sector. However, changes in government policy, needs of the public etc may alter. Therefore regular reviews of the NOS are important to reflect changes in practice.” (NDPB)

“Within Construction, jobs and functions are constantly changing and developing, the NOS must have the ability to change in order to match current occupational practices. Functional analysis and functional mapping has ensured most recognised construction occupations have NOS. However, there will be occupations in all sectors, and activities or tasks within jobs, that do not have NOS; we are just not aware of them yet.” (Professional Body)

“They do although with advances in technology they may need to be reviewed more frequently” (Trade Association)

“We deliver the NOS to a variety of employers in differing occupational areas - the standards can clearly cover these areas” (Training Provider)

“Not always. For example, in the animal care industry, jobs are extremely diverse. e.g. the requirements for caring for an elephant in a zoo are hugely different for those required to care for pet dogs. The NOS standards are the same but they don't allow for that diversity” (NDPB)

“No it has been highlighted that the current NOS for pharmacy technicians and pharmacy support workers require to be reviewed as a priority.” (Public Body)

10. Do you have views on the ways NOS could be used more widely or effectively?

The majority of respondents offered suggestions on ways NOS could be used more widely or effectively with the most common suggestions being:

- ◆ Improved marketing and promotion of NOS to employers, how they are developed, the benefits of NOS and their range of uses
- ◆ Increased emphasis on their role in HR development and recruitment processes
- ◆ Increased involvement of SMEs in NOS development to ensure NOS appropriate for whole sector
- ◆ Improved access to NOS via fit-for-purpose NOS database
- ◆ Promotion of their use as building blocks/framework for training programmes

It is suggested therefore that activity could be undertaken to increase *employers'* knowledge in particular of the varying uses of NOS, improve access to NOS and ensure NOS are appropriate for all employers in the sector with the view of widening the use of NOS. However, in their current form there may not be any *additional* uses of NOS over and above those that have already been described.

Examples of the responses provided by respondents include:

“NOS could be better promoted throughout industry” (Employer)

“If people were educated more on how the standards work and how they can be used it would encourage a wider uptake. Perhaps making some of them more complex may encourage advanced apprenticeships or standards for supervisory roles might give them more substance as some perceive them as being too easy to complete.” (Employer)

“It's likely NOS would be more widely used if we decreased the focus on them being about qualifications and "sell" them as being building blocks for much wider HRD processes.” (Employer)

“I am unsure that NOS as they stand at the moment could be used more widely...I believe that there needs to be a change in approach to their development to make them more effective. I think NOS perhaps should be categorised more effectively by relating them directly to specific job roles.” (NDPB)

“I strongly feel that the NOS is steered by the more vocal employers and awarding bodies, it appears to me that SME representation is low, and this is often the vital sector in terms of the body and depth of work required within a role.” (Other)

“More publicity would promote the use of NOS. There is a document professing that there are 115 uses for NOS, this could be used as part of the publicity campaign.” (Professional Body)

“The current NOS database is extremely poor. Even searching for NOS that is known to exist often shows inaccurate or no results. A better, more user friendly system is required. More effective marketing and communication of what NOS are and the benefits of NOS is also needed on a UK level. We promote NOS in our sectors but there is a general lack of understanding or awareness on a wider level as to what they are and can be used for etc. Employers may effectively use products and services derived from NOS without realising the link.” (SSC/SSB)

“I think they can be useful in providing a framework around which educationists and trainers can develop courses and training provision. In some aspects, they will tend to be outdated quite quickly in any industry undergoing continuous technological development. Therefore there is a risk that they may become constraining.” (Trade Association)

“Whilst they are competence based, they should form the basis of HNC/HND courses to provide the necessary skills/knowledge to allow students to blend into industry much quicker.”(Trade Association)

“Many employers are totally unaware of NOS” (Training Provider)

11. Are you aware of equivalents to NOS in other systems? Are there any lessons we could learn for the UK system?

The main feedback received against this question was that the UK system of NOS is highly regarded in some sectors internationally and that NOS frameworks are being adopted in many developed and developing countries.

“I think a system that breaks down standards to relate to specific job roles may work more effectively and also allow NOS to be more effectively used by employers in terms of job definition and training needs.” (NDPB)

“Yes these exist in most developed countries and many developing countries are trying to adopt systems based on NOS.” (Other)

“Many countries look to the UK for the development of competency or qualification frameworks, South Africa, Pakistan, Nepal, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and India are a few we are aware of. Germany, France and the Netherlands have employment registration schemes based on NOS that may be worth analysis.” (Professional Body)

“The NOS we produce are highly regarded in the transport sector across the European Union; this has led to our participation in various cross-European transport qualification development projects linked to the EQF. UK NOS seem to be used as the basis for developments in other systems.” (SSC)

“I am aware of other international competency frameworks. I think UK NOS are very good but they are not presented and promoted effectively.” (SSC)

12. Are there any improvements you could suggest to the current system?

Respondents made a number of suggestions to improve the current system of NOS. In line with feedback given elsewhere in the consultation, these improvements could be made by:

- ◆ Increasing the involvement of SMEs in NOS development and implementation
- ◆ Streamlining the development and review processes so that it is more cost and resource efficient
- ◆ Ensuring there is ease of access to NOS via a user-friendly and fit-for-purpose website
- ◆ Reviewing NOS regularly to ensure they are up-to-date with legislation changes and technological advances
- ◆ Simplifying the language used in NOS
- ◆ Increasing promotion of NOS, the value they can bring to stakeholders and their various different uses

Comments received by respondents elaborate on these key points:

“Employer consultation should be done at the NOS stage all the way through to apprenticeship frameworks. Employer consultation takes place at each stage for NOS, Awarding Body Qualifications, Apprenticeship Framework.” (Employer)

“Stop duplicating NOS. Built NOS into the context, don't build the context into the NOS.” (Employer)

“Too numerous to list, but: 1. Simplify the language 2. Look at core units and sub sector specific units to make more room for sector skills in an individual unit and cover H&S once as a standalone unit. 3. Reduce the practice of cross-referencing to previous items achieved in other units.” (Employer)

“Wider involvement to include more SME viewpoints.” (Other)

“I think the NOS should be subject to regular review and where a substantial change in legislation occurs affecting the sector should definitely be revisited to ensure fitness for purpose.” (Professional Body)

“Streamline the process for the review of NOS, from experience it is a very time-consuming process which took several years to complete.” (Public Body)

“Funding to publicise NOS, nationally from the bottom up, so that everyone involved (employers and stakeholders including the delivery media) know what the source documents are for an occupation or task, how they are developed and maintained and how useful they can be. Custodianship of NOS is allocated using the Standard Occupational Classification Codes, the regulator could strengthen this by defining ‘limits of exploitation’ or ‘footprints’. Make single organisations responsible for occupations and give them authority to remove any proliferation of the allocated NOS via consultation with the originator.” (Professional Body)

“The SVQ model for the direct use of NOS as the basis of workplace qualifications ensures that the employer voice is most directly translated into the qualification products. We are concerned about developments outside Scotland that diminish the influence of NOS in qualifications.” (SSC/SSB)

“Make them easier to find and access for employers. Link them to an interactive website which offers business solutions, careers pathways etc.” (SSC/SSB)

“The system for developing and approval of NOS can be slow and expensive. Making this less bureaucratic and more responsive could improve this.” (SSC/SSB)

“In some - to be written in simpler terms of English - one question within each K&U rather than asking for 2/3 within the same criteria.” (Training Provider)

“Reduction in similar NOS for different sectors, for example the management NOS can be adapted for most sectors providing optional units are selected to meet the needs of the candidate and their organisation, but some sectors now developed similar NOS, for example hospitality and retail.” (Training Provider)

“A universal system for users of NOS to access current versions across all nations.” (Training Provider)

“No as I feel this is an efficient system.” (Training Provider)

“Aspects of QCF-type qualifications are excellent - less wordy, more user friendly, transfer of credit, suitability for learners and career paths I guess we will move in this direction in Scotland in time.” (Training Provider)

13. Do you think it's important that the UK has a nation-wide system of NOS?

Organisation Type	Yes	No	Other
Employer	11	0	1
Trade Association	3	1	1
Professional Body	3	0	1
College	1	0	0
Training Provider	15	0	3
Public Body / NDPB	3	0	1
SSC/SSB	14	0	0
Other	2	0	0

The majority of respondents felt that it is important for the UK to have a nation-wide system of NOS (52) however some respondents highlighted that there are some difficulties when executing this idea, particularly in regards to sectors that may have varying skill requirements in job roles which may, on the face of it, seem the same:

“Important for each sub-sector to have a simple NOS, but questionable that the overall sector needs a single NOS.” (Employer)

“Where the sector is represented across the UK then a UK wide NOS system works however there may be times when a separate NOS is required where for example the legislation for that sector differs between countries.” (Professional Body)

“As a resource yes. The fact that they are national make them of necessity generic and therefore not adequate for everyone's requirements.” (Training Provider)

“No, as the U.K. comprises 4 unique identities that must be respected as they have differing legal procedures that can affect the job role. This especially in security is essential in that teaching the powers of arrest and trespass differ tremendously between England and Scotland and different again in some aspects from say Northern Ireland.” (Training Provider)

**14. What are the main benefits to the UK having a nation-wide system of NOS?
Who benefits the most?**

Respondents highlighted benefits to the UK having a nation-wide system of NOS and these are summarised as follows:

- ◆ NOS underpin most UK wide competence qualifications
- ◆ Provide consistency of standards in qualifications across all four nations
- ◆ Allows for comparability of qualifications
- ◆ Standardised approach to competency and a benchmark for standards in job roles
- ◆ Consistency of content on which various qualifications are based
- ◆ Help identify skills gaps
- ◆ Provide clear goals for structured learning

Employers and employees benefit as without NOS many industries would need to develop their own competency frameworks and potentially qualifications would become a confusing landscape for employees and employers. They also benefit from NOS having a UK-wide system as:

- ◆ It provides consistency for employers and stakeholders.
- ◆ Give employers confidence that whatever the current rebranding for qualifications or apprenticeships, they are assured of a consistent content and quality.
- ◆ May reduce costs for recruitment by standardising the selection and interview process of employees.
- ◆ Help identify and fill skills gaps at a common standard.

Employees can benefit in terms of personal/professional development and by identifying skills gaps and professional membership requirements. UK-wide NOS also allow employees to accumulate evidence that could be used to obtain a qualification across the UK.

Public and Service Users benefit as in some sectors it can provide them with the confidence that they receive the same standard of skilled and informed care across the UK.

Training Providers benefit from a UK-wide system of NOS as they can provide clear goals for structured learning and define consistent learning outcomes for sectors across the UK.

However a couple of respondents also highlighted weaknesses in the argument for a UK-wide system of NOS:

“The main drawback, however, is the lack of flexibility to respond to emerging issues in a single country. Without some level of flexibility, NOS will always lag behind sector developments or reflect the concerns of the majority nation.”
(Public Body)

“The principle is fine, the practice is unwieldy and clumsy and likely to deter new users. The only beneficiaries must be those in the F.E. sector who have perfected a model for providing evidence to certificate a qualification without the challenge of prior training for the candidate. (Employer)

15. Is the current system being used effectively? Are there other uses which should be developed?

Overall, respondents stated that there should be an increase in the use of NOS as an HR tool. For example, in the development of job roles and descriptions, assessing performance and development needs, identifying skills gaps and recruitment and selection.

However, there was a general feeling that NOS required increased promotion of their potential uses and wider knowledge of the standards of competence they offer.

It is important to note however, that although respondents appreciated the various uses of NOS overall it was highlighted that, in some sectors, NOS require regular review to ensure they are relevant to industry.

“I will say that a system as cumbersome as this needs considerable refinement before moving on to other topics. I’m sure that career tools etc. are of use to small and micro enterprises, but most would not get beyond the current NOS.” (Employer)

“This is an under-developed area of NOS usage which would definitely benefit from further promotion within nations. NOS should be a key reference tool for these areas. Some employers do this really well and NOS employer champions should be identified as part of this strategy.” (SSC/SSB)

“I suspect that the main users of the NOS are those in education institutions. There may be limited use by personnel managers in certain context - but my suspicion is that they will base recruitment predominantly on formal qualifications and in-career experience.” (Trade Association)

16. Are you aware of any functions or sectors in which NOS are particularly successful? Why is this?

Response to the consultation highlights a number of sectors/industries in which NOS are particularly successful. These can be summarised as follows:

- ◆ Oil and Gas industry due to the development/adaptation of NOS to meet the challenges of the Offshore industry;
- ◆ Leadership and Management due to the focus on employer needs;
- ◆ Environmental Conservation as NOS allow for ease of access into the sector;
- ◆ Social Services sector as they underpin the regulation of the workforce learning and development;
- ◆ Farriery as it is a narrow sector and NOS can be easily developed;
- ◆ Construction sector as employers are committed to NOS and competency based qualifications. In construction the attainment of professional membership and Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS cards) have been the main drivers for NOS and derived competency qualifications;
- ◆ Freight Logistics as the NOS introduced over the past 10 years have made a positive impact and a growing number of employees in the sector with NOS-based vocational qualifications has created a market of people with recognised, transferable skills and given real shape to entry and apprenticeship routes; as well as
- ◆ Equine, Hospitality and Tourism sectors, Care, Health and Justice sector, Agriculture sector and Maritime sector.

Comments provided by respondents elaborate on the success of NOS in these sectors:

“Offshore industry work with Awarding Bodies in developing or adapting NOS to meet the challenges of the offshore industry.” (Employer)

“They are successful in the Oil and Gas industry in ensuring a technician has met the minimum required level of competence for their job role.” (Employer)

“Leadership and Management. Perhaps because the people using them recognise how useful/valuable they are in a wide range of circumstances. Also CFA clearly focus on the business skills angle which is much more focussed on the needs of the employer.” (Employer)

“Environmental Conservation, it is a practical job, so the NOS at the right level work well, it also gives an easier entry into the sector.” (Employer)

“The social service sector in Scotland has successfully invested commitment to use of NOS to underpin registration and regulation of the workforce learning and development. A reason for this investment might be that NOS are written by the sector for the sector.” (Public Body)

“I think they work best in construction areas - think they work least well in areas where there is rapid industrial change like computing - this not a reflection on need for NOS but on process and management of keeping these up to date and openly available.” (Other)

“NOS are successful in Construction and the Built Environment. Employers have remained committed to NOS and to the qualifications with a competent outcome derived from the NOS. Many organisations use NOS to define membership or registration criteria e.g. Construction Skills Certification Scheme, Chartered Institute of Building and the Construction Plant Competency Scheme.” (Professional Body)

“The Freight Logistics sector is large and diverse, with employers of all sizes throughout the UK. There is no legacy of common approaches and standards for skills development. Historically, there has been little common definition of job roles and even less recognition of professionalism in key occupations. The NOS introduced into the sector in the past 10 years have made a real impact in changing this situation. The growing number of employees in the sector with NOS-based vocational qualifications has created a market of people with recognised, transferable skills and given real shape to entry and apprenticeship routes.” (SSC/SSB)

“In our own sector (extractives and mineral processing) the Health and Safety Executive use NOS to establish the definition of 'competence' in the Quarries Regulations 1999.” (SSC/SSB)

“Business and Administration NOS - covers roles in multi sector disciplines.” (Training Provider)

“Management as they professionalise the employees who use them and provide a framework for development in an area that is so important but often neglected.” (Training Provider)

“They are used extensively in offshore Oil and Gas sector, and have become the desirable 'must have'.” (Training Provider)

“I would support SummitSkills and the current NOS, they form the backbone of the Electrical qualification.”(Training Provider)

“Only aware of our own section – Horse Care. This qualification is increasingly popular mainly because of the options available and the flexibility that they give.” (Training Provider)

17. Similarly, are there any particular areas of weakness?

Respondents highlighted a number of areas of weakness for NOS including:

- ◆ NOS are often out of date as they are not reviewed often enough or in line with technological advances within the sector
- ◆ There are a large number of NOS, often for similar skills
- ◆ There is a lack of understanding and awareness of NOS and their uses
- ◆ Access to NOS is limited and problematic

Some comments from respondents give further insight into these:

“In my area of work the industry has moved radically over the last 15 years and the NOS should be revisited on a more frequent basis to update.” (Employer)

“Despite work by UKCES to improve the NOS database, there is still no simple and attractive website which is aimed at and encourages and enables employers and learners to 'browse' all of the UK NOS in one place and gain information about NOS-based products.” (SSC/SSB)

“In areas where there are a lot of cross sector generic type soft skills involved or high end skills it is harder to define. Also in heavily regulated industries the employers tend to prefer more detailed NOS which leave little flexibility in range and delivery ie airlines.” (SSC/SSB)

“If we want employers to use NOS they need to be accessible. The problem at the moment is that an employer trying to find suitable standards for people in his organisation would have a great deal of difficulty finding suitable NOS from the many thousands currently on the NOS database.” (SSC/SSB)

“They may become constraining if they do not develop as fast or faster than the relevant industrial sector.” (Training Provider)

18. Are there any final comments you would like to make on NOS in particular, or on the qualifications / apprenticeships landscape in general?

A number of additional comments regarding NOS and apprenticeship landscape in general were provided by respondents and can be summarised as follows:

- ◆ NOS play a significant role in workforce development
- ◆ The public can be assured of consistent standards of workforce across the 4 nations
- ◆ There are multiple uses of NOS that support employers, employees and training providers
- ◆ Primary value in being industry/employer driven
- ◆ UK standards are held in high regard internationally
- ◆ NOS protect and promote standards in a consistent manner yet allow for flexibility in application
- ◆ Allow for transferability of skills within and across sectors
- ◆ Investment in support of NOS maintenance is critical and essential for employers and individuals and the wider economy
- ◆ More rigor in quality assurance of NOS
- ◆ Need clear articulation of the benefits of using NOS and increased promotion of how to use them to achieve these benefits is required if the potential is to be realised.
- ◆ Increased promotion of NOS would encourage wider use
- ◆ Employers may use and value qualification and training products without realising that they are based on NOS.

List of Respondent Organisations

Angus Council, Towards Employment Team
 Aviagen UK Ltd
 B.L.E.S. Training
 BDO LLP
 CBI Scotland
 C.J. Safe and Secure Training
 Chartered Institute of Payroll Professionals
 CITB
 Competence Matters Ltd
 Construction Industry Council
 ECITB
 Federation of Master Builders Scotland
 Financial Skills Partnership
 Genius People
 Glasgow City Council
 Graphic Enterprise Scotland
 Honeywell Security Group
 Horse Sense
 Improve Ltd
 ITCA LTD
 Izon Security Ltd
 L&G Learning
 Lantra
 Limelight Careers
 Maggie Braid Associates
 Maritime Skills Alliance
 MPQC
 NAFC Marine Centre
 National Trust for Scotland
 NHS Education for Scotland
 NDSL
 Pearson
 People 1st
 Pointer Ltd
 Sacro
 Salvas Learning and Consultancy Ltd
 Scottish Court Service
 Scottish Electrical Charitable Training Trust (SECTT)
 Scottish Prison Service
 Scottish Qualifications Authority
 Scottish Social Services Council
 Scottish Women's Aid
 SELECT
 Skills Development Scotland
 Skills for Health
 Skills for Justice
 Skills for Logistics
 Scottish Salmon Producers Organisation
 SummitSkills
 Training Matters
 VWS Westgarth
 Wood Group PSN