



# **Handbook: Using National Occupational Standards, industry and higher education standards in the development of SQA qualifications**

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Purpose

This handbook replaces the guide, *Using National Occupational Standards in the development of SQA Group Awards* (2006). It provides detailed guidance on how to use National Occupational Standards (NOS) and other industry and higher education standards effectively when developing SQA qualifications. It is useful for those designing and developing SQA units and qualifications, including:

- ◆ qualification managers and qualification officers
- ◆ qualification design teams
- ◆ unit writers
- ◆ vetters
- ◆ consultants
- ◆ validation panel members
- ◆ qualification support teams

This handbook introduces NOS, industry and higher education standards, and provides practical guidance on:

- ◆ using standards in the development of SQA qualifications
- ◆ the benefits of using standards in SQA qualifications
- ◆ identifying standards for use in qualifications
- ◆ aligning units and qualifications to standards
- ◆ using standards to develop criterion within SQA units and qualifications

The content of this handbook has been informed by SQA's Research and Evidence Report, *Using National Occupational Standards and other industry standards in the development of SQA Qualifications*<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> SQA, 2018. *Using National Occupational Standards and other industry standards in the development of SQA Qualifications*. December 2017. Glasgow: SQA. Unavailable online

## 2 Principles

This guidance reflects SQA's principles of assessment, which underpin the use of NOS and other industry standards to develop qualifications.

### 2.1 Principles of assessment

Assessment is an integral part of the qualification development process. As the awarding body, it is SQA's responsibility to ensure assessment requirements are clear to all centres and their learners from the start.

SQA must ensure that its qualifications are credible with users, partner organisations, and the wider community, and that they provide nationally recognised standards of attainment. This means that all assessment methods, whether internally or externally assessed, must meet our principles of assessment. All SQA assessments must be:

- ◆ valid
- ◆ reliable
- ◆ practicable
- ◆ equitable and fair

For more information on these principles, please refer to SQA's [Guide to Assessment](#).

### 3 Materials and resources

The following documents can support you to use NOS, industry and higher education standards to develop qualifications:

- ◆ [Guide to Assessment](#)
- ◆ Design Principles (as appropriate to the qualification)
- ◆ Guidance for developing unit, group award, course specifications, and assessments (as appropriate). An SQA officer can provide this on request.

## 4 What are standards?

This section provides information about the types of NOS, industry and higher education standards available, and why they may be useful when developing qualifications.

### 4.1 Introduction to standards

To support the development of education and vocational training in the UK, a broad range of standards is used. Standards play a central role in defining and shaping knowledge, skills, higher education and vocational competences, and technical and professional practice. They are described using different terms and take a variety of forms:

- ◆ Higher education standards, curriculum standards, knowledge and/or skills standards, assessment standards, and certification standards are all forms of educational standards. This handbook uses the term 'higher education standards' to describe the standards that support the development of qualifications.
- ◆ NOS, occupational standards, industry standards, professional standards, skills standards, competence standards and assessment standards are all forms of vocational standards. This handbook uses the terms 'NOS' and 'industry standards' to describe the vocational standards which support the development of qualifications.

NOS, industry and higher education standards are very important for SQA. They are used to inform the development of its qualifications to ensure these meet the needs of learners, employers and the economy. For example a qualification can be designed from the knowledge and/or skills from a subject or vocational area, by mapping or signposting it to the content of relevant approved higher education standards, NOS, or industry, professional or regulatory standards.

A range of standards-setting bodies, industry and/or professional bodies develop higher education and vocational standards, and are informed by experts from the field or subject area. They come in many different forms, each serving its own unique purpose or set of purposes.



## 4.2 National Occupational Standards

National Occupational Standards (NOS) are statements of standards describing what an individual needs to do, know, and understand in order to competently carry out a particular job or function. National Occupational Standards are:

- ◆ National — because Scotland, Northern Ireland, and Wales fund, develop and approve the standards, and employers in all four nations use them.
- ◆ Occupational — because they specify the standards that need to be applied for functions in the workplace.
- ◆ Standards — because they are benchmarks of good practice in workplace competence, which have gone through a robust approval process.

The structure of NOS is in a single format. The main sections of a NOS include:

- ◆ a title accurately reflecting the function
- ◆ an overview providing a brief description of what the NOS is about
- ◆ performance criteria specifying the things an individual must be able to do
- ◆ knowledge and understanding criteria specifying what an individual needs to know and understand

NOS may include other elements such as scope and/or range, values, behaviours or skills. There are more than 20,000 NOS, covering the majority of job roles in the UK. They are developed for generic areas, including administration, management, and information technology, and for more specific areas, for example accounting and finance, building and construction, and engineering. Where carefully grouped together, NOS can make up the requirements of a full work role, an occupation or even an entire sector, which are some of the many reasons they are important in qualifications.

The devolved administrations fund NOS. Under the management of Skills Development Scotland, NOS are procured annually, and approved standard-setting organisations (SSOs) develop them. These are usually sector skills councils and delivery partners. SSOs rely heavily on the expertise from employers and industry to inform the content of the standards and verify that they are fit for purpose.

The development and approval of NOS follows a process in which employer engagement is central to each stage of every NOS project. Working with SSOs, industry experts are involved in drafting NOS, which then undergo a UK-wide engagement process with employers and other stakeholders, before a UK NOS panel approves the NOS. This panel consists of UK representatives from SQA Accreditation (Scotland), Qualifications Wales (Wales), Council for the Curriculum, and Examinations and Assessment (Northern Ireland). From 2010, there has been no representation from England on the NOS panel. Once approved, NOS are freely available for use on the UK Standards database at: <https://www.ukstandards.org.uk>.

NOS are widely used by sector skills councils, awarding bodies and employers for qualifications development, human resource management, learning and development, performance management and workforce planning. Qualifications development is one of the

main uses of NOS in the UK. NOS provide a very important reference point to SQA and other UK awarding bodies in the development of vocational qualifications.

## 4.3 Industry standards

A range of industry standards (other than NOS) supports skills developments across a wide range of sectors:

- ◆ professional standards
- ◆ apprenticeship standards
- ◆ British Standards
- ◆ international standards

### **Professional standards**

Professional bodies develop professional standards for members whose jobs require them to have specialist knowledge, skills, training and/or a suitable qualification. Membership of a professional body is often subject to whether or not the profession is regulated and requires a professional qualification, a license to practice, or to be listed on a professional register. There are more than 80 chartered professional institutions in the UK, including finance, engineering, construction, health, law, journalism, personnel and management. Professional bodies set out, through professional standards, the requirements for professionals in their field to meet the relevant level of professional membership, for example associate, chartered and fellow.

Professional standards describe the main professional skills, knowledge and behaviour required for the profession, without going into the level of detail provided in NOS. They have an important role in the development of qualifications and lend themselves well to this purpose because they are often written in terms of knowledge, understanding and skills-based outcomes. SQA can also use professional standards to ensure that a qualification aligns with membership requirements, or by providing exemptions to components of a professional qualification as agreed by a professional body.

Note: permission must be obtained from the relevant professional body before using professional standards for the development of qualifications.

### **Apprenticeship standards**

Apprenticeship standards provide work-based learning opportunities to those in employment. Apprenticeships normally combine with a qualification in a particular occupation, which is set to an agreed industry standard. In a similar way to NOS, they set out standards required for individuals to demonstrate competence. However, a single apprenticeship standard covers an entire occupation, whereas a single NOS covers a function or part of an occupation. Apprenticeship standards are important to SQA because many of its competence-based qualifications (CBQs) form a component of existing apprenticeship frameworks. There are apprenticeship standards covering more than 1,500 occupations across the UK.

The criteria within apprenticeship frameworks vary widely across the UK nations in terms of structure and content of each 'standard'. In Scotland, the criteria consist of three very detailed components — namely, a Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQ) or CBQs (which

are based on NOS), Core Skills, and industry-specific training. Similarly, three detailed components make up the apprenticeship frameworks in Northern Ireland: a CBQ (based on NOS), a Technical Certificate, and Essential Skills. The NOS are used to develop qualifications which are components of apprenticeship frameworks in both Scotland and Northern Ireland.

In England and Wales, the new apprenticeship standards have shifted away from containing specific detail and are presented at high level to enable more flexibility in delivery. Groups of employers, known as trailblazers, design these new apprenticeship occupational standards to meet their own skills needs, those of their broader sector, and of the economy.

The guidance on writing apprenticeship standards says ‘apprenticeships are based on occupational standards’ and that each occupational standard must detail the knowledge, skills and behaviours required for competence in:

- ◆ each duty
- ◆ any mandated qualifications
- ◆ the occupation level
- ◆ where applicable, any statutory and/or regulatory entry requirements and professional body alignment

The apprenticeship standard outlines what the individual will be able to do on successful completion of the apprenticeship. It informs the ‘End Point Assessment Plan’, which tests apprentices against the occupational standard before completion of their apprenticeship. The occupational standards have various uses, including:

- ◆ designing off-the-job training
  - ◆ designing and delivering on job training
  - ◆ producing assessment tools, such as written tests and observations
  - ◆ designing T level programmes which are technical programmes designed with employers to give young people the skills that industry need’
- (IfA, 2018)<sup>2</sup>.

Note: there are no copyright restrictions on any of the UK’s national apprenticeship frameworks at the time of publication.

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<sup>2</sup> Institute for Apprenticeships (2017). How to guide for trailblazers. Available online at: [https://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/media/1033/how\\_to\\_guide\\_for\\_trailblazers\\_-\\_v2.pdf](https://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/media/1033/how_to_guide_for_trailblazers_-_v2.pdf)

## British Standards

The British Standards Institute (BSI), the national standards body in the UK, develop and publish documents that carry the status of 'BS' (British Standard). There are over 35,000 published BSI standards covering a wide range of sectors. BSI define a British Standard as:

*a document that sets guidelines and good practice for organisations to follow. It is not compulsory for organisations to use a standard, although if a standard supports legislation, for example, (in the case of toys or domestic appliances) a manufacturer or supplier may demonstrate their compliance with the requirements of the law by using the standard<sup>3</sup>.*

Standards committees, made up of industry experts, develop at an international level most BSI standards, and review these at least every five years. These publish in various formats, including:

- ◆ product standards
- ◆ test methods
- ◆ codes of practice
- ◆ guidelines standards
- ◆ management systems standards
- ◆ Publicly Available Specifications

BSI standards are not designed specifically to support the development of qualifications. However, they contain current information on processes, products, procedures and practices, and statutory and regulatory requirements, which could be of significant benefit to informing the content of qualifications. For example referencing regulatory requirements and/or to help develop specific aims learning outcomes.

Note: unlike NOS, BSI standards are not freely available, but can be purchased from BSI. They are protected by copyright, and require permission from the publishers to use the standards for any purpose other than what was originally intended.

## International standards

International standards are documents that provide requirements, specifications, guidelines or characteristics to use consistently to ensure materials, products, processes and services are fit for their purpose. They give world-class specifications for products, services and systems, to ensure quality, safety and efficiency.

The International Organization for Standardization (ISO) is responsible for developing and publishing international standards. For example ISO 9001:2000, *'the distinguished international standard'* specifies requirements of a quality management system. Organisations use ISO standards to demonstrate their ability to provide safe, reliable, high-quality products and services that meet customer and regulatory requirements. Developed by technical committees made up of industry experts and other key stakeholders, there are

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<sup>3</sup> British Standards Institute (2017). *Standards matter to consumers*. Available online at: <https://www.bsigroup.com/LocalFiles/en-GB/consumer-guides/resources/BSI-consumer-brochure-standards-matter-to-consumers-UK-EN.pdf>

more than 21,000 ISO standards and related documents covering almost every industry, from technology, to food safety, to agriculture and healthcare. They include:

- ◆ product standards
- ◆ test methods
- ◆ codes of practice
- ◆ guideline standards
- ◆ management systems standards

Like BSI standards, ISO standards are not designed specifically to support the development of qualifications, however they contain current information on processes, products, procedures and practices, and statutory and regulatory requirements, which could be of significant benefit to informing content of qualifications. For example referencing regulatory requirements and/or for helping to inform specific aims learning outcomes.

Note: ISO standards are not freely available, but can be purchased from ISO. They are protected by copyright, and require permission from the publishers to use the standards for any purpose other than what was originally intended.

## 4.4 Higher education standards

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) is an independent body who monitor and advise on standards and quality of UK higher education. The QAA defines higher education standards as 'standards that individual degree awarding bodies set and maintain for the award of their academic credit or qualifications' (QAA, 2017)<sup>4</sup>.

The QAA and the higher education sector developed the UK Quality Code, and the QAA maintains it on the sector's behalf. Higher education providers use this guidance when designing programmes of study and policies on higher education standards.

As part of the UK Quality Code, Subject Benchmark Statements set out the skills and knowledge that graduates are expected to have at the end of specific degree courses. This includes subject-specific and generic skills, as well as subject knowledge. They are available across a wide range of academic subjects and are used as reference points in the design, delivery and review of academic programmes. The QAA describe their usefulness as being an 'important external source of reference for higher education providers who are designing and developing new programmes in a subject area with substantial links to professions in devolved policy areas. They provide general guidance of the learning outcomes associated with these programmes but are not a description of a detailed curriculum in the subject.' (QAA, 2017)

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<sup>4</sup> Quality Assurance Agency (QAA). 2017. The UK Quality Code for Higher Education. Available online at: <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code/the-existing-uk-quality-code/part-a-setting-and-maintaining-academic-standards>

There is an example of a Subject Benchmark Statement for Business Management at [https://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/subject-benchmark-statements/sbs-business-management-15.pdf?sfvrsn=c7e1f781\\_10](https://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/subject-benchmark-statements/sbs-business-management-15.pdf?sfvrsn=c7e1f781_10)

Subject Benchmark Statements provide a very important reference point for SQA, in particular for Advanced Higher, Higher National (HN) qualifications and Professional Development Awards (PDAs). For example SQA's Higher National Qualifications have a dual purpose of:

- ◆ preparing people for employment and skills-development within employment
- ◆ providing opportunities for articulation into degrees

Articulation is a current priority for the Scottish Government, with recommendation 14 of the 15-24 Learning Journey Review<sup>5</sup> proposing to align the college and university higher education system to meet learner expectations and to ensure full recognition of prior learning where appropriate.

There needs to be a careful balance in meeting both purposes, therefore Higher National qualifications must closely align with NOS, industry and/or higher education standards, where such standards exist.

## 4.5 Other national standards

National Qualifications Frameworks are recognised systems designed to provide a flexible and simple method for comparing qualifications. There are different frameworks across the UK, but each share the following common measures:

- ◆ 'credit', which indicates the size of a qualification (1 credit = notionally 10 hours)
- ◆ 'level', which indicates the difficulty of a qualification

Credit rating is the process of allocating credit and a level to a qualification or learning programme so that it can be placed on to the appropriate National Qualification Framework. *Qualifications Can Cross Boundaries* is a useful resource, which provides correspondences between UK and Irish Qualifications Frameworks with European Qualifications Frameworks<sup>6</sup>.

### Scotland

The Scottish Qualifications and Credit Framework (SCQF) compares the wide range of Scottish qualifications and learning programmes, including those from schools, colleges, universities, and many work-based qualifications. It has 12 levels ranging from SCQF level 1 up to doctorate at SCQF level 12.

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<sup>5</sup> SG, 2018. *The 15-24 Learner Journey Review* [Online] Available at <http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2018/05/4774>

<sup>6</sup> Qualifications Can Cross Boundaries (2017). Available online at: [http://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/files\\_ccc/QualificationsCanCrossBoundaries.pdf](http://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/files_ccc/QualificationsCanCrossBoundaries.pdf)

As part of SQA's commitment to promoting, developing and supporting lifelong learning, all SQA's Scottish qualifications are developed using the appropriate SCQF level as the national standard. SCQF level descriptors are used in qualification development to ensure an appropriate level of demand, and the appropriate wording to differentiate between SCQF levels. The SCQF level descriptors provide a common reference point and consistent vocabulary to describe the wording of learning outcomes, knowledge, understanding, skills and assessment criteria for all types of units and qualifications at each level of the SCQF.

It is important to note, the national standard set by the SCQF differs significantly from NOS, industry and higher education standards. It provides generic criteria on which to develop qualifications, rather than specific industry or subject criteria. The SCQF therefore need to develop qualifications alongside any relevant NOS, industry and/or higher education standards. Further details on the SCQF can be accessed at <http://scqf.org.uk/>

## **Wales**

The Credit and Qualifications Framework (CQFW) is an all-inclusive meta-framework designed to provide greater clarity on the qualifications system in Wales. The levels capture all learning from the very initial stages (Entry 1, 2 and 3) to the most advanced (Level 8). Unlike in Scotland where SCQF applies to all qualifications, Qualifications Wales have adopted the Ofqual level descriptors for its vocational and general qualifications within their regulated pillar only (Ofqual, 2015). Further details on the CQFW can be accessed at <https://gov.wales/docs/dcells/publications/180129-cqfw-brochure-en.pdf>

## **England**

The Regulated Qualifications Framework provides a single, simple system for cataloguing all qualifications regulated by Ofqual, with qualifications indexed by their 'level' and 'size'. Level indicates the difficulty of the award (ranging from entry 1–3 and then levels 1–8). Total Qualification Time (TQT) and Credit are also allocated to each regulated qualification in England and Wales. TQT and Credit measure the average length of time a learner takes to complete a unit or qualification. Further details on the RQF can be accessed at [https://ofqual.blog.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/137/2015/10/RQF\\_Bookcase.pdf](https://ofqual.blog.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/137/2015/10/RQF_Bookcase.pdf)

## **Northern Ireland**

The RQF is also the single framework for describing all vocational qualifications in Northern Ireland.

## 5 Process

This section provides information on the use of NOS, industry and higher education standards in the development of SQA qualifications, including:

- ♦ how standards are used in SQA qualifications
- ♦ the benefits of using standards in SQA qualifications

Note: In the following sections of this handbook the term ‘standards’ is used, where relevant, to collectively describe ‘NOS, industry and higher education standards’.

### 5.1 How standards are used in SQA qualifications

SQA adopts NOS in many of its qualifications, and continues to do so. For example at the time of writing, over 5,600 NOS feature in approximately 370 Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs). SVQs and competence-based qualifications (CBQs), which are based on NOS, also form components of approximately 80 modern apprenticeship frameworks.

SQA uses Design Principles as the blueprint for all SQA qualifications. Design Principles outline the features our qualifications must have in order to ensure that we maintain our standards. The Design Principles specify the requirements for using NOS or other industry or professional or trade body standards within each product:

- ♦ National Certificates (NCs), National Progression Awards (NPA) and Professional Development awards (PDAs) must align to NOS or other professional or trade body standards.
- ♦ SVQs and CBQs must be based on approved NOS.
- ♦ Higher National Qualifications, Awards and Licence to Practice qualifications, National Courses and Skills for Work courses do not specify the use of NOS.

It is important to note, any absence of specificity in SQA Design Principles is intended to provide flexibility for NOS, industry, professional or trade body standards, and to use higher education standards where relevant, as opposed to preventing their use.

There is no single approach of how to use standards in SQA qualifications. This is due to the different purpose of each product type — a level of flexibility is required in terms of what detail from the standards can be used in different products. For example the dual purpose of HN qualifications means there needs to be a careful balance in meeting both purposes, creating a need to align them with NOS, industry and higher education standards.

In contrast, SVQs are work-based qualifications designed to develop the competence of individuals in a job role, and PDAs can be used to develop and extend professional and vocational skills. It is therefore reasonable to expect SVQs and PDAs to align more closely with NOS and/or other industry and professional standards than with higher education standards.



## 5.2 Benefits of using standards in SQA qualifications

It is good practice to use standards, where they exist, to inform and develop SQA's qualifications. The extent to which this is done varies between qualifications and is entirely based on the needs of the sector.

Possible benefits	Type of standard		
	National Occupational Standards	Industry Standards	Higher Education Standards
Provides a <b>national benchmark</b> of competent performance in a subject, function or role	✓	✓	✓
Provides a <b>comprehensive framework</b> of competent performance in a subject, function or role	✓	✓	✓
Indicates where there are opportunities to develop <b>industry-specific knowledge and skills</b>	✓	✓	
Indicates where there are opportunities to develop <b>subject-specific knowledge and skills</b>			✓
<b>Closer alignment</b> between vocational and academic qualifications and vice versa	✓	✓	✓
<b>Closer alignment</b> between qualifications and work-based learning and vice versa	✓	✓	
<b>Closer alignment</b> of SQA provision and further and higher education	✓	✓	✓
<b>Ensures the qualification meets the needs</b> of employers, industry/trade professional bodies, and/or further and higher education institutions	✓	✓	✓
Used by <b>centres</b> to plan the development and assessment of specific skills and knowledge	✓	✓	✓
Used by <b>professional bodies</b> to provide exemptions, and/or meet registration or professional membership requirements	✓	✓	
Used by <b>further and higher education institutions</b> to provide articulation into higher level qualifications including degrees			✓

Used by <b>employers</b> as part of recruitment and selection process	✓	✓	✓
Enhances <b>employment prospects</b> of learners	✓	✓	✓
Used by <b>individuals</b> to support personal, and professional career development and progression	✓	✓	✓
Support the <b>design and assessment</b> of academic and vocational qualifications	✓	✓	✓

SQA Design Principles permit accredited SVQ units to be added to qualification structures of PDAs, National Qualification Group Awards (NQGAs), and Awards. In these instances, an entire NOS makes up an SVQ unit and therefore aligns fully with that NOS.

In other SQA qualifications, either full NOS or other industry standards (or parts of these) can be used to develop other work-based and/or work-related units and qualifications. This could involve any of the following:

- ◆ A unit can be aligned to NOS or industry standards to show the extent of the relationship between them, for example at unit level, or at skills level.
- ◆ Relevant parts of standards can be used to develop a unit, group award and/or course, for example performance and/or knowledge and understanding criteria.
- ◆ A unit, group award and/or course can be designed to meet specific registration or professional membership requirements for recognition from a professional organisation.

The following examples provide illustration of good practice in how SQA use NOS and other industry standards in qualifications.

## HNC/D

### HNC/D in Accountancy

- ◆ NOS — all mandatory and accounting optional units are mapped to NOS.
- ◆ Professional recognition — both the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA) and the Chartered Institute of Management Accountants (CIMA) recognise the HNC/D. Units from the HNC/D provide exemptions to ACCA and CIMA specialist units.

### HNC/D in Agriculture

- ◆ NOS — units are mapped to NOS.

### HNC/D in Social Services

- ◆ NOS — the mandatory components within this award are mapped to the Social Work Standards to inform unit development.
- ◆ Professional recognition — this award is subject to approval by the Scottish Social Services Council, and is recognised as a practitioner qualification for registration. It is a required qualification for those working in all residential child care settings.

## **Scottish Vocational Qualifications**

### **Scottish Vocational Qualification (SVQ 3) in Domestic Plumbing and Heating at SCQF level 7**

- ◆ NOS — each SVQ unit is derived from the entire content of a single corresponding NOS.
- ◆ Professional recognition — this award is jointly certificated with SQA and Scottish and Northern Ireland Joint Industry Body (SNIJIB).

## **Professional Development Awards**

### **PDA/HNC Engineering Practice: Electrical Engineering**

- ◆ Professional recognition — the Institution of Engineering and Technology (IET) and the Institution of Mechanical Engineers (IMechE) have advised that a PDA/HNC Engineering Practice award partially meets the underpinning knowledge and understanding requirements for registration as an Incorporated Engineer, and may meet fully the underpinning knowledge and understanding requirements for registration as an Engineering Technician.

Each PDA/HNC Engineering Practice award may provide important underpinning knowledge and understanding for SVQs in Engineering or Management at level 3.

# 6 Practical Guidance: using standards to develop units and qualifications

This section provides practical guidance on the use of NOS, industry and higher education standards in the development of SQA qualifications, including:

- ♦ identifying standards for use in qualifications
- ♦ aligning standards to SQA qualifications
- ♦ using standards to develop criterion in SQA units and qualifications

## 6.1 Identifying standards for use in qualifications

Before you start to develop a unit, group award or course, it is important to check if any standards already exist that may help inform development of these. The following practical guidance helps you to find current and relevant standards and check whether they are suitable for use.

### 6.1.1 Finding NOS

The first part of finding NOS is to access the NOS Database, which accommodates all current approved NOS. This website provides free public access to the full range of NOS at: [www.ukstandards.org.uk](http://www.ukstandards.org.uk)



From the main screen of the NOS Database search the link **[start the search for your National Occupational Standards here]** to access more than 20,000 approved NOS. You can do this by typing key words into the search engine to locate NOS in your area of interest.

For example if you type Business and Administration, this identifies all the NOS titles containing the words Business and Administration.



You can refine your NOS search as follows:

Use the **[suite link]** to refine your search to NOS titles specific to a particular suite of NOS, for example the *Business and Administration* suite.

Use the **[Developed by link]** to refine your search to a particular SSO who developed the NOS, for example Skills Council for Administration (Skills CFA).

Use the **[Occupations]** link to refine your search by a particular occupation, for example Business, Administration and Law, Administration.

You can also search for specific NOS by typing the **NOS Unique Reference Number** (URN) into the search engine. This is the relevant Standards Setting Organisation code plus its unique numbering, for example CFAOP1.



You can now scroll down the list of NOS titles you have found until you find a title or titles which reflect your development.

You can hover the cursor over the NOS title to check the **overview**, which provides a summary of the NOS content and gives you a good indication of whether you may want to use the NOS. If it seems relevant, then you can double click on the NOS title to open the NOS to check all content.

You can save or print the PDF file for use. However, NOS are regularly reviewed so you must remember to check the NOS database to find the current version.

## 6.1.2 Finding industry and higher education standards

### Professional standards

You can find professional standards by searching the website of the relevant professional body or institution, for example:

ICAS: The Institute of Chartered Accountants of Scotland <https://www.icas.com/>

SSSC: Scottish Social Work Services Council <http://www.sssc.uk.com/>

Professional Engineering Institutions:

<https://www.engc.org.uk/about-us/our-partners/professional-engineering-institutions/>

CIPD: The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development <https://www.cipd.co.uk/>

### Apprenticeship standards

#### Scotland

Modern Apprenticeship Frameworks are available across a wide range of sectors:

<https://www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk/what-we-do/apprenticeships/modern-apprenticeships/modern-apprenticeship-frameworks>

#### England, Wales and Northern Ireland

Apprenticeship Frameworks Online is the repository for apprenticeship frameworks that meet the national standards for England, Wales and Northern Ireland. You can use the frameworks library to search for an apprenticeship framework, or to check if a new apprenticeship framework is being developed. <http://www.afo.sscalliance.org/>

The Institute for Apprenticeships is responsible for publishing approved standards and assessment plans at <https://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/apprenticeship-standards/>

## **BSI standards**

You can access the full range of BSI standards at <https://www.bsigroup.com/en-GB/standards/> and search the full standards catalogue.

## **ISO standards**

You can access the full range of ISO standards at <https://www.iso.org/standards.html> where an online browsing platform provides a free preview of each standard.

## **Higher education standards**

QAA Subject Benchmark Statements set out the skills and knowledge graduates are expected to have at the end of specific degree courses. They are available across a wide range of academic subjects and are reference points in the design, delivery and review of academic programmes. Subject Benchmark Statements are part of the UK Quality Code and they set out expectations about standards of degrees in a range of subject areas. They describe what gives a discipline its coherence and identity, and define what can be expected of a graduate in terms of the abilities and skills needed to develop understanding or competence in the subject.

You can access all Subject Benchmark Statements at <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code/subject-benchmark-statements>

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (CEFR) is a guideline used to describe achievements of learners of languages across Europe and, increasingly, in other countries. Its main aim is to provide a method of learning, teaching and assessing which applies to all languages in Europe. The CEFR is useful in developing units and courses because it provides a detailed description of learner level by skill in 'can-do' statements. It is written as knowledge and skill statements and in a language-neutral format, for example the CEFR organises language proficiency in six levels, A1 to C2, which can be regrouped into three broad levels: Basic User, Independent User and Proficient User.

You can access all CEFR Standards at <https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages/table-1-cefr-3.3-common-reference-levels-global-scale>

A manual for language test development (for use within the CEFR), has been produced by the Association of Language Testers in Europe (ALTE) on behalf of CEFR: <https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=0900001680667a2b>

Cambridge University has produced a useful introductory guide to the CEFR: <http://www.englishprofile.org/images/pdf/GuideToCEFR.pdf>

ALTE is an association of language test providers, who work together to promote the fair and accurate assessment of linguistic ability worldwide. The ALTE developed 'can do' statements as part of a long-term research programme. The 'can do' statements are a useful tool to those involved in the development of units and courses as they provide easily understandable descriptions of performance, which can be used in specifying the requirements of language.

The ALTE 'can do' statements can be accessed at

<https://www.alte.org/resources/Documents/All%20Can%20Do%20English.pdf>

More information about the ALTE Framework and the 'can do' project can be accessed at

<https://www.alte.org/resources/Documents/CanDo%20Booklet%20text%20Nov%202002.pdf>

## **National qualification frameworks: level descriptors**

### **Scotland**

The SCQF handbook explains the criteria for qualifications to be credit rated on to the Scottish Credit and Qualifications framework:

[http://scqf.org.uk/media/1125/scqf\\_handbook\\_web\\_final\\_2015.pdf](http://scqf.org.uk/media/1125/scqf_handbook_web_final_2015.pdf)

SCQF levels are based on a single set of level descriptors that are the common reference points and definitions. Level descriptors provide a way of recognising learning that is outcome-based and quality-assured, irrespective of whether that learning is academic, vocational, non-formal or informal. The SCQF level descriptors can be accessed at

<http://scqf.org.uk/media/1123/scqf-level-descriptors-web-aug-2015.pdf>

### **England and Wales**

SQA must use Ofqual's level descriptors as the national standard for developing qualifications, which are regulated in England and Wales<sup>7</sup>. The level descriptors provide the language for describing learning and make relationships between qualifications clearer. Similar to the SCQF, Ofqual's level descriptors set out the generic knowledge and skills associated with the typical holder of a qualification at that level, and are used in England for general and vocational qualifications. They include examples of verbs to use for developing outcomes and assessment criteria at each qualification level, but do not provide occupational or industry-specific criteria. Ofqual's level descriptors can be accessed at [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/461637/qualification-and-component-levels.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/461637/qualification-and-component-levels.pdf)

Ofqual uses level descriptors in:

- ◆ England for vocational and general qualifications
- ◆ Wales for vocational and general qualifications within their regulated pillar only

Ofqual's level descriptors can be accessed at

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/461637/qualification-and-component-levels.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/461637/qualification-and-component-levels.pdf)

### **Northern Ireland**

Northern Ireland has adopted Ofqual's level descriptors for its vocational qualifications.

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<sup>7</sup> Note: Ofqual's level descriptors do not include the wider CQWF descriptors which apply to some non-regulated provision in Wales.

## 6.2 Aligning units and group awards and courses to standards

SQA's Design Principles use the term 'aligned' to specify the relationship between a qualification (and its component parts) and standards.

- ◆ In units, the depth or level of alignment indicates the extent to which the standard maps to the SQA unit specification. The content of the unit is represented by the outcomes. This involves matching the combined knowledge and skills and evidence requirements incorporated in the outcome to the standard.
- ◆ In courses and group awards, the depth or level of alignment indicates the extent to which standards map to the content to each SQA unit within a group award, or to the content of a course.

The relevant Design Principles specify where there is a requirement for a qualification to be aligned to standards. When you align your unit, group award or course to standards you need to provide details of this alignment through a process of mapping or signposting — these are two very different processes, and are outlined in the following sections.

### 6.2.1 Mapping

Mapping is a comprehensive description of the precise alignment between a qualification (and its component parts) and standards. Mapping indicates all aspects of the course or group award that align to standards. Mapping guarantees that the mapped standards are achieved by each successful candidate. Mapping can be carried out at:

- ◆ unit level (usually mapped)
- ◆ outcome level
- ◆ group award level
- ◆ course level

The SQA Group Award Specification (GAS) provides this guidance on mapping of standards:

*Note to writers: here you should provide an explanation of the links with National Occupational Standards and/or trade/professional body requirements. Information should identify the standards and the extent to which the qualification(s) is aligned to them. For example, does it provide underpinning knowledge or does it relate closely to a particular SVQ unit.*

The guidance *Producing Group Award Specifications: Guidance for writers* provides the following instructions on mapping:

#### **5.2 Mapping National Occupational Standards (NOS) and/or trade/professional body standards**

*This section should provide an explanation of the links with National Occupational Standards and/or trade or professional body requirements.*

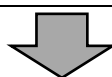


*Information should identify the standards and the extent to which the qualification aligns to them — for example, whether it provides underpinning knowledge or relates closely to a particular SVQ unit. This information is best presented as a table (a suggested template is provided).*

*You should complete the unit and code box of the template and then map to the relevant units in the National Occupational Standards.*

Here is an overview of the key process steps to help you with mapping standards to SQA units, group awards and courses:

<b>Finding standards</b>	<p>Check the relevant Design Principles to find out any requirements for using standards for your qualification.</p> <p>Where there is a requirement to use standards, you can search NOS database and/or industry and professional body and QAA websites to identify NOS, industry and/or professional standards that may be relevant to your development. For details refer to sections 7.1.1 and 7.2.2.</p>
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<b>Mapping standards to SQA units, group awards or courses</b>	<p>If you are developing a new or revising an existing unit, group award or course, you can use any relevant standard to inform the development to ensure it maps with relevant standards.</p> <p>For an existing unit, group award or course that has never been aligned with standards, you can compare the development with each identified standard to identify areas of precise alignment.</p> <p><b>Key points</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Mapping sets out the relationship between the unit, group award or course and the relevant standard in terms of where there are areas of precise alignment.</li> <li>◆ Mapping usually covers all of the mandatory units and/or components of a qualification structure.</li> <li>◆ Mapping may cover the optional units and/or components of a qualification structure.</li> <li>◆ Mapping may cover any or all of the following: objectives, aims, outcomes, assessment criteria, and evidence requirements, for example professional registration requirements or exemptions.</li> </ul>
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<b>Presenting mapping information</b>	<p>Produce a mapping table or grid to show the extent to which your unit, group award or course aligns to standards.</p> <p>The mapping table or grid will show where there are no areas of alignment between your unit, group award or course and standards.</p> <p><b>Key point</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ There is no single format for presenting your mapping table or grid, however you must ensure it is relevant to the extent to which the mapping has been carried out.</li> </ul>
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## Examples of mapping

The examples here are for illustration, to show different methods of mapping for:

- ◆ outcome level
- ◆ unit and qualification level
- ◆ the requirements of professional bodies

Further examples of mapping are available by searching the group award specification on different qualifications from SQA's website: <https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/41278.html>

### Example 1: mapping at outcome level

This example shows mapping at outcome level, where knowledge and skills outcomes from the Social Work standards have been mapped to mandatory unit titles from the HND Social Services. This indicates areas where there is precise alignment between the HN unit title, and specific knowledge and/or skills outcomes from Social Work standards.

In the table below, the Social Work standard '*Manage and be accountable for own practice*' and its knowledge and performance indicators have been mapped to the HN unit, Applied Sociology. The completed mapping for all SQA units in the group award provides the mapping of NOS at outcome level. Unit titles and NOS titles are used in the mapping table below to illustrate this. This is a very detailed level of mapping, completed to ensure the registration requirements of Scottish Social Services Council are met.

Social Work standards	HN unit title (mandatory)		
	Professional Development and Practice	Applied Sociology	Social Services: Graded Unit 2
	<b>Manage and be accountable for own practice</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>manage and prioritise workload</li> <li>carry out duties accountably</li> <li>monitor and evaluate their work</li> <li>use professional and managerial supervision ...</li> <li>take action to identify and meet CPD needs</li> <li>contribute to the continuing education of others</li> <li>maintain accurate...up to date records &amp; reports</li> <li>share records and reports within ethical guidelines</li> <li>relationships and issues between agency policies, legal and regulatory requirements and professional boundaries</li> </ul>	<b>Plan, carry out, review and evaluate SW practice with individuals, families, carers, groups and communities</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>understanding societal and structural influences on human behaviour</li> <li>group and organisational behaviour</li> <li>theoretical ideas and evidence form international research on designing and putting into practice services</li> <li>research-based concepts and critical explanation from sociology that contribute to the knowledge base of social services including reliability and how they are applied</li> <li>range of expressed needs, social processes by which needs become defined</li> <li>discrimination and issues of power</li> </ul>	<b>Prepare and work with, individual, families, carers, groups and ...</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>review notes and literature relevant to the situation</li> <li>work with others to get additional information</li> <li>engage and relate effectively with people ...</li> <li>evaluate all information ...</li> <li>develop and record an initial action plan</li> <li>work with individuals and families to ...</li> <li>work in partnership with individuals and ...</li> <li>listen actively ...</li> <li>assess and review preferred options ...</li> <li>assess and evaluate needs ...</li> <li>identify and evaluate and recommend appropriate courses of action</li> <li>support people who use services, to achieve and maintain independence</li> </ul>

### Example 2: mapping at unit and qualification level

In this example, SQA units from the National Certificate in Travel and Tourism at SCQF level 6 are mapped against relevant NOS titles. This indicates where there is precise alignment between SQA units and NOS. For example, the SQA unit 'Selling Skills' has been mapped to map two NOS. The completed mapping for all SQA units in the group award provides the mapping of NOS at qualification level. SQA unit titles, NOS titles and the NOS Unique Reference Number (URN) are used in the mapping table below to illustrate this.

SQA Unit	National Occupational Standard	NOS URN
Selling Skills	• overcome your customer's objections and answer their queries	Unit T1.3
	• close the sale	Unit T1.4
Local Tourism Product Knowledge	• promote the features and benefits of tourism products and services	Unit T13.2
	• answer queries and provide alternatives	Unit T13.2
Tour Guiding: An Introduction	• ensure the delivery of the itinerary	Unit T41.1
	• care for customers	Unit T41.2
	• carry out tour administration	Unit T41.3
	• ensure the health and safety of the group	Unit T29.1
	• co-ordinate the tour	Unit T29.2
	• maintain group cohesion	Unit T29.3
	• present a commentary to customers	Unit T30.1

### Example 3: professional bodies

This is an example of mapping to professional body requirements, where SQA units from the HNC Accounting have been mapped against two Association of Chartered Certified Accountants qualifications to indicate where accreditation and exemptions have been agreed.

SQA Award	Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA) accreditation and exemptions
HNC Accounting	<b>Foundations in Accountancy (FIA)</b> FA1 Recording Financial Transactions MA1 Management Information FA2 Maintaining Financial Records MA2 Managing Costs and Finance FAB Accountant in Business FMA Management Accounting FFA Financial Accounting
	<b>ACCA Qualification</b> F1 Accountant in Business F2 Management Accounting F3 Financial Accounting

## 6.2.2 Signposting

Signposting is a description of where there are opportunities for alignment between a qualification and standards. It provides a less detailed description than mapping, and indicates that there may be some aspects of the qualification which may align to NOS, industry or higher education standards. It does not guarantee the opportunities highlighted will be taken, rather it indicates potential areas for the assessment of standards. Signposting is usually carried out at unit level, but can also be carried out at group award and course level.

<b><i>Finding standards</i></b>	<p>Check the relevant Design Principles to find out any requirements for using standards for your qualification.</p> <p>Where there is a requirement to use standards, you can search the NOS database and/or industry and professional body and QAA websites to standards that may be relevant to your development. For details refer to sections 6.1.1 and 6.1.2.</p>
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<b><i>Signposting standards to SQA units, group award or courses</i></b>	<p>If you are developing a new or revising an existing unit, group award or course then you can use any relevant standard to identify areas where there are opportunities for alignment (signposting).</p> <p>For an existing unit, group award or course which has already been completed and but has never been aligned with standards, you can compare the development with each relevant standard to identify where there are opportunities for alignment.</p> <p><b>Key points</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◆ Signposting sets out the relationship between the qualification and the relevant standard in terms of where there are opportunities for alignment.</li><li>◆ Signposting usually covers all of the mandatory units/components of your qualification structure.</li><li>◆ Signposting may cover the optional units/components of your qualification structure.</li><li>◆ Signposting does not usually cover any or all of the following: objectives, aims, outcomes, assessment criteria, evidence requirements.</li></ul>
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<b><i>Presenting signposting information</i></b>	<p>Produce a signposting table or grid to show the extent to which there are opportunities to align your unit, group award or course to standards.</p> <p>The signposting table or grid will show where there are no areas of alignment between your unit, group award or course and standards.</p> <p><b>Key point</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◆ There is no single format for presenting your signposting table or grid, however you must ensure it is relevant to the extent to which the signposting has been carried out.</li></ul>
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## Examples of signposting

The examples here are for illustration purposes, to show different methods of signposting at unit and qualification level. You can find further examples of signposting by searching the group award specification for different qualifications from SQA's website:

<https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/41278.html>

### Example 1: signposting at unit and qualification level

This is an example of signposting at unit level, where NOS in Accountancy have been signposted to units from the HNC/D Accounting. This indicates where there are opportunities for alignment between NOS and HN units. In the table below, the Accountancy NOS 'FA4 Prepare Accounts' is signposted to four HN Accounting units. The completed signposting for all SQA units in the group award indicates where there are opportunities for alignment of NOS at qualification level. Unit titles and NOS titles are used in the mapping table below to illustrate this.

Accountancy National Occupational Standards	HN Accounting unit titles						
		Recording financial information	Preparing financial statements	Cost Accounting	Management Accounting using IT	Using Financial Accounting Software	Graded Unit 1
	FA-1 Process Income	✓					✓
	FA-2 Process Expenditure	✓					✓
	FA-3 Account for Income and Expenditure	✓					✓
	FA-4 Prepare Accounts		✓		✓	✓	✓
	FA-5 Draft Financial Statements		✓		✓	✓	✓
	MA-1 Provide Cost and Revenue Information			✓	✓		
	MA-2 Provide Management Information			✓	✓		

### Example 2: signposting at unit and qualification level

This is an example of signposting at unit level where units from the Professional Development Award (PDA) in Hospitality at SCQF level 7 have been signposted against NOS in Hospitality. This indicates where there are opportunities for alignment between PDA unit title codes and the Unique Reference Numbers (URN) of relevant NOS. In the table below, the PDA unit H198 34 Hospitality Supervision has been signposted to six relevant NOS. The completed signposting for all units from the PDA indicates where there are opportunities for alignment of NOS at qualification level. Unit titles and NOS URNs are used in the mapping table below to illustrate this.

Professional Development Award unit titles		National Occupational Standard (URN)					
	H198 34 Hospitality Supervision	HSL1	HSL2	HSL5	HSL7	HSL10	HSL21
	DL3G 34 Food and Beverage Service	1GEN1	2GEN4	2GEN4	2FS1	2FS2	2FS5
	H942 34 Conferences: An Introduction	HSL8					
	DL3E 34 Alcoholic Beverages	2BS2	2BS4				
	H1L7 34 Hospitality Industry	HSL6					
	F4TI 34 Food Hygiene Intermediate	1GEN1	2GEN4	HSL30			
	DL3T 34 Food Hygiene Intermediate	HSL3	HSL9				
	DL3K 34 Food Production Processes	GEN4	2GEN3	2PR1	2PR2	2PR4	2PR6

## 6.3 The alignment of NOS and SVQs

SVQ development is unique in that the entire content of a NOS is used directly as the associated SVQ unit. This means SVQs are fully aligned to NOS — it is not permitted to use partial NOS to form an SVQ unit. There are two stages of SVQ development: approval of SVQ products, and accreditation of SVQs.

### **Approval of SVQ products**

As part of the SVQ development process, sector skills organisations are responsible for developing SVQ structures for approval. This is conducted in close consultation with employers, through a process involving grouping NOS to cover the functions of an entire job role. It is important to note, NOS cannot be used in isolation to form an SVQ, or indeed any qualification, as they have no credit value, are not allocated a level on the SCQF or RQF, have no relationship with Core Skills, and do not provide any information on assessment.

As part of the SVQ development process, a sector skills organisation must credit rate each of the NOS and units within the proposed qualification structure and signpost them to Core Skills. The sector skills organisation submits the completed qualification product to SQA Accreditation for approval, alongside any assessment strategy specified by the sector.

### **Accreditation of SVQs**

Once the qualification product is approved, an awarding body can pick it up and develop it into an accredited qualification for delivery. The awarding body does this by producing guidance on approaches and instruments of assessment, and any details of evidence and assessment requirements for the qualification. An awarding body sends the final SVQ submission to SQA Accreditation, which considers quality assurance arrangements, assessment methodology and guidelines, and marketing information. Once they accredit the SVQ, the awarding body can offer it for delivery.



## 6.4 Using standards to develop units and qualifications

### 6.4.1 When should standards be considered?

It is important to consider standards at each of the following stages of a qualification life cycle.

- ◆ Research — since a major success factor of any qualification is its relevance to the market. Research must be carried out into identifying appropriate standards for the qualification area.
- ◆ Development — during this stage it is important that the Qualification Design Team's proposals consider and reflect the research on standards. Consultation on the proposals should include clear communication about standards so that interested parties can give feedback in an informed way. It is also crucial to give unit writers a clear brief regarding standards in each unit. This should include:
  - which standards need to be taken into account
  - instructions on including information about standards in the support notes section of units
- ◆ Validation — reference to standards should be made in the appropriate sections of the group award specification, but particularly in the 'Aims of the Award' section, which should be based on an analysis of the market research and the needs of the employment sector. Mapping or signposting of standards to units should be done, where applicable. Members of the validation panel may require background information on standards.
- ◆ Implementation — the arrangements document should contain information on standards. Much of this can be taken from the validated document for the group award.
- ◆ Maintenance — an important aspect of maintenance is keeping up-to-date with any changes in the sector(s) relating to a particular qualification. This includes changes to standards, which in turn will impact on the timing and extent of any subsequent review of a qualification.
- ◆ Review — changes to standards are crucial to any review process and/or decision to review a qualification.

### 6.4.2 Getting started with using standards to develop units and qualifications

The qualification manager, supported by others involved in development or review:

- ◆ obtains up-to-date copies of relevant standards, and (where required) permissions for use (section 6.1 provides information on how to find standards)
- ◆ identifies any reviews of standards that may affect the design of the qualification
- ◆ feeds this into design of the qualification, for example aims, structure, units and levels
- ◆ for units, draws up a brief for unit writers, which states clearly which standards should be considered and where to put information
- ◆ decide how alignment will be done at qualification level. The qualification manager, someone in the Qualification Design Team or a consultant might do this. It is likely that this will be done towards the end of the development after the units (where relevant) have been written, and before the group award specification is finalised

### 6.4.3 Using standards in units

Units are the building blocks of group awards and many courses, as well as being certificated in their own right. It is essential to develop units in line with the current standards for the occupational areas or subjects. Not every unit will align with a standard or standards. However, within a qualification, each unit contributes to the whole, and this strengthens the link between the qualification and the standard.

Three points are crucial when using standards to develop units:

- 1 writers actively use standards, where they exist, when developing a unit
- 2 providing good information in the support notes for individual units makes it easier to align standards within a qualification
- 3 when using standards to draft criteria for units, avoid the chance of over-assessment by using only what is essential to the unit, for example not the entire content of a standard

You will need:

- ◆ the unit writer's brief to provide you with an indication of whether standards are being considered
- ◆ a copy of any current standards that are relevant to the qualification. This may involve some research and enquiry to ensure any relevant links have been explored (section 6.1 provides details on how to find standards)
- ◆ instructions on:
  - the extent to which the unit and standard should be aligned and expressed
  - instructions to put links in the support notes section
  - the use of the terminology of 'alignment'
  - the depth or level between the unit and the standard, for example outcome level
  - representation through a grid that maps the unit to the standard
  - evidence requirements and assessments which cover the standard

In SQA units, the depth or level of alignment should indicate how the standard maps to the content of the SQA unit, which is represented by the outcomes. However, this is not about matching the wording of the outcome to the standards — it requires aligning all knowledge and skills, and evidence requirements that are incorporated in the outcome.

### 6.4.4 Using standards in group awards and courses

Group awards and courses are developed to ensure that the units (where relevant), outcomes, knowledge and skills, and evidence requirements reflect the appropriate sector's needs as closely as possible.

In the group award specification, you must make clear the relationship between the group award and/or course and standards. You do this by providing summary information in the form of a table or grid. This information can be taken from all the individual units which have been aligned to standards.

Please note that the support notes are guidance only, and if the qualification is being used as part of professional accreditation then it is necessary to ensure the evidence requirements cover any professional body requirements.

Information on standards is largely taken from the group award specification. This is important as it impacts on:

- ◆ the terminology used to explain the links between a qualification and standards, and the depth or level you should consider, for example in outcome, performance criteria
- ◆ how you represent this in the group award and the amount of detail to provide

### **6.4.5 Principles of using standards to develop criteria**

The following common principles apply when you use standards to develop criteria within units, group awards and courses.

- ◆ Permissions — where required, you must obtain relevant permissions from the owner of the standards.
- ◆ Mapping and signposting — when you use NOS, industry and/or higher education standards, to develop a unit, group award or course, you must provide any details of the alignment between the unit and the standard in the support notes section of the specification. The alignment between qualifications and standards is made at unit, group award and course level. You can do this by listing the relevant code and title for the standard and title, and indicating whether you have mapped or signposted the unit to the NOS.

Where a unit is being developed to meet the requirements of a particular NOS, industry or higher education standard, you must be able to show that the unit maps fully against all the criteria of that NOS, industry or higher education standard.

- ◆ Using standards to develop criteria — you can use the content of relevant NOS, industry and/or higher education standards to help develop criteria of a unit, group award and course, for example elements of competence (skills, knowledge, and understanding), learning outcomes, performance criteria, assessment criteria and/or evidence requirements.

With the exception of SVQ units which are based entirely on the NOS, there is no requirement to use the entire content of a standard when developing units and qualifications. It is acceptable to use part of a standard which reflects the purpose of your development.

When using standards, fully or in part, a general rule is not to change any criteria that will affect the demand of the original standard. You must develop any criterion in line with the relevant guidance for developing SQA units, group awards and courses.

Examples of changes you can make when using standards to develop a unit, group award and course include:

- ◆ tailoring criteria where it is unclear or ambiguous
- ◆ changing words which have a specific meaning in one context but not in another
- ◆ adding specific context to criteria to make it particular to a sector, occupation or role

Things to avoid when using standards to develop a unit, group award and course:

- ◆ changes must not alter the demands of a standard
- ◆ changes must not be interpreted in a way that would enable a learner to perform 'badly' and still meet the standard
- ◆ creating any criteria that equate to an entire title or significant area of a standard