

National Occupational Standards: Youth Work

May 2012

Overview

The Learning and Skills Improvement Service together with employers, practitioners and stakeholders from across the UK have revised the National Occupational Standards (NOS) for Youth Work, which identify the skills, knowledge and understanding needed by those who work in the sector.

This was a light touch review carried out to ensure that the Standards continued to reflected current practice in all parts of the sector across the four nations of the UK. The opportunity to present the NOS in the format now required for all NOS, whatever the sector, was also taken.

Although the NOS now look very different, the skills and knowledge they encompass are similar to the previous version and continue to be underpinned by the values of youth work. Following online and face to face consultation events with practitioners, employers and stakeholders across the UK, these revised National Occupational Standards have been approved in each nation and can be accessed at: <http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/node/61>

What are National Occupational Standards?

National Occupational Standards describe what a person needs to do, know and understand in order to carry out a particular job or task in a consistent way and to a nationally recognised level of competence. They cover the activities a person might undertake in the course of their occupation, and consider all the circumstances or contexts a person is likely to encounter.

NOS can usually be applied across a wide range of roles, settings, levels of responsibility and contexts. Typically they might describe current best practice, highlight values and principles associated with a role and benchmark achievable levels of attainment for individuals carrying out a role or part of a role.

What do NOS look like?

National Occupational Standards always include, as a minimum:

- A title and overview which explains the content of the unit
- Details of the knowledge, understanding and skills needed to carry out tasks within the job role/function
- Performance statements describing activities that represent effective performance of tasks within a unit.

How are they used?

A suite of National Occupational Standards consists of a number of individual NOS. NOS are versatile tools which directly support staff and employers in the lifelong learning sector in a number of ways:

- **Managers** can use relevant standards to describe the skills they need in their workforce, identify skills that already exist and to develop plans to fill any gaps. They also offer an ideal starting point for benchmarking exercises.
- In **staff recruitment, training and development** standards can become the basis for job descriptions and training plans. They also contain descriptions of good practice which can help in setting performance objectives.
- For **individuals** NOS are a useful tool for self-assessment and a means of recognising and describing personal achievements. They can also form the foundation for continuing professional development and associated career progression.

NOS for Youth Work

The NOS for Youth Work have been revised with the input of the youth work community from across the UK. They represent the minimum recommended performance and knowledge and, alongside other relevant NOS or accepted standards, can be used to inform and underpin training courses and qualifications, as well as individual professional development.

Prior to the light touch review and revision of the youth work standards, the functional map related to the roles and functions being addressed was reconsidered. This mapping work formed the basis for development and review of the National Occupational Standards.

The key purpose of the NOS continues as that agreed in 2008:

“Enable young people to develop holistically, working with them to facilitate their personal, social and educational development, to enable them to develop their voice, influence and place in society and to reach their full potential.”

The introduction to the suite of NOS includes:

- The Functional Map
- The NOS resulting from the light touch review
- The values of youth work and
- NOS from other suites which may also be part of workforce activity.

The suite of NOS are not designed to describe specific roles but to ensure that the breadth of youth work activity is met by NOS; it is not expected that any one individual will meet the requirements of every standard. Different combinations of knowledge, skills and competencies can be drawn from the NOS to reflect the requirements of different roles.

The youth work NOS are written in a way which allows them to be used by practitioners from across the sector, and the performance and knowledge statements can be met in different ways as required by different roles.

NOS can be used by awarding bodies and regulatory organisations to develop and approve new qualifications. A cross mapping of these refreshed NOS to the Units of Assessment available at May 2012 has been completed for guidance in this area. Copies of this cross-mapping are available by email from Sue Gill, Partnerships Manager for UKQS at LSIS: sue.gill@lsis.org.uk

Resources and Guidance

All NOS are available from the online database, which includes frequently asked questions and case studies with examples of use: www.ukstandards.co.uk

Guides are available which show how to use NOS in specific areas; however the principles and techniques to apply NOS are the same for all sectors.

- “Standards for the lifelong learning sector: A User Guide” (*Lifelong Learning UK*): webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20110414152025/http://www.lluk.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/09/110325-LLUK_Standards_UserGuide.pdf
- “How to use National Occupational Standards to develop your workforce” (*SkillsActive*): www.skillsactive.com/images/stories/PDF/NOS_Manual.pdf
- “Putting National Occupational Standards to Work: Legal advice sector toolkit Section B” (*Skills for Justice*): www.skillsforjustice.com/las/section_b/index.html