

## National Occupational Standards Consultation UK Commission for Employment and Skills

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### A response from the National Council for Voluntary Youth Services (NCVYS)

October 2008

#### Introduction

1. The National Council for Voluntary Youth Services (NCVYS) is the independent voice of the voluntary youth sector in England. A diverse network of over 170 national voluntary youth organisations and regional and local youth networks, NCVYS has been working since 1936 to raise the profile of youth work, share good practice and influence policy that has an impact on young people and the organisations that support them.
2. The NCVYS network reflects the diverse range of voluntary organisations working with young people at community, local, regional and national level. Most of our members offer opportunities to engage in challenging activities or develop creative talents. They also support young people to become active in their communities and offer opportunities for their voice to be heard. Some offer interventions to prevent or tackle specific issues such as homelessness or offending behaviour. Others offer counselling, advice, guidance and information. All contribute to young people's personal and social development; some also engage with spiritual development.
3. For more information on any element of this paper, please contact NCVYS's Workforce Development Officer, Nichola Brown, on 07792875635 or e-mail [nichola@ncvys.org.uk](mailto:nichola@ncvys.org.uk)

## General comments

4. NCVYS welcomes the review of the national occupational standards (NOS) to ensure that they meet the needs of employers. NCVYS looks forward to a forthcoming strategy and would be happy to take part in any future workshops or telephone interviews.

## Response to questions

### **Question 1: Our view is that there continues to be a need to define and update occupational standards. Do you agree?**

5. NCVYS agrees. The NOS are useful as a basis for the design of qualifications as this ensures that they are 'fit for purpose'.
6. NCVYS agrees that more evidence needs to be collated and shared as to employers views on NOS. As a national membership organisation for voluntary and community youth sector organisations, NCVYS is ideally placed to facilitate this in partnership with UKCES.

### **Question 2: Our view is that there is an evidence-base for usage of NOS in qualifications, but there is limited information about wider usage of NOS, and their impact on employability and productivity. We need a detailed investigation into use of NOS. Do you agree?**

7. More work needs to be done on promoting the use of the NOS for a variety of purposes. As expressed to a consultant appointed by the Sector Skills Development Agency (SSDA) who interviewed NCVYS's Workforce Development Officer in 2007, employers need advisers to show them how to implement the NOS and explore a wide variety of uses to meet the workforce development needs of their organisation. NCVYS promotes examples of practice and usage, but does not have sufficient resources to be able to provide the practical support employers need.
8. Employers need toolkits and guides to help improve usage. However, to save costs toolkits and guides need not be produced separately by different Sector Skills Councils, they should be available from a single central source (perhaps the same website which houses the NOS database?).
9. NCVYS recommends that the funding for NOS development be reviewed. NCVYS has been frustrated that the Sector Skills Councils it liaises with have only been able to draw down funding for the review of a specific NOS. What is desperately needed is funding which would be used to promote the NOS and support employers with the usage. It is very frustrating that a huge amount of work, time and investment goes in to reviewing a set of NOS then they are not fully utilised and widely implemented.
10. Funding is also required for Sector Skills Councils to consult with practitioners, employers and awarding bodies, which 'elements' of the NOS should be used in the review of existing qualifications. This is currently a difficulty the youth sector is facing with regards to the review of existing youth support worker qualifications and the need to update the qualifications based upon the new NOS for youth work.
11. NCVYS agrees that a detailed investigation is required into the use of NOS.

**Question 3: Do you support an investigation into whether there should be priorities for NOS development influenced by skills needs of each home nation, and what those priorities should be?**

12. If there was a priority system, this would be detrimental to full coverage of all occupations. The NOS is a good basis for qualifications and NCVYS would not like this to be lost as it also means that employers can be assured that qualifications are fit for purpose.

**Question 4: NOS should be presented in a format that makes them easy to use for the widest range of potential users, particularly as occupations are often common to more than one sector. In clarifying what best practice looks like, we should consider overseas approaches, and the benefits and costs of a more consistent approach to presenting NOS. Do you agree?**

13. It would be beneficial to review a standardised format in presenting the NOS to enable employers to use NOS much more easily, particularly if they use more than one. There is a considerable amount of time needed to interpret the NOS and to familiarise oneself with the layout.
14. NCVYS recommends that good practice is reviewed both in the UK (across the range of suites of NOS) and abroad. NCVYS suggests that consultation takes place with stakeholders with regards to a standardised format.

**Question 5: Do you agree with the proposed approach to assuring the quality of the NOS platform? Do you support the two key tests of quality? What role do you see the UK Commission playing in retaining oversight of the criteria and processes?**

15. Under the SSDA arrangements, NCVYS's experience is that NOS approval (for youth work) took far too long after submission. Instead, a presentation of evidence into the depth and breadth of employer consultation should be signed off by a central body such as UKCES. This should be matched against a set of criteria. Also follow-up by UKCES should take place with a small selection of employers and other stakeholders as to check the effectiveness of the consultation process. Once all criteria has been met, then approval for the NOS should be given.
16. In addition, Sector Skills Councils (SSC) should annually supply evidence of how useful the NOS, and related products, have been through the performance management system UKCES proposes. The SSC should also supply evidence at the NOS review stage to UKCES evidencing the two key tests of quality.
17. NCVYS would want UKCES to have central control of the quality, criteria and processes.

**Question 6: Should NOS be designed to illustrate “excellence” and “good” in addition to “competent”? Would this act as an incentive for individuals and employers to invest in their workforce? Or are there other ways of promoting excellence in the workforce through standards and qualifications?**

18. The standards are a source of good practice (and have been promoted so) and therefore NCVYS is surprised by the question. The focus should be on promoting the benefits of the NOS to employers (which includes the fact they are a source of good practice), the different types of usage, and, most importantly, provide practical hands on help e.g. adviser/workshop facilitator, to provide guidance.

**Question 7: Our view is that NOS need to be defined in a way that makes them useful to professional bodies and HE so that learners can progress to a higher level skills. Do you agree?**

19. The NOS need to be defined so that they are beneficial to a wide range of users, including employers and education providers. Specific feedback is required from professional bodies and educational institutions to enable UKCES to assess whether there are any changes required.

**Question 8: We wish to promote and maintain the principle that the NOS platform must be “framework neutral” but be capable of being used for qualifications. What challenges does this bring and how can we best meet them?**

20. Flexibility is required so that the NOS can provide the basis for the various units/qualifications being developed and are robust enough to be adapted to frameworks. Investment in staffing resources, with regards to personnel who specialise in standards, is required within the Sector Skills Councils. In addition, staffing resources are required centrally at UKCES in order to participate in dialogue and meetings about developments of the various qualifications frameworks and to offer guidance on the NOS. Guidance will be needed by UKCES to influence any changes that may be required to the frameworks to ensure that the NOS is used effectively (and vice versa).

**Question 9: Do you support a new NOS Directory, which provides easy access to the proposed new NOS platform? What functions do you this new NOS directory should have?**

21. Whatever replaces the current NOS Directory needs to link to products, including centrally produced toolkits and guides for employers. The searching mechanisms need to be improved to be able to find all the standards related to specific areas of work.

**Question 10: Do you agree that NOS have not been promoted effectively to date? Do you support a major marketing and communications drive for the NOS platform, led by the UK Commission for Employment and Skills?**

22. NCVYS agrees that the NOS have not been promoted effectively to date. NCVYS would prefer a marketing and communications budget to be given to the appropriate Sector Skills Councils. Some of this funding could be used to ‘buy-in’ the time/capacity of stakeholders such as membership organisations like NCVYS. NCVYS would be happy to work with Sector Skills Councils to promote the NOS e.g. workshops, promote flyers, information sheets but capacity and time is an issue.
23. There are good examples of some Sector Skills Councils, e.g. Children’s Workforce Development Council paying for partner membership organisations to not only promote NOS but also be involved in consultation exercises and represent the sector on Steering Groups. Sadly, not all the Sector Skills Councils are in the same financial position but this would be a model that NCVYS would like to encourage.

## **Conclusion**

24. NCVYS recognises the benefits of the NOS but its resources are limited. NCVYS would be very keen to work in partnership with Sector Skills Councils to provide more support, information and guidance to promote the usage of the NOS. In addition, funding should be available to support the representation and consultation role bodies like NCVYS provide which are vital to NOS development.

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