

# National Occupational Standards Strategy 2022 and beyond

September 2022



Department for the  
**Economy**  
[www.economy-ni.gov.uk](http://www.economy-ni.gov.uk)



Llywodraeth Cymru  
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# FOREWORD

## A Government Perspective

Funded and managed by the three Devolved Governments of Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, **National Occupational Standards (NOS)** are recognised internationally as a trusted brand, founded upon well-established, robust quality assurance systems that facilitate movement of skills across borders.

## Vision

**Our vision is to continue to help the workforce, as an ultimate beneficiary of NOS, to make better-informed decisions regarding the employability skills which the economy requires.** We will do this by utilising trustworthy Labour Market Intelligence (LMI) to improve our response times to emerging and evolving occupations. **Our vision is to maintain an inclusive, employer-centric, consultative approach to development, as employers are also an ultimate beneficiary and user of NOS.**

## Mission

**To simplify and improve access to NOS,** offering linkages across the skills landscape and supporting the concept of lifelong learning by **enabling individuals to gain the transferable skills most critical to the economy of the future.**

The governments of Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales collectively support and endorse the future direction of NOS as set out in this strategy.



A blue ink signature of Gordon Lyons.

**Gordon Lyons MLA**  
Minister for the Economy  
(Northern Ireland)



A blue ink signature of Jamie Hepburn.

**Jamie Hepburn MSP**  
Minister for Higher Education and Further Education,  
Youth Employment and Training (Scotland)



A black ink signature of Vaughan Gething.

**Vaughan Gething MS**  
Minister for Economy  
(Wales)

## The Business Leader's Perspective

The world is changing at a rapid pace. And the world of work is being transformed by new technology, the growing decarbonisation agenda along with major global events such as the COVID-19 pandemic. The growth in high-value industries such as advanced manufacturing, life sciences, artificial intelligence and cyber security enabled by the rapid advance in technology, requires a sustainable skills pipeline coupled with an ability to support lifelong learning needs.

Investment in skills has never been more important and, as business leaders, we are confident of the role that strong vocational training and learning will play in this future, both economically and socially.

Some of the poorest communities across the UK were the hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic and we must ensure that the future holds opportunity for all. Skills play an important role in both inclusive growth and in social mobility. Reskilling and upskilling through vocational training and learning underpinned by high-quality NOS will support progression into and within employment. This also needs to be enabled by fast-track training interventions to respond quickly to changes in the labour market.

**NOS provide a line of sight to the workplace and ensure vocational qualifications and training programmes reflect how a job is done, all of which supports the rebuilding of skills pipelines.** They also provide a robust description of how a job should be performed competently, proving vital as, during the COVID-19 pandemic, some sectors had to move to remote working with less opportunity for face-to-face training. As remote working and hybrid working models become the norm, supporting materials to facilitate training and enable employees to engage in lifelong learning will be crucial in maximising the benefits of such models. And NOS can provide a solid foundation for learning and development activities.

**NOS must be agile, current and relevant** to meet the needs of the rapidly changing labour market. The position of pan and multi sector NOS such as business and administration, leadership

and management and customer service, which are transferrable across sectors must be strengthened, promoting movement and resilience in the labour market.

This strategy addresses all those challenges and is designed to transform the way we think of NOS, and the value we place on them. This will be achieved by modernising their content, redesigning processes which will bring them quicker to market and continually monitoring and improving the NOS system.

As business leaders, we know how important skills are to achieving our goals and the significant value created economically and socially through investing in training and learning which accurately reflects the world of work. We commend this strategy to all business leaders and employers and urge you to invest in training which is built on the solid foundation of NOS.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark Huddleston".

**Mark Huddleston**

Director & Founder jheSOLUTIONS & Vice-Chair  
Northern Ireland Skills Council



A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Scott Waddington".

**Scott Waddington**

Chair of Transport for Wales

## The Awarding Body Perspective

The Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) believe NOS are an important element of the education and skills system in Scotland, and in many sectors NOS underpin vocational qualifications. They, together with professional standards in some sectors, integrated within vocational qualifications provide portability and recognition of learning and achievement across the UK and beyond. SQA incorporates or references NOS in its vocational qualifications in the units and course specifications we develop, with sector bodies, employers, colleges and training providers.



**Gill Stewart,**

Director of Qualifications Development, SQA

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**“Stakeholders agreed that National Occupational Standards were important in supporting consistency in approach, preferably across the UK, in setting industry benchmarks and measuring competency; the transferability of skills and competencies; and the portability of quality-assured qualifications.”**

**Edge Foundation, 2021**

(REF)

The foreword to this strategy and the quote above show that NOS are important despite a turbulent environment. But what if NOS didn't exist? Theoretically, the nations across the UK could continue to maintain separate vocational training and learning systems based upon different standards with content according to local needs. However, adopting UK-wide NOS reduces confusion, fragmentation, duplication and added cost, building trust amongst employers and individuals in a system which aids transferability of skills through a mobile workforce.

The Edge Foundation 2018 Report 'FE and Skills across the four countries of the UK' – makes a very strong argument for “tackling common problems and sharing knowledge and experiences at different levels” to achieve maximum impact. (REF)

**This is why the Governments of Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, remain committed to assuring the future of NOS.**

Prioritising an employer-centric approach and the transferability of skills whilst monitoring the context and the evidence base to ensure continued relevance and utilisation are also top of the agenda. And despite policy in England shifting away from mandating the use of NOS to underpin apprenticeships and technical education, the importance of common standards remains, and the three governments are committed to retaining NOS as a UK-wide product.

**Importantly, this new NOS strategy cements the critical role of NOS in creating a skilled UK workforce, for now and the future, and sets out a new vision for 2022 and beyond.**

The purpose of NOS is still relevant today and the intention of this strategy is not to dig up the NOS system by its roots. The overall strategic direction, therefore, is to build on a solid foundation and ensure continuous improvement across all aspects of the system through strategic and operational change.

The NOS Governance Group (NOS GG) is responsible for strategy, policy and commissioning the development and review of NOS. It has representation from the three Devolved Governments. Skills Development Scotland (SDS) manage the operational delivery of NOS and report to the NOS GG.

## CONTEXT

To realise the vision and mission, it is important to acknowledge the world which surrounds NOS.

**Changes in the political and social context**

and the subsequent policy changes have impacted NOS significantly. Apprenticeship reform and the review of technical education in England has changed the UK-wide approach to standards and additional economic and political factors have resulted in a reduction in the number of sector bodies, which has made UK-wide engagement with industry more challenging. An ageing population is leading

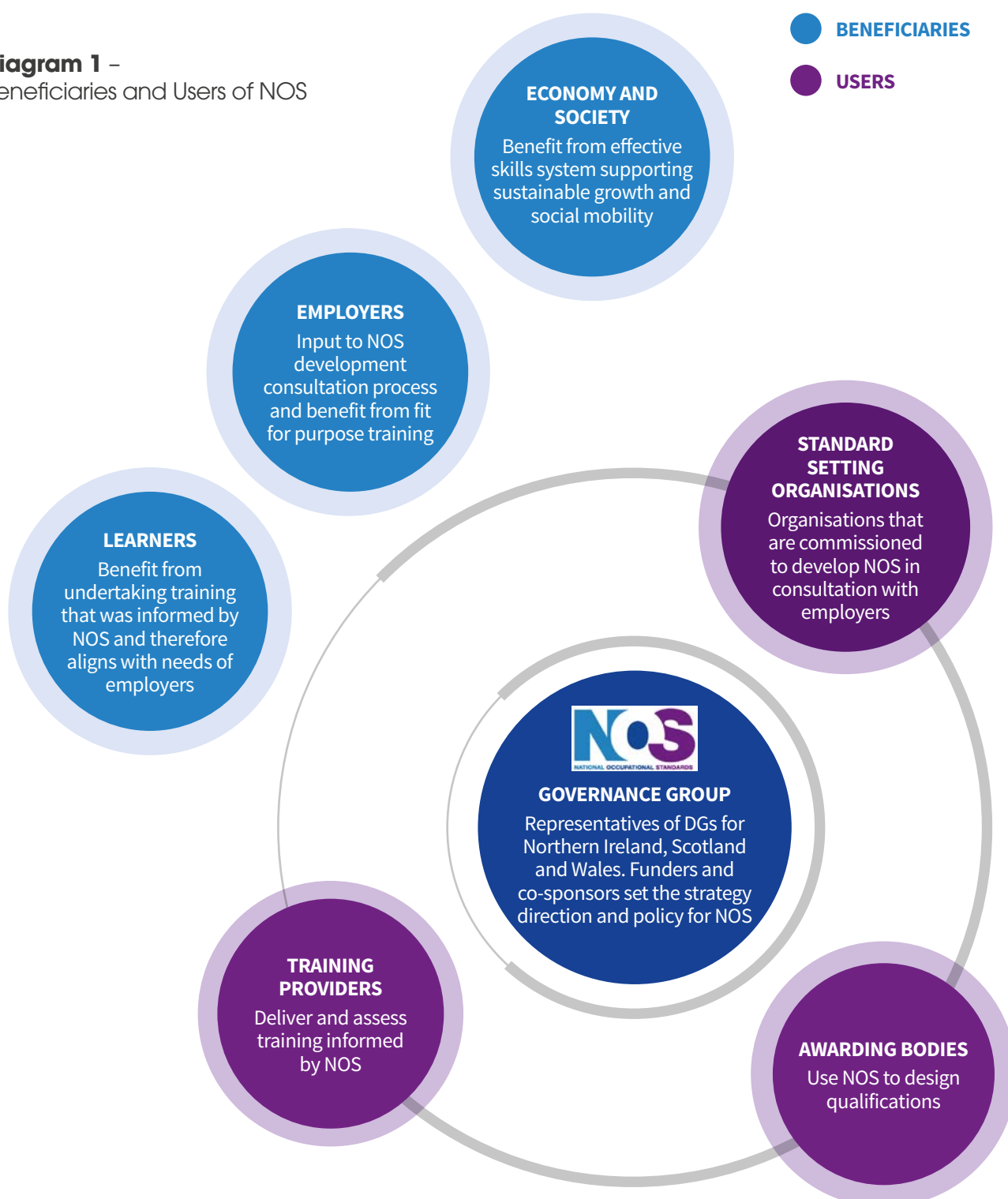
to multi-generational workplaces and the way we learn will need to change as the demand for lifelong learning increases. **NOS now have a real opportunity to respond to this and lead the way.**

The **economic challenges** in the last 14 years, created by the financial crash of 2008/09, and the COVID-19 pandemic have disrupted the economy and highlighted social challenges. In

times of disruption, transferable skills are even more important, and NOS can play a key role in articulating and highlighting those skills.

**The Fourth Industrial Revolution is changing the way people work** through automation, advances in technology, and the demand for green skills. Consequently, the labour market is changing at a rapid pace with new skills and occupations emerging.

**Diagram 1 –**  
Beneficiaries and Users of NOS





Despite this turbulent operating environment, evidence from a recent report by the Edge Foundation found that **NOS are still valued by a range of users**. And valued, in particular, for the role they play as the “cement” which binds the UK skills system to the world of work (REF)

## What will this strategy do to meet challenges and maximise opportunities in the future?

The NOS strategy for 2022 and beyond has a new set of principles and priorities.

### NOS will be:

- **RESPONSIVE** – being employer-centric and a UK-wide product with a **FOCUS** on pan and multi sector NOS which enable the transfer of skills and mobility of labour.
- **RECOGNISED** – through compelling communications, for their role and purpose in underpinning the UK skills system and **INCLUSIVE**, presented in a way that allows for multiple access and different uses.
- **RELEVANT** and **CURRENT** – reflecting new skills demands and **ALIGNED** to other standards and qualifications architecture.
- **ROBUST** – having evidence of impact and usage and systems and processes which are accessible, agile, and trusted.

The priorities over the coming years, to realise these principles, will be as follow:

- ❖ **NOS will remain demand-led and be based on real-time insights**, by continuing to prioritise the employer-centric approach. Better use will be made of LMI and strong stakeholder engagement.
- ❖ To strengthen the transferability and mobility of skills, **a set of pan and multi sector NOS will be identified and supported by a catalogue of common work-relevant behaviours**.
- ❖ **The functionality of the NOS database and website will continue to be refreshed** to improve access and usability.

- ❖ **The presentation of the NOS product will be refreshed.** NOS will continue to include sufficient detail to allow for bite-sized learning, supporting flexible upskilling/reskilling and lifelong learning.
- ❖ **Systems and processes will be more agile but still ensure high-quality NOS which are responsive to change.** There will be better use of commensurate, continuous review processes to improve agility and embed a “develop once, use often” philosophy, which will give confidence to the end user and bring NOS and related products to market quicker.
- ❖ **The purpose of NOS will be better communicated and will identify the primary audience as the skills system**, building on the recognised NOS brand to raise awareness of their value.
- ❖ **Impact and outcome evaluation data to exemplify the economic and social value of NOS will be developed** and used to support effective communications.
- ❖ **Finally, policy alignment is important.** Clearer linkages will be pursued between NOS and other standards policy across the UK, Europe and internationally, as well as other professional standards and qualification frameworks, to complement other systems and avoid any unnecessary duplication.

The NOS GG will work with a range of stakeholders and partners across the UK to realise the principles and deliver on the priorities over the coming years. There is a commitment to implement a continuous improvement cycle through ongoing, regular monitoring and a formal review of progress in 2027.

The NOS GG will also commission the development of a NOS Strategic Development Plan which will put the principles and priorities of this strategy into action. This will be published, and progress monitored and reported regularly.



# INTRODUCTION

## **National Occupational Standards (NOS)**

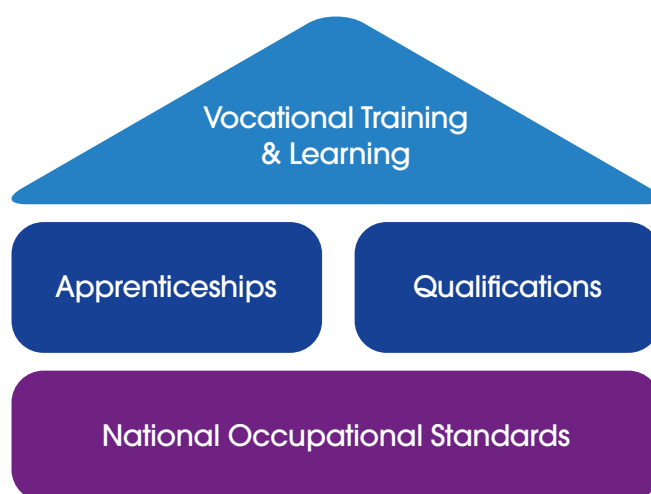
were introduced forty years ago by government to ensure that vocational training and learning aligned with industry needs and to address the UK's poor industrial performance compared to competitor nations. They define the skills, knowledge and understanding needed by an individual to perform a task competently. And support the transfer of skills across businesses, within and across sectors and geographically, promoting a flexible workforce. Their longevity and continued use throughout the UK skills systems to date exemplifies the value of NOS.

**UK-wide NOS continue to be supported and enabled by the strategic alliance and financial investment between the Governments of Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, through the NOS Governance Group (NOS GG).** NOS are the foundation of most of their post-16 vocational training and learning offer and this will continue to give employers confidence on the transferability and portability of skills across the UK and the assurance of universal competence.

NOS are reviewed and developed with employers from across the four nations and take account of other related standards, where appropriate, to ensure NOS are representative, valuable, and transferrable across the UK even when there is divergence of skills policies.

The new principles and priorities within this strategy have been designed to reinforce the important role NOS play across the UK and help drive them forward.

**Diagram 2** – NOS, the foundation of UK-wide vocational training and learning



# WHERE ARE WE NOW?

## NOS Strategy 2010 – 2020: Progress to date

Through the previous NOS strategy considerable progress has been made in the last 12 years to improve NOS and the NOS system, particularly in relation to exemplifying the benefits of NOS and improvements to the database.

However, there is much still to be done, notably reinforcing the purpose of NOS, prioritising the demand-led approach, making NOS more agile and modernising the content, continuing to improve access to NOS and having clear success measures to communicate the value of NOS.

## Context

What is the current position of NOS in the UK skills systems? And what are the social, technological, economic, and political (STEP) factors which will help shape their future through this strategy?

### Social

Despite the new opportunities advanced technology will bring, there is a danger that **the rapid pace of change in the workplace and the demand for new skills will leave the most disadvantaged communities behind.** The Institute for Public Policy Research in 2017 stated: “The total level of wages associated with jobs that have the technical potential to be automated in the UK is £290 billion per year, which represents 33% of all wages and earnings from labour in the economy and low-wage jobs have more potential to be automated than high-wage jobs.” (REF)

**Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic disproportionately impacted the poorest communities across the UK.** An inquiry by the Health Foundation in 2021 found “working-age adults in the poorest areas are almost four times more likely to die from COVID-19.” (REF)

To minimise the social impact of these global events and capitalise on new opportunities, reskilling and upskilling of impacted individuals will be needed. Vocational training and learning

will play an important role in improving social mobility by providing new skills for new jobs and by offering an alternative to the academic pathway which is closer to the labour market. This training and learning, which is supported by NOS, will be vital in ensuring that no one is left behind.

**Changing demographics across the UK mean there is an ageing population,** in turn, increasing the demand for lifelong learning and upskilling/reskilling of the existing workforce. Multi-generational workforces are now more common than ever, and workplaces must respond to the demands that this places on skills. Lifelong learning has continued to be a focus of the skills system, emphasising the need to invest in the skills which people need throughout their lives for the benefit of the individual, society, and the economy. Once again, NOS which are current and relevant and aid progression through reskilling/upskilling will support this.

## Technological

**Increasing use of advanced technology** is creating new ways of working and learning. And this will affect not only the labour market but also skills systems and qualifications. NOS will need to be future-proofed to ensure longevity and sustainability.

Future-proofing will happen in two ways:

- ❖ ensuring the content of NOS reflects new ways of working such as the increased use of technology and the demand for green skills to support the Net Zero agenda.
- ❖ ensuring that central to NOS are a set of pan and multi sector NOS which reflect the emerging global core requirements of the workplace supported by a catalogue of common work-relevant behaviours.

## Economic

The two global recessions of the last 12 years have impacted NOS. Following the financial crash in 2008-09, public and private investment in training and education was restrained, arguably constraining industry's ability to recruit, retain and progress skills in the workplace. **The economy and labour market have more recently been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic** and despite furlough, there are significant skills shortages. A KPMG survey found that the number of staff available to fill vacancies declined during the pandemic at the quickest rate since 2017. (REF)

**The low productivity puzzle** in the UK has long been a challenge for employers and governments. Whilst unemployment fell rapidly after the recession of 2008-09, the story on productivity remains challenging. Estimates by the University of Sussex and Loughborough University in February 2020, suggest that productivity is at its lowest since the industrial revolution, attributable to the global pandemic. (REF)

**“ In their current form, National Occupational Standards may not be the common framework they were once intended to be. But looking forward rather than dwelling on the past, evidence suggests we should not underestimate their value. Naturally, there will be challenges for governments taking this forward. Navigating the rapid pace of economic change and complexity of emerging technologies (not to mention the pandemic) requires agility and strategic thinking. Collaboration between businesses, broader society and devolved administrations will also be vital in shaping a future approach. ”**

**Dr. Andrea Laczik, Edge Foundation - FE Week, 2021**

(REF)

## Political

Despite the policy shift in England to end the mandatory use of vocational qualifications in apprenticeships, many of which were underpinned by NOS, **policy on NOS in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales remains constant**. And NOS will continue to play an important role in supporting cross-nation skills policy including lifelong learning.

The Welsh Government's 'Post-Compulsory Education and Training (PCET) Principles for Change', 2020, states: **"As the economy and labour market continue to change, and the population of Wales is set to grow older, lifelong learning has never been more important."** "We will establish a right to lifelong learning; widening access to skills and knowledge throughout lives and careers, increasing the proportion of PCET students and learners who are returning to education later in life." (REF)

**NOS are an essential part of Scotland's skills and education system. They underpin many competency-based qualifications in Scotland, particularly Scottish Vocational Qualifications.**

In Scotland, the ambition is for all young people to undertake relevant work-related learning as part of their school curriculum, regardless of their learning pathway, future career aspirations, gender or background. And there has been an increase in the percentage of school leavers attaining vocational qualifications at SCQF level 5 and above by 15.2 percentage points since the baseline in 2013-14. These vocational qualifications include National Certificates, Higher National Qualifications, Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs), National Progression Awards, and Skills for Work.

**NOS are the basis of many professional standards and business improvement tools and are also an important part of Scotland's successful Modern Apprenticeship programme and Foundation Apprenticeships, which are delivered for young people in the senior phase of school.** And a strong skills and education system will be vital to the success of the Young Person's Guarantee, launched in November 2020, to ensure that within two years, every person aged between 16 and 24 will have the opportunity to study; take up an apprenticeship, job, or work experience; or participate in formal volunteering.

The skills system in Northern Ireland has been through a significant period of development in recent years. There has been a consistent pace of reform, with a range of new strategies designed to meet the needs of employers and to boost levels of skills in Northern Ireland. In 2014 the development of 'Generating Our Success and Securing Our Success Strategies' provided the future direction of youth training and apprenticeships in Northern Ireland. The introduction of Sectoral Partnerships in 2016 provided a process for bringing together employers, industry specialists and learning centres to inform changes and improvements to vocational programmes that reflect industry standards, therefore ensuring programmes and underpinning qualifications meet the needs of learners and employers. **NOS have continued to underpin vocational programmes in NI ensuring that programmes and qualifications are valued, portable and support industry needs.** The new skills strategy for Northern Ireland, (REF) demonstrates how skills can support economic recovery post-pandemic as well as supporting economic growth in the future. NOS continue to provide a strong foundation upon which to build appropriate skills solutions. (REF)

But governments need to be continually assured of value for money for sustained investment and it is important that NOS can easily and readily demonstrate economic and social value, a key objective in this strategy.

Additionally, a priority of this strategy is to continue to pursue clearer alignment with both English and international standards policy, despite policy divergence on standards over the past 10 years. This will help preserve the Unique Selling Point (USP) of NOS in supporting transferability and mobility.

**The full impact of the UK's exit from the EU may not be known for some time.** But in terms of potential skills shortages, some sectors are facing challenges already such as in agri-food, transport, logistics and construction. Construction News reported in January 2021: "The number of European Union-born workers in the UK construction industry dropped by more than a quarter in 12 months. In the third quarter of 2020, there were 127,000 EU-born workers in the industry, down from 176,000 recorded in the same period in 2019." (REF)

The UK may still need to import skills to meet the demands of the labour market. How that is achieved will depend on emerging immigration policy. Whatever the outcome, greater investment in vocational training and learning will be needed to meet skills demand. And work will continue to ensure NOS support any expansion of vocational provision.

Additionally, the Devolved Governments are committed to equality of access to all training and learning and ensuring it meets the needs of a diverse audience. The NOS GG have collectively signed up to the following statement:

**This equality and diversity statement reflects the NOS Governance Group's commitment to ensuring that activity relating to the development and review of National Occupational Standards (NOS) with employers and stakeholders will aim to be inclusive, representative and reflect the diversity of the four UK nations.**

# WHERE DO WE WANT TO BE AND HOW ARE WE GOING TO GET THERE?

There are four new principles for 2022 and beyond.

NOS will be:

- ❖ **RESPONSIVE** – being employer-centric and a UK-wide product with a **FOCUS** on pan and multi sector NOS which enable the transfer of skills and mobility of labour.
- ❖ **RECOGNISED** – through compelling communications, for their role and purpose in underpinning the UK skills system and **INCLUSIVE**, presented in a way that allows for multiple access and different uses.
- ❖ **RELEVANT** and **CURRENT** – reflecting new skills demands and **ALIGNED** to other standards and qualifications architecture.
- ❖ **ROBUST** – having evidence of impact and usage and systems and processes which are accessible, agile, and trusted.

The Devolved Governments of Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales are keen to ensure that NOS remain employer-centric and will be looking to developers of NOS to ensure the employer voice continues to be reflected. **The role of NOS as a direct link to employers also has the benefit of ensuring standards are common, transferable and reflect the world of work.**

During the COVID-19 pandemic some industries struggled to meet business demands because of a lack of skills and others had to reduce output and reduce staffing levels. By having robust pan and multi sector NOS which are relevant to many occupations throughout the UK and beyond, the movement of people and their skills to other industries and locations is easier. NOS, which continue to include detailed, job-specific competences in bite-sized components, make reskilling in more technical areas quicker and simpler and continue to support licensed occupations.

This will be achieved by exploring the way NOS are presented so there is a clearly identified set of pan and multi sector NOS and job-specific standards within a complete NOS, allowing for multiple uses of the individual levels of standards, as exemplified below:

**Diagram 3** – Example of a new model for NOS



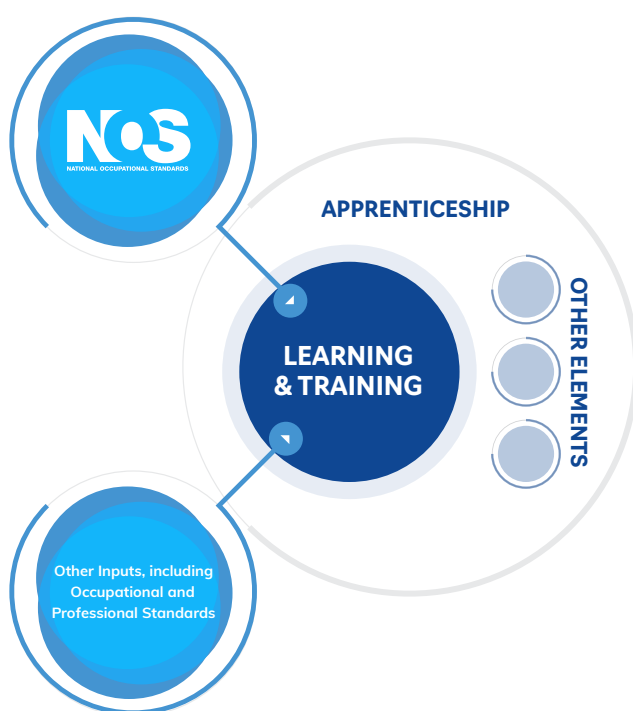
This model also attempts to reconcile the tension between employer demand for job-specific standards and NOS being specified at an occupational level. It recognises that training and learning and ultimately qualifications underpinned by NOS will be assessed within a specific job context, whilst the individual progresses to full occupational competence.

Improvements and updates to the NOS database and website will allow for comprehensive searches of NOS and present NOS in different ways for different users. Alongside this, a catalogue of common work-relevant behaviours such as teamwork and resilience will also be explored.



The Edge report 'Perspectives on NOS: What do users think?' (2021) concludes that "there is a danger of perhaps seeking to be too many things to too many people. **In general, hard evidence suggests the main purpose of NOS remains to help build learning/training solutions such as qualifications and apprenticeships.**" It is important therefore to reinforce, through a new narrative, the role of NOS in raising the quality of NOS-based learning/training solutions by maintaining the line of sight to the world of work and acting as the foundation for vocational training and learning. (REF)

**Diagram 4** demonstrates the position of NOS in relation to training and learning.



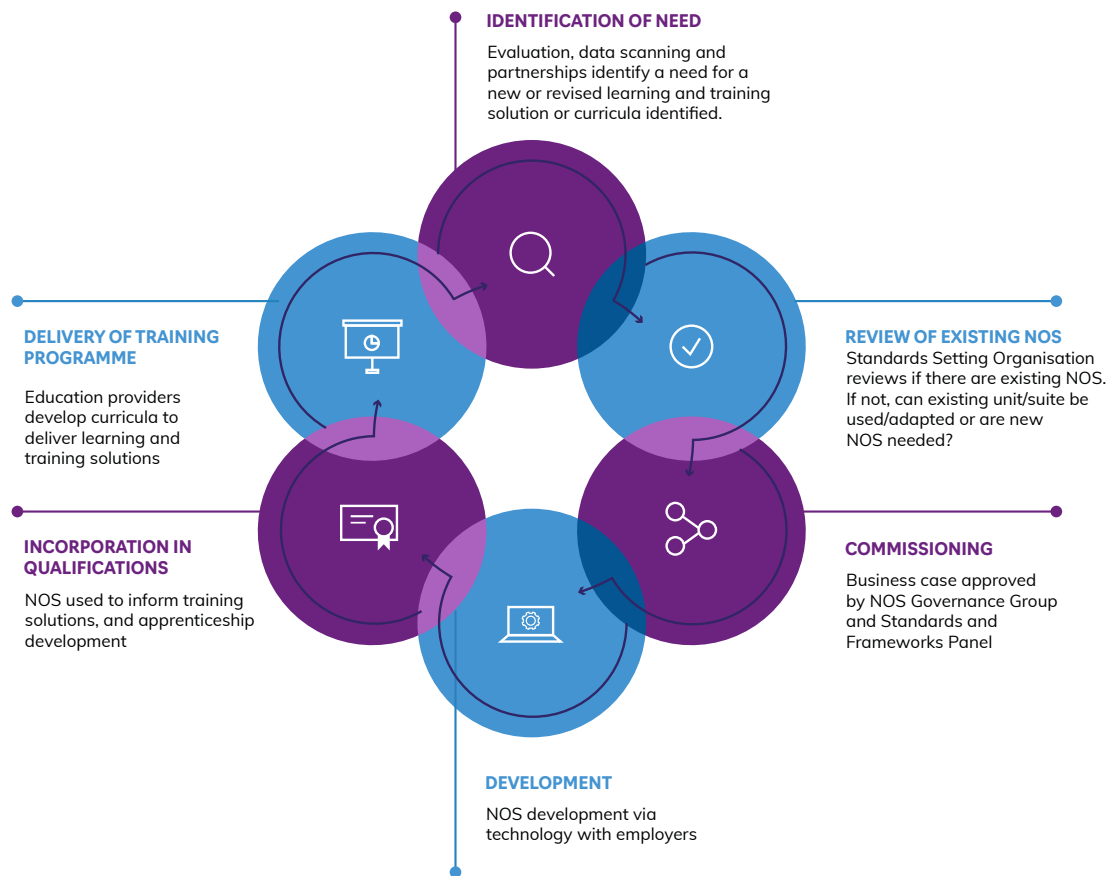
**A comprehensive communications strategy will be developed** making use of a range of communication tools to reach the full network of users and beneficiaries of NOS. We will build upon the recognised and valued NOS brand to simplify and support the new narrative, and visual representations will be used which promote the role of NOS as the universal foundation within a skills system.

To build capacity and capability and to reach a wider audience of employers, experts, developers and stakeholders, **an online network will be developed** which will allow for an exchange of ideas, sharing of insights and help raise the profile of NOS.

**Better use of a robust UK-wide evidence base will ensure NOS reflect new, emerging skills,** supporting progression and lifelong learning. Labour market changes and other skills priorities such as technological advances and the pursuit of the Net Zero agenda will require the NOS system to modernise and adapt. NOS GG recognises the importance of these priorities and will ensure the NOS system is responsive and flexible to the changing environment.

It is particularly important in times of severe disruption, such as those created by the emergence of technology and global recessions, to understand how skills and the world of work have been affected both positively and negatively. NOS will need to support the fast-track training and learning solutions which will aid rapid recovery and growth, by streamlining the development process and providing a quicker response to labour market changes and emerging skills demands. Diagram 5 demonstrates how the end-to-end NOS system is able to anticipate and respond to changes within the labour market.



**Diagram 5** – NOS Lifecycle

**NOS will be clearly positioned within broader skills architectures and will be mapped to Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) 2020 codes.** By ensuring NOS are aligned to SOC 2020, it will be easier to link to wider data sets to better measure and report impact. Success measures will be developed based on real outcomes and impact which have value to employers, individuals, the economy, and society as a whole.

**Systems for development and review will be reformed to increase agility.** Technology will be explored to allow for fast-tracking emerging occupations not covered by SOC 2020 and to identify and avoid duplication with other standards, such as professional standards. Better use of technology to support a co-development approach of NOS and products based on NOS and to speed up current systems for procurement will also be explored.

Work has already started to improve accessibility and the functionality of the database, and this will continue.

To deliver on the principles in the short term the following priorities will form the basis of an action plan:

- ❖ refresh the NOS Database to improve accessibility and appropriate presentation of the NOS product.
- ❖ enable transferability of skills across sectors through the definition of pan and multi sector NOS .
- ❖ make better and more consistent use of LMI and other data sources in NOS development to support economic recovery and growth.
- ❖ ensure continuous improvement of the end-to-end NOS process.
- ❖ develop and implement a robust evaluation and monitoring process.
- ❖ develop and implement a communications and engagement strategy to support the delivery of the NOS strategy and action plan.
- ❖ continue to pursue clearer alignment with respective four nation and international occupational standards policy.

## GOVERNANCE

The current NOS governance structure operates effectively for the three Devolved Governments and ensures delivery of the NOS system. It includes the NOS GG as the body which has strategic and policy responsibility for NOS, including investment decisions, and is supported by other groups such as the Standards and Frameworks Panel and the wider supplier network.

**The main objective is to formalise and refine the current governance arrangements, so every stakeholder is clear on the lines of accountability and responsibility.**

But equally important is to ensure governance is flexible and can anticipate and respond to the rapid pace of change, whilst maintaining proportionate efforts to retain oversight, accountability and demonstrate value.

Collectively funding and supporting NOS demonstrates common efficiencies and provides the most cost-effective method of underpinning the respective skills and apprenticeship systems. **The sharing of expertise and knowledge across the devolved governments is an excellent example of cross-government collaboration.**

NOS GG will also revisit the long-term priority, to explore alternative and sustainable funding to support the future of NOS.

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**The rapid pace of change, complexity of emerging technologies and the broader impacts of the fourth industrial revolution, coupled with the fall-out from the COVID-19 pandemic, mean that there will be challenges for governments in taking forward the NOS system. There will be a need to think strategically, adopt ‘agile’ governance, continuously adapt to new, fast-changing environments, and collaborate closely with business and civil society to be in a position to reflect common objectives and values and shape a future that works for all.**

”

(REF)

## CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

**NOS continue to play an important role in UK skills development, economic growth and an effective vocational training and learning system. But we know lessons can be learnt.**

This strategy has been developed on the principle of evolution and continuous improvement. However, in formulating new principles and priorities, it is hoped that the coming years prove to be both reinforcing for NOS in terms of value in the skills system, and transformational, reflecting the rapid changes in the world of work translated into relevant training and learning solutions.

The NOS GG commissioned the development of a NOS Strategic Action Plan which will put the principles and priorities in this strategy into action. This has been published alongside this strategy, and progress will be monitored and reported on regularly. The NOS Strategic Action Plan can be found on page 21.

## PRIMARY SOURCES

There are a number of significant unpublished reports which have been used for general research purposes and to support the development of this strategy:

- ❖ Review of NOS Database – Nesta, 2019
- ❖ NOS Strategic Framework – Pye Tait, 2021
- ❖ Start with Standards – UKCES, 2016
- ❖ NOS 5 Year Plan – York Consulting, 2016

The following sources provided specific references:

The NOS Strategy 2010–2020, UKCES which was published, has also been used to support the development of this strategy

| Page Number         | Reference and links   |
|---------------------|---|
| <b>4, 7, 15, 19</b> | The Edge Foundation, 'Perspectives on National Occupational Standards' Report, 2021   |
| <b>4</b>            | The Edge Foundation, 'FE and Skills across the four countries of the UK' Report, 2018   |
| <b>9</b>            | Links to NOS Five-Year Plan and NOS Strategy Progress Table, 2010–2020  |
| <b>10</b>           | The Institute for Public Policy Research 'Greater Inequality not mass job losses most likely outcome of Automation' report, 2017              |
| <b>10</b>           | The Health Foundation, 'Unequal pandemic, fairer recovery' Inquiry, 2021  |
| <b>11</b>           | KPMG and REC, 'UK Report on Jobs' 2021  |
| <b>11</b>           | University of Sussex and University of Loughborough, 'UK Productivity slowdown unprecedented' Report, 2020                                    |
| <b>12</b>           | 'The fourth industrial revolution means there is an important role for high-quality re-skilling', Dr Andrae Lazick, The Edge Foundation, 2021 |
| <b>12</b>           | The Welsh Government 'Post-Compulsory Education and Training (PCET)–Principles for Change' report, 2020                                       |
| <b>13</b>           | The Northern Ireland Government 'Generating our Success and Securing Our Success Strategies' report, 2014                                     |
| <b>13</b>           | 'UK Construction loses a quarter of its EU workforce', Construction News, 2021  |

## GLOSSARY

|                            |   |
|----------------------------|---|
| <b>Pan-sector</b>          | relevant to all sectors across the economy, for example 'administration'.   |
| <b>Multi-sector</b>        | relevant to a number of roles across multiple sectors.  |
| <b>Job-specific</b>        | relevant to a specific job within a sector.   |
| <b>Transferable</b>        | standards that enable an individual to move across sectors, occupations, or borders. This can come about through a process of identifying the links of NOS to job roles using various tools, for example, automation or skills frameworks, to show matches between roles and NOS. This process is a manifestation of working with a skills architecture.  |
| <b>Skills architecture</b> | a means to which skills, qualifications or other training/learning solutions and apprenticeships are interlinked. The term "skills architecture" is a recognition of the existence of a skills taxonomy and a good example is SOC 2020, which is an occupational classification system and hosts families or groupings of occupations with descriptions of skills required. The categories within the current classification system (2020) provide links to data that provides useful Labour Market Intelligence (LMI) again another key element in determining NOS developments. |
| <b>Skills system</b>       | describes the full range of post-compulsory, post-16 education, training, and learning systems across the UK. This includes vocational provision delivered at or via school, college, university, training providers as well as apprenticeships and other types of work-based learning. Where it is referenced in the singular it is intended to imply the skills systems of the four nations of the UK.  |

## NOS STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN

| Objective  | Actions  | Timescales and Notes   | Owner                |
|--|--|--|----------------------|
| Refresh the NOS Database/ website to improve accessibility and appropriate presentation of NOS product       | Refine and refresh content of database including cleansing and removing duplications and align content to SOC 2020 codes             | January 2022 – ongoing   | NOS Governance Group |
|  | Improve functionality and accessibility of the database/ website and consult with stakeholders to ensure fitness for purpose         | October 2022 – ongoing   |                      |
| Enable transferability of skills across sectors including through the definition of pan and multi sector NOS | Define and agree pan and multi sector NOS, and those currently within NOS, and work relevant behaviours common across the UK economy | January 2022 to June 2022  | NOS Governance Group |
|  | Identify behaviours currently embedded in NOS and map to other sectoral behaviour catalogues   | June 2022 to September 2022  |                      |
|  | Explore the presentation of NOS to allow for different uses by different audiences   | Linked to NOS Database development objective above: July 2022 to December 2022 |                      |
|  | Agree, publish and launch new approach to pan and multi sector NOS to include support and guidance                                   | October 2022 to March 2023   |                      |

## NOS STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN

Continued

| Objective  | Actions  | Timescales and Notes         | Owner                |
|--|--|------------------------------|----------------------|
| Make better and more consistent use of LMI and other data sources in NOS development to support economic recovery and growth | Identify and agree current, robust and trusted sources of LMI which can be accessed easily and quickly   | January 2022 to March 2022   | NOS Governance Group |
|  | Signpost NOS developers to LMI sources   | Ongoing                      |                      |
|  | Use LMI sources to identify new occupations and skills trends and inform development of new standards and review of existing standards   | October 2022 to March 2023   |                      |
| Ensure continuous improvement of end-to-end NOS process  | Commission case studies to exemplify how technology has been used to expedite NOS review and development processes   | April 2022 to September 2022 | NOS Governance Group |
|  | Commission case studies to exemplify the concurrent development of NOS and qualifications  | April 2022 to September 2022 |                      |
|  | Develop, agree and implement a continuous improvement framework to include: Governance, Procurement, Delivery, Quality Assurance, Capacity and Capability using existing good practice | July 2022 to December 2022   |                      |



## NOS STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN

Continued

| Objective  | Actions   | Timescales and Notes   | Owner                |
|--|---|--|----------------------|
| Develop and implement a robust evaluation and monitoring process   | Define clear and realistic measures of success and develop an evaluation framework based on outcomes, impact and value of NOS and carry out annual assessments            | April 2022 to June 2022  | NOS Governance Group |
|  | Monitor the operational performance of NOS on a regular basis through the NOS database and general communications   | Linked to continuous improvement framework above: October 2022 to March 2023 |                      |
|  | Create a reporting process on the performance of NOS against the NOS Strategy, and publish an annual report   | October 2022 to March 2023   |                      |
| Develop and implement a communications and engagement strategy to support the delivery of the NOS strategy and action plan | Develop and implement a new communications strategy with support of NOS ambassadors/ advocates  | January 2022 to March 2022   | NOS Governance Group |
|  | Develop a suite of communication resources appropriate to different audiences including infographics and animations to demonstrate the purpose and transferability of NOS | January 2022 to March 2022   |                      |
|  | Exchange good practice and share insights via an online community of NOS stakeholders on LinkedIn and attend relevant external events                                     | October 2022 to December 2022  |                      |

## NOS STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN

Continued

| Objective  | Actions  | Timescales and Notes   | Owner                |
|--|--|------------------------|----------------------|
| Continue to pursue clearer alignment with respective four-nation and international occupational standards policy | Create a map using the SOC 2020 architecture which identifies the links between different occupational standards systems | October 2022 – ongoing | NOS Governance Group |
|  | Identify and pursue opportunities to collaborate with other government agencies/ stakeholders to strengthen linkages     | Ongoing                |                      |