CONCORE TŪHURA

Project Summary

Good practice in the development and implementation of skill standards-based qualifications

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Hummingbird EFFECT

With the support of

WAIHANGA ARA RAU
Construction and Infrastructure
Workforce Development Council

NZQA SUPPORT FOR THE GUIDES

NZQA supports ConCOVE Tūhura's approach in developing these guides to help standard setting bodies and end-users develop a deeper understanding of skill standards.

As the building blocks of vocational qualifications and micro-credentials, skill standards have huge potential to support consistent graduate outcomes and meet industry needs. We envisage that the toolkit approach to the good practice guides will be particularly useful to the target audiences, some of whom may be new to standards-based qualifications and programmes. – NZQA

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- Waihanga Ara Rau Workforce Development Council
- Building and Construction Industry Training Organisation (BCITO)
- Te Pūkenga
- Apprenticeship Training New Zealand (ATNZ)
- Eastern Institute of Technology (EIT)
- Competenz
- Ara Institute of Canterbury
- Site Safe New Zealand Incorporated
- New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) Policy Team

Technical Advisory Groups for:

- Rigging
- Core Construction
- Temporary Traffic Management
- Glazing
- Painting
- Structural Detailing
- Ringa Hora Services Workforce Development Council
- Toi Mai Workforce Development Council

Their collective knowledge and experience have been invaluable in shaping this resource to support assessment practice in vocational education and training.

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THE PROJECT

The Good Practice in Skill Standards-Based Qualifications Development and Implementation project was designed to build system capability for working with skill standards. The project supports standard setting bodies (SSBs) to develop and quality assure skill standards-based qualifications. It also supports tertiary education providers and industry training organisations (ITOs) to implement (deliver and assess) skill standards-based qualifications through programmes of learning.

The main project output is a toolkit made up of six guides. They equip those in qualifications development and implementation roles with:

1. an understanding of the system and its wider context, and how this shapes what skill standards are and should do;

2. good practice principles that should guide the work that uses skill standards; and

3. examples that interpret and illustrate those principles to show 'what good looks like'.

The toolkit represents a leadership opportunity to promote good practice and alignment between industry and the vocational education system. While the toolkit is based on work with the Construction and Infrastructure sectors, its principles-based approach makes it equally appliable to qualifications development and implementation in any sector.

WHY IT MATTERS

In late 2023, skill standards began replacing unit standards, becoming compulsory components, where they exist, of the programmes leading to New Zealand national qualifications. The first skill standards were approved and listed by the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) in 2024. National qualifications and programmes of learning developed from 2024 onwards will be based on skill standards.

This is a technical-sounding change. However the wider context for skill standards includes important relational changes. The Review of Vocational Education (RoVE) envisaged, and legislated for, a more coherent national system for vocational education. The aims were: improved status and careers appeal for vocational education; a stronger voice for industry; and better (more industry-aligned; more learner-centric) learner outcomes, particularly for those typically underserved.

Legislation changed the roles of some existing system entities and established Workforce Development Councils (WDCs) as standard-setting bodies.[1] Tertiary education providers

now have their assessment outcomes moderated by WDCs and its moderators must consider not only how assessment outcomes are arrived at but how a provider goes about preparing learners for assessment against skill standards. The parts of the system ideally work together more, and differently, to achieve quality and consistency in qualifications development and implementation.

NZQA's 2023 change in Rules specified the use of skill standards. It was driven by a desire that skill standards be more holistic than unit standards and provide better evidence about what has been learned. Skill standards-based qualifications are expected to be more logical and relevant, with providers' programmes delivering meaningful and consistent experiences and outcomes. Within this context, good practice in skill standards development can influence the rest of the system to help produce good learner outcomes with real-world value.

[1] This was formerly done by Industry Training Organisations (ITOs).

These technical and relational changes mean that industry, SSBs and tertiary education organisations will need a deep understanding of what the new skill standards should be and do. Much of the vocational education sector is still building understanding of skill standards. Some parts of the sector are still learning about the existence of skill standards and will not be exposed to them in practice for another year or more. So this project addresses the potential missteps that can come from a lack of understanding and experience, and builds capability across the system.

APPROACH AND METHODS

Recognising a system and its constituent parts

One of the two overarching project approaches is that skill standards are understood in terms of their system context where each part, and role, depends on others in order to realise the industry and learner outcomes. So the good practice guidance is designed to address the system. Each part of the toolkit of guides speaks specifically to a part of the system, and in a way that links it with the other parts.

The toolkit features six different guides:

1. A Background to the Emergence of Skill Standards

2. An Overview of the System

3. Standards and Qualifications Development

4. Programme Development and Delivery

5. Assessment and Consistency Measures

6. Industry Stakeholders and Advisory Work

Each guide addresses the different roles and experiences of those in the system – e.g. qualifications developers, programme developers, tertiary teachers/tutors/trainers and assessors, moderators and industry representatives. The guides are therefore also addressing different entity roles in the system (SSBs, ITOs, Institutes of Technology and Polytechnics, Private Training Establishments), as well as a range of different expertise and operating models. The guides discuss drivers, challenges and opportunities specific to each role, and explicitly connect that work to the rest of the system.

The main audience for each guide is indicated by the guide's title. For example, the Assessment and Consistency Measures guide will be most relevant for assessors and moderators. A secondary audience for each guide is those who work 'upstream' or 'downstream' of the work discussed. For example, programme developers in ITOs, ITPs and PTEs work 'upstream' of assessors. So they will find it useful to understand how assessors take up the results of programe development work. Similarly moderators will find it useful to look at the guidance for programme developers working 'upstream' of them.

Guides are colour-coded. A separate Introduction to the Toolkit sets out the coding system, the primary audience and upstream/downstream 'reach' of each guide. It also sets out where particular topics are covered (specific to each audience or perspective) across the guides. For example, "credit value" is covered in A Background to the Emergence of Skill Standards; Standards and Qualifications Development; Programme Development and Delivery; and Assessment and Consistency Measures. "Technical expert advice" is covered in Industry Stakeholders and Advice; Standards and Qualifications Development; and Programme Development.

So the guides may be read together as a set (the entire toolkit) or mixed and matched as needed, including on a just-in-time basis. It would be ideal for managers and team leaders to 'workshop' one or more guides with their staff or group.

Good practice for principled decision-making

The second overarching approach to the project concerns the nature and purpose of guidance. We see the guides as resources to helps people make the best possible decisions. We use the term 'good practice', rather than 'best practice'.

Best practice is appropriate for very specific and established situations at a given point in time. However it is limited in its ability to cater for wide variation or unpredictability. Good practice, on the other hand, focuses on clear principles over set recipes and rigid checklists. There is no substitute for thinking things through and interpreting the guidance for each situation. Well-explained principles, illuminated with examples, aid the thinking and support the autonomy and initiative of industry, SSBs, ITOs and tertiary education providers.

Determining what 'good' looks like

Good practice is based on the best available evidence – i.e. what has been tried and shown to work, and is shaping, and being shaped by, theories or principles in the field. However there is no research on skill standards specifically, and almost no field experience of working with them. They are too new. For example, in the first months of this six month project, only a handful of skill standards had been approved out of the tens of thousands that will eventually be listed. We therefore needed to determined what 'good' would be, or would look like, by bringing together different strands of evidence.

We identified indicators of 'good' as being those which advanced the aims of qualifications development and implementation in the wider context. For example:

- a more coherent system with collaboration between system entities;
- qualifications that are credible to industry (and the economy) and credible to learners (and their whānau and family);
- a strong voice for industry about what competence looks like;
- assessment and moderation practices based on sound and evidenced judgements, and which enable rather than constrain
- learner outcomes that are industry-recognised
- standards designed in alignment with the defining foundations of standards and standards-based assessment – e.g. that articulate the competency and identify the learning outcomes, that recognise learning and offer opportunities for success, and that can be validly and reliably assessed

We therefore reviewed the research on what supported such systems and practices, and on the contested areas or debates. We conducted a literature search of: peer-reviewed articles published in academic journals, books and book chapters; research reports; conference papers; academic theses; government agency guides; and government cabinet papers and related documents.

We also drew on our own long-term experience and expertise in vocational education: major research projects with the sector; roles in senior ITO leadership and ITP governance; invited and Ministerial advisory roles for national education initiatives; stakeholder relationship management; teaching and assessment roles; development of communities of practice; and qualifications framework design.

Capability-building and field-testing with the sector

We created early drafts of principles and possible guidance based on our expertise and insights from experience, and on what we learned from research. We needed to make the guidance accessible to a wide range of system entities and an even wider range of experiences related to their business models – from those who knew little about standards and standards-based assessment (including not knowing skill standards existed)[2] to those who had worked with unit standards but did not know how skill standards were different, nor what they would mean for their business model. We also needed to account for variation in terms of practices considered to be business-as-usual, acceptable compromise and ideal, internal targets, internal capability and capacity and stakeholder expectations.

We carried out a series of interviews and workshops with the vocational education sector to do three things:

- field-test, refine and validate the draft principles and guidance;
- build sector capability where needed; and
- learn about the sector group's specific (often business model-related) challenges, opportunities and insights so we could ensure the guidance addressed these matters.

Organisations were approached on the basis of working with the Construction and Infrastructure industries and having taken an acknowledged leadership role in vocational education.

We varied the exact nature of how we engaged according to the needs and interest of those concerned. A qualification cycle from development to implementation with providers typically takes several years longer than we had for this 6-month project. So SSB qualifications developers were the only people who had any practical experience with skill standards. We were able to run capability-building workshops and observe and influence their real-time practice, as well as hear their reflections on this.

For everyone else, our interviews and workshops were based largely around their context and speculation about anticipated opportunities and challenges. We taught them about the aims and features of skill standards and then explored with them what it could mean once they started implementing skill standards in programmes of learning.

For example, ITOs, previously the SSBs, had experience in setting (unit) standards and in developing and assessing programmes of learning, and moderating providers' assessment outcomes. Some ITPs and PTEs would had little (or no) experience with standards of any kind. Some providers and ITOs were exposed to the design of skill standards from their inclusion in WDC technical advisory groups. However in general providers and ITOs had not had any opportunity to work with skill standards.

In many cases, we had more than one meeting with a group or had follow-up interviews with selected managers or representatives. As the good practice guides moved into final draft stage, representatives from an ITP and a WDC provided peer review to help ensure accessibility and relevance of the guidance.

[2] They instead worked with their own Graduate Programme Profiles or other yardsticks.

Table 1 Sector input into the development of guidance

Sector entity	Roles
SSB	• qualifications development staff • quality assurance staff
Industry	• representatives that advise SSBs and tertiary education providers
Institutes of Technology and Polytechnics (ITP)	• representatives that advise SSBs • programme developers • teachers and assessors • quality advisors and teacher educators
Industry Training Organisations (ITO)	• programme developers • assessment and moderation leaders
Te Pūkenga (national network)	• programme development managers
Private Training Establishments (PTE)	• programme developers • teachers and assessors • moderation staff
New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA)	• Policy team • Approvals managers (of standards and qualifications)