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Guidance

Developing an occupational standard

How to develop the occupational standard for a new occupation which provides the basis for a new apprenticeship, T Level and other technical qualifications.

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Applies to England

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Policy Update: In February 2025, the government announced reforms to apprenticeship assessment and published a new set of [apprenticeship assessment principles](#). Skills England will provide updated guidance incorporating these principles in due course, and this page will be fully updated once all policy details are finalised.

You must have your occupational proposal agreed by Skills England before you can develop an occupational standard. You can find out how to develop an occupational proposal.

Occupational standards are a description of an occupation. They include the knowledge, skills and behaviours (KSBs) needed to be competent in a role. This means being able to work at a level expected by employers. Occupational standards are prepared by trailblazer groups which include employers and other stakeholders for occupations that meet Skills England's occupational criteria.

Occupational standards form the basis of apprenticeships, T Levels and other technical qualifications and should be developed with this in mind.

If you are developing an occupational standard as part of an apprenticeship, you will also need to [develop an end-point assessment \(EPA\) plan](#) and collect evidence for your funding band recommendation.

Occupational standards are used by:

- potential apprentices, parents or guardians, schools, careers advisers, employees and employers as a description of the occupation
- T Level panels to develop the outline content for T Level programmes
- Skills England when we consider whether a technical qualification should be approved
- awarding organisations and bodies in the design and development of technical qualifications

When they are developed as part of an apprenticeship, occupational standards are used by:

- end-point assessment organisations (EPAO) as they produce assessment tools, such as written tests and observations
- external quality assurance providers (EQAP) to determine and inform monitoring activity

Occupational standards can also help employers and training providers to:

- analyse individual jobs for apprenticeship coverage and suitability
- assess the prior learning of apprentices at the start of their apprenticeship
- design and deliver the on-and-off-the-job training

When preparing an occupational standard you may need to revise it to address any feedback received from us or if you identify changes are needed.

Occupational standard requirements

Short, concise and clear

The occupational standard must be short, concise and clear.

Clear occupational profile

The occupational standard must be based on a clear occupational profile setting out the duties carried out by employees in the occupation and including the KSBs which will be applied in the workplace and are directly relevant to the duties.

We will assess this by:

- ensuring any feedback received at the occupation proposal stage has been incorporated
- verifying that the occupation continues to meet our occupation requirements
- confirming that the KSBs are developed directly from each of the duties in the occupational profile
- confirming that the KSBs statements meet our guidance in terms of format and structure

Define occupational competence

The occupational standard must define competence in an occupation so that, on completion, the new entrant to the occupation is able to carry out the role in any size of employer across any relevant sector.

We will assess this by:

- checking that the occupation is in demand from a range of employers using commonly understood or similar job titles and with substantially common duties, and KSBs
- verifying that the KSBs required for a new entrant to the occupation (beyond generally expected prior knowledge and skills) is agreed across a range of employers, including reviewing the outcomes of your consultation

Align with regulatory requirements and

professional recognition

The occupational standard must align with regulatory requirements and professional recognition and allows the individual to apply for this.

We will assess this by scrutinising the supporting evidence to confirm that the occupational standard meets the requirements of regulatory or professional bodies.

Knowledge, skills and behaviours

You need to set out the KSBs required to be competent in the occupation profile's duties. We will consider these KSBs when assessing the extent to which technical qualifications are aligned to an occupational standard and this will inform whether or not we approve the qualification. They will also form the basis of an apprentice's [on-and-off-the-job training](#).

If you are developing an apprenticeship, the EPA plan is designed to test an apprentice's competency against the KSBs, rather than the duties. It is important to consider how they will be assessed as you develop them.

Occupational standards typically have:

- 15 to 20 knowledge statements
- 15 to 20 skill statements
- five to six behaviour statements

It is not necessary for knowledge statements to always have a corresponding skill or behaviour statement. Knowledge may underpin several skills and behaviours.

You need to identify the KSBs required to undertake each duty. Each KSB is likely to be needed for more than one duty. Only map the most relevant KSBs to

each duty. You need to ensure that each KSB is mapped to at least one duty.

How to write good KSBs

When you are writing your KSBs you should make sure you:

- use appropriate language for the skill level of the occupation and, as far as possible, use gender-neutral language
- describe them as if you are describing someone who is fully competent in the occupation
- list each KSB subject in a separate statement for each assessment method (for example, group health and safety-related knowledge that is going to be assessed by an observation in one statement and health and safety-related knowledge that is going to be assessed by a test in another one)
- do not put 'knows' or 'understands' at the start of knowledge statements, as this is clear from the heading
- do not put 'can' or 'be able to' at the start of each skill statement
- be as specific as possible
- knowledge statements should be as definitive as possible, avoid using words like 'including' and 'for example' where possible
- words like 'including' and 'for example' can be used in skill and behaviour statements but should only be used where it helps understanding
- give examples if it helps with understanding
- start skill statements with an active verb (for example, 'communicate' rather than 'communicating')
- do not repeat duties as skill statements, they should be different

- avoid being too context-specific (for example, use 'communicate' as the skill rather than 'communicates with colleagues in team meetings')
- only include KSBs at their highest level not KSBs that progress to a higher level of KSB
- avoid using wording that could mean a statement becomes out of date quickly
- avoid vague and absolute statements that could be open to interpretation like 'relevant legislation' and 'all types of materials'
- avoid stating how well a KSB should be performed, this needs to be detailed in the grading descriptors in the EPA plan

You should be careful with your choice of words. If a KSB statement is worded 'including a, b, c' – then 'a, b, c' must be tested in the apprenticeship's EPA. It is better to use 'for example, a, b or c' where there are a range of things that could be demonstrated to show competence. It is sufficient to put 'including' rather than 'including, but not limited to'.

Engage with your industry

You must engage with a wide group of people and organisations when you are developing your occupational standard. This is to give employers who are not part of your trailblazer group and other interested people and organisations an opportunity to input. This may include:

- trade associations
- professional and regulatory bodies
- training providers
- EPAOs
- higher education institutions
- trade unions

- sector bodies
- world skills
- apprentices
- employees

It is up to you how you carry out this engagement work. For example, it may be through an on-line survey or by holding workshops in person.

You will need to reflect on the comments you receive and make any changes you want to your occupational standard.

In your submission, you need to include details of who you have engaged with and how, what the results were, and changes made to the occupational standard as a result.

Statutory regulated occupations

To practice in some occupations or professions, it is a legal requirement for individuals to be registered with a statutory regulator. Registration with the statutory regulator is required for the individual to practice in their chosen occupation on completion of their studies.

Occupational standards must be agreed and recognised by the relevant statutory regulator and this must have been part of your occupational proposal.

When you submit your apprenticeship documents to the approvals process, you need to provide evidence that the regulator agrees the occupational standard aligns with the regulated occupation requirements.

You need to upload a letter of support from the regulator. If a qualification is being included at the request of the regulator, the same letter can cover both points.

You can find out more about statutory regulated

occupations.

English and maths requirements

The government's minimum English and maths qualification level requirements for an apprenticeship are set out in the apprenticeship funding rules and must be met as part of a learner's completion of their apprenticeship.

A British Sign Language (BSL) qualification is an alternative to the English qualification for those whose primary language is BSL.

Mandated qualifications

A qualification can be mandated as part of an apprenticeship subject to meeting certain criteria. Where a qualification is mandated, all apprentices must pass the qualification as well as the EPA to complete the apprenticeship.

If you are proposing to mandate a qualification in a new apprenticeship, you will have submitted your request to do so at the occupation proposal stage.

If you are proposing to mandate a qualification as part of a revision to an existing apprenticeship, you must submit the relevant information and evidence early in the occupational standard development stage.

You can find out more about this in our guidance on degree apprenticeships and our mandated qualifications policy.

Professional recognition

When you submit your occupational standard to the approvals process, you need to provide evidence that the professional body agree to how the occupational

standard aligns or partially aligns with professional recognition.

You need to provide a letter of support from each relevant organisation.

The professional body or bodies should accept an apprenticeship certificate as evidence the individual has reached a recognised standard of competence they issue. In such cases, the apprenticeship is fully aligned with the professional recognition or status.

In some cases, the professional body or bodies may only recognise the apprenticeship certificate as evidence the individual has reached part of a recognised level of competence and so the apprenticeship is partially aligned with professional recognition or status. That means the learner will need to achieve any additional requirements (for example, a certain amount of experience or type of experience) and provide evidence of them before they are eligible to apply for professional recognition. This needs to be stated in the occupational standard.

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