

Skill standards – Frequently Asked Questions – October 2022

Topic	Question	Answer
Definition	What are skill standards?	<p>Skill standards are defined in the Education and Training Act as:</p> <p>(a) <i>a specification of skills, the levels of performance in those skills, and the learning outcomes associated with those skills</i>; and</p> <p>(b) <i>in relation to any vocational education and training (or proposed vocational education and training), means a specification of some or all of the skills in which training is (or is proposed to be) received, the levels of performance in those skills intended to be attained by people receiving the training, and the learning outcomes associated with those skills.</i></p>
	How will skill standard be different to unit standards?	<p>Skill standards are different to unit standards in terms of how they are defined, developed, designed, and used:</p> <p>Definition</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In simple terms, the difference is the explicit inclusion of learning outcomes in the definition in the Education and Training Act. • Learning outcomes provide: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ a clear link from the skill standard to the overarching qualification or credential ○ the framework for assessment design that supports consistent achievement. <p>Development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standard setting bodies (Workforce Development Councils and NZQA) will lead the collaborative development of skill standards for their industries/sectors. • Workforce Development Councils (WDCs) are new leaders in the system and have a very clear focus on skills leadership. Providers are responsible for structuring the individual learner journey and delivering the learning experience. The collaborative development and implementation of skill standards provides the opportunity for WDCs and providers to work together to ensure employer and learner needs are met. The delivery of this goal requires collective ownership and buy-in across the vocational qualifications and credentials landscape. <p>Design principles</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We are encouraging a more holistic approach to standard design, with larger credit values where appropriate, transferable competencies, and less prescriptive ranges. We

Skill standards – Frequently Asked Questions – October 2022

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		<p>have heard that some providers find unit standards overly detailed, which can cause frequent re-versioning of the standard and over-assessment.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skill standards will bring together the best of both worlds in terms of standards-based assessment and provider-based learning. They will include high level indicative content to inform programme design as well as assessment. • We are proposing design principles for skill standards to ensure they meet the needs of all ākonga, industry, employers, communities, iwi, hapū, and hapori. These principles are based on ngā kaupapa that form Te Hono o Te Kahurangi, a unique kaupapa Māori whareako framework and methodology used for the quality assurance of tertiary education organisations. Representatives from Wānanga, private training establishments, institutes of technology and polytechnics and Te Kōhanga Reo National Trust contributed significantly towards the building of Te Hono o Te Kahurangi, which was launched in April 2012 at Waiwhetū marae in Lower Hutt. <p>Usage</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unlike unit standards, skill standards will be mandatory in qualifications unless specified by the standard setting body – i.e., a common building block that all providers must use to support portability of learning and consistency of graduate outcomes. Standard setting bodies will work through a programme of transition to include skill standards in qualifications. • Like unit standards, skill standards can contribute towards the credit requirements for NCEA. • Over time, skill standards will replace unit standards as WDCs and NZQA review existing qualifications and develop new ones.
	<p>How will skill standards help industry and learners?</p>	<p>The sector working group has proposed design principles for skill standards that are intended to maximise industry and learner benefits. For more information refer to the <i>Ngā kaupapa as expressed in the development of skill standards</i> document.</p> <p>The collaborative development process and intention that skill standards will be the common building block of vocational qualifications will also benefit industry and learners, in terms of consistent outcomes and portability of learning.</p>
<p>Design principles</p>	<p>Who contributed to the design principles being consulted on?</p>	<p>NZQA and WDCs have led Te Rāngai Ohu Mahi - Paerewa Ako me te Marautanga ā-motu, a skill standards and ‘national curriculum’ sector working group. Group members have been drawn from WDCs, Te Pūkenga, Te Wānanga o Aotearoa, Transitional Industry Training Organisations,</p>

Skill standards – Frequently Asked Questions – October 2022

Topic	Question	Answer
		Universities, Schools, Private Training Establishments, Government Training Establishments, Tertiary Education Union, Tertiary Education Commission, Ministry of Education and NZQA. Since February 2022, the sector working group has contributed to develop skill standard examples and has given input to guidance for the development, approval, delivery and quality assurance of skill standards.
	Will skill standards and qualifications be outcome focused?	Skill standards will include learning outcomes, and qualifications will continue to include graduate profile outcomes. Skill standards may include criteria for grades (achieved, merit and excellence).
	How will the design of skill standards balance the needs of industry with the needs of providers to contextualise delivery and assessment?	A high-level design approach will be taken to ensure that key industry competencies are outlined, with sufficient flexibility to enable regional and contextual customisation. A plain language approach to writing the standard, as if the learner is the main audience, will also help create a platform for providers to structure the learning journey.
	How will skill standards ensure that the learner journey is given more emphasis?	NZQA and WDCs are recommending a learner-centric approach to the design of skill standards. This means giving priority to the intended learning outcomes and describing the indicative content a learner will cover in each skill standard. The standards will also include and encourage the development of the relevant transferable skills.
	What is the delivery guidance for skill standards?	Skill standards provide guidance for delivery methods and sequencing. They may specify where and how learning could take place for the skills within the standard. Skill standards may also identify how delivery of that standard could be integrated with other skill standards.
	What guidance and tools will WDCs (and other SSBs) need to guide the development of skill standards?	The sector working group has proposed design principles for skill standards. For more information refer to the <i>Ngā kaupapa as expressed in the development of skill standards</i> document.
	How can we ensure there is a consistent approach?	In addition, WDCs and NZQA will develop guidelines for the development and approval of skill standards, including a consistent approach to writing learning outcomes.
	What are the implications for learners, assessors, and end users (employers/industry) of graded standards?	There are some instances where graded standards will be desirable, and others where they may not be. For example, NZQA and Waihangā Ara Rau have been exploring the use of grades in a Building, Construction, and Allied Trades (BCATS) standard used in schools. WDCs will consider the option to include grades when establishing the sector skills landscape for a particular industry.
	How might we weigh these considerations against broader system implications, such as	

Skill standards – Frequently Asked Questions – October 2022

Topic	Question	Answer
	the desire for a simplified qualification landscape?	
	What is the quality management system for skill standards?	Skill standards are developed by standard setting bodies and listed on the Directory of Assessment Standards (to be renamed the Directory of Assessment and Skill Standards) according to NZQA Rules and guidelines. To use skill standards, providers must meet criteria set out the Consent and Moderation Requirements for that standard.
Development	Who, besides WDCs, can develop skill standards?	The Education and Training Act 2020 specifies who may develop skill standards. Those functions are limited to WDCs, NZQA and the Ministry of Education.
	Who is the standard setting body for skill standards?	<p>The standard setting body for skill standards will be either a WDC or NZQA or, in some instances, the Ministry of Education. WDCs will develop skill standards for the specified industries set of in Schedule 2 of the Order in Council for each WDC. NZQA will develop skill standards for standards classified as in Field Core Generic and Field Māori.</p> <p>For more information about the WDC specified industry coverage please visit the links to the Orders in Council listed below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hanga-Aro-Rau • Muka Tangata • Ringa Hora • Toi Mai • Toitū te Wairoa • Waihanga Ara Rau <p>The Ministry of Education is currently the standard-setting body for the Literacy and Numeracy and Te Reo Matatini me te Pāngarau standards that will become mandatory corequisites to NCEA in 2024. It is still to be explored whether or not these would become skill standards or remain as unit standards.</p>
	Who needs to be involved in the development of skill standards?	<p>Standard setting bodies (WDCs and NZQA) will be responsible for ensuring that skill standards are collaboratively developed and meet the needs of a range of stakeholders including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Industry - Learners - Iwi, hapū, whānau - Te Pūkenga - Wānanga - Private Training Establishments and Government Training Establishments

Skill standards – Frequently Asked Questions – October 2022

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Schools - NZQA - Universities
	Does NZQA intend to develop skill standards in Field Māori?	Yes - NZQA intends to develop skill standards in Field Māori .
	Will skill standard include grades?	Skill standards may include grades. Standard setting bodies will discuss this with industry and providers, including schools, when developing the qualifications and credentials for a particular sector.
	Will the WDCs develop and write assessments as well as training?	Providers are responsible for developing and maintaining assessments for skill standards. WDCs will pre- and post-assessment moderate provider assessments. However, WDCs may set capstone assessments if there is an industry need for this.
	Who is responsible for developing the teaching and learning resources for skill standards?	Providers will be responsible for producing the teaching, learning and assessment resources that align with a qualification, programme, or skill standard. Centres of Vocational Excellence also have a role in supporting the development and sharing of high-quality curriculum and programme design.
Schools	How will skill standards link with NCEA?	Skill standards will replace unit standards over time. Credits from skill standards will continue to contribute towards NCEA in the same way that unit standards currently contribute to NCEA.
	What, if any, school-specific standards will there be? How will schools access and use skill standards?	Currently there are some NZQA unit standards for whom schools are the primary audience. For example, music technology and legal studies. One option would be to replace these over time with skill standards. All standards can be accessed via the Directory of Assessment Standards (to be renamed the Directory of Assessment and Skill Standards) .
	How will standard setting bodies balance school vs industry needs? What does school-based credentialling look like? How does it connect with/differ from workplace-based learning and credentialling?	The design of skill standards will be consistent across education provider types. This supports the objectives of RoVE, to ensure the portability of students' learning and employer confidence in the consistency in graduate outcomes. It also ensures that similar learning achieved in different contexts (e.g., on-job or off job) would not need to be repeated. WDCs will collaborate with providers when developing qualifications and their component standards to try to balance all user needs.
	Why are skill standards important for school-based learners?	One of the aims of RoVE is to make it easier for learners to move between education settings and reduce the need to repeat learning. Skill standards provide a 'common currency' or 'building block' which will make this easier.

Skill standards – Frequently Asked Questions – October 2022

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University	How will skill standards affect university qualifications? Will skill standards be recognised?	<p>Skill standards will be the building blocks of qualifications, designed around learning outcomes that align with the overarching qualification or credential. The inclusion of learning outcomes will help identify any crossovers with higher learning pathways - for example degrees offered by universities and other providers.</p> <p>As a nationally agreed education product, skill standards will be listed on a learner's New Zealand Record of Achievement. Therefore, they will have the same status as unit and achievement standards in terms of being recognised by universities and other providers.</p> <p>Universities New Zealand and WDCs will continue to work together on sub-degree university developed qualifications (certificates and diplomas) and the place of skill standards within them. Like unit standards are currently, skill standards will be aligned to levels on the New Zealand Qualifications and Credentials Framework so that levels of performance can be compared.</p>
Usage	Will vocational qualifications, programmes, and 'national curriculum', be based on skill standards?	Vocational education qualifications developed by WDCs will include skill standards where they exist, unless otherwise specified by a WDC. Outcomes-based (non-standards based) programmes will be phased out over time, as qualifications are reviewed, and skill standards become available.
	Will there be programmes made up of skill standards and unit standards during the transition? How will that work?	There will be a transition period where programmes could be completely non-unit standards based, partially or completely unit standards based, or completely skill standards based. NZQA will provide guidance to providers on transition, while working to ensure that learners are not disadvantaged by qualification or programme version changes.
	Will skill standards be internally assessed (i.e. not externally assessed like some achievement standards)?	Yes, providers will assess skill standards. WDCs are responsible for national external moderation systems for the standards they develop. WDCs may also set capstone assessments if a particular industry requires one.
	Will skill standards be bigger than unit standards, i.e., will several unit standards be turned into one skill standards?	There is a lot of variation in the credit value of unit standards (from 1 to 120 credits). We expect skill standards will be larger than unit standards where this appropriate for the context. The inclusion of transferable competencies, and a broader focus than specific or atomised tasks will likely to lead to higher credit values than many unit standards.
	What happens when the skills need to be updated? How can we minimise the re-work involved for providers?	<p>Standard setting bodies are required to keep their standards up-to-date, to ensure that standards are delivering the learning and assessment outcomes as intended.</p> <p>The new simplified approach to skill standard design, which includes learning outcomes and removes detailed ranges will in the longer-term minimise the re-versioning and rework.</p>

Skill standards – Frequently Asked Questions – October 2022

Topic	Question	Answer
		The standard setting body may also choose to publish current guidance information on resources, references and definitions on its website to reduce the need to make changes to the standard itself.
	How will skill standards link with the Unified Funding System?	The Unified Funding System (UFS) delivery component funds programmes and courses leading to approved vocational qualifications. Funding is based on the credits of training delivered or achieved. The development of skill standards will align with this funding approach. The UFS performance development and maintenance element of the strategic component could support the adoption of skill standards within programmes in areas of strategic priority. More information about the UFS can be found at https://www.tec.govt.nz/rove/a-unified-funding-system-2/ .
'National Curriculum'	What is a 'national curriculum'?	<p>A 'national curriculum' provides a pathway to achieving a New Zealand qualification. In effect it is a nationally agreed programme, supported by a dynamic, ongoing community of practice that promotes collaboration and excellent graduate outcomes.</p> <p>Standard setting bodies (WDCs and NZQA) may develop and maintain a national curriculum for a qualification for which they are responsible, but it is not mandatory for them to do so.</p> <p>Feedback to date is that 'national curriculum' is a confusing name. In the school context, the National Curriculum is composed of The New Zealand Curriculum and Te Marautanga o Aotearoa, which set the direction for student learning and provide guidance for schools. This is different to the intended use of the name in the context of vocational qualifications.</p> <p>It is also confusing for the 'national curriculum' to replace the need for a programme leading to a New Zealand qualification, without it being referred to as a programme itself.</p> <p>We propose to rename the 'national curriculum' to reflect its core function in the vocational education landscape.</p>
	How do skill standards fit with a 'national curriculum'?	Skill standards would provide the core content, with the 'national curriculum' building on this, adding information such as guidance to inform delivery, sequencing, assessment and other information intended to support the provider to deliver the 'national curriculum'.
Standard Setting Bodies	What are standard setting bodies?	Standard-setting bodies are responsible for the quality of standards submitted to NZQA for listing on the Directory of Assessment Standards (DAS). They work with industry partners, professional groups and others to develop useful and relevant standards that are nationally

Skill standards – Frequently Asked Questions – October 2022

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		<p>recognised. There are currently three types of standard-setting body: WDCs (for specific industries and professions), the Ministry of Education (for NCEA achievement standards and the Literacy and Numeracy Te Reo Matatini me te Pāngarau standards) and NZQA (for all other standards).</p>
RoVE	<p>How do skill standards and ‘national curriculum’ deliver on the aims of RoVE?</p>	<p>One of the aims of RoVE is to make it easier for learners to move between education settings and reduce the need to repeat learning.</p> <p>Skill standards provide a ‘common currency’ or ‘building block’ which make this easier.</p> <p>Currently some programmes are standards based and others are module or course based. In future, the intent is that skill standards will be mandatory in vocational qualifications at levels 1-7 (sub-degree) unless specified otherwise by the standard setting body.</p> <p>In this situation a secondary student enrolled in a secondary tertiary programme needs to engage in a standards-based programme so that these standards can be counted towards their NCEA.</p> <p>However, if they wish to continue their vocational education after finishing schooling, the learning they have already done does not always clearly articulate into the next level, which may be a course-based programme.</p>
CoVEs	<p>What is the role of CoVEs in the development of qualifications and skills?</p>	<p>CoVEs are hosted by either Te Pūkenga, or wānanga, and involve industry, providers and other relevant groups working together to share best practice and knowledge. They will not develop qualifications and skills standards, WDCs do this.</p> <p>One function of CoVEs is to support quality teaching, learning, programme and curriculum design in vocational education. The scope of this role could vary depending on the industry area and what is required e.g., it could be part of qualification design, curriculum development, or preparation of training resources/materials.</p>
DASS	<p>Is the goal to rationalise the number of standards?</p>	<p>The primary goal is not to rationalise the number of standards. Rather, it is to have a coherent suite of standards within qualifications, national curriculum, and programmes.</p> <p>However, a significant proportion of all registered and expiring unit standards were not reported for credit in 2019 and 2020. NZQA and SSBs will be monitoring closely the usage of skill standards to ensure they are fit for purpose.</p>

Skill standards – Frequently Asked Questions – October 2022

Topic	Question	Answer
	What is the DASS?	The Directory of Assessment Standards lists all quality-assured unit and achievement standards, known collectively as 'assessment standards'. The Directory is being renamed as The Directory of Assessment and Skill Standards (DASS) so it can include skill standards as well as assessment standards.