

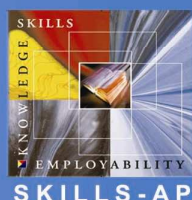
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MAKING FULL USE OF COMPETENCY STANDARDS

A handbook for governments, employers,
workers and training organizations



Regional Skills and Employability Programme in Asia and the Pacific (SKILLS-AP)

Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific

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ILO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific

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Foreword

Many countries in Asia and the Pacific are establishing modern and effective skills-development systems. Central to this process is the designing of competency standards to describe the work carried out in industry to then guide the development of training programmes that will match the needs of industry. These competency standards are used for consultation with industry and for the development of training courses. Most but not all countries use this tool. However, even where used, it appears that it is not applied to its full potential by the different groups that can immensely benefit.

This publication is designed to illustrate the various ways that competency standards can be applied as a tool for dialogue or communication by governments, employers, training organizations and workers to clearly describe the skills needed for training or employment. If better use can be made of competency standards, training will be more relevant to the needs of industry and to individuals.

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Introduction

This handbook illustrates the various ways that competency standards can be used in a range of situations by different groups:

Government agencies

- to assess the competencies of migrant workers leaving or arriving in a country;
- to benchmark competencies against other countries;
- to specify licensing and registration requirements (such as skill requirements for crane drivers, gas installers, food inspectors);
- to license or register training and assessment organizations in accordance with specified quality standards;
- to license and accredit courses and qualifications.

Industry employers

- to specify training requirements to training organizations;
- to specify skills requirements to agencies supplying labour from within the country or from another country (employment agencies and organizations supplying contract labour);
- for recruitment and internal promotion within an organization;
- to assist with decisions about remuneration;
- to identify the need for specialist staff.

Training organizations

- to provide the basis for curriculum development;
- to develop teaching, learning and assessment resources;
- to assist in the design of buildings and equipment;
- to identify plant, materials and equipment for effective training.

Workers' organizations

- to assist in negotiations with employers;
- to identify skills needed by their members;
- to organise training programs for their members.

Individuals

- as the basis for having their existing skills recognized.

Competency standards

Definition

“Competency standards”, “competencies”, “competency units”, “unit standards” or “units of competency” are terms that are used interchangeably to describe the knowledge, skills and attitudes that a person needs in order to carry out a particular job or activity and at the level of performance required. Competencies generally specify minimum standards and the conditions in which they should be applied.

Format

Sets of competency standards have been developed by many countries in the Asia–Pacific region. The format of each set varies in the amount of detail and information included and the way that the content is organized, grouped and subdivided. A variety of formats is used, and most include sub elements to describe different aspects of the competency.

Some include extra information such as:

- evidence requirements to guide those assessing the competency;
- critical aspects of the evidence;
- a “range statement”, which describes the equipment, tools or materials to be used;
- underpinning knowledge or skills required;
- suggested or required methods of assessment;
- resource requirements.

Reviews of many systems have often found that many competencies are so complex they can only be understood by a few technical specialists and that others emphasize such simplicity they can be more readily used with industry groups.

Key skills, workplace skills or generic skills

Generic competencies or key skills are handled in different ways in each country. Many countries have recognized that everyone in the workforce needs and uses a set of “common”, “core” or “key” skills that apply to any occupation. These are basic enabling competencies for work, education, training and life generally. They include workplace communication, problem solving, environmental awareness or project management. In some systems, these are seen as different to competencies that describe a technical aspect of the work. There are also some differences between the way that attitudes and values are incorporated into competency standards.

Grouping competencies

Some countries group competencies into occupations, others group them according to industry and still others use a combination of methods. Sometimes they are grouped into courses or qualifications.

Competency standards are not the same as the curriculum, although there are many similarities. A curriculum describes a formal training programme; while this may be based on competencies, it also describes the sequence for teaching the various competency elements and suggestions or prescriptions about how the training should be carried out. Competencies describe the work carried out and can be obtained through work experience, private study or formal training programmes.

Regional Model of Competency Standards

The Regional Model of Competency Standards (RMCS) was developed by the International Labour Organization's Regional Skills and Employability Programme for Asia and the Pacific (SKILLS-AP) to help countries develop their own standards. The RMCS is designed to be a tool for countries to discuss training needs with industry groups.

NOTE: The examples used in this document (in the boxes sprinkled throughout the handbook) relate to the RMCS. However, they equally apply to competency standards developed in any national system.

Government agencies



Migrant and guest workers

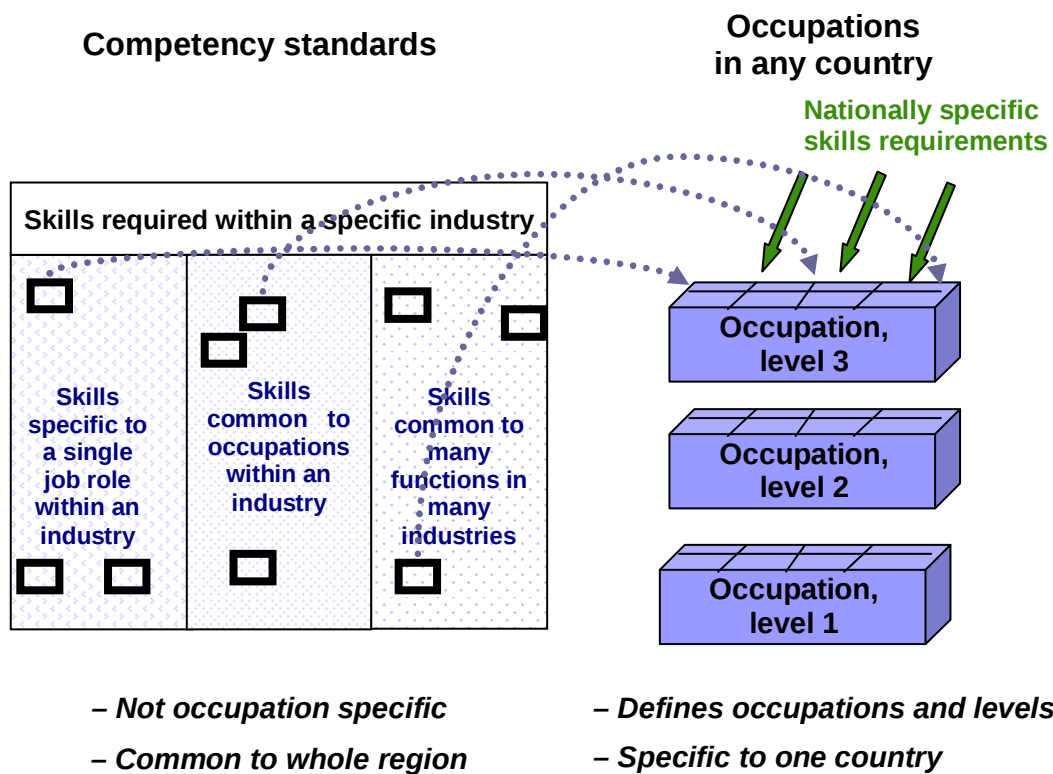
How can government agencies use competency standards to assess the skills of migrant and guest workers?

Competency (or skill) standards developed in different countries usually have levels or hierarchies used to group the skills defined. In the Asia-Pacific region, these are predominantly based upon occupational classification structures and the particular qualification framework for that country. However, these vary considerably across the region and worldwide in terms of the number of occupational definitions, levels of qualifications and terminology used. This can make straightforward technical skills recognition between countries difficult.

For example, there are common references to concepts such as “basic” or “advanced” used as occupation or qualification descriptors in a number of countries, but the definition of these terms is not consistent internationally. There are also grading systems and levels often using terms such as “technician” and “senior technician”. This terminology reflects an industrial manufacturing background that does not readily translate to the service sectors of an economy where engineering terminology is not commonly used.

The result of country-specific qualification frameworks that underpin technical skills recognition is that cross-border recognition for migrant and guest workers is difficult. If skills recognition is largely by issue of academic credentials (as is usually the case), then only a commonly used translation tool can equate the outcomes for the purposes of migrant worker evaluation. The ILO competency standards can assist in this regard.

The inherent flexibility of the competency standards structure is the key to using them as a translation tool. By defining units of competency in broad functional groups, the competency standards do not tie particular competencies to any specific occupation or job role. Thus, while welding competencies are within the manufacturing competency standards, they can be used to define training or recognize workers' skills in any industry as required, such as construction work.



Similarly, office and administration skills found in, say, the tourism competency standards can be used in any job role where they are required. This “mix-and-match” potential of the competency standards means many lower-level jobs typically required of migrant workers can be easily described as competency units even when neither the sending or receiving country has a relevant occupational definition or national qualification.

As shown in the above diagram, the same units can be sourced from any competency standards and grouped together to describe a job role or occupation in any country.

Benchmarking skills

How can government agencies use competency standards to benchmark skills against other countries?

Many countries have their own form of competency descriptions for vocational roles in their industries. These are often very detailed and designed for local use by training organizations and employers to define the skills they need. The competencies are often designed to suit a particular occupational definition used in the country and are thus grouped together under a single framework – usually leading to a specific qualification. This is very valuable for the type of highly skilled occupations that suit many industry purposes and for extensive training programmes to prepare trades people and semi-professionals.

However, when benchmarking vocational skills with other countries, very detailed standards in local languages are difficult to compare, and many job roles at lower levels are not covered by competency standards.

Competency standards in the RMCS are all in English and are not grouped into particular occupations or job roles; instead, they are aligned to broad types of similar work. Because of this flexible structure and straightforward unit titles, it is quite easy for different countries to use the competency standards to describe worker levels and benchmark these against another country for possible migrant worker assessment or other purposes, such as determining whether a country is competitive in skill terms.

Example 1: Using competency standards to benchmark skills against other countries

Country A has an economic imperative to increase its income from tourism. Many other countries in the region also are trying to attract tourists and foreign income, so a competitive situation exists. Country A thus wants to compare the skills used in its common tourism jobs with the more successful tourism of nearby Country B. If Country A can define the full range of tourism skills that its more successful competitor is using in its industry, then it can improve its training and thus try to attain the same worker standard. Competency standards can be a good guide for this purpose.

Specifically, Country A wants to set up a national tourism development agency to promote its attractions and build up the country as a tourist destination. Government officers looked at a similar agency in a neighbouring country that has done this successfully and saw the sort of skills applied to undertake relevant research, plan tourism promotion and gain sponsorship for major events.

Knowing this, they realized they needed to train their people against a high-level programme. They could use the following RMCS units of competency to define the programme content and outcomes:

- Unit B1 Create and implement strategic product development Initiatives
- Unit B2 Research tourism data
- Unit B3 Source and package tourism products and services
- Unit B7 Plan and develop culturally appropriate tourism operations
- Unit B8 Plan and develop meeting/event proposals and bids
- Unit B9 Develop conference programmes
- Unit B10 Develop and implement sponsorship plans
- Unit B13 Assess tourism opportunities for local community
- Unit B14 Develop and implement local/regional tourism plan

Licensing occupations

How can government agencies use competency standards to specify occupational licensing skill requirement?

Internationally, the licensing of certain occupations and types of work is increasing to protect workers and consumers. Government agencies responsible for providing a licensing regime need to specify the conditions under which licenses are issued. These usually include a measure of the competence of the individual seeking the license. Often, the only competency measure available is holding a particular qualification. This works if the license is purely for local use or the license coverage is a whole occupation; it is less useful when the license is for a set of tasks that do not make up a whole occupation.

Competency standards can assist here because one of several units of competency can be cited as the minimum competency requirement for that licensing category. Because competency units are quite specific about the performance criteria and assessment requirements, a regulatory authority knows exactly the fit between safe and effective work practice and any training or assessment a person has completed in achieving the unit outcomes.

Example 2: Using competency standards to specify licensing skill requirements

A regulator deals with the licensing of safe electrical work. Naturally, a licensed electrical worker requires a full qualification to be completed, and this will usually entail training through a local trade course. However, many other workers may undertake simple electrical work in the course of their job roles. Someone fitting air conditioning equipment or a pump for a swimming pool installation will at some point need to access and wire in the equipment to mains electricity. Calling in an electrician just for this is unnecessary if the regulatory authority can issue a minor license that just covers this sort of routine disconnection and re-connection.

The following extract from the Manufacturing RMCS shows how a regulator could call up this unit as the competency requirement for such a license:

Unit B19 Terminate and connect electrical wiring

Performance criteria:

Prepare for electrical wiring termination and connection

- All work is undertaken safely and to workplace procedures and local regulations and legislative requirements.
- Materials are checked for correct specifications.
- Preparation of work is undertaken or checked/inspected for correct location and specifications.

Connect electrical wiring

- Terminations/connections are made to specifications, manufacturers' requirements and to safety and local regulations and legislative requirements.
- All cables, wires, conductors and connections etc. are marked/tagged and labelled to specification.
- All completed wiring and connections are tested for compliance with specifications.
- All reports and documentation are completed correctly to required specifications.

Importantly, competency standards also provide detail of evidence, knowledge requirements and the scope of work, such as the following example from the Manufacturing RMCS Unit B19:

Critical skills and essential knowledge

Required skills

Look for evidence that confirms skills in:

- checking materials for conformance to specifications
- checking existing and new installation site for correct location and specification
- making terminations/connections to specification, manufacturer and regulatory requirements
- adjusting and fixing wiring supports
- marking, tagging and labelling cables, wires, conductors and connections to specification
- undertaking testing of wiring and connections for conformance to specification
- using language and literacy skills to complete short reports and required documentation
- reading and interpreting routine information on written job instructions, specifications and standard operating procedures. May include drawings
- using measurements for checking connections and components.

Required knowledge

Look for evidence that confirms knowledge of:

- safety hazards associated with the termination and connection of electrical wiring
- statutory and regulatory requirements associated with the termination and connection of electrical wiring
- wiring support and/or protection requirements and specifications
- relevant manufacturer requirements
- specifications and methods for terminating different materials
- wiring support techniques and alternatives
- marking, tagging and labelling requirements for cables, wires, conductors and connections
- tests for wiring and connections
- data to be recorded/reported and the frequency of
- recording/reporting
- requirements for approval to work
- use of personal protective equipment for terminating and connecting electrical wiring.

Range statement

- local regulations and legislative requirements – applicable acts, regulations, wiring codes and codes of practice (electrical), international standards
- correct location and specifications – cable trays, brackets, trenches
- electrical wiring – wiring associated with power, lighting, control wiring, machinery, switchboards and other electrical apparatus
- terminations/connections – utilization of a range of methods including clamping, crimping, pin connection, soldered joints, plugs, sockets etc., clamping of cables and wires, sealing entry points where required.

Licensing training and assessment organizations

How can government agencies use competency standards to measure trainers' skills when registering education and training organizations?

In most countries, teachers and vocational trainers need to complete a course of study in teaching and learning theories and practices in order to train and assess learners. They also require expertise in a particular industry discipline to train in their vocational field.

Full-time trainers will probably have a recognized educational qualification as evidence of their teaching ability. But more and more training organizations are using part-time trainers to deliver training to meet the ever-increasing demands. These part-time trainers will normally be working in an industry occupation that gives them excellent and up-to-date knowledge of their vocational field. But they may not have any qualifications in training and assessment practices and could be unwilling to undertake a lengthy educational programme to gain such certification for what is not their full-time job.

Some countries have recognized this and developed short and very specific programmes designed to give part-time trainers the necessary training and assessment skills to they need. The intention is to provide a set of “smart skills” for a training environment that can be built upon over time as the new trainer becomes more accustomed to the role, gains confidence and improves delivery techniques.

Example 3: Using competency standards to measure trainers’ skills

There are a number of units of competency in the Manufacturing RMCS that cover basic training delivery and assessment:

- Unit G3 Prepare for training
- Unit G4 Deliver training
- Unit G5 Conduct assessment
- Unit G6 Review and promote training

A government agency responsible for quality-assurance of training organizations can easily specify these minimum staff competency requirements when registering the organization.

The agency would undoubtedly want the training organization staff responsible for planning and managing the training programmes to have a full educational qualification covering curriculum design, assessment moderation and validation and other higher-level skills. But this would be a very high benchmark for all the part-time trainers that would be used. However, the agency could also call up the group of competency units above as the minimum requirements for all part-time trainers the organization employs. These units plus evidence of their vocational expertise would be a good start to ensuring that learners have suitably competent trainers.

This would be valuable where government also register enterprises that conduct their own in-house training as a quality measure of the training delivered. The manager of the enterprise training department would have supervisors conducting training in their own section, so there are even competency units for workplace mentoring:

- Unit G1 Coach others in job skills
- Unit G2 Train colleagues in the workplace

Accrediting courses and qualifications

How can government agencies use competency standards to accredit courses and qualifications?

Commonly, a training organization presenting a vocational course for accreditation by a government agency has developed its own resources. This can be an extensive and costly exercise, particularly where the agency accreditation guidelines are comprehensive and require

evidence of industry consultation and support for the delivery methodology and learning outcomes.

Where the course to be accredited is a major programme delivered to large numbers of new learners over a long period of time, the cost and expense is justified and the accrediting agency would naturally take considerable care in assessing the programme before giving it accredited status.

But as industry processes and skill demands change more quickly, it becomes difficult for a few “flagship” courses to meet all the demands for training a workforce. Enterprises often want short, focused programmes to deliver particular groups of skills to a small number of workers. Sometimes a whole industry sector may require a programme to train many in its workforce with a new work practice to meet emerging technology changes or for regulatory compliance.

This is where units of competency can be helpful. A training organization can determine in a short time whether a demand for a short course can be met by using groups of the existing units. As competency standards have already been validated by industry as defining the necessary skill and knowledge required for a large number of work functions, they are a perfect basis for course design. Apart from assisting the training organization to develop a short course quickly and reliably, the use of competency standards means the government accrediting agency can also be assured that the course has a firm foundation for its aims and learning outcomes.

Example 4: Using competency standards to accredit training courses and qualifications

A construction company has large contracts to build new roads for a government authority (this example is taken directly from an actual industry demand and a timely accreditation process). This requires a fast expansion of their workforce and focused training for new recruits, particularly in civil construction skills. After contracting a training organization to deliver the necessary training, the company and the training company agree that existing units of competency will meet their needs. The training organization then uses the units to develop a course and submits that proposal for government accreditation so the learners know they will have a quality outcome and the company can access government training subsidies.

The accrediting agency is already familiar with the competency standards and its validation processes. It has no problem supporting the following units as the aim and competency outcomes of the new programme:

- Unit F31 Conduct aggregate spreader box operations
- Unit F32 Roll aggregate in sprayed sealing operations
- Unit F33 Hand spread asphalt
- Unit F34 Compact asphalt with rollers

Industry employers



Specifying training needs

How can employers use competency standards for specifying their skill requirements for training?

This is one of the most useful purposes for competency standards. Every employer will need to determine the training required for new entrants or existing employees from time to time. It can also be used when new work processes, products or equipment are introduced into the workplace. Job roles and performance expectations in any industry change over time; existing workers need additional training to remain productive and efficient.

The benefit of competency standards is that they concisely describe the aspects of a job in a competency or outcome format. They can be compared with the current work performance of an employee to assess if the person needs training to strengthen his/her skill level. Additional competency standards may be required for workers to perform to the employer's expectations in the future. The "gap" between what competencies the employee displays now and what is required in future is a training need, and competency standards can describe it precisely.

Example 5: How do competency standards work with employers?

An employer wants to add a warehousing section to the business and requires employees with a range of common and specialist skills to ensure it works well. The employer may have a training department or engage an external training organization to undertake the training. In either case, the employer selects the workers who need the training and then uses selected competency standards to specify exactly what training is wanted.

The employer wants broad functional competencies: He/she wants all the workers in the new warehouse to communicate well with each other and the company customers; work safely when using the equipment and moving materials around; understand and apply quality principles and processes in their work so the materials coming in and the goods going out are always to specification. They should also be able to plan their work efficiently.

Four units of the manufacturing RMCS respond to the training required:

- Unit A1 Communicate effectively in the workplace
- Unit A2 Follow workplace health and safety requirements
- Unit A3 Apply quality procedures
- Unit A4 Plan for work tasks

The particular warehousing skills that will be needed involve receiving goods and dispatching the finished products after the production work. The manufacturing RMCS has relevant units for this:

- Unit B7 Undertake warehouse receiving process
- Unit B8 Undertake warehouse dispatch process

Finally, the employer needs all the warehouse personnel to be efficient in packaging products for shipping without damage. Again, the RMCS has appropriate training units:

- Unit B9 Perform production packaging
- Unit B10 Package materials

By using competency standards' detailed units describing all the necessary work requirements in outcome terms, the employer can easily specify exactly the targeted training the new warehousing employees should receive.

Specifying skilled labour requirements

How can employers use competency standards for specifying their skill requirements to labour-supply agencies or agencies dealing with overseas skilled labour?

Using competency standards to describe industry skills is an important means of comparing the skill requirements needed in one country with those available from prospective migrant workers in another. The greatest barrier to more transparent and effective cross-border skills recognition is the different means used by enterprises and government training and human resource planning agencies to describe occupational skill outcomes.

If the comparison is based on academic pathways, the description of skill tends to be inputs such as course learning requirements, subject content and assessment tools. These can often be very detailed and knowledge centric, whereas valuable "applied skill" is a combination of acquired knowledge and task performance meeting a clearly defined output. Educational programmes concentrate on the rigour and validity of learning inputs and assessment of these against what was taught.

Whereas in a true competency-based system, the inputs are not the prime focus because assessment measures what a person can actually do in a variety of normal workplace circumstances.

Many countries now have their own competency standards to define skills and knowledge required for highly skilled workers. While these can be very useful to define training for and assessment of the skills of local workers, they are often too complex and high level to use for migrant workers or to provide to labour-supply agencies that mainly deal with less skilled jobs.

It works best if all the users already understand and adopt a competency-based approach to describing workforce skills. But if they do not, a tool such as the RMCS could be the basis for developing their own, such as the following example illustrates.

Example 6: Flexibility in competency standards

Country A regularly recruits skilled migrant workers for temporary residency from up to four neighbouring countries. The sending countries are in various stages of implementing national qualification frameworks, although some have local competency standards for a number of trade occupations. Country A has well developed competency standards organized in occupational groupings for most trades and technicians – highly skilled workers.

However, a survey of Country A's employers seeking migrant workers indicates that it is not really trade-qualified people they require but production line workers for job roles that are routine and provide support to other local higher-skilled workers.

It is not a simple matter to disaggregate Country A's complex occupational competency standards to define the lower order work required of migrant workers. Nor is it easy to use the competency standards of the four sending countries, if they have them, to define the relevant skills they require.

The flexibility of the competency standards, though, allows that they be used in small combinations that can easily reflect the sort of job roles that Country A has available for migrants. Being in a common format, both sending and receiving countries can work with them.

Thus, a company making household white goods in Country A could, for example, use the manufacturing RMCS to define the following job role:

The role is basic fabrication of metal shells for the range of household whitewoods that the enterprise produces. It involves non-complex forming and shaping of steel with simple welding of a completed shell and then surface finishing ready for a later powder coating process. These skills are probably a small part of what a qualified tradesperson such as boilermaker and welder have but are a lot less than they would normally be expected to do in the workplace. The competency standards can however define just this sort of job role with sufficient detail for sending countries to assess prospective migrant workers.

Using the manufacturing RMCS again as an example, the relevant RMCS units would be:

- Unit E1 Perform manual production assembly
- Unit E2 Perform sheet and plate assembly
- Unit E12 Apply safe welding practices
- Unit E13 Perform manual production welding
- Unit E17 Apply fabrication, forming and shaping techniques
- Unit E18 Assemble fabricated components
- Unit E20 Manually finish/polish materials
- Unit E21 Prepare surfaces using solvents and/or mechanical means
- Unit E23 Pre-treat work for surface coating

Each of the units has performance requirements and defines the range of work that can be undertaken. Even if an assessment indicates a prospective migrant in a sending country has most but not all the required skills, the receiving country employer will know this and may still be prepared to employ and train the person in these areas. Competency standards is a straightforward and common language for skills required in many basic migrant worker roles.

Identifying the need for specialists

How can employers use competency standards to identify the need for specialist jobs?

From time to time, employers may need to define a new job role that requires particular skills not currently held by any existing employees. This may be solved by additional training for current workers or recruiting specialists who already have these skills.

Whether the specialist role is covered by someone new or by training an existing worker depends upon the match of the current work with the new role. If a current employee has a significant amount of the required skills already and just needs additional training and/or experience, it can be more cost-effective to provide the training and promote that person. This also has the benefit of sending a good message to other workers that the employer looks internally first and offers training and career progression opportunities.

Example 7: Using competency standards to identify special needs

A construction employer maintains a group of workers who do the concreting on buildings up to three storeys as the primary business. The workers require competencies (to communicate, work safely, use common measuring equipment and read plans) defined in the following competency units of the RMCS:

- Unit A1 Communicate effectively in the construction workplace
- Unit A2 Follow construction industry workplace safety requirements
- Unit A3 Work productively and sustainably in the construction industry
- Unit A4 Apply measurements and calculations to construction work
- Unit A5 Interpret common construction plans and specifications

Then there are concreting-specific units the workers in the group need:

- Unit D7 Erect and dismantle slip form formwork
- Unit D9 Place, finish and cure concrete
- Unit D11 Apply and finish sprayed concrete
- Unit D13 Use concrete boom delivery equipment
- Unit D18 Place and fix reinforcement material
- Unit D19 Cut and arc weld reinforcement steel

The employer has assessed against these units and found that each member of the workgroup has these essential competencies to carry out their regular work and regularly provides work experience and on-job mentoring to ensure they all operate effectively at this level.

However, the employer wins a contract to construct a high-rise building of ten storeys. This means there are now additional, higher-level skills required to those in the existing group to ensure that handling different materials and more specialist concreting practices for larger building projects can be managed. Using the competency standards units (in the RMCS in this example), the employer determines that there are additional specialist skills needed for the new high-rise project work:

- Unit D8 Slump test concrete
- Unit D12 Carry out high performance and off-form concreting
- Unit D21 Carry out monostrand, multistrand and stress bar-post tensioning
- Unit D20 Splice and anchor reinforcing

The employer can now make an informed decision that two members of the concreting group should have these additional skills for this project and so they can supervise the others as team leaders in the future. After deciding to train rather than recruit new specialists, the employer contacts a training provider who can undertake the training and ensure the chosen employees get the additional skills needed.

Another option could be to find a friendly business colleague who already has workers skilled in these areas and who could provide work experience to mentor the workers and help them gain the new competencies.

Recruitment and staff selection

How can employers use competency standards to determine requirements for recruiting or career progression of present employees?

Competency standards can be used to help draft specifications for the recruitment of new workers when advertising jobs and selecting applicants, as the following example illustrates.

Example 8: Using competency standards to recruit

An employer needs to recruit new workers to act as tour guides on a new nature park and resort. While prepared to train for specific skills on the job, the employer is keen to attract new staff who already possess a core of useful skills that fit the guide role.

Using the tourism RMCS as an example, the employer decides that the following units describe the full range of guiding skills required at the nature park:

- Unit E12 Offer arrival and departure assistance
- Unit E10 Provide on-site meeting/event management services
- Unit E1 Conduct pre-departure checks
- Unit E2 Drive vehicles
- Unit E11 Work as a guide
- Unit E14 Coordinate and operate a tour
- Unit E15 Lead tour groups
- Unit E16 Prepare and present tour commentaries

The employer decides that the first five units of competency (E12, E10, E1, E2, E11) required for the new jobs are skills that should already be available in the local region. But units E14, E15 and E16 are areas that should be specific to the new nature park environment and attractions; training will be provided on-the-job after recruitment. The employer is now clear about what the minimum recruitment needs are and places the following job listing in local newspapers and with several recruiting agencies:

Tour Guide Wanted

The exciting new ABC Nature Park has openings for 10 tour guides to escort visitors through the many park attractions.

This is a great opportunity for outgoing people seeking an interesting and challenging job with good future prospects of promotion to a supervisory role for the right people.

On job training will be provided in all aspects of the specific ABC Nature Park attractions, including how to lead groups of park visitors through the unique environment and providing informative commentary on the park attractions.

Suitable candidates will have evidence of experience in greeting and assisting visitors and/or providing tour guide services in a tourist environment. The capacity to assist in conducting meetings and servicing tourist events would be a distinct advantage. Applicants should hold a current driving license for passenger buses holding up to 14 passengers.

Apply in writing to

But what about using competency standards for planning career progression and promotions for presently employed workers? It is relatively easy to use various combinations of the competency standards to describe the job roles in an enterprise. Workers can then see the particular skills that they need to perform at different levels in the organization. They may decide to gain these skills by seeking further training or by taking advantage of opportunities to work with more experienced co-workers to build up their skill levels.

If both employer and employee are working from the same description of the skills required by using competency standards, there is no confusion about what is needed to progress to different and higher-paid work in an enterprise.

Example 9: Using competency standards to develop training plans and job descriptions

A small factory manufactures metal and plastic components for vehicles and is expanding its product range and introducing new equipment to speed up the production process. Most existing workers operate well on basic tasks such as machine cutting, metal and plastic fabrication, forming and shaping plus assembly.

The new equipment being installed will help perform many of these tasks quicker and with more precision thus requiring fewer lower skilled production workers. What the factory manager wants is to re-train and promote several good production workers to roles in the new machine set-up, monitoring and maintenance functions.

The manager finds the appropriate new skills wanted in the higher-level role described in the following manufacturing RMCS:

- Unit F2 Perform verification/certification or in-service inspection
- Unit F3 Maintain and overhaul mechanical equipment
- Unit F4 Perform equipment condition monitoring and recording
- Unit F5 Shut down and isolate machines/equipment
- Unit F6 Maintain tools and dies

By reading the details in these competency units, the existing workers can now see what is required for promotion and seek further training or experience to gain the new skills and apply for the maintenance jobs.

The manager can use the details to develop training plans and job descriptions.

Remuneration decisions

How can employers use competency standards to assist with remuneration decisions?

Often workers seek increased pay and working conditions because they believe that the work they do deserves more recognition or their productivity increases over time as they become more efficient. However, employers must make judgements about better remuneration based on objective evidence so that everyone in the workplace is treated fairly and all their workers are appropriately rewarded.

As noted in the previous section, competency standards can be used to define various jobs in an enterprise so that a standard benchmark of skills applies in each case. Employers can then negotiate with an individual worker or group of workers in similar job roles to determine fair pay and conditions. This will show how jobs that use different or higher-level skills may justify a higher pay rate.

Of course, just because someone applies more skills and knowledge to undertake a particular job does not mean it should attract higher remuneration than another person who may appear lesser skilled. Work has other attributes that should be considered, such as accountability and responsibility for others.

As an example, a person operating a tower crane on a high-rise building may, when observed, appear to use fewer and less complex competencies than say, a fully qualified carpenter. But the responsibility aspects of a crane operator moving many tonnes of materials around a crowded worksite is very high and deserves special recognition because it is a very stressful role. Work that is potentially dangerous, physically demanding and performed in dirty or very hot or cold environments can also be reasons to differentiate remuneration.

Where increasing skill or responsibility/accountability levels are more obvious through using competency standards to compare jobs, it is possible for employers to make sound decisions on appropriate pay scales. This approach is more transparent for employees to see and understand and can lead to fewer disputes about fair pay and conditions.

An important factor to remember is that competency standards should be used to measure the skills used in the actual jobs – which may not use all the skills an employee has. It is often the case that a worker will have many existing skills and experience that are not specifically required to perform the job currently held. Having an “extra” suite of skills is useful for a person to progress in their career later, but employers usually expect to pay for skills used – not those held by a worker. A person may hold an engineering qualification, but if the job is driving a forklift, then performing that role should be what defines their pay rate.

Example 10: Using competency standards to determination wage levels

A builder employs a number of workers to build small houses with timber or steel frames. Several workers approach the employer saying that they carry out a wider range of more complex work than others and should therefore be paid more. Checking with a supervisor on why the work varies between the workers, the employer is told some do not have the right skills to perform certain tasks to the required standards. The main areas of work that only a proportion of the workers regularly carry out is pitching roofs and building stairs.

This leads the employer to assess all the workers to determine what skills they have and can apply in his house-building projects and then decide if a differential in pay scales is justified. There is no readily available information to make an accurate decision in this regard except competency standards construction competencies. The employer uses these and finds that 40 per cent of the workers have all the following units of competency and use them in their work:

- Unit C1 Use setting out techniques
- Unit C2 Construct and install timber flooring
- Unit C3 Construct and erect timber or steel wall and ceiling frames
- Unit C4 Construct and erect timber or steel roof trusses
- Unit C5 Construct a timber pitched roof and eaves
- Unit C6 Install and replace windows and doors
- Unit C7 Frame and fit wet area fixtures
- Unit C8 Install lining, panelling and moulding
- Unit C9 Construct timber bulkheads
- Unit C10 Assemble timber or steel partitions
- Unit C11 Construct timber external stairs

This is the full suite of skills required in his projects. However, the other 60 per cent of workers have some but not all of the competencies and thus cannot undertake work in pitching roofs or constructing stairs because these are complex tasks requiring more knowledge of measuring and planning techniques. This confirms what other workers have said: that this work is not shared equally.

The employer therefore decides that workers who have and use all 11 of the competency units will be on a new top-pay scale while those not yet able to undertake the more complex work defined in competency units C5, C10 and C11 will be on a scale below this. This is effective because the employer is paying appropriate remuneration to the most skilled workers and the workers not yet able to do this work know exactly what they need to achieve if they aspire to being put on the higher rate and job tasks.

Training organizations



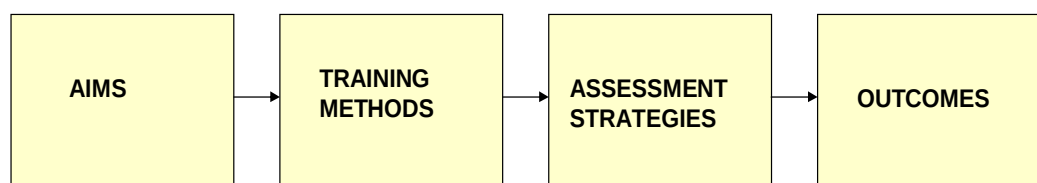
Curriculum development

How can education and training organizations use competency standards for curriculum development?

As every teacher and learning manager knows, developing curriculum is a complex and detailed task requiring considerable input from experts in the area of training to be delivered. The DACUM (Developing a Curriculum) occupational analysis method is often used to develop the curriculum scope and primary content, which is then analysed and whittled into distinct subjects and learning outcomes for a full programme.

Competency standards can assist curriculum development by shortening the initial scoping work that analyses vocational roles for the training. Competency standards development has already looked in detail at many industry tasks and whole occupational roles to determine the range of skills and knowledge needed in each case. This has been disaggregated for individual jobs into units of competency that can be combined in many different ways.

In considering a simple curriculum design flow, there are four main elements:



It is important to remember that competency standards are not descriptions of the learning process itself or of any particular method for training and assessment. That is rightly the preserve of education and training professionals when considering the needs of their learner groups. But the competency standards do provide a well-established and validated description of actual work outcomes in various industries, so a training programme can be designed for learners to achieve them.

Example 11: Designing a training programme

A training organization wants to design a training programme for office supervision and management to service a growing demand from businesses in a city location. Rather than interview many employers to determine the range of skills required and analyse this through a DACUM (Developing a Curriculum) or similar methodology, the organization can use competency units to scope the range of office management functions and knowledge requirements.

The units in the RMCS, for example, would provide these guidelines:

- Unit G12 Roster staff
- Unit G13 Monitor staff performance
- Unit G14 Recruit and select staff
- Unit G15 Lead and manage people
- Unit G17 Manage workplace relations
- Unit G18 Provide mentoring support to business colleagues
- Unit G19 Manage quality customer service
- Unit G21 Manage finances within a budget
- Unit G22 Prepare and monitor budgets
- Unit G23 Manage financial operations
- Unit G24 Manage physical assets
- Unit G27 Develop and implement a business plan

At this level, the curriculum development can take shape because the unit titles provide a systematic and logical format for the programme subjects.

At the discretion of the curriculum developer, some of the competency units could be combined into a single subject; for example, units G21 and G22 (above) could be delivered as a single course subject entitled “Prepare and manage business finances through a budget” or something similar. There does not have to be a one-to-one relationship between the units of competency and course subjects.

An important benefit is that the detail in each competency standards unit is a ready-made source of useful information for the curriculum developer. For example, unit number G27 (above) has the following details on what a course subject should cover:

- a. preparing a business plan that meets management requirements, uses all relevant sources of information and promotes and enhances the opportunities of the organization to meet and extend its operational objectives;
- b. implementing the business plan across the whole organization in a coherent and effective manner;

- c. monitoring the business plan for effectiveness, and enhancing and amending as required to maintain maximum operational outcomes.

It also includes the critical skills and essential knowledge learners will demonstrate, such as:

- in-depth knowledge of business planning techniques
- broad legal and business liability issues as appropriate to the industry context
- economic issues which impact business performance
- business knowledge, including current trends, structures and government policies
- internal and external business environments as appropriate to the industry context
- communication and leadership skills
- research skills
- ability to develop and implement a business plan within a specific workplace; an integrated approach is required
- knowledge of all the items covered in the “evidence and the ability to apply that knowledge to a specific industry” context.

Once establishing the formative aspects of the curriculum, the developer can use his/her educational expertise to plan the appropriate training and assessment approaches for the content. For example, the first aspect of preparing a business plan may lend itself to a simulation exercise in which the learners are given a description of a company mission statement, structure, workforce breakdown, production targets and financial balance sheet in order to draft a viable plan for business improvement. Of course, if the learners are already employed in a relevant business and can access similar workplace documentation, the learning would be far more meaningful. Assessment of the developed business plan would be the same in either case.

Other strategies could be used for introducing the learners to the essential skills and knowledge, such as broad economic issues impacting on businesses and legal and government requirements a business plan must cover. These change over time and sometimes quite rapidly, so competency standards are deliberately not too specific. Curriculum should also not include too many specific references to legal acts or business compliance requirements in case they go out of date too quickly. It is not detailed knowledge of specific legal documentation that the learner requires to develop a business plan but the competency to understand *how* business is impacted on by certain legal issues and *what* sort of information should be accessed when planning to deal with this.

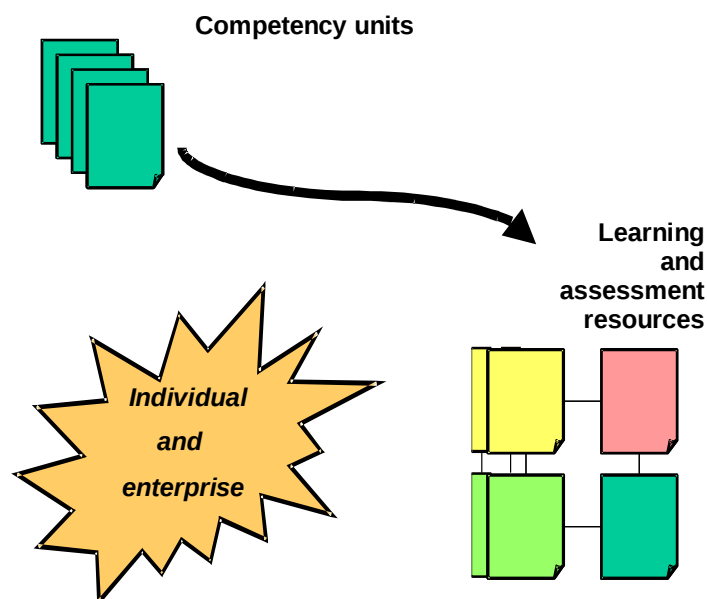
Training and assessment resources

How can education and training originations use competency standards to develop training and assessment resources?

Designing training and assessment resources is one of the most difficult and time-consuming aspects of training. Even with good curriculum documentation, the trainer still has to determine how best to expose the learners to the various knowledge and skill components of a vocational programme and ensure they can reliably achieve the competency outcomes.

The units of competency state the performance required in logical sequence and indicate the critical aspects of performance and the required knowledge that underpins this. It is therefore a detailed and structured framework for learning outcomes and can be used directly to design effective training resource materials.

It is necessary to remember that each unit of competency is not a subject in a course. The units set out how work is organized and the sequence of task performance – but this may not always be how the training should be conducted.



For example, the knowledge required to work efficiently may overlap several units of competency. Thus, it can make sense to recognize this and not repeat the same knowledge exposition over and over again.

Real work does not usually fall into categories that reflect individual units or elements of competency. A real-work activity draws on a range of competencies at once. Good training and assessment resources will recognize synergies and bring together relevant topics to make the learning meaningful and practical.

Therefore, a good training and assessment approach will involve clustering a number of competencies to reflect a real-work task or particular job role. The degree to which someone could (or may need to) cluster a number of units together to reflect a real-work activity will vary between training courses. Courses can contain sets of skills identified by groups or clusters of units of competency that meet specific work roles or regulated/licensed activities, which may be treated together for good practice assessment.

For training resource purposes, clustering units is a defining of the relevant groups that fulfil a particular function and include a brief explanation.

Example 12: Using competency standards to develop training and assessment resources

The following group of units from the RMCS meet common storekeeping functions in enterprises that warehouse materials and products. Training against these competencies could be integrated using practice methodologies that show how the tasks overlap and that the job role requires coordinated performance:

- Unit D4 Communicate on the telephone
- Unit D5 Perform clerical procedures
- Unit D9 Receive and store stock
- Unit D10 Control and order stock

An assessor may use an assessment activity, involving observation and questioning, to gather evidence for these units of competency.

Clustering should take account of the work activity, the assessment context, the training and assessment arrangements for the course plus time, resource, facility and personnel considerations. Appropriate clustering is a key way to ensure that training and assessment are holistic. Clustering, where it is appropriate, may also result in reducing the time and cost of training.

When designing training and assessment resources, competency units can be a source of useful information on the types of evidence of skills and knowledge required to ensure the learner is competent.

The following is a simple evidence resource with example entries for assessing a competency standard dealing with sustainable environmental practices in a manufacturing context.

Required evidence	Resource A Written questions	Resource B Project	Resource C Simulation activity
▪ Evidence that a full analysis of all the materials and resources used in the relevant manufacturing process was conducted as the initial stage of the activity.	<i>Question 3</i> What could be common causes of low efficiency of materials used in a manufacturing	Study a complex manufacturing process in your industry and develop a plan for more effective and sustainable resource	A detailed four-week production schedule for an automotive component manufacturing process is provided. Analyse the resources

Required evidence	Resource A Written questions	Resource B Project	Resource C Simulation activity
- Proposed improvements made to maximise sustainability in the process must show how alternatives were considered and the best option chosen. - Implementation of sustainable environmental practices must be through liaison with relevant personnel and monitored for effectiveness over a suitable time period.	process? <i>Question 6</i> How would you rank proposals for more effective use of limited resources in a manufacturing process based on benefit to cost?	use. Identify production waste due to: - excess/early production schedules - delays - movement and transport of materials - inventory control - inefficient processes - defective items.	used, the production process and equipment, projected component output and necessary waste estimates to develop: - a more sustainable resource use - a strategy for the process with accost/benefit analysis and - an implementation plan.

Specifying equipment and building requirements

How can education and training organizations use competency standards to assist in designing training facilities and identifying needed equipment?

In the absence of sufficiently detailed course documentation or where a training facility must serve multiple purposes, competency standards can be a good guide to the sort of infrastructure and equipment needed to train and assess well.

Relevant competency units can be interpreted to decide the type of experiences a learner will need to achieve the competency outcomes. This may mean not just having a teacher demonstrate a particular competency but the capacity for the learner to practise new skills and apply required knowledge. Where this is the case, simply providing the equipment or a demonstration space will be insufficient.

Example 13: Using competency standards to develop training facilities

A training organization wants to provide a course on metal fabrication and welding. Certainly an experienced professional teacher will need to show how welding techniques are applied and explain in great detail the safety, quality and other requirements that have to be used to become competent. But the only way a learner will gain the necessary welding competencies is to select and use the right tools and equipment and practically apply relevant theoretical knowledge to achieve the desired work result.

Using relevant units from competency standards can illustrate the necessary facilities and equipment needed to provide that training forum. The following competency standards manufacturing units have sufficient detail to indicate what facilities and equipment are needed for a training programme:

- Unit D7 Perform tool and cutter grinding operations
- Unit D6 Perform grinding operations
- Unit D8 Perform machining operations using horizontal and/or vertical boring machines

The training facility thus needs to provide sufficient space for the intended number of learners (12–16), including a workbench for each learner with accessories to measure and secure metal parts up to 60 cm. Each sector of the facility should have access to a pressurized water supply for coolant purposes and overhead electrical connections for tools at each bench. All areas should have dust extraction provision.

Learners should have access to:

- Personal protective equipment (12–16 sets)
- Drawings setting out parallel line and taper boring, facing, turning, drilling and reaming specifications.
- Measuring equipment such as callipers, rules, electronic precision measuring equipment
- Surface, cylindrical and centreless machines (1 per 4 learners)
- Grinding tools and accessories including wheels for shape, grit/bond composition
- Vices, clamps, magnetic chucks, face plates, collets, 3/4 jaw chuck
- Sharpening/shaping tools and cutters sufficient for 4 machines
- Horizontal boring machines – table type or floor type (1 per 4 learners)
- Vertical boring machines – double column (2) and single column (2) ...

Workers' organizations and individuals



Workers' organizations

Many unions or workers' organizations are heavily involved in helping their members identify skills to help in collective bargaining and various negotiations with employers. They can be specified in agreements to ensure that their members gain additional skills in the workplace and can also be used by workers' organizations to arrange training programmes for their members.

Union-learn is one example of the ways that unions can use competency standards; the British Trades Union Congress (the main national body of trade unions) set up Unionlearn in 2006 with government funding to help unions become "learning organizations" and help them to broker learning opportunities for their members. The website includes sections on negotiating learning agreements and strategies for supporting learners. (Refer to the Unionlearn website for more details: <http://www.unionlearn.org.uk>)

Individuals

Assessing current competencies

How can individuals use competency standards to assess their own skills?

People often want to know exactly what vocational skills they possess in order to apply for a new job or to justify asking for a promotion in their existing employment. Being clear on exactly what skills someone possesses is not as easy as compiling formal qualifications or collecting past job descriptions. This is because what was learned in a training course some years ago may no longer be relevant in the current employment or want to do in the future; and everyone gains additional skills and knowledge through life and work experience over time.

A person working successfully but assuming that his/her skills are defined adequately by the subject titles on a qualification gained ten years previously is likely to be selling themselves seriously short in the job market. More importantly, experience in one or more jobs builds up a person's capacity to understand and adapt to new environments. This means that someone who has worked successfully in, say a travel agency, has a range of skills that would be valuable in many other service sector employment roles, such as customer service, communication skills and the ability to undertake a range of administrative and management tasks. These are described as "transferable skills".

While it may be obvious that a person will gain more and more valuable workplace skills over time and with various experiences, there is no simple way to find out what these are or to provide evidence of having them to a prospective employer. Competency standards can help, as the following example illustrates.

Example 14: Using competency standards to assess individual skill level

A woman working in travel agencies would like to expand her career to a supervisory role in a city hotel. She needs to first find what are the necessary skills required for the intended role and then assess from some detailed information what skills she has already gained formally and informally so she can apply for her next job.

Talking to some hotel managers, looking at hotel job descriptions and recruitment advertisements, the woman gets a picture of which competencies hotels look for in a reception supervisor. She can then turn to competency standards, such as the following units from the RMCS, to see more specifically what is required:

- Unit C1 Receive and process reservations
- Unit C2 Operate a computerised reservations system
- Unit C3 Provide accommodation reception services
- Unit C4 Conduct night audit
- Unit G7 Monitor work operations
- Unit G8 Implement workplace health, safety and security procedures
- Unit G12 Roster staff
- Unit G13 Monitor staff performance
- Unit G15 Lead and manage people
- Unit G19 Manage quality customer service
- Unit G20 Develop and manage marketing strategies
- Unit G21 Manage finances within a budget

The experienced travel agency worker can then easily see that some of the competencies required – units C1 to C4 – have specialist content that would need to be gained through further training or a new employer prepared to train on the job. But more importantly, it is clear that a number of the skills

now used in a travel agency role with transfer relatively easily into a career move. These would be the supervisory/management functions:

- Unit G7 Monitor work operations
- Unit G8 Implement workplace health, safety and security procedures
- Unit G12 Roster staff
- Unit G13 Monitor staff performance
- Unit G15 Lead and manage people
- Unit G19 Manage quality customer service
- Unit G20 Develop and manage marketing strategies
- Unit G21 Manage finances within a budget

The above example demonstrates that someone not sure what skills she possesses or how her current skills might assist in a new job role or promotion opportunity can use the detail and clarity of units of competency to assess her skills and compare them to what is required in roles she aspires to.

Formal skills recognition

How can workers' organizations or individuals use competency standards to assist in having existing skills recognized formally?

As described in the previous section, most people gain additional skills as they progress through life and various job roles. Not everything that a person learns is through a formal training programme that leads to a qualification or some other form of credential. But they still have the skills and naturally want to have these recognized to enhance future job options and remuneration.

In countries where recognition is tied to particular courses, it can be difficult for an individual to find out what benchmark competencies are required for employment so that he/she can self-assess and, where appropriate, seek formal recognition through a training organization able to do this.

Competency standards can be a good starting point for many recognition processes because they are not tied to a particular course or learning approach. They simply describe what someone is able to do and the knowledge they apply when performing to a required industry standard. Accessing relevant competency units can thus help a person make judgements about what skills he/she actually has before undertaking the next step in seeking formal assessment.

Example 15: Using competency standards to acquire formal recognition of existing skills

A worker in a landscaping enterprise has a range of skills in laying complex paving and hard landscaping but has not completed a training programme. Competency standards can be used to check if all required skills for a qualification have been obtained. The following is an extract of a real self assessment guide prepared by a paving company using competency standards so existing workers and prospective recruits can assess themselves:

SELF-ASSESSMENT GUIDE	
Competency standard: Prepare subgrade, base and bedding course for paving	
Can I?	Evidence
Prepare subgrade for laying segmental pavers	▪ Excavate subgrade to meet site conditions ▪ Accurately identify soil types ▪ Identify and take measurements to accommodate services and other subterranean features
Prepare base course	▪ Select and appropriate base course ▪ Install and compact the selected base course
Level bedding course	▪ Select correct bedding material for job ▪ Correctly compact bedding using a hand compactor ▪ Screed off a bedding course for water runoff

The previous example is a simple illustration of how well-designed units of competency, such as competency standards, can be easily used to develop self-assessment guides and allow people to make judgements about what skills they have and if they need more training and experience to reach the industry standard.

Where there are no existing self-assessment guides like the previous example, a workers' organization official or an individual can still look at units of competency and gain useful information on what the full extent of skills and knowledge is needed in many functions. They are described in non-academic terms and do not specify how the skills should be gained but simply what they are.

In this process, there are many competing priorities for funding, such as buildings, equipment, teacher education, systems development and course development.

Conclusion

As companies increase in size, they will have increasing organization and management demands regarding the employees. Training, recruitment and selection become more structured, and there is greater potential to incorporate competency standards into all aspects of a company human resource management system. Clearly, if the same set of competencies can be used in job descriptions, salary negotiations, discussions with partner training organizations and with licensing agencies, all parties will benefit considerably.

MAKING FULL USE OF COMPETENCY STANDARDS: A handbook for governments, employers, workers and training organizations

This publication illustrates the various ways that these competency standards can be used by governments, employers, workers and training organizations as a tool for dialogue or communication. It illustrates various ways that competency standards can be used in a wide range of different situations including curriculum development, assessing skills of migrant workers, licensing and accrediting qualifications and in the recruitment and internal promotion of staff.

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