



UK Business Support Framework

Professionalising the Business Support Sector

Introduction

This document has been prepared by the Small Firms Enterprise Development Initiative (SFEDI), the Sector Skills Body for Business Enterprise and Business Support. Since 1995 UK government has appointed sector (now SSCs) and cross or pan sector bodies (including SFEDI) to research, develop and describe the competences for specified occupational groups.

Each Sector Body or Cross Sector Body is responsible for ensuring that the employers in their sector or cross sector occupational group subscribe to the descriptions/statements of competence of what people need to do, know and understand in order to be competent in the occupation.

The occupational groups SFEDI is responsible for are people thinking of, preparing for, starting up and running their own enterprise and all those that support them (business support). This clarification paper is restricted to **business support occupations**.

The Business Support competences have been researched, reviewed and agreed with the small business and business support sector (including SFEDI Advisory Board members) and government four times since 1995. The latest review, funded by UKCES, took place in 2009/10.

This review of the current SFEDI Business Support National Occupational Standards (NOS), commissioned by UKCES, and the development of new NOS commissioned by the Learning and Skills Council and Business Link has provided a robust and simplified framework of competences that can be assessed against to ensure the quality of publicly funded business support in the UK. It also provides a framework for professionalising and simplifying the entire business support practitioner sector ensuring:

- Potential or existing business owners receive the very best business support available
- Funders of business support services appoint the very best business support practitioners to deliver their service
- Business support practitioners are given every opportunity to continually develop their skills, knowledge and experience and to achieve national recognition where appropriate (in line with other professional industries).

It is true to say that in England prior to 2006, there were different means of assessing and qualifying/accrediting publicly funded business support and practice. This is not the case today and this paper outlines the current quality assurance framework.

It is also important that all business support practitioners know what they have to do and the accreditation/qualification they need to achieve in order to be considered for providing government funded business support. This paper also provides this clarification.

UK Business Support Framework

In line with other sector and cross sector expert bodies containing all the major employers and trade associations in that sector the Small Firms Enterprise Development Initiative Limited (SFEDI - the independent, Standards Setting Body for Business Enterprise and Business Support) has developed a simplified framework for qualifications, based on the National Occupational Standards and derived QCF Units. The framework will offer:

- National Occupational Standards (NOS) and QCF Units for all Business Support roles, agreed by the Sector, and approved by the Regulator
- Defined progression route from Level 3 to Level 5
- Optional NOS and QCF units covering a range of specialisms
- Consistent assessment guidelines used by all Ofqual approved Awarding Organisations
- Example CPD model and accompanying guidance

The framework is intended for use by Awarding Organisations, Institutes, Funding Bodies and Employers engaging and engaged with Business Support Practitioners.

Starting Point – National Occupational Standards

Since 1996, SFEDI has been recognised by government as the Standards Setting Body for National Occupational Standards (NOS) in Enterprise and Business Support. The current suite of SFEDI NOS for Business Support includes:

- Generalist Business Support
- Business Information
- Advice and Brokerage
- Skills Advice
- Social Enterprise Support
- Resource Efficiency
- Enterprise Training
- Business Mentoring
- Business Link

- Business Support related standards to include standards for government officials and business service professionals

As the Sector Skills Body and Expert Body through research, SFEDI has taken responsibility for not only developing and maintaining the standards but for also promoting best practice amongst business owners, business support practitioners and government.

The recent review of existing standards and the development of additional standards, undertaken by SFEDI, has resulted in a comprehensive suite of NOS covering all aspects of business support activity including both business and skills development.

For details of all current Business Support NOS please visit our website www.sfedi.co.uk

Use of the standards

NOS describe best practice by bringing together skills, knowledge and behaviours presented as statements of competence. They are valuable tools to be used as benchmarks for qualifications as well as for defining roles in the workplace, staff recruitment, appraisal, training and development.

In the context of business support NOS are currently used:

- As a benchmark of best practice for employing organisations (e.g. Business Link), funders of business support services and professional membership organisations
- As a basis for a range of business support practitioner professional development programmes (both accredited and non accredited)
- As a basis for Business Information and Business Support qualifications

The UK now has a common set of business support standards for all small business support roles. Individuals achieving the competences described by the standards are able to gain nationally recognised qualifications and accreditation demonstrating to government that they are 'licensed to practice'.

Qualifications

With the introduction of the Qualification Credit Framework (QCF) and credit based provision, the business support profession can define the requirements of each business support role and match this to an appropriate qualification route within the UK Business Support Framework.

SFEDI has always promoted best practice in the professional development and accreditation of business support practitioners and this has manifested itself through the term SFEDI Accredited. This term has been used extensively but has not always reflected the true meaning of the term 'accreditation'. This QCF linked approach will ensure that all activity undertaken and referred to as an accreditation is as it is portrayed.

Within the framework, accreditation will only be recognised when achieved through a qualification validated by an Awarding Organisation using the common, shared QCF Units based on SFEDI standards. Because QCF units are presented in small bite size pieces, it provides a flexible way of acknowledging the competence of individuals and groups of a variety of business support professionals.

Assessment

All qualifications within the UK Business Support Framework involve a common method of assessment. SFEDI sets this and meets with all Awarding Organisations quarterly to ensure the assessment method is consistent throughout. Only qualified external verifiers, internal verifiers and assessors are able to implement this assessment strategy and only Ofqual recognised Awarding Organisations are able to issue certificates which show that the individual is competent against the SFEDI Business Support standards

The Future of Qualifications

SFEDI is approved by government to develop and submit QCF units for all areas of enterprise and business support. We currently have 26 QCF approved units in business support and skills advice and brokerage and 131 QCF approved units in enterprise related activities including pre start, start up and growth. All based on NOS, these QCF units are made freely available to all Awarding Organisations to be used in the development of nationally recognised qualifications. See Appendix 1

For details of all approved units please visit our website www.sfedi.co.uk

Continuing Professional Development

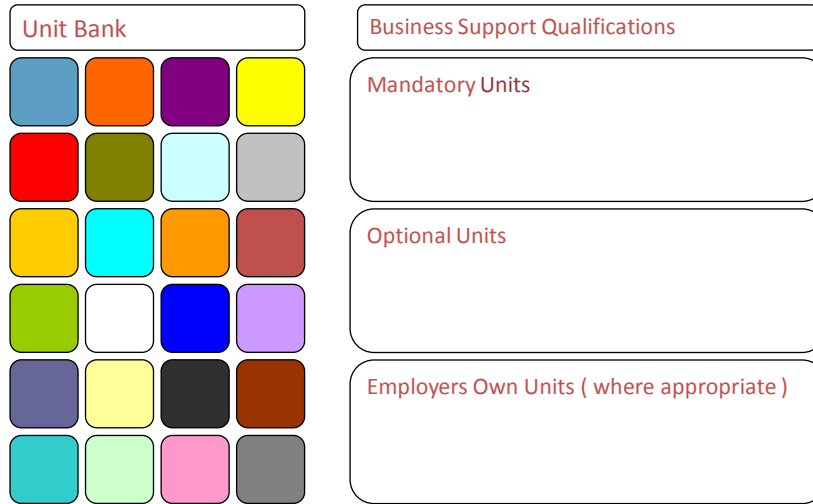
Business support is no different from accountancy, marketing or management where certain qualifications plus track record allow membership of a choice of professional institutes. To remain a full member of a professional body requires proof of CPD.

The UK Business Support Framework includes example CPD guidelines to ensure that Institutes, employers and/or Awarding Organisations can provide consistent opportunities for development. Proof of ongoing CPD will allow an individual to continue to practice in the business support profession and will replace re-accreditation.

For example CPD guidelines please refer to Appendix 2

Appendix 1:

Business Support Framework



The Business Support Framework unit bank will include all of the new QCF units forming a menu of options which have been/or are being developed to reflect every business support role.

SFEDI will work with Awarding Organisations and Employers to make sure that each qualification offer meets the needs of the business support profession in terms of relevancy, accessibility, transparency, consistency and progression .

Where there is a gap in provision, SFEDI will work with partners to develop new NOS and QCF units that fill the gap.

SFEDI, as the SSB for Enterprise and Business Support, will ensure that all NOS and QCF units based on NOS are made freely available to all interested parties.

The resulting suite of qualifications, all approved by SFEDI, should offer the platform and route to progression for all business support practitioners including generalist advisers, skills advisers, social enterprise advisers, mentors, coaches and enterprise trainers .

Appendix 2: CPD Guidelines as defined by SFEDI the Sector Skills Body for Enterprise and Business Support

CPD Process Overview

This process overview indicates activity, time line and example outputs of Business Support Professionals as they move from initial Accreditation and Approval to on-going CPD with a biennial Re-approval.

Activity	Time line	Example Outputs
Initial attainment of Award, Certificate or Diploma in Business Support to include, generalist adviser, specialist adviser(e.g. social enterprise, skills adviser, broker, mentor, coach and/or trainer)	0 Yr and 0 months	Certification Completed portfolio of evidence SFEDI Accredited Card (issued)
Various CPD activities	Continuous with a minimum of 30 hours/year	Learning resource materials Certification Personal Development Plan Organisation performance review Reflective statements Training log Relevant feedback Witness statements
Application for CPD review	Up to 2 years following initial achievement of qualification	CPD Review application/request CPD Overview CPD Evidence portfolio
Updating of Status	Individually prescribed by professional institute or employing organisation	Directory/database of current professionals entry SFEDI Accredited Card
Quality Assurance checks	Individually prescribed by professional institute or employing organisation	Institute Report

