FOOD & FIBRE CoVE
Learner-Focused, Industry-Led, Government-Enabled

Transferable Skills Forum

Project Summary Report

August 2025

With the participation of:

NZQA | Mana Tohu Mātauranga o Aotearoa New Zealand Qualifications Authority

OHU AHUMAHI Workforce Development Councils

Contents

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Background

The Transferable Skills Forum (TSF) project aims to promote collaboration among the six Workforce Development Councils (WDCs) and other standard-setting bodies (SSBs), including the NZQA National Qualification Services (NQS) and Māori Qualification Services (MQS). These groups are collectively called SSB in this document. The Forum's purpose is to advance the development, recognition, and portability of transferable skills within vocational education, aligning with workforce demands and ensuring equitable outcomes for learners. Forum and Steering Group members are listed in Appendix 1.

Forum objectives

The objectives are to:

- Develop a unified transferable skills framework.
- Standardise processes for integrating transferable skills into qualifications at Levels 2–5.
- Propose strategies to prevent duplication of skill standards across SSBs.
- Explore methods to future-proof the initiative, including determining timelines and processes for reviewing or introducing new skill standards as part of the project.

Outline

This document is a project summary of the purpose and work of the Transferable Skills Forum. As background, and for readers less familiar with the current Qualification Development situation within Aotearoa, the Situation Report[1] should be reviewed first. Appendix 2 is a summary of the key findings, however it would be useful to review the full report first for a more detailed understanding of some of the challenges and opportunities that exist.

This report is intended for multiple purposes and audiences and can be split into separate reports as required. As well as a project summary, there are recommendations and proposed next steps for the key stakeholders.

The primary audiences are:

- The TSF Forum members – for ongoing activities, as indicated in this report
- The TSF Steering Committee – for approval and decisions on presenting to WDC leadership. Recommendations have been written so that they can be presented to:
    - Current WDC, NZQS and MQS leadership teams (to be passed on to ISB Establishment Boards as appropriate).
    - NZQA qualification approval leadership
- The Food and Fibre CoVE leadership – for decision on publication or distribution through their networks.

[1] Situation Report: https://foodandfibrecove.nz/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/TSF-Situation-Report-May-2025.pdf

Executive Summary

The transfer of the current SSB functions from WDCs into eight Industry Skills Boards creates an opportunity to incorporate the recommendations from this paper in the establishment of the new entities. This report has been written so that it provides a picture of the current situation, and recommendations on next steps. It may provide decision-makers in this time of change, the ability to learn from the existing situation, and to build collaboration into the backbone of the future organisations.

There is also a valuable opportunity for vocational education policy makers to seek feedback about their experience of the introduction of skill standards, from qualification developers within the WDC network who may not move into the ISBs.

We have enough research and experience to understand that we need to create a workforce that can adapt to changing conditions. The path to achieve this, is to recognise skills that are required to build skills (core transferable skills) and enable an environment where skills learnt in one industry or sector are portable and recognised in another. There are existing tools available in our qualification development kete, what we need is a concerted effort to work together to build a cohesive set of skills standards and qualifications, which will support the creation of the skilled workforce that Aotearoa New Zealand requires now and in the future.

Key components of this effort are:

- Continue to develop the skills-first environment throughout our vocational education ecosystem, started in RoVE 2020, and just beginning to gain traction
- Establish the ISBs with collaborative core skill development as a priority
- Look into existing constraints and ask “what can we change”
- Use the same language and have the same focus across our ecosystem- more effective and portable core and general technical skill development for all learners – work-based, online, and on campus.

> *For society, taking a skills-first approach can create a far more inclusive and diverse workforce, because it means that people who missed out on traditional education pathways have more opportunities in the labour market. For the economy, fewer shortages of skills and labour will mean higher productivity, more innovation and higher GDP growth - plus a better sense of preparedness for the future.*
>
> *World Economic Forum*[2]

Recommendations

This is a summary of the recommendations found within this report. Further details to explain the rationale of the recommendations are in each section below, by using the reference number in brackets, which refers to the numbered recommendation in the following sections. The actions have

[2] https://www.weforum.org/stories/2023/05/adopting-a-skills-first-approach-help-people-better-jobs/

been assigned to three groups, although naturally they are interlinked. Some items have been repeated in more than one section, as the activities sit with multiple groups.

SSB Leadership Recommendations

SSB Leadership has been used as a generic term. These recommendations will initially need to be approved by the Qualification Development General Managers but may need further leadership approval in each organisation.

- The Vision Statement is approved and adopted by SSB leadership (1)
- The Skills Categories are approved and adopted by SSB leadership (2)
- The Core Skill Design Principles are approved and adopted by SSB leadership (4)
- The Core Skill Tools are approved and adopted by SSB leadership (6)
- The strategic planning function is extended to include Core Skills, with collaboration across all SSB (10)
- A mechanism to use and update the Skills Categories is built into SSB collaboration (3)
- A mechanism to update the Design Principles is built into the SSB collaboration (5)
- A mechanism to use and update the Tool Kete is built into the SSB collaboration (7).

SSB Transferable Skills Forum and Qualification Development Teams

Continue the collaborative Forum working group, integrating their efforts into the wider Qualification Development teams at all SSB.

- A mechanism to use and update the Skills Categories is built into the SSB collaboration (3)
- A mechanism to update the Design Principles is built into the SSB collaboration (5)
- A mechanism to use and update the Tool Kete is built into the SSB collaboration (7)
- A shared repository for core skills – existing and planned work is created and maintained across all SSB (9)
- Initiation Phase of Core Skill Development is built into new developments for all SSB (11)
- Pilot Core Skill Standard Development projects are established by Forum members to test thinking, process and create templates (12).

SSB Leadership in conjunction with other parts of the VET ecosystem

These actions require consultation and collaboration with other parties in the Vocation Education ecosystem. The term SSB Leadership has been used as a generic term, it could be assigned to a range of roles across the SSB.

- Any future development with the data engines of SSB or NZQA, should use tagging to identify core skills within standards and qualifications (8)
- Further discussions are held with NZQA to ensure that the Core Skill Development processes outlined meet their requirements (13)
- SSBs agree core skill building blocks which are included in qualifications, and contribute to discussion about recognition of core skills that remain outside the NZQA framework (14)
- Employer and Provider consultation guidelines are prepared collaboratively by SSB, NZQA, and TEC to promote the importance of skills-first and Core Skills (15).

Transferable Skills Guidelines

This section contains the underlying principles drafted by the Transferable Skills Forum working group. They should be further discussed, and iterated as needed, evolving as this paper is reviewed by wider stakeholder groups. The term Standard Setting Bodies (SSB) was used to encompass current and future iterations of these organisations.

Transferable Skill Development Vision

SSBs collaboratively develop learning frameworks which facilitate the recognition and portability of core skills

For clarity, there are two notes:

Core Skills – includes Core Transferable, Core and General Technical skills. These categories are defined below.

Learning Frameworks – includes skill standards, learning outcomes, general conditions and other mechanisms for providers to use in the development of programmes of delivery. These are outlined below.

This vision statement is the foundation of the Transferable Skills Forum. It is the guiding light in all discussions. It is critical to have a shared vision, to build a skills-first qualification development regime in New Zealand. The Reform of Vocational Education[3] began paving the way for skills-first qualification development, by creating Skills Standards and encouraging flexibility in design (see NZQA Design Principles below).

The Food and Fibre CoVE: *A New Approach to Learner Pathways: Skills Framework*[4] research paper outlines the benefits of the Skills-First approach in supporting future workforce development including unlocking hidden talent pools, increasing productivity, supporting talent mobility and redeployment, and promoting diversity, equity and inclusion.

This vision statement encourages all SSB to keep the focus on building learning frameworks for core skills that can be used as building blocks across multiple industries.

Recommendation 1: The Vision Statement is approved and adopted by SSB leadership

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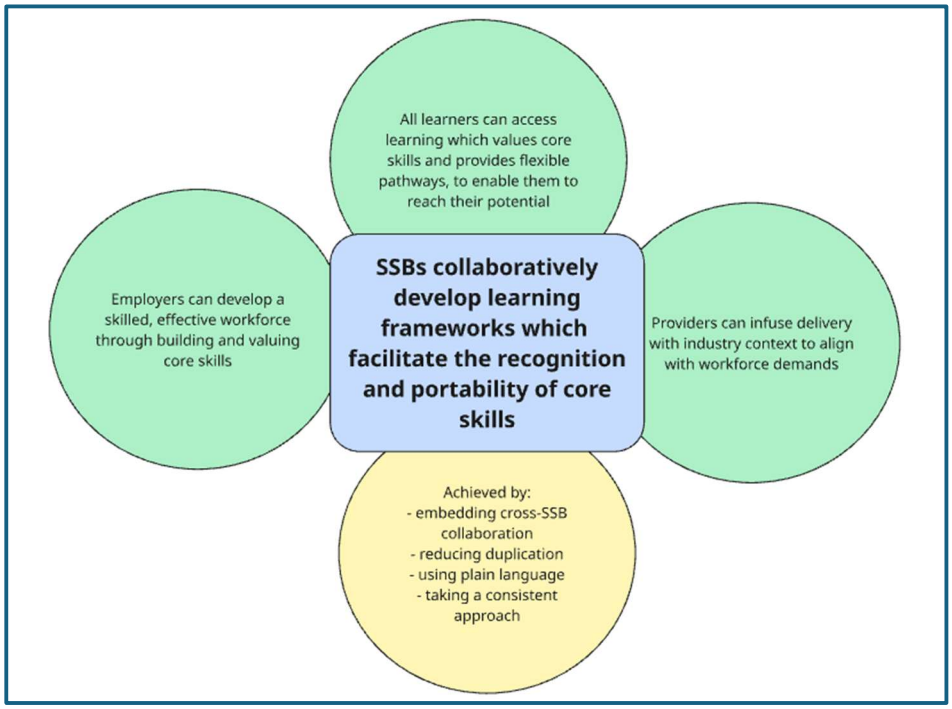
Figure 1 provides impact statements for the key stakeholder groups – employers, learners and providers. It also shows how the vision will be achieved.

[3] NZQA Vocational Education system summary: https://www2.nzqa.govt.nz/about-us/strategies-projects/vocational-education-system/

[4] https://foodandfibrecove.nz/reports-and-resources/project-delivery/ff-initiatives/a-new-approach-to-learner-pathways/

Figure 1: Vision with stakeholder impacts



Core Skills Categories

To provide clarity during discussions, draft categories and definitions of skills were developed. The skill categories used within the Skills Framework were used as the starting point for categorising skills. Figure 2 provides a visual representation of these skills and Table 1 gives working definitions of each category.

Figure 2: Skills categories

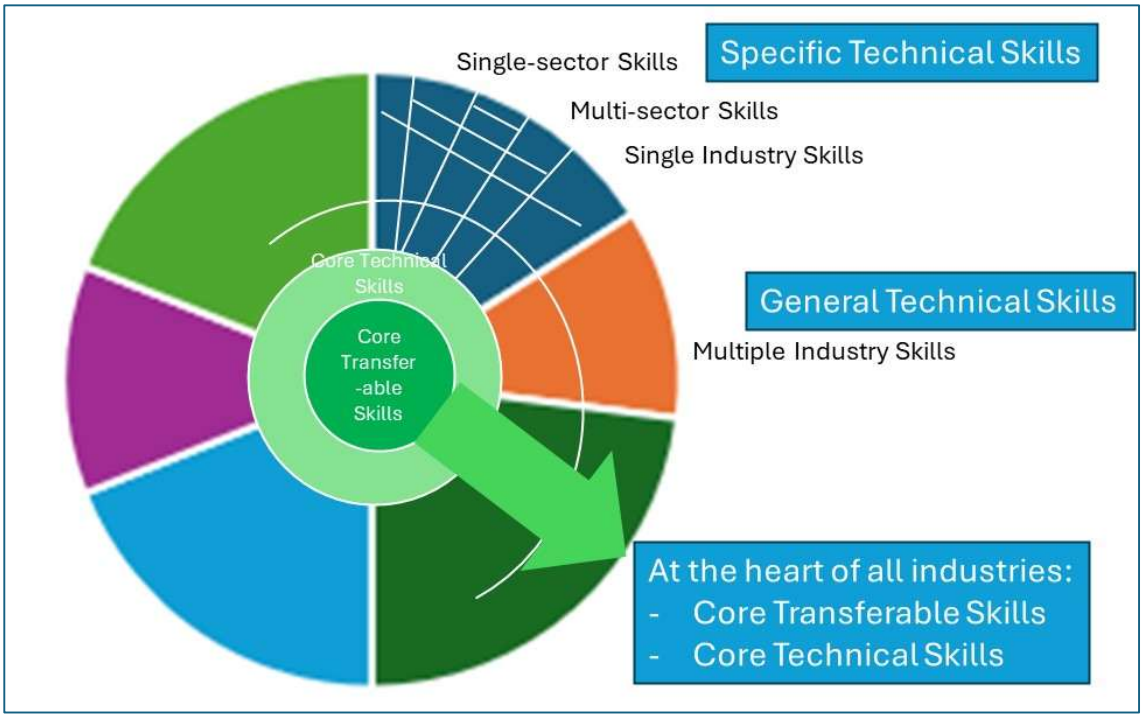


Table 1: Skills category definitions

Category	Definition
Core Transferable Skills	Skills to build skills – all Standard Setting Bodies (SSB) (e.g. thinking critically)
Core Technical Skills	Technical Skills across majority of SSB (e.g. digital skills, health, safety and well-being skills)
General Technical Skills	Technical Skills across two or more SSB Industries (e.g. trades essentials)
Specific Technical Skills	Technical skills specific for one SSB, or a sector within an SSB (e.g. apply paint by brush and roller to substrate surfaces)

Core Transferable Skills

Similarly, the Food and Fibre Skills Framework provides the starting point for the definition and outline of Core Transferable Skills, summarised in Table 2. Five skills sets were developed based on New Zealand and international research and which align with the primary and secondary education sector's New Zealand Curriculum Key Competencies.

Table 2: Skills Framework Core Transferable Skills

Skill Set	Practical Definition
Sense of Self	*You know your strengths and weaknesses. You believe in yourself.*
Learning to Learn	*You have a growth mindset.*
Thinking Critically	*You are known for being curious and others ask your advice*.
Interacting with People	*You can get things done because a wide range of people like working with you.*
Participating and Contributing	*You act fairly for everyone.*

For each skill set there are details in the Skills Framework[5] for three to five skills, outlining a definition and active "I Can" statements which show progression from entry level/supervised skills, to intermediate/independent skills, and on to experienced/strategic leadership skill levels. While these were not designed to be used directly for qualification development, they provided an accepted starting point for this analysis and forum activity.

Core Technical Skills

In addition, the Skills Framework also identifies the five categories of Core Technical Skills, summarised in Table 3. At this stage, only limited work to explore each of these has been completed. While these were designed to be specific to the Food and Fibre sector, in discussions with the Forum members, they largely fit the wider workforce. As they are used more, the titles and groupings should evolve.

[5] Core Transferable Skills: https://foodandfibrecove.nz/food-and-fibre-skills-framework-new-landing-page/core-transferable-skills/

Table 3: Core Technical Skills

Skill Set	Practical Definition
Living Beings and Environmental Skills	The skills required to work in the chosen environment.
Machinery and Technology Skills	The skills required to work with tools and technology of the industry.
Legislative and Regulatory Skills	The skills to understand the laws and regulations that govern the industry.
Good Practice Operations	The skills and operating procedures to ensure smooth running of the organisation.
Quality Management	The skills to assess and adjust process to meet the quality requirements of the industry.

General Technical Skills

This category of skills is for technical skills which are required in a few industries, across multiple SSB remits. For example, Trades Essentials is a foundation qualification that could be used by a wide range of industries. While it was created for the construction and engineering industries, it has applicability across any industry that has a workforce with practical/hands-on roles – e.g. agriculture, manufacturing.

Specific Technical Skills

This category represents the technical skills required by industries within one SSB remit. This is where the majority of qualification development activity occurs, and will not be covered in this project, except to note that when these skills are built on Core and General Technical skills, then the standards that already exist should be used where possible.

Recommendation 2: The Skills Categories are approved and adopted by SSB leadership

Recommendation 3: A mechanism to use and update the Skills Categories is built into the SSB collaboration

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For the purpose of this document Core Skills includes Core Transferable, Core Technical and General Technical skills.

Design Principles:

As this is a cross-organisation initiative, rather than dictating set procedures, a range of principles have been agreed, that can then be adapted by each SSB organisation.

There are existing design principles outlined by NZQA for any qualification to be listed on the NZQCF[6]. These are shown in blue text in each section. The Forum aligned the core skill principles within that existing outline for consistency and simplicity.

1. Needs Based

"The usefulness, relevance and value of the qualification is based on its relationship to the workforce and skill needs of individuals, groups of learners, employers, industry and communities. Evidence is required to establish and demonstrate these workforce and skill needs.

The qualification explicitly acknowledges the cultural and social aspirations of Māori, Pasifika and/or other identified communities, where appropriate."

Core Skills specific:

1.1. Re-use rather than create

1.2 Consideration of credit alignment is given in the early stages of design.

For example:

- a suite of standards of different sizes are designed at the same time for a wider range of uses (not all may be implemented at that time).
- designing smaller standards that can be used as building blocks, which would suit a wider range of industries.

2. Focused on outcomes

"Clear specification of outcomes makes the purpose of the qualification transparent, enables comparisons with other qualifications (both nationally and internationally) and increases portability of the qualification internationally.

Clear outcomes make explicit what graduates can "do, be and know" on completion of the qualification. Clear outcomes also indicate pathways to further education, employment and/ or a contribution to their community.

Evaluative quality assurance emphasises the achievement of outcomes relevant to the needs and aspirations of significant stakeholders, particularly learners."

Core Skills specific:

2.1 Clear plain language, and skill building blocks that employers' value

2.2 Show clear progressions through levels of core skills

- Design assuming learners bring skills with them

2.3 Design industry-agnostic standards

- Reduce use of "in X setting" in title and purpose
- Use other mechanisms to allow industry context – e.g. Indicative content, general conditions. Provide enough context for clarity, without creating a barrier.

[6] The New Zealand Qualification Framework, p.3 https://www2.nzqa.govt.nz/assets/Tertiary/Approval-accreditation-and-registration/Qualifications/new-zealand-qualifications-framework.pdf

3. Flexibility

"Qualifications can be achieved in different settings including the workplace and education institutions.

Having programmes of study and industry training that lead to a qualification allow learners to achieve it in ways most suited to their educational, work or cultural needs and aspirations. This may include credentialing learning obtained formally or informally towards the qualification."

Core Skills specific:

3.1 Check in with what exists first – across all SSBs

3.2 Outcome design translates well into assessment design that allows for multiple ways of demonstrating evidence

- Work-based learning is appropriate
- Can be contextualised to employers' own space and place
- Easy to assess using well defined assessment criteria
- Evidence requirements for achievement clearly established

3.3 Use exemplars across SSBs for consistency

- E.g. reuse good examples in purpose, guidance documents

3.4 Learning outcomes are designed to be portable

- Learning outcomes can be used in other standards
- Standards can be used in multiple qualifications.

4. Trust and Accountability

"Qualifications are developed collaboratively with a wide range of stakeholders in an environment of mutual trust and accountability. The relationships between these parties, like those between government agencies and tertiary education organisations, are based on good communication and collaboration. Parties can rely on the integrity of the processes used and the information provided."

Core Skills specific:

4.1 SSB use a consistent message about core skills and generic building blocks with stakeholders

- includes NZQA and employers/industry in consultations

4.3 Agree and support a lead developer (SSB) for a particular skill standard or qualification development, then support through SSB endorsement mechanisms

4.4 Each SSB appoints an ongoing cross-SSB forum member responsible for championing the core skills approach in their organisation.

Recommendation 4: The Core Skill Design Principles are approved and adopted by SSB leadership

Recommendation 5: A mechanism to update the Design Principles is built into the SSB collaboration

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Tools Available

There is no one size fits all with qualification development, especially for core skills. However, a consistent approach can be taken across SSB, that will facilitate the recognition and portability of core skills.

There are a range of tools available within the qualification developer kete, which are listed in Table 4, along with recommended next steps. Appendix 3 is an overview of the mechanisms, with examples of their current use in developing core skills.

Table 4: How available tools could be used

Mechanism	How it could be used	Next Steps
Micro-credential	A significant standalone core skill, where credentialising adds value	Lead developer to hold discussions across interested SSB at the beginning of design stage to see if an M-C is appropriate.
Skill Standards	Credit value is a key decision – to avoid multiple standards with size being key differentiator Design in a bundle, being mindful of how it could be embedded in a wider context Could aim for 5 credits being standard If smaller, create transferable learning outcomes	Lead developer to hold discussions across interested SSB at the beginning of design stage to see what range of skills standards, at what credit level are appropriate for different industries.
Purpose Statement	This could have a standard sentence to say these skills can be used across multiple industries.	SSBs to use existing example in appropriate core skills development underway e.g. *[This skill] may also be undertaken by people working in other industries or contexts where applicable.*
Graduate Profile or Outcome Statement	Some qualifications may require core skills to be spelt out here (communications, teamwork). Not relevant for skill standards	No action at this time, wait for example to arise.
Learning Outcomes and Assessment Criteria	Aim to keep core skills generic/agnostic - so that we can use in multiple standards (especially for different credit weighting)	Test approach in pilot developments (see below)
Indicative Content	This is a good place to add some contextualised industry information (static) Where they are not explicitly assessed, this is a place for core skill details	Test approach in pilot developments (see below)
General Conditions	Mandatory requirements – specific to industry	Test approach in pilot developments (see below)
Guidance Document	Use this to contextualise to specific industry Not too long, easy to use	Test approach in pilot developments (see below)

	Could add some contextualised assessment info (Consent and Moderation Requirements (CMR) has this also) Could look at Waihanga Ara Rau documents as an exemplar/template However, anything that needs to be assessed – needs to be in the Standard	
Other	Information to contextualise could be added in here. e.g. Moderation and Programme Endorsement details	Test approach in pilot developments (see below)

The Situation Report also has details from the Australian VET unit of competency, that could be useful when considering future changes. Appendix 4 shows a few units of competency which align with the Skills Framework as examples.

Recommendation 6: The Core Skill Tools are approved and adopted by SSB leadership

Recommendation 7: A mechanism to update the Tool Kete is built into the SSB collaboration

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Tracking Core Skill Standard Development

One outcome of developing the Situation Report was the observation of how difficult it is for anyone to search for skills in our current environment. The NZQA website has three different search engines, one each of micro-credentials, skills standards and qualifications. There are some filters for qualification search, for subject area, type of qualification, level and credits, but only a keyword search in the micro-credential and standards search engines. Some tools are being built by the current WDCs to improve visibility of data in their areas of activity, but that hasn't extended to work that aids searching for skills.

Recommendation 8: Any future development with the data engines of SSB or NZQA, should consider using tagging to identify core skills within standards and qualifications

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For this project, a couple of tools were trialled – a spreadsheet and a Miro visual board. It showed by skill category and level, the existing standards. The Forum then added a dimension of "planned" standards. The spreadsheet is useful to more easily filter, the visual table is useful to show a heatmap – where there are multiple standards and categories where there are none.

The following two figures show these visual maps, as at the end of June. While the descriptions cannot be read, it is possible to see that existing standards (Yellow) have been focused on Level 2 and 3, current activity (green) is more focused on Level 3 and 4, and that there are non-generic standards (pink) which could be adapted to become core skills.

Figure 3: Core Transferable Skills - visual table

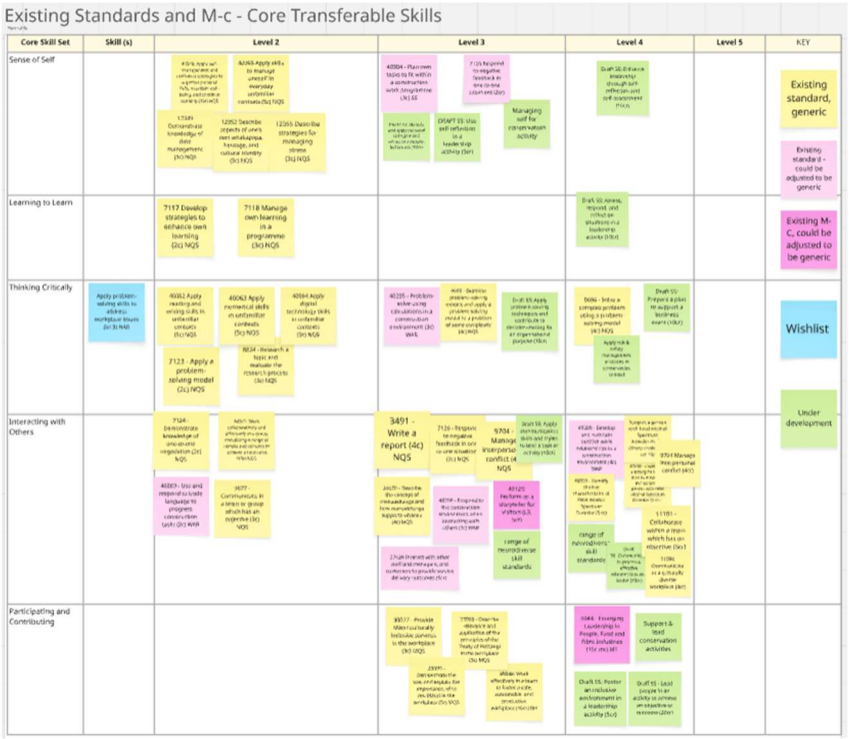
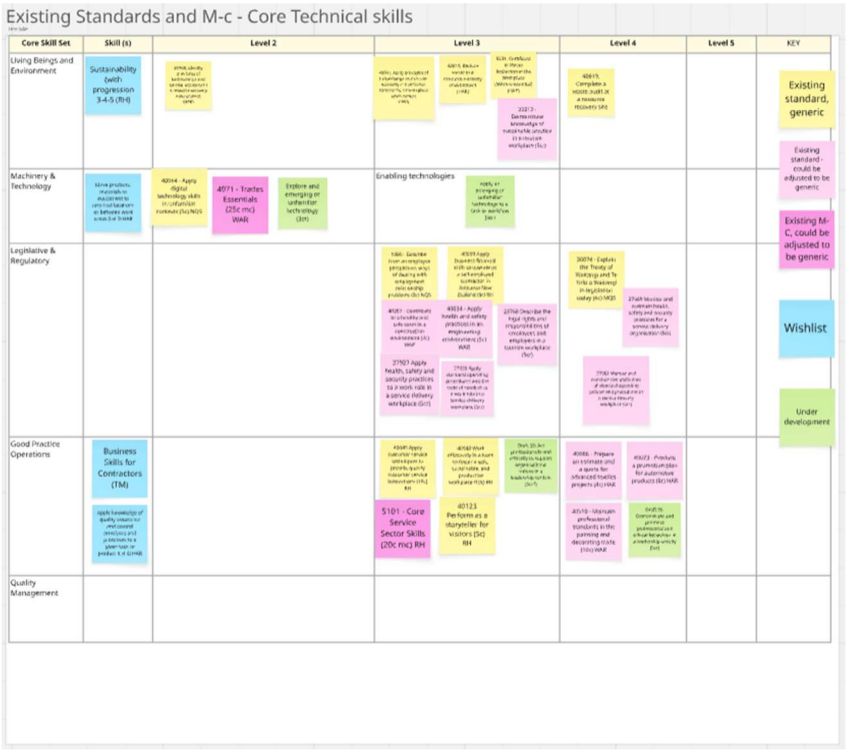


Figure 4 Core Technical Skills - Visual Map



The information captured on these tools is at draft status and requires further effort to complete. However, the work started within the project to identify existing core skills was greatly appreciated by the Forum and showed the importance of having a shared view of current and planned work to avoid duplication of effort, and to create a more holistic skills platform for our workforce.

Recommendation 9: A shared repository for core skills – existing and planned work is created and maintained across all SSB

Development Process

The discussion about what a process flow could look like, tended to focus on the planning and initiation phase of qualification development. Once the decision about scope of development has been decided, each SSB has their own internal processes to follow.

Strategic Planning

Forum members pointed out the cyclical standard review and consultation cycle for each SSB often meant that co-ordinating development across even just two SSB was logistically difficult. A need to create a strategic planning function across SSB to focus on core skill development would be an important success factor for any collaborative process.

If the Core Generic domain is to remain with NZQS, then it is vital that there is leadership, and collaboration about core skills from this SSB.

This could be an extension of the annual planning process but needs to be done as a collaborative step to consider what is required by the wider workforce in terms of core skill development. It should look across existing plans for the upcoming period and consider what alignment can be achieved between SSB to further enhance the core skill qualification development planned for that period.

Recommendation 10: The strategic planning function is extended to include Core Skills, with collaboration across all SSB

Initiation Process

Steps in this initiation phase of a core skill development process should include

- Check what already exists and have a discussion with who "owns" it
- Consult other SSB to gauge interest levels
- Consider breadth and detail needed across all industries
- Agree who should "own" the development, and what support other SSB will provide
- Ensure the development considers clear progressions through the levels – even if not all are developed at that point in time.

Then use the Core Skill Development Principles (outlined above) in the planning and design phases.

Recommendation 11: Initiation Phase of Core Skill Development is built into new developments for all SSB

Pilot Core Skill Standard Development

Throughout the Forum discussions there was broad agreement about the approach of generic skill standard and qualification development for core skills. There were multiple approaches discussed, and generally it was felt that the lead developer would decide the approach based on their industry needs. It was generally agreed that some templates should be created (i.e. for General Conditions), or some shared exemplars (i.e. for purpose statements) that could be used across the SSBs.

Rather than add to workload it was decided that the Forum could use a couple of planned developments, to test out process and create some templates. These were three identified that would each test a slightly different area.

Problem Solving – Ringa Hora
Apply problem solving techniques and contribute to decision -making for an organisational purpose (10cr). Lead by Ringa Hora, this skill could be considered under Core Generic (NQS SSB) – and build on existing unit standards (7123 and 9095). There is also a construction environment mathematical problem-solving standard to consider (40295).

Digital Tools – Toi Mai
Explore an emerging or unfamiliar technology (3cr). The Forum thought this could be a good example of a Core Technical skill, with a desire that it fit a wide range of industries.

Health and Safety Review – Toitū te Waiora
This is planned for next year. The Forum agreed this was a vital core skill development, that would need multiple approaches designed so that the standards and qualifications are able to be used across the full range of industries.

Recommendation 12: Pilot Core Skill Standard Development projects are established by Forum members to test thinking, process and create templates

External Factors

While most of the project focused on what SSB collaboration could achieve, there were aspects of the qualification development process that drive behaviour and would also need some systemic shift for the skills-first approach to be successful.

NZQA Guidelines and Approval Process

There appears to be some conflict between the design principles in the NZQA Guidelines, and the approval process for new standards and qualifications. On the one hand, more generic standards are

being encouraged. On the other hand, clear context and requirements from industry have to be shown in the qualification approval process.

This inconsistency needs to be surfaced and addressed through ongoing discussion, in order to facilitate the change of approach required to move towards transferable core skill standards and more streamlined qualifications and credentials.

Funding of Vocational Education

Time and time again, funding of vocational education came up in discussions. There is push-bask from providers to adopt new skill standards, and pushback from employers to accept qualifications which may have elements of core skills split out from the core technical skills they need.

This topic was outside the remit of this project. However, it needs to be noted that the funding of vocational education based on location (work-based, online or on-campus) and measured by Full Time Equivalent student has unintended consequences. For example, it drives the delivery of longer qualifications rather than shorter micro-credentials. It drives the development of work-based qualifications which are purely technical. It drives competition rather than collaboration between providers.

There is no easy answer, but continued collaboration between the stakeholders in the vocational education system is important. The WDCs being reformed into the Industry Skills Boards provides a good opportunity to listen the experience the qualification development teams have had, and build that into any future planning for changes to funding structures.

What to credentialise? Is an alternative needed?

At the core of any discussion about funding is the tension between what training should be funded by the government, and what by employers or industries. The focus is on developing a workforce with the skills needed for effective and productive industries. The Reform of Vocational Education, and subsequent changes, from 2019 to 2025, seek to provide a system that is more responsive to changing needs, and more flexible and equitable for learners. There are clear boundaries for vocational education funding as far as level (not above level 7 or below level 2) and that the programmes are delivered by registered providers and are on the NZQA framework. There are also guidelines that the training is not specific to a particular manufacturer and is not site-specific Health and Safety training.

The area of core skills has not been addressed at a system-level, with ad hoc historical decisions driving interesting inconsistencies. For example, the government doesn't fund driving license training but does fund driver education for Utility Vehicles used in many farms. There is funding for communication skills when part of a business qualification, but reluctance to include communication skills in learning outcomes of other technical qualifications. There is dissatisfaction with the "life skills" for students leaving schools, but a lack of system for gaining those skills and recognising them in the workplace.

The Forum discussed the possibility of a Learner Passport which could be a way for employers to recognise skills gained by their employees in an informal or non-formal manner. This would provide scaffolding for employees, who may then recognise the skills they have, and begin a journey of life-long learning.

While this will remain a grey area by the nature that some core skills are difficult to "teach" and "assess" in an objective consistent manner, it is an area to which this cross SSB collaboration can contribute and provide insight into.

Employer Consultation and Education

Over the last few years, with the creation of WDCs, consultation with industry has been increased, and the proposed Industry Skills Boards will take this even further. However, the message of skills-first and more generic skill standards has not filtered through to industry. There were several examples given by Forum members of thorough qualification development processes that sought to include core skills – with full approval by industry, which were then stripped back to technical skills prior to finalisation.

There are multiple reasons for the push-back – most with the desire to see a specific industry named in the title/purpose, with specific technical skills emphasised.

However, the researchers and educators know the value of core skills. The step that has been missed is the education of employers as to the reason behind changing to more generic standards, how their industry needs are still going to be met, and the importance of core skills, as the skills that build skills.

Recommendation 13: Further discussions are held with NZQA to ensure that the Core Skill Development processes outline meets their requirements

Recommendation 14: SSBs agree core skill building blocks which are included in qualifications, and contribute to discussion about recognition of core skills that remain outside the NZQA framework

Recommendation 15: Employer consultation guidelines are prepared collaboratively by SSB to promote the importance of skills-first and Core Skills

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Appendix 1: Transferable Skills Forum

Steering Committee

Name	Appointment	Role
Craig Langdon	Muka Tangata	Chair
Kathryn Koopmanschap	Boost Services	Project Manager
Dr Nicky Murray	On Task Ltd	Lead researcher
Jenni Pethig	Toi Mai	Member
Te Oho Reedy	Ringa Hora	Member
Catriona Petrie	Waihanga Ara Rau	Member
Jackie Lynch	Food and Fibre CoVE	Observer

Working Group

Name	Organisation	Role
Dr Nicky Murray	On Task Ltd	Chair/Project Manager
Kathryn Koopmanschap	Boost Services Ltd	Project Manager
Amy Buckland	Toi Mai	Member
Nicola McCartney	Toi Mai	Member
Lydia Harrell	Waihanga Ara Rau	Member
Syd Reweti	Ringa Hora	Member
Diana Garrett	Ringa Hora	Member
Ashley Acklin	Toitu te Waiora	Member
Sara Goff	Toitu te Waiora	Member
Jude Robertson	Hanga Aro Rau	Member
Adrienne Dawson	Muka Tangata	Member
Mata Lameko	Muka Tangata	Member
Mohammed Farun	NZQA NQS	Member
Mereana Su	NZQA MQS	Member
Emmett Isaac	NZQA MQS	Member
Jackie Lynch	Food and Fibre CoVE	Observer

Appendix 2: Situation Report – Summary

The Situation Report[7] outlines the current situation of qualification development within the New Zealand vocational education and training ecosystem, with regards to skills that build skills, and technical skills that are common across multiple if not all industries.

The report comprises:

- data analysis of existing standards,
- the current work in progress across the WDCs,
- and an analysis of some of the constraints and barriers reported by the Transferable Skills Forum members, including industry resistance.

Key findings

Importance of this work to the Standard Setting Bodies (SSBs): There is good support within the current SSB organisations to create principles, processes and definitions for core transferable and technical skills.

Data analysis of existing standards and qualifications is difficult across the whole spectrum of industries, however, analysis does show that there are existing products which include core transferable and technical skills, in a widely varied manner.

Current work in progress: All SSBs are working on elements of core transferable and technical skills – from their own industries' perspective, acknowledging that other industries may use them.

Current constraints: There are multiple constraints to a more coherent approach to developing core transferable skills across standards and qualifications, which will need to be addressed for any change to be effective. While some are internal and this project will seek to resolve, others are external, and a wider systemic transformation approach would be required to address these.

Mechanisms in existing processes: There are mechanisms within the current New Zealand qualification development process that could be used to give more emphasis and guidance for developers and providers about core transferable and technical skills. In addition, the Australian Units of Competency as building blocks for training packages, plus the Foundation Skills section, could be used as a model for New Zealand SSBs.

Current constraints in qualification development

This is a summary of the discussions with the Forum members, highlighting themes that were common across the multiple SSBs when describing the current situation.

Qualification review cycles

Each SSB has an existing list of products - standards and qualifications - with set review periods. In addition, Workforce Development Plans were created to highlight the key factors that are impacting industry sectors now and the actions the WDC is taking to improve the workforce. These are rolled into Annual Reports and Advice to TEC, and multi-year Operational plans. These focus the resources

[7] Situation Report: https://foodandfibrecove.nz/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/TSF-Situation-Report-May-2025.pdf

of the WDC into the areas that have been highlighted through ongoing discussions with industry groups. These show a wide range of focus areas and the high priority areas for their industries, to which WDCs are mandated to respond. It can difficult enough to align priorities across the different sectors within a WDC's coverage, let alone to align focus areas, and therefore project deliverables and timelines across multiple SSBs. What one sector may see as a focus area is not always the same as another sector.

'Ownership' of coverage areas

Adding to this complexity is that different WDCs have coverage responsibilities for areas that may be considered 'core'. Those WDCs must address these areas with a planned and measured approach but this can cause frustration with other WDCs if areas have been identified as high priority within their industries and yet do not sit within their mandated coverage area.

Resourcing levels

There are differing levels of resourcing across the SSBs. This is linked to overall budget and size of sectors but also changes due to staff movements and immediate budget constraints due to policy changes. The impact of this is that projects which extend across multiple SSB are more difficult to prioritise and resource.

Industry challenges

Several WDCs mentioned that there is resistance from industry to the changes required in the transition from Unit Standards to Skill standards. Unit standards were introduced in the early 1990s. Industry are familiar with them, and some are resistant to change. Some examples of this include industry wanting to see:

- Their specific industry in the title
- Continuity from existing unit standards
- The assessment criteria specificity that exists in unit standards.

However, Skill Standards are to be designed to be more generic, to reduce fragmentation and increase portability for learners.

In addition, there is resistance to paying for training in Core Transferable Skills, which many employers believe are life skills, picked up by experience, rather than formal training. In consultation with industry, it has been the experience of qualification developers that there is a desire to include Core Transferable Skills into a new qualification, but when presented with a draft qualification, it is this content which is most likely to be debated and removed.

Provider challenges

While there is sound progress towards development of skill standards and micro-credentials, the uptake of these new products has been slow. There could be a few reasons for this, but the most common reason providers are giving, is the investment required to develop either new programmes, or the resources to teach the new skill standards. There is a feeling that the current poor economic environment is the primary driver for this reticence. However, the state of flux in both Te Pūkenga and the work-based training divisions would also be critical. While there is limited security for their funding, budgets and structure, the appetite for developing new resources is naturally low.

Vocational education ecosystem non-alignment

International and local research highlights the importance of teaching these core transferable skills – as they are the skills required to build skills. This message has not yet reached all of the industry stakeholders who are engaging with qualification development. An aid to this discussion could be understanding what core skills should be recognised and credentialised. At this point in time, neither industry nor the vocational education ecosystem have a clear picture on this.

External and regulatory factors

Alongside internal factors faced by qualification developers - organisational priorities, coverage, resourcing, and industry and provider buy-in, there are regulatory and external factors which need to be considered.

Consultation and stakeholder engagement processes

The need for industry buy-in and the mandate for collaboration between WDCs are clearly set out in the regulatory documents guiding this work. NZQA has produced Operational Rules[8] [9] and Guideline[10] [11] documents for the development of Skill Standards, and Qualifications separately. The impact on these for both stakeholder engagement and collaboration between SSBs is summarised below.

Skills Standards

While there is no mention of stakeholder engagement or consultation in the Operational Rules for Standards, the Guidelines have several statements to be followed in regards to stakeholder engagement:

- "All users of skill standards and sector stakeholders will be consulted during development and review" (p.6)
- To be approved the standard "must match the needs of employers, industry and/or communities" (p.10)
- To be approved "all users of skill standards and sector stakeholders will be consulted during development and review" (p.10)
- "Users of skill standards and sector stakeholders must be consulted during a review. SSBs are expected to provide evidence of consultation." (p.21).

Qualifications (including Micro-credentials)

The Operational rules contain a section on the content and process for approval, which has a list of statements in Clause 11.2 around stakeholder engagement, from which WDC applications are exempt.

[8] NZQA Directory of Assessment and Skill Standards Listing and Operational Rules 2022: https://www2.nzqa.govt.nz/about-us/rules-fees-policies/nzqa-rules/directory-of-assessment-and-skill-standards-listing-and-operational-rules-2022/
[9] NZQA Qualification and Micro-credential Listing and Operational Rules 2022: https://www2.nzqa.govt.nz/about-us/rules-fees-policies/nzqa-rules/qualification-and-micro-credentials/
[10] NZQA Guidelines for listing skill standards on the Directory of Assessment and Skill Standards: https://www2.nzqa.govt.nz/assets/Tertiary/Approval-accreditation-and-registration/Standards/Skills-standards/Guidelines-for-listing-skill-standards-on-the-DASS.pdf
[11] NZQA Guidelines for listing qualifications on the NZQCF: https://www2.nzqa.govt.nz/assets/Tertiary/Approval-accreditation-and-registration/Guidelines/guidelines-for-listing-quals-on-the-nzqcf-nz-cert-levels-1-6-nz-dips-levels-5-7.pdf

The Guidelines have a section specifically for WDC applications because their remit is inclusive of industry engagement. This allows that each application doesn't need to show stakeholder engagement evidence.

"WDCs are…required to submit different information to support applications for quality assurance and approval:

- For new qualification listing, a high-level summary of stakeholder engagement, and the need for qualification, is required.
- For reviewed qualifications, a summary of the review process, stakeholders consulted, and review outcomes is required" (p.12).

In the section about review of a qualification there is also an exemption of stakeholder evidence.

- "A Review Report (not for publication) that includes:
    - a summary of the review process, consultation with stakeholders and their support for the changes.
- Evidence of consultation with stakeholders and their support for the changes (not required for WDCs)" (p.32).

Cross SSB collaboration

The Skills Standard guidelines have this guidance:

- "SSBs can share the development of skill standards with one SSB nominated as the lead developer. The lead developer will be responsible for consent to assess requirements and the national external moderation system for the skill standards" (p.6).
- "Consultation should also take place with other SSBs if there is potential for a reviewed standard to overlap with any other SSB's standard setting coverage" (p.21)

There is no similar statement in the Guidelines for Qualifications and Micro-credentials. However, there are implicit collaborative statements:

- "Qualifications are developed collaboratively with a wide range of stakeholders in an environment of mutual trust and accountability" (p.5)
- "NZQA will list a qualification at levels 1 to 6 only where it is satisfied that the qualification does not duplicate an existing qualification, that there is a distinct need for the qualification, and that it will meet the outcomes as stated in the outcome statement" (p.16)

Future workforce requirement challenges

The SSBs have developed a wealth of research aimed to understand and forecast future workforce requirements. Part of this is the requirement for upskilling and reskilling of the current workforce to cope with demographic and societal changes.

Statistics NZ estimate that the workforce will increase from 2.9 million in 2020, to 3.2 million in early 2030s. The workforce will continue to "grey", as the proportion of labour force who are over 65 years old, will increase, while the core working-age group (15-64) as a proportion of the total population will shrink. The workforce will become more ethnically diverse. In particular Māori are projected to comprise 21% of the total population by 2043, up from 17.3% in 2023.

In parallel with the changing workforce demographics, the nature of work and workplaces is also forecast to significantly change. The impact of technological advances and increasing digitization will see the need for more higher-level technical skills and digital proficiency from basic to advanced skills across the whole workforce. The Hays 2025 Skills Report estimates that "by 2033, over 90% of new jobs will require post-secondary qualifications, with 44% of those having vocational education and training as the primary pathway to access" (p.6).[12]

While the SSBs attempt to factor these changes into development considerations, industry is focused on the here and now. There is a desire to move to more flexible training to address skills gaps and help adapt the workforce to changing needs, but change to the current system is slow, and most employers are continuing to use the qualifications and standards with which they are familiar.

Funding challenges

The Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) is responsible for investing government funding in tertiary education, which in 2024 amounted to just over $3bn for tertiary tuition and training.

The funding for training organisations is complex and based on both historical performance (how many students completed which qualifications) and the future looking Investment Plans submitted by the training organisation.

The majority of tertiary education programmes are funded through the Level 3-7 (non-degree) on the NZQCF Fund. Table 8 shows the core components for this fund – Mode of Delivery and Equivalent Full-Time Student (EFTS).

Table 5: EFTS per mode of delivery

2025: DQ3-7(Non-Degree): Delivery Component					
Mode of delivery / Equivalent Full-Time Student (EFTS) - Excluding GST					
Subject categories	**Provider-based***	**Provider-based: extramural**	**Work-based**	**Pathway to work**	**Assessment & Verification**
Humanities, Business and Social Service Vocations (F1)	$6,584.00	$6,584.00	$5,701.00	$6,901.00	$1,658.00
Trades, Creative Arts, Information Technology and Health-related Professions (F2)	$10,469.00	$10,469.00	$7,825.00	$9,732.00	$1,658.00
Agriculture, Engineering, Health Sciences and Science (F3)	$11,786.00	$11,786.00	$8,543.00	$10,693.00	$1,658.00
Pilot Training and Priority Engineering (F4)	$14,419.00	$14,419.00	$9,984.00	$12,613.00	$1,658.00
Foreign-going Nautical and Specialist Agriculture (F5)	$19,753.00	$19,753.00	$12,900.00	$16,499.00	N/A
Mātauranga and Te Reo Māori (F6)	$7,827.00	$7,827.00	$7,827.00	$7,827.00	$1,782.00

Due to the nature of this funding structure, there is an unintended incentive for providers to focus on longer training courses. While a year-long training course will provide $11,786 funding (in Agriculture, Engineering, Health Sciences and Science) per learner, a 20-credit micro-credential will bring in just 16% of this (20 credit / 120 credit) – and yet have similar overhead costs for enrolling, marketing, moderating, quality assurance measures and reporting. Most providers are not set up for the delivery of shorter courses, and the workload is typically additional to the year-long delivery programmes for the teachers involved.

A Provider also noted that there is an unintended incentive to create programmes which fall into the higher funding buckets (for example Specialist Agriculture receives nearly $8,000 more per FTE than

[12] Hays: The Changing face of skills.

Agriculture). In addition, there is no additional funding mechanism for programmes which require a very high tutor to student ratio in order to maintain health and safety. For example, in forestry, requires one tutor to four chainsaws and eight students.

In addition, it is difficult for training providers to prepare forecasts for micro-credentials – having no historical delivery to base it on.

NZQA Level Descriptors proposed change

Late in 2024 NZQA consulted on changes to the NZQCF – including updating the level descriptors. The consultation closed on 17 November 2024. Implementation is anticipated to be from 1 July, but there has been no further announcement since the publication of the summary of responses.

The summary of the changes is:

> "We have worked with international experts to update the level descriptors. These describe what is expected of a graduate at each level of the NZQCF.
>
> The first two domains, 'knowledge' and 'skills', have not changed. We have renamed the third domain to 'context, autonomy and responsibility'. It was previously 'application (of knowledge and skills)'.
>
> In the skills domain, we now include transferable competencies of critical thinking, communication and collaboration as sub-domains.
>
> A fourth sub-domain, 'performance and practice', is intended to make vocational outcomes more visible."

National Secondary Curriculum - changing focus

There is currently a multi-year change programme underway in the National Curriculum which:

> "Includes refreshing, redesigning and strengthening our curricula and assessment systems so they are in line with the best in the world.
>
> The changes we are making encompass what will be taught and in what sequence for each year of schooling, the teaching practices that teachers and kaiako use in classrooms, and the assessment and aromatawai tools and practices teachers and kaiako use to monitor and respond to learner and ākonga progress."[13]

This is a move away from a skills-based approach which has focused on generic skills such as problem-solving, towards mastery in a given subject. It is a move from Constructivist principles towards Science of Learning[14] principles. Table 9 highlights some points of difference.

[13] The National Curriculum: https://tahurangi.education.govt.nz/our-story
[14] The Science of Learning explained: https://newzealandcurriculum.tahurangi.education.govt.nz/the-science-of-learning-explained/5637228585.p

Table 6: Changes to the National Curriculum

Aspect	Science of Learning (SoL)	Constructivist Theory
Curriculum Structure	Sequenced, explicit, knowledge-rich	Flexible, emergent, context-driven
Teaching Approach	Direct instruction, modelling, practice	Inquiry-based, student-led, exploration
Knowledge Emphasis	Core Disciplinary knowledge, skills and concepts	Learner constructed understanding
Assessment	Regular, formative, focused on mastery	Often project-based, reflective
NZ Curriculum Trends	Moving towards SoL principles	Previous emphasis on competencies, inquire and learner agency

In Forum discussions this point was raised:

> *"Secondary education is moving towards 'knowledge rich' curriculum, but work based learning is skill based – how do we bridge the gap?"*

It will take time to understand what if anything needs to change to accommodate learners who come through the adjusted New Zealand Curriculum. However, the nature of work-based learning is to show and practise until mastery is achieved. This is in line with the Science of Learning approach. However, it may mean that some core transferable skills in Learning to Learn and Thinking Critically may become more important to explicitly teach and recognise in the tertiary environment.

Appendix 3: Possible Tools – examples

Mechanism	Definition and *Example*
Micro-credential	A small, standalone aware with set learning outcomes. They range between 1 to 40 credits
Skill Standards	A specification of skills, the levels of performance in those skills and the learning outcomes associated with those skills.
Purpose Statement	The strategic purpose statement is usually structured as two-three statements that clearly identify the: • target group of learners, industry and/or community that will benefit from the qualification • standard level of responsibility and/or autonomy at which the graduate will operate or a definition of the scope of practice. This refers to any relevant industry or professional standards, licensing or professional registration requirements. *Example: NZ Certificate in Service Sector Skills (NZ5025)* *The purpose of this qualification is to provide New Zealand service-based industries with individuals who have the transferable skills required to operate effectively in a service sector workplace environment.* *It is intended that ākonga who acquire the skills, knowledge and behaviours in this qualification will be able to pursue a career in a variety of work roles in the service sector industry.* *The qualification focus is transferable skills of customer service, teamwork, communication, health and safety, professional and ethical behaviour, problem solving, and critical thinking required by service sector work roles.*
Graduate Profile or Outcome Statement	A graduate profile describes what a person awarded the qualification can do, be and know. The description should reflect the full range of graduate capabilities and competencies. *Example: NZ Certificate in Māori Business and Management (3501)* *Graduates of this qualification will be able to:* *- Apply basic te reo Māori in business and cultural contexts.* *- Apply understanding of Te Tiriti o Waitangi to support effective business operations.* *- Demonstrate professional and ethical behaviour in a socially and culturally appropriate manner.* *- Foster collaboration and robust communications with internal and external parties.* *- Use business management tools and techniques appropriate to business sustainability.* *- Manage personal growth and professional development in relation to business objectives* *- Work cooperatively as a team member to support effective business operations*
Learning Outcomes and Assessment Criteria	The learning outcomes describe the skill(s) and knowledge a learner will have once they have achieved the standard. Learning outcomes must include an action verb, content, and context. *Unit & skills standards have learning outcomes and assessment criteria.* *Example: 40060 Apply self-management and resilience strategies…* *Learning outcome 1:* *Describe self-management and resilience strategies.* *Assessment Criteria:* *a. Identify self-management and resilience, and potentially relevant strategies* b. *Describe relevance of strategies to self.*

Indicative Content	SSBs include the indicative content they encourage providers to cover with their learners. Along with the learning outcomes, the indicative content provides the framework for a provider to develop its specific learning activities and assessment tasks, while also supporting portability of learning and consistent graduate outcomes. The content is expressed at a high level as topics rather than tasks, and along with other skill standard details, helps inform the credit value *Example: 40289 – Use and respond to trade language to progress construction tasks* ***Ihirangi waitohu |*** *Indicative content* *Project information* - *Trade language, including jargon, and technical vocabulary* - *Reasons for working to specific timeframes and sequencing.* - *Level of detail required to progress construction tasks.* - *Considering safety and timing.* *Communication methods for construction tasks* - *Sketches and updates to project plans.* - *Task boards.* - *Toolbox meetings.* - *Communication points during the project.* - *Visual communication.* - *Use of technology.* - *Project and task supervisors.* *Developing trade language in a construction environment* - *Reading situations and adapting communication.* - *Noise in the construction environment.* - *Concept of āko (learning) through the project.* - *Onsite buddy system.* - *Tuakana-tēina.*
General Conditions	Qualifications may also contain General Conditions. These may include: • Entry requirements, including a range of contexts and learning pathways, and minimum literacy levels • General guidance for programme developers • The context for delivery or assessment • Any practicum requirements *Example: NZ Cert in Aquaculture (NZ3135):* *TEOs offering programmes leading to this qualification must maintain currency with relevant legislation, regulations, and codes of practice which may include the following: Health and Safety at Work Act 2015, Treaty of Waitangi (Fisheries Claims) Settlement Act 1992, Biosecurity Act 1993, Animal Products Act 1999, Food Act 2014, Fisheries Act 1996, Wildlife Act 1953.* *Company quality, risk management, recording, and reporting; and relevant legislation apply across all outcomes.* *Programmes developed must ensure the behaviours that contribute to compliance with workplace procedures, and commercial standards and timeframes are inherent in the performance of the qualification's outcomes and must be considered as part of the assessment process.* *Programmes informing learners/ākonga on Fisheries Observer roles can find information here:*

Guidance Document	SSB create a template that could be used
Other	Programme endorsement and moderation

Appendix 4: Australian Unit of Competency – examples

These are examples and not intended to be either a direct alignment or an exhaustive list.

Skill Set	Skill Element examples	Australian Unit of Competency
Sense of Self	Whakapapa Staying Positive Self-managing Turangawaewae Aiming high	BSBPEF302 Develop self-awareness SIRXHWB001 Maintain personal health and wellbeing BSBPEF401 Manage personal health and wellbeing MSMPMC200 Organise self TLIG3003 Apply positive behaviours in the workplace
Thinking Critically	Creative Thinking Problem-Solving Mātauranga Decision-Making	BSBCRT301 Develop and extend critical and creative thinking skills BSBCRT411 Apply critical thinking to work practices BSBCRT511 Develop critical thinking in others BSBCRT201 Develop and apply thinking and problem solving skills MSMSUP390 Use structured problem-solving tools BSBCRT611 Apply critical thinking for complex problem solving RIIBEF404 Undertake informed and dynamic decision making AMPMGT809 Analyse data for business decision making
Interacting with Others	Listening Communicating Manaakitanga Whanaungatanga Developing People	FSKOCM006 Use oral communication skills to participate in workplace teams PSPGEN143 Prepare high-level written communication BSBCMM511 Communicate with influence PUATEA001 Work in a team POLGEN036 Work collaboratively in a team environment CPPCMN4003 Establish, develop and monitor teams
Participating and Contributing	Building inclusivity Kotahitanga Kaitiaki	PSPGEN115 Uphold and support inclusive workplace practices BSBTWK301 Use inclusive work practices PSPGEN118 Provide leadership BSBLDR411 Demonstrate leadership in the workplace CPPCMN4013 Operate a sustainable business

Source: https://training.gov.au/