

5. How do unit standards relate to learning programmes?

There are many theories, models and approaches to curriculum development and learning programme design. Whatever approach is held, however, at some point in the design of a programme of learning the aim and purpose of the learning has to be stated. Purpose in turn relates to the scope of the course – is it a short course with very specific outcomes? Is it a much longer programme or combination of courses resulting in a set of professional competencies? It is only from *purpose* that the desired outcomes of learning can be identified.

In the current NQF context there are various starting points for the design of a learning programme. It may be that the need for a course has been identified and its purpose defined. In that case, the learning programme designer needs to find out whether unit standards and outcomes (or even a qualification) already exist to address this purpose. If so, the designer can then select the unit standards which will inform the development of the course. If not, the provider will need to liaise with the relevant body for example, the SETA responsible in this area, to develop and register the outcomes or standards. Alternatively, a provider may wish to develop a programme against a qualification, unit standards or outcomes which are already registered on the NQF. These then become the starting point for programme development.

In other words, a unit standard or set of unit standards does NOT equal a learning programme. Learning programmes will generally bring together a number of unit standards, which could be from different fields, to achieve their purpose. In some instances, a learning programme could be developed as a short course for the achievement of one unit standard. The point is that the relationship between unit standards and learning programmes is extremely flexible, and is defined by the purpose of the learning programme.

Consider a scenario which involves designing a programme for security guards in a particular context. After doing a needs analysis, you might decide that your learners will need skills in the following areas:

- Literacy skills – e.g. for report writing.
- Communication skills
- Numeracy skills – e.g. for timekeeping and timetabling issues.
- Money management – e.g. for their own life skills
- First aid skills
- Specific skills in security areas – e.g. self-defence, gun handling, emergency standard operating procedures and so on.
- Understanding of the context and circumstances in which they will be working

This framework of skills could be developed into a learning programme which could draw on unit standards from a number of different fields. Alternatively, a review of existing qualifications in the security sector may find that the required standards have already been clustered into a qualification.

The unit standards themselves will give some guidance on some of the elements of a learning programme. However, it must be stressed that this guidance is very minimal. For example, while range statements might help give an idea of the boundaries of content (and thus of the learning materials) for those outcomes and at that level, the designer will still have to find, develop and integrate appropriate material into the course.

You will also notice that the unit standards do not (and are not intended to) provide detailed information on design features such as learning sequence, teaching methodology and specific activities and methods of assessment.

So while unit standards do give some guidance, their main function in relation to learning programmes is to inform developers of the outcomes, and the kinds of evidence that will illustrate those outcomes.

[Answer to FAQ 5, The NQF and Learning Programme, the NQF Gateway]