

# Skilled for the Future: Executive Summary

A Strategy for Developing Qualifications Solutions  
for the Health Sector: August 2011

# Executive Summary

## Introduction

This is the second qualifications strategy published by Skills for Health. The completion of the UK Vocational Qualifications Reform Programme has dramatically changed the vocational qualifications landscape. A lot of what was described in the first strategy (published in 2007) and subsequent Action Plans for the 4 countries has been realised. Great achievement can be evidenced through the availability of new qualifications for the health sector across all 4 UK countries.

**Realising the vision of a more skilled, flexible and productive workforce will only happen if the health sector has access to high quality education and training.**

As a licensed Sector Skills Council, Skills for Health has a role to play in articulating the health sector's needs for vocational qualifications now, and into the future, as it changes in response to political, social, demographic and technological advances.

## Strategic Aim

Skills for Health's ambition, and therefore **the aim of this strategy, is to ensure that health sector employers and learners have access to the best designed qualifications to underpin the development of a more skilled, flexible and productive workforce.**

## Strategic Objectives

1. The vocational qualifications 'offer' for those learners employed in the health sector will address not only the sector specific occupational skills gaps but also their wider skills gaps for example in literacy, numeracy, ICT, management and leadership, team working, research/innovation and enterprise.
2. Qualifications designed to prepare learners for working in the health sector will contribute to securing a supply of individuals with the necessary wider employability skills and underpinning knowledge of the health sector.
3. Characteristics of vocational qualifications so valued by employers, for example credit rating, levelling and inclusion in a national qualifications framework, will be restated.
4. The vocational qualifications 'offer' will meet the needs of the emerging workforce, particularly identified by employers as the Assistant Practitioner role.
5. Apprenticeship programmes will be designed in order that the health sector can maximise opportunities offered by Apprenticeships, at all levels, as a solution for addressing its skills gaps. The Apprenticeship programme will be on par with that offered by companies such as Rolls Royce and Airbus.
6. The vocational qualifications 'offer' will support progression from vocational to higher education.

**The 6 strategic objectives** are ambitious and to achieve them, Skills for Health will need to secure engagement with multiple stakeholders and maximise opportunities to access appropriate funding in order that it can put in place the necessary programmes of work. The success of this strategy is therefore subject to these conditions being met.



Please click the links below to open the action plans:

**Action Plan - England**

**Action Plan - Scotland**

**Action Plan - Wales**

**Action Plan - Northern Ireland**

The objectives will be further expressed in more detailed Action Plans to demonstrate the programmes of work which will need to be completed in the context of each of the 4 UK countries. These Action Plans will include timescales and more detailed dependencies associated with delivery of the programmes of work.

### **The Learning Design Principles (SfH 2011)**

Skills for Health Learning Design Principles were first published in 2006. Whilst the scope of this strategy has been described as having outcomes which relate to qualifications contained within the SCQF, QCF and CQFW, these principles have no such boundaries and may be applied on a much wider basis, including higher education. **As a result of extensive testing and implementation over a 5 year period, the Learning Design Principles (2011) have been refreshed and are re-stated** to underpin this strategy.

In shifting to an employer led model of design, it is important to note that the Learning Design Principles may not be appropriate to inform learning design for those learners in compulsory age education, preparing to enter the workplace when their role or workplace destination may be undetermined or for those learners undertaking learning for personal development reasons. Determining the purpose of the learning must therefore be the First Principle to underpin the design of any learning programme.

Skills for Health therefore commends the use of the First Principle in the design of qualifications on behalf of the health sector. When the purpose can be justified by employer-led design then **Skills for Health recommends the use of the Learning Design Principles 2011 across vocational and higher education.** These principles therefore underpin this qualifications strategy and are fully aligned with the policy shift towards greater employer involvement in determining the qualifications 'offer' as described in the skills strategies of all 4 UK countries.

Diagram 1. The Skills for Health Learning Design Principles (2011)

**First Principle:** The commissioner and designer must together understand the purpose of the learning.

*Where the demand is employer-led and based on service delivery the following principles apply:*

**Principle 2** The employer should be able to describe the role expressed in National Occupational Standards

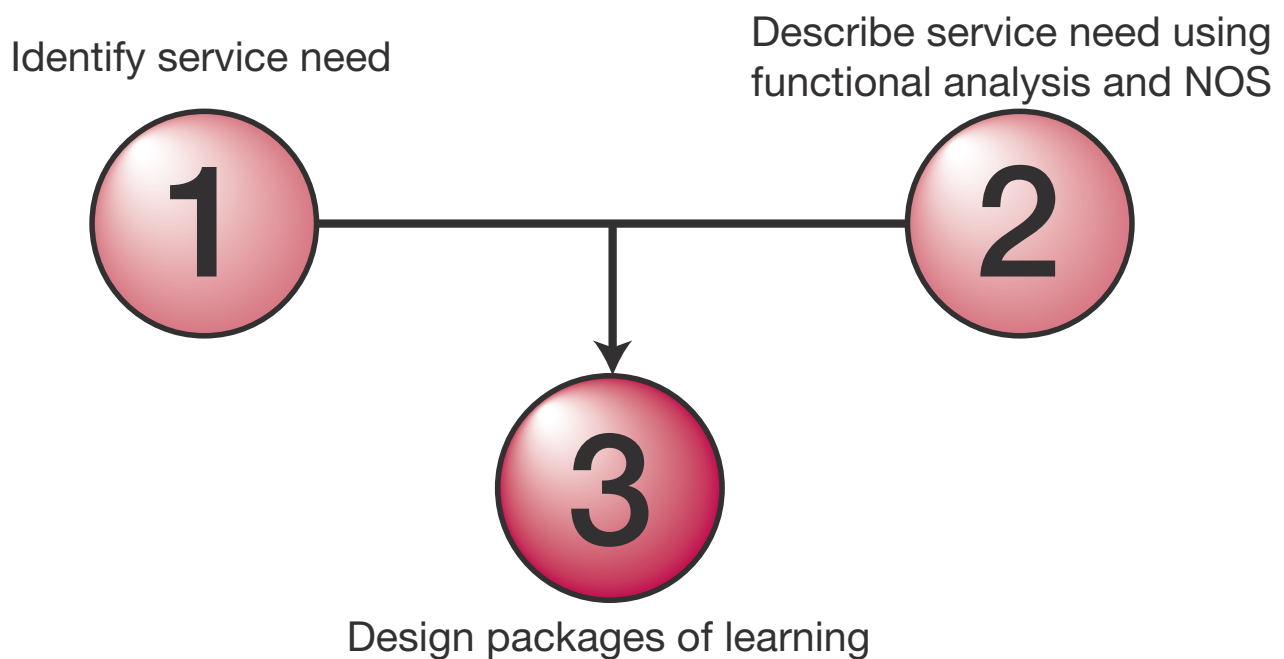
**Principle 3** The content of the learning output should be informed by the content of the NOS

**Principle 4** The design process should define the size and level of learning, transferability of credit and progression opportunities before packaging units/modules into qualifications

**Principle 5** When learning outputs are packaged into qualifications which confer occupational competence they should be assessed in the real work environment

**Principle 6** The learning outputs should be subject to rigorous quality enhancement

Diagram 2. The Learning Design Principles (SfH 2011)



## Context of the Strategy

On-going change in the health sector has been a feature in the 4 year period which has followed since the 2007 publication. There have been governmental changes as a result of elections in all 4 UK countries, major changes to the economic environment and the emergence of new policies which will continue to drive change in both the health sector and skills arena. This strategy is published at a time change and financial constraint and we recognise that this places limits on the levels of certainty to which we can forecast the outcomes described by this strategy. Nevertheless we believe that the current environment should not limit our ambition of ensuring that the best qualifications are available to the health sector to support the vision of a more skilled, flexible and productive workforce.

Outputs from this strategy specifically relate to vocational qualifications which are contained within national qualifications frameworks across the UK, including the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF), the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) and the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW). Qualifications delivered within Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are not explicitly considered however we are pleased to commend to HEIs the principles on which the strategy is built.

**Skills for Health is pleased to have received input and feedback from a wide range of stakeholders including employers, sector bodies and government departments.**

We will continue to work in close collaboration with all of our stakeholder partners to ensure that the strategic outputs are fit for purpose and to mitigate as far as possible against the risks associated with the on-going change and fiscal austerity which sets the context to this strategy.

Both health and skills are devolved matters. The economic downturn presents a very different environment compared to the previous years of growth experienced in the UK and the restrictions applied to the public purse present a 'double blow' to those involved in the skills agenda for the health sector. Each of the home nations has refreshed its skills strategy in response to the economic conditions and each is at different stages of developing its health strategy for the coming years.

The increased productivity and growth required for economic recovery are dependent, in part, on a skilled workforce; however, demographic changes will force the UK to up-skill and re-skill the existing workforce rather than relying solely on young people entering the workplace. Literacy, numeracy, ICT, leadership and management and enterprise skills are recognised by all UK countries as their current skills gaps.

**Developing technical skills at higher levels will be important into the future for securing competitive advantage in a global market.**

Without exception, Apprenticeships are cited in skills policies as the best way to realise this vision. However, each nation recognises that in this time of fiscal austerity, there will need to be a shift in expectations on the public purse which means that employers and learners will need to take greater responsibility in funding skills development.

The UK Sector Skills Assessment (SfH 2011) found that across all 4 UK countries there are current skills gaps in the health sector similar to that of the whole economy. **The health sector will need to become less reliant on migrant labour and will need to address specific skills gaps in literacy, numeracy, ICT, problem solving, leadership and management and general employability skills such as customer handling and team working.** These skills gaps were re-iterated in the results of sector engagement activities carried out as part of the development of this strategy.

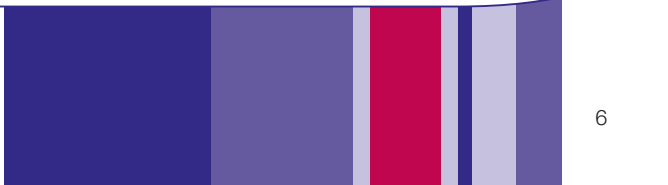
Over and above addressing the current skills gaps, the health sector cannot afford to ignore predictions on its future skills needs. The very nature of healthcare means that its workforce is made up of highly skilled and highly qualified individuals. **The need to 'deliver more for less' means that health employers are instigating new ways of working and often employing new or hybrid roles to carry out tasks which would have previously been carried out by others, predominantly nursing and allied health professionals.** There are also changes to the way that the health and social care sectors are expected to work, blurring the boundaries between sectors and traditional professional groups to ensure the delivery of more holistic services. The role of the support workforce is one which is evolving and is a major factor which will drive the need for re-skilling and up-skilling of the workforce.

Current and future skills gaps in the health sector are fully articulated in the Sector Skills Assessment (SfH 2011). Distilling these gaps shows us that the workforce needs to develop skills that are specific to health i.e. those occupational and technical skills specific to health care roles, and the more general skills which are applicable to the UK workforce. **Central to this qualifications strategy is ensuring that the future vocational qualifications 'offer' to the health sector can address not only the sector specific skills but also the wider skills gaps.**

Early indications suggest that the UK Vocational Qualifications Reform Programme has resulted in a qualifications 'offer' across the UK which has been well received by the health sector. Credit, credit transfer and the inclusion of qualifications within a regulatory framework are important to the sector. Preparing learners for working within the sector by equipping them with the wider employability skills is also very important to employers. **Developing qualifications to support the emerging Assistant Practitioner role is probably the biggest challenge in vocational qualifications faced at the time of publication of this strategy** and resonates firmly alongside the need to develop the higher level technical skills of the whole UK workforce. We must protect what is valued by sector employers in the current qualifications 'offer' whilst striving to design qualifications solutions to meet the future needs of the health sector workforce.



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