



Scottish Water: how one of Scotland's major utilities uses National Occupational Standards to streamline internal procedures and communicate with external bodies

Background

Scottish Water is the main provider of domestic water supply and sewage treatments to approximately 5m people in Scotland. Additionally Scottish Water is the main wholesaler for water in Scotland and directly employs 3,400 people throughout Scotland.

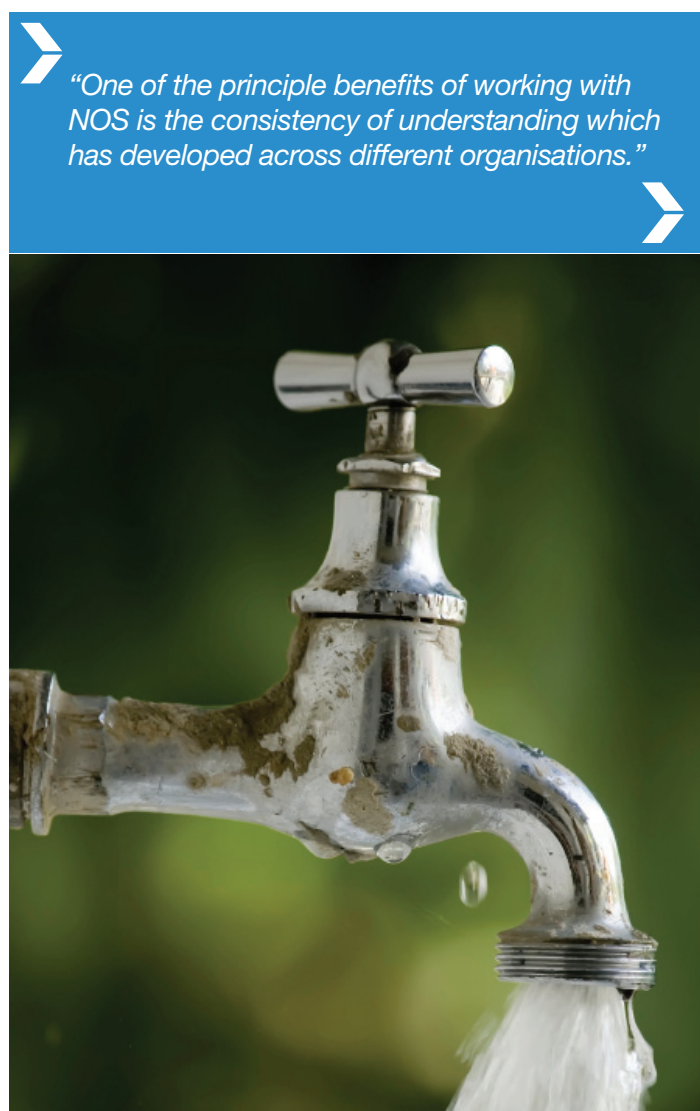
Scottish Water is the only publicly owned water company, created in 2002 by the merger of three previous water authorities in Scotland. Since Scottish Water was formed National Occupational Standards (NOS) have been used as part of a vocational qualification programme.

Working with NOS

Skills Development Manager, Paul Campbell, has worked for this major utility since it was created in 2002. As Paul states,

“NOS were first instigated at Scottish Water as a result of collaborative work we were involved in within the UK water industry for areas of skills, learning and development. Scottish Water is a Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) accredited organisation and we work closely with Energy and Utility Skills (EUS) as the Sector Skills Council for the water industry. EUS are responsible for helping to determine the National Occupational Standards for water industry occupations.”

Scottish Water works in consultation with EU Skills to develop national occupational standards and to ensure these align with water industry job roles. They jointly examine labour market information and use NOS to help create competency-based qualifications. These can be in the form of N/SVQs or alternatively as in-house competency-based qualifications.



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Forward planning and building on staff skills with NOS

Scottish Water use NOS in forecasting and forward planning for the skills and competencies that are required to maintain future operational capability. The HR & D team are mainly responsible for agreeing the NOS on behalf of Scottish Water although to do so they may call on subject matter experts within the business to help define what the required standards are for specific job roles.

One of the many ways that Scottish Water has used NOS is by aligning the areas of their skills, learning, development and practice within their internal business with the NOS. This is done by analysing their internal systems, processes and procedures and then designing solutions that integrate these with relevant areas of NOS. Paul says:

“We are always looking to pro-actively increase the skills and capabilities of our people at Scottish Water and utilising the consistency of the NOS frameworks helps us to do that by acting as a form of industry comparator and benchmark.”

How customers receive an improved service with NOS

Scottish Water also uses NOS to provide its customers with a positive customer experience to increase efficiency and to align with the regulatory requirements by using NOS to improve skills in areas where it is regulated and assessed.

“We also use NOS to look at the job roles that we need to recruit for in the business and for when we are future planning for apprenticeships and trainees,” states Paul. “We look at the knowledge and competency statements that exist within the roles and then examine them to see how they actually align with national standards. This can be particularly helpful when we are looking at the labour market information to see what’s happening in the external market with skills related to our operational roles.”

Improving the Scottish water industry with NOS

For Paul and his colleagues, not to mention Scottish Water’s customers, the effect of using NOS has been positive:

“One of the principle benefits of working with NOS is the consistency of understanding which has developed across different organisations. In relation to NOS, Scottish Water works with a range of different organisations and it is beneficial operationally when our learning processes, systems, activities and procedures can be fitted into a national context. The standards have been useful as a lever for change in our developmental activities, helping us to influence skills development and to positively improve our customers’ experience.”

Intelligence > Investment > Impact

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