

The Further Education National Training Organisation

The Further Education National Training Organisation (FENTO) is a National Training Organisation (NTO) and is responsible for setting standards for the further education sector in the UK. There are over 70 NTOs in the UK. However, this number is likely to decrease in March 2002 following a government review of NTOs.

NTOs are:

- set up and funded by the Department for Employment and Skills (DfES);
- UK-wide – they operate in Scotland, Northern Ireland, Wales and England;
- responsible for vocational training and education matters and delivering the UK skills agenda for the post-16 sector;
- responsible for researching workforce development plans – forecasting the future skills needs of the sector;
- standards-setting bodies – they produce all the occupational standards for those working in their sector;
- employer-led – in this case, principals and key stakeholders.

Occupational standards development

One of the key roles of FENTO is to develop occupational standards for the sector.

Standards are based on the roles carried out in an occupational area, e.g. teaching, governance, management etc.

Standards have many uses, and these include:

- the recruitment of staff – the standards can be used as the basis of recruitment details, selection procedures etc.;
- job descriptions – the standards can be used to formulate detailed job descriptions to support staff in their day-to-day work;
- for job appraisals – especially when linked to the job description – this way staff can identify their strengths and weaknesses, and areas for further development;
- as the basis of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) – this can be in-house training and development programmes, or accredited qualifications;
- for the development of nationally-recognised qualifications;
- for cross-college quality assurance.

FENTO aims to produce support materials to help colleges use all the standards. These materials will include toolkits, publications, CDROM materials, teaching materials and so on. Many of these materials will be produced in collaboration with colleges, trades unions, national and regional organisations and other NTOs.

The Qualification and Curriculum Authority (QCA) and the Scottish Qualification Authority (SQA) fund most standards development, so National/Scottish Vocational Qualifications (NVQs/SVQs) have to come from them. These are qualifications developed for the workplace and so are assessed through the person's everyday work.

The NTO produces an assessment strategy for awarding bodies and universities who wish to develop qualifications based on the standards to ensure that the qualifications are assessed appropriately.

FENTO is the standards-setting body for all those who work in further education and is developing the following standards:

- teaching and supporting learning,
- management,
- governance,
- clerks,
- support staff,
- ICT.

In addition to developing the standards and standards support materials, FENTO works with the sector to look at skills needs and development. When future skills needs are identified, FENTO will work with the sector and key stakeholders to develop strategies to meet these skills needs.

FENTO also provides information and advice to the sector and works with government departments and key agencies across the UK, e.g. Association of Colleges, Association of Scottish Colleges, Association of Northern Ireland Colleges, Fforwm, the association for colleges in Wales, QCA, SQA, Learning and Skills Development Agency etc.

New qualifications arrangements for England – background

FENTO has been closely involved in the development and implementation of the new qualifications framework for further education teachers in England. From September 2001, there will be a new qualifications requirement for all further education teachers in England. The background to this can be found in a range of Government reports:

- Green Paper “*The Learning Age*” signalled government’s intention to introduce new qualifications framework;
- Followed by White Paper “*Learning to Succeed*” – about skills and qualifications. Introduced Learning Skills Council (LSC);
- Blunkett’s speech at AoC conference – “*Colleges of Excellence and Innovation*”.

The new qualifications framework changes the emphasis from driving down costs to raising standards, improving skills and productivity from sector and the retention and achievement of students. FENTO research demonstrates that 67% of further education lecturers want professional recognition through Qualified Teacher in Further Education status.

Teacher training in England – key proposals

The main features of the proposed qualifications for further education teachers from September 2001 are as follows:

For new staff:

- all new, unqualified teachers will have to gain a relevant qualification – this will be a statutory requirement and is enshrined in the Statutory Instrument;

- full-time and fractional staff will have to acquire a relevant qualification within 2-4 years;
- part-time staff to achieve a relevant qualification in up to 2 years, depending on their status;
- DfES to fund qualifications and CPD with £80m in year one, £95m in year two, year 3 to be decided;
- FENTO will endorse all qualifications as being mapped to FENTO standards and quality assured;
- there may be a probationary/induction period for newly-qualified staff.

For existing staff:

- colleges will receive up to 50% matched funding from the funding agency to support existing unqualified staff to gain relevant qualifications

Other points

The new qualifications framework also includes teachers of basic skills to adults who will have to achieve specialist qualifications in literacy and numeracy. In these specialist qualifications, the newly-developed subject specifications for literacy and numeracy will be underpinned by the FENTO standards for teaching and supporting learning.

A proposed National Qualification for Principals will be compulsory from 2002 based on FENTO Management standards, and a two-year induction programme for new principals is planned for September 2002.

Implications

The proposed changes have a number of implications for FENTO and the sector:

- do the universities and awarding bodies and colleges have the capacity to provide the necessary training?
- is there enough funding to support the new qualifications framework –ie- will there be adequate funds for staffing and resources?
- will there be UK/European/world-wide recognition of the teaching qualifications? It is important to maintain international links to ensure information is exchanged.

Finally, some say this is the start of the **re-professionalisation** of further education teachers as the turmoil of the last decade has so undermined their position (for example, further education teachers' pay has fallen well below that of school teachers).

“It is time to attach a proper value to the further education teacher’s professional role, as a teacher, and to address the future of a sector which has yet to receive the kind of support and attention it deserves.”

Jocelyn Robson, PCET Research briefing (University of Greenwich), Volume 2, No 5.