

**The Development of  
National Occupational Standards for Intercultural Working  
in the UK**

## **Abstract**

This paper reports on three issues arising from a project led by CILT (2007-8) to develop ‘National Occupational Standards for Intercultural Working; Standards for working with people from different countries or diverse cultures’ in the UK: what makes them distinctive from other standards, how they realise intercultural competence and how they meet workplace expectations. Drawing on an extensive evidence-base (O’Regan & MacDonald, 2007; Witana, 2008) it argues that: these standards are distinctive in their relationship with other suites, the range of their application, and the ways in which personal attributes are exemplified and embedded within performance outcomes; they reflect a multi-dimensional approach to competencies which include personal qualities such as reflection, self-development, critical thinking and ethics; and the standards are described in a way which is credible and achievable in the workplace. For example, one pivotal unit of the standards focuses on self-exploration and performance improvement around the areas of inclusive working practices, effective communication and challenging stereotypes.

**Keywords:** CILT, occupational standards, NVQ, competence, intercultural working, intercultural competence, INCA.

**Words:** 7,147/7,000

## **1. Introduction**

Over the past 20 years a comprehensive national framework of occupational standards has been developed within the UK. These standards provide benchmarks for assessing individual performance in the workplace, as well as for designing qualifications, recruiting personnel and devising training materials. Within an increasingly multicultural UK society and internationally mobile workforce, there is a growing need for the national development of intercultural competence in the workplace. Although training programmes in intercultural communication have become more numerous in many areas of employment, until 2008 there was no set of occupational standards in intercultural working in the UK, nor was there a nationally recognised definition of what it means to be interculturally competent in the workplace.

Between 2004 and 2005 CILT, the National Centre for Languages, reported on the feasibility of developing a set of National Occupational Standards for Intercultural Working (NOS in ICW). In particular, it reviewed and re-evaluated the Intercultural Competence Assessment framework (INCA, 2005). The recommendations from this preliminary study were adopted; and work to research, evaluate and develop the NOS in ICW was started by CILT in 2007. The aims of this project were: to research the latest approaches and thinking in intercultural skills; to raise awareness and consult on the development of NOS in ICW with employers and key providers; to re-evaluate the draft NOS framework developed in the feasibility study in light of current research; and to develop full and detailed NOS in the requisite format to meet the needs of employers and training providers. The standards were approved by the UK Commission for Employment and Skills in September 2008.

This paper reports on three issues arising from the (2007-8) standards development project. The first issue is how the standards describe ‘softer’ skills and personal attributes that previous sets of standards have found difficult to define. The second is how intercultural skills and knowledge can best be defined for the workplace. The third is how the project team [grappled with, consulted on and ultimately] identified elements of best practice in intercultural working. Specifically, the paper will consider the

following questions relating to the NOS in ICW: first, what is distinctive about the standards in comparison to other standards; second, how do the standards realise intercultural competence; and third, how does the standards' realisation of intercultural competence meet workplace expectations?

## **2. National Occupational Standards**

National Occupational Standards (NOS) provide the benchmarks for the National and Scottish Vocational Qualifications (NVQ/SVQ) in the UK. Standards are regulated by Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) and Standards Setting Bodies (SSBs) in different occupational areas, most recently under the aegis of the UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES). At the time of first draft (October, 2008), there were 656 different suites of standards, covering 79 different occupational groups (available at <http://www.ukstandards.co.uk/>) and VQs had been developed in 44 different countries (Coles, 2004; Hyland, 1998; Mulder et al, 2007; Prais, 1989, 1991; Wilkins, 2002; Young, 2003; Young, 2008).

### *2.1. Competence*

Two different meanings of competence have been distinguished: disposition and capacity (Carr, 1993). Disposition refers to a more reductive, atomistic form of evaluation which entails the labelling of particular abilities 'to mark episodes of causal effectiveness'; capacity refers to a more holistic form of evaluation, whereby individuals are evaluated in relation to their aspirations to realize particular professional standards (Carr, 1993, p. 256-7). The idea of competence as disposition leads to standards being conceived of as an instrument of assessment, while the idea of competence as capacity leads to standards being conceived of more as an aid to personal development (Stewart and Hamlin, 1992a). Early critics argued that the early design and implementation of NOS tended towards the more reductive version of competence (Ashworth and Saxton, 1990; Hodkinson, 1992; Hyland, 1994). However, in later models (e.g. Cheetham and Chivers, 1996, 1998, 2001, 2005) and within the NOS in ICW, the original functionalist idea of competence has evolved to encompass not only knowledge but also personal reflection and ethics.

A key issue was the apparent focus of N/SVQs upon observable evidence of experience, which tended to confine assessment in the N/SVQ framework to performance rather than knowledge and understanding. This functionalist approach underpinning the NOS framework (Jessup, 1991) was criticized as being derived from the principles of behaviourist psychology (Hevey, 1997) leading to a corresponding narrowness of focus (Hyland, 1994; Velde, 1999). First, the framework emphasised specific, predefined skills (Velde, 1999, 439) and technical ‘competencies’ (Thomson 1990, 179) which neither entailed the systematic acquisition of knowledge (Smithers, 1993; Winterton et al 2006) nor the development of communications, group techniques, and problem-solving skills (Thomson 1990, 179). Second, a rigid focus on task functions excluded the role of the worker (Stewart & Hamlin, 1994) and simplified the complex relationships between workers and organisations, and amongst other spheres of social life (Jones & Moore, 1995, 90). Third, the approach was inappropriate for the preparation and development of professional spheres such as teaching and business management (Hyland, 1995, 50). There might also have been some confusion in the conceptualisation of occupational standards across different workplace contexts (Stewart and Hamlin, 1992a).

However, ways of working towards broader, more holistic conceptualisations of competence within NOS have evolved, mostly in the professional and educational spheres. Within the ‘competency-based’ approach adopted by managerial and professional occupations, the personal characteristics of employees now receive more emphasis (Winterton et al, 2006). In their designation of the caring professions, Hodkinson and Issitt (1995) suggest that skills be integrated with the knowledge, understanding and values that ‘reside within the person who is the practitioner’ (149). Finally, Eraut (1994) proposes that the evaluation of the ‘capability’ of professionals requires a more developmental approach, to acknowledge the potential for progression along the entire trajectory of lifelong learning (219-220).

One model which appears to integrate many of the aspects of capacity with that of disposition has been developed by Cheetham and Chivers (1996, 1998, 2001, 2005). This combines four dimensions of competence under a set of superordinate ‘metacompetencies’. First, a *cognitive dimension* is constituted from different types of knowledge: technical, theoretical and specialist; tacit and practical; procedural and contextual; as well as ‘application’ (knowing how to transfer skills). Second, a *functional dimension* comprises occupation-specific, ‘process/organisational/management’, mental and physical competence. Third, a *personal dimension* consists of ‘social/vocational’ and intra-professional competence. Finally, an *ethical dimension* represents both personal and a professional orientations towards values. These four dimensions of competence are governed by a fifth, overarching set of ‘generic, high-level competencies which appear to transcend other competencies’ (Cheetham and Chivers, 1998, 268). These *meta-competencies* include: communication, creativity, problem-solving, learning and self-development, mental agility and analysis, as well as reflection. The very nature of intercultural competence described below would suggest standards in this domain should not only be multi-dimensional, but also incorporate higher level competencies as in this model.

## 2.2. *Workplace practice*

Early commentators also claimed that occupational standards were insufficiently grounded in workplace practice; however, more recently a range of interpretive methodologies have been proposed in order to develop and evaluate standards while taking into account the social and cultural context of workers in different sectors.

Standards were initially viewed as being unduly influenced by two groups of stakeholders (Williams, 1999: 216): government officials and training professionals (Bates, 1995; Field, 1995; Stewart and Hamlin, 1992a). Stewart and Hamlin also claim that employers' representatives can endorse standards from the standpoint of normative public policy that they would not necessarily deploy in their own organisations (27). Arguably, this lead to a dislocation of outcomes from what actually takes place in the workplace, resulting in a reluctance to give credence to broad-based

skills (Prais, 1991). This dislocation was also influenced by the multiplicity of lead bodies involved in the original production and dissemination of occupational standards (Matlay, 1999: 133-4), as well as the complexity of N/SVQ assessment.

A tension has also been noted regarding the extent to which standards can specify the workplace contexts in which particular functions are realized (Norris, 1991). On the one hand, standards attempt to specify the precise conditions under which performance will take place. On the other hand, standards also claim to be generic and by implication applicable across all workplace contexts in a particular occupation. Evidence suggests, however, that at least within managerial occupations ‘the proportion of commonality between particular job domains is likely to be less than 50 per cent (Stewart and Hamlin, 1992a, 26). This raises the alternative problem as to how to apply a particular standard if it is realized in an occupational context not specified within that standard.

More recently the ways in which professional competence is located in the workplace have been investigated using interpretive methodologies (Sandberg, 1994, 2000; Dall'Alba & Sandberg, 1996) derived from phenomenography (Marton, 1981; Marton and Booth, 1997). A phenomenographic approach builds up a picture of professional competence by investigating the ways in which individuals ascribe meaning to their workplace practices. This ‘interpretive-relational perspective’ (Velde, 1999) does not view competence as a set of attributes which pre-exist individuals’ engagement with the workplace, but maintains that competence is realised through the ‘conceptions’ individuals have of their work. Thus, in studies of clerical and administrative workers, Velde has also called for a ‘multi-faceted and holistic’ conception of competence (Gerber & Velde, 1996; Velde, 1997, 21). Such a model would be predicated on the interaction between workers and their professional contexts, rather than from *a priori* behavioural, cognitive or functional attributes of the individual. Against this, we concede that Chivers and Cheetham’s model described in 2.1 remains based deductively on *a priori* categories; however it does appear to capture the range of attributes which for which early N/SVQ critics clamoured.

### 3. Assessing intercultural communication

There is a range of assessment tools in intercultural communication which are referenced to different models of conceptual competence derived from psychology and the social sciences. One concern at the outset of the project was whether the (2005) INCA framework should be the main point of reference for developing the NOS in ICW. Initial responses from employers indicated that they considered the INCA definitions and descriptors too academic to be understood and easily applied.

#### 3.1. *Conceptual models of intercultural competence*

The INCA framework draws on the model of the Common European Framework (CEFR) and the UK NOS in Languages. This identifies six component skills in intercultural competence: tolerance for ambiguity, behavioural flexibility, communicative awareness, knowledge discovery, respect for otherness and empathy (Appendix A). Each skill is then subdivided into three constituent elements - motivation, skill/knowledge, and behaviour; these are realised at three different ability levels - basic, intermediate and full.

Apart from INCA, other conceptual models of intercultural competence (Humphrey, 2007) include: Ruben's Seven Dimensions of Intercultural Communicative Competence (1976); Spitzberg and Cupach's Component Model (1984); Bennett & Deane's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (1993); Van den Boom's Model of Individual Intercultural Communicative Competence (1999); Byram's '*Savoirs*' for the Council of Europe (1997); and Fantini's Awareness Attitudes Skills Knowledge (A-ASK) framework (2000). For the most part, these models conceive of competence derived from cognitive or behaviourist principles along the same lines as the early N/SVQs frameworks. They identify sets of personal attributes, knowledge and behavioural competencies which persons would be expected to display in order to be considered interculturally competent. For example, Ruben et al (1976) point to personal qualities such as respect for others, the ability to be non-judgemental, empathy, motivation, the ability to deal with uncertainty and the acceptance of the non-universality of cultural



values. Spitzberg & Cupach (1984) emphasise effectiveness and appropriacy in communication, so that a person who is interculturally competent would be expected to be able to identify goals, assess resources, predict responses, choose workable strategies, and recognise and understand cultural expectations and constraints. Byram (1997) and Fantini (2000) draw attention to the attributes of curiosity, openness, flexibility, patience, interest, humour, and awareness. However, on analysis (Humphrey, 2007; O'Regan and MacDonald, 2007), there seemed to be considerable agreement across the conceptual models as to the essential attributes for successful intercultural communication. Moreover, when set alongside the attributes described in the INCA framework, such as tolerance for ambiguity, behavioural flexibility, communicative awareness, INCA encapsulated nearly all of them.

### *Assessment tools*

Over 100 assessment tools can be identified that have been designed to measure intercultural competence (Humphrey, 2007; O'Regan and MacDonald, 2007) - mostly developed by commercial intercultural training providers. For the purposes of this project, a sample of sixteen tools was compared and categorised according to whether they assessed intercultural competence through psychometric measurement or through performative behaviour (Table 1).

*Table 1: Assessment tools for intercultural competence*

<b>Assessment tool</b>	<b>Developer</b>	<b>Psychometric</b>	<b>Performative</b>
Intercultural Development Inventory	Bennett & Hammer	Psychometric	
International Profiler	WorldWork Ltd.	Psychometric	
Language On-Line Portfolio Project	LOLIPOP EU	Psychometric	
Global Intelligence Model	Eun Y. Kim	Psychometric	
Process Communication Model	Kahler	Psychometric	
Intercultural Readiness Check	Trompenaars, Hampden, Turner	Psychometric	
Intercultural Assessment Check	Van der Zee	Psychometric	
Discovery Personal Profile	Insights Group	Psychometric	
Behavioural Assessment Scale for Intercultural Competence	Koester & Olebe	Psychometric	
Cross-cultural Capability Inventory	Kelley & Meyers	Psychometric	
Framework of International/Intercultural Competencies	George Mason Management School		Performative
Pro-Group Tolerance Scale	ProGroup Inc.		Performative
Intercultural Competence Framework	Catteeuw		Performative
International Management Assessment	LTS Training & Consultancy; Théry International Management		Performative
Intercultural Competence for Professional Mobility Project	ICOPROMO, Council of Europe	Psychometric	Performative
INCA Framework	INCA	Psychometric	Performative

Psychometric measurement is usually derived from discrete item questionnaires; responses can then be used to produce a profile for an assessor to score or for self-reflection and evaluation. Profiling tools are more common in business settings and self-reflection tools in educational and professional contexts. Psychometric tools find favour with employers because of their capacity to produce clearly defined and targeted outcomes (e.g. Global Diversity Gap. Inc., 2007; Workforce Development Group, available at <http://www.workforcedevelopmentgroup.com/>). By comparison performative tools are more qualitative, based on the observation of individuals' behaviour on real-time tasks. These can involve role playing, individual and team activities, problem solving, and in some cases interactions with specially-trained actors.

On analysis (O'Regan and MacDonald, 2007), the INCA framework not only appeared to reflect and replicate the range of competencies found in the other conceptual models and assessment tools, but it also included aspects of both psychometric and performative assessment techniques. However, the majority of intercultural competence assessment tools reviewed seemed to focus on the requirements for cross-cultural rather than the multicultural encounters which are increasingly a feature of the workplace in advanced post-industrial societies. Along with ICOPROMO, INCA was among the few assessment models to distinguish between cross-cultural and multicultural working. It was therefore decided to retain the INCA framework as the principal point of reference for the development of the NOS in ICW.

#### **4. National Occupational Standards in Intercultural Working**

This section will draw on an extensive evidence base to describe three issues which arose out of the drafting of NOS in relation to their application to intercultural working: what makes them distinctive, how they realise intercultural competence and how well they met workplace expectations.

#### 4.1. *Evidence base*

The NOS project on which this paper is based adopted a pragmatic, mixed-methods approach incorporating elements of both interpretivist and positivist methodologies (O'Regan & MacDonald, 2007; Witana, 2008). It combined analysis of the latest intercultural research, theory and practice (Humphrey, 2007; O'Regan & MacDonald, 2007) with both quantitative and qualitative data collection, and incorporated extensive face-to-face encounters with participants in an iterative process of consultation which took place in two phases over 18 months. A heterogeneous steering group also met regularly throughout the project. In Phase 1 (January-July 2008), initial consultation through interviews and five focus groups were held in Cardiff, Glasgow, Birmingham and London with employers, sector bodies and training providers led to a draft NOS framework. Feedback on how well the draft framework met the training and employment requirements of relevant employment sectors was collected through a quantitative online questionnaire distributed to employers of intercultural workers, employment sector bodies and intercultural training providers.. Detailed empirical findings ( $n=103$ ) are reported in O'Regan and MacDonald (2007). In Phase 2 (August 2007-July 2008), consultation on the draft standards was carried out through a combination of online questionnaire and face-to face consultation across the UK. The second online questionnaire was qualitative in design and was emailed to 750 respondents made up of employers, employment sector bodies, training providers, steering group members, participants in earlier consultations, and other interested parties across the UK. While only 47 questionnaires were returned, 168 respondents took part in a second round of face-to-face consultation consisting of expert interviews, presentations at third party meetings and dedicated focus groups. Consultation participation was entirely voluntary and consensual; responses were stored securely by the CILT project team and their consultants. Detailed empirical findings are reported in Witana (2008).

#### 4.2. *Distinctiveness of standards*

Six main units set out the NOS for ICW, as well as one template unit which can be used to embed ICW within roles in other standards. These do not profess to convey any one job in its totality but are rather an overall description of the range of intercultural encounters that take place in the workplace. Thus any

user will probably find one or two units from the standards relevant, while other sets of standards will describe the remaining aspects of their particular role. These are therefore cross-sectoral standards that can apply in part to a person in any working situation.

#### 4.2.1. Range of application

One of the most distinctive aspects of the NOS for ICW is the range of people to whom they apply. There are many sets of standards, such as management and leadership, business enterprise, customer service, language and administration, that already apply across sectors. Likewise, the standards for ICW apply across the entire range of sectors including construction, local government, hospitality and tourism, passenger transport, and sport and recreation. As well as for private and public sector organisations, throughout the development process the importance of ICW was also flagged up for voluntary, aid, and humanitarian work. Early in the project, consultation with employers and sector representatives identified a wide range of roles for which ICW is deemed important. Specific mention was made of instructors, trainers and coaches, tax collectors, librarians, receptionists, sales staff, nurses, play-workers, conference advisers, drivers, local government staff responsible for working with local communities, and those responsible for marketing or public relations.

Additionally, the standards for ICW apply to those carrying out cross-sectoral activities. Most specifically these include those responsible for other workers such as those in line management and supervisory roles, project management and human resource and training roles. In addition, the standards apply to all “levels” of people in hierarchical workplace structures. Skills and knowledge in ICW are as necessary for those on the shop floor as those for involved in senior management and strategy, for those involved in commissioning work as for the sub-contractors and freelancers that they commission.

The standards can also be used in a variety of different geographical locations. They describe ICW for those who are both in the same and in different locations as well as those with whom they are working, whether in the UK, in the wider European context or worldwide. Thus they can be used in the UK from

those working in multicultural teams, negotiating with multicultural clients or engaging with migrant workers, through to those interfacing with people and organisations in the wider European context and worldwide. Since misunderstandings between people from different cultures can occur when using email, letter or telephone just as much as when working face to face, the full range of roles that engage with mediated communication are taken into account. These include UK-based telephonists, call-centre workers and those involved in telesales; as well as workers who communicate with counterparts, customers or suppliers in the UK and in other countries.

#### 4.2.2. Relationship with other suites of standards

As mentioned above, ICW is particularly important for those involved in the management of people. With standards relating to people-management already widely used, it was decided that new units should not be created to focus these roles on ICW as this would result in poorly used units and could risk sidelining intercultural working. The view was taken that agreement should be reached with the originating bodies to 'enhance' already existing units with some well-placed ICW statements. This would result in the adoption of ICW statements in all the sets of standards that include these existing management units, and lead more effectively to the mainstreaming of intercultural working.

Examination of the current NOS for managers within large, medium and small businesses identified those pertinent to ICW units. CILT then worked with the originating bodies - the Management Standards Centre (MSC) and the Small Firms Enterprise Development Initiative (SFEDI) - to develop, test and agree ICW statements to add to these standards. For example, the ICW statements 'How differences and similarities between your own and others' cultural behaviour and use of language may change or affect their understanding and expectations' will now feature in any set of standards that wishes to represent management in their sector by adoption of these mainstream units. These units are signposted in the Standards Framework Overview Diagram (Appendix B) as well as within each relevant ICW standards unit.

Early on in the project, a mapping of the ICW content of all other existing NOS was carried out. This identified that many sectors already have ICW units, although they tend to focus on the implementation of equality and diversity policies such as ‘Promote equality of opportunity and diversity in your area of responsibility’ (Management Standards Centre, 2007). Consultation with the SSCs and SSBs identified that a method of embedding the principles of effective ICW within their own standards would be a useful tool. A template unit was therefore developed to embed ICW within a specific aspect of a job - such as customer interaction, team working or supplier management – rather than importing one of the six ICW units.

The template unit covers those aspects of ICW that are fundamental and key to any industry, context or work activity for individuals working with people from other countries or cultures. This unit has been designed so that it can be extended and adapted to embed effective ICW within any work activity. This is different to importing a unit because additional content can be added to the core of ICW content. The unit title and unit summaries may be changed and the performance outcomes and knowledge and understanding may be renamed and substantially added to. This means that each time it will effectively become a completely different, non-transferable unit which is owned by the importing body; although there will be a common thread of ICW practice throughout all versions.

Early in the project, employers were asked what format they would like the standards to take in order to make them practical and easy to use. They specifically asked for examples to be included to clarify meaning and position the standards in real work situations. Examples of the knowledge statements in particular were trialled and proved extremely popular. These were therefore augmented throughout the remaining consultation phases of the project. The published standards have examples for nearly every knowledge statement, all of which have been suggested by people involved in intercultural working. These appear in brackets and follow the words ‘for example’ so that they are clearly identifiable and have no ‘and’ before the penultimate item so they are not seen as an exhaustive list. Thus the knowledge

statement, ‘How differences and similarities between your own and other people’s cultural behaviour and expectations may change or affect business ethics, decision making, communication, financial transactions, working procedures and relationship-building’ has the examples, ‘timekeeping, timescales, decision-making processes, perceptions of status and role, attitudes to men or women, communication styles and conventions, business relationships, business meeting conventions, attitudes to emotion and levels of formality and hierarchy’. These allow the statements to remain outcome-focused without actually suggesting a particular way of achieving something. Any specific instances can appear as one of many examples and, therefore, not as an assessable part of the standards.

Consecutive drafts of the standards contained various sections that tried to capture those things that featured so highly in conventional models of intercultural communication described above. They included characteristics such as acceptance of others’ beliefs, respect and empathy for others’ views, curiosity about different cultural practices, openness to new perspectives, tolerance of ambiguity, flexibility in how things should be done, and keenness to work with different people. These sections, alternately called ‘personal attitudes’ and ‘personal attributes’, appeared as a main part of each standard alongside the performance outcomes and knowledge and understanding sections. During consultation, while many users liked the concepts that they contained and found them fundamental to intercultural working, more expert respondents expressed uncertainty as to their place and purpose. Subsequently, these concepts became embedded firmly within the performance outcomes of the ICW standards. Later feedback has shown that this has made the performance outcomes stronger and more focused on the fundamentals of ICW whilst keeping them firmly rooted in the workplace.

#### *4.3. Realising intercultural competence*

The NOS in ICW have been designed to be as far as possible appropriate for anybody from any country or culture regardless of whether they were born and educated in the UK, or whether they live and work there or in another country. The standards were trialled with people from many different countries and cultural backgrounds, and checked to ensure that they do not imply any particular ethnocentric methods

of doing things. For example the phrase ‘depersonalising an incident’ was removed because it contained the assumption that depersonalisation is a good thing, which may not be a universally accepted principle, when one looks to an international context.

In drafting these standards it was regarded as particularly important to focus upon shared common ground rather than upon ‘otherness’ in intercultural working. Feedback partway through the project expressed concern that the standards presupposed cultural difference and were in danger of elevating difference above shared human attributes. One aim that emerged was to enable the construction of common ground that could be used either to tease out shared values from seemingly diverse world views, or to break down the segregation that can exist between groups where individuals cluster around colleagues from similar backgrounds. For example, Unit 4, knowledge statement 16 reads:

Ways to improve working relationships between team members. (For example managing conflicts or disagreements, teasing out common values from seemingly diverse views, building a respect for diversity, breaking down segregation between groups, assuring all team members of team processes that are fair to all, allocating time for people to get to know each other, organising sports or social events).

In this way the benefits of finding shared or common ground were included in statements relating to knowledge and understanding, as well as by consistently referring to similarities wherever differences are mentioned.

Another issue in drafting the standards was to find terminology that did not actually create otherness. Phrases used in early drafts of the standards to describe the diverse positioning of participants within ICW included: ‘people from different countries or cultures’; ‘people from countries or cultures other than your own’, and ‘people from a range of diverse countries or cultural backgrounds’. Each of these phrases was contested in the process of consultation and in discussions with the project steering group. Eventually it was agreed to use the phrase ‘people from different countries or diverse cultures’



consistently throughout the standards. In addition, an introductory statement was added to each standard to say that they apply to ‘anybody from any country or culture who is working with people from another country or culture’. One concern expressed about early drafts of the standards was that the onus should not be placed on members of one particular culture having to find out about and adapt to members of another particular culture. This is reflected in Unit 2, performance outcome (g): ‘Agree to decision making, communication and working processes that meet your own and other organisations’ needs and take account of the key differences and similarities in working practices, values and attitudes of the countries or cultures involved’. Similarly, while there is no requirement within the standards to have foreign language skills, an awareness of language and how it can contribute to intercultural misunderstanding is present throughout all parts of the standards. They also address the implications of working in one’s mother tongue when all other colleagues are working in a second language.

In early drafts, the standards explicitly promoted openness and implied that people should volunteer attitudes and beliefs which embraced the values of their particular culture. However, this led to a concern that the expression of cultural attitudes and beliefs may not be sensitively delivered or even be appropriate to the workplace. This led to this proposal being dropped from subsequent drafts of the standards. However, one particular statement was added prominently as Unit 1 performance outcome (a): ‘Recognise your own values, beliefs and cultural conventions and how they affect your perceptions and expectations in work situations’. This statement requires individuals to become aware of how their beliefs may affect their perceptions and expectations in work situations.

Personal attitudes have not been specifically developed within the standards, but have been embedded within descriptors of working practices associated with intercultural working. These include references to emotional intelligence, acceptance of others’ beliefs, respect and empathy for others’ views, curiosity about different cultural practices, openness to new perspectives, tolerance of ambiguity, flexibility in how things should be done and keenness to work with different people. For example, Unit 1, performance outcome (d) reads: ‘Challenge and adapt your own assumptions about the behaviour of

people from different countries or diverse cultures’. Although conflict management and management of change are both necessary skills for effective intercultural working, they do not appear as separate areas within the standards. However, certain performance outcomes do require an individual to deal with and manage both conflict and change. For example, Unit 4, performance statement (e) reads: ‘Manage the team in a way that meets team objectives while showing flexibility towards team members’ cultural needs’; and Unit 4, performance statement (i) reads: ‘Challenge any stereotypes, prejudice or racism expressed by other people about yourself or others in the team’.

#### 4.4. *Meeting workplace expectations*

Any set of standards should reflect practices that are credible and achievable in the workplace. In the iterative drafting process, some tensions arose between certain descriptions of ICW in the draft standards and what was actually perceived to take place in the workplace. These related in particular to the nature of intercultural working, knowledge about co-workers from different backgrounds and cultures, and issues of flexibility and conformity in the workplace.

##### 4.4.1. The nature of intercultural working

Foundational thinking relating to general competence (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1986), intercultural communication (INCA, 2005) and N/SVQs (Eraut, 1994) suggests that individuals move through different competence levels. However, a tension remains between this and the original requirement for occupational standards to define effective performance in a particular place at a particular point in time (Jessup, 1991). Extensive feedback on potential applications of the standards gleaned during the consultation process led to a more pragmatic definition of the nature of intercultural competence which could reasonably be expected in workplace situations.

In particular, this suggests the need to build in pointers for the progression of ICW skills that emphasise the importance of workplace requirements and objectives while maintaining opportunities equally for all members of the workplace. For example, Unit 1 ‘Develop your skills to work effectively with people

from different countries or diverse cultures’ was written in a much more developmental style than the other units in this suite (Appendix C). This unit is pivotal to the standards as it is the one unit that will apply to anybody regardless of sector, level or type of job. It focuses on self-exploration, reflection and performance improvement around the areas of inclusive working practices, effective communication and challenging assumptions and stereotypes. In addition, a section on personal qualities was developed which appears in the summary for each unit as a non-mandatory part of the standard.

#### 4.4.2. Knowledge about co-workers from different backgrounds and cultures

As well as skills, standards in ICW necessarily focus on the knowledge that intercultural workers should have about their co-workers from other countries or cultures. However, early on in the drafting process, the scope of this statement was expanded ambitiously to require intercultural workers to know about the ‘values, ethical roots, beliefs, faith, cultural conventions, perceptions and expectations’ of their co-workers. While this statement would indeed embrace many of the ideals of intercultural communication, in the consultation process it received more comments than any other part of the draft standards. For example, one respondent wrote:

There is no indication of how the person might do this. Is it by asking the persons or groups they wish to understand better? The danger here is that even if they did this asking, any existing stereotypes and prejudices may simply be strengthened or confirmed. There is an underlying assumption here that obtaining cultural information is the ‘cure’, however people can receive logical, rational information and still persist with their prejudices and stereotypes, and thus their behaviours will not necessarily change.

Concerns that prejudicial knowledge about co-workers could lead to stereotyping were expressed by a good number of other respondents.

In response to such comments, the approved and published standards situate the ideals of intercultural communication more within more specific workplace requirements. The final version of Unit 1,

knowledge statement 1, relating to intercultural knowledge of co-workers now reads: ‘How differences and similarities between your own and other people’s cultural behaviour may change or affect attitudes, expectations, communication and working practices’. Moreover, reference is made to specific areas in the workplace where cultural practices may differ such as timekeeping, timescales and gendered attitudes. In this respect the standards no longer aspire to the ideal of a totally integrated intercultural workforce, but rather to the more manageable goal that intercultural workers ‘get along together’ in a form of mutual civil understanding.

In a similar vein, early drafts of the standards presented a positive, non-conflictual view of intercultural working. This was also criticised for not reflecting the discrimination and racism that are often found in many organisations. The standards were subsequently amended to include specific mention of stereotypes and prejudice. Although some feedback on these later drafts stated that the focus on removing problems and challenges presented a negative model of interculturalism, the majority of respondents supported this focus as more representative of real-world conditions of intercultural working.

#### 4.4.3. Flexibility and conformity in the workplace

Underpinning the NOS in ICW is the expectation that the needs of the organisation and the laws of the country in which people are operating must be met. Thus, while the standards promote flexible working approaches and open-mindedness, they also focus on objectives that apply to the environment within which the individual is working. This balance is displayed in Unit 4 performance outcome 4, ‘Manage the team in a way that meets team objectives while showing flexibility towards team members’ cultural needs’. Similarly, in some places soft terms such as ‘motivate’ and ‘encourage’ have been used whilst in others much stronger terms such as ‘expect’ have been found to be more appropriate. Further suggestions were made within early drafts of the standards about how to make the workplace more attractive to people from different countries or diverse cultures. However, consultation indicated that this

was in danger of contravening equal opportunities legislation. The standards now present these concepts whilst making it clear that flexibility should be offered to all.

## **5. Discussion**

This paper has considered three issues that arose from the development of NOS for ICW: what makes them distinctive, how they have realised intercultural competence and how the standards' realisation of intercultural competence meets workplace expectations.

### *5.1. Distinctiveness of standards*

On the argument set out in the previous section, three aspects of the National Occupational Standards ICW are particularly distinctive: their relationship with other suites of standards; the range of their application; and the way in which personal attributes and attitudes are embedded within performance outcomes and strategically exemplified with details from the workplace.

Extensive mapping of the ICW content of other sets of occupational standards was carried out early on in the standards development to ensure a robust relationship between these standards and those which apply to other areas where ICW takes place. This close attention should eliminate possible contradictions in outcomes and terminology across sets of standards applicable to this sphere of activity (Stewart and Hamlin, 1992a, 24). Moreover, the incorporation and enhancement of already existing standards will not only eliminate redundancy and repetition within the N/SVQ system, but will also ensure that standards in ICW can be applied flexibly across different sectors. The adoption of ICW statements in all the sets of standards that include the existing units will result not only in the mainstreaming of intercultural working, but also in the consistent description of ICW in management across sectors in order to aid transferability for individual managers.

This combination of robustness and flexibility is further reflected in the design of an additional template unit that can be added to by sector bodies to describe specific job activities for which ICW is important.

In this respect, the NOS for ICW are cross-sectoral standards that apply to all sectors, all cross-sectoral roles and at all levels of working. These standards can also be used in a variety of different geographical locations: from those working in the UK in multicultural teams, with multicultural clients or engaging with migrant workers; through to those working with people and organisations in the broader European context and worldwide.

There was still a risk that possible tensions might exist between generic and specific aspects of competence to which occupational standards can apply (Hamlin, 1990; Stewart and Hamlin, 1992a, 26-7). To counter this, examples were inserted throughout the NOS in ICW in order to clarify their meaning, position the standards in real work situations and embed personal attributes and attitudes within performance outcomes. The inclusion of lists of open-ended examples with performance and knowledge outcomes provide the widest possible scope for the application of a standard to incorporate both the general frame of reference of a particular outcome and the specific conditions under which it might be realized. Just so, the standards have attempted to capture the essence of the beliefs, values and attitudes that feature in the most influential intercultural communication literature (e.g. Byram, 1997; Byram & Morgan, 1994; Byram & Zarate, 1994; Holliday et al, 2004), and yet enable them to be operational by embedding them within performance outcomes squarely located in workplace practices.

### *5.2. Realisation of intercultural competence*

These standards have incorporated many aspects which relate to the development of intercultural working, particularly in Unit 1. In this respect they appear to supersede the dichotomous description of competence as an exclusive choice between disposition and capacity (Carr, 1993). We suggest that the definition of competence in these standards can be seen more in terms of a cline of attributes rather than as an absolute dichotomy.

In this respect, the NOS in ICW appear to incorporate many of the aspects of the meta-competencies proposed by Cheetham and Chivers (Chivers, 1996, 1998, 2001, 2005). This is particularly the case with

respect to the specification of ‘underpinning personal qualities’ set out in Unit 1, which is repeated as a non-mandatory element throughout the other five units. Indeed it is possible to map these meta-competencies on to the personal qualities set out in these standards (Appendix D, Table 2). Here we can see that reflection, learning and self-development are a particular feature (c.p. Eraut, 1994; Hodkinson and Issitt, 1995; Winterton et al, 2005). While problem-solving and creativity also occur, they are not so much in evidence; and for this suite mental agility does not feature as a particular requirement. However, three other qualities do emerge as important aspects of ICW competence: critical thinking, sensitivity, and in particular ethics, which to date appears to have been under-represented in the N/SVQ literature. This goes some way to addressing Norris’s (1991) plea for ‘standards of criticism and principles of professional judgement that can inform action in the context of uncertainty and change’.

In contrast to the debate which engulfed the notion of competence underwriting the introduction of the N/SVQ framework in the UK through the 1990s, that over aspects of intercultural competence has been less controversial. However, the same broad dichotomy has been identified in the literature: a more atomistic conceptualization of intercultural competence amenable to psychometric assessment is deployed in the more ‘applied’ domains of manufacturing, commerce and service sectors; while a more holistic conceptualisation of competence is located in ‘softer’ domains such as the caring professions and education. However, both the psychometric and performance models of competence appeared to be reconciled within the (2005) INCA framework. In this respect, the approach adopted for the design of the NOS in ICW would appear to be broadly coterminous with recent trends in the philosophy of research in education and the social sciences which have moved towards the pragmatic supersession of long-standing divisions between realist and subjectivist ontologies, along with their corresponding positivist and interpretivist epistemologies (Biesta & Burbules, 2003).

### *5.3. Meeting workplace expectations*

While operating within conventional practice for standards writing and evaluation, this project has taken significant steps to counter early criticisms of standards being divorced from the workplace (Bates,

1995; Field, 1995; Prais, 1991; Smithers, 1991; Stewart and Hamlin, 1992a; Williams, 1999). Not only has it deployed a mixed-methods approach through two extensive consultation rounds throughout the UK with a wide range of representatives from different sectors, but the feedback and subsequent drafts of the standards themselves have been discussed by a heterogeneous steering group comprising members from a range of different occupational sectors.

However, we would concede that the deductive approach to standards writing and evaluation in the UK described in this paper reflect methodologies originally conceived in the 1980s. This can appear rather out of kilter with more recent developments in the interpretive research methodologies and mixed methods design that are now common practice in many areas of educational and social science research (Crotty, 2002). By contrast, more inductive approaches to ground standards development in empirical data gleaned from workplace contexts (Dall'Alba & Sandberg, 1996; Gerber & Velde, 1996; Sandberg, 1994, 2000; Velde, 1997, 1999; Velde & Hopkins, 1995) appear to have much potential for future standards development projects.

#### *5.4. Conclusion*

This paper has argued that the NOS for ICW have gone some way to addressing issues realised by early critics of the N/SVQ framework, and have incorporated several of the ideas of some of its more progressive commentators (Cheetham and Chivers, Chivers, 1996, 1998, 2001, 2005; Eraut, 1994; Hodkinson, 1992; Hodkinson and Issitt, 1995; Stewart and Hamlin, 1992a, 1992b, 1993, 1994; Winterton et al, 2005). Members of the CILT project team, and the authors of this paper, have approached the issue of occupational standards embedded within the N/SVQ system from a variety of perspectives, and it is hoped that the breadth of this intellectual and occupational pool has not only enriched the set of standards that were finally drawn up, but perhaps has also moved forward the long standing, and increasingly international debate surrounding the VQ system itself.



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## Appendix A: INCA framework (2005)

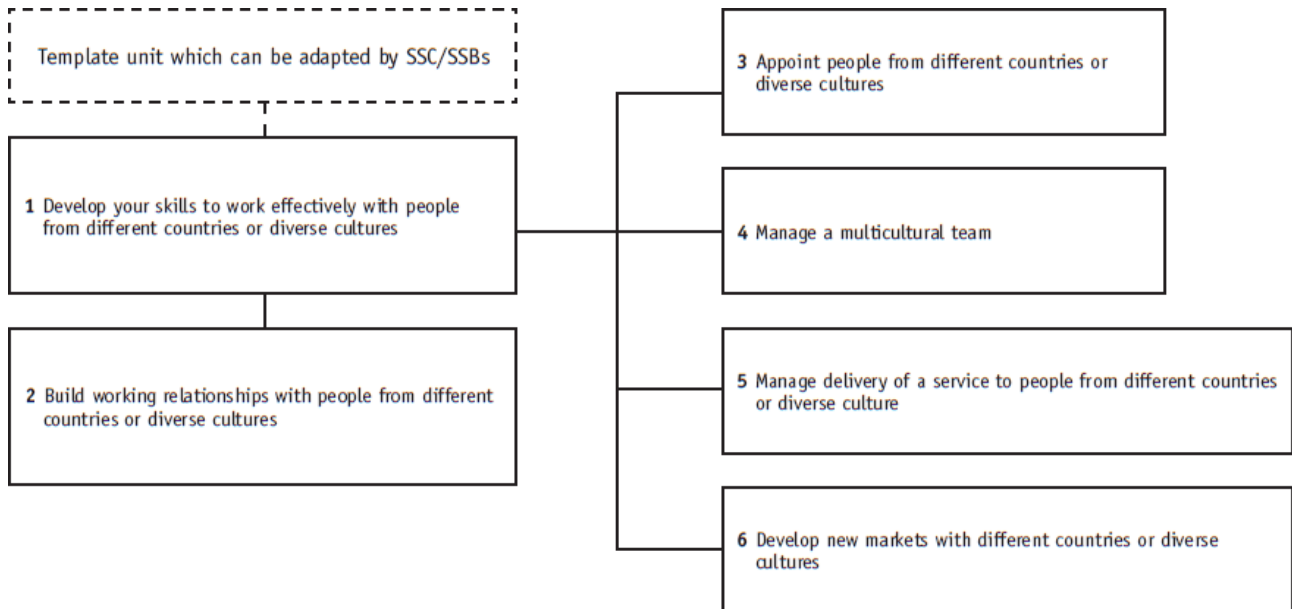
	<b>A) Motivation</b>	<b>B) Skill/Knowledge</b>	<b>C) Behaviour</b>
<b>i) Tolerance for ambiguity</b>	Readiness to embrace and work with ambiguity	Ability to handle stress consequent on ambiguity	Managing ambiguous situations
<b>ii) Behavioural flexibility</b>	Readiness to apply and augment the full range of one's existing repertoire of behaviour	Having a broad repertoire and the knowledge of one's repertoire	Adapting one's behaviour to the specific situation
<b>iii) Communicative awareness</b>	Willingness to modify existing communicative conventions	Ability to identify different communicative conventions, levels of foreign language competencies and their impact on intercultural communication	Negotiating appropriate communicative conventions for intercultural communication and coping with different foreign language skills
<b>iv) Knowledge discovery</b>	Curiosity about other cultures in themselves and in order to be able to interact better with people	Skills of ethnographic discovery of situation-relevant cultural knowledge (including technical knowledge) before, during and after intercultural encounters	Seeking information to discover culture-related knowledge
<b>v) Respect for otherness</b>	Willingness to respect the diversity and coherence of behaviour, value and belief systems	Critical knowledge of such systems (including one's own when making judgements)	Treating equally different behaviour, value and convention systems experienced in intercultural encounters
<b>vi) Empathy</b>	Willingness to take the other's perspectives	Skills of role-taking de-centring; awareness of different perspectives	Making explicit and relating culture-specific perspectives to each other

## Appendix B: Framework for standards for working with people for different countries or diverse cultures

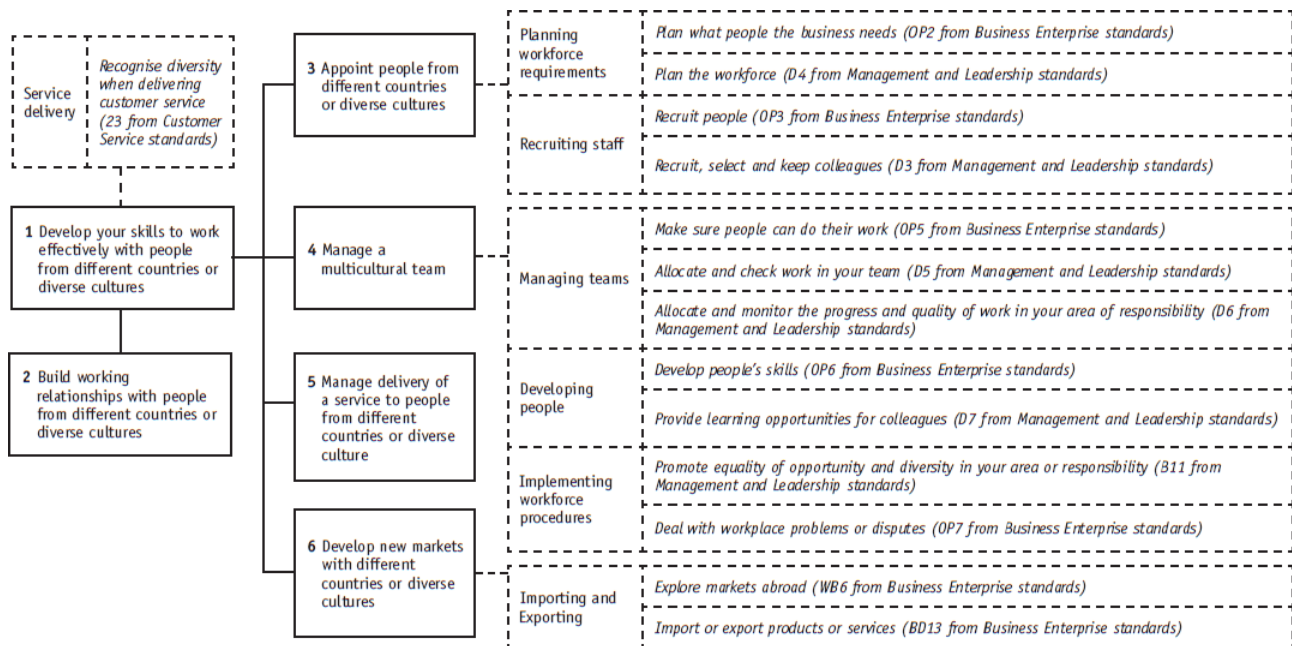
These standards describe working with people from different countries or diverse cultures in ways that promote open and respectful interaction, better understanding and improved performance.

These standards describe intercultural working for different people within the workplace and do not describe the role of one individual.

Unit 1 is a useful starting point for any individual.



The standards for intercultural working are shown in bold. The complementary units from other sets of standards are shown in italics.



## **Appendix C: Unit 1 - Develop your skills to work effectively with people from different countries or diverse cultures**

### **Unit overview**

#### **Who might do this**

Anybody from any country or culture who is working with people from another country or culture.

#### **When you might do this**

- When working with people from a different country or diverse cultures who were born, educated, work or live here or who live or work abroad.
- When working with individuals or groups from one or more countries or cultures.
- When working in the private, public or not-for-profit sectors.
- When working in voluntary, aid or humanitarian work.
- When working with people inside or outside your organisation, face to face or using telephone, letter or email.
- When working with your manager or colleagues at the same or a different level than you, customers, clients or students, as a member of a multicultural team, as a member of a UK-based or international project team or collaboratively with non-UK partners.
- When working with people long term or for one-off transactions to provide a service, information or advice or to carry out research.

#### **The benefits and business case for doing this effectively**

- Improved cohesive workforce relations between people from different countries and diverse cultures.
- Reduction in workplace racism and workplace stress and the wasted time, potential and assets resulting from it.
- Work produced by individuals and teams that meets or exceeds work requirements.
- Services delivered sensitively and appropriately to all users.
- Service users satisfied with the service they have received.
- Strengthened diversity and equality policies and procedures.

#### **Description of activities**

Explore your own value-base and expectations and how they are viewed by others, challenge your own and other people's stereotypes and prejudices, communicate and work with others in ways that maximise individual performance and organisational productivity.

#### **These standards**

These standards describe working with people from different countries or diverse cultures in ways that promote open and respectful interaction, better understanding and improved performance.

## **Other useful units**

This unit covers the general skills needed to work with people from different countries or diverse cultures. The following units build on this and describe intercultural working in specific situations.

- Build working relationships with people from different countries or diverse cultures (2 from Intercultural Working standards)
- Appoint people from different countries or diverse cultures (3 from Intercultural Working standards)
- Manage a multicultural team (4 from Intercultural Working standards)
- Manage delivery of a service to people from different countries or diverse cultures (5 from Intercultural Working standards)
- Develop new markets with other countries or diverse cultures (6 from Intercultural Working standards)
- Recognise diversity when delivering customer service (23 from Customer Service standards)

## **Underpinning personal qualities**

These are a non-mandatory part of the standard but are desirable attributes and attitudes which people with different cultural experiences working together might need. They represent what people who are well disposed to intercultural working may aspire to and grow towards.

- You enjoy working alongside people with different cultural experiences and perspectives to your own and actively try to appreciate why differences and similarities may exist.
- You are able to reflect on how your own working practices might be perceived by others and are ready to negotiate new ways of working.
- You are open to the positive potential of cultural diversity in the generation of ideas and in developing workplace productivity.
- You are sensitive to the different levels of English language skills people have and are willing to adapt your language in the interests of mutual comprehension.
- You are sensitive to how your use of language, tone of voice and behaviour may be interpreted by others.
- You are able to look critically at work practices and projects and make contributions designed to enhance intercultural cooperation and understanding.
- You are working towards greater critical understanding of difference while appreciating that this is a lifelong process.
- You are aware that others subscribe to equality and human rights in different ways, but do your best to adopt an ethical outlook which reflects how you would like to be treated yourself.



## **Performance outcomes**

- a. Recognise your own values, beliefs and cultural conventions and how they affect your perceptions and expectations in work situations.
- b. Actively seek to understand how your values, beliefs, cultural conventions and language use appear to other people.
- c. Base your opinions of people on your own interaction with them rather than on common perception, stereotypes, their accent or their dress.
- d. Challenge and adapt your own assumptions about the behaviour of people from different countries or diverse cultures.
- e. Challenge any stereotypes, prejudice or racism expressed by other people about yourself or others.
- f. Communicate in ways that can be understood by the people from the countries or cultures you are working with.
- g. Make enough time and effort and respond flexibly and positively so that your working practice engages and includes people from different countries or diverse cultures.
- h. Work in ways that balance other people's expectations of you with the need to achieve organisational objectives.
- i. Deal constructively with situations that you find unclear or confusing when working with people from different countries or diverse cultures and maintain respect for individuals when you are unable to understand or empathise with their views or behaviour.
- j. Reflect on the impact of your behaviour and use of language when working with people from different countries or diverse cultures and adapt them to improve results in the future.

## **Knowledge and understanding**

To perform effectively you need to know and understand the following.

### ***Cultural influences***

- K1. How differences and similarities between your own and other people's cultural behaviour may change or affect attitudes, expectations, communication and working practices. (For example timekeeping, timescales, decision-making processes, perceptions of status and role, attitudes to men or women, communication styles and conventions, business relationships, business meeting conventions, attitudes to emotion and levels of hierarchy and formality.)
- K2. How your own and other people's values and beliefs may change as culture evolves or you and they are exposed to a different culture. (For example by growing up in a country that is not your or their parents' or grandparents' native country, by living or working abroad, by living or working with people from different countries and cultures.)
- K3. How to base your opinions and actions towards people from a different country or diverse culture on them as an individual and not on common perception, stereotypes, prejudice or old information. (For example by asking the person, by judging them on their work, by getting to know them.)
- K4. How cultural stereotypes can be reinforced by the way you and others behave and present information about your country or culture.

### ***Communication and language***

- K5. How your use of language, body language, gestures and tone of voice may appear to people from different countries or diverse cultures and how theirs may affect your perceptions of them.
- K6. The possible results of a lack of understanding or ineffective communication tools. (For example disagreements, misunderstanding about expectations, potential conflict.)
- K7. The politeness conventions used by yourself and the people from the countries or cultures you are working with and how these may affect people's perceptions of each other. (For example apparent rudeness caused by non-use, apparent insincerity caused by over-use of 'please' and 'thank you'.)
- K8. Ways to minimise misunderstanding and improve communication with people with a different first language to you (For example taking the time to listen closely to what they are really saying, learning the conventions for introductions and greetings, not using your own fluency as a way to overpower others, learning some simple phrases in their language, gesturing, avoiding idioms, explaining acronyms, using pictures and diagrams, learning their language.)
- K9. The challenges in communicating with people from another culture who share the same first language with you. (For example differences in vocabulary, spelling, accent, expressions and directness.)

### ***Working relationships***

- K10. How finding shared ground can contribute to good working relationships between people from different countries or diverse cultures.

### ***Training and support***

- K11. What training or support to develop your skills for working with people from different countries or diverse cultures might be relevant to you and who to approach to access it. (For example language awareness training, language training, ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages), EFL (English as a Foreign Language), intercultural skills training, training courses about specific cultures.)

### ***Equality laws and regulations***

- K12. The laws, regulations and company guidelines that dictate how you are expected to behave with people from different countries or diverse cultures, how to apply them in relation to your work and where to get further information and advice about them. (For example equality legislation, company policies and values, codes of practice.)
- K13. What to do or who to approach if you or a colleague feel unfairly treated at work. (For example relevant manager, trade union representative.)

**Appendix D Table 2 Mapping of personal qualities and meta-competencies (CILT, 2008; Cheetham and Chivers, 1997)**

You enjoy working alongside people with different cultural experiences and perspectives to your own and actively try to appreciate why differences and similarities may exist.	Reflection; learning and self-development
You are able to reflect on how your own working practices might be perceived by others and are ready to negotiate new ways of working.	Reflection; learning and self-development
You are open to the positive potential of cultural diversity in the generation of ideas and in developing workplace productivity.	Reflection; learning and self-development; problem solving;; creativity
You are sensitive to the differences which exist in levels of English-language competence and are willing to adapt your language in the interests of mutual comprehension.	Sensitivity; learning and self-development
You are sensitive to how your use of language, tone of voice and behaviour may be interpreted by others.	Sensitivity; learning and self-development
You are able to look critically at work practices and projects and make contributions designed to enhance intercultural cooperation and understanding.	Critical thinking; creativity; problem solving,
You are working towards greater critical understanding of difference while appreciating that this is a lifelong process.	Critical thinking, learning and self-development
You are aware that how others understand equality and human rights is varied, but do your best to adopt an ethical outlook which reflects how you would like to be treated yourself.	Ethical awareness, learning and self-development; reflection