

# Developing the occupational skills qualifications framework for floral designer education and training in the floristry industry

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## Abstract

Retail florists, integral to the floristry industry, are experiencing workforce challenges due to an aging population and a shortage of well-trained entrants. New talent recruitment and retention are critical to the sustainability and prosperity of the profession and its associated industries. Occupational skill standards assist in identifying competencies for success in the profession. This research established skills profiles of floral designers in the U.S. by examining occupational skills standards from the United Kingdom (U.K.), Finland, India, and Singapore. The framework outlines competencies needed for progression from entry-level to master-level designers, detailing roles, tasks, knowledge, and abilities to address challenges, and autonomy of work at each level. Ten competency categories were identified across all levels. This framework can serve as a foundation for career development strategies, elevating professionalism and boosting workforce competitiveness. Through adoption, along with other recommended strategies to address labor shortage issues, the floristry industry can enhance its ability to attract, train, and retain skilled designers, ensuring long-term growth and sustainability.

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## Introduction

The U.S. floristry industry, valued at USD\$72.8 billion in 2023, supports over 83,000 jobs across retail flower shops and floriculture growers<sup>[1]</sup>. Despite this, the floral designer profession faces significant workforce challenges due to an aging population and limited labor availability<sup>[2]</sup>. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2024), there is a projected 10% decline in floral designer employment between 2023 and 2033<sup>[3]</sup>.

While the industry contributes significantly to the U.S. economy, several labor-related challenges continue to hinder workforce growth. The floristry industry faces challenges in attracting and retaining skilled employees, partly due to compensation and employment stability issues. While some positions offer competitive wages, many lack essential benefits such as healthcare, which can deter potential employees from pursuing careers in the sector. A survey conducted by the American Floral Endowment (AFE) revealed that while benefits like paid time off and professional development opportunities are common, comprehensive medical insurance is less prevalent across the industry<sup>[4]</sup>. Additionally, the industry experiences significant seasonal fluctuations in demand for cut flowers and floral designs. During peak periods, such as holidays and wedding seasons, the demand surges, leading to intense workloads. Conversely, slower periods, particularly in the summer months, result in reduced demand, causing small businesses to struggle to maintain full-time staff and leading to employment instability<sup>[5]</sup>. Furthermore, floristry is a physically demanding profession, involving prolonged periods of standing at workstations that may lack proper ergonomic design. This physical strain contributes to job dissatisfaction and high turnover rates<sup>[6]</sup>. In addition to these challenges, florists must continuously adapt to the evolving preferences of modern consumers, who can be highly selective and difficult to satisfy. This adds another layer of complexity to maintaining a stable and satisfied workforce<sup>[7]</sup>.

Pursuing a career in floristry involves both financial and time investments in education and training. However, the income potential in this field may not always align with these investments. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the median annual wage for floral designers was USD\$34,690 in May 2023, with the lowest 10% earning less than USD\$24,960<sup>[3]</sup>. This compensation level may pose challenges for individuals seeking to recoup their educational expenses. Moreover, while formal training can enhance design skills and business acumen, the return on investment in terms of salary may be limited. The Floral Design Institute notes that a solid foundation in floral design can lead to greater job satisfaction and faster advancement<sup>[8]</sup>. However, the overall financial return may not correspond proportionally to the time and money spent on education.

Over the past few decades, there has been significant growth in amateur florists entering the market, often without formal education or training. This influx has contributed to a perceived decline in professionalism and craftsmanship<sup>[7]</sup>. Furthermore, increased competition from non-specialist outlets such as grocery stores and supermarkets has diminished the perceived value of floral products, making it challenging for professional floral designers to differentiate their high-quality, handcrafted arrangements from mass-produced alternatives<sup>[9]</sup>.

Taken together, these workforce challenges and competitive pressures highlight the floristry industry's urgent need to articulate professional training standards. Establishing industry-driven skill standards is crucial not only for attracting interested individuals to the profession but also for providing a structured roadmap for long-term professional development<sup>[10,11]</sup>. Recent initiatives like Seed Your Future and the American Floral Endowment's Sustainbloom project highlight nationwide efforts to promote workforce growth<sup>[12,13]</sup>. However, these initiatives must be bolstered by structured workforce development strategies to secure the profession's future.

This study seeks to address this gap by developing an occupational skills qualifications framework designed to elevate the professionalism of floral designers and provide a clear roadmap for new entrants. The proposed framework could serve as a support for a well-trained workforce, ensuring the continued prosperity of the floral designer profession within the floristry sector. As the second part of a research series examining floristry education and qualifications, this study builds upon the foundational educational and career pathways outlined in the preceding research<sup>[10,11]</sup>. The forthcoming third study in this series will evaluate the educational and occupational frameworks developed in the first two phases, integrating direct input from industry experts and academic professionals to enhance their feasibility and applicability.

## Materials and methods

The objective of this study was to develop an occupational skills qualifications framework tailored for floral designers in the U.S. by reviewing and synthesizing global floral designer skills standards from various countries. Countries were selected based on their strong vocational training programs and recognition of their certification systems, which include the U.K., Finland, India, and Singapore.

To develop an occupational skills qualifications framework tailored for U.S. floral designers, we conducted a comprehensive review of international floristry standards from ten countries. Our methodology included a systematic search of academic databases such as Google Scholar, industry-specific sources, and government publications. Keywords used in the search included 'floristry qualifications', 'floral design certification', 'occupational standards in floristry', and 'vocational skills standards in floral design'. While the review covered a broad spectrum of international models, the frameworks from the U.K., Finland, India, and Singapore were selected for detailed analysis due to their structured, comprehensive, and well-documented qualifications. These models provided a solid foundation for developing a U.S. framework, offering clear certification structures, assessment methods, and competency delineation.

The systematic review process involved identifying relevant certification frameworks that provided detailed descriptions of qualification levels, certification processes, and assessment criteria. The search for floral designer criteria at the international level was conducted by analyzing government education and vocational training websites, professional floristry associations, and industry reports. Priority was given to countries with established floristry education programs and recognized qualifications in vocational training. Each identified framework was evaluated based on its structure, competency requirements, assessment methodology, and alignment with professional industry standards. Content analysis was employed to categorize key competencies and qualification levels within each country's framework. A comparative analysis was then conducted to evaluate structural differences and common themes across the frameworks, informing the synthesis of a tailored model for the U.S. floristry industry.

## Results

This study examined and analyzed the floristry occupational skills qualification standards from four countries, namely, the U.K., Finland, India, and Singapore—each offering distinct systems for certifying floral designers with varying structures, assessment methods, and competency requirements. Each system contributes valuable insights for developing a U.S.-target framework. The skills standards of each country are outlined as follows:

### U.K.: City & Guilds

The City & Guilds Group, in collaboration with the British Florist Association, offers one of the most comprehensive floristry qualification systems with five main qualifications: Award, Certificate, Diploma, Higher Diploma in Floristry, and Master Diploma in Professional Floristry<sup>[14]</sup>.

There are two levels for an Award, Certificate or Diploma, Level 2 and Level 3. Level 4 provides a Higher Diploma and Level 5 provides a Master Diploma. Each level requires a progressively greater number of credit hours, with 15 credit hours for an Award, 30 for a Certificate, and 90 for a Diploma—culminating in more advanced levels. The qualification framework specifies the structure, entry requirements, career pathways, and rules for achieving each qualification, which involves both coursework and practical assessments. Assessment strategies include pass, merit, and distinction levels, providing clear benchmarks for student performance.

### Finland: Finnish National Board of Education

Finland's floristry qualifications, part of the Vocational Qualification in Horticulture, emphasize a modular, competency-based approach. This system, issued in 2011, focuses on practical skills development through mandatory and optional modules. The qualification framework covers a wide range of subjects, such as business, arts, and science<sup>[15]</sup>.

Student assessment is based on demonstrated competence, with performance rated as satisfactory, good, or excellent. Unlike some systems, Finland's qualifications do not require formal education as a prerequisite, allowing for flexible entry into the program. The qualification is awarded upon successful completion of these competency-based assessments.

### India: Agriculture Skills Council

India's National Occupational Qualification for Florists, developed by the Agriculture Skills Council of India (ASCI) in partnership with the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC), focuses on foundational skills essential for florists. Introduced in 2016, the qualification framework includes mandatory national occupational standard units, covering areas such as writing, literacy, and interpersonal communication, alongside professional competencies such as analytical thinking, decision-making, and effective problem resolution<sup>[16]</sup>.

Each unit contains detailed performance criteria, technical knowledge, and required skills. Assessments are based on the ability to meet performance criteria in various occupational tasks. The qualification is geared toward individuals entering the profession at a young age (minimum age 16), typically with minimal experience in floral design.

### Singapore: Floristry Workforce Skills Qualifications (WSQ)

Singapore's Floristry Workforce Skills Qualifications (WSQ) system is a national educational and training framework established by the Singapore Workforce Development Agency (WDA) in partnership with the floristry industry. The WSQ framework offers four certification levels designed to support skill development and career progression: Level 1-Floral Assistant (WSQ Certificate in Floristry Operations); Level 2-Florist (Higher Certificate in Floristry Operations); Level 3-Floral Supervisor (Advanced Certificate in Floristry Supervision); Level 4-Floral Designer/Manager (Diploma in Floristry Management)<sup>[17]</sup>.

Each level is comprised of both mandatory and optional training units. Participants earn Statements of Attainment (SOAs) by completing these units and passing assessments. These SOAs accumulate towards achieving a full qualification. There are no

formal academic prerequisites for entry, although basic literacy and numeracy skills are required.

### Synthesis for the U.S. framework

The comparison of these four international certification systems reveals valuable insights for developing a tailored U.S. occupational skills qualifications framework for floral designers (Table 1). The U.K.'s tiered certification framework offers structured pathways for professional growth. The competency-based models of Finland and Singapore emphasize practical skill development rather than focusing on formal education alone. India's approach emphasizes foundational skills, ensuring that new entrants have the basic professional and technical skills necessary to succeed.

In developing the U.S. occupational skills qualifications framework, a combination of these international approaches was synthesized to create a cohesive model tailored to the specific needs of the U.S. floristry industry. Drawing from the best practices of certification systems in the U.K., Finland, India, and Singapore, a four-tiered framework was established to outline clear pathways for educational and professional advancement. This structure aligns with global standards while addressing the unique demands of the U.S. market. The proposed framework delineates potential job titles and defines the roles, duties, and competencies required at each qualification level, ranging from junior floral designer to master floral designer. Each level necessitates the mastery of specific knowledge

and skills, systematically organized into ten core competency categories. These categories provide a comprehensive guide for professional growth and ensure that floral designers are equipped with the necessary expertise to advance within the industry. The identified competency categories are listed below:

(1) Horticultural Sciences: Understanding plant growth needs, botanical materials, seasonality, and plant habits relevant to floral design.

(2) Floristry Practices: Specialized techniques and methods involved in the care, handling, and postharvest management of floral and plant materials. Knowledge of floral preservatives, environmental control, and the use of appropriate tools and equipment to maintain the aesthetic and structural integrity of floral arrangements.

(3) Floral Design Skills: Proficiency in applying the elements and principles of floral design to create professional floral designs.

(4) Artistic Design Skills: Artistic competence in incorporating design principles from other art forms, such as fine art, architecture, and photography into floral work.

(5) Customer Service Skills: Proficiency in managing customer expectations, providing high-quality service, merchandising, and handling orders and complaints effectively.

(6) Event Planning and Designing Skills: Competence in planning and executing floral designs for events, with a focus on theme development and logistical management.

**Table 1.** Key comparative elements of floristry occupational skills qualifications frameworks in the U.K., Finland, India, and Singapore.

Country	Organization	Levels of certification	Assessment methods	Qualification focus
U.K.	City & Guilds Group	Award, Certificate, Diploma, Higher Diploma, Master Diploma	Credit hours, coursework, assessments	Progressive skill development, vocational competencies
Finland	Finnish National Board of Education	Vocational Qualification in Horticulture with Floristry Specialization	Competence-based assessments	Practical skill demonstration, vocational skills
India	Agriculture Skill Council	National Occupational Qualification – Florist	Performance criteria, technical knowledge, professional skills	Basic skills, foundational competencies
Singapore	Workforce Skills Qualifications (WSQ)	Floral Assistant to Floral Manager	Training unit completion, accumulation of Statements of Attainment	Literacy and numeracy competencies, practical skill application

**Table 2.** Recommended general roles, knowledge, tasks, work autonomy, and abilities to address challenges for junior-to-master level floral designers.

	Role	Knowledge & skill level	Tasks/work	Autonomy of work	Problem-solving abilities
Junior Floral Designer	Conduct simple tasks and assemble pre-determined designs.	Basic knowledge of floral design and a limited range of basic floristry skills.	Carry out routine and repetitive tasks requiring basic and limited knowledge, and skills of floral design, and the floral industry.	Work under direct supervision in a structured context.	Resolve routine problems using relatively simple methods.
Floral Designer	Use well-developed skills to design and sell a variety of floral products.	Have good knowledge and understanding of elements and principles, and skills in techniques.	Take responsibility for the completion of general tasks. They could provide technical advice and support for the improvement of teamwork.	Work with some independence and under limited supervision.	Solve problems by choosing and using easy-to-master methods.
Senior Floral Designer	Apply highly developed knowledge, skills, and creativity to design and sell a wide variety of high-style floral products.	Have comprehensive knowledge, a deep understanding of elements and principles of design, and are skillful in design techniques.	Play leadership roles and coordinate routine, operational, decision-making processes, and other business activities.	Maintain work independence. They take supervisory responsibilities for the work of team members. They also mentor and manage the professional development of individuals and groups.	Solve unpredictable problems and manage complex technical or professional issues. They could develop creative solutions to difficulties.
Master Floral Designer	Use specialized technical and conceptual skills, and innovative creativity to design and sell a diverse range of complex, high-style, or themed floral products.	Have a substantial depth of knowledge, the most advanced skills in design techniques, and great execution of design elements and principles. They have a critical awareness of trends in different fields.	Demonstrate substantial innovation, professional integrity, authority, and continued commitment to the development of new ideas, products, techniques, and trends at the forefront of the industry.	Work with significant autonomy and take responsibility for reviewing the strategic performance of the whole team.	Solve critical problems, and integrate, extend, and redefine existing knowledge or professional practice.

No occupational certification, credential, or licensing requirements apply to these qualifications at the time of writing.

**Table 3.** Floristry Occupational Skills Qualifications framework for junior-to-master level floral designers, along with educational and professional advancement pathways to attain each qualification level.

Educational and career pathways	Roles	Category	Core knowledge & skills
<b>Certificate</b> (short-term design class); <b>High school diploma or equivalent</b> ;	<b>Junior floral designer</b>	Horticultural sciences	Identification and appropriate uses of cut materials Maintain indoor plants
		Floristry practices	Proper care and handling of cut materials for maximizing longevity Proper utilization of floral preservation products
		Floral design skills	Basic application and understanding of elements and principles Utilize basic floral design techniques Apply pre-determined design ideas Plan, prepare and construct fundamental floral arrangements
		Support services	Check the quality of incoming floral products Maintain tools and equipment, know how to use properly Source information on products and services Receive, store, and care for stock
		Customer service skills	Knowledge of the Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA) hazards Interact with customers and take care of their needs Sell floral products
		Education & training	Continuing education with higher-level designers
		Artistic design skills	N/A <sup>2</sup>
		Event planning and designing skills	N/A
		Business Skills	N/A
		Professional presentation skills	N/A
<b>Higher certificate</b> (AIFD education partners; state floral association certified florist program); <b>Higher education degrees</b> (Associate degrees, BA or BS); CFD;	<b>Floral designer</b>	Horticultural sciences	Identification and appropriate uses of cut materials Maintain indoor plants <b>Knowledge of plants and gardening<sup>y</sup></b> <b>Limitations of plant use</b> <b>Availability of plant varieties</b> <b>Install and maintain plant displays</b>
		Floristry practices	Proper care and handling of cut materials for maximizing longevity Proper utilization of floral preservation products
		Floral design skills	Check the quality of incoming floral products <b>Good execution and application of elements, principles</b> <b>Good execution and application of design techniques;</b> <b>Plan and create diverse floral designs</b> <b>Create new design ideas above the basic level</b> <b>Drawing/Sketch skills to communicate ideas</b> <b>Understanding of good photography skills</b>
		Artistic design skills	Understanding of good portfolio design skills <b>Understanding of good website design skills</b> <b>Color uses of designs</b>
		Customer service skills	Interact with customers and take care of their needs Sell floral products <b>Provide quality service to customers</b> <b>Communicate with customers on social media</b> <b>Provide quotations for floral products</b> <b>Generate and implement marketing strategies</b> <b>Sell and market floral products</b>
		Business skills	Maintain tools and equipment, know how to use properly Source information on products and services Receive, store, and care for stock Knowledge of the Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA) hazards <b>Order and maintain floral supplies and products</b>
		Support services	<b>Assist in coordinating and design floral arrangements for special events</b> Continuing education with peers or higher-level designers
		Event planning and designing skills	N/A
		Education & training	
		Professional presentation skills	
<b>Advanced certificate</b> (State floral association master florist program; AIFD education partners); <b>Higher education degrees</b> (Associate degrees, BA or BS, MS, doctoral degree); <b>CFD</b> ; <b>AIFD</b>	<b>Senior floral designer</b>	Horticultural sciences	Identification and appropriate uses of cut materials Maintain indoor plants Knowledge of plants and gardening Limitations of plant use Availability of plant varieties Install and maintain plant displays
		Floristry practices	Proper care and handling of cut materials for maximizing longevity Proper utilization of floral preservation products

(to be continued)

Table 3. (continued)

Educational and career pathways	Roles	Category	Core knowledge & skills
<b>Advanced certificate</b> (State floral association master florist program; AIFD education partners); <b>Higher education degrees</b> (Associate degrees, BA or BS, MS, doctoral degree); <b>CFD</b> ; <b>AIFD</b>		Floral design skills	Check the quality of incoming floral products Plan and create diverse floral designs <b>Create complex and trendy floral design</b> <b>Skillful application of design elements, principles, and techniques</b> <b>Develop innovative design ideas/concepts</b> <b>Innovative ways of using floral products</b>
		Artistic design skills	<b>Using software (photoshop, etc.) to communicate design ideas or freehand</b> <b>Professional photography skills for floral design</b> <b>Integrate advanced color theory into design processes</b> <b>Good portfolio design skills</b> <b>Good website design skills</b>
		Customer service skills	Interact with customers and take care of their needs Sell floral products Provide quality service to customers Communicate with customers on social media <b>Manage customer expectations positively</b> <b>Handling customer complaints</b>
		Business skills	Provide budget quotes for floral products Generate and implement marketing strategies Sell and market floral products <b>Develop and implement a business plan and mission statement</b> <b>Promote business image</b> <b>Negotiate and make contracts with clients</b> <b>Promote e-business and improve online sales and services</b> <b>Keep accurate, up-to-date financial records</b> <b>Lead and manage employees</b>
		Support services	Maintain tools and equipment, and know how to use them properly Source information on products and services Receive, store, and care for products Knowledge of the Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA) hazards Order and maintain floral supplies and products <b>Create an innovative work environment</b>
		Event planning and designing skills	<b>Plan, coordinate, and design for events</b> <b>Construct designs that fit in with an assigned theme or are appropriate for occasions</b> <b>Work effectively with other professionals involved in the project</b>
		Education & training	<b>Continuing education from designers all over the globe and via various sources</b> <b>Mentor in the workplace</b> <b>Provide workplace skill instruction</b> <b>Build and maintain good workplace relationships</b>
		Professional presentation skills	<b>Take care of shop presentation</b> <b>Effective presentation and communication skills for floral showcase</b>
<b>Higher education degrees</b> (Associate degrees, BA or BS, MS, doctoral degree); <b>CFD</b> ; <b>AIFD</b> ; <b>May have other nationally and/or internationally recognized credentials</b>	<b>Master floral designer</b>	Horticultural sciences	Identification and appropriate uses of cut materials Maintain indoor plants Knowledge of plants and gardening Limitations of plant use Availability of plant varieties Install and maintain plant displays
		Floristry practices	Proper care and handling of cut materials for maximizing longevity Proper utilization of floral preservation products
		Floral design skills	Check the quality of incoming floral products Plan and create diverse floral designs Create complex and trendy floral artworks Skillful utilization of elements and principles Develop innovative design ideas/concepts Innovative ways of using floral products <b>Implement global trends in the floral industry</b> <b>Expand global trends for development and implement innovative floral products</b>
		Artistic design skills	Using software (photoshop, etc.) to communicate design ideas or freehand Professional photography skills for floral design Integrate advanced color theory into design processes

(to be continued)



**Table 3.** (continued)

Educational and career pathways	Roles	Category	Core knowledge & skills
Higher education degrees (Associate degrees, BA or BS, MS, doctoral degree); CFD; AIFD; May have other nationally and/or internationally recognized credentials	Business skills		Good portfolio design abilities Good web design abilities <b>Incorporate diverse art forms (such as fashion, jewelry, fine art, etc.) in floral artwork by applying relevant design concepts</b> Provide budget quotes for floral products; Generate and implement marketing strategies Sell and market floral products Develop and implement a business plan and mission statement; Promote business image Negotiate and make contracts with clients Promote e-business and improve online sales and services Keep accurate, up-to-date financial records Lead and manage employees <b>Market and manage business</b>
		Customer service skills	Interact with customers and take care of their needs Sell floral products Provide quality service to customers Communicate with customers on social media Manage customer expectations positively Handle customer complaints
	Support services		Maintain tools and equipment, know how to use properly Source information on products and services Receive, store, and care for products Knowledge of the Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA) hazards Order and maintain floral supplies and products Create an innovative work environment
		Event planning and designing skills	Plan, coordinate, and design for events Construct innovative floral artworks that fit in an assigned theme or are appropriate for specific occasions Collaborate effectively with other professionals involved in the project <b>Event management practices</b>
	Education & training		Continuing education from designers all over the globe and via various sources Mentor in the workplace Provide workplace skill instruction Build and maintain good workplace relationships
		Professional presentation skills	Take care of the shop presentation <b>Strong presentation abilities for high-profile floral events and showcases, including symposiums, floral expos, and shows.</b>

<sup>z</sup> N/A = These skills are not necessarily required for that level. <sup>y</sup> Bold font = These skills are in addition to the requirements for the previous level.

(7) Business Skills: Knowledge of business operations and management, including strategic planning, marketing, and managing day-to-day shop functions.

(8) Professional Presentation Skills: Skills in presenting floral work at educational and industry events including workshops, symposiums, and floral expos.

(9) Education and Training: Ability to train employees and stay updated with the latest industry trends and innovations through continuing education.

(10) Support Services: Skills in maintaining floral supplies, tools, and equipment to ensure smooth and efficient operations.

Tables 2 and 3 illustrate the proposed framework and provide a detailed comparison of the competencies required at each qualification level.

## Discussion

The international floral design frameworks offer valuable insights for the development of the U.S. occupational skills qualifications framework. The U.K.'s City & Guilds tiered approach provides a structured path for floral designers to develop their skills incrementally, from basic to advanced levels. The inclusion of credit-based

assessments ensures that candidates acquire not only practical skills but also a deep understanding of floristry principles. This model serves as a potential reference for the U.S. to implement a similar structure for professional progression. Finland's focus on competence rather than coursework aligns well with the U.S. need for a system that emphasizes practical skills and performance. This model could be adapted to provide a more flexible approach for U.S. floral designers, allowing them to enter the field based on demonstrated skills.

India's framework emphasizes foundational competencies and professional skills, serving as a valuable model for entry-level training in the U.S., particularly for young or less experienced workers. By focusing on core skills, this system equips new entrants with the basic tools necessary for success, laying the groundwork that can be further developed through advanced training and professional growth. The Singapore Workforce Skills Qualifications framework presents a competence-based, flexible framework that prioritizes practical skills. Its modular design allows individuals to progress at their own pace, accumulating Statements of Attainment (SOAs) as they complete training. This approach could be adapted for the U.S., providing a straightforward, step-by-step pathway for skill development in floral design.

By integrating insights from these international models, we have developed a U.S. floristry occupational skills qualifications framework (Tables 2 & 3) that not only aligns with global best practices but is also tailored to meet the specific demands of the U.S. market. This framework is designed to address both current and future challenges faced by the U.S. floristry industry, to be both practical and adaptable, reflecting the knowledge and skills most valued in today's floral education and training programs. The framework's tiered structure provides clear pathways for professional growth, from entry-level to master floral designers. It enables students and practitioners to identify the training necessary to achieve their professional goals and ensure that the workforce remains competitive and well-equipped to meet evolving industry needs.

The U.S. floristry occupational skills qualifications framework (Tables 2 & 3) serves a broad range of stakeholders, including industry practitioners, educators, students, and policymakers. It can be used by industry professionals to assess career progression and set clear goals, by employers to evaluate employee performance and support their professional growth, and educators to align training programs with industry standards. Policymakers can leverage the framework to enhance vocational training and elevate the skill level of the floral designer workforce.

## Recommendations

Our findings emphasize the importance of collaborative input from both industry and academic professionals in shaping this framework. While the current model offers a comprehensive approach to skills and qualifications, its practicality and real-world application will be evaluated in the forthcoming third part of this study series. This next phase will involve direct feedback from key stakeholders, enhancing the framework's relevance and increasing the likelihood of widespread adoption.

To facilitate the successful adoption of the proposed occupational skills qualifications framework, we recommend fostering strong partnerships between academic institutions, industry organizations, and policymakers. Collaboration with key stakeholders such as the American Institute of Floral Designers (AIFD)<sup>[18]</sup>, American Floral Endowment (AFE)<sup>[19]</sup>, Seed Your Future (SYF)<sup>[12]</sup>, and the Society of American Florists (SAF)<sup>[20]</sup> will be essential in embedding the framework into both educational curricula and industry practices. These partnerships will ensure that the framework remains relevant, practical, and aligned with the evolving needs of the floristry sector.

We encourage the integration of the framework into vocational training programs, certification processes, and continuing education initiatives. This will provide floral designers with clear, structured pathways for professional growth and skill enhancement. Pilot programs and feedback mechanisms should be established to continuously refine the framework based on real-world applications and stakeholder input.

In addition, incorporating strategies to promote workforce stability and skills alignment is essential. Industry-wide initiatives, such as group insurance programs from the Society of American Florists (SAF)<sup>[21]</sup>, retirement savings options, and paid time off policies, can enhance job stability and satisfaction. Addressing seasonal instability through cross-training, off-season services, and industry collaborations can maintain consistent employment and revenue. Promoting workplace well-being with ergonomic equipment, wellness initiatives, and safety training will support retention and productivity. Aligning education with industry needs through internships, apprenticeships, and career pathway campaigns ensures a skilled workforce while enhancing consumer responsiveness through customer service training and digital technology integration.

## Conclusions

This study introduces a comprehensive occupational skills qualifications framework for U.S. floral designers, addressing a significant gap in formalized skill standards and career pathways. By synthesizing international best practices and tailoring them to the U.S. context, the framework provides a structured approach to professional development. The tiered qualification levels and competency categories align with current industry trends and needs, offering a practical tool for career progression.

The inclusion of workforce stability, skills alignment, and industry sustainability strategies strengthens its practicality and relevance. As part of a research study series on floristry education and qualifications, this study sets the stage for the forthcoming evaluation phase, where feedback from industry and academic professionals will further validate and refine the framework. With continued collaboration, the frameworks developed in this study series have the potential to drive significant progress in addressing labor shortages and fostering long-term growth within the U.S. floristry industry.

## Author contributions

The authors confirm their contribution to the paper as follows: study conception and design: Wu X, McKinley WJ, Hall CR; Data collection: Wu X; analysis and interpretation of results: Wu X; draft manuscript preparation: Wu X. All authors reviewed the results and approved the final version of the manuscript.

## Data availability

The datasets generated during and/or analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

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## Conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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