

# Provision: In Focus

An assessment of current training  
provision in **Northern Ireland**

Facilitated by  
**Summit** SKILLS  
The Sector Skills Council  
for Building Services Engineering

**HORIZON**

the sector skills agreement  
for building services engineering

# Sector Involvement In Training

Please refer to the full Assessment of Current Provision report for the detail behind these summaries.  
The recommendation numbers and priority listings also correlate to the full report.

## Employer views on use of training providers

- Of the total training carried out, 42% is done through FE colleges, 42% private training providers, 17% manufacturers, 9% universities. Most employers use more than one provider.
- Areas such as manufacturer training do not add to the formal qualification base of the sector.
- 73% of firms carried out in-house training of some form which again does not add to the formal qualification base of the sector.
- The Qualification and Credit Framework being developed by CCEA is a mechanism for recognising and accrediting this valuable training and skills development so it can contribute to the sector's skills base.

### RECOMMENDATION 4

SummitSkills will work with partners to develop credit-accumulation transfer\* and quality assurance for manufacturers and non qualification based courses from private training providers. Medium priority.

## Employer spend on apprenticeship training

- SummitSkills has created a 'work-in-progress' model that looks at the cost of funding an apprentice, excluding course fees, time allocated to mentoring and in-house training spend.
- Considerable amounts of money (in this case via an employee's time) are spent on in-house mentoring throughout the course of the training programme.
- There are many hidden costs associated with training staff and employers are already making a significant contribution.
- Currently there is significantly less funding per apprenticeship in Northern Ireland than in England (approximately £5000). Therefore apprenticeship frameworks need to be funded to a comparative level with England and Wales, with increased financial support for employers to promote training and recruitment of apprenticeships, taking into account comparative costs.

### RECOMMENDATION 7

SummitSkills will develop these models further to assess the total costs of training on employers. This information will be used work with the DEL to achieve a wider recognition of and sensible balance between employer and government contributions to training. Medium term priority.

## Employers willing to pay for training

- In SummitSkills' Sector Needs Analysis, the majority of employers see Level 3 as the standard for the sector.
- Only 37% of businesses would be willing to pay more for their training.
- The sector will need some convincing to fund more than they currently do, as the move to employed status from day one for apprenticeships has transferred a high level of financial cost to the employer.
- Funding support through 'Training for Success' is end loaded and achievement based, and does not consider employer costs incurred in the initial years of employment.
- Concerns about the revised training provision structure may fuel employers' reluctance to pay more, as the Training for Success initiative does not operate on a similar model for both the mechanical and electrical sectors.
- Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) has introduced targeted grant support to assist employers with sector specific up-skilling initiatives.

### RECOMMENDATION 5

It is vital to get the sector's curriculum and training structure right with a similar model across the whole sector to Level 3 so that employers can see the benefit and value in training. SummitSkills will work closely with the DEL, partners and the training provider network to implement this in conjunction with industry's recognised training bodies. Short term priority.

\* For instance allowing a manufacturer course to provide credit towards a wider qualification

## Employer perspective on quality of training provision

- Generally there is more dissatisfaction with the quality of service and teaching provided by further education than for private training providers. Major issues revolve around communication, the quality of teaching, resources and general curriculum planning.
- A high level of employer satisfaction has been achieved by the activities of ETT, the industry recognised training body acting on behalf of the electrical sector in Northern Ireland.
- Mechanical employers have established a similar body to act as the managing link between industry and the delivery providers (PMST).
- Activities of the Renewable Energy Installer Academy network in the country has successfully developed a skilled workforce capable of installing the emerging technologies in a domestic environment
- Educational Training Inspectorate (ETI) is recruiting industry professional associates to assist in monitoring the IQ:RS quality standard for the grading of vocational training.

### **RECOMMENDATION 12**

SummitSkills and partners will work with the recognised training bodies and providers to continue to improve the quality of both the administration and teaching of sector courses. Short term priority.

## Employer views on content of training provision

- Qualification content in particular is seen as being in some cases out of date or not suitable enough for the needs of the sector. There is a need for maintaining and updating qualifications regularly.
- Technician curriculum seems satisfactory, although there is concern that some of the material taught is too specialised and out of date. The general nature of HNC/D courses is detracting from the specialist requirements of employers.
- SummitSkills has already begun to address some of these issues as part of the Sector Qualifications Strategy.
- SummitSkills is currently working in conjunction with the Renewable Energy Installer Academy to research the ongoing needs for training in emerging environmental technologies.

### **RECOMMENDATION 13**

SummitSkills will work with the bodies responsible for qualifications to update existing qualifications in line with the sector's requirements, to address the issue of unsuitable curriculum content. Medium to long term priority.

# The Provision Itself

## Rationalising the number of courses and qualifications

- There are training courses and qualifications currently in the system within England and Wales that have not been funded (and therefore we assume have not been run) for a considerable amount of time. SummitSkills will work with the DEL using the English and Welsh data to more accurately identify the situation in Northern Ireland.
- By reducing the number of qualifications and courses that are surplus to employers' requirements, we can concentrate on those that truly meet the sector's needs.

### RECOMMENDATION 1A

Once the identification exercise described above with the DEL has taken place, where the provision has not received funding in the last three academic years, the sector curriculum that SummitSkills has identified should be removed from the DEL funding database.

### RECOMMENDATION 1B

Future changes to sector curriculum need to be reviewed and approved by SummitSkills to ensure it is fit for purpose for the sector.

## Develop a "Training for Success" job-ready provision which provides real opportunities

- There is a need to develop a 'job ready' strand that is based on a general VRQ (Vocational Related Qualification), in order to equip learners with the required transferable skills to enter employment within the sector or other occupations.
- The job ready provision must support the Modern Apprenticeship programme, providing informed career options and progression routes to all learners.
- Technical certificates taken from SummitSkills approved frameworks delivered in a stand alone mode are seen by employers across the UK as not producing economically valuable skills and not meeting their business needs.
- Research across England and Wales shows that high numbers of learners undertaking a full time stand alone technical certificate do not move into full time employment within the sector; therefore have little prospect of gaining the work-based experience to allow them to gain a National Vocational Qualification.
- SummitSkills, through its development of NI-specific Labour Market Intelligence, will continue to inform providers on the skills needs across the country on a regional basis, structured around the six new FE colleges.

### RECOMMENDATION 2

Technical certificates should only be funded as part of a full framework apprenticeship or as part of a National Vocational Qualification. SummitSkills will work with DEL and partners to develop 'job ready' provision which meets the needs of employers and learners alike. Short term priority.

## Higher Education Training Provision

- There are a low number of higher education establishments offering building services engineering courses.
- This low number is spread unevenly around the UK, although Northern Ireland would appear to be reasonably well catered for at technician level, unlike in England and Wales. There would also appear to be undergraduate and postgraduate provision within the province, making Northern Ireland one of the best catered for nations in the UK for building services engineering provision.
- There is however a weakness in the mapping of Level 3 provision to HNC/D, which needs to be improved.

### RECOMMENDATION 3

SummitSkills will continue to work with stakeholders in Further Education and Higher Education to seek to develop and maintain a network of providers offering degree and sub-degree courses within Northern Ireland. The development of foundation degrees may facilitate this process further. Medium term priority.

## Expenditure on training provision Renewable Technologies

- From the data available it was not possible to evaluate the current spend on training provision in Northern Ireland that produces non economically valuable skills. Possible savings have been identified in England and Wales which may be of interest to policy makers in the DEL.
- Funding could be redistributed to much needed training provision elsewhere in the sector such as environmental technologies (solar panels, photovoltaic panels for example), business management, benchmarking, supply chain management and apprenticeships for adults.

### RECOMMENDATION 6

SummitSkills will work with DEL, partners and stakeholders to identify curriculum spend, the appropriateness of this curriculum and seek, if necessary, a more effective use of funding to increase the sector's productivity performance and skills levels within Northern Ireland. SummitSkills will apply to the DEL for additional funding to undertake this activity. Medium term priority.

- SummitSkills is currently developing National Occupational Standards for renewable technology activities and occupations.
- The Renewable Energy Installer Academy (REIA) is continuing to develop progressive training provision to meets the needs of the sector's employers.
- SummitSkills, Energy and Utility Skills and Action Renewables are currently conducting a research project to determine employer needs for qualifications based on the design and specification, service and maintenance and commissioning of domestic systems.
- SummitSkills has had initial discussions with Belfast Metropolitan College to help determine the structure for a Foundation Degree in renewable technologies.

### RECOMMENDATION 15

SummitSkills will continue to work with Action Renewables and the REIA network to ensure that required skills are developed to support the continual development of these emerging technologies. Medium priority.

## Quality Marks/Awards of Providers

- Within the existing 16 FE college structure, eight providers have achieved the IIP Award, two hold the Charter Mark Award and two have providers have achieved the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) award.
- A number of existing providers have achieved recognition for innovative teaching and learning practice, achieving both AOC Beacon Awards and National Training Awards. However none of these awards relate specifically to the building services engineering sector.
- There is scope for more providers to achieve relevant quality marks and provide innovation in teaching and learning for our sector, as part of the ongoing college restructuring.

### RECOMMENDATION 11

SummitSkills will work with providers to increase achievement of relevant quality marks. Essentially it is believed that if more providers achieve these standards then it should raise the overall quality baseline of the sector's provision in Northern Ireland. Medium term priority.

# Profile Of Learners

## Adult basic skills

- 33% of all employers are concerned at the low level of literacy and numeracy of new entrants to the sector, with candidates experiencing difficulty in completing qualifications.
- Concerns are also expressed by employers on the literacy and numeracy levels of existing workers
- Awareness of basic skills issues in the workforce across the sector is low.
- Speaking, listening, reading, writing and numeracy are key to all occupations across the sector.
- 17% of employers employ migrant workers and additional provision may be required to address the basic skills of these workers.

### RECOMMENDATION 14

SummitSkills will work with the DEL, trade union Unite and employers through their industry recognised training bodies to support and encourage both new entrants and existing employees, to improve their basic skills for personal development and enhance the sector's productivity.

## Diversity

- Access to the sector is still dominated by white males.
- The problems of diversity are worse in Northern Ireland than elsewhere within the United Kingdom, with almost no engagement by women and ethnic minorities in some of the industries making up the sector.
- Despite various initiatives and mechanisms being introduced to encourage under-represented groups to join the sector, there seems to have been little impact.
- The sector undertakes very little activity with local schools promoting opportunities within the sector.

### RECOMMENDATION 8:

SummitSkills will continue to work with Careers Service NI and stakeholders to increase the engagement of women and ethnic minorities by facilitating innovative progression pathways into the sector. Medium to long term priority.

## Mode of delivery and age of participants in sector courses

- The sector within Northern Ireland has a very traditional entry route to employment through under-19 apprenticeships with employed status.
- There are very few adult learners entering the sector. Adults undertaking learning within the province appear to be on part time up-skilling courses, suggesting that they are existing sector employees.
- SummitSkills will advise partners on the annual required numbers of new entrants to the sector based on the latest sub regional LMI data.

### RECOMMENDATION 9

SummitSkills will work with partners, stakeholders and providers to develop sustainable entry and progression routes into the sector for the appropriate number of non-employed status learners within the province. This recommendation will equip learners with the pre-requisite skills to allow entry to a full employed Modern Apprenticeship, while at the same time seek to avoid the problems and difficulties that have been experienced in England and Wales.

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