

Provision: Viewpoint

West Midlands

assessment of current provision
workshop outcomes



Sector Involvement in Training

This is a 'work in progress' document. The views listed throughout these pages were suggested by delegates at the ACP meeting in Birmingham and will contribute to the Sector Skills Agreement for the West Midlands.

Use of training providers

Areas such as manufacturer training do not add to the formal qualification base of the sector. If formal mechanisms can be developed to recognise this kind of valuable training, skills development of this type can officially contribute to the sector's skills base.

RECOMMENDATION 4:

Develop credit-accumulation transfer and quality assurance with manufacturers and private providers.

VIEWS FROM THE GROUP:

- Proper rationalisation between training providers. Colleges should focus on their respective strengths. Competition between providers can adversely affect whether provision can be viably offered
- In reviewing existing qualifications consider a unitised/credit approach
- Need effective communication between SSC, awarding bodies, LSC, employers, training providers
- Clarification needed on who will set values of individual courses
- Explore the Open University model as an example
- Provide a set of core units and a pick list of funded units/options to cater for individual employer need
- Increase delivery of training in the workplace
- Upskilling should be given formal status – this would benefit the employers that provide in-house training
- Create a training list to form a directory of opportunities for training providers and employers
- Develop closer links between employers and training providers
- HE to get appropriate training accredited

Employer willingness to pay for training

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.

RECOMMENDATION 5:

Get the curriculum and training structure right so that employers can see the benefit and value in training.

VIEWS FROM THE GROUP:

- Need providers who are willing to participate in employers' staff development planning
- Providers should offer full support to employers in discharging local labour/sustainability requirements for large local projects
- Build strong employer links to enable people to get placements
- Employers to consider using the college for their staff recruitment and selection – colleges have good intelligence on learners wishing to enter industry
- Use the evidence providers have to make the business case to employers
- Involve employers in emerging markets/environmental technologies through Regional Business Clusters
- Bring employers and trainers together around large projects and new technology developments
- Engaging employers with Business Link will help ground training in the context of business performance improvements
- More open forum to debate the issues of both sides
- Improve employers and learners understanding of the 'mechanics' of NVQs, technical certificates and full frameworks
- Training providers working with SSCs should provide best practice case studies, particularly to small-medium employers
- Focus on establishing progression
- SummitSkills needs to have a concentrated campaign to engage with small to medium employers and make the case for investment in skills
- Develop 'case studies' of success/good practice to show the benefits of investment in training
- Maybe the initial cost of training is considerable but when fully qualified the employee is of value to the employer, representing a return on investment
- Remove the employer stigma concerning NVQs
- Engage employers more in the value of NVQs
- Present strong evidence to employers of the case for investment in skills
- Work with employers to help them make better use of the money they currently spend on training
- Employer champions to change perceptions
- How do we challenge larger employers to influence their supply chain?

Employer spend on apprentice training

Considerable amounts of money (in this case via an employee's time) is 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.

RECOMMENDATION 7:

Develop cost models further to achieve a sensible balance between employer and government training contributions

VIEWS FROM THE GROUP:

- Review availability of Government funding for apprentices and simplify the process
- Could buying power of large companies be used to purchase training on behalf of the industry and supply chain?
- Remember we are likely to be training a considerable number of individuals over a 4–6 year period
- Maintain full time technical certificate as a mechanism for reducing employer costs of mentoring
- The cost would be reduced if employment of students with technical certificate was adopted
- Train the trainers or train potential trainer programmes possibly funded by LSC
- Give training providers more freedom to change training or programme content

Views on content of 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.

RECOMMENDATION 13:

Continually update existing qualifications in line with the sector's requirements. This also includes the development of new content such as environmental technologies

VIEWS FROM THE GROUP:

- Use Train to Gain to collect information on employer needs alongside SummitSkills SSA.
- Develop a more flexible day/block release programme for training to meet needs of employers
- Employers must be able (via SSC) to influence awarding bodies to change the content of courses
- Colleges and employers should sign up to service level agreements that are reviewed regularly
- Ask the employer what needs they require for their workforce
- It is really important that the training industry provide skills training in the context of business needs performance measures. Conversation is too focused on qualification levels and not on skills
- Colleges should work as area groups to better utilise their finite resources
- Provide a mechanism for regular updating of qualifications/assessment. Perhaps have an online news brief to incorporate changes in technologies/legislation
- Training providers need to provide employers with information requested as a right not as an option
- Employers need to indicate what they want, in terms of training, then training provision offers flexibility. Could be logistical nightmare for training provision
- SSC to liaise with employers to provide input to City & Guilds updates to existing NVQs etc
- Develop new ways for employers and providers to communicate and engage – the will is there on both sides. Providers should establish better relationships with SSC, professional and trade institutions, and organisations to identify regional sector needs
- Providers must adopt an “anytime, anywhere, any place” approach to training
- Tailor curriculum to meet employer needs
- Employers engaged in working groups to shape FE provision
- Drivers to open dialogue linked in to the employers projected workload in the area and identify required training
- Create clearer pathways for employers to articulate their specific needs and use Train to Gain to support this
- Have nationally agreed qualifications with flexibility to flavour skills to meet regional/local needs
- A pick list of funded units available or acceptance by employers that additions will need to be paid for
- Awarding bodies need to give more flexibility in allowing providers to deliver up to date programmes
- How do we build and maintain dialogue with companies to align training with industry needs?
- Plumbing is a difficult qualification to achieve
- Hold a full review of existing qualifications to employer needs including funding streams

Views on quality of provision

Generally there is more dissatisfaction with the quality of service and teaching provided by further education than for private training providers. Issues revolve around communication, the quality of teaching, resources and general curriculum planning.

RECOMMENDATION 12:

Work with partners to improve providers' service: administration, teaching and communication

VIEWS FROM THE GROUP:

- Providers must understand the needs and general operation of the businesses and must develop long term partnership agreements and tailored provision
- Colleges need to act like members of our supply chain – sell the services and engage employers interest
- Give employers the opportunity to impact on provision structure
- Share best practice, create better customer relationship training in colleges to see employers as customers
- Close liaison via meetings with employers regarding technical certificates, NVQ issues and delivery
- We recognise it's a two-way street but we are already putting valuable resource into this area
- Employers will only feel valued if they get the service they require
- Communication improvements show visible changes as a result of employer input
- Use best practice models to educate both parties Providers and employers should participate in a staff exchange
- Closer links with industry on regular basis
- Communication between all parties must be improved
- Have regular contact and communication with employers
- Is 30 face to face interviews with employers representative of industry? Were these employers made up of a range of small-medium employers?
- SSC should help training providers set up better employer forums
- Two-way dialogue needed
- Provide a centralised point of access
- Coordinate training provision as a group of providers
- Develop close working partnerships in regular contact with each other
- Look at approaches successful in other sectors bringing together employers and training providers e.g. Bull ring retail
- Provide forums to discuss customers needs (recognising that employers are not the total pool of customers provided to)
- Establishment of better employer forums/steering groups at colleges
- Improve channels of communication between employers and providers with SummitSkills as the 'broker'
- Dialogue with all sizes of employers
- Where do employers source information on training provision?
- Employer links – more employers should attend open days at colleges
- Need better brokers who can link all the providers to access training needed in a flexible way
- Need to have better, informed infrastructure for all parties to get together e.g. London 2012

The Provision Itself

Rationalising the number of courses and qualifications

There are training courses and qualifications currently in the system that have not been funded for a considerable amount of time. Because there has been no demand for this curriculum we suggest that it is no longer relevant to the sector.

RECOMMENDATION 1:

Remove curriculum that has been unfunded in the past three years to remove the confusion in the system.

VIEWS FROM THE GROUP:

- Deliver a coordinated view
- Partnering arrangements with providers needed

Technical certificate funding

There is a significant amount of funding directed at stand-alone technical certificates, which offer a theory-based qualification but no work-related experience. People undertaking a full-time technical certificate are typically not employed in the sector and have little prospect of gaining work-based experience to allow them to gain a National Vocational Qualification.

RECOMMENDATION 2:

Only fund technical certificates as part of a full-framework apprenticeship or as part of an NVQ.

VIEWS FROM THE GROUP:

- Improve employers and candidates understanding of technical certificates
- Consider a better incentive scheme for employers to recruit learners through apprenticeships
- SummitSkills is taking the opportunity away from young people to experience an area they wish to work in
- Technical certificates have a purpose and should not be linked only to apprentice frameworks
- Standalone certificates create a grey economy of under-trained one man operators
- Better educate employers about technical certificates to encourage them to take up existing trainees
- Identify how many technical certificates do not link to NVQ
- Develop Programme Led Apprenticeships in plumbing and electrotechnical
- Is the removal of technical certificate training about getting rid of future competition and keeping shortages in the sector – more profit!
- If we reduce technical certificates will SummitSkills sanction a pre apprenticeship for 16 year olds funded by LSC?
- Limit the number of technical certificates to meet/match local need
- Reduce/restrict evening only courses
- Maintain a viable full time option to encourage minorities
- University/colleges and employers should work together to ensure the best delivery in each relevant area i.e. joint delivery of programmes
- Technical certificates are valuable outside apprenticeships as long as there is strong employer engagement

Profile of learners

Access to the sector is still dominated by white males. Despite various initiatives and mechanisms being introduced to encourage under-represented groups to join the sector, there seems to have been little impact. There are also significant numbers of non-employed learners, both adults and 16–19s, who are on technical certificates that the sector deems to be non-economically valuable (NEV).

RECOMMENDATION 9:

Reduce the large number of NEV courses and instead develop innovative and sustainable entry and progression routes into the sector for a reduced number of non-employed status learners.

VIEWS FROM THE GROUP:

- Ensure coordinated communication of the career paths available – should be a realistic view
- Use large infrastructure projects to bring employers, providers and individuals together and resolve issues of diversity and skills
- Promote all industries for diversity
- School careers sections should work with colleges more closely
- Offer discrete courses for female staff and people from ethnic minorities with role models (e.g. female and teaching staff from ethnic minority groups)
- Identify the business benefits for diverse workforce
- Offer better careers advice at all levels to attract more people (especially well qualified young people from schools)
- Use case studies
- Identify “champions” from under represented groups to help promote careers in sector KS3
- Extend adult apprenticeship provision
- Have more funding for adult apprenticeships – there is a large market
- Get greater clarity on progression and what NEVs are
- Improve perceptions of the sector as a career choice – need evidence in the form of ‘success stories’ or ‘role models’

Higher education

There are a low number of higher education establishments offering building services engineering courses. This poses a problem for individuals who need to gain a professional qualification alongside their work.

RECOMMENDATION 3:

Develop a sustainable network of providers offering degree and sub-degree courses within all regions.

VIEWS FROM THE GROUP:

- Develop bridging qualifications L3 to L4 e.g. foundation degrees
- Identify need from employers, with SummitSkills possibly acting as convenor, and seek appropriate regional provider
- All training needs to be included in a credit accumulation framework
- Progression routes need to be clear and transparent for learners
- The root area to explore is working within schools to explain career paths and what is required of young people i.e. GCSE grades A–C
- Need understanding of what HE provision is available – and destination of students migration patterns
- Give training providers market analysis in order to help develop level for provision i.e. foundation degrees
- HE providers are flexible between themselves. Provide what employers and learners need ultimately
- Training the trainers and continuing professional development are very important and they must be linked to on-going industry and commercial experience

Expenditure on provision

Based on an analysis of current funding for non-economically valuable skills, there is potentially around £22 million across England that 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:

Seek a more effective use of funding to improve sector productivity performance and skills levels

VIEWS FROM THE GROUP:

- Signpost what qualifications employers need i.e. new technologies to allow providers to meet needs
- Stop funding 20-week training courses that promote the grey economy
- Redeploy NEVS money to encourage employers to recruit and pay/contribute to training (in addition to mentoring)
- Make more efficient use of resources available – pool resource and training provision
- Encourage and promote further studies – support and fund to move and take higher qualifications
- Make funding regimes more flexible to include 'informal', 'bite-sized' training meeting specific employer needs
- Is it all about plumbing? Will we train too many?
- For training to be made more effective more funding is needed
- Support funding for modern methods qualifications – where are they and when will they be available?

Provider quality marks and awards

Whilst there is some take-up of quality marks and CoVE status in the region, there is still scope for more providers to achieve quality marks. Essentially if more providers achieve these standards then it should raise the overall quality baseline of the sector's provision.

RECOMMENDATION 11:

Work with providers to increase the achievement of quality marks. Agree criteria of the 'New Standard' in the sector to ensure quality provision is recognised and endorsed.

VIEWS FROM THE GROUP:

- Aid training providers that achieve the 'new standard' to access employers needing bespoke training
- There should be only one standard
- Key Performance Indicators on our existing providers e.g. JTL/BEST – what are they delivering – success rates?
- Quality standards must be endorsed by industry as well as the LSC
- No more quality marks are required but standards that are recognised and easily understood.

Hurdles and Bridges

These 'hurdles' and bridges' to achieving great future provision were suggested by meeting delegates.

Hurdles	Bridges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Perceptions – especially small-medium employers ● Employer engagement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – FEs employer contacts ● FEs to do work on evidence of progression ● Rationalising the provision <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Not 20 colleges knocking on the door ● Who is the customer <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Employer vs Learner 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Dialogue <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Catalyst to bring sides together <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free lunches ● Partnerships are good, but what impact on providers? ● Much better advice and guidance to make choices and without delusion

Great Future Provision...

Delegates were asked at the start of the meeting what three words they would use to sum up great future provision. The highlighted words represent the three words which resonated with delegates following discussions.

Partnership	Training	Flexibility
Responsive	Timely	Cooperative
Training	Responsiveness	Flexibility
Inclusive	Responsiveness	Flexibility
Employer-led	Partners	Flexibility
Innovation	Responsiveness	Relevant
Employer	Engaged	Provision
Smart	Efficient	Effective
Qualifications	Partners	Employer-links
Responsiveness	Flexibility	Partnership
Valued -	By -	Employers
Relevant	Flexible	Training
Responsiveness	Timeliness	Quality
Industry-	Relevant-	Skills
Flexible	Relevant	Practical
Competence	Affordable	Quality
IMPROVED	PRODUCTIVITY	PRE-EDUCATION

These 'practical' and 'challenging' ideas are also the views and suggestions of the meeting delegates.

The most PRACTICAL idea worth doing

- Improve communications between all stakeholders
- Research via colleges/training providers to establish the number of technical certificate students progressing to employment as a full apprentice. This will lead to Programme Led Apprentices being promoted by SSC to industry as currently done by ConstructionSkills.
- Reduce the numbers of technical certificate starts – should be dependent upon local need/history of apprenticeship starts.
- Redevelop the qualifications to provide a sustainable, flexible offer to employers
- Establish West Midlands facts and figures
- Creating more joined up approach to satisfy employer wants through more discussion between providers and employers
- Educate at an early age by using school links more effectively
- Engage in dialogue with the FE providers on a regular basis.
- More communication between the training provider and employer
- Further detailed discussions of this subject of training provision, keeping all parties informed of progress. Universal directory of training provision in West Midlands to be supplied to employers including both private training provision and colleges.
- Identify major infrastructure projects and bring employers and trainers together to work on achieving joint training initiatives to address business needs, skills shortages, diversity.
- Re-educate existing stage in technical certificate also engage the employer in the value of the NVQ, by regular meetings, updates, delivery work to their needs. Link the technical certificate and NVQ together, they are of equal importance but must be run together.
- Activity to improve dialogue between employers and providers
- Map technical certificates onto the existing traditional NVQ based training schemes. Show employers and learners where the two tie in
- Brokering the established custom and practice with both employers and providers to achieve quality, customer (industry) focused training, delivered in a timely manner, at flexible times

The most CHALLENGING idea worth doing

- Provide an effective and efficient way of achieving improvement in communications between stakeholders and making it all-inclusive
- Ensure entry criteria for full time programmes are nationally set and adhered to by training providers.
- Compulsory work experience for technical certificate full time learners and industry support for such placements.
- Work together to make it great!
- Making provision employer driven
- Changing the perception of current provision
- Installing new technology delivery in FE due to cost
- Understanding what benefit education led trainees have to my organisation and where they fit in a 'site' based team
- Getting the awarding bodies to understand what industry wants and the LSC to match with time and funding
- Engaging with more employers of all sizes within industry. More representation required around table to get informed decisions
- Changing attitudes and perceptions of all parties (employers, providers, individuals)
- Changing attitudes of employers towards training
- Improving the engagement and 'buy in' of small-medium employers regarding skills and training
- Open the gates between employers and providers, introduce partnering through service level agreement concepts and/or introduce training coordination and brokers who look at the bigger provision available for learner and employer.
- Regional rationalisation of building services engineering training provision.

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