

In focus

Key issues affecting the building
services engineering sector in the
North West

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

HORIZON

the sector skills agreement
for building services engineering

New entrants

BASIC SKILLS

- 40% of employers in the North West are alarmed at the low level of literacy and numeracy of new entrants.
- Poor employability and attitudinal skills are areas of concern.

DIVERSITY

- 87% of firms employ no women outside of administrative roles. Those that do, only employ a small percentage.
- 20% of firms have employees from ethnic minority groups.
- There are opportunities to utilise female staff to visit clients from vulnerable or ethnic groups, who would be uncomfortable with a male operative.
- Should training be developed in diversity issues and behaviours to make existing and future workforce more aware of needs of these groups?

MIGRANT WORKERS

- Only 20% of firms stated they employ migrant workers at present.
- However, the expected increase in the requirement for skilled operatives may change this situation.
- Is there a need to develop English courses and health & safety training for migrant workers to meet potential future training demand?

SKILLS REQUIREMENTS

- 82% of employers need their craft workforce to be trained to Level 3. However, Learning & Skills Council funding is driven by Level 2 targets. Stakeholders and partners also accept Level 3 as the industrial standard.
- Employers have stated a clear need for technician training at Higher National Certificate level.
- Many companies believe government policies on funding are putting older apprentices (19+), who are more attractive to the sector, at a disadvantage.
- There is some concern at the quality of training provision in the region.

SCENARIO PLANNING

- SummitSkills has two workforce forecasting models for labour requirement, produced by BSRIA and Experian.
- 70% of North West employers expect that the market for their services will grow, which will fuel the need for new entrants.
- Therefore, SummitSkills recommends that the more optimistic model (Experian) is applied to North West planning.

THE BIG QUESTIONS:

- Q How important are each of these issues to business?
- Q What are the most effective ways of dealing with them?
- Q Are there solutions already in place that meet the needs identified?
- Q Can other solutions that are already in place be adjusted or developed?

Business & workforce development

SKILLS REQUIREMENTS

- Employers in the North West have stated a requirement for practical and IT skills, supervision and management skills, multi-skilling, communication and business acumen skills.
- There is also a wish for technician training at Higher National Certificate (HNC) level.
- 57% of North West employers undertake management and supervisory staff training – much more than other regions in England.
- However, there are concerns about how much of this is carried out through the HNC without sufficient practical experience.
- Day release creates problems for some employers. Distance learning may be a solution.
- Employers have identified future skills required in legislation (for example Part P and L of Building Regulations) and technology (environmental and IT training).

RETIREMENT AND NATURAL WASTAGE

- 33% of firms in the North West carry out retirement planning – this is better than many other areas in England.
- But still not enough firms in the region make allowances for retirement.
- Trade Associations offer training in retirement planning – should the principles of this training be rolled out more proactively?

PARTNERING

- Extended contracts and partnering arrangements are becoming more prevalent in public sector, which encourage cooperation rather than competition.
- In the North West, some private sector clients are developing partner-type relationships with building services engineering firms.
- Is further training needed to address the development of new partnering arrangements?

BARGAINING POWER WITH SUPPLIERS/CLIENTS

- In bargaining power with clients, the region's employers stated service, company name and reputation as heavily influential. Price was stated by only 10% as being a factor.
- Use of supply chain management was mentioned by only 7% of companies.
- Would more efficiency be achieved through training for the sector on supply chain management techniques?

RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

- 40% of companies engage in forms of research – the majority of firms who don't will be at a disadvantage.
- SummitSkills is well positioned to work as a broker to enhance the marketability and relevance of research to the industry.

NEW IT IMPLEMENTATION

- 93% of North West employers are responding well to new IT, with varying degrees of expertise amongst staff.
- However, some workers may require further training to get IT skills levels up to make full use of technologies available and improve productivity.

ENTERPRISE

- 77% of firms feel that entrepreneurship is an important issue but less feel they have the necessary skills.
- Does the sector need to investigate further development in entrepreneurial skills, either as bespoke courses or through integration in general vocational education?
- SummitSkills notes that as much new business and entrepreneurial activity begins with small firms started by craft operatives, this training should be extended to all levels within the curriculum, and not seen as a management or technician function.

BENCHMARKING

- 37% of North West employers carry out formal benchmarking activity – a high proportion compared to other regions.
- In order for more firms to benefit from this practice, should formalised benchmarking practices be integrated into training for managers and supervisors?

THE BIG QUESTIONS:

Q Which of the issues listed above need the most urgent attention?

Q How can they be dealt with?

Q Are there systems or programmes already in place that meet these needs?

Q Can existing solutions be adjusted or developed?

External influences

GLOBALISATION

- 77% of North West employers do not think that the market will be adversely affected by foreign competition.
- However, through open tendering systems companies may experience rivalry from abroad for work in home markets.
- If the employer perception is incorrect, it may leave the sector vulnerable once foreign competition becomes established.

TECHNOLOGY/ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGE

The driving force:

- The UK's energy policy commits to cut CO2 emissions by 60% by 2050.
- £22m will be invested over two years to strengthen consumer demand for energy efficiency.
- The North West Development Agency has a sustainable energy strategy which includes development of renewable technology in the region.

The skills need:

- 60% of employers feel they are comfortable in environmental skills, however these appear to be restricted to existing legislative-driven technology such as condensing boilers.
- Less are confident in skills such as solar and photovoltaic.
- The sector is reactive rather than proactive in training in new technologies.
- To meet the increasing demand for installation and maintenance of renewable energy, more certified training opportunities need to be developed.

GOVERNMENT REGULATION

- Employers feel that implementation of the skills card regime is piecemeal and insufficient inspection is taking place on sites.
- Many companies point towards increased costs on business in light of the Building Regulations.
- The North West is generally more positive towards government than other regions in how regulations impact on sector.

THE BIG QUESTIONS:

- Q How do these external influences impact on business?
- Q How can the sector ensure that it is prepared for change?
- Q Are there existing solutions that meet the needs identified?
- Q Can other solutions that are already in place be adjusted or developed?

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