

The dawn of a new era for building services engineering skills

Sector Skills Agreement Northern Ireland summary of action



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

HORIZON

the sector skills agreement
for building services engineering

April 2008 heralds a fresh approach to addressing the sector's skills issues. After months of careful consultation and planning, the Sector Skills Agreement for the building services engineering in Northern Ireland has come to fruition.

What is a Sector Skills Agreement?

Building services engineering permeates the whole of society and every industry in the United Kingdom and plays a major role in sustainable development and energy efficiency. Without the activities of this sector, the whole UK economy would cease to function. Therefore it's vital we have a clear strategy to ensure the sector has the skilled people it needs. This is where the Sector Skills Agreement comes in.

The purpose of a Sector Skills Agreement (SSA) is to understand the skills issues facing employers and work with them and stakeholders, to develop solutions which will lead to significant skills improvement and longer term productivity benefits for the sector.

In simple terms, it is a deal between employers, training providers and government. Employers lay out their workforce and skills requirements now and in the future. In return, the government and providers agree to fund and deliver training tailored to this need, within government policy, providing employers are also willing to make a commitment

What does OUR Sector Skills Agreement involve?

The SSA for building services engineering is based around five 'skills priorities' which were developed following detailed consultation around the UK:

- **Image and competence:** promoting a positive image of the sector
- **Communication and Information:** creating a knowledge centre for all sector skills development needs
- **Training Provision:** ensuring pro-active, highly quality and relevant training
- **Funding:** flexibility in funding to meet fast-changing needs
- **Management & Leadership:** supporting the sector to plan and develop profitable and competitive businesses

In this document we present a summary of each of the five skills priorities and the planned 'sector programme' activity that we will undertake, in conjunction with partners, to generate positive and beneficial change for the sector's skills landscape.

How did we get to this stage?

The whole SSA development has been a five stage process. The strength of SummitSkills' work has been its 'bottom-up' approach – from the very start we consulted throughout Northern Ireland with employers and stakeholders, ensuring the documents produced at each milestone were a true reflection of the sector's needs in the nation.

- **Stage 1:** the sector's skills needs over the short, medium and long term future were assessed
- **Stage 2:** current sector training provision was analysed in terms of range, nature and employer relevance
- **Stage 3:** supply and demand were compared and gaps identified. A draft 'action plan' was drawn up with suggested solutions to address these gaps.
- **Stage 4:** SummitSkills liaised with employers, industry partners, providers and funders to gain commitment on the action plans, to agree what can and will be achieved.

Signed up to by all...

Key partnership agreements have been signed with stakeholders to formally recognise their commitment to work together for significant change for the NI building services engineering sector. The table below shows the partners that SummitSkills will be working in some form to deliver the SSA:

Partner
Action Renewables and the Renewable Energy Installer Academy Network
Careers Service Northern Ireland
Electrical Training Trust
Foundation Degree Forward
Management & Leadership Network
Ofqual and CCEA
NI Trade Associations including SNIPeF, HVCA and ECA
Unite the Union
DEL Sectoral Development Branch
DEL Training Programmes Branch
ConstructionSkills
CITBNI
Energy & Utility Skills
DEL Project Board

Grounded in NI opinion...

Throughout the project we have been committed not only to close employer engagement, but also Northern Ireland-specific LMI. At each stage we actively reviewed the data collected through open consultation events that focused on the issues affecting the country.

The table below provides a summary of the employer surveys that were undertaken in Northern Ireland and have informed our Sector Skills Agreement work.

Title	Area of Focus	Date	No. of Employers Surveyed
SSA initial research	BSE sector, training, future skill needs, review of current provision	Mar – May 2006	30 face to face in-depth employer interviews
DEL policy change – Training for Success	MA programmes and quality of new entrants now and in future	July – Sept 2006	Paper survey of 1551 registered businesses in NI BSE sector
SNA consultation event	Testing the findings of the Sector Needs Analysis and exploring potential solutions	October 2006	35 attendees consisting of employers, stakeholders and government partners
Statutory levy	Ongoing support for statutory levy for the mechanical and plumbing sectors	Nov 2006 – Feb 2007	Survey of 500 registered NI businesses
Skills and employment requirements of NI BSE sector	Current training provision New entrant requirements	July 2007	600 telephone interviews
ACP consultation event	Testing the findings of the Assessment of Current Provision and exploring potential solutions	July 2007	23 attendees consisting of employers, stakeholders and government partners
FE and HE provision for NI BSE sector	Current Provision Delivery Model Review	Oct 2007	Review data from wider Experian BSE survey UCAS Survey
Renewables and emerging technology in BSE sector	Current and future training needs in renewables and emerging technology	Jun – Dec 2007	10 face to face in depth interviews 150 telephone interviews
Skills and employment requirements of NI BSE sector	Testing the conclusions of the SSA and refreshing new entrant forecasts	Jan – Mar 08	300 telephone interviews

A joint effort...now and in the future

SummitSkills is grateful for the extensive time and resource contributions made by Northern Ireland employers and stakeholders to the various stages of the SSA development. This has been fundamental in developing workable solutions of direct relevance to the sector. We also value their ongoing support, energy and commitment to continue the good work and make a significant difference for the sector in years to come.

This is just the start of the journey...

The project does not finish here, this is simply 'the end of the beginning'. Now we begin a period of implementation and review. The Sector Skills Agreement activities have effectively become SummitSkills' ongoing business plan where we work with partners to deliver what the sector's employers are seeking.

This will be achieved through an SSA Northern Ireland implementation group which has the accountability and responsibility to ensure the delivery of SSA solutions in the nation. The group will meet on a quarterly basis to review and monitor progress of the SSA.

Employer engagement is crucial

For the Sector Skills Agreement to have the maximum positive impact across the whole sector, it's important that businesses of all sizes get involved. Our dedicated NI operations manager can show you how you might be able to take part and importantly benefit from the projects.

Find out more

To find out more about the Sector Skills Agreement for building services engineering or to get involved in its projects please contact SummitSkills on either 07834 868951 or 01908 303960, or visit www.horizon-ssa.org.uk

Skills Priority 1: Professional Image and Competence

Promoting a positive image of the sector and develop a skilled and sustainable workforce

The issue	Proposed solution
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of awareness and mis-perception of the sector deter many suitable people from considering building services engineering careers. Underrepresented groups have either no understanding or a negative perception of the sector. There are many in the sector with a range of experience but are part-qualified or have no qualifications or recognition of competence. Customers do not have an understanding of competence when awarding work to contractors. There are a variety of competence cards which are causing confusion across the sector. Many cards are not actively policed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aspirational sector image: Improve careers guidance and active marketing to establish work in the BSE sector as an aspirational career choice for high achievers. Fresh approaches to diversity: Transform the attitudes of students and parents towards vocational and professional careers in the BSE sector. Ensuring everyone in the sector is competent: Implement ways to recognise achievement in terms of qualifications, standards and training which is fit for purpose and meets employer needs. Public recognition of competence: Develop a competence assurance framework against which people can be assessed and registered. A common understanding of competence across the sector which is easy to understand and communicate. One well policed competency card: Benchmark existing skill card schemes for the sector and harmonise into a new skill card which is well publicised.
Proposed action for employers	Proposed action for partners
<p>Employers to act as ambassadors and role models for the sector with schools.</p> <p>Stakeholder trade associations, including employer members, to market the sector and promote careers information.</p>	<p>Careers & Diversity Interest Group -develop and steer career strategies and diversity research.</p> <p>Training providers: train and prepare new entrants effectively for the sector.</p> <p>Career advisors and organisations to provide up to date information advice and guidance on the opportunities in the sector.</p> <p>Schools motivate interest in the sector and vocational qualifications.</p> <p>Trade Union: part of the negotiation of one competency card.</p>
Proposed action for employers	Proposed action for partners
<p>Employers to act as ambassadors and role models for the sector with schools.</p> <p>Stakeholder trade associations, including employer members, to market the sector and promote careers information.</p>	<p>Careers routes that are clearly understood by people from all groups and backgrounds to position the sector as the occupation of choice.</p> <p>Flexible methods are established to create a mandatory, fully registered and qualified workforce which is recognised both internally and externally, to raise the image of the sector and its employees.</p> <p>One skill card which recognises competency across the sector which is valued by the workforce and understood by customers.</p>
Proposed action for employers	Year 1 activity for Northern Ireland
<p>Employers to act as ambassadors and role models for the sector with schools.</p> <p>Stakeholder trade associations, including employer members, to market the sector and promote careers information.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Secure funding for a sector specific careers adviser. Promote interactive careers map. Dissemination and promotion of careers guidance and information. Promote careers DVD. Promote APL schemes. Develop SQS. Support Action Renewables and REIA in developing self-regulation scheme.

Skills Priority 2: Communication and Information

Create a one stop knowledge centre for all building services engineering skills development needs

The issue	Proposed solution		
<p>Employers provide data on apprenticeship costs to help refine cost models and case studies to show training pays.</p> <p>Stakeholder trade associations contribute data to the knowledge centre and help to publicise its availability and value, and proof that training pays.</p>	<p>Proposed action for partners</p> <p>DEL, Ofqual and other relevant nations funding bodies work with SummitSkills to develop clarity in the sector provision available.</p> <p>DIUS; consider the apprenticeship cost benefit models developed to achieve a funding balance for employers.</p> <p>DEL: work with the Knowledge centre to refine the sector LMI at regional level.</p> <p>HE / HEFCE: share research data on the sector with the knowledge hub.</p> <p>FE: work with SummitSkills to provide clarity in the provision offered through authorised progression routes.</p> <p>Various LMI sources: work to develop up to date information on the sector.</p> <p>Regional observatories: share information and work with the knowledge hub on sector issues.</p> <p>Unite the Union: help to promote the proof that training pays.</p>	<p>Impact/outcome if successful</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A business focussed national hub for skills-related knowledge, development and support, providing authoritative insight and market intelligence on sector competitiveness and skills matters. • Employers have a clear understanding of provision and how it fits with their business and employee needs. • A robust model that assesses the total costs of apprenticeship training and helps to achieve a sensible balance between employer and government training contributions. • Employers value and commit to training, and to fund it to increasing levels. 	<p>Year 1 activity for Northern Ireland</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feed NI LMI into central knowledge hub. • Apply for additional funding to conduct annual research. • Developing SQS. • Develop and promote cost models including liaison with DEL. • Promote benefits of training inc work with MLN. • Case studies to support and encourage new entrants and existing employees.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information on skills development is scattered amongst a variety of sources and is difficult to access, resulting in confusion and skills gaps. Sector LMI is not regularly available. • There are a significant number of sector courses and qualifications that are surplus to employer requirements. There is also confusion over training availability and access to public funding. • Employers in the sector make a significant contribution to the training and development of staff, especially in supporting and mentoring apprentices, but this contribution is not understood or recognised by Government. • The sector needs convincing about the business benefits of training and persuaded to train more than they currently do. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SummitSkills knowledge centre: develop and communicate a one stop knowledge centre for sector skills matters. Implement annual LMI surveys and wider research and share business insights to improve competitiveness. • Provision clarity: work with the DEL to remove out of date curriculum from the Learning Aims Database and develop clarity with providers on authorised progression pathways and availability of public funding. Develop and publicise a course database for upskilling the sector. • Apprenticeship cost benefit analysis: develop and refine models that review all the costs, including employer contributions, of apprenticeship training. • Proof that training pays: develop and communicate employer case studies to show the benefit of training, clearly defining the contribution that training makes to increased productivity and profitability. 		

Skills Priority 3: Training Provision

Pro-active, timely, high quality public funded provision for all training and fast-changing sector priorities

The issue	Proposed solution
<p>Proposed employer action</p> <p>Employers: contribute to the development of up to date NOS and a process for accrediting training.</p> <p>Trade associations: work with SummitSkills to support development and implementation of NOS and qualifications, including HE.</p> <p>Manufacturers: contribute to develop an accreditation process for the sector.</p> <p>Proposed action for partners</p> <p>DEL: work with SummitSkills to remove funding for standalone technical certificates and introduce sustainable entry routes.</p> <p>Funding bodies: work in partnership with providers to ensure sector approved qualifications and courses are funded.</p> <p>FE: actively remove standalone technical certificate provision and will ensure their provision reflects the latest NOS delivered in a quality and professional way.</p> <p>HE/ HEFCE/Professional Bodies: work with SummitSkills to develop sustainable HE network of degree and sub-degree courses for the sector.</p> <p>Nations standards bodies: ensure the latest sector NOS are reflected in the qualifications.</p> <p>Awarding Bodies: develop qualifications reflecting the latest NOS.</p> <p>Ofqual: work to accredit qualifications for the sector.</p> <p>Third party certification bodies: work to develop an accreditation process.</p> <p>DIUS: help to ensure appropriate inspection regimes maintain quality provision for the sector.</p>	<p>Impact/outcome if successful</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A sector qualification strategy which meets the needs of the sector and is updated in a timely fashion. • A credit accumulation transfer mechanism to monitor and recognise employer, manufacturer and non qualification based courses. • Recognised entry and progression routes to maximise recruitment and retention of a diverse range of applicants, minimising potential for partly trained practitioners and linking requirements to LMI. • A sustainable network of degree and sub degree courses across the UK. • Employers have confidence that all providers deliver quality training with good communication links between provider, trainee and employer. • Updated and maintained NOS and qualifications that reflect renewables and environmental technology skills needs. <p>Year 1 activity for Northern Ireland</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reviewing NOS including gathering employer feedback through workshops and adding renewable technology. • Create a BSE training forum. • Revise assessment strategy based on revised NOS. • Develop cross-sector job ready framework. • Develop SQS. • Establish HE links and HE employer forum. • Ensure new college structure meets employer needs with ANIC. • Improve training provision quality and administration. • Produce LMI report on renewables requirements. • Work with REIA to develop qualifications. • Continue work with manufacturers interest group.

Skills Priority 4: Funding

Flexibility in funding to meet fast-changing skills needs to develop business and workforce

The issue	Proposed solution	
<p>Proposed action for employers</p> <p>Employers: promote and support authorised entry and progression routes with their providers and help to deliver up to date provision.</p> <p>Trade associations: promote and support authorised entry and progression routes with their employers and help to deliver up to date provision.</p>	<p>Proposed action for partners</p> <p>DEL: work with SummitSkills to redeploy NEVS funding with providers whilst maintaining the overall funding for the sector.</p> <p>DEL: work with providers to review and reduce all NEVS funding.</p> <p>FE providers: actively reduce any NEVS provision and replace it with new provision demanded by the sector.</p> <p>DEL: help to ensure the total funding available for the sector is maintained.</p> <p>Unite the Union: lobby for flexible funding opportunities for the sector.</p>	<p>Year 1 activity for Northern Ireland</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supporting ongoing funding through DEL revised priority areas. Working with regional WDFs to determine levels of provision required. Develop cross-sector job-ready framework. Developing SQS. Identify curriculum spend and appropriateness of curriculum and seek effective uses of funding. Apply to the DEL for additional funding to undertake this activity. Develop sustainable entry and progression routes.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is difficult for public funders of training to ensure it is aligned to employer needs. There are also special requirements across the sector for funding to support areas which are outside of the norm e.g. mature adults. A considerable amount of current publicly funded training provision leads to non-economically valuable skills (NEVS) and therefore is not relevant to the sector. There is also a need for new training provision to be funded to meet the changing needs of the sector. 	<p>Impact/outcome if successful</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public funding for training delivers maximum benefit to businesses and individuals. All public funding available is used to support training that is recognised by the sector and demanded by employers. All non-economically valuable skills training is stopped. 	<p>Proposed solution</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Influencing flexibility of funding: develop employer-centric brokerage for sector skills development, supported by flexible demand-led funding. Redeployment of NEVS funding: work with regional and national partners to seek a more effective use of public funding to meet the changing needs of the sector, to increase productivity and skills levels of the workforce.

Skills Priority 5: Management and Leadership

Ensuring the sector has the skills it needs to plan and develop profitable and competitive business

The issue	Proposed solution	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is a skill gap between craft and first line supervisory levels which is currently not being addressed. People on the tools are being placed in supervisory positions without relevant training to maximise effectiveness and productivity. The sector is very reactive to new opportunities. Generally SMEs and micro-businesses do not actively manage their business to take external drivers into account. As a result the productivity of the sector is low. There is a general lack of the use of business skills across the sector to formally benchmark the effectiveness of businesses and improve competitiveness. The sector uses informal benchmarking rather than formal methods. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Professional and development of first line and middle managers: develop and promote continual professional development opportunities for craft operatives to technician and first line management. Pilot initiatives in business and management skills and encourage employer take-up. Developing enterprise skills for SMEs and micros: develop and promote various tools to prepare current and future managers of SMEs and micros in the sector with the skills to thrive in a competitive market. Develop and use pilots to encourage wider employer take-up. Develop enterprise national occupational standards relevant for the sector. Developing skills to increase competitiveness of the sector: develop benchmarking and strategic planning training to help businesses realise the benefits of management and leadership training and increase competitiveness and productivity. Pilot programmes, document and promote benefits achieved. 	
Proposed action for employers	Proposed action for partners	Year 1 activity for Northern Ireland
<p>Large employers: pilot the first line manager training on key sites regionally.</p> <p>Employers: recognise and understand the benefits of management training and be more prepared to train their staff and then promote the benefits.</p> <p>Trade associations: provide training courses and guidance to their employers to encourage management and leadership development.</p>	<p>DEL: help to develop an action learning programme for leaders in the sector.</p> <p>DEL: provide funding for management and leadership training for the sector.</p> <p>Business solutions: develop the business leader development initiative.</p> <p>MLN: promote to employers the benefits of management and leadership training.</p> <p>DBERR: help to develop leadership skills for innovation for the sector.</p> <p>Unite the Union: promote the benefits of management and leadership training.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promoting business solutions leader development initiative Promote action learning for leader Develop and promote solutions for business website Promote inspirational leadership programme
<p>Impact/outcome if successful</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved succession planning in SMEs with increased use of supervisory training for first line managers leading to greater effectiveness and sector productivity. People equipped with increasingly sophisticated business skills to increase competitiveness and proactively develop new business opportunities. The UK BSE sector is proactive in the exploitation of innovation, service and business competitiveness. 		

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