

The dawn of a new era for building services engineering skills

Sector Skills Agreement UK summary of action



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 building services engineering 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 at regional and national level with employers and stakeholders, to ensure the documents produced at each milestone were a true reflection of the sector's needs in that area.

- **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.

Now at stage five, the final Sector Skills Agreement presents the outcome of these negotiations: action plans that demonstrate the commitment gained from employers, stakeholders and partners, to create a Sector Skills Agreement that is recognised and supported by all.

A joint effort...now and in the future

SummitSkills is grateful for the extensive time and resource contributions made by 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 will work with partners to deliver what the sector's employers are seeking.

This will be achieved through regional and national SSA implementation groups which have the accountability and responsibility to ensure the delivery of the SSA solutions in a given region and nation. These groups will meet on a quarterly basis to review and monitor progress of the SSA delivery in their area.

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. We have regional staff around the UK that 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 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		Solution
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of awareness and misperception 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. 	
Action for employers	Action for partners	Impact/outcome
<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: 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>LearnDirect advice line: provide clear advice and guidance to all enquirers.</p> <p>Unite the Union: part of the negotiation of one competency card.</p>	<p>Timescales</p> <p>Yr 1: careers materials developed; diversity and recruitment patterns researched; Sector marketing programme implemented; Sector Ambassadors developed; Flexible upskilling developed; National Training Awards delivered; Migrant worker equivalence qualification framework produced; existing competency cards benchmarked.</p> <p>Yr 2: flexible upskilling methods implemented; high achiever ambassador programme developed; student & parent initiative implemented; criteria for new harmonised competency card developed; recognised entry and progression pathways promoted; Skills competitions UK and World Skills supported.</p> <p>Yr 3: one competency card implemented for the sector; including marketing campaign and policing mechanism; UK World Skills and UK skills competitions supported.</p>

Skills Priority 2: Communication and Information

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

The issue		Solution
<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 LSC 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. 	
Action for employers	Action for partners	Impact/outcome
<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>LSC 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>RSP/RDA: 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>Timescales</p> <p>Yr 1: national data set for approved qualifications refined; learning databases tidied; course database developed and publicised; Employer/student /provider meetings; 'training pays' case studies developed and publicised; apprenticeship models developed; Business Solutions portal expanded; sector LMI projects implemented.</p> <p>Yr 2: LMI communications plan implemented; Government lobbied for funding balance using apprenticeship model; skills gap matrices for the sector developed; SummitSkills knowledge hub developed.</p> <p>Yr 3: knowledge hub launched linked with observatories and sector; Proactive skills gap planning implemented; E-learning material sourced available through knowledge hub.</p>

Skills Priority 3: Training Provision

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

The issue	Solution
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some qualification content is seen as out of date or not suitable for sector needs. New content needs to be developed to meet the changing needs of the sector: Non qualification based training is not currently monitored or formally recognised across the sector: A significant amount of funding is directed at standalone technical certificates* and non-economically valuable skills, which only offer a theory based qualifications and which are not suitable entry routes into the sector: The number of people receiving this training outstrips any sector requirement at least five fold. There very few HE establishments offering sector courses which are also spread unevenly around the UK, with some regions with no provision at all. Employers have a general dissatisfaction with the quality of service and teaching provided by FE. The take up of quality marks by providers across the sector is varied. NOS and qualification content is out of date in relation to renewables and environmental technologies. This means that the skills of the sector are lagging behind the market requirements to be able to design, install and maintain new technologies. <p><i>* standalone technical certificates do not apply in Scotland</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Relevant training reflecting NOS at all levels: develop a process to regularly maintain and update qualifications to reflect the real world requirements of employers. Accredited training mapped to NOS: develop credit accumulation transfer and ensure manufacturer and non -qualification-based training is mapped to NOS. Sustainable entry routes: authorised entry and progression routes into the sector are defined, implemented and promoted for a specific number of people and directly linked to the skill needs of the sector. Wider and sustainable HE provision: develop a UK-wide sustainable network of HE provision which is relevant to the real world, including foundation degrees, to help bridge the gap between sector operatives and professionals. Quality assured training provision including quality marks: work with partners to improve the quality of teaching and administration and increase achievement of quality standards. Existing inspection regimes reviewed for the sector and support provided to improve them. Summits/Skills to decide if it develops its own quality mark scheme for the sector. Renewables & Environmental Technologies: develop and implement national occupational standards for current and emerging environmental technologies to embrace craft and professional occupations. Ensure environmental technologies are fully integrated within other activities such as the careers strategy and apprenticeship training frameworks.
Action for employers	Action for partners
<p>Employers: contribute to the development of up to date NOS and a process for accrediting training.</p> <p>Trade associations: work with Summits/Skills 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>LSC: work with Summits/Skills to remove funding for standalone technical certificates and introduce sustainable entry routes. 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 Summits/Skills 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>QCA: 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>
Impact/outcome	Timescales
<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>Yr 1: L1/2 entry routes developed; NOS review completed; renewable technologies NOS completed; SQS started; sector-specific criteria developed for quality standard; professional body forum established; more employers involved in HE.</p> <p>Yr 2: New entry routes implemented; SQS continued; LSC standard implemented; fast track accreditation process developed; variety of HE delivery modes undertaken.</p> <p>Yr 3: SQS completed; credit accumulation process promoted; CPD passport scheme developed; UK HE network completed.</p>

Skills Priority 4: Funding

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

The issue		Solution
<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. 	<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 	
Action for employers	Action for partners	Impact/outcome
<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>LSC: work with Summits/Skills to redeploy NEVS funding with providers whilst maintaining the overall funding for the sector</p> <p>LSC: 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>Unite the Union: lobby for flexible funding opportunities for the sector</p>	<p>Timescales</p> <p>Yr 1: Alternative uses for NEVS funding mapped; NEVS redeployment started; social agenda items identified for funding; common strategy for ESF opportunities developed; brokers working with managing agents modelled; adult retention initiatives developed</p> <p>Yr 2: NEVS redeployment continued; funding opportunities outside academic year developed; fast track process approved for skills gap funding</p> <p>Yr 3: NEVS redeployment completed; further NEVS prevented</p>

Skills Priority 5: Management and Leadership

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

The issue	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.
Action for employers	Action for partners
<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>RSP: help to develop an action learning programme for leaders in the sector.</p> <p>LSC/RDAs: provide funding for management and leadership training for the sector.</p> <p>Business solutions: develop the business leader development initiative.</p> <p>SFEDI: 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>
Impact/outcome	Timescales
<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. 	<p>Yr 1; pilot programme for first line managers mapped; benefits of KPI and benchmarking promoted; Solutions for Business website promoted; business benefits for manager/leader training developed and promoted; business planning made easy' developed.</p> <p>Yr 2; Programme of employers using KPIs and benchmarking reviewed; case studies of first line manager programmes developed and promoted; develop pilot enterprise skills programme developed; wider strategic skills programme developed.</p> <p>Yr 3; Implement enterprise skills programme in sector; implemented, case studies developed and promoted; wider strategic skills programme in sector piloted, case studies developed and promoted; best practice business planning demystified'.</p>



EUROPEAN UNION
European Social Fund

T: 01 908 303960 F: 01 908 303989
SummitSkills Vega House, Opal Drive, Fox Milne, Milton Keynes MK15 0DF
www.horizon-ssa.org.uk email enquiries@summitskills.org.uk

