

Viewpoint

South East
Sector Skills Agreement
workshop outcomes



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

HORIZON

the sector skills agreement
for building services engineering

Business & workforce development

This is a 'work in progress' document. The solutions listed throughout these pages were suggested by delegates at the Horizon workshop in Gatwick and will contribute to the Sector Skills Agreement for the South East.

1. Enterprise

THE ISSUE:

The sector aspires to be entrepreneurial but needs to develop these new skills.

Employers see this as important. Many are even asking for training. People at all levels in our sector from craft to management need to come to grips with the skills it takes to be a good entrepreneur.

TOP SOLUTIONS:

- Dragons Den set up: 14–16 to encourage entrepreneurial set-up.
- Need for clear career guidance and direction.
- Additional funding for careers teachers in schools because teachers are reluctant to take on additional work.

OTHER SOLUTIONS FROM THE GROUP:

- Target 14–16 yr olds – incorporate sector into curriculum, intensive careers events; local chamber of commerce.
- Develop the right environment – mentors etc.
- Introduce enterprise into L2/L3 delivery – but still consider employer's technical skills requirement.
- Incorporate training into higher level delivery – HNC/D.
- Incentive systems within firms to encourage ideas within 'Mind-gyms.'
- Target parents – they are heavily influential.
- Look at CIBSE 'Imagineering' or Shell events – networks to help develop ideas.

2. Skills Requirements

THE ISSUE:

Skills requirements are changing more than the industry realises.

This applies to existing workers. Finding qualified craft operatives is increasingly difficult. Employers require greater awareness of changing skills needs to meet technological changes.

TOP SOLUTIONS (IN ORDER OF VOTES):

- Training providers: listen to employers needs.
- Employers to identify skills they've already got and develop matrix of skills requirements.
- = It's important that all parties work together to understand where we were yesterday, where we are today, and where we'll be tomorrow.
- = Training providers – need to be aware of developments at earlier stage to allow planning and resourcing e.g. contact with DCLG, manufacturers.

OTHER SOLUTIONS FROM THE GROUP:

- A knowledge 'hub' tool kit of resources, shared, central information unit.
- Highlight the importance of training to SMEs and the risk if they don't.
- For health & safety or any training – make life easier, spell out: what does it mean to me? What do I need to achieve – spell it out in one sheet.
- Continued Professional Development for providers – so they are aware of what is expected. Keep up with technology and share best practice.
- Links with manufacturers – some of them have training facilities.

3. Retirement

THE ISSUE:

Too few employers plan to replace staff before they retire or leave.

The majority of firms do not plan to replace staff retiring with key skills. And changes in the population profile e.g. fewer younger people may affect traditional recruitment streams.

SOLUTIONS FROM THE GROUP:

- Harness talent within organisation. Trade associations need to help the smallest firms.
- 'How to plan' training for firms.
- Sharing of aspirations – young and old.
- Regional Development Agency to pass on useful/relevant bits of skills strategy to employers – not whole document – so it's digestible.

4. Research and Development

THE ISSUE:

Too few industry members conduct research to share commercial knowledge.

Only 23% of regional companies do any kind of research and development (R&D) of their own. Companies know little of research and development conducted by trade associations and professional institutions. Who should be doing and sharing more? Knowledge is power.

TOP SOLUTION:

- Employers – develop a business/marketing plan, even if basic. Change the mindset and fostering a change in attitude. More engagement.

OTHER SOLUTIONS FROM THE GROUP:

- Help people realise: it's not people in white coats! It's market research and business development.
- Make use of existing data – but need to access this in the right way.
- Develop relevant provision – “bread and butter” courses – need to develop sector based new technology and IT training as well as business based.
- Improve Train 2 Gain roll out.
- Joined-up thinking between all parties to encourage cohesive, structured research and development. Top down and bottom up – embed within key skills business planning.
- ‘Dummies guide’ to business planning. Business Link does ‘PLATO’, Business Improvement Technique programmes. £1k incentive to employers. Need to publicise opportunities/ incentives.

5. Benchmarking

THE ISSUE:

Lack of formalised benchmarking makes the sector blind to competition.

The majority of companies choose not to access formal benchmarking systems that are available, though many use informal techniques. Does benchmarking need to be more formalised through management and supervisor training? Or are there other solutions?

SOLUTIONS FROM THE GROUP:

- Benchmarking informal networks – Key Performance Indicators.
- Time is a factor against successful benchmarking. Also having to accept criticism! Have to handle constructively. Business improvement techniques.
- Need a willingness to share commercial knowledge.
- Informal is just as important – can be valuable.

The three issues below were not discussed by the delegates. We would like your views on:

- Q: How important are 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 existing solutions be adjusted or developed?

6. Rivalry

THE ISSUE:

Companies need to think more positively about partnering because competition isn't always good.

Skills shortages lead to rivalry to poach and secure trained staff. Rivalry extends to extreme competitive tendering. Extended contracts and partnering arrangements are becoming more common in the public sector, encouraging cooperation rather than competition.

7. Bargaining Power

THE ISSUE:

Clients and companies must see bargaining power as something beyond price and service.

Company reputation and service are seen by a majority of employers as their major bargaining factors. Supply chain management was mentioned by only a small percentage of regional companies. Would more efficiency be achieved through training in supply chain management techniques? And what else?

8. Information Technology

THE ISSUE:

Information technology could be more effectively used to improve productivity.

Almost all regional companies use IT daily. But more training is needed to ensure IT is used effectively. IT training tailored to sector needs could improve performance and cost efficiencies. How can people be helped to get the most out of IT?

External influences

1. Globalisation

THE ISSUE:

Globalisation presents new opportunities and potential threats.

4 out of 5 regional employers don't think the market will be affected by foreign competition. Foreign competition is unfamiliar currently but Europe and Asia are potential threats. Open tendering is an opportunity for foreign traders to access the South East market.

TOP SOLUTIONS (IN ORDER OF VOTES):

- Providers to be involved at beginning to ensure provision in place to meet emerging needs. Relationships with manufacturers – train the trainers – secondment of tutors.
- Need to identify potential globalisation threats and develop strategies to counter.

OTHER SOLUTIONS FROM THE GROUP:

- Don't have craft and management skills going to firms abroad – grow in-house/UK e.g. smart home technology.
- Use overseas firms to train our workforce.
- We can export skills – it's a two-way street.
- Also secondment of apprentices and engineers to work and learn overseas.
- Don't be frightened of it – it can be an opportunity.

2. Technology/Environment

THE ISSUE:

The sector is not aiming far enough ahead in new and environmental technology.

Most recognise this as a major issue but have no plan to address it. Employers' environmental skills tend to be driven by legislation; the sector reacts to change rather than plans for it. Technology is changing faster and planning future skills well ahead will become more important.

TOP SOLUTIONS (IN ORDER OF VOTES):

- Providers to link with manufacturers to share knowledge – integrate training and develop accessible courses or alternatives.
- Customer awareness to drive the demand.

OTHER SOLUTIONS FROM THE GROUP:

- Needs to be demand-led – stimulate demand from employers – get up to speed.
- Government to enable the infrastructure to allow above elements to take place.
- Enthuse and inspire the market – regional government needs to play a role.
- Need knowledge of who plays what role. Help employers understand the terms. Language and terminology at right level, simple and straightforward.
- Work into tender process – a requirement for environmental technologies. Incentives from government to encourage grants etc.
- Public sector to lead by example.

3. Government

THE ISSUE:

Government regulation is placing burden on the sector that needs more support.

Legislation and building regulations are seen to have increased business costs and red tape. The skills card regime is felt to be implemented piecemeal and insufficiently inspected. The good guys feel penalised. What can skills and training do to help?

TOP SOLUTION:

- Manufacturer to put onus on supplier – register the products to have control of products and goods.

OTHER SOLUTIONS FROM THE GROUP:

- Supply chain to police the industry more.
- Talk to MPs – make them aware of unhappiness at red tape etc. It's difficult for small firms.
- Solutions needs to fit small firms as much as large firms.
- Strike action – we drown under too much red tape. We can turn all the switches off!

New entrants

1. Basic Skills

THE ISSUE:

Lack of basic skills is a rising issue for our sector.

40% of the region's employers are alarmed at the low level literacy and numeracy, as well as the poor attitudinal skills of new entrants. Young people with a lack of basic skills are attracted to this sector, and their basic skills will be more stretched in the future by IT demands. How must the SSA address this?

TOP SOLUTION:

- Improve delivery schools – parents also have a responsibility. Make sure they match with employer requirements for work readiness.

OTHER SOLUTIONS FROM THE GROUP

- Employers – think about objective recruitment processes – not just word of mouth.
- Basic skills embedded in induction process or a condition of contract – commit to developing/ improving.
- Providers – give support and flexible delivery programmes.
- E-learning, taking to site.
- Link basic skills to workplace activity.
- Look at the trial in retail sector through JobcentrePlus – interpersonal skills.

2. Diversity

THE ISSUE:

While overt anti-diversity comments are fewer these days, the sector is still not diverse.

73% of regional firms employ no women outside administrative roles and very few when they do. Women are interested in joining the sector later in life. A third of regional businesses employ people from ethnic minority group. Where do training and skills feature in this issue?

SOLUTIONS FROM THE GROUP:

- Also consider age and disability as diversity issues.
- Change perceptions and culture – employers and others to broaden horizons. Break the vicious circle.
- Raise awareness of what industry is about.
- Revise descriptions of job roles to widen the perceptions of them – not just male.
- Case studies / success stories/ role models.
- Providers – have open minds – willingness to do things differently.

3. Migrant Workers

THE ISSUE:

Migrant workers are a hot news topic...

27% of regional firms claim to employ migrant workers – more than other English regions. Retirement and people leaving the sector will need more migrant workers to replace them. Skills training needs to be planned to accommodate this near future trend. English for speakers of other languages is among many skills that will be required...

TOP SOLUTIONS (IN ORDER OF VOTES):

- If we ensure that we are asking the same skills requirements of home workers as of overseas and then is this not an issue?
- Measuring existing skills and assess gaps – need a system/structure.

OTHER SOLUTIONS FROM THE GROUP:

- Is it the issue we think it is?
- Qualification comparison needed – existing standards, skills cards, legislation/regulation.
- Should be equal and fair for both home workers and migrant workers.
- Spell out implications of under-paying migrant workers.
- Sell standards.

4. Employer Requirements vs. Government Funding

THE ISSUE:

Employers see Level 3 qualification as the minimum standard for a fully trained craft operative.

60% of employers need their craft workforce trained to Level 3 but see Learning & Skills Council funding driven by Level 2 targets, and Government funding policy for Level 3 as a disadvantage older apprentices (19+) whom employers find attractive. Regionally there are concerns at the quality of training provision.

SOLUTIONS FROM THE GROUP:

- Employers to plan for skills needs OR flexibility of work force – they are two different things.
- Employers to be better aware of competencies at Level 2 and Level 3.
- Government – focus on employers' needs rather than supporting current provision.
- Assistance for employers to articulate their needs.
- Ensure skills brokers are business-aware and ready.
- Providers – have more transparency – more employer led.
- Government sponsored schemes like the 'Harvey Jones' solutions for manufacturing.

These 'quick win' and 'long haul' solutions are also the views and suggestions of the delegates at the Horizon workshop in Gatwick.

TOP QUICKWIN SOLUTIONS FOR THE SSA –

Easy to do, but important

(suggestions have been grouped into similar topics for ease of viewing/assessment)

COMMUNICATION/IMPROVING UNDERSTANDING

- Listen to employers' training needs and requirements.
- Start using simple language that everyone understands and consistent terminology.
- Road map showing how different organisations link together in skills landscape, in order to improve understanding for employers.

TRAINING PROVISION

- Solving the problem of nineteen years olds being disadvantaged in the training programme.

WORKING WITH SUPPLY CHAINS AND PARTNERS

- High profile campaign to promote training and encourage whole supply chain. To maintain sustainability of local and national economy.
- Supply chain to police the industry more, this sector is probably better equipped to instigate.
- Identify regional organisations that have roles and responsibilities to deliver SummitSkills' solutions.

IDENTIFYING/IMPLEMENTING SKILLS NEEDS

- Identify existing skills and produce skills matrix to identify skills gaps correctly.
- Encourage businesses to start business and skills planning so there are coherent views on demand for skills.

TOP LONG HAUL SOLUTIONS FOR THE SSA –

Difficult, far off, but important

(suggestions have been grouped into similar topics for ease of viewing/assessment)

TRAINING PROVISION

- Ensuring that the training courses offered meet the needs of the employers in each sector i.e. are relevant.
- Confirm the issue of: level three of what?

CAREERS GUIDANCE/NEW ENTRANTS

- Better career guidance for 14/16 olds. Mixed workshops-hands on courses, which could go towards NVQ.
- Communication skills – talk to our future trainees and find out what their expectations are. There is no real career consultation at school now.
- Improve delivery in primary and secondary schools – gives a solid foundation on which to build and raises aspirations of young people.
- Influence government to ensure education delivers basic skills employment.

BUSINESS INVOLVEMENT AND PARTNERSHIPS

- Employer needs to really drive curriculum development, in order to get the skills required at right level at right time.
- Employees to give employers and training providers knowledge/skills to be proactive rather than reactive.
- Start discussions between organisations to establish priority and start to identify and begin the process.
- Effective partnership between manufacturers/employers/providers for new technology and secondment of trainees. Meet the needs of employers.

SummitSkills Limited

Vega House, Opal Drive,
Fox Milne, Milton Keynes MK15 0DF

T: 01908 303960

F: 01908 303989

www.horizon-ssa.org.uk

email.enquiries@summitskills.org.uk



EUROPEAN UNION
European Social Fund

skills
FOR BUSINESS