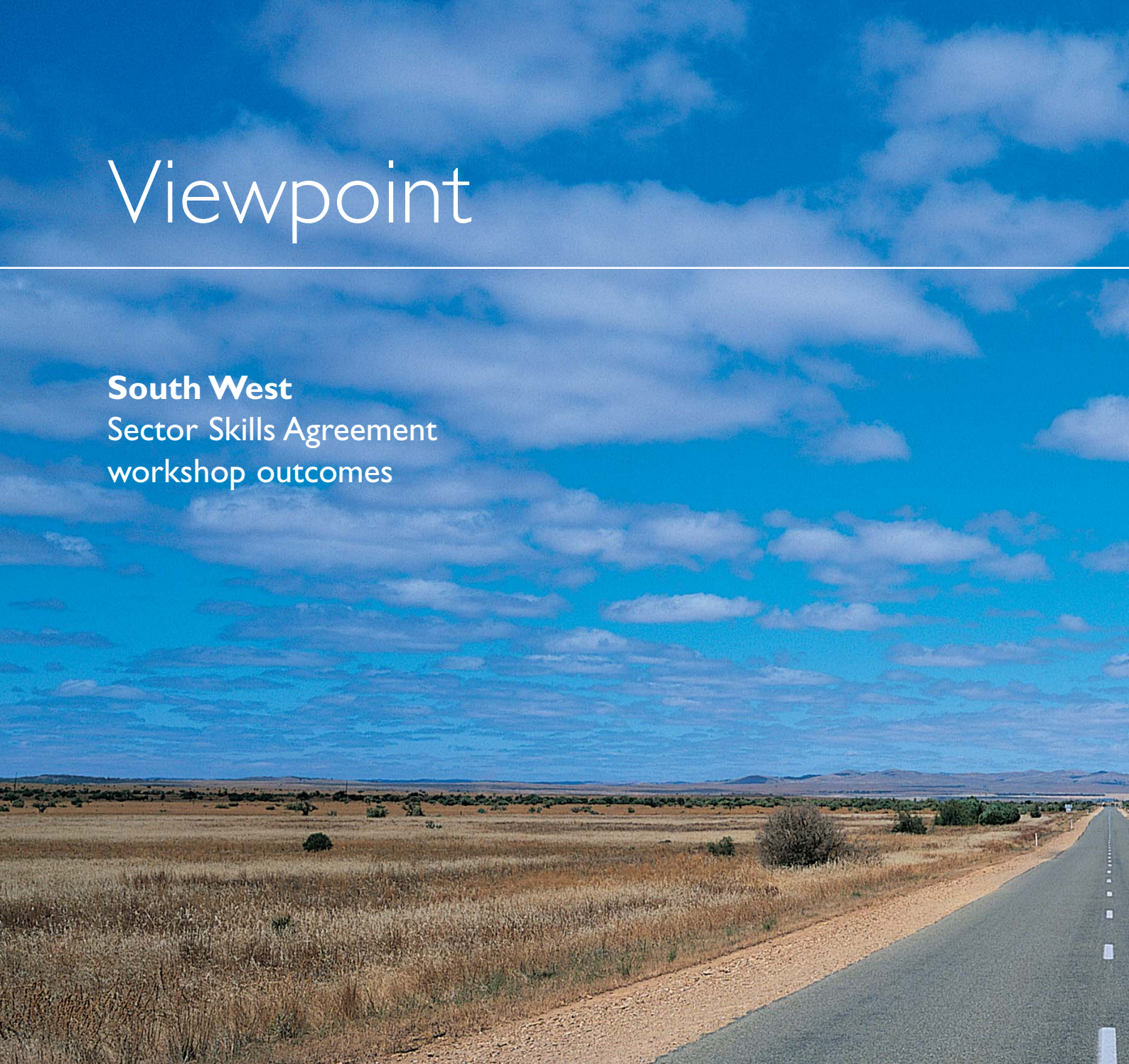


Viewpoint

South West Sector Skills Agreement workshop outcomes



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 Exeter and will contribute to the Sector Skills Agreement for the South West.

1. 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?

SOLUTIONS FROM THE GROUP:

- Employers need awareness and understanding of IT benefits and the investment involved.
- Signposting to helpdesk – for example telephone and the web. Provide assistance on IT.
 - a. produce literature in simple language.
 - b. will need good operators who are knowledgeable.
 - c. gives analysis based on input.
- Trade associations can/may help already with it.
- Don't over emphasise IT for craft – it shouldn't hold up the process if not essential.

2. Enterprise

THE ISSUE:

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

A majority of 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 SOLUTION:

- Employers: invest and plan to invest in entrepreneurial activities.

SOLUTIONS FROM THE GROUP:

- Training providers to provide bite-sized on-site training.
- RDA/LSC: allow flexibility for training providers.
 - Non qualification-based training.
 - Need autonomy at regional level – need to respond to community.
- How do you teach entrepreneurial skills? Opening doors
 - self belief – free thinking.

- Help employers to understand the market/environment
- Possible bolt-on training, not just incorporated at craft level – look at options for developing these skills after training/apprenticeship.

3. Benchmarking

THE ISSUE:

Lack of formalised benchmarking makes the sector blind to competition.

A 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:

- There is power in networking.
- Informal network to set benchmarks.

4. 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:

- A clear message of needs – 'one stop shop' training to meet employers' needs, rather than to suit providers.
- Liaison between employers and schools – increase understanding.

OTHER SOLUTIONS FROM THE GROUP:

- More information to schools: we need people skills and tool skills.
- Create commitment from government – tap into employers' knowledge.
- Fully funded training from government – but still requires employer engagement.
- Either adult funding or provide relevant training in schools.
- School ambassadors – needs employers.

5. Retirement

THE ISSUE:

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

Only 33% of regional firms actually 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:

- Engage in advanced planning – especially with employers. A re-think is needed to use retirement as an opportunity to develop.
- Need a structure for funding flexibility to allow the above to happen.
- Smaller numbers in the classroom.
- Help workers to follow other avenues – teaching for example, or other paths (needs to be tailored). They are not completely redundant.
- Develop a formal retirement process – there is a difference between employer and employee retirement.

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.

SOLUTIONS FROM THE GROUP:

- Local government contracts to encourage local consortia.
- Change law on contracts? Make clients/companies more responsible.
- Training development – Just In Time.
- Delivery needs to be more flexible.

7. Research and development

THE ISSUE:

Too few industry members conduct research to share commercial knowledge.

Only 17% of regional companies do any kind of research and development (R&D) of their own. Companies know of little R&D conducted by trade associations and professional institutions, including higher education institutions. Who should be doing and sharing more? Knowledge is power.

SOLUTIONS FROM THE GROUP:

- Sharing of knowledge – effective use of information technology.
- Make non-formal, applicable and across the board – meeting different needs.
- Engage manufacturers.
- Create a research network.

8. Bargaining Power

THE ISSUE:

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

Price and company reputation are seen by a majority of employers as the major bargaining factors. Supply chain management is barely recognised by regional companies as a bargaining element. Would more efficiency be achieved through training in supply chain management techniques? And what else?

TOP SOLUTION:

- Promote partnership arrangements.

OTHER SOLUTIONS FROM THE GROUP:

- Train for future generations to understand the issues and solutions.
- Smart procurement: through-life contracts.
- Borrow ideas from ship-building industry who have tackled the issue well.
- Companies to get involved higher up the supply chain.

External influences

1. Globalisation

THE ISSUE:

Globalisation presents new opportunities and potential threats.

Almost 90% of 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 West market.

TOP SOLUTIONS (IN ORDER OF VOTES):

- Improve strategic thinking of managers – enhance communication skills allow people to develop.
- Tap into expertise/experience from firms already working abroad.
- Need business relevant data – form business clubs.

SOLUTIONS FROM THE GROUP:

- Long term: grow people from the ground up to be future managers.
- Short term: educate current managers.
- Contracts to include clauses on work experience/training of local labour.
- Cross Atlantic/cross-country work placements to learn from abroad. Gain experience of elsewhere.
- DVD? Bring information to employers, especially training information.

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 SOLUTION:

- Environmental technology needs to be regulated and policed.

SOLUTIONS FROM THE GROUP:

- Bring new technology to the attention of consumers.
- Employers need to be pro-active and begin to ask for training in environmental areas.
- Employers need to understand the reasons for investment – e.g. profit, customer demand, added value to client
- Long term government commitment needed.
- Industry and government need to push and consumer demands need to pull the sector.
- Use case studies to promote new technologies and environmental technologies.

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 SOLUTIONS (IN ORDER OF VOTES):

- The system needs policing.
- There should be one rule for all to which everyone needs to comply.
- Unregistered one-man-bands are potentially causing the sector to suffer.

New entrants

1. Basic Skills

THE ISSUE:

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

1 in 3 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. How must the SSA address this?

TOP SOLUTIONS (IN ORDER OF VOTES):

- Improve school/advisor knowledge of the building services engineering sector.
- = School industry links strengthened.
- = Employer and provider engagement – see apprenticeship as investment not burden.
- Sector Skills Councils to promote the 14–19 diploma.

OTHER SOLUTIONS FROM THE GROUP:

- More vocational based courses e.g. 14–19 diploma.
- Allow for levels of people with additional training in-between NVQ levels.
- Employers here don't match the issue stated.

2. Diversity

THE ISSUE:

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

Fewer than 1 in 4 regional firms employ women in technical roles. Women are interested in joining the sector later in life. About a quarter of regional businesses employ people from ethnic minority groups. Where do training and skills feature in this issue?

TOP SOLUTION:

- Ensure that employers are well briefed on statistics and obligation. Trade association and trade unions could help with this.

OTHER SOLUTIONS FROM THE GROUP:

- Training providers to raise the profile of the sector and promote the sector to non-traditional groups.
- Government support for initiatives – discretionary payments.
- Role models.
- Rethink the structure in which women could be retrained to enter the sector.
- Statistics and regulations what is and what is not acceptable.
- Education to encourage culture change in the sector.
- Create an institute such as the Ford Institute for careers?

3. Migrant Workers

THE ISSUE:

Migrant workers are a hot news topic but the sector shows minimal impact in the South West... yet!

Only 1 in 4 regional firms claim to employ migrant workers. 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 SOLUTION:

- English writing and speech to be a requirement of skill cards – linked to health and safety focus.

OTHER SOLUTIONS FROM THE GROUP:

- Ensure own workforce is adequately trained to compete with foreign workers.
- Draw on building services engineering sector from previous years for experience.

4. Employer requirements vs Government funding

THE ISSUE:

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

About 4 out of 5 employers need their craft workforce trained to Level 3 but see Learning & Skills Council funding driven by Level 2 targets, and Government funding policy disadvantaging older apprentices (19+). Regionally there are concerns at the quality of training provision.

TOP SOLUTIONS (IN ORDER OF VOTES):

- Stop age discrimination – government not funding 19+.
- Change procurement – build the cost of training into the contract.
- Common qualification framework – e.g. Wales – fund specific requirements.

OTHER SOLUTIONS FROM THE GROUP:

- Revise Level 2 to meet the needs of Level 3.
- Look at creative ways of delivery.
- Consistent key messages – website career options.

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

TOP QUICKWIN SOLUTIONS FOR THE SSA –

Easy to do, but important

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

FUNDING AND TRAINING PROVISION

- Tap into cross-cutting theme support available in the region.
- Funding for the over 19s to get more of them employed into the building services engineering sector.
- Employer funding – use what money is available to help fund training.

POLICING/REGULATION

- Effective CSCS policing
- Government to police initiatives better as industry will not on its own.

ENGAGEMENT WITH SCHOOLS

- Make sure schools are teaching skills properly, are monitored, and for employers to talk to school and colleges with reference to apprentices.
- Employers to engage fully on the 14–19 curriculum so that young people understand the industry before making career decisions.

SECTOR PROMOTION/IMAGE

- Provide a clear vision/view of what the sector actually is and encompasses and this would help with publicity and engagement.
- Building services engineering sector to promote by popular appeal for a example use a celebrity on promoting why training and learning is important to access it.
- Make the building services engineering sector more interesting to school leaver... clear promotion and pathways within the industry, illustrate this through the creation of clear role models.
- Change the perception of our industry as not requiring academic ability in schools to improve standards.

WORKING ON SSA

- Keep up the good work and publicise findings well.
- Take on board and act on things that have been discussed today.

EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT

- Support employers and educate them in regards to the skills agenda.
- Promote the business benefit of training.

MIGRANT WORKERS

- Learn from experience in dealing with migrant workers in the past – it is happening in the South West now.

TOP LONG HAUL SOLUTIONS FOR THE SSA –

Difficult, far off, but important

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

STANDARDS AND QUALIFICATIONS

- Ensure courses evolve to meet current needs of employers and industry by modifying existing courses, not by creating new ones. So that employers have confidence to ensure qualifications incorporate what they want and need from new entrants.
- Maintain and improve the overall standard/competence of craftspeople by not watering down training standards for a quick fix, this would then adequately replace retirees.
- One stop shop to help get a clear picture.

CREATING PARTNERSHIPS

- Improved communication between employers, training providers, colleges, examining boards, and schools.
- Employer provider engagement – provide a flow of skilled workers for the long term investment into the building services engineering sector.
- To get information... to gather at these meetings and get as much implemented as possible and to give a government a kick to put things right.

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

- Improve strategic thinking of managers and the rest will follow.
- Encourage innovation and vision into the industry otherwise there will be no local businesses.

SECTOR IMAGE/CULTURE

- Promote diversity and equality into the building services engineering sector.
- Culture change and to promote planning and inviting forward thinking individuals into the building services engineering sector.
- Change the perception of the industry within the schools, teachers and career advisors, which will then ensure that a better standard of student will come through the system.

FUNDING

- Government funding for Level 3 and reduce the number of unqualified cowboys.
- Funding for the 19+ workers... the sector needs funding for these older entrants who can be better committed to their future skills
- Solution for long term funding of the building services engineering sector above Level 2 (employer or government led).

MANDATORY PRACTICE

- Government to enforce the fact if the employee does not have a CORGI card then they should not be installing appliances.
- Make it mandatory to be a member of trade association for small to medium enterprises and sole traders as a vehicle to give these companies access to training, amongst other things, for example.



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