



Skills for Learning Professionals

A SECTOR SKILLS AGREEMENT FOR THE LIFELONG LEARNING SECTOR

STAGE 1 – SKILLS NEEDS ASSESSMENT (SNA)

ENGLAND

Contents

skills
FOR BUSINESS

CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	1
Methodology.....	1
The profile of the lifelong learning sector in England.....	2
Drivers of the demand for skills.....	2
The competitive position of the sector.....	5
The current skills profile, skills needs and priorities in the lifelong learning sector	6
Future skills needs in the lifelong learning sector.....	7
Future priorities.....	8

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This executive summary, along with the full report and associated annexes, represent the main outputs of an extensive programme of both primary and secondary research undertaken between May and November 2006. The research forms the first and foundation stage of the Sector Skills Agreement (SSA) process for the lifelong learning sector – the skills needs assessment. It was undertaken by independent consultants SQW, in collaboration with Lifelong Learning UK, the Sector Skills Council (SSC) for the lifelong learning sector.

Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK) is the SSC representing five key constituencies, which together make up the lifelong learning sector¹:

- community learning and development (CLD)
- further education (FE)
- higher education (HE)
- libraries, archives and information services (LAIS)
- work based learning (WBL).

The lifelong learning sector occupies a unique position within the ‘Skills for Business’ network. Its employers provide services which meet the workforce development needs of other employment sectors, and it is an employment sector in its own right, with its own workforce development needs.

The Sector Skills Agreement process was developed the Sector Skills Development Agency (SSDA) in order to ensure that businesses are equipped to meet the realities of the modern working environment and that the workforce is able to offer the right skills in the right places at the right time. The SSA comprises five key stages, with the fifth resulting in a final agreement of how the SSC and employers will work together with key partners to secure the necessary supply of appropriate training for the future.

In addition, because of LLUK’s key role in supporting employers delivering lifelong learning and because of the extent to which the skills needed by the lifelong learning workforce will be shaped by the workforce development needs identified within other employment sectors, Lifelong Learning UK will undertake an additional stage. This will comprise an **Impact Review** of the SSAs produced by other SSCs, the purpose of which is to consider the effects and demands that the SSAs will place on the lifelong learning sector, both now and in the future.

Methodology

The research undertaken for Stage 1 of the SSA adopted a mixture of quantitative and qualitative methods, drawing on a range of existing secondary data sources and primary data collection. This included:

- a comprehensive review of relevant existing literature
- the identification and analysis of existing standard and sector-specific secondary data sources
- the design, collection and analysis of a range of new primary data:
 - 22 key stakeholder consultation interviews (of which eight were from England)
 - a large survey of sector providers/employers with 689 analysed responses (of which 464 were from England)

¹ Within England, a part of CLD (known as the Adult and Community Learning (ACL) or Personal and Community Development Learning (PCDL); FE and WBL are known as the Learning and Skills sector, now also known as the FE system.

- seven future scenarios workshops (of which four had representatives from England).

The profile of the lifelong learning sector in England

The total workforce within the lifelong learning sector in England, is estimated to be in the region of **800,000 people**, based on various existing secondary data sources.

The data and workforce estimates also suggest that HE, FE and CLD are the largest constituencies in terms of their workforce, with LAIS being the smallest.

Examination of the characteristics of the existing workforce, based on a range of existing secondary data sources, reveals that:

- The majority of the lifelong learning workforce in England is **female** (approx 59%), but female employment is limited in the more senior or professional employment categories.
- The majority of the workforce is **aged between 35–54 years**, with a slightly younger profile apparent within the WBL constituency and also amongst women in the HE and FE constituencies.
- The workforce in England is predominantly employed within **professional** roles (52%), which is higher than for other sectors or the economy as a whole.
- **Full-time, permanent employment** is the norm – particularly within the HE and WBL constituencies and for staff at less senior or professional levels.

These findings suggest particular challenges for the lifelong learning sector in England. For example, the greater prevalence of female employment amongst younger, non-professional and part-time staff suggests enduring gender barriers to skills development and career progression, which need to be addressed. Similarly, older workers, who make up much of the sector and have not benefited from recent reforms to the compulsory education system, are likely to have different skills needs and qualifications than their younger colleagues. This has implications for future ‘succession planning’ and renewing the workforce (particularly the professional workforce) within the sector.

Drivers of the demand for skills

UK government policy and regional strategic planning in a range of areas play a considerable role in influencing future development and the demand for skills within the lifelong learning workforce of England. Strengthening economic prosperity, productivity and social justice are key themes within government policy across the UK, to which the development of skills within the population as a whole is expected to contribute. In response, Public Service Agreements (PSAs) have been established in England, which set out clear targets for improving the educational training attainment of young people and improving adult skills levels.

In England there is a range of policies which will guide and drive the sector. These have been grouped under three themes;

1. System reform and quality improvement, including;
 - Reform of initial teacher training (or initial teacher, tutor, trainer education (ITTTE) for the learning and skills sector (now the FE system)
 - emphasis on young people shaping the services they receive
 - provision of CPD for all members of the lifelong learning sector
 - new professional status Qualified Teacher Learning and Skills (QTLS)
 - Institute for Learning (IfL) – that will ensure the professionalisation of the workforce, including administering the ‘licence to practise’ for teachers of FE, from September 2007.
 - proposals for an integrated qualifications framework for all those in the ‘children’s workforce’
 - strengthening leadership, management and supervision of organisations delivering services to the sector
 - making learning in the sector truly demand led
 - libraries becoming more learner centred, encouraging wider participation and mainstreaming access to open learning;

2. Increasing participation and achievement of young people, including;
 - 50% of young people in HE by 2010
 - more flexible pathways to HE
 - apprenticeships available from age 14
 - prioritisation of literacy, numeracy and vocational training for 14-19 age group;
 - specialised diplomas to encourage personalised learning by combining academic and vocational material
 - provide greater choice to young people (study – what, where, how and when)

3. Improving adult skills, including;
 - Promoting ‘Train to gain’ – an advisory service within the FE system, which aims to help/encourage employers improve their productivity and competitiveness by ensuring that the adult workforce has the right skills required for the job
 - more targeting of funding for the purpose of improving adult skills, to be led by demand from employers and by regional priorities
 - empowering people to work via free ‘skills for life’ training
 - libraries supporting adults with basic needs and promoting digital citizenship.

Regional policy documents in England show some similarities and some differences. For example, these could occur because the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) sets national targets which are then regionalised, but at the same time specific targets are also set on a regional basis. Broadening the range of applied (vocational) provision offered to 14–19 year olds; increasing the take-up of ‘Skills for Life’ for adults; increasing attainment at NVQ levels 2 and 3; and increasing progression to HE all feature as priorities in most English regions. Other skills priorities were found in some regions, for example: English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) provision for migrant workers (London); science and technology skills (South East); more effective information, advice and guidance services (North East); improving access to WBL (East Midlands); increasing employment rates in disadvantaged communities (East of England).

Expenditure on lifelong learning is also acknowledged as a significant driver of change within the sector. An analysis of public expenditure and investment in education services for England indicates that the sector should receive a healthy and stable flow of funding in the near future, which is likely to sustain and possibly increase employment levels across the sector. However, not all constituencies within the sector will experience this equally. Moreover, the composition of this funding is likely to change and move towards attracting increased investment by employers and learners. The lifelong learning sector will therefore require staff with the skills to secure and sustain funding from an increasingly diverse range of sources. The sector will also need to offer provision that is responsive in both content and style of delivery to meet the needs of increasingly demanding paying customers, be they learners or their employers.

Demographic changes have considerable implications for the lifelong learning sector as a whole, and in particular for the demand for services within the sector. The population of England is projected to increase by 19% by the year 2054. At the same time, the number of people in the older age groups is likely to rise, whereas the numbers of those within younger age groups are expected to remain steady. This suggests that, whilst demand for lifelong learning from younger learners may remain relatively stable, demand from older learners will increase. This is already apparent within the **trends in participation in lifelong learning**. Furthermore, increasing life expectancy and lengthened working lives will need to be supported by lifelong learning to ensure the ageing population have the skills they need to compete in and contribute to a rapidly changing labour market. The growth in HE participation in recent years has been driven by mature students and increases in participation at postgraduate level, although undergraduate students continue to make up the majority of the population. It is clear that older users of lifelong learning may have different needs, preferences and behaviours compared to younger users of services and this will require an updating of lifelong learning staff skills and approaches to service delivery.

The increasingly **global economy** will place an increased premium on skills within the workforce as a whole. It is expected that new industries, occupations and working practices will require new skills and knowledge (for example, sustainable technologies) whilst demand for replacement skills will be stronger in some labour markets than others. The full implications of this for the lifelong learning sector will become clearer once all other sectors have completed their SSAs and the identified future skills needs have been reviewed by LLUK in its SSA impact review.

Migration is another important facet of globalisation, in the short term potentially resulting in increased demand for ESOL provision for those entering England, with increasing diversification of their skills needs over the longer term. The lifelong learning sector will need to be able to respond to these changing demands, as well as to be skilled in working with an increasingly diverse population. In addition, the migration of skilled workers places pressure on the development of international standards for skills and qualifications. The proposed European Qualifications Framework is likely to have implications for some parts of the lifelong learning sector, including potentially increasing the flow of European students into the lifelong learning sector, as well as enabling greater competition for students between English and other UK providers and those overseas.

Finally, **technological change** has significant implications for the development of skills across the UK workforce as a whole, thus influencing demand for lifelong learning provision, as well as shaping the delivery of that provision and hence skills needs within the sector itself. The lifelong learning workforce will require a changing repertoire of skills, in order to cope with the introduction of new ICT hardware and new services and provision (or methods of delivering services or provision) based on technology, and these skills will require continual updating to keep pace with rapid technological innovation.

The competitive position of the sector

There are significant difficulties in measuring the impact of a complex and varied 'body' such as the lifelong learning workforce, in terms of its competitive position, performance, success and productivity. Unlike sectors that produce tangible products (and consequently have an impact on GVA), the lifelong learning sector lacks a single, standardised scale, which can be used to measure its success and productivity.

A few formal measures and performance indicators exist, but these are specific to individual constituencies (e.g. HE annual performance measures, FE system performance targets in England related to 'Success for all' (DfES, 2002), participant satisfaction, and success rates etc.) Monitoring this range of measures will continue over time to give a clear but limited picture of performance of parts of the sector. Informally, on the other hand, 'softer' measures have been identified through this research, which emphasise the competence and knowledge of employees as a proxy for success. Being qualitative measures, these are somewhat problematic in that they are hard to quantify and, therefore, unable easily to generate statistical trends.

International comparison of the lifelong learning sector is similarly complex, with each country collecting data in different ways. However, some indicators have been identified as producing robust comparisons between the OECD countries – expenditure, workforce profile, salary scales and learner outcomes – and these can be used to measure the UK lifelong learning sector against its worldwide counterparts. The key findings based on these indicators are as follows:

- Workforce profile:
 - within tertiary education, which is part of the overall lifelong learning sector, the UK has seen an increase of almost 7 percentage points in the female proportion of the academic workforce between 1998 and 2004
 - whilst the issue of an ageing population remains, the UK has a lower proportion of staff aged 50 and over in tertiary education, compared to others such as Italy and Norway.
- Salary – according to existing research on academic staff in HE, the UK comes second only to the USA in terms of salary (after weighting the cost of living). However, in terms of income distribution, the UK is closer to its European counterparts, France and Sweden, rather than to the USA, where income distribution is more dispersed.
- Expenditure:
 - expenditure on tertiary education in the UK is at a relatively low level of 1.1% of GDP (the same level as in France and Japan), ranked 15th amongst OECD countries. The USA is ranked 1st with expenditure of 2.7% of GDP.
 - the UK, like all other OECD countries, spends more on primary, secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education (3.9% of GDP), and is ranked 13th out of the OECD countries.
- Learner outcomes – the proportion of 25–64 year olds that had attained upper-secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary education in the UK has remained fairly stable since 1998, with 57% having attained a qualification at these levels, compared to the OECD average of just 44% in the year 2002.
- Rates of return – the UK has a fairly high rate of return – a measure of the benefits of education over time – relative to the costs of the investment in education, and analogous to the percentage returns from investing in a savings account. Of the nine countries where data existed, only Finland and Hungary had better rates of return.

The current skills profile, skills needs and priorities in the lifelong learning sector

Skills can be a problematic term to define and measure, particularly in a sector as diverse as the lifelong learning sector. Nonetheless there are several means by which the current profile and needs of the sector can be assessed. These means often, but not always, include the use of qualifications as a proxy for skills.

The lifelong learning workforce in the UK is a highly professional workforce, made up of a high proportion of staff (74%) within SOC classifications 1-3, incorporating: managers and senior officials; professional occupations; and associate professional and technical occupations. It is, therefore, not surprising that **a high proportion of the lifelong learning workforce across the UK (66%) held qualifications equivalent to NVQ level 4 or above.**

The proportion of the lifelong learning workforce holding their highest qualification at NVQ level 4 or above is higher than the proportion similarly qualified in other public sectors, such as other parts of education (57%) and health and social work (44%), and considerably higher than that found within the economy as a whole (24%).

Moreover, over time the proportion of the workforce with higher level qualifications has increased alongside a reduction in the proportion with no or low level qualifications. The qualifications of those in 'professional occupations' have risen especially quickly.

An assessment of current skills needs and priorities within the lifelong learning sector across England was also carried out. Skills shortages, indicated by applicants for vacancies lacking the required skills were reported by 29% of employers in the sector. Skills shortages were less evident in the lifelong learning sector in comparison to the whole country average.

The type of skills most commonly reported in the LLUK collection of primary data were **professional/technical/practical skills shortages**, for example teaching and supporting learning in FE and HE, records management and librarianship in LAIS, and occupational competence for WBL trainers and assessors.

Skills gaps are areas indicated by employers in which their current employees lack the skills required to carry out their role. The sector has an issue to face in this area but again it is a lesser issue than in other sectors of the economy.

In England skills gaps across the lifelong learning sector were most commonly associated with **general IT user skills and management and leadership skills**, compared with professional/technical/practical skills or other transferable and wider employability skills. The majority of skills gaps related to **professional and support/associate professionals**.

In England skills gaps among **professionals and managers of services at NVQ level 4 or above** were most often reported, with skills gaps for manual occupations and organisational managers least common.

For any assessment of skills needs within the lifelong learning sector to be useful and useable for planning, it needs to go beyond the high level analyses above and look in more detail at individual constituencies, to show up the range of variation. The data analysed for this chapter show a range of variations between the five constituencies in terms of their current profile and their current skills shortages and gaps.

For example, in 2005, 71% of those employed within the HE constituency held their highest qualification at NVQ level 4 or above, compared with only 37% in LAIS.

However, the research undertaken for this stage of the SSA has not enabled the identification of the current skills shortages or gaps within specific subject areas. It is expected that analysis at this level of detail will result, to an extent, from the additional stage of work being undertaken by LLUK to assess the implications of the skills needs and priorities identified within other occupational sectors by other SSCs in the production of their SSAs (i.e. the Impact Review).

In addition to the current priorities resulting directly from these skills shortages and skills gaps, stakeholders identified **leadership and management**, and **transferable and wider employability skills**, as particular priorities across all lifelong learning constituencies within England.

Future skills needs in the lifelong learning sector

The lifelong learning workforce will increasingly be dominated by professional occupations across the UK and, to a considerably lesser extent, by support/associate professionals in the coming years, and it is anticipated that a growing proportion of this workforce will be employed part-time. The very high level of replacement demand for professionals reflects the age profile of the workforce, as noted in chapter 3.

It is not surprising therefore to learn that employers anticipated that demand for higher level skills at NVQ level 4 and above, and also at NVQ level 3, would increase, and that increasing the skills levels of the existing workforce was more important to them than increasing the size of the workforce within particular occupations. Higher-level professional skills are, therefore, a key priority for lifelong learning sector employers. That being said, transferable and wider employability skills are also recognised as important for a wide range of lifelong learning occupations in the future.

Within this current research phase it has not been possible to consider in any depth the specific subject specialisms (and related skills needs), which will be required of the lifelong learning workforce at these different qualification levels. The 'Impact Review' of the SSAs developed by other SSCs, to be undertaken by LLUK, will provide details of the demand for subject-related skills across the workforce as a whole, and allow the potential impact on the lifelong learning workforce's skills needs to be more clearly ascertained.

Lifelong learning employers across England identified the following overall priority future skills needs (including occupational categories):

- **increasing demand for professionals**, especially in FE, HE and WBL. Most constituencies predicted **support/associate professionals** as the category with second highest future demand. The exception was HE which expected demand to be for managers of services.
- All constituencies in England predicted a high future demand for all skill types. The LAIS and WBL constituencies predicted the highest demands. **LAIS identified transferable skills** as likely to be most in demand. **WBL** predicted a greater need for **professional/technical skills**.
- **increasing demand for particular professional/technical/practical skills for professionals**, such as teaching and supporting learning in FE and HE, records management and librarianship in LAIS, and occupational competence for WBL trainers and assessors
- **increasing demand for transferable and wider employability skills**, such as ICT and customer service skills, and, especially, leadership and management skills, across most constituencies
- **increasing integration between lifelong learning constituencies**, resulting in growing demand for overlapping job roles and multi-skilled staff, and partnership skills.

The survey and workshop phases of primary research also allowed the five individual constituencies to identify some of their own specific skills needs in more detail. These skills needs are an indication of the type of skills development activity which will be required in England in the coming years.

Future priorities

The final chapter within the report draws together all the findings from all of the previous chapters to suggest the future priorities for:

- the lifelong learning sector as a whole
- specific constituencies within the lifelong learning sector
- Lifelong Learning UK as an organisation.

In relation to the **lifelong learning sector as a whole**, priority issues for the future relate to:

- the policy context
 - improving education and training participation and attainment among young people aged 14–19
 - improving literacy and numeracy and increasing qualifications levels in the working-age population
 - increasing social inclusion and improving individuals' employability
 - lifelong learning system reform and quality improvement
- the changing social, economic and technological context
- the changing global and international context
- major trends across the lifelong learning workforce
 - an ageing workforce
 - a predominantly female workforce, except in the more senior and professional roles
 - a highly qualified workforce in predominantly professional roles
 - an increasing need for high level skills, rather than an increase in numbers within particular occupational groups
 - a high 'replacement demand' within the workforce, with implications for future workforce succession planning.

Key priorities for the future identified in relation to **individual constituencies** within the lifelong learning sector in **England** include:

In **CLD**:

- There will be a need for increasing levels of awareness of equality, diversity and cultural differences.
- Service users, especially those in the younger age brackets, will expect greater involvement in the design of the provision that they receive.
- Professionals and managers from other sectors will increasingly work within the constituency and will need to develop a broader understanding of the constituency, in order to operate effectively.
- Managers within the sector will need to develop skills related to defining and managing the changing staff roles within the sector, and, with increased integration, managing large numbers of volunteers.

In **FE**:

- The FE workforce in general will need to develop stronger customer service and client management skills.
- Employers across the country as a whole will demand more specifically job-related training to be delivered within employment settings.

- Lecturers will increasingly be expected to have current or recent experience of working within the sectors and occupations about which they teach.
- A range of collaborative business models for FE colleges will emerge, focusing on provision for: young people aged 14–19 (in collaboration with schools); adult workforce development (in collaboration with employers); HE delivered within FE college settings (in collaboration with HE); and tackling social exclusion (in collaboration with CLD).

In HE:

- Those who teach and support learning will need skills in facilitating independent learning, catering for different learning styles and enabling the learning of a more diverse student body.
- Students will expect greater interactivity, with teaching and learning support staff in both traditional and distance delivery modes.
- There will be, potentially, an increasing demand for associate professionals responsible for supporting learning, whilst increasing use of ICT may reduce the demand for administrative staff.
- Leadership will become more distributed throughout HE organisations, with more staff requiring leadership skills.

In LAIS:

- Traditional skills for archivists and librarians will still be required, together with growing demand for non-traditional skills such as ICT and customer service.
- Information brokerage and interpretation roles will grow as information becomes more widely available through electronic media.
- Updating training will be required in health and safety, welfare and legislative and regulatory changes.

In WBL:

- Individuals within all WBL occupations will require transferable skills in communication, numeracy and ICT, and wider employability skills such as team working and problem solving.
- Professional skills needed by trainers and assessors will continue to require both occupational and assessor competence.
- The number of middle managers, professionals and administrative staff will increase.
- Closer collaboration with FE colleges will be required.

In conclusion, it can be said that skills priorities across the UK and specific constituencies are showing a strong sense of modernisation. Traditional patterns (of student/teacher; librarian/user relationships) are gradually merging into a ‘contemporary paradigm’, where lifelong learning institutions are expected to function as businesses and the workforce will need to be armed with **agility, competence and business acumen**, in order to be able to liaise with service users as customers in the modern world.

Finally, the production of this report of the first stage of the Sector Skills Agreement for the lifelong learning workforce has identified some **future priorities to be addressed by Lifelong Learning UK** as an organisation.

A programme of LLUK research projects has already been proposed, commencing in 2007, to collect new primary data, which will go some way towards addressing the remaining gaps in the evidence. These research projects will focus on the:

- archives and records management workforce across the UK
- CLD workforce across the UK (including strand-level data for community learning and development, development education; family learning, parenting; personal and community development learning (previously known as ACL) and youth work)

- WBL workforce across the UK.

It is acknowledged that this report has not been able to address some issues relating to the individual constituencies and, more particularly, to individual strands or component parts of lifelong learning constituencies at a fine level of detail. This was recognised particularly by stakeholder reviewers of the report within the CLD and LAIS constituencies. Other issues, which were identified but similarly not possible to address in detail within the scope or remit of this research, include:

- measures and indicators of success and productivity within the sector
- lifelong learning service user satisfaction
- the effects of the introduction of HE fees
- the effects of the introduction of e-learning
- issues relating to private and voluntary-sector provision of lifelong learning
- issues relating to the volunteer workforce and SMEs within lifelong learning service delivery.

There are, therefore, further decisions to be taken within LLUK about the extent to which additional and more detailed research work focused on individual constituencies, parts of constituencies and specific issues can and will be prioritised for action in the future.

Skills for Business is an employer-led network consisting of 25 Sector Skills Councils and the Sector Skills Development Agency. Through its unrivalled labour market intelligence and insights from employers in all sectors of the UK economy, the network identifies change needed in policy and practice relating to education and skills development. With the influence granted by licences from the governments of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, and with private and public funding, this independent network engages with the education and training supply-side, such as universities, colleges, funders and qualifications bodies, to increase productivity at all levels in the workforce.

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