



CITY & GUILDS
CENTRE FOR SKILLS
DEVELOPMENT

**SKILLS DEVELOPMENT:
ATTITUDES & PERCEPTIONS**



Summary report
March 2008

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KEY INTERNATIONAL FINDINGS:

GENERAL TRENDS ACROSS COUNTRIES

THE POSITIVES

- Vocational education and training gets employees ready for the workplace.
- Employers believe that they get a return on their training investment.
- Esteem is improving.

THE NEGATIVES

- The majority believe that there is a ‘skills crisis’.
- There are serious issues with leavers not finding employment after completing their training.

THE DETAIL

- Esteem for vocational education and training varies considerably between countries.
- Parental attitudes are the biggest barrier to higher esteem.
- Job-specific technical skills are in higher demand than basic skills or generic skills.
- Technological developments have the greatest impact on the demand for training.
- Small and medium sized companies face greater challenges than large employers.
- Practitioners are happier with current arrangements than employers.
- Privately funded practitioners work more closely with employers, and are gloomier about the bigger picture than publicly funded practitioners.

KEY COUNTRY FINDINGS:

COMPARING PERCEPTIONS BETWEEN 9 COUNTRIES

AUSTRALIA

Belief in a skills crisis is high, but esteem for vocational education and training is improving significantly. There are few issues with leavers finding employment after training. Employers are dissatisfied with the levels of communication they have with others involved in the vocational education and training community. Staff retention and turnover is the most important trend impacting on the demand for training.

CANADA

There is less of a perceived shortfall in basic skills than elsewhere. People believe that the ageing workforce and immigration impact on the demand for training to a greater extent than the international average.

DENMARK

Qualifications are nationally and internationally recognised. Fewer people believe that there is a skills crisis. Practitioners receive ongoing training. Leavers have few issues finding employment after training.

GERMANY

Germany has the least number of respondents believing in a skills crisis and less of a shortfall in different types of skills. Job-specific technical training is particularly strong. Finding employment after training is a serious concern. Esteem is high but is falling rapidly.

HUNGARY

Perceptions in Hungary are the most negative across the majority of issues. The system for matching supply and demand is ineffective. A greater proportion of employers do not invest in training. Vocational education and training is a ‘pathway for the less academically gifted’ that fails to lead to decent pay. Esteem is the lowest of any country – and is deteriorating still further.

INDIA

Indian respondents are the most positive across the majority of issues. Employers are the most inclined to believe that vocational education and training gets people workplace ready. Soft skills are a problem. Esteem in India has improved over the last 10 years to a greater extent than any other country.

MALAYSIA

Practitioners receive the least ongoing training. A higher proportion of respondents believe in a skills crisis. Employers invest in training to the least extent. Esteem, however, is high.

SOUTH AFRICA

Attitudes and perceptions in South Africa are bleak. More people than anywhere believe that there is a skills crisis and shortfalls are higher. Employers are the least certain that they get adequate return on their training investment.

UK

Esteem is particularly low in the UK, which contrasts with a comparatively high level of employer investment in training, less of a shortfall in skills and frequent practitioner training. Communication is a key area for improvement.

BACKGROUND

The City & Guilds Centre for Skills Development undertook this international research project to build an understanding of current issues faced by those with a stake in skills training around the world – employers, learners, practitioners, researchers and policy makers. The aim of the research was to enable the Centre to identify key priorities for its programme of work.

The research took place in three stages: desk research, qualitative research (focus groups and in-depth interviews) and a quantitative survey. For the quantitative phase, 2,000 employers and practitioners were interviewed across nine different countries – Australia, Canada, Denmark, Germany, Hungary, India, Malaysia, South Africa and the UK.

These countries were chosen for the variety of their economic, social, political and educational systems. Practitioners hailed from a mix of publicly and privately funded institutions, and employers varied by both size and sector (manufacturing, hotels & restaurants, retail, construction and utilities).

Many of the terms used will have been interpreted differently by stakeholder groups and different countries. It should also be noted that the questionnaire was translated for Danish, German and Hungarian respondents. Caution should therefore be taken in comparing and contrasting between countries without considering the language and cultural implications.

Despite the diversity of the countries surveyed, there were four themes common to all:

- **Quality of provision:** are people being given the best possible preparation for work?
- **Supply and demand:** how can we forecast and balance supply and demand in skills?
- **Employer engagement:** are employers sufficiently engaged in vocational education and training?
- **Esteem:** how can we improve the perception of vocational education and training?

These themes now constitute the four key strategic objectives of the City & Guilds Centre for Skills Development.

INTERNATIONAL FINDINGS

THE POSITIVES

The media around skills training is often so centred on the things that are going wrong, and where improvements need to be made, that the positive story gets missed. There are, however, some encouraging messages coming from employers and practitioners.

Vocational education and training gets employees ready for the workplace

The overwhelming majority of employers believe that vocational education and training gets employees workplace ready. 80% are in agreement, compared to 15% who are not [Figure 3, page 18].

Employers get a return on their training investment

Employers believe that they get adequate return on their training investment; 89% agree and just 8% do not [Figure 4, page 18].

Esteem is improving

The majority believe that the esteem of vocational education and training has improved over the past 10 years. 62% think it has improved, compared with 22% who think it has deteriorated and 17% who think it has stayed the same [Figure 5, page 19].

THE NEGATIVES

Despite the positive messages, there are some clear problems which employers and practitioners see as critical areas for improvement.

A 'skills crisis'

Over half of respondents – 54% – believe that there is a skills crisis, compared to 43% who do not. Identifying how best to address skills gaps should therefore be a key priority for policy makers internationally [Figure 6, page 19].

Difficulties with finding employment

Internationally, 51% of practitioners are concerned that there are problems with leavers not finding employment after completing their training. 43% do not believe that there are problems [Figure 7, page 20].

THE DETAIL

The average perceived regard for vocational education and training is 6.6 out of a possible 10. Esteem varies significantly by country – with Germany rating it almost three points higher than Hungary (Germany rates it as 7.9 out of a possible 10, compared to Hungary which rates it at 5.2). The UK has the second lowest perceived esteem, behind Hungary. The chart below shows the rating of esteem across all nine countries.

Parents are the biggest barrier to higher esteem

People who rate the regard for vocational education and training as 5 or under were asked the extent to which they agree with a number of possible reasons behind lack of esteem. The top rated reason is that parents encourage children towards academic higher education. The second and third ranked reasons do not differ from each other statistically – that vocational education and training is viewed as being a pathway for the less academically gifted, and that schools encourage children towards academic pathways.

Job-specific technical skills are in the greatest demand

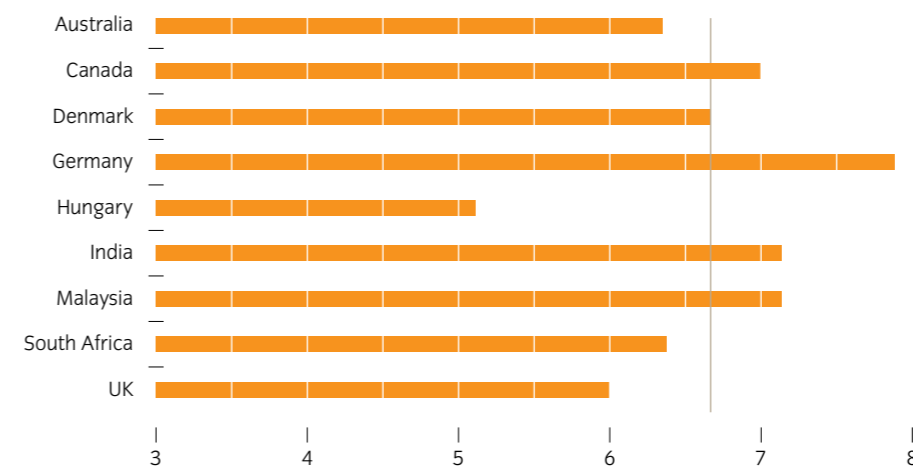
There is a higher perceived shortfall, although the difference is small, in job-specific technical skills than in basic skills or generic skills. The average shortfall for job-specific technical skills is 5.1, compared to 4.8 for each of the other two skills sets. There are no significant differences between the shortfall in soft skills and the other skills sets.

Technological developments have greatest impact on demand for training

Technological developments are the trend that most influences the demand for training internationally. It is followed by competition and staff retention & turnover*. Globalisation and an ageing workforce are next*. Immigration is the trend least likely to influence the demand for training.

*The difference between these two trends is not statistically significant.

FIGURE 1: ESTEEM OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATIONAL AND TRAINING



Average
On a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is 'low' and 10 is 'high'.

INTERNATIONAL FINDINGS CONTINUED

Greater challenges for small and medium sized companies

Large employers (250+ employees) are more satisfied than small to medium sized ones regarding their employees' quality of training in job-specific technical skills. They are more likely to invest to a great extent in training and more likely to believe that they get an adequate return on their training investment. Large employers give a satisfaction level on their employees' quality of training in job-specific technical skills of 7.5 (out of a possible 10), compared to 7.0 for small to medium sized companies. 58% of large employers invest in training to a great extent, compared to 35% of small to medium sized ones. Finally, 92% of large employers agree that they get an adequate return on their training investment, compared to 86% of small to medium sized ones.

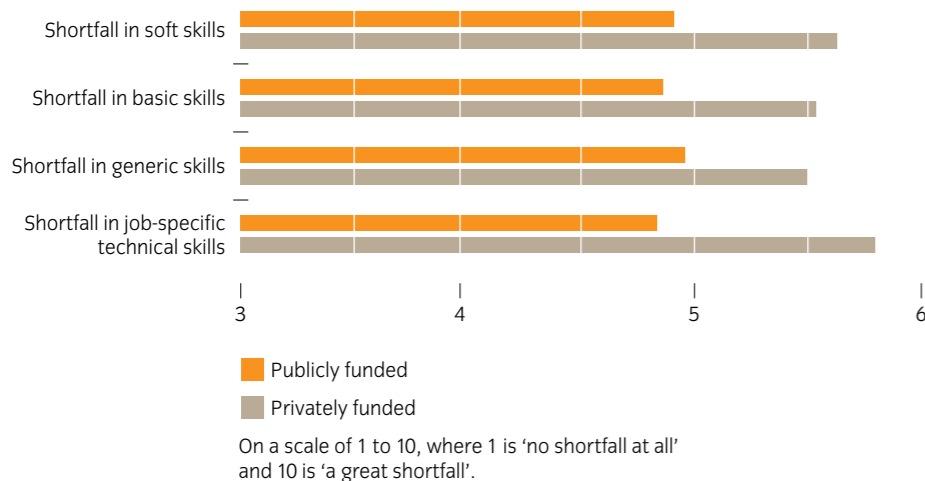
Practitioners are happier with current arrangements than employers

Practitioners are generally much more positive than employers in their opinions. They define themselves as better able to predict and respond to future training requirements than employers believe them to be, and are more positive than employers about the system's effectiveness for matching supply and demand. On predicting and responding to future training requirements, practitioners give themselves 6.5 out of a possible 10, whereas employers give them 6.1. 69% of practitioners believe that the system for matching supply and demand is effective, compared to 62% of employers.

Privately funded practitioners are closer to employers, and gloomy

Privately funded practitioners are more likely to be positive about anything directly related to employers (such as their ability to predict and respond to employers' future skills needs), but to be gloomier about the broader picture – such as the severity of skills shortfalls. Privately funded practitioners give a rating of 4.1 in relation to the difficulty of predicting and responding to employers' future skills needs, compared to 4.9 for publicly funded practitioners. Practitioners are significantly more concerned about shortfalls in skills across all areas where they are privately funded (see chart below).

FIGURE 2: PERCEIVED SHORTFALL IN SKILLS: PRACTITIONERS BY FUNDING



COUNTRY FINDINGS

AUSTRALIA

Belief in a skills crisis is high, but esteem for vocational education and training is improving significantly. There are few issues with leavers finding employment after training. Employers are dissatisfied with their communication levels. Staff retention and turnover is the most important trend impacting on the demand for training.

Lack of practitioner training

Australia has the greatest number of practitioners who never receive training to keep them up to date with their teaching and pedagogy skills. 9% never receive training in Australia, compared to 3% internationally.

Popularity of informal training

Of those practitioners that do receive training, Australians are given the greatest proportion of purely informal training. 27% of practitioners say that they receive purely informal training, compared to 17% internationally.

Quality of generic skills provision in doubt

Employers are less satisfied with the quality of their employees' training in generic skills than the international average. Australian employers rate the quality at 6.9 out of a possible 10, compared to 7.2 internationally. They are also less satisfied with the quality of generic skills training than they are with job-specific technical skills training, which is given 7.3.

A skills crisis

A greater proportion of Australian respondents believe that there is a skills crisis – 71% in Australia compared to 54% internationally.

Impact of staff retention and turnover

Staff retention and turnover is the most important trend for Australians in influencing the demand for training, compared to the average, where it is third in order of priority.

Globalisation down, ageing workforce up

Australians are less likely to believe that globalisation is a trend influencing the demand for training. It is rated at 6.1 out of a possible 10 in Australia, and 6.9 internationally. The ageing workforce is more significant as a trend influencing demand, however, with a rating of 7.2 in Australia compared to an international average of 6.8. One policy maker commented: "employers have failed to realise that if their workforce is ageing they need to 'update' their tools by training apprentices."

Employer dissatisfaction

Australian employers are significantly less satisfied than average about their communication with others involved in the vocational education and training community. They give a satisfaction rating of 5.8 out of a possible 10, compared to 6.5 internationally. According to an Australian policy maker, "the most critical issue is communication. There is a lot of confusion about [vocational education and training] and there needs to be a clearer articulation of what [vocational education and training] offers."

A 'pathway for the less academically gifted'

Australians place more weight than the international average on the statement *vocational education and training is viewed as being a pathway for the less academically gifted*, with an Australian rating of 7.9 compared to an international rating of 6.9.

Improving esteem

Coming behind only India, Australia has the second largest proportion of respondents believing that the esteem in which vocational education and training is held has improved over the last 10 years. 70% of Australians believe that esteem has improved over this period, compared to 62% internationally. Conversely, 10% believe that it has deteriorated, compared to an international average of 22%.

CANADA

There is less of a perceived shortfall in basic skills. People believe that the ageing workforce and immigration impact on the demand for training to a greater extent than the international average.

Practitioner self-belief

Canadian practitioners believe in the effectiveness of their training to a greater extent than the international average, rating themselves as 8.2 out of a possible 10. The international average is 7.7.

Quality of training – job-specific technical skills outflank generic skills

Employers' satisfaction with the quality of their employees' training in job-specific technical skills is higher than it is with the quality of their training in generic skills. Employers give an average satisfaction rating, out of a possible 10, of 7.7 for job-specific technical skills and 7.3 for generic skills. According to one employer, *“there is a failure to prepare students to think critically, to analyse and in problem-solving.”*

Basic skills not a problem

There is a lower perceived shortfall in basic skills in Canada than internationally. Canadians rate the basic skills shortfall as 4.3 out of a possible 10, compared to an international average of 4.8.

Impact of the ageing workforce

An ageing workforce impacts more than average for Canadians on the demand for training. It is given a rating of 7.5, compared to an international rating of 6.8. One Canadian employer said: *“there’s a lot more connection now than there was even 10 years ago, because the baby boomers are retiring and we’re going to have this gap in employees, and I think employers are paying more attention.”*

Immigration has more influence

While immigration is the least important trend influencing the demand for training both in Canada and internationally, Canadians nevertheless attach more importance to it, with a rating of 6.8 compared to a 5.8 average. The focus groups pointed towards the need both to upskill immigrants and to recognise their current skills and qualifications. An employer commented *“these are the people that want to work. These are the people that want to bring their families over.”*

DENMARK

Qualifications are nationally and internationally recognised. Fewer people believe that there is a skills crisis. Practitioners receive ongoing training. Leavers have few issues with finding employment after training.

Training skills above industry experience/knowledge

Denmark has a significantly higher than average proportion of practitioners who believe that they were recruited for their training skills (29% compared to 17% internationally). More employers than the international average also believe that practitioners are stronger in their training skills than their industry experience or knowledge – 29% compared to 12% internationally.

Ongoing practitioner training

Denmark comes second (after the UK) in terms of the proportion of practitioners who receive ongoing training to keep up to date with their teaching and pedagogy skills. 53% of Danish practitioners receive ongoing training, compared to an international average of 42%.

Question over quality of generic skills training, but no shortfall

Danish employers are less satisfied with the quality of their employees' training in generic skills, with a satisfaction level of 6.8 (out of a possible 10), compared to an international average of 7.2. There is, however, a lower perceived shortfall in generic skills in Denmark than internationally – with a rating of 4.3 compared to 4.8 internationally.

No crisis

Denmark has a lower than average proportion believing that there is a skills crisis. 26% believe that there is a crisis, compared to 54% internationally.

Leavers find employment

Danish practitioners are the least concerned about leavers not finding employment after training, with 21% (compared to 51% internationally) saying that there are issues. *“I think that it is nice to know that the training programmes are more or less the same no matter which college you come from. In this way the companies know more or less what to expect from the trainees. I think that it is a quality of which Denmark can be proud,”* commented one employer.

Recognition of qualifications

Danes are the most convinced that their qualifications have both national and international recognition – 76% believe this to be the case, compared to 46% internationally.

Favourable comparison with academic higher education, despite school encouragement towards academia

Respondents agree less with the statement *vocational education is not compared favourably with academic higher education than the international average*, with a Danish agreement rating of 5.6 and an international rating of 6.5. They agree more, however, with the statement *schools encourage children towards academic higher education than the international average*, with a rating of 7.4 compared to 6.9 internationally.

GERMANY

Germany has the least number of respondents believing in a skills crisis and less of a shortfall in different types of skills. Job-specific technical training is particularly strong. Finding employment after training is a serious concern. Esteem is high but is falling rapidly.

Lack of ongoing practitioner training

Practitioners in Germany believe that they receive the second least ongoing training (behind Malaysia) in both their teaching/pedagogy skills (29%) and their vocational field or subject (24%). The respective international averages are 42% for both areas.

Success of job-specific technical skills training

German employers are more satisfied with the quality of their employees' training in job-specific technical skills than the international average, rating their satisfaction level as 7.7 out of a possible 10, compared to an international average of 7.4. The shortfall in job-specific technical skills, despite constituting the highest shortfall internationally, is lower in Germany than any skills set in any other country. The job-specific technical skills shortfall is 3.8, compared to an international average of 5.1.

Employers get a return on investment

German employers are the most positive that they get an adequate return on their training investment. 98% are in agreement, compared to 89% internationally.

Less of a shortfall

The overall perceived shortfall in skills is significantly less in Germany than the international average, with a German rating of 4.3 and an international rating of 4.9.

No skills crisis

Germany has the lowest proportion believing in a skills crisis – 23% compared to 54% internationally.

Employment issues

German respondents are strikingly concerned about leavers not finding employment after completing their training, with 88% of practitioners believing that there are issues (compared to 51% internationally).

Importance of technological developments and competition

Following the international pattern, technological developments are the trend most influencing demand for training in Germany, followed by competition. More weight is lent to both in Germany, however, suggesting that they have more of an impact. Out of a possible 10, the German rating for technological developments as a trend influencing demand is 8.0 and the international rating is 7.7; the German rating for competition is 7.7 compared to an international rating of 7.3.

Good communication

Employers in Germany are significantly more satisfied than the international average with the levels of communication that they have with others involved in the vocational education and training community. The satisfaction level in Germany is 7.6 out of a possible 10, compared to an international average of 6.5.

Employers believe their investment in training is high

German and British employers believe that they invest in training to the greatest extent of the nine countries. In Germany, 59% of respondents invest to a great extent. The corresponding international figure is 41% (the level in Britain is 57%).

High but deteriorating esteem

The esteem of vocational education and training is higher in Germany than in any other country. German respondents rated esteem as being 7.9 out of a possible 10, compared to an international average of 6.6. Despite this, more people in Germany believe that esteem has deteriorated (32%) than believe it has improved (30%) over the past 10 years. The corresponding international figures are 22% and 62% respectively.

HUNGARY

Perceptions in Hungary are the most negative across the majority of issues. The system for matching supply and demand is ineffective. A greater proportion of employers do not invest in training. Vocational education and training is a 'pathway for the less academically gifted' that fails to lead to decent pay. Esteem is the lowest of any country – and is deteriorating still further.

A gloomy outlook...

Responses in Hungary are generally considerably more negative than anywhere else. This may be because of cultural differences which lead to a pattern of negative reporting, or because the situation in Hungary is genuinely considerably worse than it is elsewhere.

...but fewer believe in a skills crisis

Hungary has a lower than average proportion believing that there is a skills crisis. 41% believe that there is a crisis, compared to 54% across all nine countries.

Lack of ability to predict and respond

On the ability of practitioners to predict and respond to future training requirements, Hungary is the only country to show a significant variation from the others. Hungarians believe that practitioners are less able to predict and respond to future training requirements, rating their ability as 5.2 out of a possible 10, compared to an international average of 6.4.

Ineffective system

Hungarian respondents are the least positive that the system for matching supply and demand is effective. 48% of respondents believe that it is effective, compared to 65% internationally.

More employers who do not invest

In Hungary, over twice the average proportion of employers say that they do not invest in training at all – 7% compared to 3%. One employer commented: *“you train the employees, then other companies take away the skilled workforce.”*

Lowest esteem – and deteriorating further

Vocational education and training is held in the lowest esteem of any country in Hungary. The rating attached to it in Hungary is 5.2 out of a possible 10, compared to an international average of 6.6. Hungary has the largest proportion of respondents believing that the esteem in which vocational education and training is held has deteriorated over the last 10 years, with 56% agreeing – compared to just 22% internationally.

A 'pathway for the less academically gifted' that fails to lead to decent pay

Hungarians place more emphasis than the international average on the statements *vocational education and training is viewed as being a pathway for the less academically gifted* (with a Hungarian rating of 7.5 compared to an international rating of 6.9) and *vocational qualifications are not seen to provide access to well paid careers* (with a Hungarian rating of 6.9 compared to an international rating of 6.4). According to one employer, *“the social prestige of a university or college is much bigger than [that] of adult training.”*

INDIA

Indian respondents are the most positive across the majority of issues. Employers are the most inclined to believe that vocational education and training gets people workplace ready. Soft skills are a problem. Esteem in India has improved over the last 10 years to a greater extent than in any other country.

A rosy perspective

Indian responses were more positive in general than those of any other country.

Formality of practitioner training

India apparently has no mix at all between formal and informal training of practitioners, and practitioners receive more purely formal training than other countries surveyed – 89% compared to 46% internationally.

Vocational education and training gets employees ready for the workplace

Employers in India are the most inclined to believe that vocational education and training gets employees workplace ready. 94% of employers agree, compared to 80% internationally.

Quality of on-the-job training

Indian employers are more satisfied with the quality of their employees' training in both generic skills and job-specific technical skills than the international average. Their satisfaction levels, out of a possible 10, are 7.8 for generic skills and 8.0 for job-specific technical skills. The corresponding international figures are 7.2 and 7.3 respectively.

Greatest need is for soft skills

The shortfall in soft skills is significantly higher in India than the shortfalls in basic skills or generic skills (the shortfalls in soft skills and job-specific technical skills did not differ significantly). The shortfall in soft skills is rated as 5.6 out of a possible 10, compared to 4.7 for both basic skills and generic skills. The shortfall in soft skills is also higher in India than it is internationally – 5.6 compared to 5.0. According to one practitioner, *“if you go by the syllabuses, that is your limitation... they [the students] have the hard skills but don't have the soft skills.”*

Not a question of pay or academic conceit

Less importance is attached in India to the statements *vocational qualifications are not seen to provide access to well paid careers* (with a rating of 5.8 in India and 6.4 internationally) and *vocational education and training is viewed as being a pathway for the less academically gifted* (with a rating of 5.9 in India and 6.9 internationally).

Improving esteem

India has the largest proportion believing that the esteem in which vocational education and training is held has improved over the last 10 years. 88% believe that it has improved in India, compared to 62% internationally. Only 4% think that it has deteriorated; the international equivalent is 22%.

MALAYSIA

Practitioners receive the least ongoing training. A higher proportion of respondents believe in a skills crisis. Employers invest in training to the least extent. Esteem, however, is high.

Practitioners' skills balanced, but lack of available training

Malaysian employers are more inclined to believe, compared to the international average, that practitioners are equally strong in industry experience/knowledge and training skills. Practitioners appear to receive, however, the least ongoing training of any country to keep them up to date with their teaching and pedagogy skills (10% receive ongoing training compared to 42% internationally). They are also least in agreement that their training is frequent enough to meet changing needs (61% are in agreement, compared to 79% internationally). The difficulties in keeping updated with industry knowledge in particular are broadly recognised. One employer commented: *“today you train them; after a few months a new thing comes out, then you have to start training again.”*

A skills crisis

Malaysia has a higher than average proportion of respondents believing that there is a skills crisis (63% compared to 54% internationally). A practitioner said that *“industry has been pushing technical institutions to supply more and more skilled workers to fill up the available positions in their company. A rate of 70% of graduates are snatched up by industries within 3 months after they left their institutions. That would be a significant indication of how desperate industry is at the moment in demanding more and more manpower.”*

Leavers don't find employment

Malaysian practitioners are the second most concerned – after only Germany – about leavers not finding employment after completing their training, with 72% (51% internationally) saying that there are issues.

Importance of technological developments

As is the case internationally, technological developments are the most important trend in influencing the demand for training.

Employers don't invest

Malaysian employers appear to invest in training to the least extent – just 8% of respondents invest in training to a great extent, compared to 41% internationally. One employer commented: *“they want to see the benefits before they will invest the money.”*

Positive esteem

The esteem of vocational education and training in Malaysia is greater than in Denmark, Australia, South Africa, the UK and Hungary, and lower only than in Germany. Substantially less importance than elsewhere is attached to the statements *vocational education and training is viewed as being a pathway for the less academically gifted* (rating of 5.0 out of a possible 10, compared to 6.9 internationally), *vocational education is not compared favourably with academic higher education* (rating of 5.4, compared to 6.5 internationally) and *schools encourage children towards academic higher pathways* (rating of 5.7, compared to 6.9 internationally).

SOUTH AFRICA

Attitudes and perceptions in South Africa are bleak. More people than anywhere else believe that there is a skills crisis and shortfalls are higher. Employers are the least positive that they get adequate return on their training investment.

A lack of practitioner training

Coming behind Australia, South Africa has the second greatest proportion of practitioners who say that they never receive training to keep them up-to-date with their teaching and pedagogy skills (8% never receive training, compared to 3% internationally).

Adequate return on investment?

South African employers are the least positive that they get adequate return on their training investment (80% believe that they got an adequate return, compared to 89% internationally). According to one employer, *“we haven’t got the luxury of time to have a guy sit on a course or an apprenticeship of three years; we need to shorten that and transfer skills faster.”*

Shortfall in skills

South Africa shows a severe overall perceived shortfall in skills, with a rating of 5.7 – out of a possible 10 – compared to 4.9 internationally. It shows a higher shortfall in soft skills and generic skills than the international average, and a higher shortfall in basic skills and job-specific technical skills than any other country.

Severe skills crisis

South Africa has the highest proportion of respondents believing that there is a skills crisis (77% compared to 54% internationally). One employer stated that *“we’ve got millions of people in this country that haven’t got work and it’s because our schooling system is not good enough to prepare those guys for future employment.”*

Impact of globalisation

South African respondents perceive globalisation to be of more importance in influencing the demand for training than the international average (rating of 7.4 compared to 6.9 internationally).

Employer communications need improvement

South Africa is, behind Hungary, the second least convinced that the current level of engagement between employers and practitioners is effective. 59% are in agreement, compared to 67% internationally. Speaking about employers, one practitioner said that *“they don’t want to get involved.”* South African employers, along with those from Australia and the UK, are significantly less satisfied than the international average about their communication levels with others involved in the vocational education and training community (the average rating is 5.7 compared to 6.5 internationally).

UK

Esteem is particularly low in the UK, which contrasts with a comparatively high level of employer investment in training, less of a shortfall in skills and frequent practitioner training. Communication is a key area for improvement.

Frequent practitioner training

The UK is the country in which the most practitioners perceive themselves to receive ongoing training to keep up to date with their teaching and pedagogy skills (70% compared to 42% internationally). As is the case with Denmark, all respondents believe that they receive at least some training to keep updated in this area. According to one UK policy maker, *“the concept of CPD [continuing professional development] is more developed in the UK than it is elsewhere.”*

Not workplace ready

UK employers are the least inclined to believe that vocational education and training gets employees workplace ready (66% agree compared to 80% internationally). According to one policy maker, the amount of central direction in the system is a problem: *“efficiency is low, the system is over-engineered, it’s not responsive to specific needs on the ground and therefore provides large amounts of resource to provide things that aren’t real priorities.”*

Shortfall in skills less of a problem

The overall perceived shortfall in skills is significantly less in the UK than it is internationally (the UK rating is 4.5 compared to an average of 4.9).

Less belief in a skills crisis

The UK has a slightly smaller proportion of respondents believing that there is a skills crisis than the international average (48% compared to 54% internationally).

Immigration up; globalisation down

Immigration is significantly more important as a trend influencing the demand for training in Britain than the international average, with a rating of 6.3 in the UK compared to 5.8 internationally. Conversely, globalisation is ranked in last place for the British as a trend influencing the demand for training, compared to fourth place internationally – with ratings of 6.0 and 6.9 respectively.

Communication could be improved

British employers are less satisfied than the international average about their communication levels with others involved in the vocational education and training community, rating their satisfaction as 5.7, compared to an international rating of 6.5. A practitioner commented on the lack of communication by saying: *“we’re running after organisations trying to build relationships.”*

‘Employer investment in training is high’

British and German employers appear to invest in training to the greatest extent of the nine countries. In the UK, 57% of employers say that they invest to a great extent, compared to 41% internationally.

Low esteem

Vocational education and training is held – behind Hungary – in the second lowest esteem in the UK (rated 5.9 in the UK and 6.6 internationally).

Unfavourable comparison with academic higher education; a pathway for the less academically gifted; lower pay

The UK is the only country to agree more than the international average with the phrase *vocational education is not compared favourably with academic higher education*. Respondents in the UK score this phrase as 7.1, compared to an international average of 6.5. Substantially more importance is attached to the phrase *vocational education and training is viewed as being a pathway for the less academically gifted*. Respondents in the UK give a score of 8.2, compared to an international average of 6.9. This statement is ranked first among UK respondents. More importance is also attached to the statement *vocational qualifications are not seen to provide access to well paid careers*, with an average rating of 7.2 in the UK compared to 6.4 internationally.

NEXT STEPS

We have identified a number of **implications** and **questions** on the basis of this research:

Quality of provision, the match between supply and demand, employer engagement and esteem are key challenges across all of the nine countries analysed.

The majority of employers believe that (a) vocational education and training gets employees ready for the workplace and (b) they get a return on their training investment. How can we capitalise on this support for provision to ensure that the supply and demand issue is sufficiently addressed and that esteem gets a commensurate boost?

There are serious issues with leavers not finding employment after completing their training. What are the reasons for this and how can they be addressed to ensure that pathways to work are an integral part of any vocational training system?

Parental attitudes are the biggest barrier to high esteem. How can we change mindsets?

We know that technological developments are perceived to impact on the demand for training to the greatest extent. How do they do this and what are the potential consequences?

Practitioners are happier about the current situation than employers. Privately funded practitioners work more closely with employers, and are gloomier about the bigger picture. This suggests that a closer engagement between publicly funded practitioners and employers would align their perspectives to a greater extent and therefore potentially help address the supply and demand issue. How can we improve the communication between employers and publicly funded practitioners?

How can we help small and medium sized companies with the challenges that they face in engaging with vocational education and training?

There are also questions that we have raised in relation to individual countries, e.g.:

Germany

Why is esteem falling, and how can this be addressed?

India

How can the provision of soft skills be improved?

UK

How can we use positive messages – such as high employer investment and a relatively low shortfall in skills – to deal with low esteem?

Over the next 20 months, we intend to answer some of these questions by bringing together panels of experts and conducting more in-depth research. Our emphasis will be on finding solutions that can change policy and practice. If you would like to participate in this further work, please let us know on info@skillsdevelopment.org.

Evaluation and advisory services

We provide due diligence and health checks for existing projects and programmes with a vocational impact or focus. We also provide skills impact assessment and advice on funding programmes, frameworks and strategy.

Networks and communities

We focus on building strong, mutually beneficial partnerships, and in turn, brokering contacts between our partner organisations. It is our goal to facilitate strong, effective communication across the international skills community, through innovations such as the hosting and moderation of online forums.

Research and information

We commission and manage research projects into vocational development needs in order to direct further research or intervention. We also interpret existing research and provide systematic literature reviews to support proposed projects.

Project and programme management

We deliver comprehensive project management services, including project start-up work. Our project management approach ensures quality criteria and infrastructure conform to good practice principles in vocational skills delivery.

These services will be provided through our three main areas of work:

1. Core activity: This is our permanent offer to the international vocational education and training community, which supports our purpose of using research and development to inform and improve policy and practice. The City & Guilds Centre for Skills Development aims to become a thought leader in vocational skills and an authoritative source of information. Monitoring developments in policy and practice improves our internal knowledge base and our ability to influence outcomes for economic and social benefit. Analysis of data collected by other organisations facilitates the transformation of research into working practices and policies. We undertake and commission research in areas where there are identified needs to fill gaps and innovate – prioritising the areas that this international research project has identified.

2. Interventions: All projects are chosen on the basis of the four strategic objectives identified in this research. We believe that the City & Guilds Centre for Skills Development must build a reputation for achieving positive impact and delivering strong projects. Concentrated activity will allow us to develop sophisticated and comprehensive understanding of specific markets, producing lasting impact. Future interventions will gradually see the focus expand in order to generate wider international benefit.

3. Consultancy: Our consultancy work – in project and programme design, project management, project evaluation and post-implementation review, research and systems design – allows us to generate income to support our core activity and interventions. We will give priority to consultancy projects that help to address the issues that have defined our strategic objectives.

CHARTS

FIGURE 3: DOES VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING GET EMPLOYEES 'WORKPLACE READY'?

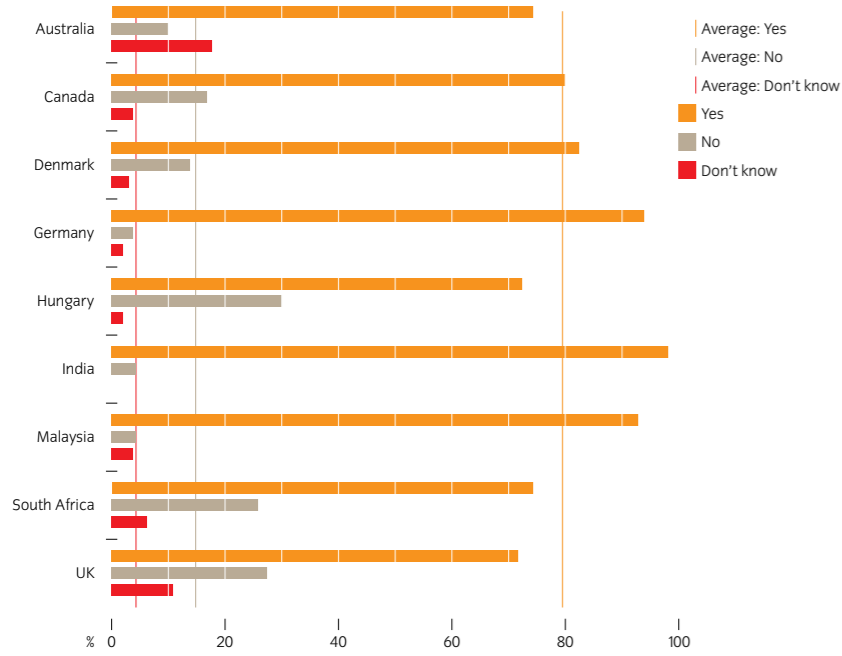


FIGURE 4: DO EMPLOYEES GET AN ADEQUATE RETURN ON THEIR TRAINING INVESTMENT?

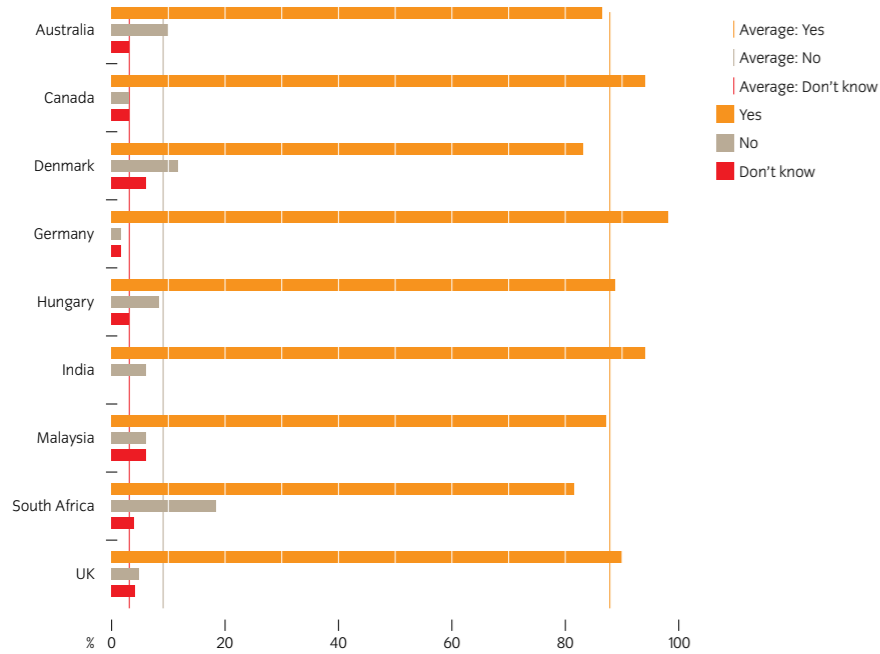


FIGURE 5: HAS THE ESTEEM IN WHICH VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING IS HELD IMPROVED OR DETERIORATED OVER THE LAST 10 YEARS?

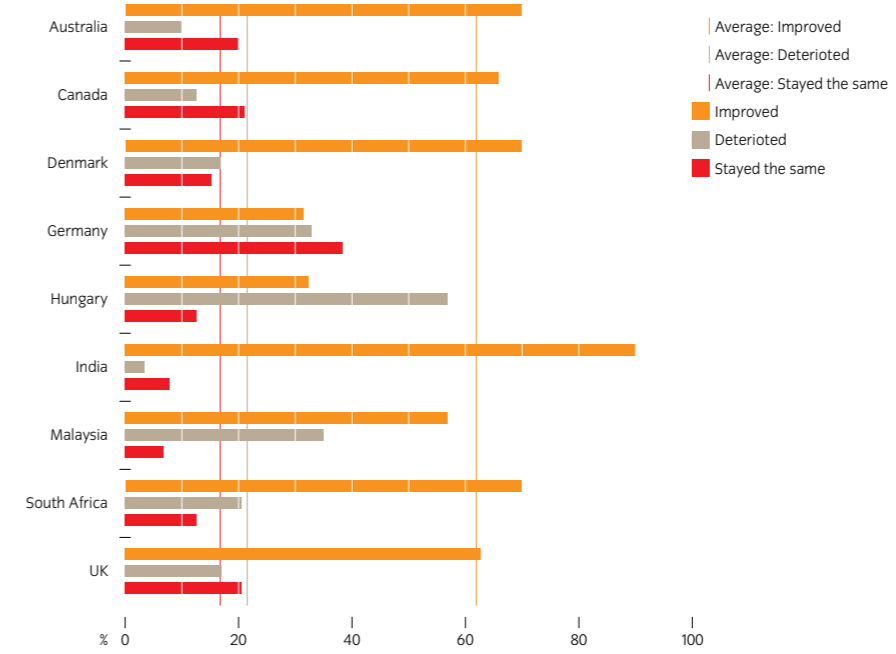
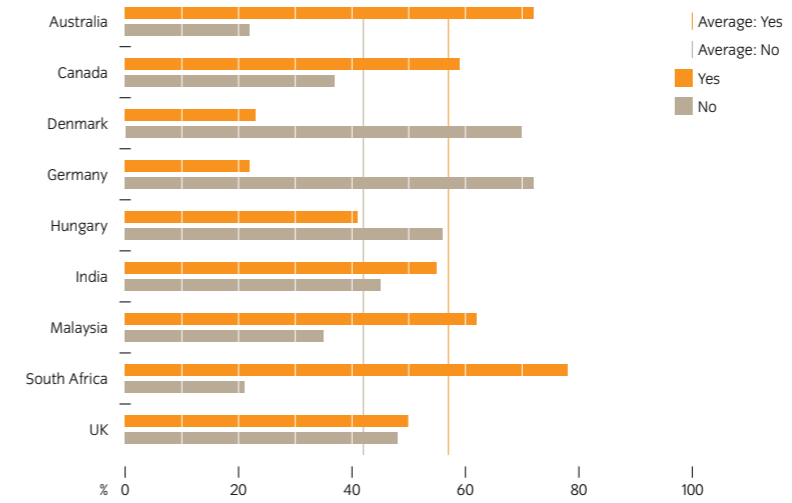


FIGURE 6: IS THERE A SKILLS CRISIS?



FURTHER INFORMATION

Our vision is raising economic and social prosperity for people, organisations and nations. Our mission is to improve the policy and practice of work related education and training through innovative research and development. For more information on our programme of work, please email info@skillsdevelopment.org or call +44 (0)20 7294 4160.

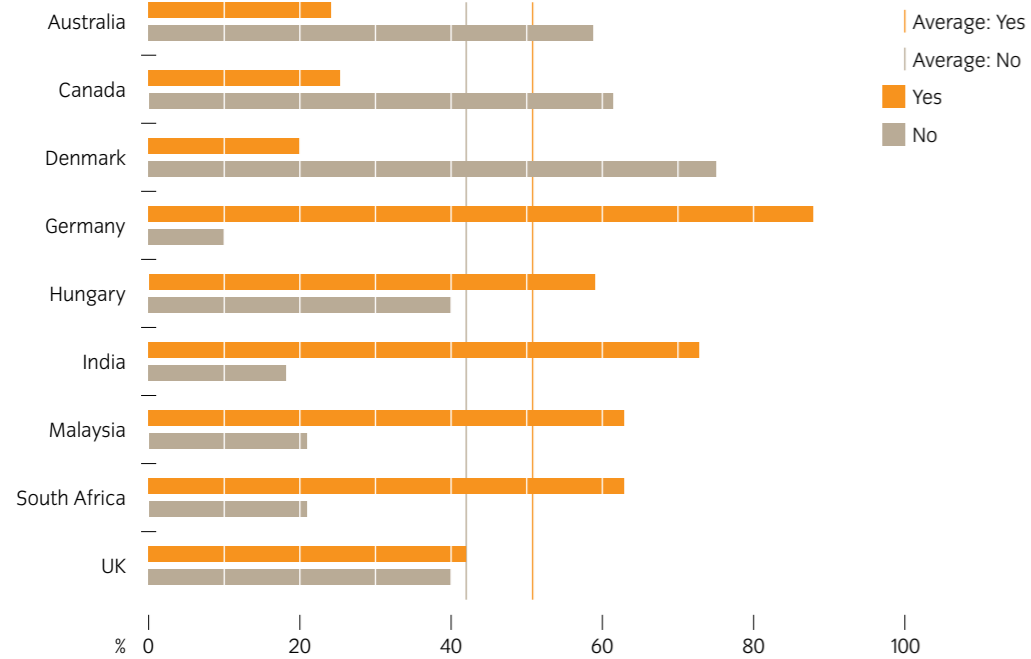
For the full report and analysis, go to www.skillsdevelopment.org

If you would like to contribute to the further research that we are doing, or for further information on this research, please contact:

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FIGURE 7: ARE THERE ISSUES WITH LEAVERS NOT FINDING EMPLOYMENT AFTER COMPLETING THEIR TRAINING?



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