

Qualification Achievements in Construction

2012 Executive Summary

July 2013





Executive Summary

This update builds on the 2010 report by producing a view of training and education details specific to the construction sector¹ from 2007 through to 2011 and where possible, data for 2012.

The 2010 report noted challenges in producing this view due to the fragmented nature of data, especially for further education. While these challenges still exist, the work in building the 'evidence base' has continued because understanding the current view is a pre-requisite towards ensuring that the right training, both in quantity and relevance, is provided to equip industry with the workforce it needs.

This report looks to build on this view by grouping qualifications into three broad types:

- **Competence** – qualifications delivered by a training provider or further education establishment, for example NVQs, QCF: NVQ Certificates, QCF: NVQ Diplomas, or SVQs.
- **Knowledge** – qualifications such as Construction Awards, QCF Diplomas, QCF Certificates, and Higher National qualifications, usually delivered by a further education establishment.
- **Higher Education** – degree and postgraduate qualifications delivered by Universities.

Although the report presents analysis by these three broad areas, it should be noted that knowledge and competence are essentially aspects of the same thing, in that an individual develops a skill through either learning or training, which they then apply in a job context.

There was a clear increase in overall numbers of qualification achievement from 2007 through to 2009, mainly due to increasing numbers in further education, however after 2009 there has been a sharp decline.

In the short term the overall numbers of construction related training and education achievements look set to continue declining. This is indicated by the achievement and start trends for both further and higher education, with this decline being more noticeable for competence based and degree qualifications.

Although this is happening at a time when the general economy and construction sector is experiencing further recessionary effects, the decline in overall training comes at a time when wider research indicates a need for a more flexible and productive workforce, for example increasing importance of energy efficiency measures across the built environment. A key element in having a more flexible and productive workforce is making sure that it is equipped with the relevant skills and training for future needs, which indicates a possible tension with the trend of declining numbers.

This decline in numbers is being seen across all nations however there are some differences when it comes to the actual patterns and trends. In part this will be due to the fact that education and training policy is devolved in each nation, especially in Scotland which is structurally different to other nations, although the relative numbers of people employed in

¹ As defined by ConstructionSkills Standard Occupational Classification footprint.



the industry, performance and composition of the sector across the nations will also have an effect.

Public funding has played an important part in supporting qualification attainment for each nation and the indication is that this has become more important in recent years. Apprenticeships are an important part of public funding and play an increasing part in support for learners in Northern Ireland and Scotland when compared to England or Wales.

In contrast to further education, higher education appears to exhibit a more stable and consistent pattern. In part this will be due to the longer time periods for degree and postgraduate qualifications when compared to further education, however it will also be due to the data being presented in broader subject area groups which would smooth out some of the detail.

For both further education and higher education the emerging trends for declining numbers for the construction sector are a cause for concern as there is the potential for future skills shortages. Indications are that while the sector is still in recession, skills shortages are less of an issue for employers when compared to general business survival, however there are reports that show the sector still has skills shortages and hard to fill vacancies. When there is an upturn in business conditions it is likely that there will be an increase in skills shortages being reported as it generally takes some time before increasing demand filters through to training and education achievements. This highlights the continued need to be aware of the underlying picture as it emerges and how this relates to the demand that exists for training and education, especially if the sector is to stand any chance of moving towards more responsive, employer driven training and learning.

In terms of future work to improve the view of training and education supply for the construction sector, there are three main points that emerge.

1. New Workers

There is a significant amount of Level 1 Knowledge qualifications delivered in England and Wales, which is not evident in Northern Ireland (same qualifications) or Scotland (different structure).

- What part do Level 1 qualifications have towards an entry route for workers in England & Wales?
- Does it equip people with the right skills that industry is looking for?
- How, or should these qualifications fit with pre-Apprenticeship training?
- What is the employment destination of learners after further education – do they work in the sector?

2. Existing Workers

Training and education can never be solely focused on the training on new entrants, it also has to respond to the demand for training and career aspirations of existing workers in the sector. This is an important aspect given the high levels of self-employment in the sector along with over 95% of employers being classed as small to medium sized enterprises.

Being able to respond too, and meet this demand will be a critical aspect in ensuring that the construction and built environment sector has a suitably skilled, flexible and productive future workforce which is able to meet future challenges. This requires an understanding of;



- What are the drivers of future training demand likely to be for the sector?
- What is the anticipated scale of impact?
- How do people develop their skills or keep them up to date as they progress?
- What are the paths for career progression?
- What role does skill development play in the creation of successful businesses?

3. Government Support

There is a considerable amount of reform happening around further and higher education across all nations as they look to provide a structure that will deliver skills that will meet employer demand and deliver wider economic benefits. The analysis identifies that government support through the likes of public funding for learners has become increasingly important in recent years, however this is at a time of constraints on public finances.

- What is the future direction of support for learners?
- What is balance between public and private funding of training and education?

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