

What are Sector Skills Councils?

In an effort to enhance UK productivity and competitiveness, there has been a coordinated attempt to identify the training and educational needs of Britain and to ensure that delivery meets requirements.

The Skills for Business network aims to boost the productivity and profitability of the UK. It does this by identifying and tackling skills gaps and shortages on a sector by sector basis. In short, trying to get the right people with the right skills in the right place at the right time.

The Skills for Business network is made up of 25 Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) - each one is an employer-led, independent organisation. The Sector Skills Development Agency (SSDA) underpins the network and is responsible for funding, supporting and monitoring the SSCs.

SSCs have replaced the National Training Organisations, but a key point for those involved in higher education is that unlike the NTOs which only looked at apprentice level training, the SSCs are looking at education at all levels from apprenticeships to Masters Degrees.

The four key goals of the SSCs are:

- to reduce skills gaps and shortages
- improve productivity, business and public service performance
- increase opportunities to boost the skills and productivity of everyone in the sector's workforce
- improve learning supply including apprenticeships, higher education and National Occupational Standards (NOS).

The responsibilities of the Sector Skills Councils as given in the SSDA's Annual Report 06-07 are:

- Producing high quality, forward-looking Sector Skills Agreements with employers, government administrations and delivery partners that clearly identify sector skills supply and employment-related qualifications priorities, including an assessment of the adequacy of current provision, and the action that will be taken to meet these;
- Promoting innovation and action by employers in each sector to develop and improve the productivity of the whole workforce, including work to identify best practice in work organisation and the use of skills and action to promote equal opportunities;
- Promoting action by employers in each sector to increase their investment in skills, to share responsibility for skills development, and for supporting the implementation of this as necessary;
- Working with government administrations and the delivery partners on skills policies to develop sector performance;
- Delivering high quality sector and occupational skills intelligence and information;
- Ensuring the production of standards for all occupations governed by statute or industry operating standards; and
- Promoting employment-related learning, including work to develop the curriculum and qualifications from age 14 to higher education and the workplace, and developing (Modern) Apprenticeships and other learning frameworks as necessary and relevant to each sector.

What is a Sector Skills Agreement?

Sector Skills Agreements (SSAs) aim to fundamentally alter the way skills are demanded, delivered and developed throughout the UK. They map out exactly what skills employers need their workforce to have and how these skills will be supplied – both now and in the future. Put simply, they are about getting the right people with the right skills in the right place at the right time.

SSAs are facilitated by the Sector Skills Councils but are subscribed to by everyone who supplies, funds and plans education and training. They are created by a process which involves a number of partners including employers, trade associations and employer bodies, and organisations that supply and fund education and training (including further and higher education).

Why should Higher Education be involved with Sector Skills Councils?

The Sector Skills Councils have already developed clear thinking on what should form the basis of Foundation degrees and are likely to have an increasing influence on higher education beyond Foundation degree development. The Leitch Review of Skills (December 2006) recommends that a proportion of higher education funding be delivered through a demand-led mechanism, and employers are to influence the content of courses and develop relationships with universities through their relevant SSC.

How can higher education engage with Sector Skills Councils?

Of immediate impact on higher education is the work of SSCs on:

- *Sector Skills Agreements which identify the training needs in particular subject areas.* The development of the SSAs will undoubtedly have some effect on future funding, they provide powerful arguments as to where scarce resources should be concentrated. They also provide evidence of the need for educational provision and thus should be a powerful tool in the hands of course developers, and, as an indication of where skills are scarce, for the marketing of courses. Also higher education institutions and organisations are key delivery partners.
- *The development of specifications for foundation degrees.* Although in some cases this development is taking place after many foundation degrees have been designed and validated, they should be seen as relatively well-informed statements of what industry is looking for and certainly should not be neglected in the design or review of foundation degrees in the future.
- *The specification of the 14- 19 specialist diplomas.* The Sector Skills Councils have been instrumental in ensuring that industry has been represented in the development of the specifications of these diplomas. From 2010 or earlier students with specialist diplomas (including engineering and manufacturing) will be applying for places at higher education institutions and it is important that higher education engages as soon as possible with these developments in order to ensure that needs are met.

However, all of their work is of interest to higher education, and they are a source of information about employment and training needs.

Further information from <http://www.ssda.org.uk>

Which Sector skills Councils are relevant to engineering?

SEMTA (Science, Engineering Manufacturing Technologies Alliance) is responsible for the Science, engineering mathematical and manufacturing technologies.

www.semta.org.uk

Automotive Skills is responsible for automotive retail motor industry from motor manufacturers and their dealers, to the repair and aftermarket sector, including specialist organisations such as Thatcham and the roadside rescue operators. It also covers vehicle recovery and rental.

www.automotiveskills.org.uk

Energy and Utility Skills is responsible for the electricity, gas, waste management and water industries.

www.euskills.co.uk

Proskills UK is responsible for the process and manufacturing sector including the coatings, extractives, glass, building products and printing industries.

www.proskills.co.uk

Cogent is responsible for oil and gas extraction, chemicals manufacturing and petroleum industries.

www.cogent-ssc.com

Skillset is responsible for the audio visual industries including broadcast, film, video, interactive media and photo imaging.

www.skillset.org

Lantra is responsible for environmental and land-based industries.

www.lantra.co.uk

ConstructionSkills represent every part of the construction industry, from architects to bricklayers.

www.constructionskills.net

SummitSkills is responsible for building services engineering including electro-technical, heating, ventilating, air conditioning, refrigeration and plumbing.

www.summitskills.org.uk

GoSkills is responsible for the passenger transport industry including aviation, bus, rail, community transport and transport planners.

www.goskills.org

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