

ABOUT THE UK SKILLS SYSTEM

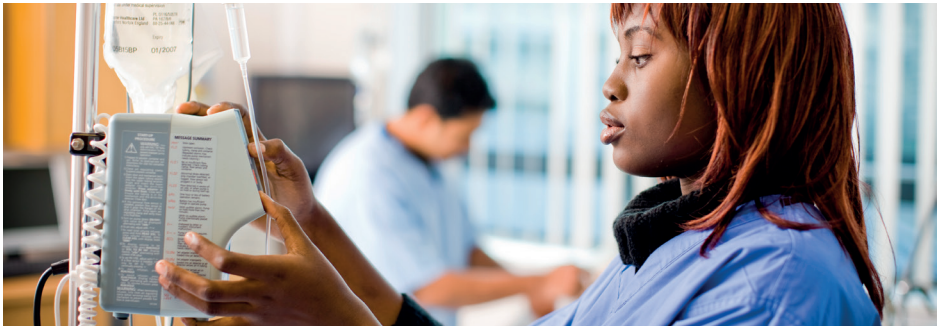
The UK has a long history of skills development by employers, with apprenticeships going back over 800 years and over 150 years of technical college education. Government has taken a strong lead in developing a skills system to equip people for sustainable work, encourage social mobility and support business growth and productivity.

KEY FACTS

- Record low unemployment rate of 4.7% in Jan 2017
- Over 900,000 people currently on an apprenticeship
- 89% of employers say apprentices make their business more productive
- 86% of employers in 2015 reported a fully proficient workforce
- World leading construction, services and creative sectors.

There are several features of Skills Development that are unique to the UK but a key unifying principle is that there is room for innovation and pilot activity built into the system. The devolved nations of Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales have authority over skills development and increasingly, so do regions in England. This gives authorities the ability to tackle the particular skills challenges they face, but without working in isolation. They operate within

an enabling environment where employers, training providers, colleges and other stakeholders can deliver the skills needed now and in the future. There are a range of skills activities and policies in effect in different places to meet different needs. This opportunity to see how policy and practice can be adapted to meet local circumstances within a flexible framework is a key reason to look to the UK when looking at policy and structural reform.



ABOUT THE BRITISH COUNCIL

The British Council works to enhance the quality of skills systems by encouraging closer links between education, employers, and policy makers in the UK and worldwide. It has strong links with the organisations that are part of the skills development system in the UK and is a member of the UK Skills Partnership.

UK SKILLS PARTNERSHIP

The Partnership comprises key stakeholders in the UK skills system, who have significant capability to promote and support skills development around the world. Members work collaboratively to build the UK sector's capacity and engagement in international activities and act as an advocate for the UK's technical and vocational education and training offer internationally.



THE UK SKILLS SYSTEM

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES OF SKILLS
DEVELOPMENT IN THE UK



CORE PRINCIPLES

Within this flexible framework, the UK’s skills system has three core principles:

1. EMPLOYERS ARE AT THE HEART OF THE UK SKILLS SYSTEM

- Employers are not just the customers of the UK skills system but are a major contributor to its’ development
- They develop apprenticeships across all sectors of the economy
- They set the professional standards of competence against which apprenticeships and national qualifications are developed
- They help to shape policy at the national, regional, and local level and they are at the heart of delivery.

2. THE UK’S SKILLS SYSTEM IS A HIGHLY FLEXIBLE ONE

- The UK approach operates within a flexible policy environment
- There is broad agreement across the political spectrum about the importance of skills development, the need to invest in it and that the focus should be on skills for economic growth and supporting young people to progress and get sustainable jobs

- Freedom and flexibility is given to colleges and training providers regarding how they manage delivery. Government allows this flexibility within a robust framework of rules on organisational governance, finances, and quality.

3. THE WHOLE SYSTEM HAS HIGH LEVELS OF QUALITY ASSURANCE

- Independent authorities approve employer-developed standards
- Qualifications are developed by organisations that have their own internal quality assurance and are overseen by the relevant national quality assurance body for qualifications
- Colleges and training providers are open to external inspection by their national office for standards in education against demanding standards and with heavy sanctions if a provider continues to fail to meet national requirements.

UNDERPINNING CHARACTERISTICS OF THE UK SKILLS SYSTEM

LABOUR MARKET INFORMATION:

World class UK wide labour market information and intelligence is available to stakeholders within the system, to support responsiveness to emerging needs.

STANDARDS AND QUALIFICATIONS:

These are the bedrock on which the UK skills system is developed. Groups of employers define the skills, knowledge and behaviours needed for effective performance in a specific occupation. These are used to build the high-quality qualifications recognised across many parts of the world.

EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT:

Employers are actively engaged in skills development to ensure market responsiveness. They act collectively within their industry to set standards and develop skills solutions, including through Sector Skills Organisations and National Skills Academies. Employers support college curriculum development and apprenticeships locally.

APPRENTICESHIP AND WORK BASED LEARNING:

UK apprenticeships are a “dual system” model. Apprenticeships are jobs which combine supervised and assessed training in the workplace to employer defined standards and technical education “off the job” in a college or another learning environment, leading to national certification.

FLEXIBLE TRAINING PROVIDERS:

Colleges and independent training providers have autonomy to meet local needs, generate commercial income from employers and leverage other sources of finance to enhance their facilities. Colleges use an expert practitioner model for teaching and have developed project based learning, bringing real world equipment and business into the college to enhance teaching and learning. Training providers are also able to meet the needs of diverse groups of learners, including those with disabilities, through flexible, tailored provision.

SHARED STEWARDSHIP

These principles and characteristics form the basis of a UK Skills System that is flexible and progressive. There is also a commitment to continuous improvement to meet rapidly changing labour market needs driven by social, economic, and technological change.

Innovation and pilot activity is built in to the policy making process and devolution allows flexibility within a broadly agreed policy framework. This is a culture where government,

employers and education and training bodies are all interested in what works and improving how we meet our skills needs.



The UK benefits greatly from having a high quality, flexible and employer led skills system. It gives people across the country opportunities throughout life to find good jobs and improve their careers, whatever their background, and provides businesses with the foundations on which to grow and succeed in highly competitive world markets.

David Hughes, CEO, Association of Colleges

