Independent training provider engagement in skills competitions

Report of findings – sector survey

June 2015
Acknowledgments

AELP would like to extend particular thanks to many of our members who spent considerable time and effort in responding to the survey – your responses have been invaluable and the creditability and usefulness of results laid out in this report are testament to your efforts.

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Further information about the programme can be found here: www.aoc.co.uk/about-colleges/world-skills-uk-the-skills-show/national-skills-competition-cpd-programme
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Background and policy landscape

It is clear that WorldSkills and the SkillsShow has had a significant impact in helping to raise the profile of Further Education and skills. Not only has involvement in skills competitions provided benefits and opportunities for the learners involved, it has also tangibly increased the profile of training organisations and employers across the country.

However, from information gleaned from recent skills competition events and anecdotally, it is clear that independent training providers are less engaged in skills competitions compared with FE Colleges, even though independent training providers deliver a significant number of the Apprenticeships in England.

As part of the National Skills Competition CPD Programme (funded by The Education and Training Foundation and delivered by the Association of Colleges), AELP was commissioned to conduct research among the provider community to map the current engagement of independent training providers in skills competitions and how they can be supported more effectively in the coming months and years.

Methodology

After agreeing the focus of the research, AELP developed a survey instrument. The survey was designed to be both quantitative and qualitative in nature – providing headline figures as well as the contextual information to explain the data.

Timescales for the research were particularly tight, with only 10 days to collect responses. AELP therefore conducted an intense promotional campaign amongst its membership and through regional provider networks. The survey was promoted via direct e-shots, through news bulletins and on various social media platforms (most notably Twitter and LinkedIn).

The survey attracted close to 70 responses. AELP’s research team carried out a process of data cleansing and analysis to identify the key findings and emerging themes. Where possible, AELP sought to drill down on the findings to identify any particular trends in responses from providers of different sizes. Due to the larger number of categories for regional and occupational delivery questions, it was not statically sound to break the findings down by region or sector.

It is hoped this report will help to inform support for providers seeking to engage in skills competitions in future. It is important that all relevant providers are equipped with the tools and resources to be involved, and as such stimulate an increase in independent training providers competing in skills competitions in future.
Executive Summary

- The survey attracted 67 responses from relevant organisations, across a good spread of providers by organisation size, regions of operation and the occupational skill sectors in which they deliver government-funded training. *(Q1-5)*

- Three-quarters of respondents are aware of skills competitions organised by Find a Future, however a minority have been involved in skills competitions such as WorldSkills and the SkillsShow. 26% have been involved in WorldSkills at regional level with a lower number at national and international stages. A higher number of respondents (31%) have attended the annual SkillsShow in Birmingham, with a lower number involved in the regional CPD programme. Smaller providers in particular have been less likely to engage. *(Q6-7)*

- In general, those who have been involved in WorldSkills have done so for the last 3-5 years, whilst those who have engaged in the SkillsShow have been involved since its inception. *(Q8)*

- A higher number of respondents involved in skills competitions, had done so in accountancy and hairdressing. A smaller number were involved in competitions relating to health, engineering, manufacturing, construction, and business admin. As expected, those respondents involved in regional competitions correlated closely to the regions in which they deliver training – West Midlands and the North West having the highest engagement. *(Q9-10)*

- Those involved have had some success, with a small number of their apprentices winning bronze, silver and gold at regional and national stages. Two respondents had learners who were hoping to secure a place with Squad/Team UK, with one respondent whose apprentice had won gold at international level. *(Q11)*

- A large number of respondents (85%) were unaware of the Skills Competition CPD Programme, particularly smaller providers. Those who were aware had attended one of the regional events. One respondent had accessed the online resources. *(Q12-13)*

- Of those who had accessed support, some had found it to be heavily focused on FE Colleges and therefore not as helpful as it could have been. However others indicated the support had helped them to develop a skills competition strategy for their organisation. *(Q14)*

- There are a number of areas of support that providers indicated would be useful. In summary, further awareness-raising activities are needed, particularly focused in reaching independent training providers and smaller organisations. Specific guidance is required on the initial steps providers need to take to engage in competitions, including timescales and entry requirements. *(Q15)*

- Responses indicated that resource implications for provider and employer is often the main barrier to engagement in skills competitions. Smaller providers in particular find it a challenge to release staff and cover associated costs, whilst employers (particularly SMEs) are reluctant or cannot afford to release apprentices from the workplace. Guidance and suggestions on how some of these barriers could be overcome, as well as guidance on how to ‘sell’ the benefits of skills competitions to employers would also be helpful. *(Q15)*

- Other suggestions included tying regional competitions with other local employer events, and providing guidance on competitions for specific occupational sectors. *(Q16)*
Recommendations

The following recommendations are based on the data and information collected within the survey, and drawn from suggestions for support given by respondents.

1. It is recommended that a targeted awareness-raising campaign is put in place, focused on reaching independent training providers (particularly smaller organisations), providing information on events and how providers can get involved. It is likely that this will be most effective if circulated through AELP communication channels and through the 40 regional work-based learning provider networks across England (with whom AELP has an established working relationship). This will help to ensure that all independent training providers are reached, particularly smaller providers.

2. It is recommended, either through the National Skills Competition CPD Programme or by other means, that guidance is produced specifically for independent training providers, providing basic information on the initial steps providers need to take to engage in competitions, including at what point apprentices need to be put forward and entry requirements.

3. It is also recommended, whether as part of the above guidance or as a separate resource, that guidance is given for independent providers on overcoming barriers to engagement in skills competitions. For example, from survey responses, this could include the benefits of skills competitions to independent providers of all sizes (including case study examples), the benefits of skills competitions for employers (particularly SMEs) and suggestions on how providers could best communicate and sell this to the employers they work with. It would also be helpful to provide practical examples of how providers can overcome resourcing concerns in terms of staff time and funding (e.g. pooling resources with other local providers). This could be supplemented with case study examples of smaller providers who have been engaged in skills competitions and how they overcame various barriers.

AELP has a significant track record in providing guidance, publications, case studies and support for independent training providers across the sector. As such, AELP, working closely with those responsible for skills competitions, would be in a strong position to expertly design, develop and disseminate guidance and resources of this kind for the benefit of ITPs.

4. It is clear, among smaller providers and SME employers, that funding and loss of business is a concern – particularly when apprentices are away from the workplace. It is therefore recommended that the Foundation explore the possibility of setting up a small grants fund. For example, modest grants could be made available to smaller employers (e.g. under 50 employees), solely to cover costs of the apprentice whilst away from the workplace. Grants could also potentially be made to regional networks, giving them the resource to coordinate arrangements for smaller providers in entering their learners into skills competitions, thus removing the resource burden from smaller providers. This support, for example, would only be accessible for providers with total budgets of under £1m. Given AELP’s national role and its close working relationship with regional networks, AELP would be able to provide the national coordination and management of such a fund.
5. In general, the Skills Competitions CPD Programme should seek to ensure that all events and resources produced are relevant and accessible for independent training providers, and indeed all relevant provider types. It is suggested that AELP are included in the review of materials and discussions regarding any future support available, perhaps piloting materials with independent training providers before publication.

In addition, AELP’s research team would be in a position to conduct impact assessment work to capture the benefits of such support (recommended above) to independent training providers. Ultimately, this would be evidenced through an increased number of independent training providers in skills competitions in future.
Demographics

Q1. Response rate

Working within a limited timeframe, AELP received 69 responses to the survey. Two responses were from FE Colleges – given the focus of the research, these responses are not represented in the findings below to ensure an accurate picture of independent training providers is drawn. The following summary of findings is therefore based on 67 responses.

Q2. Organisation type

95% of respondents categorised themselves as an independent training provider. The remaining respondents were from third sector providers (3%) and local authority providers (3%). Given the similarity in the way they operate and the need for a greater number of these providers to engage in skills competitions too, their responses have been included in the findings below.

Q3. Organisation size (based on aggregate budget for government-funded training)

The survey attracted a well-balanced number of responses from organisations of different sizes. Based on their total budget for government-funded training, 36% of respondents were from smaller providers with an aggregate budget of under £1m, 46% were from medium-sized providers (aggregate budget of £1-5m), and the remaining 18% of respondents were from larger training providers (aggregate budget of over £5m).

Q4. Regions of delivery

In general, the survey accumulated a good response rate from providers operating in each of the nine regions of England. Between 16%-36% of respondents deliver in each region – a higher number of respondents operate in the North West (36%) and West Midlands (36%), whilst a smaller number operate in the East of England (16%) and London (19%).
Q5. Occupational skills sectors

Responses indicated a high number delivering training in business admin and customer service skills (69%), health, public services and care (52%) and information and communication technology (39%). A lower number are delivering training in the agriculture, horticulture and animal care industry (7%) and in the sport, leisure and tourism sector (7%). Figures closely align with recent trends mapped from other larger-scale sector surveys conducted by AELP.

![Chart 3: Occupational sectors in which respondents deliver training](image-url)
Engagement in skills competitions

Q6. Provider awareness of skills competitions organised by Find a Future (e.g. WorldSkills, SkillsShow, etc.)

Three-quarters of respondents are aware of skills competitions organised by Find a Future. However, 25% of respondents were unaware of skills competitions such as WorldSkills and the SkillsShow. This suggests that further awareness-raising is needed among independent training providers, and particularly among smaller organisations for whom over a third (38%) were unaware of these skills competitions.

Q7. Has your organisation had any involvement with Find a Future skills competitions/events?

Although the majority of respondents are aware of skills competitions, findings show that only a minority have been actively involved. 26% have been involved in regional heats, 18% have been involved in national heats, with only 3% involved at international stage. A higher minority have been involved in the SkillsShow – almost a third (31%) have been involved in the annual SkillsShow in Birmingham, whilst 18% have had some involvement in the local SkillsShow IAG events.

The percentage of engagement is reduced quite significant for smaller providers (under £1m budget), for whom only 3%-4% have been involved in the SkillsShow or WorldSkills.

In response to a separate question, two respondents noted that they run their own internal competitions, heavily supported by the employers they work with or by industry employer groups (e.g. British Hairdressing Competition arranged by the National Hairdressing Federation).
Q8. If so, how many years has your organisation been involved?

The majority of those who have been involved in WorldSkills have done so for the last 3-5 years. A small number have only been involved in the last 1-2 years. One respondent has been involved in WorldSkills for 24 years.

The majority of those involved in the SkillsShow, have been since its launch (3-4 years ago). A small number were involved for the first time last year.

Q9. Which occupational areas has your organisation been involved in for skills competitions?
*Please provide information on the particular skill (e.g. automotive body repair, hairdressing, bricklaying, etc)*.

Those who have been involved in skills competitions, did so in accountancy, hairdressing, engineering, manufacturing, dentistry, bricklaying, carpentry, technical body paint, thermal insulation to pipework and vessels, fabrication and welding, customer service, dentistry and adult care. Accountancy and hairdressing featured most highly.

No respondents have been involved in competitions linked with logistics, hospitality and catering, ICT, or sport, leisure and tourism.¹

Q10. If your organisation has engaged with skills competition activities regionally, in which region/s have you been involved (e.g. regional heats, events, etc)?

Those who have been involved in regional heats for skills competitions, did so in all regions (including Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland). A greater number of respondents were involved in the West Midlands and the North West, with a lower number in the East of England, the South East, Scotland and Northern Ireland². There is some correlation between where respondents deliver training (Q4) and where they have been involved in regional heats.

Q11. What, if any, success have your learners had in skills competitions – regionally / nationally / internationally (e.g. medallists)?

Sixteen respondents provided information on learner success in skills competitions. Over half of these respondents had been involved in regional heats and national competition stage. A small number received medals, including bronze, silver and gold. Two respondents said that one of their learners had either secured a place on Squad/Team UK or was currently competing for a place. Several others who had been involved in regional and national competitions had learners who were finalists, with the remaining having learners who were runners up. One provider in particular had a learner who had achieved gold at international level.

(Although not directly related, one respondent also had an apprentice that achieved ‘Apprentice of the year’ in 2006).

¹ Although helpful information, given the sample size of respondents for which this question was applicable (21 organisations), it is not possible to draw any conclusions that are representative of the wider ITP sector.

² Although helpful information, given the sample size of respondents for which this question was applicable (20 organisations), it is not possible to draw any conclusions that are representative of the wider ITP sector.
Engagement in the Skills Competition CPD Programme

Q12. Are you aware of the Skills Competition CPD Programme (and the associated regional events and resources) currently being delivered by the AoC?

A minority (15%) of respondents were aware of the Skills Competition CPD Programme (and the associated regional events and resources). 85% were unaware of the programme. This suggests that further awareness-raising is required among independent training providers, particularly among smaller organisations for whom only 4% were aware of the programme.

Q13. If so, which resources have you used and/or what events have you attended?

Of those who were aware of the programme, three providers had attended one of the skills competition CPD events and one respondent had accessed the resources online. Again, findings suggest that further awareness-raising is needed among independent training providers, both in terms of the programme of events and the resources.

Q14. Of the CPD training events you have attended and/or the resources you have used, have you found these to be relevant and useful for ITPs?

The survey attracted a mixed response from those who had either accessed the resources or attended one of the programme events. Half of those who responded to the question felt the support on offer through the programme was heavily focused on FE Colleges and therefore hadn’t been as helpful as they were expecting. However, a number indicated that the support had been useful, in particular in developing a skills competition strategy as an organisation.
Support required for independent providers

Q15. What support would your organisation require to begin engaging in, or extend your engagement in, skills competitions?

Respondents detailed what support and guidance would be required, to help them to engage (or extend engagement) in skills competitions. Key themes from responses included:

Awareness-raising:
- Respondents highlighted a lack of awareness about the skills competitions, how to get involved and the support on offer – however they are keen to find out more. Providers were particularly keen to understand the dates and venues for regional heats and what the expectations and entry requirements are for apprentices.
- A number of providers asked for information to be hosted on the AELP website and through AELP news bulletins, as this is their main communication channel for updates.

Guidance on initial steps for engagement:
- Although there is a lot of publicity around WorldSkills, respondent felt it was not always clear at what point they need to engage and start putting their apprentices forward. Plenty of notice is required to ensure plans can be made.
- Respondents were therefore keen for specific guidance on what steps they need to take to start engaging in skills competitions.

Resource implications for providers and employers, and overcoming barriers:
- The most significant barrier for both providers and employers is the resource implication, both in terms of funding and staff/apprentice’s time. Smaller providers in particular, find it difficult to engage in skills competitions for this reason – both in terms of selecting and entering apprentices into the competition and/or hosting CPD events as part of the wider SkillsShow programme.
- In addition, employers can often be resistant to apprentices being away from the workplace, unless it is absolutely necessary. This is a particular challenge for SMEs who cannot afford for their apprentices to be involved.
- Respondents were therefore keen for specific guidance on what the resource implications are for a provider and for the apprentice, and suggestions on how some of these barriers could be overcome. Case study examples of similar providers who are involved in skills competitions would help in providing this support.
- In addition, specific information and guidance for providers on how they can ‘sell’ the benefits of skills competitions to employers (particularly SMEs) would be helpful.

More broadly - tailored support for ITPs and smaller organisations:
- In general, respondents were keen for specific resources and support for independent training providers, ensuring that all materials/events are relevant for them.
- Smaller providers in particular felt this support was required.
- In general, respondents are keen for help in developing a skills competition strategy for their organisation, which the above suggestions would form a part of.
Q16. Is there anything else you would like to add, not covered above?

Respondents provided a number of further suggestions in relation to ITP engagement in skills competitions, including:

- Respondents reiterated the barrier for apprentices who are employed by SMEs and the challenge for smaller (more localised) providers – many SMEs and smaller providers struggle to view skills competitions as an investment, but rather view it as an additional cost. Further support is needed for this group in particular. Respondents suggested that tying regional skills competition events in with other regional events that providers/employers are already attending, would help to improve access and interest e.g. local supplier competitions/events, events organised by Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) or Local Authorities.

- Some respondents found it challenging to understand the requirements for an apprentice operating in particular occupational skill sectors (e.g. health, social care and child care, business admin, etc). Information on how apprentices can enter into competitions for specific skills would be useful.

- One respondent used to be actively involved in WorldSkills, but explained: ‘the tests they were given were really tough and it was clear other entrants had received specific training well beyond that expected for the category and clearly aimed at the competition’. The provider had found this to be a barrier and had been put off by their experience.

The majority of respondents (87%) were happy to be contacted should any particular response/s need to be clarified.
# ANNEX 1 – Survey instrument

## Introduction

Involvement in skills competitions (such as WorldSkills and the SkillsShow) can have significant benefits for learners and help to increase the profile of your organisation, the employers you work with and the wider FE and skills sector.

AELP is conducting a short survey as part of the National Skills Competition CPD Programme (funded by The Education and Training Foundation and delivered by the AoC), to map the current engagement of independent training providers (ITPs) in skills competitions and how ITPs can be supported more effectively in the coming months and years. This is your chance to help shape the support available in helping you to engage and benefit from skills competitions in the future. The survey should only take a few minutes to complete and can be accessed here: [https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/SP3SSBS](https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/SP3SSBS). The deadline for response is Wednesday, 17th June 2015 (5pm).

All information collected from this survey will be reported anonymously and individual responses will not be shared outside of AELP, ETF, AoC and Find a Future. If you experience any technical difficulties completing this survey or have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Tim Chewter, Research & Project Manager at AELP on T: 07854 497 435 or E: tchewter@aelp.org.uk

Your response to this survey would be greatly appreciated.

## Demographics

**Q1. Name of organisation (to identify duplicate responses only):**

**Q2. Please indicate your organisation type using the categories below:**

- Independent Training Provider
- FE / Sixth-form College
- Third Sector provider
- Local Authority provider
- Other (please specify)

**Q3. Under which of the following sub-categories would you class your organisation?** (Please include all budget streams applicable to your organisation for WBL/W2W provision)

- Overall budget of under £1m
- Overall budget of between £1 – 5m
- Overall budget of over £5m

**Q4. In which regions does your organisation deliver skills training?** Please tick all that apply.

- North East
- North West
Q5. In which occupational skill sectors does your organisation deliver government-funded training? Please tick all that apply.

- Agriculture, Horticulture and Animal Care
- Business Admin and Customer Service
- Finance and Law
- Construction, Planning and the Built Environment
- Logistics
- Science, Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies
- Motor Vehicle Industry
- Health, Public Services and Care
- Hospitality and Catering
- Information and Communication Technology
- Sport, Leisure and Tourism
- Retail and Commercial Enterprise
- Hair and Beauty Industry
- Other (please state)

Skills competitions

Q6. Are you aware of skills competitions organised by Find a Future (e.g. WorldSkills, SkillsShow, etc)?

YES / NO

Q7. Has your organisation had any involvement with Find a Future skills competitions/events? Please tick all applicable options. (If none of the below are applicable, please scroll down to Q13)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WorldSkills – region heats</td>
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<td>WorldSkills – national heats</td>
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<td>WorldSkills – international competition</td>
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<td>SkillsShow (held at the NEC each year)</td>
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<tr>
<td>SkillsShow Experience Programme – local IAG events</td>
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Q8. If so, how many years has your organisation been involved?
WorldSkills:
SkillsShow:

Q9. Which occupational areas has your organisation been involved in for skills competitions?
Please tick all that apply and provide information on the particular skill (e.g. automotive body repair, hairdressing, bricklaying, etc).

- Agriculture, Horticulture and Animal Care
- Business Admin and Customer Service
- Finance and Law
- Construction, Planning and the Built Environment
- Logistics
- Science, Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies
- Motor Vehicle Industry
- Health, Public Services and Care
- Hospitality and Catering
- Information and Communication Technology
- Sport, Leisure and Tourism
- Retail and Commercial Enterprise
- Hair and Beauty Industry
- Other (please state)

Please tell us the particular skill your learners were competing in (e.g. automotive body repair, hairdressing, bricklaying, etc):

Q10. If your organisation has engaged with skills competition activities regionally, in which region/s have you been involved (e.g. regional heats, events, etc)? Please tick all that apply.

- North East
- North West
- Yorkshire & Humberside
- West Midlands
- East Midlands
- East of England
- London
- South East
- South West
- Scotland
- Wales
- Northern Ireland

Q11. What, if any, success have your learners had in skills competitions – regionally / nationally / internationally (e.g. medallists)?

OPEN TEXT BOX
Q12. Are you aware of the Skills Competition CPD Programme (and the associated regional events and resources) currently being delivered by the AoC?

YES / NO

Q13. If so, which resources have you used and/or what events have you attended?

OPEN TEXT BOX

Q14. Of the CPD training events you have attended and/or the resources you have used, have you found these to be relevant and useful for ITPs?

OPEN TEXT BOX

Q15. What support would your organisation require to begin engaging in, or extend your engagement in, skills competitions?

OPEN TEXT BOX

Q16. Is there anything else you would like to add, not covered above?

OPEN TEXT BOX

Q17. We may need to contact you to clarify your response. If you are happy for AELP/AoC to do this, please provide your contact details below:

Name:
Job title:
Email address:
Telephone number:

END OF QUESTIONS