

Frequently Asked Questions Sector Skills Agreement (SSA) Planning for the future skills needs of the lifelong learning workforce...



Skills for Learning Professionals

Sector Skills Agreement – FAQ's

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What are Sector Skills Agreements?

Sector Skills Agreements (SSAs) were one of the key announcements in the government's White Paper, *'21st Century Skills, Realising Our Potential'*, which was published in July 2003. The overall aim of the White Paper is to ensure that employers have the right skills to support the success of their businesses, and individuals have the skills they need to be both employable and personally fulfilled.

The SSA project is being led by the Sector Skills Development Agency (SSDA) in partnership with the Sector Skills Councils (SSCs), the Departments for Education and Skills (DfES) and Trade and Industry (DTI), key delivery partners including the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA), Regional Development Agencies (RDAs), higher education institutions as well as other key partners including the Trades Union Congress, the CBI and the Small Business Council.

What does that mean?

Specifically, SSAs will:

- Provide a means for employers and government to collaborate in meeting the priority skill needs of industry sectors.
- Present a genuine opportunity for employers to shape training provision and coherent progression routes.
- Challenge employers to work collaboratively across sectors.
 - Give individuals access to training which is relevant to industry needs, to help secure well paid employment and progression.

Frequently Asked Questions

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Why are Sector Skills Agreements being developed?

SSAs represent the next phase in the development of Sector Skills Council policy. Explicit in the original policy remit was the commitment that government would create the means for SSCs to exert strong influence throughout the system to help shape the supply of relevant training and skills and to raise employer commitment to skills. SSAs will be a crucial mechanism to deliver on four strategic objectives: increasing productivity, addressing skills gaps and shortages, providing greater opportunities, and more responsive education and training.

How many SSCs will develop sector skills agreements?

The Skills Strategy White Paper makes a commitment that all SSCs will be invited to develop an agreement. Initially, four SSCs are taking forward pathfinder agreements – SEMTA (science, engineering and manufacturing technologies), Skillset (audio visual industries and photo imaging), e-skills UK (information technology, telecommunications and contact centers) and ConstructionSkills. We hope that by December 2004, up to 16 SSAs will be in development. However, an important part of the pathfinder phase will be to ensure the capacity and systems are in place to deliver these successfully.

How will SSAs operate?

- Following an analysis of sector needs, employers will identify the priority issues they wish to address, the collective action they will take and the changes they will drive and facilitate.
- SSCs, working with partner agencies, will broker the deals and identify the possible solutions to address identified priorities.
- This will result in an agreed and shared plan of action, in which each party's role and contribution is clear. The impact of this will be subject to a monitoring evaluation process.

Does the SSA for the Lifelong Learning Sector apply to me?

The lifelong learning sector comprises employers who deliver learning programmes within:

- Community learning and development
- Further education
- Higher education
- Libraries, archives and information services
- Work based learning

What is the benefit?

The aim of the SSA is to raise skills competency and quality so that the workforce benefits from the improved public perception, increased productivity and profitability that will result from this.

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Who is the Agreement between?

The agreement operates at a number of different levels:

- Firstly it is an agreement between the employers within our sector, brokered by and with LLUK, to take action to invest in skills, and improve the supply of skills, in order to raise productivity in their businesses and across the sector. Agreements must have at their heart a real, active commitment by employers and employees, wishing to take action on skills because they see it as being in their own individual and collective interest to do so. That includes a commitment by employers to contribute, as most already do, in meeting the costs of training.
- Secondly, it is an agreement between the SSC and the partner organisations who need to act in various ways in order to achieve the objectives of the agreement such as Regional Development Agencies, Learning and Skills Councils, Qualifications & Curriculum Authority, Higher Education Funding Council for England, Department for Work and Pensions, Jobcentre Plus and so on.
- Thirdly, it is an agreement between the sector and the government. In return for the sector's commitment to take effective action on skills, the government will use all the instruments at its disposal to promote successful implementation.

Why should employers / training providers / stakeholders be involved in the SSA?

Whether you are an employer, training provider, college, awarding body or other stakeholder, you will be given the unprecedented opportunity to make a big difference to how education and training in the sector is delivered and funded.

Will the Agreement be developed in England only?

Commitment has been gained by Government Departments and Ministers across the UK to develop Sector Skills Agreements. So, in developing agreements, SSCs will be working with the Governments of Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland on how the agreements might apply in their territories and how best to include employer representatives from these countries.

What's happening now?

Work on our SSA has started - this will be conducted throughout the UK over an 18-month period and will cover the whole Lifelong Learning Sector. The full SSA will be complete in October 2007.



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What is the five-stage process?

The five-stage process is prescribed by Government and comprises the following areas:

Stage 1: Assessment of current and future skill needs within the lifelong learning sector

Stage 2: Understanding the current supply of skills provision

Stage 3: Analysis of the gaps in provision and market testing

Stage 4: Assessment of potential collaborative action by employers

Stage 5: Development of an action plan with employers and stakeholders

After Stage 5 there will be the last sign-off process for the final agreement involving all parties.

Due to unique composition of the Lifelong Learning Sector we are also developing an Impact Review, assessing the impact of the other Sector Skills Councils' SSAs on the lifelong learning sector.

So how many SSAs have been developed so far?

The Government asked four SSCs to develop "pathfinder" SSAs. These are:

ConstructionSkills, representing the Construction Industry

e-skills UK, representing Information Technology and Telecommunications

SEMTEA (the Science, Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies Alliance)

Skillset, representing the Audio-Visual Industries

When will the SSA the Lifelong Learning Sector be finalised?

The full SSA will be complete in October 2007.

How can I get involved and where can I find out more information?

There are opportunities throughout the development of the SSAs for employers & stakeholders to have their say on the skills to make a big difference to how education and training in the sector is delivered and funded.

More information and updates can be found at www.lifelonglearninguk.org/ under SSA or contact the SSA team at ssaenquiries@lluk.org.