

Research Briefing N° 100

Trends in Skills Utilisation and Training in Britain

For the economy to thrive, the best use needs to be made of the skills produced, and workers need to continually upgrade their skills. This report provides recent evidence on what has been happening in Britain.

Key words: skill utilisation; training

Key findings

The research is of general interest to the wider public and of particular interest to policy makers in vocational education and training.

- Qualification requirements of jobs have risen over the last quarter of a century. By 2012 jobs requiring degrees on entry reached an all-time high, while jobs requiring no qualifications fell to historically low levels.
- Yet overall, the evidence for continued upskilling is mixed because there has also been a shortening of training and learning times for jobs – a reversal of trends previously recorded. The importance of computing skills at work continued to grow, albeit less rapidly than in the past, but the rise in most other generic skills came to a halt.
- For the two decades from 1986 to 2006 the prevalence of over-qualification had been rising, but it fell between 2006 and 2012. Although mismatches remain quite high, this turnaround may signal more effective use of qualifications at work by employers.
- The volume of training has fallen: the proportion of British workers engaged annually in more than ten days' training declined from 38% in 2006 to 34% in 2012. This fall is especially concentrated among women.
- There have been no changes between 2006 and 2012 in the extent of certification of training or in its perceived contribution to skills enhancement. But fewer people are satisfied with the training they receive, and fewer report that their training helps them to enjoy their job more.
- The quality of training, like its volume, is greater for those workers with more prior education; this gradation reinforces inequality.
- There is a rising demand by workers at all levels of education to receive workplace training.



What we did

Governments, employers and individuals devote large amounts of money and time to education and training. As a result, the stock of well-educated people in the workforce has been increasing rapidly in recent decades. It has been shown that education and training lead to beneficial social outcomes such as reduced crime, lower anti-social behaviour and better health and well-being. Yet a central expectation is that education and training will raise skills and so enhance economic performance. This enhancement depends on whether employers utilise the raised skills. By engaging in skilled work that matches their potential, workers are able to fulfil themselves and meet a basic human need, while enabling businesses to thrive. Yet it is not always possible for people to find employment that effectively uses the skills and educational qualifications they have.

Funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and the UK Commission for Employment and Skills, this study examined whether skills demand has been continuing to grow in recent years, whether the match between workers and their jobs has been improving, and how much training has been demanded and provided.

How we did it

The study – entitled the Skills and Employment Survey 2012 (SES2012) – collected data from working adults in England, Scotland and Wales, interviewed in their own homes. The survey was hosted by the **IOE's Centre for Learning and Life Chances in Knowledge Economies and Societies (LLAKES)**, in collaboration with researchers from Cardiff University and Oxford University.

The sample was drawn using random probability principles subject to stratification based on a number of socio-economic indicators. Only one eligible respondent per address was randomly selected for interview, and 49% of those selected completed the survey. SES2012 is the sixth in a series of nationally representative sample surveys of individuals in employment. The numbers of respondents were: 4,047 in the 1986 survey; 3,855 in 1992; 2,467 in 1997; 4,470 in 2001; 7,787 in 2006; and 3,200 in 2012.

Further information

[Reports in the SES2012 First Findings Series:](#)

1. Skills at Work in Britain.
2. Training in Britain.
3. Job Control in Britain.
4. Fear at Work in Britain.
5. Work Intensification in Britain.
6. Job-Related Well-Being in Britain.

All titles, along with technical reports, are downloadable free from **LLAKES** at <http://www.llakes.org/>

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