Request for Feedback - Skills for Work

Skills for Work: Shaping the future of occupational standards

Occupational standards are at the heart of England's technical education system, helping to ensure training meets employer needs. Our Skills for Work programme, led by our Board Chair Phil Smith, is considering how the standards and the products they underpin, are fit for the future, meet employer need, equip people for good jobs and careers and support the devolution agenda.

As part of this work, we are asking for your views on how occupational standards and the products they underpin can better support learners, employers and local economies.

Focus of the work
This programme will consider:

- How to improve simplicity and flexibility for employers and places and make it easier to respond to emerging regional and national skills needs, such as AI;
- How participation by young people could be increased;
- Whether occupational standards are sufficiently aligned with growth priorities;
- Whether there are gaps in provision and how these should be addressed;
- Whether there are lessons we can learn from international comparisons to strengthen the system here.

Why your contribution matters
We want your views on how to shape a stronger, future-ready occupational standards system. Thank you for your continued engagement and we look forward to hearing from you.

Before you begin

Before completing this request for feedback please refer to the glossary. Key terms used throughout the questionnaire are summarised below:

Occupational standards

Occupational standards describe the knowledge, skills and behaviours required to demonstrate competence in an occupation. They are used to inform apprenticeships, qualifications and other skills products. Throughout this request for feedback, respondents should distinguish between occupational standards themselves and the products, programmes and policies that may be developed from them.
Example occupational standard – Adult care worker

Standard Skills Classification (SSC)

The Standard Skills Classification (SSC) is a framework used by Skills England to group and organise occupations and occupational standards. It supports the analysis of skills needs, workforce trends and occupational relationships across the economy. Throughout this request for feedback, references to the SSC relate to how occupations and skills are structured and classified, rather than the content of individual occupational standards.
SSC Explorer

Providing feedback

We welcome responses based on professional experience, organisational insight, practical knowledge or lived experience. Where possible, please support your responses with evidence such as data, workforce intelligence, research findings, evaluation evidence, case studies or practical examples. Responses do not need to include formal evidence, but supporting information will help Skills England better understand the issues raised and inform future recommendations.

Glossary

Please refer to the glossary before completing this request for feedback. The glossary provides definitions of key terms used throughout the survey, including occupational standards and the Standard Skills Classification (SSC).
Skills for Work Glossary

Survey details

Who should respond?

We welcome responses from anyone with experience of, interest in, or insight into occupational standards, skills products, workforce development and future skills needs. This may include:

- employers and individuals who use, or may use, occupational standards, apprenticeships, qualifications and other skills products;
- Strategic Authorities and local leaders;
- organisations representing sectors, regions and other parts of the skills and employment system;
- training providers, universities, colleges and schools; and
- industry regulators, professional bodies and other representative organisations.

How to respond

Respondents do not need to answer every question and may respond only to those where they can provide relevant evidence, insight or experience.

If your response relates to a specific occupational standard or a group of occupational standards, please identify which standard(s) it relates to.

Where possible, please support your responses with evidence, examples or practical experience.

Duration

The survey will remain open until 23:59 on Friday 16 October 2026.

Survey format

The survey consists of five main sections together with a short profiling section about you. A combination of multiple-choice questions, dropdown options and free-text response boxes is provided throughout the survey.

There is also an opportunity at the end of the survey to provide any additional comments, evidence

or recommendations.

Contact

If you would like to contact us about this survey, please do so by sending an email to skillsforwork.skillsengland@dwp.gov.uk

Your data and confidentiality

Confidentiality

Information provided in response to this survey, including personal data, may be subject to publication or disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Data Protection Act 2018, or the Environmental Information Regulations 2004.

An automatic confidentiality disclaimer generated by your IT system will not, of itself, be regarded as binding on the Department for Education or the Department for Work and Pensions.

Confidentiality disclaimer

If your response contains information that you would like treated as confidential, you will have an opportunity at the end of the survey to identify this information. Where possible, please ensure any confidential information is clearly identifiable within your responses.

Use of responses and quotations

Information provided in response to this request for feedback may be used within published reports, summaries and other outputs arising from this work.

Unless respondents have requested confidentiality, anonymised quotations may be used to illustrate themes, findings and recommendations. Quotations will not be attributed to named individuals or organisations without permission.

Where there is a proposal to identify an individual or organisation directly, Skills England may contact the respondent to seek agreement before publication.

1. **Your details for using responses and quotations**

   When you submit this form, it will not automatically collect your details like name and email address unless you provide it yourself. (Optional)

   emily@r-e-a.net

Privacy notice

The personal data (name and address and any other identifying material) that you provide in response to this survey is processed by the Department for Education and the Department for Work and Pensions as data controllers in accordance with the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) and Data Protection Act 2018, and your personal information will only be used for the purposes of this survey. The Department for Education and the Department for Work and Pensions rely upon the lawful basis of article 6(1)(e) of the UK GDPR to process this personal data as necessary for the conduct of this survey, which is a task carried out in the public interest. Your

information will not be shared with third parties unless the law allows or requires it. The personal information will be retained for a period of 12 months following the closure of the survey period, after which it will be securely destroyed. You can read more about what the Department for Education and the Department for Work and Pensions do when we ask for and hold your personal information in our personal information charter, which can be found here:
Personal information charter - Department for Education - GOV.UK
Personal information charter - Department for Work and Pensions - GOV.UK

Statement on the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in feedback analysis

In the event that we receive a large number of responses, we may use Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools to assist in analysing responses to this survey. The purpose of using AI is to identify themes, trends, and insights more efficiently and accurately, ensuring that all feedback is considered in a structured and transparent way. AI will not make decisions; it will support our analysis process, which will be reviewed and validated by our team to maintain fairness and integrity.

2. **Future engagement** *

Would you like to participate in future engagement activities related to the Skills for Work programme?

- (●) Yes
- ( ) No

About you

This is an anonymous survey. We would like to gather some basic information to help us analyse responses across different stakeholder groups.

3. **Are you over 18?** *

You must be over 18 to complete this survey to comply with data protection and consent requirements. You will not be able to progress through the form if you are under 18.

- (●) Yes
- ( ) No

4. **Are you responding:** *

- ( ) As an individual
- (●) On behalf of an organisation

- ○ On behalf of a region or sector
- ○ Both as an individual and on behalf of an organisation

5. **What best describes your role or organisation?** *

- ○ Employer
- ○ Employer Representative Body
- ◉ Sector Body or industry body
- ○ Strategic Authority / Combined Authority
- ○ Local Authority
- ○ Government department or public body
- ○ Training provider
- ○ FE College
- ○ Higher education provider
- ○ School
- ○ Careers professional
- ○ Awarding organisation / assessment organisation
- ○ Professional body or institute
- ○ Trade union or employee representative body
- ○ Charity or third-sector organisation
- ○ Learner, apprentice or recent learner
- ○ Independent consultant / researcher

- ○ Prefer not to say
- ○ Other

6. **Which type of provision does your organisation primarily deliver or engage with?** *

- ☐ Apprenticeships
- ☐ Technical qualifications at Level 2
- ☐ Technical qualifications at Level 3
- ☐ T Levels
- ☐ Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQ's)
- ☑ Higher Education
- ☐ Adult skills provision
- ☐ Not applicable
- ☐ Other

7. **Does your organisation currently employ, or have recent experience of employing, any of the following?** *

- ○ Young people (under 25)
- ○ Apprentices
- ○ Both young people (under 25) and apprentices
- ◉ Neither
- ○ Don't know

- ○ Prefer not to say

8. **Which sector(s) are you most involved with?** *

- ☑ Agriculture, environmental and animal care
- ☐ Business and administration
- ☐ Care services
- ☐ Catering and hospitality
- ☑ Clean energy
- ☐ Construction and the built environment
- ☐ Creative and design
- ☐ Defence
- ☐ Digital
- ☐ Education and early years
- ☐ Engineering and manufacturing
- ☐ Hair and beauty
- ☐ Health and science
- ☐ Legal, finance and accounting
- ☐ Protective services
- ☐ Sales, marketing and procurement
- ☐ Transport and logistics
- ☐ Multiple routes

- [ ] Other

9. **How many employees work at your organisation?** *

- ( ) Sole trader or Self-employed
- ( ) Micro (1 to 9 employees)
- (•) Small (10 to 49 employees)
- ( ) Medium (50 to 249 employees)
- ( ) Large (250 to 999 employees)
- ( ) Very large (1,000+ employees)
- ( ) Prefer not to say
- ( ) Not applicable

10. **Where are you based in England?** *

This does not have to be the head office of your organisation. If you live in a different area to your organisation, please answer from the perspective of the area which you know the most about the skills system in.

- ( ) North East
- ( ) North West
- ( ) Yorkshire and the Humber
- ( ) East Midlands
- ( ) West Midlands
- ( ) East of England
- (•) London

- ○ South East
- ○ South West
- ○ National (England-wide)
- ○ Prefer not to say
- ○ Other

11. **Does your organisation have experience of working with skills, training or apprenticeship systems outside England?** *

- ○ Yes, in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland
- ○ Yes, internationally
- ○ Yes, both
- ○ No
- ○ Not applicable
- ◉ Liaised with CIWM (WAMITAB) on Operator Competence Scheme. nce.

12. **Please tell us more about your experience**

Liaised with CIWM (WAMITAB) on Operator Competence Scheme - the parts relevant to managing facilities that treat biodegradable wastes.

13. **How familiar are you with occupational standards?** *

Please select the option that best describes your level of familiarity.

- ○ Very familiar
- ○ Fairly familiar

- ○ Somewhat familiar
- ◉ Aware of them but have a limited understanding
- ○ Not familiar
- ○ Prefer not to say

14. **Have you used, developed, reviewed or worked with occupational standards in the last three years?** *

- ○ Yes, regularly
- ○ Yes, occasionally
- ○ No, but I am familiar with them
- ◉ No, I have limited experience
- ○ Don't know

15. **How familiar are you with the Standard Skills Classification (SSC)?** *

Please select the option that best describes your level of familiarity.

- ○ Very familiar
- ○ Fairly familiar
- ○ Somewhat familiar
- ○ Aware of it but have a limited understanding
- ◉ Not familiar
- ○ Prefer not to say

Getting people into skilled jobs and careers

This section asks whether occupational standards and related skills products help people move into skilled employment and careers, particularly young people. We are interested in what is working well, where there are gaps and how occupational standards could better support progression into skilled jobs and careers.
Please identify whether your response mainly relates to young people, adults or both.

16. **How well do occupational standards describe the skills, knowledge and behaviours people need for skilled jobs? What changes would you make?**

The prompts below are intended to help you consider relevant issues and examples. You do not need to address every prompt and should focus on those most relevant to your experience and evidence.

- Occupational competence
- Career progression
- Professional recognition

We are not familiar enough with occupational standards to answer about how well they describe the skills, knowledge and behaviours people need for skilled jobs.

17. **How effective are current skills products at helping young people move into skilled employment?**

- ○ Very effective
- ○ Fairly effective
- ◉ Neither effective nor ineffective
- ○ Fairly ineffective
- ○ Very ineffective
- ○ Don't know

18. **Please explain your answer. What works well and what could be improved?**

The prompts below are intended to help you consider relevant issues and examples. You do not need to address every prompt and should focus on those most relevant to your experience and evidence.

- Progression pathways
- Gaps in provision

- Examples of effective practice

We are not commenting exclusively on current skills products for young people (under 25 years old) in this answer.

Each waste management facility operated under an environmental permit must have an appropriately qualified manager who is part of a government-approved technical competence scheme, e.g. CIWM (WAMITAB) Level 4 Primary Competence qualifications. In the composting and anaerobic digestion sectors it should be checked what progression pathways are visible, or could be made visible, to young people and other potential new recruits.

Recruitment is already difficult across the waste management sector. Many potential recruits may not be aware of the range of relevant roles and some already working in the sector may not be aware of within-sector career pathways they could progress along. It is unlikely they are also aware that gaining experience of working for a waste management business could lead to a variety of related jobs. Examples in the composting sector are emissions monitoring service provision, driving vehicles for hauling biodegradable wastes and/or composts, provision of services for maintaining and repairing composting site machinery and vehicles, compost supply chain roles, agronomy, and consultancy on a range of composting-relevant topics.

In the clean energy and organics recycling sectors, identifying and communicating career progression pathways would reduce recruitment and retention difficulties.

Meeting employer and workforce needs

This section asks whether occupational standards reflect the knowledge, skills and behaviours employers need now and in the future. We are interested in how occupational standards support workforce development, economic growth and Industrial Strategy priorities and where improvements could be made.

Where possible, please support your responses with evidence, examples or practical experience.

19. **How well do current occupational standards reflect what employers and the economy needs for growth? Please explain your answer.**

They probably do not reflect all that employers and the economy need for growth. E.g. given the site operative recruitment / retention difficulties in the UK's composting sector, we suggest reviewing how well the current occupational standards connect the relevant skill areas within the SD.07 'operating and monitoring' skills domain with composting site operations knowledge, such that the person doing the work is capable of performing their specific job role.

We also suggest checking how occupational standards link with the qualifications/standards in government-approved technical competence schemes for managers of permit-scale waste management facilities.

20. **How well does the current mix of apprenticeships, technical qualifications and apprenticeship units meet the needs of employers and the economy?**

- ○ Very effective
- ○ Fairly effective
- ○ Neither effective nor ineffective
- ◉ Fairly ineffective
- ○ Very ineffective
- ○ Don't know

21. **Please explain your answer, what works and what doesn't work.**

The prompts below are intended to help you consider relevant issues and examples. You do not need to address every prompt and should focus on those most relevant to your experience and evidence.

- Where are there gaps in provision
- Where may one product be better than another

We have not had time to track down course relevant courses / units and check what they include. We have written below about gaps that may exist, based on our sector knowledge.

How to use:
1) product-status, waste-derived composts and digestates in agriculture as per the Codes of Good Agricultural Practice for the Protection of Air, Water and Soil, the BioFertiliser Matrix, RB209, and England's Farming Rules for Water (or equivalents in the devolved administrations)*;
2) waste-derived composts and digestates that have retained their waste status, in agriculture as per waste regulatory controls and the guidance and rule types referred to in 1)*;
3) product-status, waste-derived composts and separated fibre digestates in soft landscape, green amenity and sports turf applications;
4) product-status, waste-derived composts and separated fibre digestates in manufactured topsoils;
5) product-status, waste-derived composts and separated fibre digestates in growing media;
6) product-status and waste-status waste-derived composts and separated-fibre digestates in land restoration.
*In higher education and diploma courses, or any others equivalent to the BASIS Foundation Award in Agronomy or the Fertiliser Advisers Certification and Training Scheme course.

22. **How could occupational standards be made simpler without reducing quality or confidence in the system?**

The prompts below are intended to help you consider relevant issues and examples. You do not need to address every prompt and should focus on those most relevant to your experience and evidence.

- Common or overlapping standards
- Core knowledge, skills and behaviours
- Clustering, grouping or combining approaches
- Impact on employers, providers and learners

We suggest Skills England works with sector bodies and companies active in particular parts of the clean energy and waste management sectors to identify how occupational standards could be made common, overlapping, clustered, grouped or otherwise improved. E.g. there may be aspects of anaerobic digestion and composting site occupational standards that require common/the same skills and knowledge (such as checking and recording waste types and amounts received), while other aspects are different (such as monitoring and assessing whether the treatment process remains under control) which may mean the relevant occupational standards could be clustered or grouped (e.g. treatment of biodegradable wastes) but could not be entirely common / the same.

Supporting local and regional skills needs

This section asks how occupational standards can support local and regional workforce needs and skills pathways.

Where possible, please support your responses with evidence, examples or practical experience.

23. **What role should Strategic Authorities and local partners play in reviewing and shaping occupational standards?**

The prompts below are intended to help you consider relevant issues and examples. You do not need to address every prompt and should focus on those most relevant to your experience and evidence.

- Labour market intelligence
- Partnerships
- Skills priorities
- Technical pathways

Strategic authorities and local partners should review and shape occupational standards using their knowledge / intelligence about the labour market, technical pathways, and where they think the skills priorities lie.

24. **How can occupational standards reflect local and regional skills needs while staying consistent nationally?**

Perhaps the relevant occupational standards could include sub-sections that set out skills needed in named localities and regions, while the rest of each of those standards could identify which skills are nationally applicable. In this way, those standards could be specified as applying nationally, regionally and locally.

Preparing for future workforce and skills needs

This section asks how occupational standards should evolve to keep pace with future workforce needs, emerging technologies and wider labour market change. We are interested in the changes that are likely to affect occupations in the future and how occupational standards can remain current and relevant.

Where possible, please support your responses with evidence, examples or practical experience.

25. **How might labour market changes, such as AI, new technologies, automation and net zero, affect occupational standards over the next 5 to 10 years? How could they be updated more quickly to remain relevant?**

Influences that could/should affect occupational standards: considering the UK's biodegradable / organic waste recycling sector, AI seems likely to evolve its role in the Digital Waste Tracking system (DWT). In-scope waste management companies can currently report by using software or manually submitting spreadsheets, but Defra aims to withdraw the option to report using spreadsheets 'at an appropriate time' after October 2027. It could be beneficial if competence in reporting for DWT purposes were to be included in one or more occupational standards for the waste management sector, e.g. DWT competence for companies reporting hazardous waste, DWT competence for companies reporting aggregate wastes, DWT competence for companies reporting organically recyclable (biodegradable) wastes, and so on.

Life cycle analysis influences government for England's and the devolved administrations' waste management hierarchy policies/guidance. It also influences local authority, other public sector, NGO and business decisions about how their wastes are collected and treated. It's important that LCA methodologies relevant to waste management continue to be improved and those latest methods be taken up and correctly implemented. It continues to be important that the data required to carry out robust LCAs is identified and communicated. If there is not already an occupational standard for competence in carrying out LCA as relevant to options for managing wastes or particular sub-categories/groupings of waste types, Skills England could look into the feasibility of developing one.

Quicker updating: if not already being done, Skills England could provide the secretariat for regular review of each occupational standard by a task & finish group. The T&FG should consist of stakeholders who use or are otherwise relevant to the particular occupational standard under review. A similar approach could be taken when developing a new occupational standard.

26. **How useful is the Standard Skills Classification (SSC) for the skills system? How could it be improved?**

By this survey's deadline we have not assessed the skill's system's SSC for its usefulness and ways in which it could be improved. The REA may do this if Skills England confirms it would welcome SSC feedback for the UK's clean energy and organic recycling sectors and the feedback timescale is sufficient.

27. **Which 3 areas should be the highest priorities?**

- [ ] Occupational standards content and design
- [ ] Opportunities for young people
- [x] Apprenticeship and technical qualification pathways
- [ ] Apprenticeship units and modular approaches
- [x] Employer and sector needs
- [ ] Local and regional skills priorities
- [ ] Economic growth
- [ ] Workforce planning and career development
- [ ] Simpler occupational standards
- [x] Future workforce needs and changes
- [ ] Standard Skills Classification (SSC)
- [ ] Other

Additional evidence

This section provides an opportunity to share any additional evidence, insights, examples or recommendations that may not have been captured elsewhere in this request for feedback.

28. **Is there anything else Skills England should consider?**

The prompts below are intended to help you consider relevant issues and examples. You do not need to address every prompt and should focus on those most relevant to your experience and evidence.

- Additional evidence

- Examples
- Risks
- Recommendations

CIWM's report Beyond Waste: Essential Skills for a Greener Tomorrow highlights vacancies across the UK waste management industry, short-term demand being circa 1000 across-industry roles, over half of them being driver and operative roles. Immediate need for more: drivers, collection operatives, technical consultants, and regulators. More employment routes and training to develop skills is needed to support reuse and repair of items / materials / wastes.

There is need for training and support of operatives so they can perform their role safely and effectively and understand how their jobs are likely to evolve. CIWM and existing specialist trainers could rapidly mobilise health and safety training.

Bootcamps and 'other mechanisms in key locations' are needed to train operatives. Drivers must have a Certificate of Professional Competency, which can require an investment by the individual or organisation. CIWM had spoken with the Green Jobs Delivery Group (the GJDG) and Department for Work and Pensions on whether there are opportunities to address these immediate needs.
The Office for Clean Energy Jobs (OCEJ) will continue the GJDG's but the former will focus on 'clean energy jobs' while the latter had aimed to 'set out clear plans to enable the UK workforce to deliver net zero and wider environmental goals'.

If the parts of the waste management industry that are not involved in clean energy, e.g. the composting sector, are outside of the OCEJ's scope, will government (for England) play no role in their jobs needs? Government does also have an important role in the parts of the waste sector that are not 'clean energy'.

Careers advice at all levels needs to communicate the range of roles available in the waste management sector, why they are important and that they can provide a rewarding career. Funding support is needed for green skills, particularly for Level 2 entrants to the waste management sector. Government should create a pump-priming green skills fund, for flexible use for 'apprenticeship provision, other approved qualifications and training, and for careers advice
If not already done, Skills England should talk with CIWM's Skills for the Future Working Group about the progress of its Learning and Development Strategy, which includes a competence framework for the sector and might by now include skill set assessments for key areas, (more info on page 32 of CIWM's report). At the time of reporting, CIWM was also developing learning materials and content that would align with its competence framework and deliver on the skills needs identified in CIWM's research.

REA has sent to Skills England its heat map showing the levels of difficulty in retaining or recruiting for different job levels in the clean energy and organics recycling sectors. Considering where there are severe difficulties recruiting or retaining people, this is occurring for lower supervisory jobs and skilled occupations in the solar, decentralised energy, energy demand, green gas, biomass, energy from waste, electric vehicle, renewable transport fuel, innov8, organics and landfill gas sectors. There are also severe difficulties recruiting or retaining people for semi-skilled occupations in the energy from waste, renewable transport fuel and organics sectors. The same level of recruitment/retention difficulty is experienced for unskilled jobs in the

organics sector and for lower managerial, administrative and professional occupations in the solar and decentralised energy sectors.

29. **Have you included any information in your responses that you would like treated as confidential?** *

If yes, please identify the information you would like treated as confidential.

- ○ Yes
- ◉ No

30. **Please identify the information you would like treated as confidential.**

N/A

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