

Response to Scottish Funding Council call for evidence

Introduction:

WorldSkills UK welcomes the opportunity to provide a response to the Scottish Funding Council Review of Coherent Provision and Sustainability in Further and Higher Education. In doing so, we set out our evidence against selected key themes as identified in the briefing note. These being:

- the realisation that the future will not look like the past, as we consider how to support our institutions to thrive internationally and keep a collective competitive edge as we respond to global change
- the need for innovation, productivity improvements and sustainable economic growth
- the need to widen access and participation in further and higher education for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds through promoting equality and inclusion
- the expectation that institutions will respond flexibly and with vigour to changing economic demands and local skills and employment needs.

WorldSkills UK already successfully works in partnership with a range of colleges, universities, training providers, employers and sector agencies in Scotland and was recently endorsed as a model for skills excellence in the Cumberford-Little report “One tertiary system”, published February 2020.

We believe that the unique opportunities presented through WorldSkills UK’s global connectivity, international benchmarking and pursuit of excellence can help realise the Scottish Funding Council’s ambition to: Create and sustain a world-leading system of tertiary education, research and innovation that changes lives for the better, enriches society and supports sustainable and inclusive economic growth.

About WorldSkills UK

WorldSkills UK is an independent charity and a partnership between employers, education and governments. Together, we are raising standards in apprenticeships and technical education so more young people get the best start in work and life.

We are part of WorldSkills, a global movement supported by over 80 member countries, which celebrates young people achieving world-class standards in the biennial 'skills olympics'. As the only skills charity which can bring this global benchmarking back into the UK, we have the unique assets, resources and networks to help raise training standards and improve young people's technical and soft skills-set and resilient mindset to ever higher standards.

We inspire young people via our careers advice resources to choose excellence through apprenticeships and technical education as a prestigious career route on their path to reaching their potential, whatever their background. We develop excellence in young people by testing and assessing their skills and knowledge against their peers through our national and international competitions programmes, improving their confidence and potential. We innovate to mainstream global excellence to help improve the standard of teaching, training and assessment through international benchmarking to help young people, employers and the UK economy succeed.

We have directly reached over half a million young people in the last three years. Each year, we engage with over 100,000 young people, 850 schools, over 90% of UK colleges and hundreds of employers and training organisations. Evidence shows that our competition activity is beneficial to all, with 97% of young people competing in our National Finals in 2019 saying that they felt inspired for their future, while 95% said that personal and employability skills had improved.

WorldSkills UK is funded primarily through the English FE budget, via the Education and Skills Funding Agency, and other investors and sponsors such as the learned societies, key industry partners, FE colleges and the devolved administrations of Wales and Northern Ireland.

Evidence

The realisation that the future will not look like the past as we consider how to support our institutions to thrive internationally and keep a collective competitive edge as we respond to global change.

As the Scottish Funding Council and the Scottish Government develops its vision for the sector, WorldSkills UK stands ready to share international best practice from countries such as Germany, China, Russia, South Korea, Brazil, Switzerland and Austria. All of which have used WorldSkills as a catalyst for significant improvements in their skills systems.

At WorldSkills UK we are well-placed to feed into this thinking. Thanks to our international outlook, and partnerships with industry we have already been focusing on the UK's long-term skills needs for a number of years, eager to feed in our unique skills expertise and know-how to help drive up standards in technical education to benefit young students and apprentices throughout the UK. The report we produced with the RSA and FETL ['Adopting global skills innovations for the UK'](#) is full of policy lessons citing best practice in Russia, Switzerland, Singapore and Shanghai, where in every case technical education is seen as strategically important to that country's economic success. With further international case studies coming out this year we stand ready to support the Scottish Funding Council and the Scottish Government with the information they need to help build a world-class skills system.

In everything we do the emphasis is on standards, quality and improvement because we want young people, whatever their background, to be able to excel. That's why we are working hard to give young people access to a growing suite of [online resources](#) so that they can continue to refine their technical and mindset skills so that they are work-ready for the future. That's why we are reviewing our skills competitions so that in areas that are critical to the economy, such as digital, we can be confident that we are at the cutting edge and giving young people skills that the country needs. And that's why we are setting up a [Centre of Excellence](#) in partnership with NCFE to share our world-class skills expertise with a range of colleges, to inspire excellence in teaching, learning and assessment.

The National Finals of the WorldSkills UK Competitions take place each year at WorldSkills UK LIVE which is held at the NEC in Birmingham. Each alternate year international competitions, EuroSkills and WorldSkills, are held in host cities across the world.

WorldSkills UK is the UK representative at both competitions and has responsibility for training and entering the Team UK.

The most recent UK national event was in November 2019 and the most recent WorldSkills event was in Kazan, in Russia, in August 2019. The next event will be EuroSkills in Graz, Austria in January 2021 and the next WorldSkills event will be in Shanghai, China in 2021.

A focus on Scotland

Scotland has been a keen participator in both national and international WorldSkills Competitions over many years and has gained much success, demonstrating potential for national and international benchmarking to help bring innovation and boost overall skills system performance.

Young people from Scotland are consistently amongst the top performers in WorldSkills UK's Competitions and Scottish young people consistently achieve the world-class benchmark when they compete as part of Team UK at international WorldSkills and EuroSkills Competitions.

Since 2013, a college from Scotland has topped the WorldSkills UK [medal table](#) with New College Lanarkshire coming number one on no less than four occasions and City of Glasgow College on three occasions. In November 2019, New College Lanarkshire took the number one spot with City of Glasgow number two, separated by one point. Scotland as a country gained 12 Gold, 9 Silver, 13 Bronze and 12 Highly Commended awards. (See Annex A)

Scotland had five competitors representing Team UK in WorldSkills Kazan 2019 and brought back two Medallions of Excellence. Over the last six years Scotland has won 11 medals at international competitions (WorldSkills and EuroSkills).

Currently, 18 squad members from Scotland are engaged in the WorldSkills UK international talent development programme and are training towards potentially competing at EuroSkills Graz 2020 (now Jan 2021), WorldSkills Shanghai 2021 or both.

The need for innovation, productivity improvements and sustainable economic growth

WorldSkills UK has been benchmarking internationally and honing our training methods for many years. To ensure our work adds value to the whole UK Further Education sector, we have created the WorldSkills UK Productivity Lab – helping us mainstream world-class skills excellence across the UK.

Through the Productivity Lab, we conduct research and share best practice from our outstanding partners across the worlds of business, government and education. We continue to develop and share our methodology for becoming world-class, while delivering insights into how other countries in the WorldSkills global network are developing their skills systems to meet their economic needs and boost their competitiveness.

As we emerge from the worst stages of the coronavirus and start to deal with the economic and social consequences, we know that that a renewed focus on higher quality skills will be critical for a 'skills led' recovery and the future of the economy. This was highlighted in EY's 2020 Attractiveness Survey 'Building Back Better' which also confirmed that the development and supply of higher-level digital skills will remain an economic priority.

The trends highlighted in EY's survey are important to us, as we work with our partners across the UK and globally to address some of the challenges raised in the report about skills supply and quality. That is why we have set out three key actions in our new report, [Answering the call for digital skills excellence from international investors](#)

Firstly, we will explore new digital skills competitions. Looking at our international performance at WorldSkills over the past six years, the UK ranks ninth globally and has potential to do better. In recent years we have moved into new digital areas, ranging from cyber security and 3D games and more recently to industry 4.0, industrial robotics and building information modelling. However, by working with our partners in colleges and training providers and investing more in a broader range of digital skills to reach global standards, we will be helping develop the skills base needed to help attract more inward investment.

Secondly, we will help level up digital investment beyond London. With current inward investment patterns for digital projects heavily skewed to London, we need to contribute to evening out investment opportunities and levelling up economic prosperity in areas where it is most needed. In tracking demand for our digital skills competitions, we see a wide geographic spread including from Northwest England, West Midlands and East of England, Glasgow and South Wales. Such locations would be attractive to inward investors as more cost-effective locations to invest in to create new jobs if the right skill supply is in place.

Thirdly, we will focus more on global quality standards. We will bring partners together at an International Skills Summit in Autumn 2020 to debate what we can learn from international benchmarking in skills development to help drive up quality to world-class standards investors want to see. As we look ahead to the next global competition in Shanghai in 2021, we will review the UK's skills pedigree with insights into how other countries are developing their technical skills base, as well as looking ahead to the opportunity to showcase our skills to the rest of the world.

We believe that by turning our insights into action we can help ensure the UK skills supply can win more digital inward investment to maintain and create new jobs for more young people across the UK.

A focus on Scotland

We have worked with New College Lanarkshire and industry partner, Autodesk, to launch and run the largest building information modelling competition for young people in the UK. The competition builds on what the students are learning at college and reflects real life practical scenarios providing essential experience that employers are looking for. The success of this competition has seen three apprentices from Scotland selected to join the WorldSkills UK international talent development programme with the aim of representing the UK in building information modelling at WorldSkills Shanghai 2021.

We will bring together sector leaders in Scotland and across the UK, who have signed up to the WorldSkills UK Centre of Excellence, to share best practice on how developing higher standards can attract inward investment across the UK.

Widening access and participation in further and higher education for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, and promoting equality and inclusion, remain core priorities.

In March this year, we published an ambitious report on diversity and inclusion in WorldSkills UK's work, [Championing difference for a better workforce](#). This diagnostic research was the culmination of a year-long deep dive analysis, involving 700 stakeholders, it was wide-ranging in scope (covering gender, race, sexual-orientation, disability and social mobility) and was ambitious in its recommendations.

The research conducted by The Social Innovation Partnership (TSIP) found that the issues we faced with diversity and inclusion were reflected in the wider FE sector. Many colleges reported that they struggled to attract young people to non-traditional skills, which has a knock-on effect on those they entered into our competitions training programme. We know we have an important role to play in tackling these existing stereotypes and preconceptions. The results made for uncomfortable reading. And it firmly galvanised us as an organisation to focus and allocate resources to address the series of challenges with a more joined-up and data-driven approach.

In response to the findings, we developed a [five-point plan](#) in which we committed to:

- working with our partners to increase inclusive registrations
- taking positive action to address longstanding challenges
- encouraging more role modelling to boost confidence
- addressing regional cold-spots to increase uptake from diverse populations
- reviewing our marketing images so young people can see we want them to get involved.

Our aim is that by 2025, members of Team UK who participate in WorldSkills will be more reflective of young people across the UK. To achieve this, we need to be successful in tackling stereotypes and open to all: more young women in engineering and construction, more young men in hair, beauty and care services and in all skills more young people from disadvantaged areas, who are BAME and those who identify as LGBT. Only then can we ensure we are selecting from a wider talent pool and the best and brightest young people, irrespective of their background, will represent the UK on the world stage.

A focus on Scotland

Achieving equality means starting in schools: it's where young people's perceptions about the kind of careers they might want to pursue are formed. Following the successful pilot in England, we would like to replicate the model in Scotland and build on the promotion already undertaken to celebrate inspirational role models, like Betsy Crosbie from East Kilbride, and share their stories more widely with young people across Scotland.

[Betsy](#) was a member of Team UK who competed at WorldSkills Abu Dhabi 2017. She took home a Medallion of Excellence in mechanical engineering and did not let the fact that she was one of only two women (out of 26 total competitors) get in her way. Betsy's journey from college student to international medallist is an inspiration to other young women studying STEM.

The expectation that institutions will respond flexibly and with vigour to changing economic demands and local skills and employment needs

This year, we have launched the WorldSkills UK Centre of Excellence, in partnership with NCFE. Drawing on our unique insights into global skills systems and utilising NCFE's expertise in curriculum design, the Centre will mainstream excellence in skills development.

The Centre of Excellence Programme was developed following research conducted by SKOPE, part of The University of Oxford. The [report](#) 'Good People in a flawed system: the challenges of mainstreaming excellence in technical education', concluded that through our network of training managers and access to international best practice, we are as an organisation uniquely positioned to inform UK skills systems.

The WorldSkills UK Centre of Excellence involves four strands:

- **Train the trainer.** Skills coaches will lead the development and transformation of a skills and knowledge transfer programme with 20 colleges in the first year across a broad range skills and industries to disseminate world-class vocational expertise and support the mainstreaming of excellence to make a positive difference in the development of a cadre of world-class educators. This will enable thousands of young people across the UK to better fulfil their potential.

- **Digital workshops.** The online learning programme will demonstrate what it takes to move from competence to excellence against the world-class occupational standards and showcase the application of practice in curriculum, planning and delivery.
- **Informing standards.** Our Skills Coaches will play a pivotal role in informing standards, qualification development and assessment practices using global insights and lessons to influence change and higher quality provisions.
- **Global insights.** Through the Centre of Excellence, we will commission a series of international case studies to uncover insights about teaching excellence in technical education from other countries.

A quarter of all FE colleges (55) across Scotland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland applied to be part of the Centre of Excellence. This shows that despite the current challenges facing FE, there is an incredible appetite in the sector to drive excellence in technical education.

A focus on Scotland

Eight colleges across Scotland have applied to be part of the Centre of Excellence programme, illustrating their understanding of the benefits of the initiative and their desire to aspire to excellence.

Working with the successful selected colleges, we will develop teaching, learning and assessment provisions to embed world-class competencies and practices. The application of new techniques and practices in technical skills development will boost approaches to formative and summative assessment.

Future Activity

WorldSkills UK has recently commissioned independent research to understand better the benefit to Scotland of participating in WorldSkills initiatives. This research is due to be completed by the end of August 2020 and we would welcome the opportunity to share its findings as part of this call for evidence.

Another piece of research about to get underway is a review of the economic impact of WorldSkills UK. This due to be completed by early Autumn and we will gladly share those findings.

Annex A: WorldSkills UK Regional Table

Regional League Table

WorldSkills UK National Finals 2019



Rank	Count of points	Organisation Region	Count of Gold medals	Count of Silver medals	Count of Bronze medals	Count of Highly commended
1	113	Scotland	12	9	13	12
2	98	Wales	9	11	10	9
3	61	North West	4	9	7	4
4	58	West Midlands	9	4	4	2
5	53	Northern Ireland	4	6	8	3
6	44	South West	6	3	3	5
7	41	London	4	5	4	2
8	30	South East	3	5	1	1
9	27	East Midlands	2	3	4	2
9	27	Yorkshire and Humberside	2	4	3	1
10	25	East of England	4	0	4	1
11	6	North East	1	0	1	0

The league tables do not include Demonstration Skills or Inclusive Skills Competitions

Annex B: Examples of Colleges in Scotland using WorldSkills UK Competitions to raise standards

City of Glasgow College

City of Glasgow College selected 125 of its students to take part in the National Qualifiers for WorldSkills UK Competitions 2020. With the competitions postponed until 2021 due to Coronavirus, City of Glasgow College continued with a virtual bootcamp to ensure its students still benefited from the training offered by the competitions.

Paul Little, Principal and Chief Executive at City of Glasgow College, said, “As an advocate for vocational excellence, I firmly believe these competitions help to improve skills levels and deliver economic growth. Given the current crisis it is encouraging to have such a significant number of registrations this year and to see our students rise to the challenge of rigorous training under lockdown conditions.”

Dundee and Angus College

Dundee and Angus College lecturer Mike Swan is also the WorldSkills UK training manager for painting and decorating, preparing competitors to take part in the international competitions EuroSkills and WorldSkills. Under Mike's guidance, Scottish apprentice Callum Bonner achieved the world-class standard in painting and decorating at WorldSkills Kazan 2019, receiving a Medallion of Excellence. Mike holds WorldSkills UK training sessions at his college so he can inspire other students.

Mike said, "When hosting training sessions at Dundee and Angus College, I always invite other students to come and observe. By watching the UK's top apprentices at work, they see first-hand the skills needed in construction. They are also able to speak with past competitors, from previous international skills competitions, who help me deliver the training. These former competitors now run successful businesses employing their own apprentices or are part of senior management teams on sites so the students can see how far they can go in their own careers. The WorldSkills UK competitors are the role models we need to show young people, their parents and teachers the full range of opportunities available in construction."

New College Lanarkshire

WorldSkills UK Competitions not only improve the skills of those entering the competitions, but they also help the lecturers' own personal development. Barry Skea, Head of Faculty: Engineering and Automotive, at New College Lanarkshire and WorldSkills UK training manager for mechanical engineering CAD explains, "WorldSkills UK Competitions are a great tool to help young people prepare further for the world of work. Entrants enhance their skills learned in college or in the workplace by training alongside people from the UK and around the world. The time element of the competitions also requires a high level of discipline and focus, all good attributes to showcase to current and potential employers.

"For me being involved in WorldSkills UK has helped my own career as well. It has made me reflect on my own teaching practice. I have learned new ways of working and expanded my professional network and as a result I have been able to introduce new ways of learning to my college which has benefited all of our students."

Annex C: Successful competitors from Scotland

Connor Cruden, Squad UK, WorldSkills Shanghai 2021

Conor, an apprentice who attends Moray College UHI and works for Gary Cowie Plumbing and Heating, is in training to represent the UK in plumbing at WorldSkills Shanghai 2021. He was invited to join WorldSkills UK's international talent development programme after winning Gold in the National Finals at WorldSkills UK LIVE in 2019.

David Patterson, CEO and Principal of Moray College UHI said he was, "very proud" of Connor's success. He said: "To qualify for the UK Finals is an achievement in itself, so to come home with a Gold is testimony to the great skills and tireless dedication of Connor and our staff here at Moray College."

Samuel Henderson, Squad UK, WorldSkills Shanghai 2021

Samuel, who attends Tullos Training and works for Derek Scott Plumbing and Heating, is also part of Squad UK for WorldSkills Shanghai 2021. Samuel, who is training alongside Connor, hopes to represent the UK in plumbing at the international competition in China next year, after excelling in the WorldSkills UK National Finals in 2019.

Commenting on Connor and Samuel's success, Fiona Hodgson, CEO of SNIPEF, said the success of all involved was testament to the high quality of apprentice training available in Scotland.

"The skills and training of these young people are the foundation for the future of our industry, and it's fantastic to see their achievements recognised on a national stage. They are a credit to the lecturers who teach them, and to the forward-thinking employers who provide them with training while on the job."

Mark Scott, EuroSkills Budapest 2018 and WorldSkills Kazan 2019

Mark was named one of the best tilers in the world, after delivering an impressive performance in wall and floor tiling at WorldSkills Kazan 2019.

An apprentice with J McGoldrick & Sons, based in Airdrie, Mark was awarded a Medallion of Excellence to recognise him reaching the world-class standard in his skill.

Mark trained with City of Glasgow College which supported him throughout his competition journey including hosting international training sessions for Mark at the college where he could train against the best apprentice tilers from around the world before entering the WorldSkills Competition. This transfer of international knowledge is a key benefit of Scotland participating in WorldSkills.

Following his success at Kazan, Mark has stayed involved with WorldSkills UK as a volunteer and he will be involved in training Squad UK for WorldSkills Shanghai 2021.

Betsy Crosbie, EuroSkills Gothenburg 2016 and WorldSkills Abu Dhabi 2017

The Daily Telegraph named Betsy Crosbie as a role model for budding female engineers when it reported on her success at WorldSkills Abu Dhabi 2017. Betsy was one of just two women who competed in the Mechanical Engineering CAD Competition in the UAE, and was the only woman in her class at New College Lanarkshire where she studied for an HNC in Mechanical Engineering. Her college lecturer put Betsy forward for WorldSkills UK Competitions where her talent was quickly recognised. Betsy's determination and professional attitude saw her selected for Team UK for EuroSkills Gothenburg 2016, where she reached the European Standard in Mechanical Engineering. Betsy went on to represent the UK at WorldSkills Abu Dhabi 2017 where she reached the world-class standard.

Jordan Charters, WorldSkills Abu Dhabi 2017

Jordan Charters, who attended Edinburgh College and completed his apprenticeship with his family's firm, Charters & Son, was awarded a Medallion of Excellence in painting and decorating at WorldSkills Abu Dhabi 2017. In preparation for the competition, Jordan was trained by Peter Walters a lecturer at Stoke-on-Trent College and Mark Nevin, of Nevin of Edinburgh who won Gold at WorldSkills Calgary 2009. Jordan spent every spare minute training for WorldSkills, fitting his preparation around his day job. He said, "I know my father made a lot of sacrifices for me to take part in the competition, including having to turn down work as I wasn't available."

However, both Jordan and his father confirm that the sacrifices were worth it. On his return, Jordan had three different job opportunities from companies who had been hugely impressed with his work at WorldSkills Abu Dhabi 2017, but Jordan has remained with his father's company and has now been made a partner.

He is applying the knowledge and skills he has gained training with WorldSkills UK for the international competition in his role at the company. Jordan said, "I now look at the jobs we have booked in and am able to suggest new ways of working to save money and reduce the time needed to complete the jobs for our clients. Working with my father, our focus is to use the expertise from competing internationally to transform our business operations.

"Being able to say you have a world class decorator in the team, really helps our company stand out to existing and potential clients."

Andrew Beel, EuroSkills Lille 2014 and WorldSkills São Paulo 2015

Andrew began an HND in Computer-Aided Drafting and Design at New College Lanarkshire and was encouraged to enter the WorldSkills UK Competitions by his lecturer. Skills Competitions play an important role in curriculum development at New College Lanarkshire and the college has a strong track record in performing well both on the national and international stage. Andrew excelled in the WorldSkills UK Competition in Mechanical Engineering CAD and was selected to join Team UK for EuroSkills Lille 2014, where he won a Gold medal.

Andrew went on to reach the world-class standard in Mechanical Engineering CAD at WorldSkills São Paulo 2015, where he was awarded a Medallion of Excellence. As a result of his competition success, Andrew was invited to become a Student Expert Ambassador for Autodesk. Andrew believes his involvement with WorldSkills UK has had a huge impact on his career, helping him to progress ahead of his peers. He is now a Design Draughtsman with National Oilwell Varco in Aberdeenshire.

Mark Nevin, Contracts Director, Nevin of Edinburgh

Mark started his apprenticeship in 2003 with his father's firm, Nevin of Edinburgh. While attending Edinburgh's Telford College, Mark's tutor spotted his willingness to learn and be the best in his field and entered him into WorldSkills UK Competitions. Progressing through regional and national competitions, Mark was selected to represent the UK in painting and decorating at WorldSkills Calgary 2009, where he was named the world's best, winning Gold.

His competition experience helped Mark progress through the ranks at his father's company where he is now Contracts Director. Mark is passionate about apprenticeships and keeping the traditional skills alive by teaching them to his apprentices. Mark has remained involved with the work of WorldSkills UK and supports the training of apprentices who are preparing for the international WorldSkills Competitions.

Richard Sagar MBE, Managing Director, Sagar Smart Homes

Richard completed his electrical engineering apprenticeship with the Eden Group in Edinburgh. During his apprenticeship, Richard was encouraged to enter the WorldSkills UK Competitions by his employer who recognised the importance of skills competitions in developing their apprentices. His performance in the National Finals saw him invited to join the WorldSkills UK training programme where he was selected to represent the UK in electrical installation at WorldSkills Calgary 2009. Richard, who was the first UK international entrant in electrical installation for a number of years, won Gold and was named the best in the world.

Following his success at WorldSkills Calgary 2009, Richard was determined to set up his own business and he launched Sagar Smart Homes, where he is Managing Director. The company provides home automation and AV control consultancy, design and integration services for the high end, luxury residential market working on projects around the globe.

Richard has remained involved with WorldSkills UK and recently judged the National Competition in Electrical Installation at WorldSkills UK LIVE.