



Department
for Business
Innovation & Skills

BIS PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

International comparison (within
the OECD) of the qualification
levels of the working age
population

SEPTEMBER 2013

International comparison (within the OECD) of the qualification levels of the working age population

Why is this indicator important?

Having a skilled population is vital to maintaining the international competitiveness of our economy and creating high quality jobs. OECD evidence suggests that the UK's intermediate and technical skills lag behind our major competitors such as Germany and the US. [Previous research](#)¹ has suggested that up to one fifth of our productivity gap compared to such countries can be attributed to a lack of skills in the UK.

The productivity gap reduces the competitiveness of UK businesses because, simply put, workers in the UK have to work long-hours or more cheaply to produce the same goods at the same cost as our competitors. Improving our skills will create more opportunities to export the products and services we produce and make the UK a more attractive place for international businesses to invest in. This in turn will create growth and jobs.

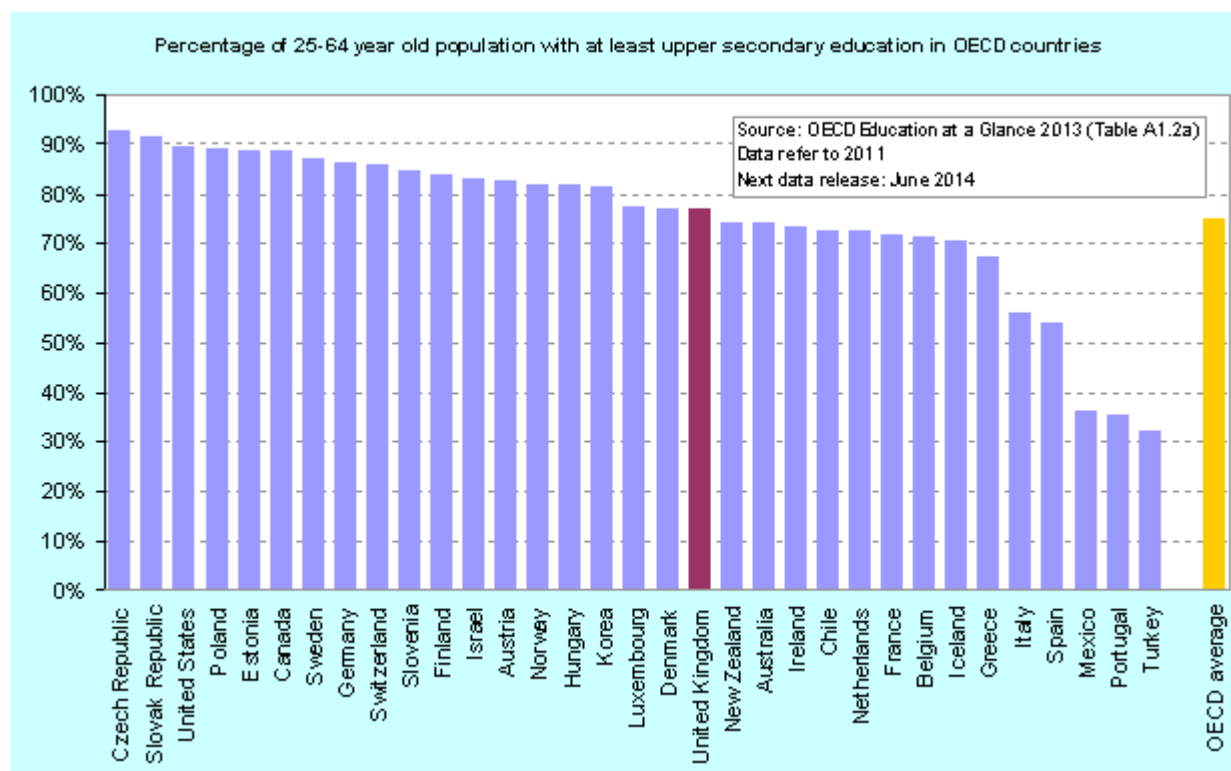
Improving our skills does not just improve our economy, it also has the potential to make the UK a fairer place by creating more social mobility and enabling people to play their part in society

How are we performing?

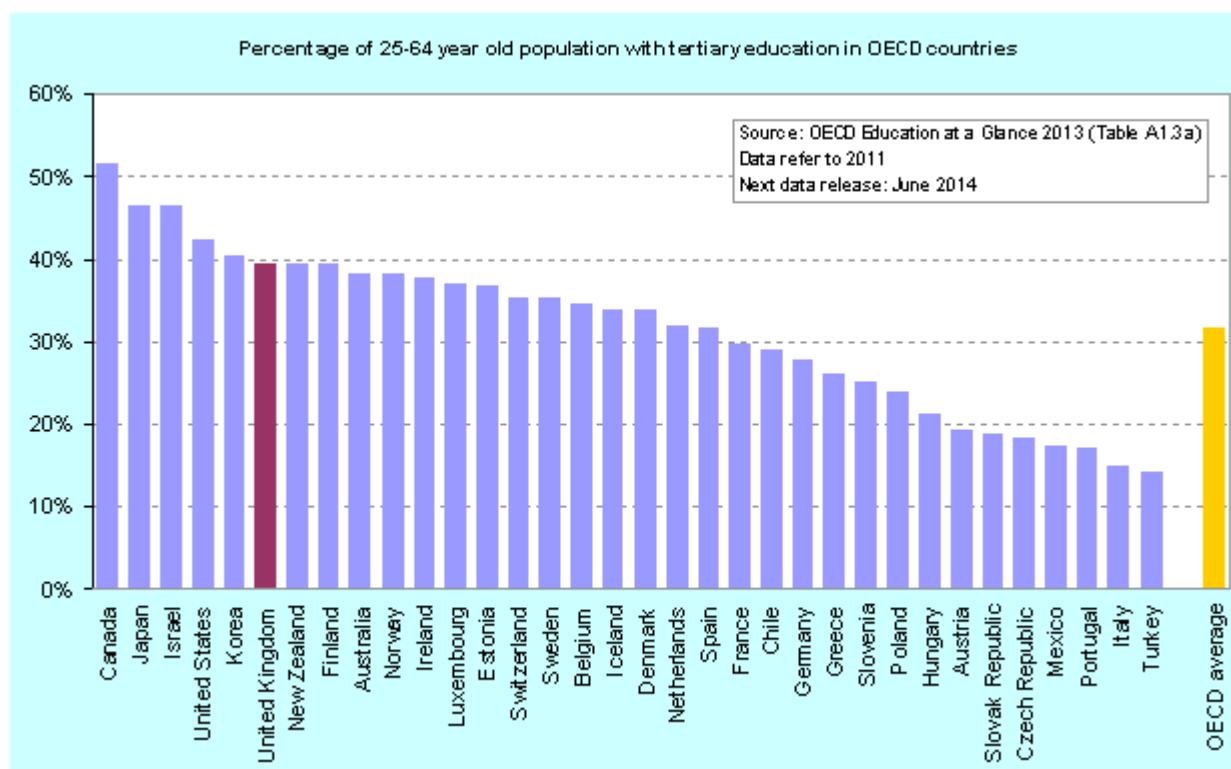
Our most recent performance is based on OECD data published in June 2013 (data refer to 2011). In this, the UK ranking is:

¹ <http://www.bis.gov.uk/files/file44507.pdf>

1) 19 / 33 OECD countries for the percentage of 25-64 year olds with at least upper secondary education; the same as last year's ranking.



2) 6 / 34 OECD countries for the percentage of 25-64 year olds with tertiary education; up from 7 / 34 in last year's ranking.



What will influence this indicator?

The domestic skills level of the UK is influenced by participation in education, inward and outward migration, and the qualification levels of those entering versus those leaving the workforce.

Given that most of the workforce of the next ten years has already left compulsory education, the qualifications achieved by individuals in the workplace are as important as the qualifications being achieved by young people in school and continuing beyond compulsory education.

The indicator measures the skills level of the UK relative to other countries, hence the performance of other nations has a major influence on the indicator; if our major competitors up-skill at a faster rate than the UK then this can impact on our relative position, as can migrations and a range of other factors in those countries.

What is BIS's role?

Individuals and businesses make decisions about whether to invest in qualifications. BIS's role is to ensure that the further and higher education systems operate in a way that is responsive to the needs of individuals and businesses, to increase the incentive to invest in qualifications. The FE and HE reforms are designed to increase this responsiveness, moving away from a system where the numbers and kinds of qualifications were determined by central government.

Indicator definition

The OECD reports on people attaining at least upper secondary and tertiary education. Upper secondary is broadly equivalent to Level 2 qualifications in England, which itself is equivalent to 5 or more GCSEs at grade A* to C. OECD's tertiary education is equivalent to Level 4 in England, i.e. higher education or access to higher education qualifications.

The OECD provides unrounded percentage data for each country. BIS presents ranks based on this. The ranks are derived from the set of full OECD member countries which have returned data for the qualification level under consideration at the time of publication by OECD. Some countries are unable to report against some parts of the international standard; in recent years more countries have been included in comparisons of performance at upper secondary level than are included at tertiary level.

Methodology

These are OECD statistics and not produced within the UK statistical system.

BIS re-presents the key statistics, alongside the more up to date England indicators, within the National Statistics First Release on Post-16 Further Education and Skills.

Further information

[Further information on original OECD data and methodology](#)² can be obtained from the OECD Education at a Glance web-site.

The UK ranking is published as a [Supplementary Table to the Statistical First Release](#)³.

The most recent statistics for England are published in Table 12.1 of the

[Further Education & Skills Statistical First Release](#)⁴.

Note, however, that the OECD indicator is for the UK rather than England, and is based on a different sub-population from the National Statistic.

Who are our partners?

- Department for Education
- Skills Funding Agency
- Higher Education Funding Council for England

Related indicators

[Number of government-funded learners participating in Further Education](#)⁵

[Average funding per course in government-funded adult further education](#)⁶

[Participation levels of 18-24 year olds in part-time or full-time education or training](#)⁷;

²<http://www.oecd.org/edu/eag.htm>

³http://www.thedataservice.org.uk/Statistics/fe_data_library/other_statistics_and_research/international_comparisons/

⁴http://www.thedataservice.org.uk/statistics/statisticalfirstrelease/sfr_current/

⁵https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/82958/Number_of_government-funded_learners_participating_in_Further_Education.pdf

⁶https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/82957/Average_funding_per_course_in_government-adult_further_education.pdf

⁷https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/82960/Proportion_18-24_year_olds_participating_in_full_or_part-time_education_or_training_activity.pdf

Status

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